



“And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2).

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

Central Truth: The Holy Spirit was active as God even in Old Testament times.

L393. Date: December 1982. **Text:** Genesis 1:1, 2; 6:3; Exodus 31:1-5; I Samuel 16:13; Isaiah 44:3, 4. **Topic:** Holy Spirit.

The Old Testament contains more than one half of the 713 references to the Holy Spirit to be found in the Bible. That is surprising to the person who thinks the doctrine of the Spirit of God is just a New Testament doctrine.

In the Old Testament as in the New, the Holy Spirit is personally present and powerfully active among men. There were two aspects to the religion of Old Testament times. It was institutional (with its rituals and ordinances) and it was personal (with a real relationship with God by faith). The Holy Spirit of God was involved in the personal aspect of true religion then as He is involved now.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit was different in Old Testament times from His ministry today. (1) He came upon some but not all of God's people then; He indwells every believer now. (2) He came upon a man to qualify him to serve but not as the “seal” of salvation; He comes today as evidence and essence of salvation and to qualify to serve by spiritual gifts which He confers. (3) He would come on a person at one time and depart from him at another time then; He comes and remains forever today. How privileged believers are today.

The present dispensation is “the dispensation of the Holy Spirit.” Every contact we have with God today is by the Holy Spirit. Our privileges become the more evident by a review of the ministry of the Spirit in Old Testament times.

I. THE SPIRIT IN CREATION

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:1, 2).

Genesis 1:1, 2 reveals that the Holy Spirit was the intermediate Agent through whom the creative power of God was communicated to the mass of formless matter, so that order was brought where there had been chaos.

That truth is stated elsewhere in the Bible. Even the creation of man (Genesis 2:7) is attributed to the Holy Spirit in Job 33:4, *“The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.”* The Spirit was the life which entered into the form made of dust. Ezekiel saw that happen to a whole army of dead men in his vision of the dry bones (Ezekiel 37:10). When *“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,”* it was the Holy Spirit who imparted life to the human being (Genesis 2,7).

All three persons of Holy Trinity were involved in the creation. That is indicated by the plural name for God (Genesis 1:1) and the plural pronouns used as God contemplated the creation: *“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness”* (Genesis 1:26). That is why man is capable of knowing God and entering into personal relationship with Him today. He was formed by God with a likeness to God.

II. THE SPIRIT IN CORRECTION

“And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years” (Genesis 6:3).

One blessed ministry of the Holy Spirit to sinners is expressed in these words of Jesus: *“When he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment”* (John 16:8). To *“reprove”* means “to present convincing proof; to convict.” A present ministry of the Spirit is to convict men of sin and to call them to forgiveness in Jesus.

The convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit was actively exercised in Old Testament ages. He convicted men of sin in those terrible days of sinful abandonment just before the flood came in Noah's time. The Lord said to Noah, *“My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh”* (Genesis 6:3). The statement that the Spirit would *“not always strive with*

man” indicates that the Spirit was already striving (dealing with, convicting, calling to repentance). The warning was that such a ministry would not continue indefinitely.

Thank God for the convicting ministry of the Spirit of God. Apart from it, no one could or would come for forgiveness. All through human history, God has dealt with men concerning their sins. That is an act of His grace. Your feelings of guilt, uncleanness, or discomfort upon the presence of sin in your life is the result of that convicting ministry.

III. THE SPIRIT IN CRAFTSMEN

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, And in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship” (Exodus 31:1-5).

Does the Holy Spirit of God concern himself with our personal skills? Is He concerned about the skill of the surgeon, the techniques of the teacher, or the productivity of the farmer? Yes, indeed! He even increases the skills of those who are truly committed to serve God in manual labor or in artistic pursuits.

Read Exodus 31. Moses had received the blueprints for the building of the tabernacle and the design for each article of furniture to be housed therein. God gave the design but men were to do the work of weaving curtains, preparing planks of wood, setting precious gems, and erecting the structure. Now notice that God increased the skills of artisans by the endowment of His Holy Spirit to enable them to do in an excellent manner the work with their hands: *“To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship”* (Exodus 31:4, 5). God qualified workmen then and He does the same today when men are truly available to the ministry of the Spirit in their lives.

God is still involved in the daily affairs of men. The Holy Spirit will make a teacher a better teacher, a parent a better parent, a worker a better worker. He did it then and He can do it now.

IV. THE SPIRIT IN CHOOSING

“Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah” (1 Samuel 16:13).

We speak of “the call to the ministry” or of “a special call to Christian service.” That is real. Your pastor testified of such a call upon his life. You probably know many other Christians who claim the same experience. Such a divine call is real. The Holy Spirit calls people to special service today.

A call to special service was witnessed in Old Testament times. The Lord sent his prophet Samuel to Bethlehem, to the house of a man named Jesse, and commissioned him to anoint the youngest son David as future king of Israel (I Samuel 16). The Scripture records, *“Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward”* (I Samuel 16:13). The anointing was the outward manifestation of the divine call; the Spirit was the inward qualification for the designated ministry.

God acted in totally sovereign choice when He selected David. The Holy Spirit acted in totally sovereign choice when He instructed the Christian congregation at Antioch, *“Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them”* (Acts 13:2). God moves by His Spirit in choosing men and women for special service.

V. THE SPIRIT IN CHRIST

Isaiah spoke in behalf of all the prophets who claimed divine inspiration when he said, *“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me”* (Isaiah 61:1). Common statements in the Old Testament regarding the ministry of the Spirit upon a chosen servant are, *“The Spirit of the Lord came on...began to...spake by...fell upon...”* and kindred statements. God's Spirit inspired God's servants in ancient times.

But the ministry of the Holy Spirit upon men in the generations passed was only a foreshadowing of His ministry in and upon the God-man, Jesus Christ. Jesus chose to read Isaiah 61:1 in a worship service in the synagogue at Nazareth. He preached a sermon on the text and it is summarized in one statement: *“This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears”* (Luke 4:21). Yes, the Holy Spirit was active in Jesus Christ.

Consider this list of the activities of the Spirit in relation to Jesus Christ. (1) The Spirit foretold the coming and ministry of Jesus (Luke 24:25-27). (2) The Spirit effected the conception of the physical body of Jesus by a creative miracle in the womb of Mary (Luke 1:31-35). (3) The Spirit

anointed Jesus (Luke 3:21, 22; 4:16-21; Acts 10:38). (4) The Spirit led Jesus (Luke 4:1). (5) The Spirit empowered Jesus (Luke 4:14, 32). (6) The Spirit presented the atonement of Jesus before the Father (Hebrews 9:14). (7) The Spirit teaches the things of Jesus to those who believe (John 16:13-15). (8) The Spirit was the element in which Jesus baptized the disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:4, 5; 2:1-41). (9) The Spirit baptizes believers into Christ today (I Corinthians 12:13). What blessed unity and ministry exist between the Spirit and the Son!

The Holy Spirit continues His ministry in Christians today. Each Christian is “in Christ” and those who are in Christ are indwelt by the Spirit of Christ. As the Spirit was active in the life of Jesus during His incarnate ministry, He is active in the lives of those who are in Jesus. What a consolation!

VI. THE SPIRIT IN COMPLETENESS

“For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses” (Isaiah 44:3, 4).

The Holy Spirit moved in sovereign majesty through the ages of Old Testament revelation. He came upon an Abraham, a Moses, seventy elders, and one or another who became a prophet. But the ministry of the Spirit was like lightning: He struck a man here and another man there, not coming upon all of God's people. He came upon a person at one point and departed from him at another point. (Compare I Samuel 10:1-9 with 1 Samuel 16:14.) Something better was ahead.

Isaiah spoke the words of God concerning that better day: *“I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring”* (Isaiah 44:3). The promise was that God would one day give forth His Spirit in such abundance that it would be like a great rain which covers all the country and ends a long drought.

Joel spoke God's promise of that day: *“It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh;...sons...daughters...old men...young men...servants...handmaids...I will pour out my spirit”* (Joel 2:28, 29).

That was “the promise of the Father” which Jesus commanded the disciple to wait for (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4, 5), and which came to pass on the blessed day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

You have entered into the good of it by faith in Jesus Christ. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the Christian is his birthright according to God's promise and provision.

God has “*provided some better thing for us*” (Hebrews 11:40). How fortunate we are to be living in this dispensation of the fullness of the Holy Spirit where every child of God has the Spirit living forever in him. Christian, rejoice!

Questions

1. What emphasis is put on the Spirit in the Old Testament?
2. How was His ministry then different from what it is now?
3. What did the Spirit do in creation?
4. How did the Spirit work in correction?
5. How did the Spirit qualify craftsmen?
6. How did the Spirit manifest His call to special service?
7. How did the Spirit work in Jesus Christ?
8. What promises did God make concerning the Spirit?
9. What is our relationship to the Spirit today?
10. How can we walk in the Spirit as the Bible commands?