

## Lesson 3

# The Work of the Spirit in the Old Testament

## Introduction

As we study this lesson, we will be looking primarily at the Old Testament through the lens of the New Testament. If we only had the Old Testament to go by, our understanding of the Spirit would be very limited. There is nothing wrong with this as the Bible has been designed to be taken all together. When we see the Old Testament in light of the New, our understanding of the Spirit is vastly improved. The New Testament writers clearly present the Holy Spirit as a divine person distinct from the Father and the Son, and they often make the connection between the Holy Spirit and the “Spirit of God” in the Old Testament.<sup>17</sup>

In this lesson we will focus on the Spirit’s role in creation. Then we will take a look at the Old Testament teaching surrounding the equipping work of the Spirit during the time of the Old Testament.

## The Spirit’s Work in Creation

### *The Creation of the Universe*

Taking both testaments together, it is clear that each person of the trinity was completely involved in the work of creation. It is also evident that they were not all doing the same specific things. Exactly how this applies to their work remains a matter of speculation. Some have explained the nature of the Trinity’s work in this way:

The Father brings forth, the Son disposes and arranges, and the Holy Spirit perfects. As applied to creation, the Holy Spirit did not create the stuff from which the universe is made, but began His work only after matter had been brought into existence by the Father through the Son.<sup>18</sup>

Another author has explained it this way:

In general, the work of the Father is that of serving as supreme planner, author, and designer; that of the Son as worker, carrying out the directives of the Father . . .; and that of the Holy Spirit as completer or consummator, bringing to final form that which has been brought into existence by the Son at the Father’s command.<sup>19</sup>

As we examine Genesis 1.2, we see the Spirit as the one giving life to and bringing order to the just created, barren earth. It seems that the Spirit’s role in the physical creation is parallel to His spiritual work of regeneration and sanctification in the time of the New Testament.

Isaiah 40.12-14 might supply some evidence of this. Notice:

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? Who has directed the

---

<sup>17</sup> Compare 2 Samuel 23.2 with Matthew 22.43; Mark 12.36; Acts 1.16; and Hebrews 3.7. Also compare Isaiah 59.21 with Acts 28.35; 1 Peter 1.11.

<sup>18</sup> Kuyper, Abraham. *The Work of the Holy Spirit*. New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900, p. 19-30.

<sup>19</sup> Wood, Leon. *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976, p. 16.

spirit of the LORD, or as his counselor has instructed him? Whom did he consult for his enlightenment, and who taught him the path of justice? Who taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?

– Isaiah 40.12-14

From this we might infer the Spirit's, "intimate connection with the plan and the management of the universe."<sup>20</sup>

A more specific statement regarding the Spirit's work in the creation and organization of the heavens, i.e., the solar system, stars, and galaxies, is Psalm 33.6:

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.

The key word in the passage is the word *breath*, many take to be a reference to the Spirit. Some also suggest *the word*, as mentioned in the first part of the verse, is a reference to Jesus. From this we might conclude that all of the heavenly bodies were made by a combination of Jesus and the Spirit. It has been said that Psalm 33.6 implies that the Spirit put on the finishing touches of the heavens, drawing out their glory and beauty.

Job 26.13 is also noteworthy where Job's uninspired comment says:

By his wind the heavens were made fair; his hand pierced the fleeing serpent.

The phrase *were made fair*, is translated "made beautiful," "garnished," and "adorned" in other versions. The idea carries the thought of beautifying or bringing to a state of order and design.

### ***The Creation of Man***

Genesis 1.26 specifically involves the participation of the Spirit in the creation of mankind:

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

Another passage to take into consideration is Genesis 2.7:

then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

The Spirit's presence in 2.7 is inferred from the references to the act of breathing and the *breath of life*.

## **The Equipping Work of the Spirit in the Old Testament**

As we think about the Spirit from the New Testament perspective, we clearly see the difference between His equipping work and His saving work. But what about the Old Testament? To what extent was the Spirit performing His saving activity? No one questions, however, that He was very much involved in the life of the people of God, bestowing upon them special ministries and skills that enabled them to perform needed services for Israel as a whole. This section focuses on His equipping work.

---

<sup>20</sup> Walvoord, John F. *The Holy Spirit*. Galaxie Software, 2008, p. 38.

## ***The Prophets***

A prophet is a spokesperson, who speaks on behalf of someone else. A prophet of God delivers inspired messages from God, whether orally or in writing. Inspiration is the work of the Spirit. All true prophets are thus empowered by the Spirit, whether His role is specifically mentioned or not.

Before Israel, there were prophets. Enoch, Jude 14; Abraham, Genesis 20.7; Joseph, Genesis 41.16, 38; Aaron, Exodus 7.1; and Miriam, Exodus 15.20, all prophesied. True prophecy is always by the Spirit and there is even a reference to the pagan Balaam who experienced “the Spirit of God” upon him, causing him to speak a blessing upon Israel, Numbers 24.2.

Prophets among Israel are mentioned from the very beginning. In those verses God is praised for bearing with His rebellious people during the wilderness wanderings and in the era of judges and kings:

You gave your good spirit to instruct them, and did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and gave them water for their thirst. Many years you were patient with them, and warned them by your spirit through your prophets; yet they would not listen. Therefore you handed them over to the peoples of the lands.

– Nehemiah 9.20, 30

During the time of the judges and kings we are made aware of Deborah, Judges 4.4; Nathan, 2 Samuel 7.2; Gad, 2 Samuel 24.11; and Huldah, 2 Kings 22.14. In 2 Chronicles 15.1-8 we read of Azariah who had the Spirit of God come upon him as he delivered a prophetic message to Asa. Similar statements about Jahaziel, 2 Chronicles 20.14; and Zechariah, 2 Chronicles 24.20 are made. Most scholars believe these individuals were filled only intermittently or temporarily.<sup>21</sup> They only dealt with contemporary problems and this is why they did not write books of the Bible for use for future generations.

A few other nonliterary prophets seem to have had more prominent roles within Israel, serving as God’s spokesmen on a more ongoing basis. An example is Samuel, who “was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD,” 1 Samuel 3.20. Also in this category are Elijah and Elisha. The account of the prophetic succession (from Elijah to Elisha) in 2 Kings 2.9–16 is sometimes taken as confirmation that the Holy Spirit was upon each (see 2.9, 15–16).

## ***Craftsman***

Another example of the Spirit’s empowering work during the Old Testament has to do with His bestowal of physical skills of craftsmanship and artisanship on those who built the tabernacle, Israel’s first center of worship. Exodus 31.7-11 contains a summary of the items God wanted constructed and how they should be built. God wanted this tabernacle to be built with the highest level of quality.

Exodus 31.1-6 mentions the names of two men whom He Himself had selected to be the foreman and assistant foreman for the project. . . Bezalel and Oholiab. The Spirit gave them the knowledge and skills that would make the experts in all the necessary forms of craftsmanship. God also gave others the specific skills for this type of work. Going back to Exodus 35.34, it was the Spirit who equipped Bezalel and Oholiab not only with expertise and dexterity to actually work with gold and cloth and wood, but

---

<sup>21</sup> See Walvoord, p. 48; Wood, p. 43-44.

also with the ability to *teach* others how to do the same. It also appears from 1 Chronicles 28.11-12 that the Holy Spirit gave David similar knowledge and skills for the planning of the temple.

When we later come to examine the New Testament teaching on spiritual gifts, we will need to remember the Spirit's empowerment of these craftsmen to build the tabernacle. This is especially true in view of the nature of Old Testament typology, where physical objects and events stand in prophetic anticipation of their spiritual counterparts under the New Covenant. According to this principle the tabernacle and the temple are forerunners of the New Testament church, which is "*a spiritual house for a holy priesthood*," 1 Peter 2.5, and "*a dwelling of God in the Spirit*," Ephesians 2.22. The spiritual gifts God gives to Christians today serve the same purpose of the gifts of craftsmanship in the Old Testament, namely, to build up the house of God.

### **Civil Administrators**

During Old Testament times, the Spirit qualified various men for official functions such as military genius, legal acumen, statesmanship, and power to inspire the masses with enthusiasm.<sup>22</sup> Moses would have been one of the first.<sup>23</sup> It also appears that Joshua<sup>24</sup> assisted in this way:

Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the LORD had commanded Moses.

– Deuteronomy 34.9

Others who came on behind Joshua upon whom the Spirit of the Lord descended are Othniel, Judges 3.10; Gideon, Judges 6.34; and Jephthah, Judges 11.29. The Spirit is mentioned several times with Samson, Judges 13.25; 14.6, 19; 15.14. Concerning the judges, Morris writes:

The whole narrative makes it clear that the judges did not accomplish their great deeds of deliverance because of any natural strength, leadership, or wisdom that they possessed. Each is God's chosen man for the particular hour. God has given him the gifts he needs to carry out the work of deliverance. In other words he is a judge only because God has put His Spirit within him.<sup>25</sup>

Concerning the kings of Israel and Judah the Spirit's empowerment for the work of administration is seen in both Saul and David. 1 Samuel 11.6 says *the Spirit of God came upon Saul mightily*. Later, when God rejected him as king, *the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul*, 1 Samuel 16.14. When Samuel anointed the shepherd David to be Saul's successor, *the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward*, 1 Samuel 16.13. After his sin with Bathsheeba, knowing what happened to Saul, he prayed asking God, *do not take your Holy Spirit from me*, Psalm 51.11. Both Saul and David would have needed special empowerment. Neither was sufficient in himself for his God-given task. Accordingly, God sent His Spirit on them both.

## **Conclusion**

---

<sup>22</sup> Kuyper, Abraham. *The Work of the Holy Spirit*. New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900, p. 38-39.

<sup>23</sup> See Numbers 11.17, 25; Isaiah 63.10-12.

<sup>24</sup> See also Numbers 27.18.

<sup>25</sup> Morris, Leon. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988, p. 23-24.

In this lesson we have learned that the Holy Spirit was very active in the work of creation, Genesis 1.2. The main work of the Spirit in the lives of individuals was to equip or empower them for service. The Spirit was given to various individuals not for their personal benefit but for the good of the whole body of Israel. In some cases, this empowerment was temporary and lasted only as long as the need for that person's service remained.<sup>26</sup> At times, miraculous signs accompanied nonmiraculous gifts; but these were temporary, Numbers 11.25. A person did not have to be a believer to receive this empowering from the Spirit, Numbers 24.2 and 1 Samuel 19.20-24.

## For Thought and Reflection

1. Explain the difference aspects of the nature of the Trinity's work:
  - a. The Father:
  - b. The Son:
  - c. The Spirit:
2. What role did the Spirit play in creation?
3. To what does Psalm 33.6 attribute the work of the Spirit?
4. What does Job say the Spirit did at creation? (Job 26.13)
5. What is a prophet?

---

<sup>26</sup> See 1 Samuel 10.10; 16.13-14; and Psalm 51:11.

6. Who are some of the prophets before Israel?
7. Did God send prophets to Israel during the wilderness period? How did the people respond?
8. For what purpose did God fill individuals with skills in craftsmanship and art?
9. Who are some God filled for the purpose of administration and government?
10. Why do you think David prayed for God not to remove the Spirit from him?