

THE SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Theme: The Scriptures show us how the Holy Spirit was active in the Old Testament era.
(All Scripture is taken from The New King James Version, unless otherwise indicated.)

Some theologians have said that the New Testament era—that is the church era—is the era of the Holy Spirit. But this should never cause us to think that the Holy Spirit was not also very much active and at work in the Old Testament era. In fact, looking at the ways that He was active in the Old Testament enables us to appreciate His help in our lives as believers in this present New Testament era.

His work during the Old Testament era can be divided up under three basic themes:

I. HIS WORK IN CREATION.

- A. The Holy Spirit was presented as active in the very first few words of the Bible—specifically in its description of the creation of this habitable world. We find this part of the work of the Holy Spirit revealed to us in the second verse of the Bible (Genesis 1:2); where He is said to be “hovering over the face of the waters” of the yet unformed earth. As the third Person of the Godhead, He was even said to have been involved in the planning of creation. As Isaiah 40:12-14 asks rhetorically;

*Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand,
Measured heaven with a span
And calculated the dust of the earth in a measure?
Weighed the mountains in scales
And the hills in a balance?
Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord,
Or as His counselor has taught Him?
With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him,
And taught Him in the path of justice?
Who taught Him knowledge,
And showed Him the way of understanding? (Isaiah 40:12-14).*

- B. But His work was not limited to the beginning of the work of creation. He was also said to have a renewing and life-sustaining role over the creation. As Psalm 104 tells us of living things;

*These all wait for You,
That You may give them their food in due season.
What You give them they gather in;
You open Your hand, they are filled with good.
You hide Your face, they are troubled;
You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.
You send forth Your Spirit, they are created;*

And You renew the face of the earth (Psalm 104:27-30)

—making the Holy Spirit a participant not only in the work of creation, but also of the ongoing work of sustaining and blessing of that creation.

II. HIS WORK IN REVELATION.

- A. The work of the Holy Spirit in revelation was declared in the Old Testament in the sense that individuals were clearly said to be speaking or writing by means of the Spirit. King David said that he spoke revealed truth by means of the Holy Spirit in 2 Samuel 23:2; where, in his final word, he affirmed, “The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue.” The prophet Micah also gave this testimony with regard to his prophetic work to the people of God, “But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin” (Micah 3:8).
- B. It is also shown in another way; that is, from the fact that words of Old Testament writers were attributed to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. This is demonstrated with the greatest possible authority. Consider how the words of King David from Psalm 110:1 concerning the Messiah are quoted by the Lord Jesus in this way; “How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord’, saying, ‘The LORD said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool?’” (Matthew 22:43-45). In a similar way, the words of King David in Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8 are cited by Peter regarding Judas the Betrayer; saying, “Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas ...” (Acts 1:16-21). Paul speaks of the vision that Isaiah wrote about in Isaiah 6:9-10; but says, “The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah ...” (Acts 28:25-27). The writer of Hebrews quotes the words of warning in Psalm 95:7-11 with this affirmation: “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says ...” (Hebrews 3:7-11). And the promise of the ‘new covenant’ in Jeremiah 31:33-34 is spoken of by the writer of Hebrews with these words: “But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after he said before ...” and then comes the quote from Jeremiah!
- C. But perhaps the clearest affirmations of the work of the Holy Spirit in giving Old Testament scripture are found in the letters of Peter. He wrote that the prophets were “searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow” (1 Peter 1:11); and that “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

III. HIS WORK IN SPECIFIC PEOPLE.

- A. The Holy Spirit clearly worked in all the Old Testament saints; because wherever there is spiritual life or activity from God, there is the work of the Holy Spirit. But it seems that the Spirit’s work was presented in more of a “person-specific” way in the Old Testament. He was recognized as being ...
1. “In” some individuals; such as Joseph (Genesis 41:38), or Joshua (Numbers 27:18), or Daniel (Daniel 4:8; 5:11-14; 6:3).
 2. “Upon” some individuals for a time (even some, surprisingly, who were not necessarily “saintly” or “saved”) in order to make them useful for God's purposes;

such as Balaam (Numbers 24:2), or Sampson (Judges 13:25), or Saul, the son of Kish (1 Samuel 10:10).

3. "Filling" some individuals for service; such as Bazalet who was used by God to built the articles of the Tabernacle (Exodus 31:2-3; 35:30-31).
- B. The Spirit's work in Old Testament times seems to have been limited to specific people, for specific ministries, and only for a brief period. Perhaps the difference is best shown in Jesus' words to the disciples regarding the way things would change after the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost: "He dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:17). His indwelling of the believer now is "forever" (v. 16); and this is true of all those who are Christ's (Romans 8:9).

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So then, the same Holy Spirit at work in the Old Testament era is at work in us today. And this helps us appreciate the greatness of this blessed, divine Friend and Helper who is in us.

Consider that the Holy Spirit who was present and involved in the work of Creation—and also works in an ongoing way to sustain and to renew and to bless that Creation—also indwells us as believers; and His power is unlimited in its potential to renew our lives in Jesus Christ, and to help us to conquer sinful habits and practices and disordered ways of thinking. Consider also that the Holy Spirit who guided the writers of the Old Testament, and who enabled the prophets to recorded the promises of God concerning Christ—every one of which came to pass just as written and recorded—also indwells us as believers to guide and teach and enable our understanding of the written word of truth today. And consider yet further that the same Holy Spirit who came upon and empowered the Old Testament saints—giving them the guidance and strength to perform great works in the redemptive plan of God—also now indwells us and is able to help us to do whatever it may be that God the Father calls us to do in obedience to the commands of His Son Jesus Christ.

It is the same Holy Spirit who works in us now who worked such wonders then. And the differences between the nature of His work then, and the nature of His work now, shows us the surpassing greatness of our privilege in Christ today! What an honor it is to be the permanent dwelling place, in this era, of the same Holy Spirit who ministered so powerfully in the former era!