

## The 3 Baptisms in scripture

### **Luke 3:16 (NASB)**

<sup>16</sup>John answered and said to them all, “As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

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### ***Baptism No. 1 – Water!***

John baptizes only with water for (because of) repentance.

**COLOSSIANS 2:12 (NASB)** <sup>12</sup>HAVING BEEN BURIED WITH HIM IN BAPTISM, IN WHICH YOU WERE ALSO RAISED UP WITH HIM THROUGH FAITH IN THE WORKING OF GOD, WHO RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD.

*Baptism is an expression of faith and therefore only for believers. Baptism is an ordinance of the Lord by which those who have repented and come to faith express their union with Christ in His death and resurrection.*

*This is clearly taught in Acts 2. In this chapter, Peter is preaching the gospel message on the Day of Pentecost. Peter proclaims Jesus’ death and resurrection and commands the crowd to repent and believe in Christ (Acts 2:36, 38).*

- *The response to Peter’s gospel presentation is recorded in verse 41: “Those who accepted his message were baptized.” Note the order of events—they accepted the message (the gospel of Christ), and then they were baptized. Only those who believed were baptized. We see the same order in Acts 16, when the Philippian jailer and his family are saved.*
- *They believe, and then they are baptized (Acts 16:29–34). The practice of the apostles was to baptize believers, not unbelievers.*

### ***Baptism No. 2 – Spirit!***

The Holy Spirit was promised by Jesus to His disciples as “another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you” ([John 14:16-17](#)). At Pentecost ([Acts 2:1-4](#)) and during the initial formation of the church ([Acts 8:5-17](#); [10:44-48](#); [19:1-7](#)), the promised Holy Spirit did come upon the disciples, baptizing them and establishing them in the body of Christ. Though without such dramatic attending signs, every believer since that time is baptized into the church by Christ with God’s Spirit. “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free” ([1 Cor. 12:13](#)).

God had promised to “pour out [His] Spirit on all mankind” ([Joel 2:28](#)), when He would “sprinkle clean water on [them],” and “give [them] a new heart and put a new spirit within [them]” ([Ezek. 36:25-26](#)). In that day they would at last be baptized in the very power and person of God Himself.

The coming Messiah baptizes with the Holy Spirit ([1 Cor. 12:13](#); also [Ezek. 36:25-27](#); [Joel 2:28](#))

### ***Baptism No. 3 – Fire!***

The third baptism mentioned here is that of **fire**. Many interpreters take this to be a part of the Holy Spirit baptism, which began at Pentecost and which in that instance was accompanied by “tongues of fire” ([Acts 2:3](#)). But the Acts account says that those tongues “appeared to them” (that is, the waiting disciples) “as of fire.” They were not fire, but looked like licks of fire. In his last promise of the soon-coming baptism with the Holy Spirit, Jesus said nothing about actual fire being a part of the experience ([Acts 1:5](#)). And when, a short time later, Cornelius and his household were baptized with the Holy Spirit, no fire was present ([Acts 10:44](#); [11:16](#); cf. [8:17](#); [19:6](#)).

Consequently, it seems best to consider fire as representing God’s coming judgment, which, as we have seen, is so frequently in Scripture symbolized by fire. In both the preceding and following verses ([10](#), [12](#)) John clearly uses fire to represent judgment and punishment. It is impossible that the middle reference to fire would concern an entirely different subject. Both of the adjoining verses contrast the fates of believers and unbelievers, those who bear good fruit and those who do

not ([v. 10](#)) and the valuable wheat and the worthless chaff ([v. 12](#)). It therefore seems logical and natural to take [verse 11](#) also as a contrast between believers (those baptized **with the Holy Spirit**) and unbelievers (those baptized with the **fire** of God's judgment).

As in the preceding two verses, John again gives consolation to believers but warning to unbelievers: **And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.** The figure is changed to that of a farmer who has just harvested his grain crop.

In Palestine, as in many other parts of the ancient world, farmers made a **threshing floor** by picking out a slight depression in the ground, or digging one if necessary, usually on a hill where breezes could be caught. The soil would then be wetted and packed down until it was very hard. Around the perimeter of the floor, which was perhaps thirty or forty feet in diameter, rocks would be stacked to keep the grain in place. After the stalks of grain were placed onto the floor, an ox, or a team of oxen, would drag heavy pieces of wood around over the grain, separating the **wheat** kernels from the **chaff**, or straw. Then the farmer would take a **winnowing fork** and throw a pile of grain into the air. The wind would blow the chaff away, while the kernels, being heavier, would fall back to the floor. Eventually, nothing would be left but the good and useful **wheat**.

In a similar way the Messiah will separate out everyone who belongs to Him and, like a farmer, **He will gather His wheat into the barn**, where it will be forever safe and protected. Also in a similar way to the farmer's, **He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.** The long-awaited Messiah would Himself perform both functions, though not in the time and sequence that John and the prophets before him may have thought. The final separation and the ultimate judgment will be only at Christ's second coming, when the unsaved "will go away into

eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” ([Matt. 25:46](#)). That scene is dramatically presented by our Lord in the parable of the tares ([Matt. 13:36-43](#)) and the parable of the dragnet ([Matt. 13:47-50](#)).

John’s introduction to the person and ministry of the Messiah prepared the people for the arrival of their King.

*What is the “baptism of fire”? It does not refer to the “tongues of fire” at Pentecost, for tongues over a person’s head could hardly be called a “baptism.” John’s use of the symbol of “fire” in Luke 3:9 and 17 indicates that he is talking about judgment and not blessing. In A.D. 70 the nation experienced a baptism of fire when Titus and the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem and scattered the people. All unbelievers will experience a baptism of judgment in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15).*

and fire. Some take “fire” here as a symbol of judgment (as [Isa. 34:10](#); [66:24](#); [Jer. 7:20](#)), while others see it as a symbol of purification (as [Isa. 1:25](#); [Zech. 13:9](#); [Mal. 3:2-3](#)). As both the Spirit and fire are controlled by the same preposition, *en*, which is not repeated in the text, the second view is preferable.

### ***Purification by Fire?***

Other interpreters take the **fire** to represent a spiritual cleansing, as described in the quotation above from Ezekiel. But nothing in Ezekiel’s text, in the context of John’s message here, or in the Pentecost reference to the tongues “as of fire” relates to such cleansing.

“He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. “

### **Fired Up!**

In describing the baptism that Jesus brings, John links the ministry of the Holy Spirit with fire. Fire can give light, warm us, and cook our food. Fire can also purify. The Holy Spirit, like fire, purifies believers in a number of ways. He shines light on their hearts and in their minds, disclosing areas that need to be confessed, repented, and brought under the lordship of Christ. He uses the heat of conviction from God’s Word to prompt them to deal with their sins. He illuminates the path before believers, guiding them into all truth. Like a laser in the hands of a skillful surgeon, the Holy Spirit helps bring healing and wholeness to the believer. Have you taken time lately to let him examine you and do any necessary treatment?