

# Laying on of Hands

---

*A Brief Summary of the  
Biblical References and  
History of Its Use*

---

James Swanson

There is some confusion and controversy regarding the laying on of hands and its function in the church today. According to the writer of Hebrews, the laying on of hands is among some of the elementary things that the Christian should know about.

**Hebrews 6:1-2 NASB**

Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, **2** of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

**Hebrews 6:1-2 NLT** So let us stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding. Surely we don't need to start again with the fundamental importance of repenting from evil deeds and placing our faith in God. **2** You don't need further instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

However, there seems to be a need to clarify it's purpose and practice as it is still misunderstood. Let's begin with a definition of sorts.

The laying on of hands or imposition of hands is an act or ceremony that is performed which can be symbolic, like when praying for someone who is sick in a hospital room, or formal, as in an ordination ceremony. This practice is not limited too any one denomination or religion in particular. The practice of laying on of hands has its roots in the Old Testament.

## Old Testament Roots

### *Blessings*

One of the first instances we find this act is when Jacob blesses Joseph through his sons in Genesis 48.

#### Genesis 48:13-14 NASB

Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right, and brought them close to him. **14** But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head,

#### Genesis 48:13-14 NLT

Then he positioned the boys in front of Jacob. With his right hand he directed Ephraim toward Jacob's left hand, and with his left hand he put Manasseh at Jacob's right hand. **14** But Jacob crossed his arms as he reached out to lay his hands on the boys' heads. He put his right hand on

crossing his hands, although Manasseh was the firstborn.	the head of Ephraim, though he was the younger boy, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, though he was the firstborn.
--	---

The priests would raising his hands over the people to bless them.

<b>Leviticus 9:22 NASB</b> Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he stepped down after making the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings.	<b>Leviticus 9:22 NLT</b> After that, Aaron raised his hands toward the people and blessed them. Then, after presenting the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offering, he stepped down from the altar.
---	---

## *Sacrifices*

The practice is also used by the priests during the sacrificial rituals when the hands of the person presenting the animal would lay their hands on the head of the animal.

<b>Exodus 29:10 NASB</b> "Then	<b>Exodus 29:10 NLT</b> "Bring
--------------------------------	--------------------------------

<p>you shall bring the bull before the tent of meeting, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the bull.</p>	<p>the young bull to the entrance of the Tabernacle, where Aaron and his sons will lay their hands on its head.</p>
<p><b>Exodus 29:15 NASB</b> "You shall also take the one ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram;</p>	<p><b>Exodus 29:15 NLT</b> "Next Aaron and his sons must lay their hands on the head of one of the rams.</p>
<p><b>Exodus 29:19 NASB</b> "Then you shall take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram.</p>	<p><b>Exodus 29:19 NLT</b> "Now take the other ram, and have Aaron and his sons lay their hands on its head.</p>
<p><b>Leviticus 1:4 NASB</b> 'He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf.</p>	<p><b>Leviticus 1:4 NLT</b> Lay your hand on the animal's head, and the LORD will accept its death in your place to purify you, making you right with him.</p>
<p><b>Leviticus 3:2, 8, 13 NASB</b> 2 'He shall lay his hand on the head of his offering</p>	<p><b>Leviticus 3:2, 8, 13 NLT</b> 2 Lay your hand on the animal's head, and</p>

<p>and slay it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, and Aaron's sons the priests shall sprinkle the blood around on the altar. ... 8 and he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering and slay it before the tent of meeting, and Aaron's sons shall sprinkle its blood around on the altar. ... 13 and he shall lay his hand on its head and slay it before the tent of meeting, and the sons of Aaron shall sprinkle its blood around on the altar.</p>	<p>slaughter it at the entrance of the Tabernacle. Then Aaron's sons, the priests, will splatter its blood against all sides of the altar. ... 8 lay your hand on its head, and slaughter it in front of the Tabernacle. Aaron's sons will then splatter the sheep's blood against all sides of the altar. ... 13 lay your hand on its head, and slaughter it in front of the Tabernacle. Aaron's sons will then splatter the goat's blood against all sides of the altar.</p>
<p><b>Leviticus 4:4 NASB</b> 'He shall bring the bull to the doorway of the tent of meeting before the LORD, and he shall lay his hand on the head of the bull and slay the bull before the LORD.</p>	<p><b>Leviticus 4:4 NLT</b> He must bring the bull to the LORD at the entrance of the Tabernacle, lay his hand on the bull's head, and slaughter it before the LORD.</p>
<p><b>Leviticus 4:15 NASB</b> 'Then</p>	<p><b>Leviticus 4:15 NLT</b> The</p>

<p>the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands on the head of the bull before the LORD, and the bull shall be slain before the LORD.</p>	<p>elders of the community must then lay their hands on the bull's head and slaughter it before the LORD.</p>
<p><b>Leviticus 4:24 NASB</b> 'He shall lay his hand on the head of the male goat and slay it in the place where they slay the burnt offering before the LORD; it is a sin offering.</p>	<p><b>Leviticus 4:24 NLT</b> He must lay his hand on the goat's head and slaughter it at the place where burnt offerings are slaughtered before the LORD. This is an offering for his sin.</p>
<p><b>Leviticus 4:29 NASB</b> 'He shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and slay the sin offering at the place of the burnt offering.</p>	<p><b>Leviticus 4:29 NLT</b> They must lay a hand on the head of the sin offering and slaughter it at the place where burnt offerings are slaughtered.</p>
<p><b>Leviticus 8:14 NASB</b> Then he brought the bull of the sin offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the bull of the sin offering.</p>	<p><b>Leviticus 8:14 NLT</b> Then Moses presented the bull for the sin offering. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the bull's head,</p>

<p><b>Leviticus 8:18 NASB</b> Then he presented the ram of the burnt offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram.</p>	<p><b>Leviticus 8:18 NLT</b> Then Moses presented the ram for the burnt offering. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the ram's head,</p>
<p><b>Leviticus 8:22 NASB</b> Then he presented the second ram, the ram of ordination, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram.</p>	<p><b>Leviticus 8:22 NLT</b> Then Moses presented the other ram, which was the ram of ordination. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the ram's head,</p>
<p><b>Leviticus 16:21 NASB</b> "Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send <i>it</i> away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who <i>stands</i> in readiness.</p>	<p><b>Leviticus 16:21 NLT</b> He will lay both of his hands on the goat's head and confess over it all the wickedness, rebellion, and sins of the people of Israel. In this way, he will transfer the people's sins to the head of the goat. Then a man specially chosen for the task will drive the goat into the wilderness.</p>



## *Witnessing*

The laying on of hands was also used in bearing witness to a blasphemous offense.

### **Leviticus 24:14 NASB**

"Bring the one who has cursed outside the camp, and let all who heard him lay their hands on his head; then let all the congregation stone him.

### **Leviticus 24:14 NLT**

"Take the blasphemer outside the camp, and tell all those who heard the curse to lay their hands on his head. Then let the entire community stone him to death.

## *Ordination or Separation*

The tribe of Levi was set apart for service to the Lord in an official ceremony involving the laying on of hands.

**Numbers 8:9-10 NASB** "So you shall present the Levites before the tent of meeting. You shall also assemble the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, **10** and present the Levites before the LORD; and the sons of

**Numbers 8:9-10 NLT** Then assemble the whole community of Israel, and present the Levites at the entrance of the Tabernacle. **10** When you present the Levites before the LORD, the people of Israel must lay their hands

Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites.	on them.
<b>2 Chronicles 29:23 NASB</b> Then they brought the male goats of the sin offering before the king and the assembly, and they laid their hands on them.	<b>2 Chronicles 29:23 NLT</b> The male goats for the sin offering were then brought before the king and the assembly of people, who laid their hands on them.

Joshua is set apart by Moses as his successor. Although Joshua did not receive all of Moses' authority because he was required to have Eleazar make inquiry of the Lord using the Urim to determine the Lord's direction rather than speaking directly to God as Moses did.

<b>Numbers 27:18-20 NASB</b> So the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; <b>19</b> and have him stand before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and commission him in their	<b>Numbers 27:18-20 NLT</b> The LORD replied, "Take Joshua son of Nun, who has the Spirit in him, and lay your hands on him. <b>19</b> Present him to Eleazar the priest before the whole community, and publicly commission him to lead the people. <b>20</b> Transfer some of your authority to
--	--

<p>sight. 20 "You shall put some of your authority on him, in order that all the congregation of the sons of Israel may obey <i>him</i>.</p>	<p>him so the whole community of Israel will obey him.</p>
<p><b>Deuteronomy 34:9 NASB</b>          Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses.</p>	<p><b>Deuteronomy 34:9 NLT</b>          Now Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him. So the people of Israel obeyed him, doing just as the LORD had commanded Moses.</p>

So in the Old Testament we have to ritual used in blessing heirs, in consecrating sacrificial animals, as a means of providing legal witness, and in separating someone or a group apart for special service to the Lord.

## New Testament

### *Blessing*

Jesus laid his hands on children to bless them.

Matthew 19:13-15 NASB

Then *some* children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them.

14 But Jesus said, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

15 After laying His hands on them, He departed from there.

Matthew 19:13-15 NLT

One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him. 14 But

Jesus said, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children." 15

And he placed his hands on their heads and blessed them before he left.

**Mark 10:13-16 NASB** And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them.

**14** But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

**15** "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all*." **16** And He took them in His arms and *began* blessing them, laying His hands on them.

**Mark 10:13-16 NLT** One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him. **14** When Jesus saw what was happening, he was angry with his disciples. He said to them, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. **15** I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it." **16** Then he took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them.

Jesus also blesses His disciples prior to His ascension.

**Luke 24:50 NASB** And He

**Luke 24:50 NLT** Then

led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them.	Jesus led them to Bethany, and lifting his hands to heaven, he blessed them.
--	--

## Healing

Jesus touched some of the people He healed, although there were some who He healed by other means.

<p><b>Matthew 9:23-25 NASB</b>          When Jesus came into the official's house, and saw the flute-players and the crowd in noisy disorder, <b>24</b> He said, "Leave; for the girl has not died, but is asleep." And they <i>began</i> laughing at Him. <b>25</b> But when the crowd had been sent out, He entered and took her by the hand, and the girl got up.</p>	<p><b>Matthew 9:23-25 NLT</b>          When Jesus arrived at the official's home, he saw the noisy crowd and heard the funeral music. <b>24</b> "Get out!" he told them. "The girl isn't dead; she's only asleep." But the crowd laughed at him. <b>25</b> After the crowd was put outside, however, Jesus went in and took the girl by the hand, and she stood up!</p>
<p><b>Mark 5:22-23 NASB</b> One of the synagogue officials named Jairus *came up, and on seeing Him, *fell at</p>	<p><b>Mark 5:22-23 NLT</b> Then a leader of the local synagogue, whose name was Jairus, arrived. When</p>

<p>His feet 23 and *implored Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death; <i>please</i> come and lay Your hands on her, so that she will get well and live."</p>	<p>he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet, 23 pleading fervently with him. "My little daughter is dying," he said. "Please come and lay your hands on her; heal her so she can live."</p>
<p><b>Mark 6:5 NASB</b> And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them.</p>	<p><b>Mark 6:5 NLT</b> And because of their unbelief, he couldn't do any miracles among them except to place his hands on a few sick people and heal them.</p>
<p><b>Luke 4:40-41 NASB</b> While the sun was setting, all those who had any <i>who were</i> sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and laying His hands on each one of them, He was healing them. 41 Demons also were coming out of many, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But rebuking them, He would not allow them to</p>	<p><b>Luke 4:40-41 NLT</b> As the sun went down that evening, people throughout the village brought sick family members to Jesus. No matter what their diseases were, the touch of his hand healed every one. 41 Many were possessed by demons; and the demons came out at his command, shouting, "You</p>

<p> speak, because they knew Him to be the Christ. </p>	<p> are the Son of God!” But because they knew he was the Messiah, he rebuked them and refused to let them speak. </p>
<p> <b>Luke 13:12-13 NASB</b> When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, <b>“Woman, you are freed from your sickness.”</b> <b>13</b> And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again and <i>began</i> glorifying God. </p>	<p> <b>Luke 13:12-13 NLT</b> When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, <b>“Dear woman, you are healed of your sickness!”</b> <b>13</b> Then he touched her, and instantly she could stand straight. How she praised God! </p>

We also know that Jesus was able to heal by just speaking the word (Matthew 8:8) and by others touching the hem of his garment (Matthew 9; Mark 5; Luke 8).

Ananias was able to heal Saul by laying his hands on him.

<p> <b>Acts 9:11-12 NASB</b> And the Lord <i>said</i> to him, <b>“Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of</b> </p>	<p> <b>Acts 9:10-18 NLT</b> Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, <b>“Ananias!”</b> </p>
---	--



Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight." ... Acts 9:10-18

**NASB** Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." 11 And the Lord *said* to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight." 13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about

"Yes, Lord!" he replied.

11 The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now. 12 I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again." 13 "But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! 14 And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name." 15 But the Lord said, "Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of

this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; 14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; 16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." 17 So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 And immediately there fell from his eyes something

Israel. 16 And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake." 17 So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized.

like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized;

The apostles were also able to heal people by laying hands on them.

**Acts 3:6-7 NASB** But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!" **7** And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened.

**Acts 3:6-7 NLT** But Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!" **7** Then Peter took the lame man by the right hand and helped him up. And as he did, the man's feet and ankles were instantly healed and strengthened.

**Acts 5:12 NASB** At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico.

**Acts 5:12 NLT** The apostles were performing many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers were meeting regularly at the Temple in

	the area known as Solomon's Colonnade.
<p><b>Acts 28:8 NASB</b> And it happened that the father of Publius was lying <i>in bed</i> afflicted with <i>recurrent</i> fever and dysentery; and Paul went in <i>to see</i> him and after he had prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him.</p>	<p><b>Acts 28:8 NLT</b> As it happened, Publius's father was ill with fever and dysentery. Paul went in and prayed for him, and laying his hands on him, he healed him.</p>

### *Ordination or Separation*

The ritual was used to set apart certain people to the service of the Lord.

<p><b>Acts 6:2-6 NASB</b> So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. <b>3</b> "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the</p>	<p><b>Acts 6:2-6 NLT</b> So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, "We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program. <b>3</b> And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We</p>
--	--

<p>Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. <b>4</b> "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." <b>5</b> The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. <b>6</b> And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.</p>	<p>will give them this responsibility. <b>4</b> Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word." <b>5</b> Everyone liked this idea, and they chose the following: Stephen (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (an earlier convert to the Jewish faith). <b>6</b> These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them.</p>
<p><b>Acts 13:1-3 NASB</b> Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was <i>there</i>, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of</p>	<p><b>Acts 13:1-3 NLT</b> Among the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch of Syria were Barnabas, Simeon (called "the black man"), Lucius (from Cyrene), Manaen (the</p>

<p>Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. <b>2</b> While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." <b>3</b> Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.</p>	<p>childhood companion of King Herod Antipas), and Saul. <b>2</b> One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Appoint Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them." <b>3</b> So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way.</p>
<p><b>1 Timothy 4:14 NASB</b> Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.</p>	<p><b>1 Timothy 4:14 NLT</b> Do not neglect the spiritual gift you received through the prophecy spoken over you when the elders of the church laid their hands on you.</p>
<p><b>2 Timothy 1:6 NASB</b> For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.</p>	<p><b>2 Timothy 1:6 NLT</b> This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you.</p>

There is also the warning to not be too hasty in laying hands on anyone for the Lord's service.

**1 Timothy 5:22 NASB** Do not lay hands upon anyone *too* hastily and thereby share *responsibility for* the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.

**1 Timothy 5:22 NLT** Never be in a hurry about appointing a church leader. Do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

### *Imparting the Holy Spirit*

There is a connection to the coming of or imparting of the Holy Spirit and the associated gifts through the laying on of hands.

**Acts 8:14-23 NASB** Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, **15** who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. **16** For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply

**Acts 8:14-23 NLT** When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted God's message, they sent Peter and John there. **15** As soon as they arrived, they prayed for these new believers to receive the Holy Spirit. **16** The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, for

been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

17 Then they *began* laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! 21 "You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. 22 "Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if

they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then Peter and John laid their hands upon these believers, and they received the Holy Spirit.

18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given when the apostles laid their hands on people, he offered them money to buy this power. 19 "Let me have this power, too," he exclaimed, "so that when I lay my hands on people, they will receive the Holy Spirit!" 20 But Peter replied, "May your money be destroyed with you for thinking God's gift can be bought! 21 You can have no part in this, for your heart is not right with God. 22 Repent of your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive your evil



<p>possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 "For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity."</p>	<p>thoughts, 23 for I can see that you are full of bitter jealousy and are held captive by sin."</p>
<p><b>Acts 19:1-6 NASB</b> It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. 2 He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they <i>said</i> to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." 3 And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." 4 Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was</p>	<p><b>Acts 19:1-6 NLT</b> While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior regions until he reached Ephesus, on the coast, where he found several believers. 2 "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" he asked them. "No," they replied, "we haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." 3 "Then what baptism did you experience?" he asked. And they replied, "The baptism of John." 4 Paul said, "John's baptism called for repentance from sin. But John himself told the people to believe</p>

coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they *began* speaking with tongues and prophesying.

in the one who would come later, meaning Jesus.” 5 As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 Then when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in other tongues and prophesied.

We do know that this is not the only way people received the Holy Spirit.

**Acts 2:1-4 NASB** When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each

**Acts 2:1-4 NLT** On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. 2 Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. 3 Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of

one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

them. 4 And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

**Acts 10:44-48 NASB** While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. 45 All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. 46 For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, 47 "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized

**Acts 10:44-48 NLT** Even as Peter was saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the message. 45 The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles, too. 46 For they heard them speaking in other tongues and praising God. Then Peter asked, 47 "Can anyone object to their being baptized, now that they have received the Holy

who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *did*, can he?" 48 And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.

Spirit just as we did?" 48 So he gave orders for them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Afterward Cornelius asked him to stay with them for several days.

There are also instances in the Old Testament where God had given people gifts with regard to building the tabernacle and of prophecy, although we don't know if this was through some sort of ceremony like laying on of hands.

**Exodus 31:1-11 NASB** Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. 3 "I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all *kinds of* craftsmanship, 4 to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver,

**Exodus 31:1-11 NLT** Then the LORD said to Moses, 2 "Look, I have specifically chosen Bezalel son of Uri, grandson of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. 3 I have filled him with the Spirit of God, giving him great wisdom, ability, and expertise in all kinds of crafts. 4 He is a master craftsman, expert in working with gold, silver,

and in bronze, 5 and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, that he may work in all *kinds of* craftsmanship. 6 "And behold, I Myself have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and in the hearts of all who are skillful I have put skill, that they may make all that I have commanded you: 7 the tent of meeting, and the ark of testimony, and the mercy seat upon it, and all the furniture of the tent, 8 the table also and its utensils, and the pure *gold* lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, 9 the altar of burnt offering also with all its utensils, and the laver and its stand, 10 the woven garments as

and bronze. 5 He is skilled in engraving and mounting gemstones and in carving wood. He is a master at every craft! 6 "And I have personally appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, to be his assistant. Moreover, I have given special skill to all the gifted craftsmen so they can make all the things I have commanded you to make: 7 the Tabernacle; the Ark of the Covenant; the Ark's cover—the place of atonement; all the furnishings of the Tabernacle; 8 the table and its utensils; the pure gold lampstand with all its accessories; the incense altar; 9 the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils; the washbasin with its stand; 10 the beautifully stitched

<p>well, and the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, <i>with which</i> to carry on their priesthood; <b>11</b> the anointing oil also, and the fragrant incense for the holy place, they are to make <i>them</i> according to all that I have commanded you."</p>	<p>garments—the sacred garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments for his sons to wear as they minister as priests; <b>11</b> the anointing oil; the fragrant incense for the Holy Place. The craftsmen must make everything as I have commanded you."</p>
<p><b>Numbers 11:24-30 NASB</b>          So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD. Also, he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people, and stationed them around the tent. <b>25</b> Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him; and He took of the Spirit who was upon him and placed <i>Him</i> upon the seventy elders. And when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied.</p>	<p><b>Numbers 11:24-29 NLT</b> So Moses went out and reported the LORD's words to the people. He gathered the seventy elders and stationed them around the Tabernacle. <b>25</b> And the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to Moses. Then he gave the seventy elders the same Spirit that was upon Moses. And when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But this never happened again. <b>26</b></p>

But they did not do *it* again. **26** But two men had remained in the camp; the name of one was Eldad and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them (now they were among those who had been registered, but had not gone out to the tent), and they prophesied in the camp. **27** So a young man ran and told Moses and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." **28** Then Joshua the son of Nun, the attendant of Moses from his youth, said, "Moses, my lord, restrain them." **29** But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD'S people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!" **30** Then Moses

Two men, Eldad and Medad, had stayed behind in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but they had not gone out to the Tabernacle. Yet the Spirit rested upon them as well, so they prophesied there in the camp. **27** A young man ran and reported to Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp!" **28** Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' assistant since his youth, protested, "Moses, my master, make them stop!" **29** But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit upon them all!"

<p>returned to the camp, <i>both</i> he and the elders of Israel.</p>	
<p><b>1 Samuel 16:13 NASB</b> Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah.</p>	<p><b>1 Samuel 16:13 NLT</b> So as David stood there among his brothers, Samuel took the flask of olive oil he had brought and anointed David with the oil. And the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David from that day on. Then Samuel returned to Ramah.</p>

As with David, the Spirit of the Lord also came upon judges of Israel (Judges 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 14:18; 15:14) and Saul (1 Samuel 10:6) before David. Although none of these was like David.

## Conclusion

The laying on of hands is practice that has nothing to do with the who performs the ritual, except for maybe Jesus himself but even he was hindered in performing miracles by people's lack of faith. On the other hand, the ritual had more to do with God imparting His



blessing and gifts upon individuals.

Yes, there does seem to be some evidence that the Apostles and others were able to impart spiritual gifts through the laying on of hands but this was usually associated with beginning a new work in a new location, as in case of the Peter and John in Samaria and Paul in Ephesus. Although the laying on of hands was not always required for the impartation of the Holy Spirit and the gifts to be given as in Peter and Cornelius.

In summary, the laying on of hands was done while blessing people (which included parental blessings and healing), to bear witness to a criminal charge, to set aside people for service to the Lord, and for imparting gifts necessary for the building up the community of faith.

I'll conclude with this quote from the article "*Laying on of hands - what does the Bible say?*" from GotQuestions.org.

Undoubtedly, the laying on of hands in the early church was a means of connecting the message with the messenger, or the spiritual gift with the gifted giver. It provided a "sign" authenticating him through whom the physical manifestation of a spiritual gift

was bestowed. We need to understand very carefully that there are no magical biblical formulas for the ministry of the church. Laying on of hands has no power itself. Laying on of hands is only used by God when done in agreement with God's word.

---

## Bibliography

---

- “Laying on of Hands - What Does the Bible Say?”  
*GotQuestions.Org*,  
<https://www.gotquestions.org/laying-on-of-hands.html>. Accessed 13 Oct. 2018.
- “Imposition of Hands | Judaism and Christianity | Britannica.Com.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*,  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/imposition-of-hands>. Accessed 9 Oct. 2018.
- “Laying on of Hands.” *Wikipedia*, 3 Sept. 2018. *Wikipedia*,  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Laying\\_on\\_of\\_hands&oldid=857867635](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Laying_on_of_hands&oldid=857867635).
- Hebrew Roots/The Original Foundation/Laying Hands Hebraic - Wikibooks, Open Books for an Open World*. 1 July 2012, [https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Hebrew\\_Roots/The\\_original\\_foundation/Laying\\_Hands\\_Hebraic](https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Hebrew_Roots/The_original_foundation/Laying_Hands_Hebraic).
- Daly, Kevin. “The Laying on of Hands.” *Messianic Good News*, 5 Oct. 2012,  
<http://www.messianicgoodnews.org/the-laying-on-of-hands/>.
- Elwell, Walter A., editor. *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Baker Books, 1996.
- Hoffman, Rabbi Lawrence A. “The Laying Of Hands.” *The New York Jewish Week*, 19 Apr. 2017,  
<http://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/the-laying-of-hands/>.
- Mathis, David. “The Laying on of Hands.” *Desiring God*, 8 Feb.

2018, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-laying-on-of-hands>.

Nave, Orville J. *Nave's Topical Bible, A Digest of the Holy Scriptures*. Public Domain; e-Sword, 1900s.

Orr, James, editor. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939.

Prather, James. "The Laying on of Hands - S'mikhah." *Think Hebrew*, 8 Dec. 2009, <https://thinkhebrew.wordpress.com/2009/12/07/the-laying-on-of-hands-smikhah/>.

Thielman, Frank. "Laying on of Hands - Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology Online." *Bible Study Tools*, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/baker-s-evangelical-dictionary/laying-on-of-hands.html>. Accessed 9 Oct. 2018.



James Swanson –  
[StudyTheBook.org](http://StudyTheBook.org)



This work by James Swanson is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) International License.

© 2018 All rights reserved.

Created: 12/22/2018; Updated: 12/22/2018

---