

## **THE FATAL FLAWS OF CHARISMANIA – Fatal Flaw #7: Failing to Distinguish the Critical Differences Between Water Baptism and Spirit Baptism (Part Two of Eight)**

Any serious attempt at achieving some sort of consistent harmony from the apparent disparities represented in last week's list of dilemmas, will inevitably bring the student of God's Word back to one key text in the New Testament: Matthew 3:7-17. In that passage, we have the account of the two-fold encounter experienced by John the Baptist. His initial interaction with the Pharisees and Sadducees was confrontational; with John rebuking those religious leaders for their pretense in appearing at the site of his ministry of repentance (3:7-10; cf. Luke 7:30). It prompted John to issue his all-important prophetic promise in verses 11-12, where we read the following –

**'As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 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 promise of coming judgment was undeniably directed at those religious leaders. This is confirmed by John's use of the word "fire" on three occasions in verses 10-12. There was also a positive aspect to the prophetic promise as John refers to the coming Messiah, who would not only baptize with the fire of God's judgment, but with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. In the providential orchestration of God's redemptive plan, it seems likely that Jesus' appearance at the Jordan River, immediately after the issuance of John's prophetic promise, was no coincidence.

This encounter with Israel's promised Messiah would have been overwhelming in and of itself. But when Jesus appears for the purpose of being baptized by John, it is no surprise that the prophet initially resists such an idea (3:14). Once Christ explains the need for it, the baptism of Jesus by John does occur. What happens next would have been just as awe-inspiring for John. As Jesus comes up from the water, the Holy Spirit descends upon Him like a dove, and God the Father voices His approval in saying, **"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."**

If we are to gain an accurate understanding of the relationship between Spirit baptism and water baptism, and its spiritual and doctrinal impact upon the Church Age, it begins here in Matthew 3:7-17. John's confrontation with the Pharisees and Sadducees, prompting his two-fold prophetic promise, followed by the baptism of Jesus, is essential to resolving the dilemmas contained in the contrast between these two baptisms. In addition, the intricacies involved in arriving at these resolutions need not be complicated, if governed by common sense.

This cannot be emphasized often enough. The ministry of John the Baptist must be given strong consideration as to its significance, if we are to make sense of the many events which take place during the apostolic era, as recorded in the book of Acts. Through the lens of John's ministry, we will be able to see a relatively clear, purposeful and harmonious pattern of development, which would otherwise be difficult to discern. In doing so, not every gap will be filled to everyone's satisfaction. But the redemptive plan and purpose of God in these initial stages of the building of Christ's Church, will be seen with greater clarity. It will also help us to realize just how much Pentecostal/Charismatic teaching has willfully created a distorted view of what took place in the early church; failing to answer the critical question of WHY it occurred in the way that it did.