

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis 1:1-2

One of the greatest days in television history was September 8, 1973. I was seven years old, and on that date ABC debuted the cartoon Superfriends. Each week Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, and Aquaman battled Lex Luther and his Legion of Doom. In 1977 the All New Superfriends Hour continued the crime fighting by adding Flash, Green Lantern, and Hawkman to the team.

Without a doubt the greatest Superhero of them all was Aquaman. Everyone knows you can't fly like Superman; and even though her plane was invisible you could still *see* Wonder Woman in the cockpit. Batman can't be a real hero because he needed Robin—a real super hero doesn't need anyone. But a guy who can breathe under water and talk to fish, now that's reality! That's super! I always wanted to be like Aquaman. I guess that's why I fell in love with scuba diving. Over the years I have used several illustrations from scuba diving. I see several parallels between scuba diving and the ministry and purpose of the Holy Spirit.

When scuba diving I am completely immersing myself into an unknown and hostile environment. The scenery can be breathtaking, but touch one piece of coral, or pick up one sea urchin, and you learn how painful, and deadly, the beauty can be. A fascinating thing about diving is that every time is different. I never know what will be around the corner, or what will pop out of the next hole. I never know what I will see next. Furthermore, every time I take a breath I am reminded I was not created to live under water. "H₂O is not my home; I'm just a swimmin' through..." In fact, when I dive, I don't take the regulator out of my mouth until I am completely, and safely, back on the boat or dry land.

Likewise, as a Christian, like it or not, I am completely immersed in the culture of this world. I am living in an unknown environment. I am living in a place that is becoming more and more hostile to me. The scenery and temptations of this life can be breathtaking, but they can also be extremely dangerous and deadly. This world is not my home, and after every breath I am reminded I was not created for this life only. In the water I depend on my regulator for breath and life. In this world, if I am to survive, I must depend on the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. As the regulator is to a scuba diver, so is the Holy Spirit to the believer. I must stay connected to the breath of the Holy Spirit

until I safely reach the other side.

Background and Review

Last week we began a journey exploring the purpose and ministry of the Holy Spirit. This journey flows out of the conviction that a deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit is one of our greatest needs. My prayer is that each of us will ask God to teach us what it means to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. The one thing I hope we learned last week was that the Holy Spirit is God. The Holy Spirit is co-eternal, co-equal, and has inter-personal relationships with God the Father and God the Son. Since the Holy Spirit is God, and since He is eternal, that means He existed before the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. If that is the case, what was His ministry and purpose in the Old Testament?

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

Genesis 1:1-2 reads, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” The Hebrew word for “God” is *Elohim*, which is the plural form of the word “God.” This plural word for God is used in agreement with the singular verb, *bara*, meaning “created”. Thus, even though *Elohim* is plural, because of the singular verb, *bara*, it refers to one Being.¹ In other words; “In the beginning God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, created the heavens and the earth.”

In Genesis 1:26 God says, “Let *us* make man in our image...” Who were the “us”? To whom was God talking? Again, “God” is *Elohim*; therefore the “us” refers to the Trinity. In other words, you and I were created in the image of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

What does it mean to be created in the image of God? I believe the basic meaning is one of *personhood*. The one thing separating humans from animals is *personality*. A person is defined as one who thinks, feels, and acts. It is our ability to think, feel, and act that makes us persons. It is our ability to think, feel, and act that separates us from the animal kingdom.

Our ability to think, feel, and act is what it means to be created in the image of God. God—Father, Son, and Spirit—is a Person (thinking, feeling, acting). You and I a persons (thinking, feeling, and acting). Thus, we were created for a personal relationship with God; a thinking, feeling, and acting relationship. Our personal relationship with God the Father starts the moment we, through faith, accept God the Son, and is lived out through obedience to God the Holy Spirit. We were created in the image of God so we could have a personal relationship with God. This brings us to the first ministry and purpose of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.

1. **The Holy Spirit was active in creation.**

The Old Testament teaches that the Holy Spirit was active in creation. The Holy Spirit was not created. The Holy Spirit has always been and will always be. The Holy Spirit had an active role in creating you and me. To say the Holy Spirit had an active role in creation is to say He is sovereign. He is all-powerful. He is all knowing. He is God!

What else does the Old Testament say about the Holy Spirit?

2. **The Holy Spirit was active in the lives and hearts of people.**

The Holy Spirit has always worked in the lives and hearts of people. In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit did four things in the lives and hearts of people: First of all, the Holy Spirit drew people to God. King David said he could not go anywhere without the Holy Spirit being present, drawing him closer to God. David wrote, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up the heavens, You are there; if I make my bed in the depths, You are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there Your hand will guide me, Your right hand will hold me fast” (Psalm 139:7-10). In the Old Testament, people were brought into a personal relationship with God by faith, and it was the Holy Spirit who compelled people to place their faith in God.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit called people to service and equipped them to carry out that service.

In Exodus 31, God tells Moses that a man by the name of Bezalel will help build the tabernacle. Concerning Bezalel God says, “See I have chosen Bezalel...and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts...” (Exodus 31:2-3). The book of Judges is full of instances where the Spirit of the Lord came upon different people and enabled them to do miraculous things. Interesting, isn’t it? In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit gave people gifts to be used in service to God.

Third, in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit convicted of sins. Through the prophet Nathan, the Holy Spirit convicted David of his sin with Bathsheba. David repented and prayed, “Create in me a pure heart; O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me” (Psalm 51:10-12).

Fourth, the Holy Spirit worked signs and wonders through people. Through the prophets, and others, the Holy Spirit wrote the Old Testament. At different times the Holy Spirit came upon people, empowering them to perform miraculous acts. Through the Holy Spirit, Samson killed a lion with his bare hands (Judges 14:6). The Spirit of the Lord came upon King Saul and he prophesied (1 Samuel 10:10). Isaiah tells us it was the Spirit of the Lord that enabled Moses to divide the Red Sea, and perform all the miracles he performed (Isaiah 63:11-14).

Believers in the Old Testament experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives just like the believers in the New Testament. The difference was in intensity, abundance, availability, and quantity. But make no doubt about it, the Holy Spirit was alive and well in the hearts and lives of Old Testament saints.

3. The Holy Spirit’s future ministry was prophesied in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit drew people to God, called and equipped people for service, convicted people of their sins, and worked signs and wonders through people. What He did in the Old Testament, however, pails in comparison to what He did in the New Testament and what He desires to do today. The Holy Spirit’s ministry in the Old Testament was preparatory to the New

Testament, and a foreshadow of His ministry today. The prophets of the Old Testament understood this truth. Isaiah said, “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; and from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord” (Isaiah 11:1-3). Ezekiel prophesied, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (Ezekiel 36:26-27). Speaking through the prophet Joel, God proclaimed, “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions” (Joel 2:28).

These prophecies were fulfilled (or filled-full) in Acts 2 when, “Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:2-4). God’s Word sums up the ministry and purpose of the Holy Spirit when it says, “‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty” (Zechariah 4:6).

CONCLUSION

One word captures the ministry of the Holy Spirit—past, present, and future; and that one word is *transformation*. By drawing people to God, calling them to service, convicting them of sin, and working wonders through them, the Holy Spirit transforms people. Right now He wants to work in your life, transforming you into the image of Jesus Christ.

We were created for a personal relationship with God. We were created in the image of God. Through the sin of Adam and Eve that image was greatly damaged. But through faith in Jesus Christ that image can be completely restored. How can the Holy Spirit transform you into the image of Jesus Christ?

H – Have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The first step in the transformation process is to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Confess your sins to Him. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins. Allow the Holy Spirit to come into your life.

O – Obey God’s Word and do what you know to do now.

Once you have asked Christ to forgive you of your sins, the Holy Spirit begins His work. The Holy Spirit will convict you of things in your life; things you are not doing that you should be doing, things you are doing that you should not be doing. Listen and obey. The Holy Spirit will then call you and equip you for a particular service in the church. Listen and get involved. The Holy Spirit will work in your life and do the impossible if you will obey Him and do what you know to do now.

W – Watch Out!

Once you place your faith in Jesus Christ and allow the Holy Spirit free reign in your life, watch out! Things will start to happen. Prayers will be answered. Opportunities to serve will be abundant. You will experience a joy and peace like never before. There will be freedom in worship and boldness in witness.

Maybe the reason you are so unhappy in your Christian life is because you are living in disobedience to the Spirit. Maybe you have not allowed Him the freedom to do all in your life that He wants to do. Maybe you are guilty of what the Apostle Paul called “quenching the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19). God, through the Holy Spirit, wants more for you than you want for yourself.

The first time I went scuba diving I was quite nervous. I wasn’t sure this thing on my back would really work. I wasn’t sure I really wanted my life to depend on a mouthpiece hooked to a tank. By faith, I stepped off the boat into the water, and after a few moments of hesitation, I drew my first breath. It worked! I was still alive. By jumping off the boat, and trusting my regulator, I saw and experienced things that 90% of the population never gets to see or experience.

Does all this talk about the Spirit make you nervous? Are you unsure if it will work? Are you a little hesitant to let go and let God? By faith surrender. Jump in. Pray, “Holy Spirit, here I am. Take all of me there is to have. Do with me as you please.” Not only will you live, you will see and experience things that 90% of believers never see or experience. For the first time in your life you will understand what it means to have a peace “which transcends all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). For the first time in your life you will understand what it means to live in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

¹ The *Hebrew/Greek Key Study Bible* says, “Is God a singular entity...or a plural entity?...the Hebrew word for God is *Elohim*...a plural noun. In Genesis 1:1, it is used in grammatical agreement with a singular verb *bara*...‘created.’ When plural pronouns are used, ‘Let us make man in our image after our likeness,’ does it denote a plural or number or the concept of excellence or majesty which may be indicated in such a way in Hebrew? Could God be speaking to the angels, the earth, or nature thus denoting Himself in relation to one of these? Or is this a germinal hint of a distinction in the divine personality? One cannot be certain. Until Jesus came, the essential (internal) unity of the Godhead was not understood to a great extent, though it was intimated (Is. 48:16).”