

The Mystery of the Spirit

The Work of the Spirit in the Old Testament

Lecture 3

Do you have a CV? A CV or curriculum vitae is an important part of getting a job. Prospective employers want to know what your level of training and experience is. Or, to put it another way, what is your body of work to that point.

Everyone has a body of work. For some, the list of qualifications and experiences is just starting to accumulate. For others, who are no doubt older, the list may be quite extensive. I was reading some information on the Cornerstone University website recently and I saw a link to the university president's CV. I thought that might be interesting, so I clicked on it. It went for miles! All the degrees he's earned; all the books he's written; all the awards he's won – it was quite a body of work. I was impressed.

In our studies on the Holy Spirit, we noted last week that the Bible has far less to say about the Spirit than it does about the Son or the Father. Nevertheless, if we were to take what the Bible does say and put it in the form of a CV, it would be impressive indeed – much more so than the university president.

This session is focused on the body of the Holy Spirit's work. We won't be exhaustive – that would take hours! We will just give an abbreviated CV.

His Work in the Old Testament

The Holy Spirit's work begins in the second verse of the Bible.

Genesis 1:2 (NKJV)

²The earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* on the face of the deep. And **the Spirit of God** was hovering over the face of the waters.

That phrase, “the Spirit of God”, is sometimes misunderstood. Some interpreters are not convinced that it is referring to the Holy Spirit. After all, God the Father is a spirit (John 4.24), so couldn't this simply mean that God in His spirit form hovered over the creation? For that matter, since God is a spirit anyway, could what we call the Holy Spirit be better understood as merely the thoughts of the spiritual God?

The fact of the matter is that the name Holy Spirit is found in only three verses of the entire Old Testament (Psalm 51.11; Isaiah 63.10-11). Is this an indication that the Holy Spirit is simply a New Testament manifestation of God?

We've already answered these questions in part. We have proved that the Holy Spirit is not merely a thought or a manifestation – He is a person. We have further proved that the Holy Spirit as a distinct person in the single Godhead is fully divine.

But what about the absence of His name in the Old Testament? Do the phrases “Spirit of God” (Gen 1.2) and “Spirit of the Lord”, which occur 90 times, mean the same as the name “Holy Spirit”? Or could those phrases be a reference to the Father?

The answer comes from the Hebrew language. Did you know that in the Hebrew language, unlike Greek and English, adjectives are virtually non-existent? Without adjectives, Hebrews would use a double noun as a descriptor. So, the Old Testament uses the expression “man of understanding” – two nouns – instead of the simpler “wise man” (Proverbs 1.5).

Therefore, “Spirit of God” is identical to Holy Spirit. It is only the limitation of the Hebrew language that makes the two sound different.

With 90 references to the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, obviously the Spirit was doing quite a lot. Let’s take a brief overview.

Origin of Life

Psalm 104:29-30 (NKJV)

²⁹You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their **breath**, they die and return to their dust. ³⁰You send forth Your **Spirit**, they are created; And You renew the face of the earth.

It is interesting that the word translated “breath” is the same as the word translated “Spirit”. In Hebrew, the word is *ruach*. As long as we have breath, we are alive. Breath and life are inseparable – in fact, life at the creation began with breath.

Genesis 2:7 (NKJV)

⁷And 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 being**.

Job 33:4 (NKJV)

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

It is one thing to create something. It is quite another to give it life. The Holy Spirit is the origin of life.

Convicts of Sin

Because the Spirit is Holy, it is no surprise that He works with great zeal to prevent sin – which is intolerable to Him.

Nehemiah 9:30 (NKJV)

³⁰Yet for many years You had patience with them, And testified against them by **Your Spirit** in Your prophets. Yet they would not listen; Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.

Because of sin, the breath of life is taken away, and we die. From the time of Noah’s flood onward, the lifespan of humans has been reduced. With every death, we are reminded of the destructive nature of sin – and how sin is repulsive to God.

Genesis 6:3 (NKJV)

³ And the LORD said, “My **Spirit** shall **not strive** with man forever, for he *is* indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.”

Empowers Service

The work of God among people is a spiritual and supernatural work. Therefore, the Holy Spirit gave enablement to Old Testament craftsmen and leaders.

Bazalel

When God gave the blue print for the Tabernacle, He specified furnishings and tapestry that would require great craftsmanship. Where could such a craftsmen be found in the desert of Sinai? God specially gifted a man to do the work. That man’s name was Bazalel.

Exodus 31:3-5 (NKJV)

³ And I have **filled** him with the **Spirit of God**, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all *manner of workmanship*, ⁴ to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, ⁵ in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all *manner of workmanship*.

Joshua

Leadership, too, is not something just anyone can do effectively. Special giftedness is required – especially when it is God’s people who are being led, and they are attempting the impossible. Joshua was chosen and gifted by God to take God’s people into the Promised Land.

Numbers 27:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ And the LORD said to Moses: “Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom *is* the **Spirit**, and lay your hand on him;

Gideon

Gideon, too, had an impossible job to do. Actually, he had two – rebuke his own people for their shameless idolatry, and defeat the occupying Midianite army. With only 300 men to battle against 135,000, Gideon didn’t stand a chance . . . except for the Spirit of God.

Judges 6:34 (NKJV)

³⁴ But the **Spirit of the LORD** came upon Gideon; then he blew the trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him.

Samson

What made Samson so strong? His hair? No. It was the Spirit.

Judges 14:6 (NKJV)

⁶ And the **Spirit of the LORD** came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat, though *he had* nothing in his hand. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done.

Dictated Prophecy

The Old Testament prophets repeated the messages the Holy Spirit put into their hearts.

David

2 Samuel 23:2 (NKJV)

² “The **Spirit of the LORD** spoke by me, And His word *was* on my tongue.

Ezekiel

Ezekiel 2:2 (NKJV)

² Then the **Spirit** entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me.

Inspired Holiness

The Holy Spirit prompted aspirations in believers to be godly – and enabled those believers to succeed.

Psalms 143:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ Teach me to do Your will, For You *are* my God; Your **Spirit is good**. **Lead me in the land of uprightness.**

Ezekiel 36:27 (NKJV)

²⁷ I will put My **Spirit** within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and **you will keep My judgments** and do *them*.

Instilled Anticipation for the Messiah

How did the people know to expect a Messiah who would deliver them from suffering and death, and reign gloriously forever? The Holy Spirit revealed God’s plan for the future.

Isaiah 42:1-9 (NKJV)

¹ “Behold! **My Servant** whom I uphold, My Elect One *in whom* My soul delights! I have put **My Spirit** upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.

² He will not cry out, nor raise *His voice*, Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. ³ A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. ⁴ He will not fail nor be discouraged, Till He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands shall wait for His law.” (see Matt 12:18-21)

⁵ Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, Who gives breath to the people on it, And spirit to those who walk on it: ⁶ “I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles, ⁷ To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the prison, Those who sit in darkness from the prison house. ⁸ I *am* the LORD, that *is* My name; And My glory I will not give to another, Nor My praise to carved images. ⁹ Behold, the former things have come to pass, And new things I declare; Before they spring forth I tell you of them.”

Isaiah 11:1-5 (NKJV)

¹ There shall come forth a **Rod** from the stem of Jesse, And a **Branch** shall grow out of his roots. ² The **Spirit of the LORD** shall rest upon Him, The **Spirit of wisdom and understanding**, The **Spirit of counsel and might**, The **Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD**. ³ His delight *is* in the fear of the LORD, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; ⁴ But

with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. ⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist.

Isaiah 61:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ “The **Spirit of the Lord God** is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound; ² To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, (see also Luke 4.18-19).

Instilled Anticipation of the Age of the Spirit

Joel 2:28-29 (NKJV)

²⁸ “And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My **Spirit** on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. ²⁹ And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My **Spirit** in those days.

This prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to indwell all believers. (See Acts 2.16-21)

Whereas in the Old Testament, God the Holy Spirit only came upon certain people for particular tasks, in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit indwells all believers – not just for a task, but for life. He is the breath of eternal life.

His Work in Jesus

The Holy Spirit features prominently in the life and ministry of Jesus. From conception to resurrection, the Holy Spirit was at work.

Conception

Luke 1:35 (NKJV)

³⁵ And the angel answered and said to her, “*The Holy Spirit* will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.

Matthew 1:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is **conceived** in her is of the **Holy Spirit**.

Ministry

The earthly ministry of Jesus was inaugurated at His baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended visibly upon Him. This was the anointing of Jesus for ministry.

Matthew 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the **Spirit of God** descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.

Interestingly, the first place the Spirit directed Jesus to go was into isolation. While fasting for forty days in the wilderness, the Devil tempted Jesus. This was the plan of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 4:1 (NKJV)

¹Then Jesus was led up by the **Spirit** into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Luke 4:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴Then Jesus returned in the **power of the Spirit** to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region.

The healings and miracles that Jesus performed – and the authoritative teachings that He spoke – were done with the assistance of the Spirit. While it is true that Jesus, being God, could have done all of this without assistance, He nevertheless limited His own ability in dependence on the Spirit – just as we must do of necessity (since we are not God).

When the Pharisees accused Jesus of taking assistance from the Devil, Jesus warned them of the seriousness of blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 12:25-32 (NKJV)

²⁵But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. ²⁶If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? ²⁷And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? Therefore they shall be your judges.

²⁸But if I cast out demons by the **Spirit of God**, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. ³⁰He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad. ³¹“Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy *against* the Spirit will not be forgiven men. ³²Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the **Holy Spirit**, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age* to come.

Resurrection

Just as the Spirit is the breath of life, He is the breath of resurrected life. It was by the Spirit that Jesus was raised . . . and by the Spirit that believers will be raised as well.

1 Peter 3:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but **made alive** by the **Spirit**,

Romans 8:11 (NKJV)

¹¹But if the **Spirit of Him** who **raised Jesus** from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also **give life to your mortal bodies** through His **Spirit** who dwells in you.

This is dramatically illustrated by a vision that Ezekiel had.

Ezekiel 37:11-14 (NKJV)

¹¹Then He said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, ‘Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!’

¹²Therefore prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³Then

you shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves.

¹⁴ I will put My **Spirit** in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken *it* and performed *it*," says the LORD.' "

Application

It is possible that someone may think that tonight's lesson was a nice piece of historical trivia and that is about it. Nothing we talked about occurred within the last 2000 years. So what is its importance to us today?

Plenty.

1. Without the *ruach*, we do not have life. We must, therefore, be doubly dependent upon the Spirit – firstly to wake up tomorrow; and secondly, and more importantly, to wake up in eternity.

Some people live as if there is no frailty to life. I'm talking here about hard smokers and heavy drinkers . . . and also fast drivers – people who are reckless and foolish. Many young people think bad things will never happen to them. But roadside memorials tell a different story – as do the headstones of graves that should not be occupied.

But it is not only the addicts and revheads that need fear the uncertainty of life; it is also the closet sinner. Who supplies the breath that a young man draws when he clicks a pornographic link on the internet? Whose breath enables the young woman to speak when she tears another person to shreds with vile gossip?

Is God mocked? Is He unaware when we take the Holy Spirit – the Holy Breath – and make it bad breath?

Sometimes the Holy Spirit takes the breath away – as He did when people desecrated the Lord's Table in Corinth (1 Corinthians 11.30).

2. With the Spirit, we are never outnumbered; never incompetent. In fact, God often asks us to do things we are not confident doing. Rather than turn such opportunities down, we should embrace the enabling presence of the Spirit will give us the words to say in witness, and who will break through the resistance of Satan, the world and the flesh to bring people to Christ.

This does not mean that we don't have to put any effort or preparation into what we do in God's service. I know of a preacher who no longer studies for his sermons because he has decided to depend on the Spirit. This preacher is being lazy and foolish. The Spirit gives enablement in the study – by illuminating the Word. It is not a lack of faith to prepare – in fact, it is an expression of faith . . . and it shows a healthy fear for the awesome responsibility of heralding God's Word.

3. Be expectant of the Holy Spirit's working. This is the Age of the Spirit – a special age that was anticipated by the Old Testament saints, and proclaimed by Jesus to be a step forward from the days that Christ Himself walked on this earth.

This is an exciting time to be alive. Every day is a new adventure in following the Spirit as He transforms us to be instruments of praise to God.