

IMPARTATION

Throughout the Bible, it is recorded that God has chosen to impart various blessings, abilities, and guidance upon His people by the Laying on of Hands. In some Old Testament situations involving capital punishment, all witnesses to the crime committed were obligated to lay their hands on the head of the guilty and the congregations were to stone him to death. (See Leviticus 24:10-16). That might discourage witnesses from violating the 9th Commandment (refer to Exodus 20:16) However, Laying on of Hands was much happier than participating in capital punishment.

This brief study will list several purposes for the Laying on of Hands, first in the Old Testament and then in the New Testament.

OLD TESTAMENT

1. To Confer Blessing on Children: Genesis 48:8-20

As Jacob (Israel) was near death in Egypt under the care of Joseph, he had opportunity to bless his two grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh. He blessed them by laying his right hand on Ephraim's head (although Ephraim was the younger) and his left hand on Manasseh's head (even though Manasseh was the older). Joseph, as father of the two boys, objected to Jacob's placement of his hands on the boys since the laying on of the right hand should have been on Manasseh, the oldest.

Although Jacob would not reverse the placement of his hands on the boys despite Joseph's protest, the importance of proper (traditional) laying on of hands upon children was quite evident and especially important to male children later in their lives.

2. To Commission for Leadership: Numbers 27:18-23

God told Moses to lay his hand upon Joshua to inaugurate (commission) him for leadership following Moses' tenure and to impart to him some of Moses' authority so that the Israelites would obey Joshua when his term of leadership would begin.

 **3. To Impart Wisdom: Deuteronomy 34:9**

"Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses." Very seldom is the incoming leader of a large nation such as Israel so thoroughly prepared for his tenure.

 **4. To Transfer Israel's Iniquities and Transgressions Onto the Scapegoat: Leviticus 16:20-22**

The High Priest (Aaron) laid both of his hands on the head of the scapegoat in order to confess over it the iniquities and transgressions of Israel, thus transferring them onto the head of the goat. The goat was then taken into uninhabited wilderness, bearing upon itself Israel's iniquities. It was finally released there, eventually to die, thereby completing its destiny of removing Israel's iniquities from the camp, to be remembered no more.

NEW TESTAMENT

 **1. To Bless Little Children: Mark 10:13-16**

When parents brought little children to Jesus so that He might touch them, their motivation may have been similar to that of parents in the United States who attempt to have campaigning politicians kiss their babies. Whether or not that might be so, Jesus' disciples tried to prevent the children from being brought to Jesus. When Jesus became aware of their intervention, He made them allow the children to be brought to Him, warning that anyone not receiving the Kingdom of God as a little child will not be able to enter the kingdom. Finally, Jesus held the children in His arms, "laid His hands on them, and blessed them." (Verse 16)

 **2. To Impart Healing: Matthew 9:18-19; 23-26**

A ruler came to Jesus and told Him that his daughter just died, but if Jesus would lay His hand on her she would live. When Jesus arrived at the ruler's home, the people there had already begun mourning the child's death; but Jesus told them the girl was merely sleeping and not dead. Jesus was ridiculed for His comment, but He went to the girl, "Took her by the hand and the girl arose." (Verse 25)

The girl was indeed fortunate to have a father who sincerely believed that Jesus could bring her back from the dead (or "sleeping") by the Laying on of Hands.

To Impart Healing continued: Acts 9:9-18

While the Apostle Paul (then named Saul) recuperated in Damascus from complete blindness suffered during his encounter with Jesus, the Lord spoke in a vision to a believer named Ananias. He told Ananias to visit Saul, to bring healing to him; and that Saul had already "seen" in a vision Ananias "putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight." (Verse 12)

When Jesus convinced Ananias it was safe to visit Saul, he went in to Saul and "laying his hands on him" (verse 17) told him that Jesus sent him so that he could receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. "Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once.." (Verse 18)

3. To Impart the Holy Spirit: Acts 8:14-17

When revival broke out in Samaria under Philip's leadership, the Apostles at Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria to pray for the new believers in Samaria to receive the Holy Spirit. They had been water baptized (verse 12), but were not baptized in the Holy Spirit. However, Peter and John "laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit." (verse 17)

To Impart the Holy Spirit Continued: Acts 19:1-7

Paul came to Ephesus and found about twelve disciples, none of whom had ever heard of the Holy Spirit. When Paul questioned them further, he learned that they had all been baptized only into John's baptism. "Then Paul said 'John indeed baptized with a Baptism of Repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him Who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.'" (verse 4) It was Paul's way of urging them to go another step further in their relationship with Christ by being baptized into Christ.

The Ephesian disciples were convinced by Paul's recommendation and were immediately water baptized, this time "in the name of the Lord Jesus." (verse 5) Then "when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them and they spoke with tongues and prophesied." (verse 6)

These Ephesian believers confessed that they had not heard of the Holy Spirit. That being the case, it is VERY likely that they had never heard of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. And yet, with the help of the Apostle Paul teaching them about being baptized into Christ, then actually being water baptized "in the Name of the Lord Jesus" (verse 5), they were then ready for their Baptism of the Holy Spirit in the manner of those on the Day of Pentecost.

4. To Impart Spiritual Gifts: 1 Timothy 4:14

Paul advises Timothy not to neglect the gift (spiritual gift) that was imparted to him "by prophecy with the laying on of hands of the eldership." (2 Timothy 1:6) Paul takes the liberty here to remind Timothy to stir up (keep active) "the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands."

 **5. To Ordain Church Officials: Acts 6:1-6**

The first church (in Jerusalem) found itself with a dispute regarding equal amounts of food being distributed daily to the widows in the church. The church leadership invited candidates (men) from the congregation that would be suitable (of good reputation and full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom) to govern this particular ministry. When seven such men were chosen, they were "set before the Apostles and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them." (verse 6)

 **6. To Commission for Service: Acts 13:1-3**

The church at Antioch was the church home of five notable men, some prophets and some teachers, including Saul (Paul) and Barnabas. "As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, 'Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" (verse 2) (The work to which they had been called by the Holy Spirit was missionary work, going from place-to-place to preach the Gospel of Christ). "Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they (the church) sent them away." (verse 3) This sending out would become known as Paul's First Missionary Journey.

 **7. A Precaution Against Hurried Laying on of Hands: 1 Timothy 5:22**

The Apostle Paul, in writing to Timothy, mentioned to him to maintain the gift which he received "by prophecy with the Laying of the Hands of the eldership.." (1 Timothy 4:14)

However, in this Scripture (1 Timothy 5:22), Paul warns Timothy that there is a "flip side" to the benefits of impartation via the Laying on of Hands. That "flip side" is the very real danger of laying hands on someone too hastily ("Do not lay hands on anyone hastily..." (1 Timothy 5:22). To lay hands on anyone before really knowing them (their heart for God and for the church as well as their reputation within and without the church) could result in harm to the person and to the church. An untimely Laying on of Hands for someone's hurried ordination or commission to service in the church may fill a vacancy but eventually will create greater problems than the vacancy itself.

Despite this stern warning, the Laying on of Hands is an effective tool ordained by God to accomplish the impartations of blessing, ability, and guidance.

