

²³ When they had been released, they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them^a. ²⁴ And when they heard *this*, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, “O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM, ²⁵ who by the Holy Spirit, *through* the mouth of our father David Your servant, said^b,

‘WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE,
AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS?’

²⁶ ‘THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND,
AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER
AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST^c.’

²⁷ For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur^d. ²⁹ And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, ³⁰ while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus^e.” ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *began* to speak the word of God with boldness^f.^a

^a 4:23 **When they had been released, they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.** Another word for “companions” is “church family.” Persecution drove believers to seek refuge with the people of God.

^b 4:24-25 **And when they heard *this*, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, “O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM, who by the Holy Spirit, *through* the mouth of our father David Your servant, said.** The word “with one accord” does not mean *in unison*. There was likely only one voice heard, but the praying saints were *of one mind*.

The congregational praying started out with adoration of God. He is the powerful creator of heaven and earth and He is the one Who has spoken to His people through the prophets.

^c 4:25-26 **WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS? THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.** This comes from Psalm 2, where the psalmist pictures the *goyim* or *heathen swarm* attacking God’s people. It is notable that the apostles applied a psalm speaking of raging Gentiles to raging Jewish authorities. Persecution knows no ethnic or cultural boundaries.

^d 4:27-28 **For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.** Just as he had done in his sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2:23), Peter pointed out that the plotting enemies of Jesus played right into His hands rather than the other way around. The rescue mission advanced when the nations raged.

^e 4:29-30 **And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.** The church viewed persecution as an opportunity as much as it was a threat. The word “confidence” here does not speak of proud speech, but open, plain speech. It was used in Mark 8:32, where Jesus spoke so “plainly” about the cross that Peter felt the need to rebuke Him. The desire of the church was to seize opportunities to make the gospel message clear.

^f 4:31 **And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *began* to speak the word of God with boldness.** We cannot know whether this was a physical shaking or an emotional/spiritual one. The word can be used either way. We do know that God responds to prayer. We know that He will answer prayers that flow from a desire to speak the gospel with confidence.

The word here translated “filled” was used in New Testament times of boat sails being filled with wind, rooms being filled with fragrances and people being filled with anything from joy to rage (see Luke 4:28; 5:7, 26; 6:11; John 19:29; Acts 5:17; 13:45; 19:29). Paul commanded the Ephesian believers not to be drunk with wine, but to be filled with the Spirit, implying that things that are filled are controlled by what fills them. This picture fits the biblical doctrine of the filling of the Holy Spirit.

The filling ministry of the Spirit has been confused in our times because some have insisted on equating it with the gift of tongues. Certainly the ability to speak in human languages never learned was one evidence in Acts of the filling of the Holy Spirit, but to limit this important ministry to tongues is to miss his very practical work in believers of all ages.

Old Testament saints were filled with the Spirit. In the case of Bezalel and Oholiab, that filling resulted in a creative ability that could be specially used by God. In the New Testament where believers are commanded to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), the following context shows that Spirit-filled people have thankful, worshipful attitudes and submit to those in authority over them. It is regularly associated with communication of God’s message (Luke 1:15, 67).

The clearest contrast recorded in Scripture between being Spirit-filled and not Spirit-filled is Peter. In promising the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus sought to encourage Peter and the rest of his disciples when he said, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18). To look at Peter when Jesus was near is to look at Peter after he was filled with the Spirit.

When Jesus was near, Peter knew he could walk on water (Matthew 14:28). He gave the great God-inspired profession of faith that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the Living God” in the presence of his Lord (Matthew 16:16). He spoke up on the mount where Jesus was transfigured and offered to make huts for Jesus, Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:4). At the last supper he swore allegiance to Jesus even if he had to die (Matthew 26:35). In the garden standing next to Jesus, Peter drew a sword and lopped off the ear of the servant of the high priest (John 18:10).

When Jesus was not near, Peter disowned him three times (Matthew 26:70, 72, 74). After a few days without a post-resurrection appearance, Peter told the other disciples “I’m going out to fish” (John 21:3), returning to the career he had before Jesus came.

When Peter was filled with the Spirit, he preached one of the most effective evangelistic sermons in Christian history (Acts 2:4, 14-41). He boldly confronted the Jewish cultural and religious elite, as well as the general populace, with Truth (Acts 4:8-13, 31).

Is it not true that as the omnipresent God Jesus is present everywhere (Psalm 139; Matthew 28:18-20)? True, but not all his servants make use of that presence. Spirit-filled Peter acted as he did when Jesus was standing beside him. There is no need to fear when you realize and appropriate the presence of God (see also Joshua 1:9; 2 Timothy 4:17). You can speak out for him because he is there bringing his word to your mind. Worship is automatic when Jesus is standing right in front of you.

^a 4:23-31 So is there something you can “do” to become filled with the Spirit? There must be, since it is commanded in Ephesians 5:18. But rather than recording “easy steps to the filling of the Holy Spirit,” simply observe that the Bible characters who are recorded as having been filled with the Holy Spirit bear certain marks. Picture Jesus standing right next to disciples who were:

1. Submissive. In other words, they understood what or who their authorities were and placed themselves in subjection. To fear God is to honor the king (and husbands, parents and masters). Are all submissive people filled with the Holy Spirit? No. But all people who are filled with the Holy Spirit are submissive.
2. Courageous.
 - A. They were courageous evangelists. With Jesus at your side, you need not shrink when you have opportunity to tell others that you have a reason for the hope that you have. If he is alive, the people to whom you speak have more cause to fear than you.

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- B. They were courageous confronters. To be aware of the presence of Jesus is to hate the same things he hates. Spirit-filled Peter told the truth even when the truth was painful to his listeners.
 - 3. Worshippers. To stand in the presence of true greatness is to stand (or bow) in awe. When Spirit-filled people understand the identity of the one before whom they stand (Revelation 1:17). That is why Spirit-filled people “speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” (Ephesians 5:19).
 - 4. Servants. Like Bezalel and Oholiab, conscientious work comes from those who know they are both empowered and inspected by the King of kings.
 - 5. Prayer warriors. Like the church in this text understood, a Lord near is a Lord available for assistance.