

**What is “filling” or being “full of the Spirit?”**  
**A Series on the Holy Spirit - Baptism verses Filling: Part 3**

“Filling of the Holy Spirit” is found frequently in both the Old and New Testament. Is there a difference between the “filling of the Holy Spirit” and the filling that occurs with regeneration?

In the Old Testament “filling of the Spirit” was a supernatural endowment that enabled the recipient to serve a divinely appointed function:

Bezai was filled in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge and in all kinds of craftsmanship (Ex 31:3-5; 35:31).

Joshua was filled and commissioned by God (Deut 34:9 [Deut 31:14]).

Micah was filled and was able to prophesize (Micah 3:8 [Micah 1:1]).

John the Baptist was filled while in the womb of his mother (Luke 1:15).

Elizabeth was filled so that she could prophesize (Luke 1:41).

Zacharias was filled so that he could prophesize (Luke 1:67).

When the Spirit falls on someone, is it equivalent to the Spirit filling that person? From the following passages, it appears that the Spirit falling upon a person is the same as the Spirit filling a person.

The Lord therefore said to Moses, “Gather for Me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and their officers and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. Then I will come down and speak with you there, and **I will take of the Spirit who is upon you, and will put Him upon them**; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you will not bear it all alone. (Num 11:16-17)

So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD. Also, he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people, and stationed them around the tent. Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him; and **He took of the Spirit who was upon him and placed Him upon the seventy elders**. And when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do it again. But two men had remained in the camp; the name of one was Eldad and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them (now they were among those who had been registered, but had not gone out to the tent), and they prophesied in the camp. So a young man ran and told Moses and said, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” Then Joshua the son of Nun, the attendant of Moses from his youth, said, “Moses, my lord, restrain them.” But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!” Then Moses returned to the camp, both he and the elders of Israel. (Num 11:24-30)

And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe; and the **Spirit of God came upon him**. (Num 24:2)

Did the Spirit fall on or fill only Believers?

Balaam was a non-Israelite prophet who was summoned to curse the nation of Israel (Num 22:4-5). While the Spirit of God came upon him (Num 24:2), the Bible does not portray Balaam as a Believer. Peter refers to Balaam in the context of false teachers (2 Pet 2:15), the book of Jude speaks of Balaam in the context of the ungodly (Jude 1:11), and John calls Balaam a stumbling block (Rev 2:14) for tempting the Israelites to eat food sacrificed to idols and committing immorality (Num 25:1-3).

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It appears that in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit fell on both Believers and non-Believers.

Understanding the covenantal context provides some clarity to discerning the difference of “filling of the Holy Spirit” between the Old and New Testament. The Mosaic Covenant does not stipulate any role of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit of God is seen as temporarily coming upon human beings (ie. 1 Sam 11:6; 16:14). In contrast, the New Covenant stipulates that God’s Spirit will indwell the Believer and not depart (Ezek 36:25-28; Isa 59:21; 1 Cor 6:19; 2 Cor 3:3).

For the apostles, the role of the Holy Spirit seems to be more complex.

The disciples receive the Holy Spirit for the first time from Jesus (John 20:22) with a commission of proclaiming the forgiveness of sins.

On Pentecost, they appear to receive the Holy Spirit a second time with the “baptism with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:2-4). In contrast, when the “baptism with the Holy Spirit” occurs for Gentiles, it is their first filling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44-46; 11:15-17). To learn more about this, see the article: What does it mean “baptism in / with the Holy Spirit? at [www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/3HolySpirit/DefBaptism.aspx](http://www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/3HolySpirit/DefBaptism.aspx).

One of the purposes of the New Covenant was to endow the Believer with the Holy Spirit and enable him to learn the truth and understand the Bible (John 14:16-17, 26; 1 Cor 2:10-16). This supernatural union is the means to cause Believers to live in a holy manner (Ezek 36:25-28) and serve God.

Peter, **filled with the Holy Spirit**, is enabled to answer the questions of the Jewish high priests and religious authorities. (Acts 4:8)

Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, **full of the Spirit** and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. (Acts 6:3)

But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man **full of faith and of the Holy Spirit**, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. (Acts 6:5)

But being **full of the Holy Spirit**, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; (Act 7:55)

for he was a good man, and **full of the Holy Spirit and of faith**. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. (Acts 11:24)

The Bible presents a contrast; those without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit have bad qualities of character. One can be filled with violence (Gen 6:11-13), rage (Esther 3:5; Luke 4:28; 6:11; Acts 19:28), trouble (Prov 12:21), confusion (Acts 19:29), jealousy (Acts 5:17; 13:45), and unrighteousness (Rom 1:29).

With the New Covenant stipulating the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, it is apparent that this filling of the Spirit does not remove the possibility of moral and spiritual failure of the Believer. Yet when the Bible speaks of one who is “full of the Holy Spirit,” this state of Spirit filling implies a state of divine enablement. Fullness is not presented as an end in itself, but the condition of doing bold things for God.

Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit when He was led around the wilderness by the Spirit and withstood Satan’s temptations (Luke 4:1).

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Observed to be “full of the Holy Spirit,” Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas were chosen to take care of the daily serving of food to the church’s widows (Act 6:3-5).

While “full of the Holy Spirit,” Stephen did great wonders and signs as he shared the word of God (Acts 6:8; 7:55), ably defended himself before Jewish religious authorities, powerfully testified to Jesus as the Messiah, and courageously confronted them for “resisting the Holy Spirit” with no regard for his personal safety (Acts 7:1-60).

In response to the growth of Gentile Believers at Antioch, Barnabas was sent from the church of Jerusalem to see if the news was true (Acts 11:22-23). “Full of the Holy Spirit,” Barnabas rejoiced and encouraged Antioch which resulted in the conversion of a “considerable number” (Acts 11:24).

While the Bible informs us what people do when “full of the Holy Spirit,” there isn’t any explicit information as to what it really means. However, there are some attributes that can be observed by others that may be characteristics associated with being “full of the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus avoided temptation with His knowledge of God’s word (Luke 4:1-14).

Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas were men of good repute, full of wisdom and full of faith (Acts 6:3- 5).

Stephen was also full of grace and power (Acts 6:8).

Barnabas was noted as a good man and full of faith (Acts 11:24).

Some characteristics invite the possibility of a reference to spiritual gifts; however, the inclusion of characteristics not mentioned as spiritual gifts does not make this possibility certain.

In summary, the Old Testament indicates that the “filling of the Holy Spirit” can occur temporarily and upon Believers and non-Believers.

Permanent filling of the Holy Spirit, however, depends on genuine faith and is mediated through the New Covenant.

A reference of being “full of the Holy Spirit” appears to be a state of filling which varies in the course of one’s life. In the next article of this series, “What does it mean “be filled with the Spirit?”, the question of whether a Believer can affect the state of filling will be examined.

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