

# **Acts 2:41 and the Holy Spirit Issue: A Logical, Textual, and Scriptural Response**

Kevin Cauley

## **Summary**

The Acts 2:41 argument on the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit is not as impregnable as supposed. Recent studies conducted by the author in the Greek New Testament shed additional light upon the construction of the sentence from which this argument comes. These studies show that “receiving the word” and “being baptized” are actions that are completed simultaneously, thus invalidating the argument that assumes “receiving the word” must be completed prior to baptism. The concept of baptism being simultaneous with receiving the word is then shown to be consistent with the rest of scripture. With the mere possibility that the premise traditionally argued to be true from Acts 2:41 is rather false, the traditional dilemma that has been set forth in favor of the personal indwelling fails.

## **Introduction**

There has perhaps been no greater controversy within the brotherhood over the past ten years than that of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. There are those who believe that the Holy Spirit indwells the child of God representatively only through the word. There are also those who believe that the Holy Spirit personally indwells the child of God independently, but in conjunction with the word. Those who set forth the argument that the Holy Spirit personally indwells the Christian have relied heavily upon Acts 2:41 as their basis for making this claim. The argument that is set forth states that A. If the Holy Spirit indwells only through the word and B. If the persons in Acts 2:41 received the word prior to baptism, then C. the Holy Spirit either indwells a child of the devil OR D. one is saved prior to baptism. I will admit that it is quite a formidable argument and has perplexed many for years. I also want to state that I highly respect those who have in the past set forth this argument. However, I would like to go on record as stating that it assumes something that has yet to be proven true. You will notice in B. above that this whole argument is predicated upon the assumption that Acts 2:41 teaches that those to whom Peter preached the gospel in that day received the word prior to baptism. That is,

before they were baptized, they received the word. It is this particular assumption about which I would like to think in this article.

## **The Logical Situation**

Acts 2:41 states, “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized....” It is alleged based upon this particular scripture that baptism was administered after those in this passage “received his word.” This is to say that the phrase “received his word” is antecedent to the main verb of this passage, “were baptized.” It is my task to deny that this is the case in this passage. Now, I do not wish to be misunderstood. I believe that a person must hear the word of God before one is baptized. But I do not believe that “hearing the word of God” is necessarily equivalent with “receiving the word of God.” The two are completely different concepts and as such must be handled differently. At this point we need to know when did those receive the word if it was not prior to baptism?

It is my contention that those in Acts 2:41 received the word at the same time as they were baptized. This is to say that they received the word contemporaneously and simultaneously with their baptism. Now, if those in Acts 2:41 “received the word” at the same time as they “were baptized,” then the argument from Acts 2:41 for the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit is completely demolished because this argument depends wholly and completely upon the assumption that these people received the word prior or antecedent to baptism. Let us examine the argument logically at this point to see if this particular method is logically valid. The argument for the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit from Acts 2:41 is presented in the following hypothetical syllogism:

- A. If the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian only through the word, AND
- B. If the reception of the word is completed prior or antecedent to baptism, then
- C. Either the Holy Spirit indwells a child of the devil
- D. Or a person is saved prior to baptism.

Those who argue for the personal indwelling say that C. and D. are false. To this I agree wholeheartedly. They argue that if the conclusion is false, then the major premise composed of the conjuncts A. and B. must be false based upon the logical principle modus tollens. Again, to this I wholeheartedly agree. They argue that of the conjuncts

in the major premise that B. is true (based in Acts 2:41) and that therefore A. must of necessity be false. Here is where I disagree. We shall see that the testimony from the Greek and the scriptures shows that B. above is not true and that in fact, B. is false. However I emphasize that if it is even possible that B. is not true, then it is possible that B. may be false and A. may be true. If it is possible that A. is true, then the argument fails to prove what it claims to prove namely that A cannot be true. In logic, this is known as taking the dilemma by the horns where you deny the consequences alleged to flow from the premises of the argument.

In symbolic terms the argument for the personal indwelling is as follows:

1.  $(A \ \& \ B) \supset (C \vee D)$
2.  $\sim C$  (not disputed)
3.  $\sim D$  (not disputed)
4.  $\sim C \ \& \ \sim D$  (by conjunction)
5.  $\sim (C \vee D)$  (by De Morgan's Theorum)
6.  $\sim (A \ \& \ B)$  (by modus tollens)
7.  $\sim A \vee \sim B$  (by De Morgan's Theorum)
8. B (by Acts 2:41 based on the English)
9.  $\therefore \sim A$  (by disjunctive syllogism)

However if we can show that B. is false then while the syllogism is valid, the premises will not be true. Hence the conclusion will not be sound. In contrast, in this article the following will be shown to be correct:

1.  $(A \ \& \ B) \supset (C \vee D)$
2.  $\sim C$  (not disputed)
3.  $\sim D$  (not disputed)
4.  $\sim C \ \& \ \sim D$  (by conjunction)
5.  $\sim (C \vee D)$  (by De Morgan's Theorum)
6.  $\sim (A \ \& \ B)$  (by modus tollens)
7.  $\sim A \vee \sim B$  (by De Morgan's Theorum)
8.  $\sim B$  (by Acts 2:41 in the Greek)
9.  $\therefore \sim (\sim A)$  (by disjunctive syllogism)

I want to emphasize that the only thing that needs to be shown is the possibility that B. is false and this will doom the argument. Hence, it will not follow that A. is logically false. A. must be proved to be false upon some other grounds. This is what is being shown in line 9, namely, that it is not the case that A is necessarily false. The syllogism is valid, and if the premises are true, the conclusion will be sound. From the Greek and the scriptures let us seek to prove line 8 above, that it is false to say the reception of the word is completed prior or antecedent to baptism.

### **The Textual Situation**

One of the beautiful things about the Greek language in which the New Testament was written is that it is a highly accurate way of communicating concepts. It is much more accurate than the English language and the Greek New Testament clarifies many items that are obscure in English. In the English, the clause “that gladly received his word” is an adjective clause introduced by the relative pronoun, “that” which refers back to the pronoun “they” in the independent clause. The “they” in this passage are those “that gladly received his word.” The main or independent clause has as its verb “were baptized.” When the subordinate clause and the main clause are compared, this gives the impression in the English that the time of the subordinate clause verb “received” is antecedent to the time of the verb “were baptized” in the independent or main clause. But this is not the case in the Greek!

In the Greek, we have the following statement: “οἱ μετὰ τὴν ἀποδέχασθαι τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθησαν.” Please notice the following facts regarding this passage of scripture. The adjective clause in the English translates from the participle “ἀποδέχασθαι.” Note that the participle is a verbal adjective. This means that it has both the qualities of an adjective and the qualities of a verb. The adjectival qualities of this participle are as follows. In this passage the participle “ἀποδέχασθαι” is modified by the definite article “οἱ” and as such is adjectival, positioned in relationship to the main verb as the primary subject of the sentence. The adjectival aspects of this participle answers the question, “Who was baptized?” The answer: “the ones who received the word.” The verbal qualities of this participle are as follows. The participle “ἀποδέχασθαι” is in the aorist tense and middle voice. It is specifically these verbal qualities of this participle (particularly the time/tense element of the participle) as they relate to the main verb of this sentence that are most enlightening!

In brother Roy Deaver's debate with brother James Bales, brother Deaver writes the following: "We must observe further: the Greek participle has no time of its own, but gets its time from the time of the lead verb." Brother Deaver goes on to describe the present tense, modal participles found in Matthew 28:18-20. But the first statement that brother Deaver makes regarding participles—that they have "no time" of their own—is generally true of all Greek participles. This is well attested to in the Greek grammars. So, in order to get the time aspect of the participle, one must look to the main verb within the sentence. The main verb in Acts 2:41 is "εβαπτισθησαν." The person of this verb is third person; the number of this verb is plural; the tense of this verb is aorist; the voice of this verb is passive; the mood of this verb is indicative implying that it is a finite verb. Having said this, we have within the Greek text a construction where an aorist middle participle ("αποδεξαμενοι") is subordinate to a 3rd person plural, aorist passive indicative verb ("εβαπτισθησαν"). The time of the main verb is aorist; this indicates completed action in past time or punctiliar action. The time of the participle must come from the time of the lead verb. The participles time must also be completed action in past time. But this still leaves the question unresolved: is the time of the action indicated within the participle completed before/antecedent to the time of the main verb or simultaneous/contemporaneous as the main verb? Let us turn toward the grammars.

### **The Testimony of the Greek Grammars**

Now, in all fairness, the beginning grammars state that the time of an aorist participle is antecedent to the time of the main verb. In Ray Summers grammar in lesson twenty-four he states, "The aorist passive participle is used like the other participles. The kind of action is punctiliar; the time of action is antecedent to that of the main verb." This is primarily true when the aorist passive participle is being used with the present, imperfect, perfect, or future tenses. So the beginning grammars do not go beyond this basic principle. Such is consistent with the purpose of a beginning grammar. They do not educate the student to the detailed nuances of the language, but simply teach the basic principles. You will notice that I did not list the aorist tense with the other tenses above when describing the relationship of the aorist passive participle to the main verb. This is because in the advanced grammars, where the details of the relationships between various different parts of speech are exhaustively explored and the nuances of such relationships are exposed, we find a very unique situation regarding the aorist participle particularly when subordinate to an aorist main verb. Let us look at what

these advanced grammars have to say regarding this particular construction within the Greek language.

In “A Grammar of the Greek New Testament” written by Blass and DeBrunner, on the section regarding “The Present and Aorist Participles,” (section 339), we read:

Participles originally had no temporal function, but denoted only the Aktionsart; their temporal relation to the finite verb was derived from the context. Since, however, a participle expressing the notion of completion often preceded the finite verb . . . so that the sequence normally was: the completion of the action denoted by the participle, then the action of the finite verb, the idea of relative past time became associated to a certain degree with the aorist participle.... The same applies to the participle coming after the verb.... The present and aorist participles could the more readily be used with temporal nuances because the future participle (like the future infinitive and optative) always expressed relatively future time. The notion of relative past time, however, is not at all necessarily inherent in the aorist participle. (1) The element of past time is absent from the aorist participle especially if its action is identical with that of an aorist finite verb....

The grammar is basically saying that in Classical Greek the participles denoted no time of their own. But slowly over time the aorist participle began to denote time antecedent to the main verb particularly when used with tenses other than the aorist. In other words, if you had an aorist tense participle subordinate to a non-aorist tense verb then the action in the aorist participle would be considered to have occurred before the action in the lead verb. However, please note carefully what the last two sentences of this grammar states regarding the aorist participle when subordinate to an aorist verb. They say that time antecedent or prior to the time of the main verb, “is not necessarily inherent in the aorist participle.” Then the grammarians state that such time is “absent” from the aorist participle, “especially if its action is identical with that of an aorist finite verb” (Emph. krc). The aorist participle subordinate to the aorist finite verb is exactly what we have in Acts 2:41. The time of the participle must be the same as the verb if the actions can be said to be identical.

Let us turn to the highly acclaimed and respected A.T. Robertson in “A Grammar of the Greek New Testament.” Robertson says:

Goodwin holds that the aorist participle generally represents the action as antecedent to the principle verb. Burton has it more nearly correct when he insists that the aorist participle conceives of the event indefinitely or simply. So Blass denies that the aorist tense implies antecedent action. It is usually assumed that the proper use of the aorist participle is antecedent action and that only certain verbs (as exceptions) may occasionally express simultaneous action. But this is a misapprehension of the real situation.... “The aorist participle of antecedent action does not denote antecedence; it is used of antecedent action, where antecedence is implied, not by the aorist tense as at tense, but in some other way....” It is probable that the original use of the aorist participle was that of simultaneous action.... One has no ground for assuming that antecedent action is a necessary or an actual fact with the aorist participle. The aorist participle of simultaneous action is in perfect accord with the genius and history of the Greek participle.... This coincident use of the aorist participle is by no means so rare in the ancient Greek as is sometimes alleged. The action was specially likely to be coincident if the principle verb was also aorist.

We find from Dr. Robertson, concurrence and corroboration with Grammarians Blass and DeBrunner. Dr. Robertson first explains what the various opinions of the Grammarians are in regard to the general use of the aorist participle. Notice he says that it is normally “assumed” that such a participle indicates antecedence, “but this is a misapprehension of the real situation” (Emph. krc). He quotes another grammarian and then states that “one has no ground for assuming that antecedent action is a necessary or an actual fact with the aorist participle” and this in discussion of its use with any tense! In particular, Dr. Robertson states in regard to the aorist participle when subordinate with an aorist main verb, “The action was specially likely to be coincident if the principle verb was also aorist” (Emph. krc). And this is what we have in Acts 2:41—an aorist participle subordinate to an aorist main verb. By “coincident,” Dr. Robertson means that the action in the participle and the action in the main verb are completed at the same time, i.e. simultaneously. He states: “Indeed this simultaneous action is in exact harmony with the punctiliar meaning of the aorist tense. . . . It is needless to press the point except to observe that the order of the part[iciple] is immaterial....” Notice from Robertson, (1) the coincident participle denotes simultaneous action. (2) The coincident participle is in harmony with the aorist and its punctiliar meaning. (3) The order of the participle in relationship to the main verb is immaterial. The coincident participle is exactly what we find in Acts 2:41. It meets the conditions Dr. Robertson so ably sets forth in the Grammar. Therefore, in Acts 2:41, the

participle “ajpodexavmenoi” denotes simultaneous action with the main verb “ejbaptivsqhsan.”

For final corroboration, let us turn to one of the most recent, if not the most recent, Grammar published, “Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics” by Daniel B. Wallace. Wallace states, “The aorist participle, for example, usually denotes antecedent time to that of the controlling verb. But if the main verb is also aorist, this participle may indicate contemporaneous time.” Wallace also states regarding the verbal aspects of the aorist participle:

The aorist participle is normally, though by no means always, antecedent in time to the action of the main verb. But when the aorist participle is related to an aorist main verb, the participle will often be contemporaneous (or simultaneous) to the action of the main verb.

The NT is filled with theologically significant texts related to the temporal participle. Just within Eph 1, note the following . . . . 1:13-14 (ajkouvsanteV . . . . pisteuvsanteV ejsfragivsqhte [does the Spirit seal believers after they believe the gospel, or when they believe?])....

In a footnote explaining this last quote, Dr. Wallace states: “Although it is certainly possible to translate this last text [Ephesians 1:13-14, krc] as ‘after hearing ... after believing you were sealed,’ both the grammatical possibility of contemporaneity and the overall context lead me to believe that the aorist participle is contemporaneous here.” Dr. Wallace corroborates the judgments of Blass, DeBrunner, and Robertson that when the aorist participle is subordinate to an aorist verb the action within the participle occurs (or is at least completed) at the same time as the main verb. This is to say that the action within the participle is simultaneous/contemporaneous with the main verb. He even cites Ephesians 1:13-14 as an example of such contemporaneous action. This text just so happens to be regarding the issue of the time at which the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian.

I want to emphasize again that the subordinate participle “ajpodexavmenoi” in Acts 2:41 is in the aorist tense. The lead verb “ejbaptivsqhsan” in Acts 2:41 is in the aorist tense. This means according to Blass and DeBrunner, “the element of past time is absent from the aorist participle” (Emph. krc). This means according to Robertson that “the action is specially likely to be coincident” and as such the time of the participle in



relationship to the main verb is “simultaneous” (Emph. krc). This means according to Wallace that the time of the participle and the time of the main verb are “contemporaneous (or simultaneous) to the action of the main verb” (Emph. krc).

### **The Scriptural Situation**

At this point let us turn to see if the broader context of the scriptures support this kind of interpretation of Acts 2:41. In 1 Thessalonians 1:6 we read, “And ye became followers (imitators) of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.” Notice that these individuals became followers (imitators) of the Lord when they received the word. Can someone be a follower (imitator) of the Lord without being baptized? Of course not (Galatians 3:26, 27). Please note carefully: if someone could be a follower (imitator) of the Lord without being baptized, then that would imply that A. they are either saved before baptism or B. they are following (imitating) the Devil and following (imitating) the Lord at the same time but we know that neither of those are true! Yet Paul in this passage says that these had become followers (imitators) of the Lord when they received the word. How did they receive the word? Just as those in Acts 2:41 did, by being baptized simultaneously with their reception of the word. How did they become followers (imitators) of the Lord? They did so by being buried in the likeness (imitation) of his death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5).

In this regard, please also notice 1 Thessalonians 2:13. Paul writes, “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” We have already seen that those in Thessalonica became followers (imitators) when they received the word. In this passage we see that when they received the word that was the point at which the word started working effectually in their lives. That is to say, that at the point they became followers, the word began to work “effectually” in their lives.

Why is it dear reader that the word was working effectually in their life? Could it be because the Holy Spirit was indwelling these Christians through the word? The scriptures teach that the point in time at which one receives the word is at the same point in time as one’s baptism. As we have already seen, this is also strongly indicated by the coincident participle in Acts 2:41. Please note: in 1 Thessalonians 1:6 we have the

coincident participle also. Again we state the coincident participle indicates that the action in the participle occurs (or is at least completed) at the same time as the action in the main verb. So here in 1 Thessalonians 1:6 the participle is translated “having received the word” and the main verb is translated “ye became followers (imitators).” That means that the action “having received the word” was at least completed at the same time as the action “ye became followers (imitators).” Having this in mind, let’s note one more passage.

In Ephesians 1:13 we have this same type of Greek construction—the coincident participle. We read, “In whom ye also, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom, having also believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.” I have boldfied and italicized the participles in this verse and I have boldfied and underlined the main verb as the English words relate to the Greek. Notice the actions of the participles as related to the main verb itself. The Christians at Ephesus upon being sealed with the Holy Spirit were said 1) to have heard the word and 2) to have believed the word. Many say that the Holy Spirit sealed them after they had done these things. That is, after having heard and believed, they were sealed with the Holy Spirit. That is one possible way to look at it. However, the correct way to look at it is to state that it was when the Ephesians heard and believed that they were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. That is to say that at the point at which they both heard and believed, they were sealed. Perhaps someone might say, “But this excludes baptism.” This does not exclude baptism at all because the word “believed” in this passage includes the idea of being baptized just as it did for the Philippian Jailer in Acts 16:34. It was only after the jailer had been baptized that it could be said that he believed.

To prove this last point, let us notice Acts 19:2. This verse says, “and he said unto them, Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed? And they said unto him, Nay, we did not so much as hear whether the Holy Spirit was given.” What was the very next question that Paul asked of them? Did Paul tell them to “receive Jesus into your heart,” as many modern day false teachers would say? No. Paul asked them about their baptism. Why did he do such? Because it was only upon their baptism that it could be said that they had believed. Thus, we conclude from Ephesians 1:13 as well that it was only after the Ephesians had been baptized that they could say that they had heard and believed. The evidence from the scriptures is clear. That the action of those on the day

of Pentecost when they “received his word” and “were baptized” is simultaneously is a scriptural concept and does not militate against any other teaching of scripture.

### **The Only Scriptural Conclusion**

Let us take one final look at our syllogism to see if we have set out what we intended to accomplish. Please note the argument in its hypothetical form.

- A. If the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian only through the word, AND
- B. If the reception of the word is completed prior or antecedent to baptism, then
- C. Either the Holy Spirit indwells a child of the devil
- D. Or a person is saved prior to baptism.

We said that if we could show that B. is false then while the syllogism is valid, the premises will not be true. Hence the conclusion will not be sound. This is in fact what has been show in this article. The argument in symbolic form is as follows:

1.  $(A \ \& \ B) \supset (C \vee D)$
2.  $\sim C$  (not disputed)
3.  $\sim D$  (not disputed)
4.  $\sim C \ \& \ \sim D$  (by conjunction)
5.  $\sim (C \vee D)$  (by De Morgan’s Theorum)
6.  $\sim (A \ \& \ B)$  (by modus tollens)
7.  $\sim A \vee \sim B$  (by De Morgan’s Theorum)
8.  $\sim B$  (by Acts 2:41 in the Greek)
9.  $\therefore \sim (\sim A)$  (by disjunctive syllogism)

Please remember that the only thing that needed to be shown is the possibility that B. is false. With even this possibility, this dooms the argument. Not only have we proven the possibility, but also we have proven the reality. The scriptures teach that it is false to say that the reception of the word is completed prior or antecedent to baptism. Hence, it does not follow that A. is logically false. A. must be proved to be false upon some other grounds. The syllogism is valid; the premises are true; the conclusion is sound. From the Greek and the scriptures we have proven line 8 above, that it is false to say the reception of the word is completed prior or antecedent to baptism.

Those who believe in the representative indwelling may confidently affirm that those who “received the word” did not complete that action prior or antecedent to baptism, but at the exact point in which they were baptized. This teaching holds true to the teaching of the New Testament that one cannot be saved until one is baptized and that one does not receive the Holy Spirit (through the word) until one is baptized because complete reception of the word depends not merely upon a person’s having believed, repented, and confessed, but being baptized as well. To say that one has received the word without being baptized implies that baptism is not necessary to completely and fully receive God’s word and this I deny with every ounce of my being. One may at any second prior to one’s imminent burial in water say, “Stop, I do not want to go through with it.” Can it be said of one who does such that they have “received the word?” I deny it. A person cannot say that one has completely received the word until one is baptized. Those who believe in the representative indwelling of the Holy Spirit may, therefore, confidently affirm that the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian only through the word at the point of one’s having received the word. Having affirmed this, one can dismiss the dilemma that has been popularly set forth by those who believe in the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit. These conclusions are logical; these conclusions are textual; these conclusions are scriptural.

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