



**INVOLUNTARY FILLINGS
DIFFER FROM
VOLUNTARY FILLINGS
BY THE SPIRIT**

(Source: Chapter 8 from *Rethinking Empowerment*)

Whatever you think *filling with/by the Spirit* means, it does *not* involve gaining more of the Spirit. Some, however, have unfortunately illustrated filling with the Spirit by pouring water from a pitcher into a glass, with the rising water level being similar to the Spirit's filling of the believer. At the new birth, believers possess all of the Holy Spirit they will ever have. He indwells us completely and forever. We do not and cannot get more of Him.

Luke used the phrase, "filled with the Spirit," four times in his Gospel and ten times in the Book of Acts, a total of fourteen times (see chart 1). The phrase is used only *one* additional time, by Paul in Ephesians 5:18. Since "filled with the Spirit" is overwhelmingly a Lucan expression, we will address Luke's usage and then look at Paul's treatment of the phrase.

1

FILLINGS BY THE SPIRIT
New Testament

Luke 1:15	[John the Baptist] will be filled with the Holy Spirit.
Luke 1:41	Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.
Luke 1:67	Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit.
Luke 4:1	Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit
Acts 2:4	[Apostles] were all filled with the Holy Spirit.
Acts 4:8	Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them.
Acts 4:31	[Apostles & others] were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.
Acts 6:3	Select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom.
Acts 6:5	They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.
Acts 7:55	Being full of the Holy Spirit, [Stephen] gazed intently into heaven.
Acts 9:17	So that you [Paul] may...be filled with the Holy Spirit.
Acts 11:24	[Barnabas] was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit.
Acts 13:9	Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on [the magician].
Acts 13:52	Disciples were continually filled...with the Holy Spirit.
Eph 5:18	Do not get drunk with wine...but be filled with the Spirit.

**Purpose of Fillings
(Luke’s Use)**

Each time the phrase is used by Luke, certain factors must be taken into account, particularly whether the expression reflects ministry or character, or both at the same time. One author writes,

There seem to be two facets of Spirit-filling. The first may be described as a sovereign act of God whereby he possesses someone for special activity...The second facet of Spirit-filling may be described as the extensive influence...of the Spirit in the believer’s life. It evidences an abiding state of fullness rather than the specific event. It produces a certain character of life, and seems to be a close synonym to spirituality.¹

*Ministry or
Service*

The *Spirit Fillings* identified on chart 2 note the location, individual(s) addressed and context of each passage, as well as indicating the primary emphasis: ministry or walk. The predominant focus of the majority of these texts is the *ministry or service* of the believer. In the Book of Luke, four people are mentioned as being “filled with the Spirit:” (1) John the Baptist—became the forerunner of Christ (1:15), (2) Elizabeth—offered praise to God for His provision of the coming Savior (1:41), (3) Zacharias—prophesied of the Savior’s advent (1:67) and (4) Jesus—was led out to be tested by Satan (4:1). In the Book of Acts various people were “filled with the Spirit.” Some spoke in tongues as a sign of God’s movement at Pentecost (2:4). Peter proclaimed Christ (4:8). Believers spoke with boldness (4:31). Saul became Paul for his ministry to the Gentiles (9:17). Paul confronted and silenced a deceitful magician set against the ways of the Lord (13:9). In these nine instances the primary focus is *ministry or service*.

2

SPIRIT FILLINGS

Book	Ch	Vs	Individual	Context	Ministry	Walk
Luke	1	15	John the Baptist	Forerunner of Christ	P-1	
		41	Elizabeth	Praised God	P-1	
		67	Zacharias	Prophesied	P-1	
	4	1	Jesus Christ	Tested by Satan	P-2	
Acts	2	4	Apostles*	Spoke in Tongues	P-1	
		4	8	Peter*	Proclaimed Christ	P-1
		31	Apostles* & Others	Spoke with Boldness	P-1	
	6	3	Seven Men	Criteria for Service		P-2
		5	Stephen	Servants to Widows		P-2
	7	55	Stephen	Testified of Christ	S-2	P-2
	9	17	Saul/Paul	Apostle to Gentiles	P-1	
	11	24	Barnabas	Proclaimed Christ	S-2	P-2
	13	9	Saul/Paul	Confronted Magician	P-1	
		52	Paul & Barnabas	Faced Persecution		P-3
Eph	5	18	Believers	Obedience		P-3

P = Primary Issue
S = Secondary Issue

*Peter

1 = To Fill (vb - πληθω)
2 = Full (adj - πληρης)
3 = Be Filled (vb - πληροσω)

*Walk or
Character*

However, in the remaining five occurrences in Acts the *walk or character* of the believer is the primary focus. Acts 6:3 deals with the selection of men, who were “full of the Spirit and wisdom” along with “good reputations,” to serve the tables so that the apostles would be allowed to pursue their main mission—being witnesses of Jesus Christ. One of those chosen, Stephen, was “full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (6:5), and when he was stoned for his faith he testified of

Christ (7:55). Barnabas, who “was a good man” as well as “full of the Holy Spirit and of faith,” was sent by the church in Jerusalem to serve in Antioch (11:24). In the last mention of filling, the Paul and Barnabas were “filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” on their first missionary journey (13:52). These particular combinations of “full of wisdom,” “full of faith,” and “full of joy” with “full of the Spirit” indicate *character traits* and is synonymous with a *mature walk* with Christ.

The differing purposes of Spirit fillings correspond to differing ways in which the Spirit fillings are experienced.

In the first nine references in Luke and Acts cited above, there were no prerequisites for the “filling with the Spirit.” No specific steps are required in order to be filled. No obedience to a command was needed. They uttered no prayer in order to be filled.² Rather, they served and ministered because the Spirit had already filled them. All these individuals were filled by God’s sovereign choice apart from any urging, requesting, or pleading on their part. In each instance, God moved on each person providing “special empowerment” for a particular ministry. In fact Peter was filled in three separate instances for three separate purposes as a sovereign act of the Spirit (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31).³ On each occasion God made provision to certain individuals for their responsibility in ministry or service and these fillings were involuntary (see chart 3). *Involuntary fillings* were sovereign interventions of God to accomplish a specific activity through particular believers.

**Types of Fillings
(Luke’s Use)**

*Involuntary
Fillings*

3

FILLINGS BY THE SPIRIT

TYPE OF FILLING	SPIRIT’S PURPOSE	BELIEVER’S INVOLVEMENT
Involuntary Filling	Ministry or Service	Special Empowerment
Voluntary Filling	Walk or Character	Obedient Choices

*Voluntary
Fillings*

On the other hand, the last five fillings in Acts are dependent on the believer, meaning they are *voluntary fillings*. Notice that Luke never explained how these fillings occurred; he only stated that the lives of these individuals evidenced the filling with the Spirit. In obedient response to God’s Word, their lives demonstrated their spiritual maturity. No wonder these are the ones God chose for leadership responsibilities in the Church: the seven men who cared for

the widows, which allowed the Apostles to focus their ministry on the Word (Acts 6:3, 5), and Barnabas who accompanied Paul in the establishment of new churches (11:24). These are also the men who showed Christlike character when facing persecution: Stephen who was stoned (7:55) and Paul and Barnabas who encountered resistance on their missionary journey (13:52).

Filling by the Spirit (Paul's Use)

Involuntary fillings are limited to certain believers to whom God gives “special empowerment” for ministry or service. Voluntary fillings are universally available to all believers based on their obedience to Word of God. While Luke discussed both types, Paul limited his discussion to fillings in the believer’s walk, addressing only the voluntary filling of the Spirit. Paul commanded believers to be influenced by the Spirit in order to live a lifestyle pleasing to God. Though Luke never addressed how voluntary fillings occur, in Ephesians 5:18 Paul does explain the manner in which a believer is filled by the Spirit. Voluntary filling is the result of choosing to allow the Spirit to assist the believer in walking obediently in the light of God’s Word. As a result, one’s life will give evidence of the Spirit’s filling—*maturity in Christ*.

Conclusion

It is important to distinguish the purposes of the “fillings by the Spirit” but at the same time correlate the purpose of each with the different types of Spirit fillings. The *purpose* of fillings *refer* either (1) to the Spirit’s special, sovereign empowerment of individual believers for service or ministry or (2) to the Spirit’s influence in the believer’s walk and character. The *types* of fillings *occur* (1) as God especially and uniquely empowers a believer for a particular ministry or (2) as the believer allows the Spirit to influence his walk through the Word of God. The context of each passage determines which idea is addressed.



Endnotes

1. Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1986), 376.
2. Ibid., 378.
Ryrie says, “No example of praying for the filling of the Spirit exists in the post-Pentecost material of the New Testament. So praying, however earnest, is apparently not the way to be filled.”
3. Zane C. Hodges, *Notes on Acts* (Class notes, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1973), 42.
Hodges states “that in Acts 2:4 they were all filled. And in 4:8, Peter is filled (τλησθεις). Hence, at least in Peter’s case, we have three separate instances of his being filled (2:4; 4:8; 4:31)... Apparently the filling of the Spirit is a sovereign act of the Spirit.... There is no recorded prayer for the Spirit’s filling.”