

The Spirit of God – in the Old and New Testament Scriptures

From a Biblical standpoint in history we are living in the “last times.” However we have **an ever relevant exhortation here from John the apostle in his first letter**, *which actually: 1. carries us back in time to the earliest days of human history and down through the ages, 2. but touches the present and finally 3. Takes us forward to the end of the ages:* **“Beloved do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are of God because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” 1 John 4:1.** It is clear from this reference that there are false prophets who speak by ‘the false spirit’ and further there are other rational spirits, aligned to him, which can and do influence people and in some cases indwell people in order to deceive and lead them astray from the truth of God in Jesus the Messiah. Therefore it is important to approach this area of theology with a readiness to believe in the existence of the Spirit of God and His work. We also need a willingness to see how necessary His work is for our eternal wellbeing and what practical help He may give us in order to live a God honouring life here on earth.

The Christian Church, comprising Jewish & Gentile Believers, followers of Jesus, has always given a place to the Spirit of God within its theological reflection. The works of various Systematic theologians, have assigned this subject to the locus which deals with the Doctrine of God. **Notice what is said here, that the section which deals with the theology of the Spirit of God is the one which refers to the Doctrine of God.** In that section we find theological reflection about the Living and True God, the God of the Bible (in 66 Books).

However we have to acknowledge that there have been and are still sections of the church that have neglected the Spirit’s person and work.

Before we go on let me say this again that **when I refer to the Christian Church or the Church**, I mean the people, Jews & Gentiles, who profess faith in Jesus Christ and form that part of the body and kingdom of Jesus Christ the Messiah (Y’shua Ha Masheach) here on earth.

As **Paul says** helpfully with reference to Christ’s followers Jews and Gentiles in every age, **“We are the ‘circumcision’ who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Messiah Jesus and who put no confidence in the flesh.” Phil 3:3.**

1. THE EARLIEST SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES TO THE SPIRIT OF GOD:

a) **The Spirit’s Activity: Genesis 1:2.** This takes us back to the beginnings of the formless, empty, and dark, material cosmos, which God spoke into existence. Over that dark deep, the Spirit of God hovered. Some Jewish and Gentile Interpreters say this just means a wind from God blew over the deep, He caused this breeze to blow, (the Hebrew word ruach can mean a wind as well as spirit). But the text says **“the Spirit of God hovered over” that is His Spirit.** This doesn’t mean a force or energy from God but the personal involvement of God’s Spirit in creative activity

(Mirachephet) which work would shape the formless mass which had been spoken into existence.

The Dutch commentator Prof G. C. Aalders in his commentary on Genesis is bold to say this is the first reference to the Holy Spirit in Scripture. He says, "There is here mention only of a presence and a working of God Himself. Thus there can be no real doubt that we must translate this, "The Spirit of God."

b) Earliest Pointers to Plurality within God's Oneness of Being:

It should not escape our notice that in Gen 1:1 "In the beginning God created (Bara) the heavens and the earth." The name used for God is Elohim, which is a plural See too in Gen. 26 God, Elohim, Himself says, "Let **us** make man in **our** image, in **our** likeness." Then in verse 27 we read, "So God created man in **His own** image: in the image of God, **He created** him (man)." Consider further that the plurality within God's Being is brought out by the plural for God **Elohim** but the essential oneness by the **Personal pronouns, His** (image) and **He** created man v27. We don't want to push this too far but these are clear pointers to a distinctness of Person when the Spirit of God is mentioned.

c) Post Fall Man and the Spirit of God: Genesis 6:3

After the sinful disobedience of Adam and Eve bringing their fall from the sinless state in which they were created, rebellion and ungodliness entered the human realm. So that in time as families developed people corrupted themselves so that in Gen 6:3 we read God's words, "My Spirit shall not always strive with men --." That is constrain men to consider and turn from their evil ways and to seek righteousness in and from God. Remember that Noah was, as a preacher of righteousness, given the task of calling the people to repentance, which he did faithfully for 120 years. However we should notice that the words, "My Spirit", "**shall not always strive,**" may also be translated, "Not always remain with man." See Septuagint (LXX). The meaning here is that the Spirit who gives man life will not continue to do this, which connects well with God's words, "his years shall be 120." The longevity will be removed by the power of my Spirit.

You see centuries had rolled on, and so the pervasive and corrupting influence of sin manifests itself in abounding moral evil among the people. The result would have to be judgement upon the people from the Creator. As we know from the Biblical record the universal flood came and destroyed the peoples Gen 7: (91-25), with the exception of Noah and his family. The life span was also shortened post flood by the Spirit of God.

Even at this early stage of human history, based on Biblical data we should not fail to see that the Spirit of God performs action consistent with Personality but also because of human rebellion withdraws His blessing from people.

2. Introduction re The Spirit's work in and among the Israelites is important for our understanding of God's unfolding revelation in history of the world, but here with specific reference to the, "Children of Abraham according to the flesh." This not least because too many professing Christians Jewish and Gentile fail to recognise the reality of His ministry in the Old Testament period, which in turn leads to a distortion of God's word to us in those ages.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD AND THE PEOPLE ISRAEL

The Spirit of God in the Mosaic Period: Num 11:17; Ex 31:3; Num 11:29; Isa 63:10 &11; Haggai 2:5 and Zechariah 4:6 etc.

We can only look at some strategic but illuminating references here.

a) Moses and the Spirit: Numbers. 11:17, A few years after the Exodus, in 1450 BC, the burden of carrying the people became too much for Moses so he asked for help.

The result was that God told him to gather 70 elders and then **the Lord would put the same Spirit upon them as was upon Moses. See in Num. 11:25 when the Spirit rested upon them they prophesied.** See too Num. 11:29. Now let us be clear here this ref is to God putting His Spirit upon these men as He was upon Moses. Interestingly in v29 Moses expressed the wish that the Lord would put His Spirit upon **all** His people Israel.

b) The Spirit and His work in the People: We cannot cover all we could of this interesting subject, here in this brief survey. However God testified about Caleb the son of Jephunneh, that he had "a different Spirit and has followed Me fully." Numbers 14:24 (Note that this is said of Joshua the son of Nun too: Num. 32:12).

Moving on, in Psalm 51: 11, King David, who had sinned greatly pleads with God, "Do not take your Holy Spirit from me."

There is a marvellous insight into the work of the Spirit of God in and among the Israelites, in the prophecies of Ezekiel: a) 36:26b I will remove from you the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And (v27) I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees --." See also 37:1-14 as to the spiritual resurrection of wayward Israel, verse 14a the Lord says, "I will put My Spirit in you and you shall live, and I will settle you in your own land."

One key principle for understanding the Spirit's work in this period is found in the Apostle Peter's first letter where we discover most helpfully that just as

the Spirit of Messiah was in the Hebrew prophets, it seems legitimate to say that He was in the true believers among the Israelites. See 1Pet. 1:10—12.

c) The Spirit Equipping People for Service: Ex 31:3.

Moses is told by the Lord, Himself, that He chose Bezaleel and Oholiab to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship, but not before He had filled them with the Spirit of God, who gave them skill and ability --. It is noteworthy that in the New Covenant Scriptures regarding the gifts of grace that these are supplied to followers of Messiah by the Holy Spirit.

I hope that already there is clarity on the fact that this Spirit is the Lord's and yet He is distinct from Him. In Ephesians 4: 7 and 1 Corinthians 12: 4 the gifts are given by the Spirit, "There are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit."

d) The Spirit Grieved by the People Israel: Isa 63:10&11

The reference here takes us from the time of Isaiah the prophet back to Israel in the days of Moses. The prophet Isaiah, later in his ministry (791–740 BC), reflects on how the people of Israel were loved and redeemed by the Lord and also on how "He carried them all the days of old." But then the prophet laments v10, "Yet they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit, so He (the Spirit) turned and became their enemy---." See References in Exodus 15:24; Numbers 14:11 & 12 with Psalm 78:40 etc. Consider how God speaks, it's not simply Him they grieved, though He as a Divine Person is capable of being grieved: No, He says they grieved His Holy Spirit. The Spirit is capable of being grieved. He is a Divine Person. Thus we should not be surprised when, centuries later, Paul says to the Ephesians 4:30 and to us, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the Day of redemption." Further on in Isaiah we read that the Spirit of the Lord gave the people rest and guided them 63:14. These actions are consistent with personality and with the Spirit, the Divine Spirit of God.

e) In the Post Exilic Period the Presence & Ministry of the Spirit Continued among the People (536BC f: See 1.) Haggai 2:4&5:

This too is a most illuminating reference to the Holy Spirit. The Lord gave a wonderful encouragement to a discouraged remnant in the post exilic period when 536–534 BC, under the leadership of Joshua son of Jehozadak and Zerubbabel, they had left off doing the work of building the Temple of the Lord because of 'enemy' interference. The Lord's word came through Haggai, "Work for I am with you declares the Lord Almighty." "This is the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. **And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.**"

2.) Zechariah the prophet, a contemporary of Haggai says in Zech. 4:6 that the work of God progresses not by human might, ingenuity or subtle methods, nor by man's power to do, but by the Sovereign might and power of God's Spirit. Here again there is a distinction between the Lord and His Spirit.

(Additional note as to Three Distinct Personalities in the One God. The most specific reference in the Hebrew Bible to this and sheds considerable light on the subject is undoubtedly in Isa 48:16b where the Messiah says, "From the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord God and His Spirit **has** sent me. First to find out who the subject I is, go back to verse 12: "I am He, I am the first and I am also the Last." But notice here in this passage v16b the singular of the verb 'to be' is used, "the Lord and His Spirit **has sent**," which indicates a) the unity and plurality of God: and also b) that Personality is ascribed to the Spirit of God, on the basis of the action described).

3.) **At the close of the prophetic era, about 432BC, Malachi and Nehemiah** rebuke the ungodly practises of Judah. The prophet warns them that the day of Messiah will come as a day of judgement and refining Mal 3:1-4 and urges the people to turn back to the Lord and attend to His law.

With the passing of Malachi there then follows a very long silence as to the ministry of the Spirit of God and the revelation given by Him through the prophets.

Concluding Observations on this study: The Spirit of God in Israel as found in the Hebrew Scriptures: This is a great subject but here we just remind you that it can be said of these books that they were written by "holy men, as Peter says 2 Pet. 1:21 "-- for no prophecy came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were borne along by the Holy Spirit." These Scriptures comprise **the Law, the Prophets and the Writings and the real author of them was/is the Spirit of God.** This is true whether the writer/prophet says "the word of the Lord came to me" or "The word of the Lord that came to Hosea --," the Spirit moved these men to write what He wanted written. **One last point worth making here is that the principal burden of the Spirit in prophecy was not the people Israel but the true Israel - the Messiah. See an excellent example in Isaiah 49: 3 - 6.**

3. THE SPIRIT OF GOD PERIOD COVERED BY THE NEW TESTAMENT:

Introduction: The Holy Scriptures we have in this period we know as the 27 books of the New Testament. We saw in the conclusion of the previous study the Hebrew Bible concludes with reference to the Lord Messiah coming for salvation and judgement. Cf. Malachi Ch. 3: 1–5 and Ch. 4: 1–5. And though some 400 hundred years lay between Malachi and the ministry of Messiah's Herald, the time of fulfilment arrived with John the Baptist, the one who was to come in the Spirit and power of Elijah to prepare the way of the LORD. Matthew, in Ch.3:3 refers to John by quoting as that herald by quoting Isa. 40:1f "A voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight paths for Him."

The snapshot regarding John the Baptist and his role as fulfilment of prophecy helps us understand *why* we find the New Covenant Scriptures contain so many quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures, the greatest number of these deal with the fulfilment of prophecy in Jesus the Divine Messiah.

An Enhanced Focus on the Christ Centred nature of the Holy Spirit's Ministry:

Any careful reader of the Old Testament cannot fail to see in the promises concerning the ministry of the Spirit a time of fullness. Joel 2:28–32. This was directly connected with the finished work of the Messiah Jesus in His death and resurrection and His ascension to glory.

That said it is true too that the Holy Spirit was at work in Incarnation of Jesus Christ, Luke 1:34 & 35 The angel Gabriel came to the virgin Mary and told her, "The Holy Spirit come upon you and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you; wherefore the holy one which shall be born of you will be called the Son of God." Jesus Christ's whole ministry was conducted in the power of the Holy Spirit.

However in this final section we will concentrate mainly upon Jesus' own view of the Person and Personality of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' Upper Room Jerusalem Discourses on the Night of His Betrayal: In John 14:16 in the context Jesus anticipates His bodily presence will soon enough be withdrawn from the disciples so He says to those who love Him and keep His commandments: "— I will pray the Father and He will give you another Helper, Paraklaetos (One who comes alongside to help), that He may remain with you forever – The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees Him nor knows Him (is unaware of His workings); **but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.**" See too John 14:26 "But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He (that One) shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have told you." John 15: 26 "When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify about of me --."

See also John 16:13–14 But when **He**, (note in these references the use of the **emphatic masculine personal pronoun for the Spirit**).

There are a few points arise from the Saviour's words in these passages referred to above:

1. **Jesus the Son of God regarded the Holy Spirit of God as a Divine Person/as having a Personality:**
2. **He regarded Him as possessing full Godhood:**
3. **When Jesus spoke these words the Spirit still had a 'yet to be' dimension to His ministry:**
4. **The Spirit indwells those who belong to Jesus:**
5. **His indwelling presence & ministry would be theirs always:**

It is true of course that the fullness of the **Holy Spirit's ministry was intended to be and became an even more Christ/Messiah centred** and would impact the people of God. When the Holy Spirit came in a wonderful way at Pentecost, post Jesus' resurrection (Acts 2:1f) and then onward, multitudes of Jews and Gentiles became followers of Jesus the Messiah, as the book of the Acts of the Apostles amply testifies.

As a practical point here, we ought to seek to determine for ourselves what it is to have the Holy Spirit of Messiah Jesus, by the criteria of Holy Scripture, and not the Oral Law of the Rabbis, nor traditions of men, even Christian churches, which relegate the Spirit and His work to a 'corner,' nor indeed to gauge by the views of any other religious group however large or small.

The Holy Spirit of God settles Christ believing hearts on the effectual atonement secured for them by Jesus in His death on the cross and their acceptance in Heaven's Court on account of His Righteousness.

The Spirit enables believers to love & to walk in the law of God and to explore the unfathomable riches of Messiah Jesus in order to live by faith – faith which works through love– Yes the love that is "Of God," 1 John 4:7.

Here then we come full circle as it were – see the introduction to the first study – John the apostle warns of the many false prophets and the spirit of antichrist in all the world in every age so we must be careful to test the spirits and to discern the false, this necessarily means we must rely upon and ask the Spirit of God daily to guide us in the 'truth' and make known to us more of Jesus through the Bible. So it will be as we press on, in the upward way we will, by that Blessed Spirit, be found looking for and hastening to the return of Jesus our Lord, without fear of the Judgement Day. With these things in mind we hear the word of God say by the same Blessed Spirit (and the bride (Christ's people) say, "Come!" Rev. 22:17a: thus we may gladly say by faith, "Even so Come Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20b).