

The Holy Spirit- Study 2

Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

Welcome to part two of our study on the Holy Spirit. Last week we looked at the fact that the Scriptures clearly show the Holy Spirit to be a person and that He is fully divine. Last week's talk is available on the Oasis website in video form to those who would like to catch up with it. This week our focus is upon the Holy Spirit within the Old Testament. As with last week we will have a Q&A session at the end so feel free to have any questions ready for then.

Where better to start our Old Testament study on the Holy Spirit than at the very start of Genesis.

Genesis 1:1-4

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness.

I love these opening verses of the Bible for so many different reasons. Any good book needs to grab your attention at the start and the Bible has a wonderful start. Whenever you sit down to read the Bible remember to ask God to use the Holy Spirit to reveal things to you. I've read the first few verses of Genesis chapter 1 so many times and yet I still see new truth within them every time I come back to them.

I remember hearing a preacher talking about a time when he was reading these opening verses and God kept speaking to Him to go back and read the opening words again. Time and time again God kept stopping Him after the first few words. For a long time the preacher couldn't see what God was trying to show him. Eventually the penny dropped. In the beginning: God! Everything must start with Him you see. He must be our reason for living, our inspiration, our goal and our foundation. Everything of any value in our lives is God-given and we must depend upon Him for our future. The man was so blessed by what God had shown him that he raced to share it with his wife. Reading the first verse she couldn't see what he had seen. Disappointed he asked God why she wasn't as excited about it as he was. God simply reminded him that it had taken ages for him to see it and yet he'd expected his wife to get it in thirty seconds.

Right at the beginning of the Creation account we have a picture of the Holy Spirit hovering over the waters. The waters over the earth that's about to appear puts me in mind of the waters of the womb. A world is about to be born. Mankind will soon emerge and God's Spirit is there, ready and waiting. Let me draw the parallel here to our new birth as Christians where we are instructed to be baptised in water and the Spirit. Here the world is about to emerge out of the waters and into the Spirit just as the new born Christian experiences in the two baptisms. God's will and purpose for the new convert is here, right at the beginning of Genesis, before mankind has even walked on the earth – and before mankind has fallen. God's will and purpose for us as believers is laid down here right at the beginning of Genesis: to experience the baptism of water and of the Holy Spirit.

Now, you might say I need to wait for the right time before being baptised but I believe there is another argument to say that baptism will bring about the change that you seek, rather than the other way round. Jesus of course is our example. He asked John to Baptise Him in the waters of the Jordan to fulfil all righteousness and as He came out of the waters the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove. The pattern for the two baptisms is there in Genesis and Jesus embraced them both Himself. It has to be the right thing therefore for ourselves also if we are a believer in Christ.

It's incredible to think about that moment as the Spirit hovered over the waters. Last week we looked at how the Holy Spirit had all of the attributes of God. Omnipotent (all powerful), omnipresent (present everywhere), omniscient (all knowing) and eternal. The final moments before the home of mankind emerged from these waters the Holy Spirit will have known every conversation that he would have in the future. He would have known the words He was going to bring to the prophets of Old Testament and the words he would take to the apostles of the New. He would even have in His mind the words He would minister to us. How lost the world would be without His voice and without His presence. And how humbling it is when He speaks to us to remember that this is the voice of the one who hovered over the waters before even a world had properly emerged.

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The whole of the Godhead in fact is there in these opening verses of the Bible. Whilst the Spirit is hovering over the waters, it is Father God who speaks things into being and the Word of God going forth is the Son. We see this more clearly when we hold these opening verses of the Bible up to the beginning of John's gospel:

John 1:1-4

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

And in case you're not sure that the Word mentioned here is Christ, verse 14 goes on to say:

John 1:14

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

So the whole of the Godhead is there as the creation unfolds. In actual fact the Trinity is referenced in just opening two words of the Bible but we need to understand the Hebrew text to realise that.

Genesis 1:1

re'shiyth 'elohiym

[pronounced: ray-sheath E-low-heem]

In the beginning God...

The Hebrew term for God used here is Elohim, and this is the plural form of the word El or Eloah (pronounced El-oh-akh) which are both rendered 'God'. Elohim is translated 'God' rather than 'Gods' in the Bible but the name has within its meaning the plurality of God. In other words, Elohim has the meaning of Gods but is rendered God. This is precisely how we describe the Trinity. One God but three. I would never say that I worship Gods but I know that the Father, the Son and the Spirit are each fully God in themselves.

The term Elohim is used again in Genesis 1:26 where the plurality of the Godhead is seen a little more clearly.

Genesis 1:26

Then God [Elohim] said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

Well discussing the Trinity excites me but the focus of our study is the Holy Spirit and so I had better focus upon Him. We've seen in the opening verses of the Bible how the Holy Spirit has a vital role within the work of God on earth. He's there, right at the beginning, hovering over a formless, empty and dark expanse, void of life but about to be transformed and He is instrumental in that task.

The Hebrew term used for Spirit in these verses is ruwach (rue-akh) which means wind, breath, mind or spirit. When God created man, the Bible tells us that He breathed into Him the breath of life.

John 6:63 says

The Spirit gives life.....the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.

It makes sense to me that Adam and Eve would have been filled with the Spirit of God. After all they were made in perfection and in the New Testament we see that as soon as someone becomes a believer God's purpose for them is to be baptised not only in water but also in the Spirit. God's plans don't change.

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I love the description of the Holy Spirit as a 'wind' too. When a ship is at sea it is necessary to direct the sails to catch the wind. The wind is powerless for a ship unless it sets its sails correctly. In our lives we too must submit ourselves to His leadership and allow Him to direct the course of our lives.

Although we see the Holy Spirit here at the start of the Old Testament, we must understand that in Old Testament times the Holy Spirit was not freely available to God's people. This is simply because Christ's redemptive work on the cross had not yet occurred. In contrast, the work of Christ in the New Testament made God's presence available to all who believed. As Jesus offered up His life on the cross the Gospels describe how the curtain in front of the Holy of Holies was torn in two, from top to bottom. The barrier of sin to God's presence that the curtain represented, had been removed by Jesus' atoning sacrifice.

In truth it's remarkable that before the work of redemption the Holy Spirit could come upon anyone at all, let alone fill them. In general His anointing was reserved for prophets, priests and kings. Outside of these offices, only a select few experienced His anointing over their lives in order to fulfil specific duties. Those who were to receive the full presence of Holy Spirit upon their lives within the Old Testament were frequently anointed with oil ahead of their ministry.

We can see how prophets and kings were called into office by this anointing oil in 1 Kings 19.

1 Kings 19:15,16 [Speaking to Elijah]

The Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet.

No priests could serve at the Tabernacle or Temple without being anointed first.

Exodus 28:40,41 [God's instructions to Moses]

Make tunics, sashes and caps for Aaron's sons to give them dignity and honor. After you put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they may serve me as priests.

In 1 Samuel 16:10-13 we see the effect that anointing with oil had upon David when he was called into office to lead the nation of Israel by the prophet Samuel.

1 Samuel 16:10-13

Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, "The Lord has not chosen these." So he asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" "There is still the youngest," Jesse answered. "He is tending the sheep." Samuel said, "Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives." So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; this is the one." So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David.

The oil used to anoint represented the presence and authority of the Holy Spirit. The oil itself had no magical powers or properties, just like the oil we use in church today. Its use however, was directed by God and for this purpose its proper application would be effective.

Outside of the roles of the prophets, priests and kings, some were anointed to fulfil a particular duty for God. For example, God anointed some of Moses' elders in order to help him lead the people of Israel and settle their disputes when they were roaming through the wilderness.

Numbers 11:16,17; 24,25 The Lord said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the tent of meeting, that they may stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take some of the power of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them. They will share the burden of the people with you so that you will not have to carry it alone.

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So Moses went out and told the people what the Lord had said. He brought together seventy of their elders and had them stand around the tent. Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied—but did not do so again.

Their prophesying served as a witness to those around them that the Spirit had come upon them. The fact that they didn't prophesy again was not an indication that the Spirit had left them. Their gifting was to settle disputes and help Moses lead the people rather than to prophesy.

In the New Testament all believers are promised the Holy Spirit. This was not the case in the Old Testament. Little over 100 people are described as having the Holy Spirit upon their lives in the OT and that includes the 70 elders who were anointed to help Moses lead the people of Israel in the wilderness. In the New Testament the believer also has the assurance that the presence of the Holy Spirit will never leave them. This was not the promise in the Old Testament. Some received the anointing for just a period of time whilst they fulfilled a particular divine purpose.

Exodus 31:1-11 Then the Lord said to Moses, "See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills— to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts. Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan, to help him. Also I have given ability to all the skilled workers to make everything I have commanded you: the tent of meeting, the ark of the covenant law with the atonement cover on it, and all the other furnishings of the tent— the table and its articles, the pure gold lampstand and all its accessories, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, the basin with its stand— and also the woven garments, both the sacred garments for Aaron the priest and the garments for his sons when they serve as priests, and the anointing oil and fragrant incense for the Holy Place. They are to make them just as I commanded you."

If you've ever wondered how these men knew how to create these items, then here is the answer. They were directed by the Holy Spirit who had been given to them for these specific tasks. And when their work was complete the anointing would have lifted from them.

In contrast to this, others would lose the anointing through disobedience to God. King Saul lost God's anointing when He ceased to follow God's direction and instead he became tormented by an evil spirit.

1 Samuel 16:14 Now the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him.

We must remember that this is the permissive tense used here. God allowed the spirit to come and torment him. God doesn't have evil spirits and he doesn't send them to torment anyone. I gave an example of this in the first study which related to the death of the firstborn at the Passover.

When Saul ceased fulfilling his duty as king, God no longer had any purpose keeping the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon him. Saul was resisting His counsel anyway and so the Spirit left him.

The Holy Spirit also left Samson when his hair had been cut.

Judges 16:20 After putting him to sleep on her lap, she [Delilah] called for someone to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him. Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the Lord had left him.

The Lord did return to him however when Samson called out to Him to strengthen him again in order to pull down the pillars of the Philistine temple.

David knew that even as King there wasn't the promise that the Holy Spirit would be with him forever. We can hear his heart cry in Psalm 51 for the Spirit never to leave him.

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Psalm 51:10,11 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

In the New Testament not only are all believers anointed with the Holy Spirit, but God's promise is that He will never leave them. The Holy Spirit was not available to all like this in the Old Testament. The prophet Joel could only look ahead to such a time when all believers would experience His presence.

Joel 2:28,29 I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

Joel was looking ahead to the days that we are so blessed to live in, where God's presence is no longer restricted. Where neither social class, gender, age or heritage are a barrier to His wonderful presence. Nor do believers now experience a temporary anointing but an everlasting one. And why do we receive this freedom and privilege? Because of the one who came with all the power and authority of the Holy Spirit upon His life and made us clean from sin. So completely clean that the presence of God can make His home within us.

The prophet Isaiah looked ahead to this one who would carry the complete, full and perfect anointing of God upon His life. He would bear the title Messiah which means Anointed One because He would live in all the authority of God's anointing.

Isaiah 11:1,2 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

The first chapter of the Book of Revelation refers to the seven-fold Spirit of God. In these two verses of Isaiah we have seven aspects or characteristics of the Spirit that was placed upon Christ. Scripturally seven represents perfection. Jesus lived perfectly and completely in the full anointing of the Holy Spirit. In His life, He lived and served in the roles of a prophet, a priest and as a king. As a prophet He brought the truth of God to all that would hear it. As a priest he offered the sacrifice of Himself for our sins. As a king He defeated all the power of the enemy on the cross, which itself carried the tribute 'King of the Jews'.

In closing.

The prophet Joel looked ahead to a time when the Holy Spirit would come upon all flesh. How blessed we are that we are living in these times. David asked God not to draw the Spirit away from Him. We have His presence in our lives as an everlasting promise. I believe we must seek the fullness of God's Holy Spirit with the same passion that David had. We must pray and ask God for a greater manifestation of His Spirit within our lives and within the church. I would like to encourage you to spend quality time in His presence, making room for Him in your lives and listen for His voice.

James 4:8 says: Come near to God and he will come near to you.

God's promise to us is that as we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us. He wants us to answer that call to seek Him out. Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door ahead of you will be opened. If that is the desire of your heart can I ask you to stand with me now if you are able to and as I pray, make this the prayer of your heart also.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father. Sow into our hearts the desire to seek you out. To draw closer to you. To desire more of your presence in our lives. We are so grateful that we live in a time when we have your Holy Spirit available to us. Develop within us a deeper passion for His presence. Teach us to hear your voice and have the willingness to obey it. Give us an excitement and an anticipation for what you are wanting to do in our lives, in this church, in this town, in this world. Fill us with your Holy Spirit to overflowing and help us to live in the fullness of your presence. Amen.