THE QUESTION

What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire?

Asked by a THF member on August 9, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 8 numbered quotations · the 18 early Christian passages and 85 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-is-the-baptism-of-the-holy-spirit-and-fire

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

Early writers read John's words as a promise that Christ would give the Holy Spirit, which John's water baptism could not give. They took the fire to mean the Spirit himself, shown by the tongues of fire at Pentecost. This baptism forgives sins and renews believers; it did not mean literal flames at every baptism.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
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POINT 1 OF 7

Christ's baptism gives more than John's

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Hippolytus has John the Baptist contrast himself with Christ. John's baptism was for repentance, but Christ removes sins and gives the gift of adoption. That is what he means by baptizing with the Holy Spirit and fire.

1

> "I am bound by sins, but He is the Remover of sins."
>
> *later in the same passage*
>
> "I baptize with the baptism of repentance, but He confers the gift of adoption. He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hippolytus,** *Discourse on the Holy Theophany* 1 (c. 200–236 AD) **Source 8, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

Only God gives the Spirit

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian says John's baptism was commanded by God but was a human act of repentance. It prepared for heavenly gifts but could not give the Spirit or forgive sins, because only God does those things.

2

> "Otherwise, if it had been celestial, it would have given both the Holy Spirit and remission of sins. But no one either pardons sins or freely grants the Spirit except God only."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Baptism* 10 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 5, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 7

The fire is the Spirit himself

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The Treatise on Re-Baptism says that anyone who understands the Holy Spirit knows that John's word fire speaks of the Spirit. He does not take it as a separate baptism of literal flame.

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3 “But those who are not ignorant of the nature of the Holy Spirit understand that what is said about fire is said about the Spirit Himself.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Anonymous,** *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **Source 15, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Pentecost fulfilled John's promise

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The same writer says Jesus repeated John's promise after the resurrection and told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem. At Pentecost the Spirit came on them, and tongues like fire showed they were baptized in him.

4 “For in the Acts of the Apostles, after His resurrection, the Lord confirmed this same word of John and commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for that promise of the Father, "which," He says, "you have heard from me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days from now,"”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Anonymous,** *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **Source 14, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

5 “For in the Acts of the Apostles, according to that same promise of our Lord, on the very day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit had descended upon the disciples so that they might be baptized in Him, there were seen sitting upon each one tongues as if of fire.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Anonymous,** *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **Source 15, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 7

The Spirit's baptism cleansed the apostles

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The writer notes that the apostles were already baptized, yet they fled and Peter denied Christ. He says the baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost put away those sins, and their faith afterward proved sincere.

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6 “This was so that it might be shown to us that whatever sins they had contracted in the meantime, and in whatever way, those same sins were without doubt put away by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, since afterward their faith was shown to be sincere.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Anonymous,** *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **Source 16, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

The Spirit renews people in Christ

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Irenaeus says the Spirit who came on Jesus at his baptism learned to dwell with the human race. The Spirit's work is to renew people from their old ways into the new life of Christ.

7 “Therefore, the Spirit did descend upon the Son of God, who was made the Son of man, becoming accustomed through fellowship with Him to dwell among the human race, to rest with human beings, and to dwell within the works of God, carrying out the will of the Father in them and renewing them from their old ways into the newness of Christ.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book III* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 2, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

Literal fire on the water was rejected

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

The Treatise warns against groups who claimed real fire appeared on the water when they baptized. He treats this as a trick or a deception, not as the baptism John promised.

8 “They are said to describe it in such a way that, as soon as they have gone down into the water, fire immediately appears on the water.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Anonymous,** *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **Source 17, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

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THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not settle whether John's mention of fire also points to judgment, as the burning of the chaff in the same saying might suggest.
- They do not explain exactly when, in the church's own practice, each believer received this baptism of the Spirit.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 18 early Christian passages and 85 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–18, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 19–42, in Bible order), then 61 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF’s updated English unless marked “1885 English” (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). “… [continues online]” marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *18 passages from 8 writers*

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · source 1*

1 *Dialogue with Trypho* (1885 English) “need have I of that other baptism, who have been baptized with the Holy Ghost… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 2–3*

2 *Against Heresies: Book III* (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** “He did also descend upon the Son of God, made the Son of man, becoming accustomed in fellowship with Him to dwell in the human race, to rest with human… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Against Heresies: Book III* Holy Ghost rested upon them. So, he exclaimed, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" He persuaded… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · source 4*

4 *Stromata* 7.6 But we say that the fire does not make flesh holy, but sinful souls. We do not mean the common fire that destroys everything. We mean the fire of wisdom, … [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 5–7*

5 *On Baptism* 10 **Quote 2, page 2** “again by saying that he baptized in repentance only, but that One… [continues online] **read ›**

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6 *On Baptism* 11 “look, some say, the Lord came and did not baptize. For we read, "And yet He used not to baptize, but His disciples," in John 4:2. As if John… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *On Baptism* 6 (1885 English) “1:76 Thus, too, does the angel, the witness of baptism, make the paths straight for the Holy Spirit, who is about to come upon us, by the washing away… [continues online] **read ›**

Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · source 8*

8 *Discourse on the Holy Theophany* 1 **Quote 1, page 2** “baptize with the baptism of repentance, but He confers the gift of adoption. He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 9–11*

9 *Commentary on John* 6 He is understood in different ways as living bread or as flesh. So also He, the same person, is baptism of water, and baptism of the Holy Spirit and of… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *Commentary on John* 6 “baptize? He did not baptize the logs on the altar in the days of Ahab, though they needed such a washing in order to be burned up when the Lord… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *Commentary on John* 2 (on point 6) for the salvation of men. This He did when, in bodily form like a dove, He flew to Him after the baptism. He remained on Him and did not pass… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 12–13*

12 *Epistles* Or if they say that the power of baptism comes from the greatness of the name, so that those who are baptized anywhere and in any way, in the name… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *Epistles* who agree with him argue that the putting away of sins and the second birth can come from the baptism of heretics, among whom, as they themselves admit, the Holy… [continues online] **read ›**

Anonymous · *sources 14–18*

14 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **Quote 4, page 3** “John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **Quotes 3, 5, page 3** “a man of this kind should return to you again, you will certainly hesitate whether he may have baptism or not. And yet it will be fitting for you, in… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **Quote 6, page 4** Although they were already righteous and, as we have said, had been baptized with the Lord's baptism, just as the apostles themselves had been, yet on the night when… [continues online] **read ›**

17 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 (1885 English) **Quote 8, page 4** “because John said that we must be baptized in the Holy Ghost and in fire, from the fact that he went on to say and fire, some desperate men have… [continues online] **read ›**

18 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 that the same kind of thing is common in the present day and happens often: many people, after baptism, leave this life without the laying on of the bishop's… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *24 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

19 **Matthew 3:11** I indeed baptize you in water for repentance, but he who comes after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit. **read ›**

20 **Matthew 3:16** Jesus, when he was baptized, went up directly from the water: and behold, the heavens were opened to him. He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming on him. **read ›**

21 **Mark 1:4** John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching the baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins. **read ›**

22 **Mark 1:8** I baptized you in water, but he will baptize you in the Holy Spirit.” **read ›**

23 **Mark 9:49** For everyone shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. **read ›**

24 **Luke 3:16** John answered them all, “I indeed baptize you with water, but he comes who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to loosen. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire. **read ›**

25 **Luke 3:17** His winnowing fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor, and will gather the wheat into his barn; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” **read ›**

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26 **Luke 3:22** and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came from heaven, saying, “You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased.” **read ›**

27 **Luke 12:10** And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. **read ›**

28 **Luke 24:49** Behold, I send out the promise of my Father on you. But wait in the city of Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on high.” **read ›**

29 **John 1:33** I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit coming down and remaining, he is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’ **read ›**

30 **John 3:2** He came to him by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” **read ›**

31 **John 3:3** Jesus answered him, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” **read ›**

32 **John 3:23** John also was baptizing in Enon near Salim because there was much water there. People came and were baptized; **read ›**

33 **Acts 1:4** While assembled with them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, “which you heard from me; **read ›**

34 **Acts 1:5** for John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” **read ›**

35 **Acts 2:3** Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared to them, and one rested on each of them. **read ›**

36 **Acts 2:33** Being therefore exalted by the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you now see and hear. **read ›**

37 **Acts 4:4** But many of those who heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to be about five thousand. **read ›**

38 **Acts 7:14** Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his relatives, seventy-five souls. **read ›**

39 **Acts 10:17** Now while Peter was very perplexed within himself about what the vision which he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon’s house, stood before the gate, **read ›**

40 **Acts 11:2** When Peter had come up to Jerusalem, those who were of the circumcision contended with him, **read ›**

41 **Acts 11:16** I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit.’ **read ›**

42 **Ephesians 2:2** in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *61 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Joshua 3:5 · 3:7 · 5:10

1 Kings 18:33

Malachi 4:5

Matthew 3:3 · 3:7 · 8:5 · 12:32 · 12:50 · 18:16 · 18:20 · 21:23 · 21:25

Mark 2:8 · 10:35 · 11:30 · 14:27

Luke 1:76 · 7:3 · 7:18 · 12:50 · 18:10 · 20:4

John 1:6 · 1:9 · 1:32 · 2:13 · 3:30 · 4:2 · 5:8 · 6:53 · 7:39 · 8:39 · 8:41 · 8:42 · 8:50 · 8:52 · 11:47 · 13:20 · 13:22 · 13:33 · 16:6 · 20:22

Acts 4:12 · 5:31 · 8:20 · 11:15 · 12:15 · 15:7 · 19:1 · 19:4

Romans 1:1

1 Corinthians 12:4

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2 Corinthians 1:21 · 5:5 · 13:1

1 Thessalonians 4:8

Hebrews 4:12

1 Peter 1:11

1 John 5:8

Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire?” on August 9, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY