

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

I. You Need a Prequel to make Sense of the Sequel and Sometimes the Sequel Answers Questions from the Prequal!

- Godfather II needs Godfather I and Godfather I needs Godfather II
- The OT needs the NT and the NT needs the OT if you are to understand the Work and Gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- Why this series? We want to see a church full of people who grow in understanding how the Lord comes near, by His Spirit, how he empowers, but also how he gives gifts so each individual becomes a part of his temple building work...remember, the temple is us!
- It is sometimes thought that the Spirit's activity in Scripture is primarily limited to the New Testament. But He is incredibly active and present in the Old Testament. So, before we explore the Spirit's work and gifts that come into technicolor in the New Testament, we want to lay the foundation from the Old Testament this morning.

Behold my servant, whom I uphold,
 my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
 I have put **my Spirit** upon him;
 he will bring forth justice to the nations.
²He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice,
 or make it heard in the street;
³a bruised reed he will not break,
 and a faintly burning wick he will not quench;
 he will faithfully bring forth justice.
⁴He will not grow faint or be discouraged
 till he has established justice in the earth;
 and the coastlands wait for his law.
⁵Thus says God, the Lord,
 who created the heavens and stretched them out,
 who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
 who gives breath to the people on it
 and spirit to those who walk in it:
⁶"I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness;
 I will take you by the hand and keep you;
 I will give you as a covenant for the people,
 a light for the nations,
⁷ to open the eyes that are blind,

to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.

⁸I am the Lord; that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to carved idols.

⁹Behold, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare; - Isaiah 42:1-9
before they spring forth
I tell you of them.”

- No clearer statement of the intimate interworking of the triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and especially of the Spirit’s powerful role can be found in the Old Testament than in Isaiah’s prophecy of the Servant of the Lord ([Is. 42:1–9](#)). The passage summarizes the redeeming work of all three Persons of the Trinity in the salvation of the lost. Thus, it ties together in remarkable harmony both the Old Testament and New Testament understandings of God’s grace. It also sheds light on our understanding of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is a fully and completely divine person who possesses all of the divine attributes. God the Spirit applies the work of God the Son. The Spirit’s distinct role is to accomplish the unified will of the Father and the Son and to be in personal relationship with both of them.

We Cannot Walk in Christ without the Holy Spirit!

See His Activity and Our Necessity

II. The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament¹

1. The Spirit Created and Sustained Life

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” – Genesis 1:1-2

- There is a sense of expectancy; something is about to happen...creation as we know it! And the Holy Spirit was there!
- Contrary to any idea of primordial soup that evolved over time, God spoke and the Holy Spirit of God was right there in the middle of creation!

¹ Assembled from various lists and sources, not an exhaustive list of the Spirit’s activity in the OT

- In the book of Job, his friend Elihu illustrates that God’s people understood their origin: “The Spirit of God has made me and the breath of the Almighty gives me life” (**33:4**).

2. The Spirit Spoke God’s Words

- Throughout the Old Testament, the Spirit of God is connected to God’s words. The Lord said He would put His words in His people’s mouths (**Isaiah 59:21**). In **2 Samuel 23:2**, David said the Spirit of the Lord spoke through him.
- Old Testament saints received God’s words through their prophets and leaders. Moses told the Israelites, “The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so that you may obey it” (**Deuteronomy 30:14**).
- This reality continues in the New Testament. The Spirit gives life, and the words Jesus spoke are “full of the Spirit and life” (**John 6:63**).

3. The Spirit Promoted Holiness

- The Spirit is holy. In the Old Testament, God contended with humans in their sinful nature, and Jehovah wisely limited man’s years (**Genesis 6:3**). The escalating evil (**Genesis 6:5-6**) proved **Romans 3:23** is true: “**all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**” God’s people “rebelled and grieved” His Holy Spirit (**Isaiah 63:7-10**), and as a result, God in His holiness fought against them.
- David—brokenhearted over his sins—asked God not to “cast” him from His presence or “remove” His Holy Spirit (**Psalms 51:11**). Keenly aware of how Saul was rejected from being king because of his disobedience (**1 Samuel 15:23**), David understood and felt deeply that his sins against Bathsheba and Uriah (**2 Samuel 11**) also merited God’s rejection.
- Yet there was a spark of Spirit-motivated godliness and Spirit-motivated godly fear in David. He responded in repentance at Nathan’s rebuke (**2 Samuel 12:13a**). The psalmist knew he could never be separated from God’s presence (**Psalms 139:7**), though he felt alienation in his unholiness and lack of fellowship with God. David was a man full of the spirit and David was a man who also had to contend with his flesh.

4. The Spirit Confronted Evil

“When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. Then the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.” – Genesis 6:1-3

- God put a limit to man’s years because of man’s sin. The language of Genesis 6:1-3 is the same as the Fall in the Garden:

- Man saw
 - Man was attracted
 - Man took
- The sexual assault and objectifying of women goes back to days after the Fall of man, and it caused God to declare, “My Spirit shall not abide with them forever.” Only Noah stood apart from this sin at that time.
 - Later, the prophet Micah would be a mouthpiece for the Spirit as he was bold to denounce evil and declare the righteousness of God, and he attributed this to filling by the Spirit of the Lord (**Micah 3:8**). Micah said the Spirit filled him with “justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.”
 - That same impartation of the Holy Spirit would be given to John the Baptist even while he was still in Elizabeth’s womb!

“...and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.” – Luke 1:15

5. The Spirit Regenerated

- There’s a danger on one hand to so defend the unity of the one covenant of grace that we don’t recognize the peaks and the valleys, the differences from old covenant to new covenant. The other danger is the opposite danger of not recognizing the unity of that one covenant.
- In that unity of the one covenant, if David is confessing his sin, he’s prompted by the Holy Spirit, he’s repentant, he’s trusting in Christ, he’s born again. He is a justified, converted believer.
- And yet we see that John tells us that the Spirit had not yet been poured out (John 7:39)—and even when you get to John 20, and you have a sort of mini-Pentecost there with the disciples—it’s clear that that’s not the big thing that happens in Acts 2. That’s why they are to go and wait for the Holy Spirit to be poured out.
- This is what the prophets anticipated. The full revelation of the Holy Spirit had not been fulfilled in Jesus’ ministry, which is why Jesus said, “Greater things shall you do when the Holy Spirit comes, when I am ascend and the Holy Spirit comes” (John 14:12).
- The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost was a decisive event in the history of redemption that had never happened before. Ever since we have been living in a completely different era, and yet it is one in which we share with our Old Testament brothers and sister’s faith, repentance, and renewal.
- So there something completely new at Pentecost, but also a continuity, a unity.

- If we wonder, “How is a person under the old covenant saved?” then the answer has to be, “In precisely the same way as a person in the new covenant is saved: by the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, producing faith and repentance in a promised Christ that was seen in type and shadow.”
- But there is Psalm 51:11: “Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.”
- So, yes, Pentecost is unique. It’s an exceptional moment in redemptive history. So there’s something about the fullness of the Spirit and the experience of that fullness under the new covenant that is different from the old covenant.
- So we can say Old Testament believers were regenerated by the Spirit as they looked forward in faith to a Promised Messiah, because *all* believers must be regenerated to overcome their natural hostility toward God and be able to please Him (**Romans 8:7-9**). The Bible teaches all humans are either born “in the flesh” or born “in the Spirit.” In this sense, Old Testament saints looked forward to the coming of their Redeemer Messiah, and by faith were regenerated by God’s Spirit (**Romans 4:1-5**).
- When Nicodemus seemed confused after Jesus said new birth by the Spirit was necessary for salvation, Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Are you a teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand this?” (**John 3:10**) Jesus seemed to say Nicodemus, a religious teacher in Israel, should have understood the Spirit’s role in the “new birth” even in Old Testament times.
- Jesus said *no one* can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again (**John 3:3**). This “circumcision” of the heart for spiritual life—receiving a “new heart” (**Deuteronomy 30:6**)—was the work of God’s Spirit even in Old Testament times (**Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:26-29**).
- While OT believers as a whole did not have the Holy Spirit to the measure we do in the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit was indeed working on their hearts. They had a type.

6. The Spirit Indwelt

- In regard to the indwelling or filling by the Spirit in the Old Testament, from what we can see the indwelling of the Holy Spirit was selective and temporary. This is in contrast to the New Testament where the Spirit permanently indwells believers (**1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20**).
- The Spirit was said to “come upon” Old Testament believers for God’s purposes. Joshua was filled with the Spirit and commissioned to lead Israel after Moses’ death (**Numbers 27:12-23**). Othniel (**Numbers 27:18; Judges 3:10**) was empowered by the Spirit to judge God’s people and lead them in war.

- The **Hebrews 11** “Hall of Faith” is filled with Old Testament believers who were imperfect yet operating in the power of the Holy Spirit and enabled to stand firm in their faith in God.
- The Day of Pentecost would usher in a radical shift. The Holy Spirit would not only fill believers for a select purpose...he would come to dwell within all believers!

7. The Spirit Empowered

- As the remnant of Israel returned from the Babylonian exile, the Lord encouraged them to build His temple. He wanted them to know He would protect them from threats and enable them to be courageous. God told His people through Haggai, “... my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear” (**2:5**).
- The Lord of Hosts told the prophet Zechariah that Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, would complete the temple, and it would be accomplished, “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit...” (**Zechariah 4:6**). The Spirit would enable, encourage and strengthen Zerubbabel for the work God called him to do.
- At times, the Holy Spirit empowered God’s people, helping them go beyond their own abilities. The Spirit of the Lord came “mightily” upon Sampson. In one instance, the Spirit took control and Samson tore a lion apart; and another time—as Sampson took vengeance on the Philistines—ropes that bound him snapped like burned flax (**Judges 14:5-6; 15:14**).

8. The Spirit Taught and Led

- Ezra said of God, “You gave your good Spirit to instruct them” (**Nehemiah 9:20**). Old Testament believers were enabled by the Spirit to understand what God said to them, especially through the words of the prophets—even if they refused to listen (**Nehemiah 9:30**).
- In other instances, the Spirit gave instruction to individuals. For example, David gave his son Solomon the plans for the temple “that the Spirit had put in his mind” (**1 Chronicles 28:10-12**).
- The Spirit gave God’s people understanding (**Job 32:8**). The psalmist wanted to know God’s will, and he asked the Lord to allow His “gracious Spirit” to lead him to firm footing (**Psalms 143:10**).

9. The Spirit Granted Special Skills

- The Holy Spirit gifted Old Testament individuals to accomplish God’s divine plans. When God told Israel how He wanted His tabernacle built, He also equipped craftsmen and artisans by His Spirit to do the work (**Exodus 31:1-5**).
- The Spirit enabled saints like Joseph (**Genesis 41:1-38**) to interpret God’s revelation through dreams, and He gave some believers a gift of prophecy. Seventy elders with Moses temporarily received prophetic powers from the Spirit (**Numbers 11:25**).

- The Spirit came upon and empowered God’s prophets, priests, and kings in special ways, gifting them for service. Prophets preached God’s word, the priests interceded for God’s people, and kings were anointed to lead Israel against God’s enemies (**2 Peter 1:21**; **2 Chronicles 24:20**; **1 Samuel 16:13**).

10. The Spirit Points to Jesus.

- Isaiah prophesied about Israel’s coming Messiah, noting that the Spirit would rest upon Him (**Isaiah 42:1**). When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, Luke says “the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove” (**Luke 3:22**).
- In Jesus’ early ministry, it was clear He was the promised Messiah—the “anointed one.” He fulfilled the Old Testament types and offices—God anointed Him for special service by His Spirit—as Prophet (**John 7:40**), Priest (**Hebrews 6:19-20**), and future King (**Mark 15:26**; **Revelation 19:16**).

III. The Holy Spirit’s Work and Presence are Pervasive!

- 1. Expect**
- 2. Pray**
- 3. Listen**
- 4. Look**
- 5. Serve**

Corporate Prayer – Holy Spirit by Jesus Culture