

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

An Enquiry into the Person and Work of the Third Member of the Trinity and His Influence upon Men in Old Testament Times

Introduction

The whole subject of the Person of the Holy Spirit, and especially of His work, is one that is something of a mystery to many Christians. They know that the Spirit is and has always been the third Person of the Godhead, but when they come to think about the way He is revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures, often they find it quite difficult to cite passages that plainly deal with Him. Still more, many believers are unsure about the specific roles taken up by the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, and how one would elucidate the particulars of His working.

In the following study we shall try to explain the doctrine of the Spirit in the Old Testament by first giving attention to the main verses in which the Spirit's activity is described. These can be separated into the categories of Creation, Redemption, Prophesying, Empowerment, etc. When we turn to prophets and prophesying we shall ask the question, "Did the OT prophets go into some kind of ecstatic trance-like state like the pagans, or was the Spirit's influence on them outwardly less peculiar?" Lastly, we shall examine the question of the regeneration of Old Testament saints. Our specific inquiry will be to seek to understand whether the New Testament doctrine of regeneration can be predicated of Old Testament believers.

The Personality of the Spirit

As with the New Testament the witness of the Hebrew Scriptures to the personality of the Holy Spirit is quite minimal. In one sense this is readily explainable since the Trinity is not as frankly revealed in the Old Covenant as it is in the New. On the other hand, it would be strange if the Person of the Spirit were portrayed with more clarity before Christ than after.

Nevertheless, there is sufficient testimony to the Spirit as personal in a number of passages in the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible. In Genesis 1:2 the "*Spirit of God moved [brooded] upon the face of the waters,*" a reference to an emotion such as only a person might feel – never, indeed, a force. Providing one takes *ruach* in the text to refer, not to a wind, but to a spirit, the translation of *rahap* is slimmed down to words like "was moving," "hovered," "brooded," etc. Hamilton argues that the best way to interpret the meaning is to see it as a hovering over the darkness as if to keep the chaos in check. This would lead one to construe the *ruach* as superintending personal Spirit instead of an impersonal wind.

The prophet Isaiah contains a number of interesting references to the Spirit. One of them (Isa. 30:1) appears to associate God's Spirit with His "mind" when it says, "Woe to the rebellious children... Who execute a plan, but not Mine, and make an alliance [i.e. protective web], but not of my Spirit, in order to add sin to sin." The prophet inveighs against those people who hatch schemes that are out of sync with the mind of God, and who intend to transgress. If they had feared God they would have gone to Him for counsel and they would have sued Him for the

protection of His Spirit. The connection seems to be that to seek God's wisdom is to seek also His protection.

In Isaiah 40:13 the rhetorical question is asked, "*Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has informed Him?*" (The thought continues in verse 14). The creation of the world is in view (Cf. v. 12), thus making the idea of the Spirit's codependence with the creature deliberately absurd. In this context the personality of the Holy Spirit is impossible to ignore. This is further sustained by Paul's use of the passage in his doxology at the end of Romans 11 (verse 34). When one adds to this the allegation in Isaiah 63:10 that the ones who came up out of Egypt at the time of the exodus "rebelled, and vexed His holy Spirit" it becomes a fairly uncomplicated thing to say that the Old Testament does represent the Spirit of God as a divine Person. In his comments on this passage Delitzsch sees the designation of the "Spirit of holiness" as personal "by the fact that He can be grieved, and therefore can feel grief (compare Eph. iv. 30...)." In fact, there is more here. Noticing the Trinitarian implications of the passage, Letham writes,

There is...a subtle series of ascriptions in Isaiah 63:8-14, where Israel's checkered past is in view. Yahweh became their deliverer (v. 8), the angel of his presence rescued them (v. 9), he loved, pitied, and carried them (v. 9), but they grieved his holy Spirit, and so he fought against them (v. 10). Then he remembered that he had put his Holy Spirit in their midst (v. 11), and so the Spirit of the Lord gave them rest (v. 14).

Among the hagiographa there is the well known reference in Psalm 139:7-10 where, among other things, David's musings on the attributes of God relates His Spirit with His personal presence (v. 7). Then there are the two important mentions of the Spirit in Nehemiah 9. Nehemiah 9:30 states that the Spirit of God "testified" against the children of Israel, but they would not hear. In this they were showing themselves to be ripe for chastisement (v.31) since, as verse 20 had already said concerning God's provision, "Thou gavest also thy good Spirit to instruct them." From its position in the narrative rehearsal of Israel's history this is surely a reference to Numbers 11:17-30 where the Spirit of prophecy is given to seventy elders of Israel to assist him in guiding the people. It is difficult to imagine an inanimate spirit instructing anyone. Therefore, we feel justified in the inclusion of this verse among those that refer to the Holy Spirit as personal.

We may say in summary that the Old Testament is not lacking a few plain and clear passages from which we can obtain the doctrine of the personality of the Holy Spirit. The verse are, for the most part, not such as might not be overlooked or wrongly translated without the New Testament witness, but, even so, passages like Isaiah 63:10 cannot be bypassed without doing injustice to the text of Scripture.

The Multiform Work of the Holy Spirit

The Old Testament is filled with information about the Spirit's works. Although His activity is not mentioned with the regularity of the New Testament, there are a great variety of instances deserving our attention.

Creation

To no one's surprise we shall start with Genesis 1:2, "*And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved [or 'hovered,' 'brooded'] upon the face of the waters.*" As already stated above, here the Spirit is pictured as both watching over the amorphous matter of the universe and, if we have understood it aright, anticipating the spoken creative Word (Jn. 1:1-3; Heb. 1:2; Col. 1:16) that will organize a Cosmos, placing every facet into its perfect position and true relation to everything else. The Spirit "*providentially superintended the waters that surrounded the earth until the triune God finalized the creative design in six days.*"

In John 1:4-5 the apostle brings life and light into relation with each other in the Logos-Son. This combination of light and life is there for all to see in Genesis 1:3-4, 11. That the Holy Spirit is not to be excluded from the actual creative process is shown in Psalm 104:30 where one is told that, "*You send forth your Spirit, they are created.*" Modern scholarship wants to erase the Spirit from this verse by translating ruach as "breath." Such a translation is not unnatural since God, the Subject, is "sending" it out. However, it is the ruach of God which is doing the creating – a predication better ascribed to a Person than a breath. Therefore, we think the conservative translations are correct in rendering the word as "Spirit" in this place. Here, of course, it is the Spirit regenerative power that is presented.

On a more individual level, we have Elihu's challenge to Job in Job 33:4: "*The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life.*" Elihu is saying of himself that he, like all men, is a creature of God, fashioned by His Spirit (cf. v.6). Since Job's plaint against the LORD is the issue, it is quite in order for the younger man to remind Job that it is God who, by His Spirit, makes every man. Perhaps there is also in this a hint that because we are the Spirit's work, we are by Him endued with a rational faculty that ought to be always in compliance with the will of our Creator.

Redemption (Particularly under the New Covenant)

When we come to the crucial subject of redemption, we discover that all the references to do with the work of the Holy Spirit are forward looking (Isa. 32:15; Ezek. 36:27; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28-29; Zech. 12:10), centering on the inception of the Messianic Kingdom. As a matter of fact, there is no single instance within the Old Testament record that shows that saints before Christ were spiritually renewed. This does not necessarily lead us to conclude that Old Testament believers were not regenerated, but we should proceed carefully. We do not want to run the risk of reading New Testament regeneration, with all its concomitants, back into the Old Testament situation. As this question will be the focus of more in-depth attention than we can give it here, we shall wait until the end of the paper to weigh the pros and cons of the matter in an effort to come to a possible solution. Our thoughts at this juncture are on the "Spirit-passages" which speak about the Millennium. Let us turn our attention to them one by one.

First, in Isaiah 32:15 there is the promise of a miraculous intervention by the Spirit upon both the people of Israel and upon their land. Chapter 32 is prophetic of the coming Messiah-King (v.1), and of the preceding desolations that must come (esp. vv. 9-14). Then come these words of hope:

“Until the Spirit is poured out upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field is considered as a forest.” (v. 15). What is this if it is not a prediction of the utter restoration of both people and land to God in a future day? Here, then, is an indication of the regenerative and rejuvenating power of the Spirit, as it will be experienced in the Kingdom (cf. Isa. 35:1-10; 65:8-10; Amos 9:13-15; Mic. 4:1-8).

This theme of the regeneration of the natural realm along with that of God’s people is seen in Joel 2:21-29 (cf. Rom. 8:19-23; Acts 3:19-21). There will come a day when there will be no more blight upon the land, and no more reproach upon Israel. Verses 28 and 29 make it plain that the spiritual renewal of the people will be by the Spirit. Can anyone argue that the fulfillment of the regeneration of the land is not achieved by the same divine Source?

Ezekiel supplies us with three particularly good passages on the ministry of the Spirit in the Millennium. In Ezekiel 36, after saying He will regather Israel (in unbelief! – v.24), and purify them (v.25), the Lord promises, *“Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will be careful to observe my ordinances.”* (vv.26-27). This is nothing less than a national conversion that is described (cf. Jn. 3:3-10; Rom. 11:26-27). Then, in Chapter 37:13-14 Ezekiel prophesies:

Thus says the LORD God, ‘Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it’, declares the LORD.

The passage is similar to the one in the previous chapter that we have quoted above, but here the focus is the physical resurrection of Israelites and then their regeneration by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit’s power is necessary to make the people obey God’s ordinances. That this is both a Millennial and a New Covenant promise is seen in verses 24-28. The third passage in Ezekiel 39:29 is a compliment to the other two. The Lord promises, *“I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I will have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel.”* The outpouring of the Spirit means that God can dwell in the midst of His people forever. *“All Israel’s covenants would be fulfilled. She would live secure forever under the peace covenant administered by her king, the Messiah!”*

The final Old Testament passage that speaks of the Spirit’s redemptive ministry is found in the post-exilic prophecy of Zechariah. This text supplies an important, hitherto missing ingredient in the chronology of the institution of the Kingdom – and that is, repentance. After predicting the deliverance of Jerusalem in the End Times, the prophet continues by saying:

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Meggiddon. And the land shall mourn, every family

apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart. – (Zechariah 12:10-13).

Before the glad day of the restitution of the elect of Israel takes place, there has to be national mourning for the rejection of the Messiah by the nation as a whole. Notice that the prophet distinguishes between the Royal house or family: the house of David (v.12), a prophetic family: the house of Nathan (v.12), the priestly family: the house of Levi (v.13), and, interestingly, the family (but not the “house”!) of Shimei: a rebel family (v.13). That these are expressly stipulated confirms to us at least that the one who causes this repentance is none other than “the Spirit of grace and of supplications” in verse 10, who is being poured forth. Gromacki comments: *“This outpouring of the Holy Spirit will be on the nation of Israel only. It will result in national mourning and repentance, for it will cause them to see the crucified, resurrected, and returning Christ. It will lead to the conversion of Israel, thus preparing the nation for entering the messianic kingdom.”*

What this means is that the Spirit of conversion is first the Spirit of conviction. On the singular title given to the Spirit in this place Unger writes:

The Spirit of grace is God’s covenant favor and promised graciousness toward His people Israel in the day they turn to their Messiah and have their sin and unbelief removed... The Spirit of grace (hen), moreover, produces supplication (tahanumim, from the same root hanan),... The Lord’s gracious movement toward His repentant people in that day will eventuate in their gracious movement toward Him in supplicating prayer.

In sum we can see that the work of the Holy Spirit in redemption is insolubly connected with the eschatological New Covenant.

Prophesying

Next we come to the role of the Holy Spirit in the prophetic office. The first mentions of the Spirit’s work in relation to prophecy are to do with Saul (1 Samuel 10 & 19). These will be dealt with later in due course. We may say by way of introduction, that all true prophecy is by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:13; 2 Pet. 1:21). It is also helpful to notice that in contradistinction to the ideas of some more Liberal scholarship, the relation of prophetism to the Old Testament Levitical priesthood was one of both compliment and contrast. The priests were to instruct the people in the ways of their God. The prophets would issue exhortations based upon that instruction, although, that said, it must be qualified by the fact that often the prophets spoke when the priests had failed in their instructional tasks (e.g. 1 Sam. 3:1,19; Isa. 1:2-20; Mal. 2:7-9). But in contrast to the priestly office, the prophet would often preach judgment, in addition to predicting both short-term and longer-term events. Hence the true prophet acted as the nation’s conscience, often falling foul of the people in the process (e.g. Jer. 36-38; Ezek. 33:30-33).

Our purpose is not to define the prophetic task as much as to enquire into the role of the Spirit in the ministry of the Old Testament prophet. The ministry of the Spirit is particularly evident in the Book of Ezekiel. In some places the Spirit is said to lift the prophet up from a prostrate position

to that of standing upright (Ezek. 2:2; 3:24), while in others the prophet is transported from one geographical location to another (Ezek. 3:14; 8:3; 11:1, 24; 37:1. Cf. 1 Kings 18:12; Acts 8:39). Perhaps Ezekiel just saw these places as in a vision (11:24), though in some sense, whether physically or not, he really seems to have been taken from one place to another. These are unusual incidents to be sure. More typical is the coming of the Spirit “upon” a prophet. Striking expressions of this are to be found in such Scriptures as these:

“Then the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me, and said unto me, Speak! Thus says the LORD...” – (Ezekiel 11:5).

“The Spirit of God spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue.” – David in 2 Samuel 23:2.

“Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah...in the midst of the assembly, and he said...” – (2 Chronicles 20:14-15).

Notice that there is a vital connection between the Spirit coming upon a person and them speaking forth God’s words (cf. Exod. 7:1-2; 44:26; Jer. 1:7; Amos 3:8; Hag. 1:13). The Amos passage is of particular note:

“Surely the LORD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets...The LORD God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?” – (Amos 3:7-8).

We might include Amos’s words later on in his book:

“I was no prophet, nor was I the son of a prophet, but I was a sheepbreeder, and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the LORD took me as I followed the flock, And the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy to My people Israel. Now therefore, hear the word of the LORD...” – (Amos 7:15-16).

On the basis of what has already been said we feel justified in saying that it is God the Holy Spirit who both calls and who reveals His mind to His prophets. When God speaks through a prophet, it is by the Spirit that He speaks. Another good illustration of this is found in the prophecy of Micah. Micah makes bold to claim that the reason he can speak against the false prophets is that he is *“filled with power by the Spirit of the LORD...to declare to Jacob his transgression...”* (Mic. 3:8).

These passages (i.e. Amos 7:15-16 & Micah 3:8) introduce the subject of false prophets and what was the distinguishing feature between God’s true men and those fraudulent Seers who opposed them. Leon Wood, who has a helpful section on the subject, writes that:

[T]rue prophets were those who received their messages from God, while the false prophets did not. The false were those who would say, ‘Thus saith the LORD God, when the LORD had not spoken’ (Ezek. 22:28)...The issue is not whether a prophet only thought he heard from God, ...but whether he really did have a communication from heaven. True prophets had such communication and therefore had a message of divine origin and authenticity; false prophets did not have this. They may have thought they did and claimed to have it, but actually they did not. They were those who ‘followed their own spirit’ and had seen ‘nothing’ (Ezek. 13:3).

The Scripture cited in the above quotation is noteworthy because it sets forth the contrast between the prophet who has heard from God and the false prophet who has invented a lie in his own spirit. We witness Ezekiel blasting the false prophets with: *“Thus says the Lord God, Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing.”* – (Ezek. 13:3). The clear inference is that the Holy Spirit is not given them. That the Spirit’s attendant power was necessary for true prophesying is shown by the false prophet Zedekiah’s remark to Micaiah in 1 Kings 22:24 where the audacious fakir sarcastically baits the man of God by asking him, *“Which way went the Spirit of God from me over to you?”* (cf. Jer. 28:1-17).

Much more could be said about the Spirit’s relation to Old Testament prophets and prophecy, but there are other questions we need to explore. Several fine evangelical treatments of this subject are available to anyone interested in further study.

Were The Old Testament Prophets “Ecstatics”?

There is one more topic that should be addressed before moving on. The topic concerns the matter of whether or not the early Old Testament prophets ever lapsed into an ecstatic frenzy or trance-state when the Holy Spirit overcame them. From studies that have been done on prophets and seers in other ancient cultures we know that part of the seer’s routine was to go into a trance or stupor, in which he or she would then “prophesy,” that is to say, “act like a prophet.”

Old Testament critics stress that the prophets of Israel were ecstatics, as were the prophets of Canaan and those throughout the Near East. The ecstatic behavior of the prophets of Baal, who in frenzied dances cut and mutilated themselves on Mount Carmel, as well as the peculiar conduct of Saul, who stripped himself naked as he prophesied, and the unusual behavior of Balaam are usually cited as evidence of the characteristic abnormal behavior of the prophets of Israel when prophesying under the influence of the Spirit.

Or, again, Freeman states:

The idea and pursuit of ecstaticism is believed to have originated in Asia Minor. It is thought to have moved from there westward into Greece and eastward into Syria and Palestine toward the end of the second millennium B.C. Thus the Canaanites came to accept the practice, and the thinking is that Israel became influenced by them.

That said, what is one to make of the verses cited above by Freeman? Is it any surprise that even at some evangelical seminaries, this view that the early Hebrew prophets were also ecstatics is propounded?

Without going into the subject in detail, we shall briefly examine the examples Freeman has the critics make, but, let it be noticed; only the case of Saul is important to us. We shall then add a few remarks of our own.

We are quite ready to accept that both the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18, and the false seer Balaam in the book of Numbers did indeed go into some kind of frenzy in the midst of their soothsayings. In Balaam’s case, although it is true that he spoke the words God wanted him to

speak (e.g. Num. 24:13), there is no mention of the activity of the Spirit insofar as his prophesying is concerned. It is true that Balaam heard the voice of God (Num. 22:12, 20), and saw the Angel of the LORD (Num. 22:31-36), but it is clear that he was not a willing party in the blessing he heaped upon the children of Israel. We believe, therefore, that in his case we have an instance of God turning a man's wicked devices against him.

The incidents in the life of Saul are a different matter. In 1 Samuel 10:5-6 Samuel tells Saul:

After that you shall come to the hill of God where the garrison of the Philistines is. And it will happen, when you have come there to the city [i.e. Gibeah], that you will meet a company of the prophets coming down from the high place with a stringed instrument, a tambourine, a flute, and a harp before them; and they will be prophesying. Then the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man.

This, as the narrative carries on to say, is exactly what occurred (see vv. 10-13). Commenting on this passage Edward J. Young first advises, "If we employ the word "ecstasy" to describe the prophets, we must use the word with care." Then he states:

"It is without doubt true that when the Spirit of God thus came upon a man, that man was in an abnormal condition. There was resting upon him a Divinely imposed compulsion so that he could not but speak forth and sing the wondrous works of God. To this extent we may agree the prophet [and Saul] was in a state of ecstasy."

The second episode happened in 1 Samuel 19:18-24. The circumstances were quite different than those in chapter 10. Saul has been rejected as king of Israel (1 Sam. 16:14), and is in pursuit of David. He receives intelligence that David is with Samuel at Naioth, so he sent men to apprehend David, but when they arrived, "they saw the group of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as leader over them, [and] the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied." (v. 20). The same thing happens to two more bands of messengers (v. 21), and so Saul himself went. Then we read: "Then the Spirit of God was upon him also, and he went on and prophesied until he came to Naioth in Ramah. And he also stripped off his clothes and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night." (vv. 23-24).

What was happening here? At first sight it may appear that if indeed the Spirit of God had been the cause of this bizarre behavior, there is little to distinguish the prophetism of Israel from that of their ancient Near Eastern neighbors. However, it should be emphasized that, unlike his messengers, Saul began prophesying before arriving at where Samuel and David were, and he went on prophesying as he journeyed and when he got to Naioth. Leon Wood suggests that Saul's strange behavior in verse 24 (which neither the messengers nor the prophets shared in) can be put down to Saul's abject despair at again being shown up as God's reject. "That David now enjoyed Samuel's favor spelled out unmistakably the end of Saul's hopes for a continuing rule for his family." Saul's action is thus attributed to his being, "drained of all emotional and physical strength."

Although there is some merit in Wood's explanation, he seems to read more into the text than it warrants. Both Young (pp. 89-90), and Freeman (p.65), think that this happened to Saul to humble him. In either scenario it is obvious that this occurrence prevented David from being captured by Saul.

Our conclusion is that the early prophets of Israel were not ecstatics in the sense usually ascribed to shaman-like the soothsayers and oracles of ancient times. The oft-cited examples like 1 Samuel 10 and 19 are to be understood as neither normative for Old Testament prophets, nor as comparative to the "whipped-up" self-induced madness of the pagans. For one thing, there is a world of difference between an individual who is possessed of the Holy Spirit of prophecy, and someone who is deluded, or, what is worse, possessed by a demonic spirit. What has the one to do with the other? While we do read of people like Isaiah and Ezekiel performing strange actions, they are always instructed to do so by the Lord, and, in any case, they are in command of their mental and emotional faculties at all times – something that is to be expected of men who are Spirit-directed (cf. 2 Tim. 1:7). As Williams reminds us, "*The strange behavior involved with the symbolic acts performed by the prophets is certainly abnormal, but hardly the result of an ecstatic state.*" Thus, whether or not one uses the word "ecstatic" in a cautious way (like Young, Freeman, and Williams), or prefers to use another term, any connection between the true inspired prophets of the Old Testament and their foreign contemporaries is simply non-existent. Was not the absence of this very sort of thing one of the reasons why the Syrian general Naaman was so annoyed at Elisha (2 Kings 5:11!)? But the prophet of God is not a trance-induced maniac. Much less is he possessed of a Spirit that impels him to perform antics in order to impress the on-looker. The Spirit's work in the prophet is "*a divinely induced revelatory condition of a more or less restrained nature which was not on a continuum with pagan prophetism.*"

Empowerment/Enablement

Another high-profile ministry of the Holy Spirit was the empowerment of chosen individuals for some office, normally that of judge or of regent. In the class of the former we read of the Spirit coming upon Othniel, the first judge (Judg. 3:10). As the text makes clear, the coming of the Spirit of the LORD upon Othniel (as also upon some of the other judges or deliverers), is what transformed them into men with the requisite gifts to do the task. Goslinga makes the adroit observation that the author of the book of Judges, in referring to the Spirit as "the Spirit of the LORD" (i.e. Yahweh) instead of "the Spirit of God," is stressing that the deliverances under the judges were expressive of the ties that the twelve tribes had to the God of the covenant. Walvoord thinks that this enabling, which was particular to a handful of individuals in the Old Testament (e.g. Gen. 41:38-40; Num. 27:18; Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25, etc), paralleled, "*to some degree the sovereign bestowal of gifts in the New Testament period.*" The majority of these "endowment" passages are concerned with strengthening for battle with Israel's foes. One interesting passage in Isaiah predicts a day when "*the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard*" against God's enemies (Isa. 59:19). There are other verses, which refer to a special temporary enabling given to Bezaleel of Judah and Aholiab of Dan to make the instruments of the Tabernacle (Exod. 31:1-11; 35:30-39:43. Cf. Exod. 28:3). Then there is the singular incident when the Spirit uses Amasai, the chief of the captains, to assure David that those men who had come to him were true (1 Chron. 12:18).

Although not every reference has been covered in the above remarks, enough has been said to give a good overview of the Holy Spirit's multifaceted activity during the Old Testament period. We shall lastly address the question about the salvation of saints in Old Testament times.

Old Testament Salvation.

The question of the salvation of the Old Testament saints is made more complicated by the fact that there are not the kinds of detailed descriptions and definitions relating to conversion that one finds, say, in Paul's epistles. One might ask, therefore, whether the matter is just one of a lack of good terminology? To put it more bluntly, were the Old Testament believers "born-again"? We will begin our inquiry by turning to J. Dwight Pentecost's book on the Holy Spirit, where he cites John 14:17 and says that Jesus there "divided the Holy Spirit's ministry into two parts." The verse reads as follows: "*the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you [the disciples] know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.*" Pentecost draws our attention to the difference between "He abides with you" and "He...will be in you." He allows that some certain Old Testament people had encounters with the Spirit, but he argues that one should recognize "three essential features of the Spirit's indwelling in the Old Testament."

Though the quotation is fairly lengthy, it is worth reproducing his words below.

In the first place, the indwelling was not universal; it was not for everyone who was rightly related to God. A few of the Old Testament saints had this experience, but only a few. There were multitudes...who knew God in a personal relationship, whose sins had been forgiven, who never had one day of consciously being under the control of the Spirit of God, assured of the indwelling presence and the empowerment of the Spirit of God because the Spirit had come upon them and dwelt within them...

The second thing that we would observe ...is that the Holy Spirit came upon men to empower them to some special service...A third thing we notice in the Old Testament is that the indwelling was temporary.

Here, then, Pentecost sets out three features of the Spirit's work in the Old Testament; features that might appear to preclude His work of regeneration in those saints. But Pentecost does not think so. He is adamant that, "*The one fact that we perhaps would overlook is given to us in the third chapter of John's Gospel – that the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament was, as He is today, the agent in the new birth.*"

Just here a new question arises. Does John 3 refer to knowledge that Nicodemus ought to have had about salvation in the past (Old Covenant), the present (the "Gospel age"), or in the future (New Covenant)? Robert Gromacki seems to indicate that the passage speaks of the future (from an Old Testament Jew's perspective). He declares in connection with the pending national conversion through the New Covenant of Ezekiel 36:24-28 that it "will occur just before the messianic, millennial kingdom is established." Then he continues by citing John 3:

Christ used that logic when he told Nicodemus that he had to be born again before he could see or enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3-7). When Nicodemus expressed his ignorance of this

truth, Christ responded, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?" (3:10). Christ used the demonstrative pronoun tauta ("these things") to refer to the truth of regeneration mentioned in the New Covenant promised to Israel in the Old Testament (Jer. 31:31-37; Ezek. 36:22-32)."

This does not imply that Gromacki thinks the passage is wholly future. Further on he relates John 3 to both the Gospel era and the Church-age. This is surely correct given the requirement of the Spirit's work in both providence and redemption. Passages such as Genesis 2:7; Job 33:4; Psalm 104:29-30 show that the Spirit's activity is essential to anything that lives, and the doctrine of total depravity demands that some kind of supernatural work is necessary to bring any person to God (e.g. Rom. 8:7; Eph. 2:1). So what was the Holy Spirit's role in the mechanics of conversion as wrought upon Old Testament believers?

The French Dispensational scholar Rene Pache noted that before Christ the Spirit could "only act in accordance with the Old Covenant," so that "the Spirit accomplished an incomplete work." The majority of Dispensational scholars cited in the present study (e.g. Wood, Chafer, Walvoord, Pentecost, Ryrie, Gromacki, Feinberg), believe that before the Cross, regeneration was a separate phenomenon to the Spirit's indwelling. This, of course, would have to be so because of the select company of individuals who temporarily enjoyed the Spirit's presence. Certainly many more than they were made righteous by faith in God.

What this means is that, in profile with progressive revelation a certain amount of discontinuity between the Testaments must be catered for. It were wise if Bible students trod carefully on this subject, calling to mind the words of Chafer that, "*The Old Testament will be searched in vain for record of Jews passing from an unsaved to a saved state, or for any declaration about the terms upon which such a change would be secured.*" It is our opinion that Old Testament saints were made spiritually alive by the sovereign work of the Spirit, but that did not mean that they were baptized, sealed, or incorporated into the Body of Christ – the Church. "*Israel's position in the OT was already one of "nearness" to God in comparison to the Gentiles (cf. Ps 148:14, NASB). But this "nearness" is transcended by the new position of believers in Christ. He came to peace...so that they might gain new access in the Spirit to the Father.*"

Still, some will point to what is said about Saul in 1 Samuel 10:9: "Then it happened when he turned his back to leave Samuel, God changed his heart; so that he prophesied among them." A recent article refers to this verse as an example of being born-again. But this is not the consensus among Old Testament scholars. For instance, even though he is a covenant theologian, Edward J. Young makes it quite clear that "*It would be a grave mistake to equate this remarkable change with the work of God's Spirit known as regeneration.*" Saul's altered condition was to fit him for his task, but it was not a work of salvation in his heart. Young puts the matter well when he writes: "*The change remained, we may say, upon natural ground. There was to be no passing away of old things. The heart, with its sinful, rebellious nature, would remain, and, alas did remain with Saul until his death.*"

Summing up the subject of the Spirit's work in the salvation of the saints of the Old Testament era, we can say that though salvation was by grace through faith, and while we think it a safe move to posit the regeneration of Old Testament men and women, we have to recognize

important divergences in the concomitants of salvation between the two Testaments. Allen Ross maintains that,

“...the OT does not speak of the Holy Spirit baptizing and indwelling all who believe. The influence toward faith in the OT would come from the people’s being born into the covenant community (as the physical seed of Abraham) with God’s revelation as their rule of life and their spiritual heritage as a witness to the will of God. Of course, the Holy Spirit was active in all this to enable people to come to faith and to serve the Lord.”

Conclusion

In this short survey of the Holy Spirit and His ministry in the Old Testament we have shown: a) that the Spirit as Personal is taught clearly in the Old Testament (Isa. 40:13; 63:10); b) that He is pictured as working decisively in Creation (Gen. 1:2; Psa. 104:30), Redemption (Isa. 32:15; Ezek. 36:27; 37:29; Zech. 12:10), the act of Prophesying (Ezek. 11:5; Amos 3:7-8), and in the Enabling of individuals to do their God-appointed tasks (Exod. 28:3; Judg. 3:10; 6:34). Then we looked at salvation in the Old Testament and concluded that while dispensational discontinuities must be understood, it is still the case that Old Testament believers were regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

It could not be said better than it is by the prophet Zechariah: *“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD!”* (Zech. 4:6).