

# Did the Disciples Receive the Spirit in John 20:22?

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In John 20:21-23, during Jesus' first resurrection appearance to the apostles, He said to them, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."<sup>22</sup> And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'<sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

With reference to Jesus' act of breathing on the disciples and commanding them to receive the Spirit, two questions arise: (1) Did the disciples receive the Spirit at that time?; (2) Which work of the Spirit was Jesus referring to? Was Jesus referring to the Spirit's work of regeneration or the Spirit's empowerment for ministry? In this paper, I will argue that the disciples did receive the Spirit in John 20 and that the work of the Spirit in view is regeneration.

## **Why Interpreters Deny that the Apostles Received the Spirit in John 20:22**

The fact that John records Jesus commanding the disciples to receive the Spirit, but makes no mention of them fulfilling this command, has led many interpreters to conclude that the disciples did not receive the Spirit at that point in time. I am persuaded, however, that this conclusion is driven more by the felt need to harmonize John 20:22 with Acts 2:1-4 than by an exegesis of John 20:22 in the context of John's gospel. Exegetes are too quick to move from the lack of an explicit affirmation that the disciples immediately received the Spirit to the conclusion that they must not have received the Spirit at that time because it helps them resolve an apparent conflict with Acts. Put simply, concerns regarding systematic theology are controlling their biblical theology.

Acts 2:1-4 describes an experience involving the apostles that happened approximately 50 days after the events of John 20:22. This experience is described variously as "baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4), "the promise of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:33; see also Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4), and "the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). In the last reference, Peter specifically said his audience would "receive the gift of the *Holy Spirit*," which is very similar to Jesus telling His disciples to "receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). The similarity in language implies that Luke<sup>1</sup> and John have the same experience in view. But whereas John is ambiguous regarding whether the apostles received the Spirit immediately after Jesus breathed on them, Luke is abundantly clear that the apostles received the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and that this was the first time they had this experience.<sup>2</sup> Given the clarity of Acts versus the ambiguity of John, most conclude that the disciples did not receive the Spirit immediately after Jesus breathed on them, but ~50 days later on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus is understood to be speaking proleptically or prophetically in John 20:22 of the Spirit that the apostles would receive in the near future at Pentecost.

The strength of this conclusion is based on the strength of the assumption that the disciples could only receive the Spirit once, and that assumption, in turn, is based on the further assumption that the work of the Spirit in view both in John 20 and Acts 2 is the work of regeneration. I will speak to both of these

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<sup>1</sup>Luke is the author of both the Gospel of Luke as well as the Acts of the Apostles.

<sup>2</sup>After His resurrection but prior to His ascension, Jesus spoke of the experience as a future event that would take place in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5,8). Peter saw the experience on the Day of Pentecost as the initial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy in Joel 2:28 that God would pour out His Spirit on all people (Acts 2:16-21) and the moment that Jesus' promise to send the Spirit was fulfilled (2:33).

assumptions in a moment. For now, however, I want to set forth my reasons for thinking that the apostles did receive the Spirit in John 20 when Jesus blew on them.

### **Evidence that the Apostles Received the Spirit in John 20**

When it comes to interpretation, we must do Biblical theology before we do systematic theology. That means we must seek to understand the author's intended meaning within the context of his own literary work prior to harmonizing his writings with that of other Biblical authors. We should seek to understand what John meant for his readers to understand in John 20 – independent of what some other Biblical author might have to say about the topic – before we attempt to systematize what each author had to say on the topic into a coherent, systematic theology. After we have done our best to understand John on his own terms within his gospel, and have done our best to understand Luke on his own terms within his book, then we take the second step of doing our best to systematize what each has to say together into a coherent whole.

I contend that if we read John on his own terms, we would naturally understand John 20:22 to mean that the disciples received the Spirit at that moment. This is supported by three considerations.

First, Jesus spoke in the present rather than future tense. Jesus did not say “You will receive the Spirit” (future), but “receive the Spirit” (present). Given the use of the present tense verb, we would naturally expect for Jesus' command to be fulfilled in the present. As the dispenser of the Spirit, the fulfillment of Jesus' command did not depend on any action of the disciples, but on the mere exercise of Jesus' own will.

Second, Jesus blew on them. If Jesus had merely said “receive the Spirit” without also blowing on them, perhaps one could think Jesus is speaking proleptically or prophetically about a future event despite His use of the present tense. But when Jesus' statement is coupled with the act of blowing on them, this possibility is rendered unlikely. Many commentators have pointed out that by blowing on the disciples, Jesus was re-enacting, in a symbolic way, God's breathing into Adam the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). Jesus was symbolizing that same life-giving Spirit by breathing on the disciples. It's also possible that Jesus was hearkening back to Ezekiel 37:5-6 where God said He would put His breath into the dry bones and cause them to live. As in Genesis, breath is connected with the life-giving Spirit.

It would seem quite strange for Jesus to perform an act symbolize the giving of the Spirit's life, and yet not actually give the life of the Spirit at that time. Why would Jesus perform the act to symbolize an event that did not occur? This seems unlikely. Jesus' performed this symbolic act at that time because it was at that time that they were received the life of the Spirit.

Third, this would be a fulfillment of what was promised by Jesus in 7:38-39. While at the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus told the crowd, “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”<sup>39</sup> Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” John told us that Jesus was predicting the future coming of the Spirit. This experience would only be available after Jesus' glorification (resurrection). Given the fact that John chose to include this prediction, we would naturally expect for John to include its fulfillment after Jesus' resurrection. This is precisely what we see in John 20.

Immediately after Jesus' resurrection, during His first resurrection appearance to the apostles, Jesus breathes on the apostles and tells them to receive the Spirit. This is the very experience described in John 7, and it took place at the exact time predicted by John 7. What a letdown it would be, then, if, when the glorified Jesus breathes on the disciples and tells them to receive the Spirit, they don't actually

receive the Spirit. Anyone reading the Gospel of John by itself, without reference to the Book of Acts, would naturally assume that the disciples received the Spirit when Jesus breathed on them and told them to receive the Spirit, just as we naturally assume that Paul received the Holy Spirit when Ananias laid hands on him despite the fact that Luke does not record Paul actually receiving the Spirit (Acts 9:17-18).

While we are aware that Acts depicts the disciples receiving the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, and while we must ultimately harmonize this with the Gospel of John, we ought not deny that the disciples actually received the Spirit in John 20 simply because it makes for an easier harmonization. That's doing systematic theology at the expense of Biblical theology. The best reading of John 20 within the context of the Gospel of John is that the disciples received the Spirit at that time. We must bring that interpretation to our harmonization efforts, rather than looking to Acts to interpret John 20 for us.

There is a potential objection to this conclusion, but I will wait to explore it until after we have discussed the second question pertaining to the work the Spirit in John 20.

### **Which Work of the Spirit is in View in John 20?**

Previously, I noted that those who reason that the disciples could not have received the Spirit in John 20 because Luke depicts them receiving the Spirit on Pentecost assume that the disciples could only receive the Spirit once. This assumption is based on the further assumption that the work of the Spirit in view in John 20 is the same work of the Spirit in view in Acts 2 (the work of regeneration). Both of these assumptions are wrong.

The Spirit performs many different works in the life of the believer. The Spirit regenerates us, empowers us for ministry, sanctifies us, etc. There is no reason to think that all of these works of the Spirit occur at the same time. In fact, we know they do not. Regeneration happens at conversion, but the gifts of the Spirit are received after conversion (1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1,5,13,39), and sanctification is a continual process throughout the life of the believer (Romans 6:19,22). The Spirit not only performs multiple works in our life, but does so at different times. Could it be, then, that the work of the Spirit referred to in John 20 is not the same work of the Spirit referred to in Acts 2? Could it be that these are two separate experiences of the Spirit, each for a different purpose? If so, it would allow us to affirm that the disciples received the Spirit in John 20 and Acts 2 without contradiction. I am persuaded that these are two distinct works of the Spirit for two distinct purposes. In what follows, I will argue that the Spirit's work in John 20 was regeneration, while the Spirit's work in Acts 2 was empowerment for ministry.

Evidence that the work of the Spirit described in Acts is for ministry empowerment rather than regeneration is overwhelming:

- Peter (Acts 1:13-14; 2:1-4; 4:8,31) and Paul (Acts 9:17; 13:8-11,52<sup>3</sup>) are said to be filled with the Spirit multiple times. Clearly they were not regenerated/saved multiple times.<sup>4</sup> At the very least, their subsequent infillings were for ministry empowerment. And there is no reason to believe their initial infilling served any other purpose. As we'll soon see, we have good reason to believe that every infilling of the Spirit in Acts was for the purpose of ministry empowerment.

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<sup>3</sup>Paul may be included in the group of disciples who are said to be filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts 13:52. If so, this would be a third instance in which Paul is said to have been filled with the Spirit.

<sup>4</sup>Unlike sanctification, which is portrayed as something received both at conversion and an ongoing process in the life of the believer, regeneration is never spoken of as a process. It is spoken of as a past tense event (John 1:12-13; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:1,5-6; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:3,23; 1 John 2:29; 5:1,4). It is an instantaneous and unrepeatable event. This is evident even in the metaphor used to describe it: born again. A person is only born once. Birth is the beginning of their life, never to be repeated again.

- When Luke depicts people being filled with the Spirit prior to Pentecost, it is always connected with ministry (Luke 1:41-45,67-70,76-79). There are many other instances where the Spirit is connected to some act of ministry without referring to the person being “filled with the Spirit” (2:25-35; 4:14, 18-19; 10:21; 12:12). Given the continuity of the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts (a single, two-volume literary work<sup>5</sup>), we would naturally expect for Luke to continue using “filled with the Spirit” the same way in Acts (volume 2) as he did in the Gospel of Luke (volume 1) unless he provided us a literary reason to think otherwise.
- Every time we are explicitly told what the infilling of the Spirit is for, it is always connected with ministry and never connected to salvation.
  - Jesus said the disciples would be “clothed with power from on high” while waiting at Jerusalem (Luke 24:49), and that they would receive “power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” so that they could be “witnesses” of his resurrection (Acts 1:8).
  - On the Day of Pentecost, Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32 to explain to the crowd what they had just witnessed. Joel said the Spirit would be poured out on all flesh, and the result of this would be ministry: prophesying, dreams, and visions. Joel was not envisioning a day when everyone could be saved. That was already true in Joel’s day. What he was envisioning was a day when all of God’s people would be empowered to do God’s work, rather than just the priests, prophets, kings, and other special people called by God.
  - Paul (Acts 13:8-11) and Peter (Acts 4:8,31) both performed acts of ministry immediately after being filled with the Spirit.<sup>6</sup>
- Luke regularly connects the Spirit with anointing for ministry in the life of Jesus (Luke 4:14, 18-19,27-28; 10:38)

In Acts 1:1-3 we read, “In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.” Notice that Luke says his first book (Gospel of Luke) “dealt with all that Jesus *began* to do and teach” until he ascended to heaven. Given the fact that Jesus was no longer present on earth to do or teach anything, why did Luke say “*began* to do and teach” rather than the past tense “*had* done and taught”? I think the clear inference to be drawn from this is that Luke did not think Jesus’ ministry was over. It continues on even after His ascension. How? It continues on via His followers who are empowered by the same Spirit that empowered Jesus for His ministry. The Spirit that was on Jesus to empower Him for ministry was going to be transferred to the disciples so they could do what Jesus did. For Luke, the significance of the Day of Pentecost was that it marked the transfer of the Spirit

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<sup>5</sup>The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles are both written by Luke, and intended as a single literary work contained in two volumes. The introduction to Acts makes the connection clear:

*In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. 4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” ... 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:1-5,8)*

The “former account” refers to Luke’s Gospel (also addressed to Theophilus – Luke 1:3) which contains an account of Jesus’ works and teachings, His resurrection appearances, and ends with Jesus’ ascension (Luke 24:51). Luke says he is writing a second account, this time about what Jesus – through the Spirit – *continued* to do and teach *through His followers*. In fact, to seam the two books together, Acts 1 repeats some of the same material from Luke 24. Both recount Jesus’ ascension (Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:9-11) and His instruction to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4,8).

<sup>6</sup>It is clear that these instances of being filled with the Spirit were for ministry empowerment rather than regeneration since both men had already experienced regeneration.

from Jesus to His disciples so they could continue His ministry of power and healing, being empowered by the Spirit to faithfully witness to His resurrection and preach the message of salvation. Just as Moses transferred the Spirit to Joshua to carry on the mission after his departure (Numbers 27:16; Deuteronomy 34:9), Jesus transferred the Spirit to His disciples to carry on His mission after His departure. Luke's Gospel, then, contains an account of what Jesus, **through the Spirit**, *began* to do and teach, while Acts contains an account of what Jesus, **through the Spirit**, *continued* to do and teach via His followers. In both the Gospel of Luke and Acts, Luke consistently presents the Spirit as being for mission, not salvation.

While the experience of the Spirit in Acts is for empowerment, what about the experience of the Spirit in John 20? If it was also an experience of the Spirit's empowerment for ministry, we would have a problem harmonizing John with Acts; however, there are good reasons to think that the work of the Spirit in John 20 was the work of regeneration.

- In John 3:3-5, Jesus speaks of being born again of the Spirit. This is rightly understood as the Spirit's work of regeneration in the life of the believer, which is something that takes place at conversion. This is confirmed by Jesus' saying that one who has not been born of the Spirit cannot enter the kingdom of God.
- In John 7, Jesus says those who believe in him will experience living water flowing from their bellies. John tells us that Jesus "said this about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." The fact that Jesus connected this experience with believing on Him, and believing on Jesus typically refers to salvation, leads me to believe that the work of the Spirit in view here is regeneration. This is bolstered by Jesus calling it "living water," emphasizing the life-giving (regenerative) nature of the Spirit.

Given the fact that the Spirit's work of regeneration is mentioned twice in John's gospel, and given the fact that John 20 appears to be the fulfillment of the experience spoken of in John 7, it would be no surprise to see the disciples experiencing the regenerative power of the Spirit in John 20. If the Spirit they received in John 20 was for regeneration, and the Spirit they received in Acts 2 was for ministry empowerment, there is no contradiction between Luke and John. John 20 was the first (and only) time the Spirit regenerated the disciples, while Acts 2 was the first time the Spirit empowered them for ministry. There were two receptions of the Spirit at two different times for two different purposes: the first for salvation, the second for ministry empowerment.

### Objections

While I would prefer to stop here at this nice and tidy conclusion, there is some other data that needs to be considered.

#### Could John 20 be about ministry empowerment?

One could make an argument that the experience of the Spirit in John 20 was for ministry empowerment, appealing to the following pieces of evidence:

- While John 3 and John 7 refer to the Spirit's work of regeneration, John also refers to many other works of the Spirit including help (14:16-17), teaching (14:26), bearing witness to Jesus (15:26), convicting of sin (16:7-11), guiding toward truth (16:13), revealing future events (16:13), and glorify Jesus (16:14). Since he mentions various works of the Spirit in his gospel, one cannot

presume that John 20 refers to the Spirit's work of ministry. It could be a reference to the Spirit's work of ministry empowerment.

- The context of John 20:22 refers to ministry. Just prior to breathing on the disciples and telling them to receive the Spirit, Jesus commissioned the disciples for ministry. In what appears to be a shorted Great Commission, Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21). It was "when he had said this" that "he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (v. 22). Since Jesus' command to be filled with the Spirit was uttered in connection with His commission for ministry, it stands to reason that the purpose of the Spirit was to equip them for that ministry.

While these are weighty considerations, I do not find them persuasive. Regarding the first, I am not arguing that John 20 must refer to regeneration because John *always and only* presents the work of the Spirit in terms of regeneration. My argument is two-fold. First, since the Spirit's work of regeneration was previously noted by John, understanding the experience in John 20 to be that of regeneration would be *consistent* with John's earlier presentation of the work of the Spirit. Secondly, and more importantly, John 20 is presented by John as the fulfillment of what Jesus promised in John 7. Since John 7 is referring to regeneration, it follows that John 20 refers to regeneration (despite the fact that the Spirit is spoken of as doing other things in other parts of John's Gospel).

Regarding the second, this argument focuses on Jesus' words just prior to Jesus breathing on the disciples and telling them to receive the Spirit, but what about Jesus' words immediately following the act/words in question? Jesus went on to say, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld" (John 20:23). This seems to shift the topic to salvation.<sup>7</sup> So should we connect Jesus' breathing/commanding with the statement about ministry that precedes it, or the statement about salvation that follows it (which is logically connected to regeneration)? I think the balance is tipped in favor of viewing this as an act of regeneration in virtue of the fact that John 20 seems to be the fulfillment of the Spirit's work of regeneration predicted in John 7.

#### Did the disciples truly receive the Spirit in John 20?

While I provided several reasons to think John expected us to conclude that the disciples received the Spirit on the day of Jesus' resurrection, there are two good counter-arguments to this conclusion.

The first is based on John 16:7. Jesus told His disciples that "it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you." This is another temporal prerequisite placed on the giving of the Spirit. Whereas John 7:39 said the experience would not be available until after Jesus was glorified, John 16:7 said the experience would not be available until after Jesus' ascension. Since Jesus' breathing on the disciples and commanding them to receive the Spirit occurred after Jesus' glorification but before His ascension, this seems to eliminate the possibility that they actually received the Spirit.

In the way of response, this objection would only succeed in proving that the disciples did not receive the Spirit in John 20 if the work of the Spirit Jesus refers to in John 16:7 is the work of regeneration. If it is not (and I've already acknowledged that John refers to works of the Spirit other than regeneration), then the objection fails. John 16:7 would simply demonstrate that some other work of the Spirit would

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<sup>7</sup>Alternatively, one could argue that while Jesus is talking about salvation, this is still a reference to ministry. After all, Jesus is not talking about the disciples' salvation, but their preaching the message of salvation to others. Evangelism is ministry. If one understands the statement in this way, then Jesus' act of breathing on the disciples and telling them to receive the Spirit is sandwiched between two statements regarding ministry, providing additional reason to interpret the experience of the Spirit as empowerment for ministry.

only be experienced after Jesus' ascension. If, for example, Jesus is referring to the Spirit's work of empowerment, this would be entirely consistent with the data in Acts – the disciples were not empowered by the Spirit until 10 days after Jesus ascended to heaven. Indeed, I think a good case can be made that this is the work of the Spirit Jesus had in mind in John 16:7.

First, Jesus portrayed the Spirit as “the Helper,” not the “Savior.” He emphasized how the Spirit would assist them, not save them. Second, immediately after telling the disciples the Helper would come to them, He said what would happen “when He comes” (v. 8), and the list included convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (vs. 9-11), as well as leading the disciples into all truth (v. 13-15). These are acts of ministry, not salvation, and thus we should understand this work of the Spirit as empowerment for ministry rather than regeneration. As such, this counter-argument fails.

The second counter-argument is based on a comparison of chronology in Luke and John. According to the Gospel of John, the occasion on which Jesus breathed on the disciples and commanded them to receive the Spirit was His first resurrection appearance to the apostles in Jerusalem on the day of His resurrection. Luke records the same event (Luke 24:36-49), and in Luke's accounting Jesus tells the disciples “I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (v. 49). The more detailed account is found in Luke. Whereas John only devotes three verses to Jesus' words (John 20:21-23), Luke devotes nine (Luke 24:36,38-39,41,44,46-49). In Luke's more detailed account, it is clear that their experience of the Spirit<sup>8</sup> would be a future event. Could it be, then, that John's “receive the Holy Spirit” is a shortened form of Luke's longer account, and thus we should understand John in light of Luke and conclude that the disciples did not receive the Spirit in John 20? Should we interpret the more ambiguous “receive the Spirit” in John 20 in light of the clearer reference to the future experience of the Spirit in Luke 24?

While it is possible that John's account is a shortened and more ambiguous form of Jesus' longer and clearer statement in Luke's account, it is also possible that John and Luke are recording two different sayings of Jesus. We recognize that neither account records all that Jesus said and did on the occasion. John mentions things that Luke does not, and vice-versa. Given the contextual differences of each respective saying, and given the radically different form of each saying, it is just as likely – if not more likely – that John and Luke are recording different sayings of Jesus regarding the Spirit. They could have experienced regeneration when Jesus breathed on them and commanded that they be filled with the Spirit, after which Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem to receive another infilling of the Spirit – this time to be empowered for ministry.

Another possibility is that these are two different sayings of Jesus spoken on two different occasions. Jesus' saying in Luke about waiting for the Spirit was not actually spoken on the day of His resurrection, but at some later appearance. As such, one saying should not be interpreted in light of the other, but separately. On this view, Jesus breathed on the disciples and they received the Spirit during His first appearance to them on the day He was resurrected, and then, at some later appearance to them, He spoke of another experience of the Spirit they would have in the future that would equip them to carry on His ministry.

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<sup>8</sup>While Luke's account does not specifically mention receiving the Spirit, a comparison of Luke's Gospel to his Acts of the Apostles (volume 2) makes it clear that Jesus was referring to the Spirit. Acts 1:4-5 refers back to Jesus' statement in Luke 24:49 regarding the “promise of the Father,” and then goes on to identify it as being “baptized with the Holy Spirit.” This is reinforced in Acts 1:8 where the experience is described as the “Holy Spirit” coming on them. Finally, the actual experience in Acts 2:4 is described as “filled with the Holy Spirit” (2:4), “pour out my Spirit” (2:17), “gift of the Holy Spirit” (2:38), “Holy Spirit fell” (11:15), and “baptized with the Holy Spirit (11:16).

While this suggestion might seem preposterous on its face, and perhaps even a denial of what we read in Scripture, there is good reason to entertain this possibility. There is a difference between literary chronology and literal chronology. Literary chronology is the order of events as presented by the author, whereas literal chronology is the order of events that would be witnessed by an eyewitness observer. We know that, in general, the gospels often present us with a literary chronology of the works and sayings of Jesus rather than a literal chronology. This is evident by a comparison of parallel events in the gospel accounts. The same event will be placed in a different chronological order by the different Evangelists.<sup>9</sup> Something Jesus said in one context will be placed into a different context in other gospels.<sup>10</sup> Sometimes they compress two events into a single event,<sup>11</sup> or change the chronological

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<sup>9</sup>There are too many examples to list. A few examples include Jesus' rejection at Nazareth. This occurs in the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Luke (Luke 4:16-30), but approximately midway through His Galilean ministry in Mark (Mark 6:1-6). The calling of the disciples occurs prior to preaching at Capernaum in Mark (Mark 1:16-20) but after preaching at Capernaum in Luke (Luke 5:1-11). In Mark 10:46-52 and Luke 18:35-43 Jesus heals the blind beggar after leaving Jericho, whereas Matthew 20:29-34 places the event prior to arriving in Jericho.

<sup>10</sup>For example, Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) are spread throughout Luke's gospel in different contexts. Some of the material is contained in Luke's "Sermon on the Plain" (6:17-49), so called because Luke has Jesus delivering this sermon on a plain rather than on a mountain (as in Matthew). Other material from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is interspersed throughout Luke 9:51-18:14.

One could object that Luke did not change the historical context for Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount on the basis that Jesus, as an itinerant preacher, would have surely repeated many of the teachings in the Sermon at other times and in other contexts. Luke had simply chosen to record some of the same teachings as they were presented in other contexts. While this explanation is possible for some of Jesus' teachings and sayings, it is not possible for all.

Consider the Lord's Prayer. In Matthew's Gospel, this is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (6:9-13), presented to a large crowd at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry (4:12-25). In contrast, Luke portrays Jesus as teaching the Lord's Prayer much later in His ministry, in a private meeting with His disciples, following His personal prayer time, and occasioned by a request from one of His disciples to teach them how to pray (11:1-4). Jesus' disciples were present with Him during the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1; see also 4:18-21), so they would have already heard Jesus teach the Lord's Prayer, and thus would have already known how to pray. Why, then, at a much later date, would one of the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, and why would Jesus proceed to teach them the same prayer? [*Excursus: Matthew only records Jesus as calling four apostles prior to delivering the Sermon on the Mount: Peter, Andrew, James, John. One could avoid the conclusion I draw by arguing that the disciple who asked Jesus how to pray in Luke's gospel was one of the other eight apostles who were not present for the Sermon on the Mount. While this is possible, it is an unlikely reconstruction. First, the disciple said "teach us to pray." He was not just speaking for himself, but for the group. Apparently, the group as a whole wanted to know, and this disciple was their spokesman. Second, while Matthew only named four apostles prior to the giving of the Sermon on the Mount, we do not know when the other eight were called. Matthew never includes Jesus' call of the other eight, except for Matthew (Matthew 9:9-13). Matthew 10:1-4 speaks of the Twelve, but assumes they already existed as a group prior to Jesus' commissioning them for ministry.*] Clearly, Matthew or Luke has changed the context for Jesus' teaching on the Lord's Prayer. While we cannot be certain, given the detailed setting for the teaching in Luke's Gospel, Jesus probably taught the Lord's Prayer privately to His disciples, and then later publically to the crowds. That would mean Matthew portrayed Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as being delivered much earlier than it actually was, or, more likely, that Matthew has taken many different teachings of Jesus delivered at different times to different audiences and portrays them as all being delivered to a single audience in a single sermon. Most scholars adopt the latter option. This, then, is a good example of how the Evangelists would portray Jesus as saying something in one context (literary chronology) that was actually spoken in another context (literal chronology).

Luke may have been doing the same thing with Jesus' words to the apostles at the first resurrection appearance. We know Luke was intentionally compressing his account of the resurrection appearances into a single day, and thus anything Jesus said in a subsequent appearance that Luke wanted to include in his account would have to be included as part of the one of the appearances that Luke chose to record. We know it was important for Luke to record Jesus' command to wait for the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem because his second volume (Acts) begins with that experience. Luke had a literary need to connect Jesus' command to wait for that experience with the fulfillment of that experience, and thus may have had the need to relocate Jesus' command from a subsequent appearance to His first appearance to the disciples on the day of His resurrection.

<sup>11</sup>John tells us that Thomas was not present for Jesus' first appearance to the apostles in Jerusalem (John 20:19-24), but Luke's account includes Thomas in the first appearance (Luke 24:33,36-49). Luke compressed the first and second Jerusalem appearances into one.



details within an event to shorten the account.<sup>12</sup> This was a standard way of writing in that day, and no one would have considered it to be a mistake or misrepresentation. They were less concerned with presenting a video-recording view of history (literal chronology) and more concerned with presenting a faithful view of history that fit their literary and theological purposes (literary chronology). Their recounting of the words and deeds of Jesus are more like a painting than a photograph. They capture the essence, but are not concerned as much about the details – including chronology.

Luke clearly employs a literary chronology in his gospel, and in His account of Jesus' resurrection in particular. He depicts Jesus' resurrection, appearances, and ascension as occurring on a single day despite the fact that he knew Jesus appeared many more times over a period of many days. He specifically mentions that Jesus appeared many times over the span of 40 days in Acts 1:3, but in his gospel, he only focuses on a few appearances and, for literary purposes, portrays Jesus as ascending to heaven on the same day as His resurrection.

Luke compresses Jesus' first two appearances to the apostles in Jerusalem into a single appearance. We know this because Luke 24:33 tells us that "the eleven" apostles were present for this appearance (Judas had already committed suicide), and yet John 20:19-24 informs us that Thomas was not present for the first Jerusalem appearance (meaning there were only ten apostles present for the first Jerusalem appearance). Jesus did not appear to all eleven apostles until eight days later (John 20:26). While some might be tempted to conclude that Luke made an error, this is both theologically problematic and unnecessary. There are two possible explanations.

Perhaps Luke was recording the second Jerusalem appearance rather than the first. This would be consistent with the fact that he compressed the account of Jesus' resurrection, appearances, and ascension into a single day. This explanation fails, however, because Luke clearly portrays this appearance as the first time Jesus showed Himself to the apostles. The disciples were startled and frightened when they saw Jesus, and some experienced doubt (Luke 24:37-38). They thought they were seeing Jesus' spirit, requiring Jesus to present them with proof that He was in body (Luke 24:37-40). If Jesus had appeared to them before, they would not have reacted in this way or believed these things about Jesus.

A second possibility is that Luke has compressed Jesus' first and second appearances to the apostles in Jerusalem into a single appearance. This makes better sense of the data. This explains the disciples' reaction and false assumptions that would be true of His first appearance, as well as the presence of Thomas that was only true of His second appearance. It is reasonable to conclude, then, that Luke not only compressed events that took place over many days as having happened in a single day for literary purposes, but that he also compressed two separate resurrection appearances into a single appearance.

Given the fact that the Evangelists are known to attribute words spoken by Jesus in one context to another context, and given the fact that we have good reason to conclude that Luke compressed two of Jesus' Jerusalem appearances into a single appearance, it is entirely possible that some of the words Luke attributed to Jesus' first appearance to the Apostles were actually spoken by Jesus in a different appearance (such as the second Jerusalem appearance to the apostles), but Luke attributes them to the first appearance in order to compress his account. If Luke was compressing Jesus' words from a subsequent appearance into His first appearance to fit his literary purposes, then Jesus' instructions to the disciples to wait in Jerusalem to be filled with the Spirit occurred at some point in time after they

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<sup>12</sup>For example, Mark and Luke depict Jairus' daughter as dying after he left to find Jesus (Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56), whereas Matthew depicts her dying before Jairus left (Matthew 9:18-26). Matthew shortened Mark's story (Matthew tells it in nine verses rather than 23 like Mark), so he changed the chronological details so as to simplify his shorter retelling of it.

were filled with the Spirit in John 20. As such, the experience Jesus was talking about in Luke 24:49 was not the same as the experience of Acts 20.

### **Conclusion**

The internal evidence of John's Gospel suggests that John 20 is the fulfillment of John 7, and thus John expected his readers to believe the disciples received the Spirit at that time. There is no hint that Jesus meant for them to receive the Spirit at a future date. As the fulfillment of John 7 – which predicted the Spirit's work of regeneration – we are to understand the work of the Spirit in John 20 as the work of regeneration. This understanding of John 20 does not conflict with Acts 2 since the internal evidence of Acts makes it clear that the work of the Spirit that Luke referred to was the Spirit's empowerment for ministry, not regeneration. Whereas the disciples experienced the regenerative power of the Spirit in John 20, they experienced the empowering of the Spirit in Acts 2. These were two different works of the Spirit for two different purposes occurring on two different occasions.