

John 20:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:

Analysis

And when he had said this, he breathed on them—the Greek *enephysēsen* (ἐνεφύσησεν, breathed into/upon) appears only here in the New Testament, echoing Genesis 2:7 where God breathed life into Adam. Christ, the Second Adam, breathes resurrection life into new humanity. This acted parable demonstrates the Spirit's origin (from Christ), means (His breath), and purpose (empowerment for mission). **Receive ye the Holy Ghost** (*labete pneuma hagion*, λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον)—the aorist imperative commands reception of what Christ offers.

Theological debate surrounds this verse's relationship to Pentecost (Acts 2). Some view this as preliminary empowerment for post-resurrection ministry, with Pentecost bringing fuller baptism of the Spirit. Others see symbolic anticipation of Pentecost. Regardless, Christ's breathing signifies the Spirit's coming depends on Christ's finished work—the Spirit comes from the crucified and risen Christ. The Spirit's reception enables the mission just commissioned (v.21). Without the Spirit, disciples cannot continue Christ's work; with the Spirit, they become witnesses "unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Historical Context

The imagery of divine breath creating life pervades Old Testament Scripture: God's breath creates (Genesis 1:2, Job 33:4, Psalm 33:6), sustains (Job 34:14-15), and renews (Ezekiel 37:9-10). Prophets promised Spirit-outpouring in the messianic age (Joel 2:28-29, Ezekiel 36:26-27). Jesus's breathing enacts this promise.

The relationship between John 20:22 and Acts 2 has generated discussion since patristic times. Luke-Acts presents Pentecost as the decisive Spirit-baptism empowering witness. John's Gospel emphasizes realized eschatology—eternal life and Spirit possession begin now for believers. Some scholars propose John 20:22 represents Easter gift of regenerating Spirit, while Acts 2 describes Pentecost gift of empowering Spirit. Early church fathers like Chrysostom and Augustine wrestled with this chronology. The unified testimony: resurrection, ascension, and Spirit-gift form one salvation-historical complex establishing the church.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does Christ's breathing the Spirit on the disciples echo creation, and what does this reveal about new creation?
2. What is the relationship between receiving the Holy Spirit and effective Christian witness and mission?
3. How should pneumatology (doctrine of the Spirit) shape ecclesiology (doctrine of the church)?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	τοῦτο	εἰπὼν	ἐνεφύσησεν	καὶ	λέγει	αὐτοῖς
And	this	when he had said	he breathed on	And	saith	unto them
G2532	G5124	G2036	G1720	G2532	G3004	G846

Λάβετε	πνεῦμα	ἅγιον·
Receive ye	Ghost	the Holy
G2983	G4151	G40

Additional Cross-References

Job 33:4 (Spirit): The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.

Genesis 2:7 (Parallel theme): And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Ezekiel 37:9 (Parallel theme): Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.

Acts 2:38 (Holy): Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Acts 8:15 (Holy): Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

Psalms 33:6 (Parallel theme): By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.

Acts 2:4 (Holy): And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Acts 19:2 (Holy): He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

John 7:39 (Holy): (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

Acts 4:8 (Holy): Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,