

THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

INTRODUCTION

- Some Christians seem to think that the Holy Spirit was a stranger to the Old Testament and to the Old Testament saint...In reality, the Spirit of God is much more quickly evident than the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God.
- There are approximately 100 references in the OT to the Holy Spirit –this demonstrates that the Spirit was very active in the OT
- But a careful study of the work of the Holy Spirit reveals both a continuity and a discontinuity between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant concerning the Spirit's role
- Regarding similarities between OT and NT work of the Spirit, we must bear in mind that there is only 1 Spirit and that He is God and is therefore immutable and unchanging
- Paul affirms the fact that there is 1 Spirit:

1 Cor 12:11 ~ *But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.*

1 Cor 12:13 ~ *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

Eph 4:4 ~ *There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling*

- The same eternal Spirit was at work in the OT and NT times
- If there was not such a strong continuity in the Spirit's saving ministry Jesus would not have said to Nicodemus:

John 3:5-10 ~ *Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?"*

- In John 3, Jesus explained the new birth (which involved regeneration) to Nicodemus, reminding him that these things were taught in the Old Testament and therefore he ought to have known them (John 3:10)
- So there is much continuity in the Holy Spirit's work between the OT and the NT
- But, there are also a number of differences...In the OT, there is no mention of the sealing work of the Spirit or of the baptism of the Spirit prior to the day of Pentecost
- So, it may be anticipated that after Pentecost there would be a greater work of the Spirit than in preceding ages
- Thus, the HS possesses different roles in the NT...enhanced roles that are more intimate and more personal
- However, the essential character of the Spirit remains unchanged...He is still similar in character to the way we see Him functioning in the OT

ROLES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In Creation

- He participated in the creation of the earth

Genesis 1:1-2 ~ *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.*

- God the Father, through Jesus Christ the Son, out of nothing created the substance of the universe
- Then the Holy Spirit, as the third person of the Trinity, was charged with the task of overseeing the creation of matter, energy, and all plant life, animal life, and human life
- It was by the Spirit that the Lord God sovereignly created everything that exists....In the darkness of the chaos the Spirit of God moved to prepare for the effectual creative word of God
- The phrase “moving over the surface of the waters” carries the connotation of a bird hovering over its nest to provide warmth to its eggs and providing for the life of its young
- Similarly, the Holy Spirit brings life into the world through His involvement in the creative act
- John Owen: “Without him, all was a dead sea; a rude inform chaos; a confused heap covered with darkness: but by the moving of the Spirit of God upon it, he communicated a quickening prolific virtue.”
- Thus, the Spirit hovered over and cared for the yet unfashioned and uninhabited earth
- All the stars of heaven were made by the Spirit:

Psalm 33:6 ~ *By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host.*

- All of the animals were made by the Spirit:

Psalm 104:24-26, 30 ~ *O Lord, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; The earth is full of Your possessions. There is the sea, great and broad, In which are swarms without number, Animals both small and great. There the ships move along, And Leviathan, which You have formed to sport in it... You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; And You renew the face of the ground.*

- People were made by the Spirit:

Job 27:3 ~ *For as long as life is in me, And the breath of God is in my nostrils,*

Job 33:4 ~ *The Spirit of God has made me, And the breath of the Almighty gives me life.*

- Isaiah shows the power and self-sufficiency of the Holy Spirit in creation:

Isaiah 40:12-14 ~ *Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, And marked off the heavens by the span, And calculated the dust of the earth by the measure, And weighed the mountains in a balance And the hills in a pair of scales? Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has informed Him? With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge And informed Him of the way of understanding?*

- The Holy Spirit is described as the untaught, uncounseled, and omnipotent God, who without need of instruction or assistance measured the waters, the heavens, the dust of the earth, and the mountains
- Thus, all 3 Persons of the Godhead are involved in creation

In Special Enabling

- Numerous examples exist in the OT of those who were enabled or equipped for the accomplishment of special, divinely designed tasks through the Holy Spirit
- These were tasks that required ability beyond the normal, beyond what people could do on their own
- It is reasonable to assume that when the task had been carried out, the Spirit was no longer upon the individual
- Thus, there was an indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the OT; however, it was selective and temporary
- This is evident in a number of places in the OT, marked by the expression “the Spirit of the Lord came upon...”
- John Walvoord makes three observations concerning Old Testament “indwelling”:
 1. First, the Spirit’s indwelling in the life of a person had no evident relationship to the person’s spiritual condition
 2. Second, the Spirit’s indwelling was a sovereign working of God in the person to perform a specific task, for example, delivering Israel in warfare or building the tabernacle.
 3. Third, the Spirit’s indwelling was temporary...the Spirit of the Lord came upon Saul but also departed from him (1 Sam. 10:10; 16:14). David was fearful that the Holy Spirit would leave him (Ps. 51:11).
- There are 4 main categories of people in the OT who were specially enabled by the Holy Spirit

1. The Judges

- Four of the most prominent judges are said to have had the Holy Spirit come upon them

Othniel: **Judges 3:10** ~ *The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand, so that he prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim.*

Gideon: **Judges 6:34** ~ *So the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; and he blew a trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called together to follow him.*

Jephthah: **Judges 11:29** ~ *Now the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, so that he passed through Gilead and Manasseh; then he passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he went on to the sons of Ammon.*

Samson: **Judges 14:6** ~ *The Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, so that he tore him as one tears a young goat though he had nothing in his hand; but he did not tell his father or mother what he had done.*

- They were raised up by the Spirit of God to deliver Israel and made a significant, supernatural impact because they were energized by the Holy Spirit
- An evaluation of these texts shows that all involved empowerment for a physical activity...None of them had to do with salvation from sin in any sense...Nor did the empowering have anything to do with the spiritual condition of the person...Jephthah was the son of a harlot, living in an idolatrous environment...Samson was a carnal man, living to satisfy his carnal desires
- Problem with this?

2. Craftsmen

- The primary example here is Bezalel, the chief craftsman in the building of the temple, and his assistant, Oholiab

Exodus 31:1-5 ~ Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship, to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze, and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, that he may work in all kinds of craftsmanship.

- God filled Bezalel with the Spirit, giving him wisdom for craftsmanship “to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver” to beautify the tabernacle

3. National Leaders

- God saw fit to send His Spirit upon some OT men to empower them for national leadership:

Moses: **Numbers 11:24-25** ~ 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. Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him; and He took of the Spirit who was upon him and placed Him upon the seventy elders. And when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do it again.

Joshua: **Numbers 27:18** ~ 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”

Saul: **1 Samuel 10:10** ~ When they came to the hill there, behold, a group of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him mightily, so that he prophesied among them.

David: **1 Samuel 16:12-13** ~ So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And the LORD said, “Arise, anoint him; for this is he.” 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.

- These men were enabled through a special ministry of the Spirit to lead God’s people
- But this does not mean that they were always submissive to God’s will or perfectly obedient to the Holy Spirit’s leading
- David was at times far from being a role model to his people, including the incident with Bathsheba and Uriah
- David realized this when he confessed his sin to the Lord in Psalm 51 and cried out for forgiveness
- This raises an interesting question that many Christians have wondered about: Can the Holy Spirit leave believers today as he did in the OT?

Samson: **Judges 16:20** ~ She said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” And he awoke from his sleep and said, “I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him.

Saul: **1 Samuel 16:14** ~ Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him.

David: **Psalms 51:10-12** ~ Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit

- No! The OT writers never intended to portray Samson and Saul as typical examples for believers
- The granting and withdrawing of the Spirit was related to the special kinds of empowerment for special tasks
- In David’s case, it had nothing to do with his personal relationship with God but with his desire to keep the unique spiritual anointing that made him an effective king on God’s behalf
- Furthermore, we know that the rest of the Scriptures teach that believers cannot lose their salvation, something the Spirit has secured for us in His sealing

4. Prophets

- Many OT prophets were empowered by the Spirit for the task of conveying God’s revealed word to His people

Balaam: **Numbers 24:2** ~ *And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe; and the Spirit of God came upon him.*

Elijah and Elisha: **2 Kings 2:13-15** ~ *He also took up the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and returned and stood by the bank of the Jordan. He took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and struck the waters and said, “Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?” And when he also had struck the waters, they were divided here and there; and Elisha crossed over. Now when the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho opposite him saw him, they said, “The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.” And they came to meet him and bowed themselves to the ground before him.*

Ezekiel: **Ezekiel 11:5** ~ *Then the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me, and He said to me, “Say, ‘Thus says the LORD, “So you think, house of Israel, for I know your thoughts.*

Micah: **Micah 3:8** ~ *On the other hand I am filled with power - With the Spirit of the LORD - And with justice and courage To make known to Jacob his rebellious act, Even to Israel his sin*

- The Spirit’s ministry in the OT was largely external
- These passages demonstrate that the Holy Spirit played a prolific and significant role throughout the OT

In Revelation

- The Spirit was the Agent of revealing and recording God’s message to man in the OT...He ensured the revelation of divine truth by divine words
- The Spirit was not simply present and occasionally intervening in OT events...He was and is the author of the OT books that we read today

2 Timothy 3:16 ~ *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness*

- “all Scripture” refers to the OT
- “is inspired” translates the Greek word *theopneustos* which literally means “God-breathed” – the very use of this term, with the root *pneustos* closely related to *pneuma* (“spirit”) strongly implies the Holy Spirit was involved in the entire process of revealing God’s Word
- Every thought and sentence of the OT (and NT) is the breathed-out Word of God, which was faithfully recorded by the Spirit-guided writers

2 Peter 1:20-21 ~ *But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God*

- In the OT itself, the men God used to write Scripture testify to the Holy Spirit’s role in that process

2 Samuel 23:1-2 ~ *Now these are the last words of David. David the son of Jesse declares, The man who was raised on high declares, The anointed of the God of Jacob, And the sweet psalmist of Israel, The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, And His word was on my tongue*

Nehemiah 9:30 ~ *For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you handed them over to the neighboring peoples*

Zechariah 7:11-12 ~ *But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the LORD Almighty was very angry*

- Thus, the Spirit acted in giving God's truth in OT times

In Regeneration

- Did the Holy Spirit regenerate people in the OT? → In John 3, Jesus essentially reprimanded Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader, for not knowing the OT better

John 3:5-10 ~ *Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?"*

- As one who supposedly knew God's law, Nicodemus should not have been baffled by Jesus' explanation of the new birth and the Holy Spirit's role in it
- It is important to remember that Jesus met with Nicodemus before the New Covenant was ratified at the cross, so Jesus' salvation instruction was based on OT truths
- In all likelihood, Jesus was referring to Ezekiel 36, because both passages involve a discussion of water and Spirit.
- In Ezekiel 36:25–27, God promises Israel a regeneration experience in the Millennium when God will give them a new heart and a new spirit—He will put His Spirit within them; He will regenerate them.
- Although these passages pertain to the future, the Old Testament believers would have also experienced regeneration
- It appears that the Spirit was vitally involved in the regeneration of people during OT times
- The existence of total depravity in all people since the Fall argues for the fact that Old Testament believers were regenerated by the Holy Spirit
- Because total depravity came with the Fall, we know it affected OT people and everyone since
- This is a fact clearly demonstrated in the OT:

Genesis 6:5 ~ *Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

Genesis 8:21 ~ *The LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.*

Jeremiah 17:9 ~ *The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?*

- Thus, in order for OT believers to be born again, they, like NT believers, they would need the Spirit's miraculous work in their hearts...a regeneration that could not occur by any other method
- Hebrews 11 also testifies to the regenerating power of the Spirit in the OT
- There is no way any of those in the hall of faith could have lived such exemplary lives of faith without being regenerated by the Spirit...Because the theology of regeneration was not fully defined until Jesus' time does not make it any less a reality for the Old Covenant believers

In All the World or Just Israel?

- We do not have a clear revelation of the Spirit's ministry outside of Israel, although, Genesis 6:3 may be an exception

Genesis 6:3 ~ *Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."*

- Was the Spirit calling men to repentance and righteousness? Possibly through the preaching of Enoch and Noah? Or was the ministry of the Spirit primarily directed toward Israel?
- Ryrie: "After God chose Israel to be His people, the Spirit's work was with that group primarily if not exclusively... Certainly there was no indication that the Spirit convicted the world of sin in the Old testament times (as He does now, John 16:8), and no other nations enjoyed His general presence among them as Israel did. As far as the record is concerned His ministry was to Israel and individuals in Israel" (*Systematic Theology*, 348-9).
- The Holy Spirit does seem to have a special relationship with Israel:

Nehemiah 9:20 ~ *You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst*

Nehemiah 9:30 ~ *For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you handed them over to the neighboring peoples*

Psalms 106:32-33 ~ *By the waters of Meribah they angered the Lord, and trouble came to Moses because of them; for they rebelled against the Spirit of God, and rash words came from Moses' lips*

Isaiah 30:1-2 ~ *"Woe to the obstinate children," declares the LORD, "to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin; who go down to Egypt without consulting me; who look for help to Pharaoh's protection, to Egypt's shade for refuge"*

Isaiah 63:10-14 ~ *Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them. Then his people recalled the days of old, the days of Moses and his people—where is he who brought them through the sea, with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he who set his Holy Spirit among them, who sent his glorious arm of power to be at Moses' right hand, who divided the waters before them, to gain for himself everlasting renown, who led them through the depths? Like a horse in open country, they did not stumble; like cattle that go down to the plain, they were given rest by the Spirit of the Lord. This is how you guided your people to make for yourself a glorious name*

Zechariah 7:11-12 ~ *But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the LORD Almighty was very angry*

CONCLUSION

- While the Holy Spirit was active in the OT, Jesus indicated that following Pentecost the Spirit would begin a new ministry to believers that was unlike that of the OT

John 14:16-17 ~ *And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.*

- The emphasis of this passage is that the new ministry would be an indwelling (in contrast to the Spirit simply being with them) and it would be permanent