

The Eschatology of the Holy Spirit

by John F. Walvoord

The Holy Spirit will have a ministry which exceeds previous dispensations in its fullness and power in the millennium, and will continue to convict men of their need of Christ and reveal the way of salvation during the tribulation period.

Scripture: Isaiah 11:2, Jeremiah 31:31, Ezekiel 36:24, Joel 2:28, Zechariah 14:16, Matthew 24:14, John 16:7, Acts 2:16, 2 Thessalonians 2:7

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Eschatology"

Description

John F. Walvoord concludes a series on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, focusing on the Holy Spirit's work in the tribulation and the millennium. He highlights the importance of understanding the Holy Spirit's ministries during these prophesied periods, emphasizing the significant role of the Spirit in salvation and empowerment of believers amidst unprecedented sin and divine judgment. The sermon delves into the unique aspects of the Holy Spirit's work in the tribulation, including the conviction of lost souls and the regeneration of believers, as well as the Spirit's ministry in the millennium, characterized by universal righteousness, peace, and spiritual fervor.

Transcript

[Author's Note: This article brings to conclusion the series of studies in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit begun in the April-June, 1940, Number of Bibliotheca Sacra. The present article includes the discussion of the work of the Holy Spirit in the tribulation and in the millennium. The entire series on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is scheduled for republication in book form with added material and indexes in the near future.]

Introduction.

The doctrine of the future work of the Holy Spirit has attracted practically no attention in existing works on theology and in books on the Holy Spirit. We search in vain for an exposition of this doctrine in standard theologies such as Hodge, Strong, Shedd, Alexander, Watson, Wardlaw, Dörner, Dick, Miley, Gerhart, Valentine, Buel, and the recent work of Berkhof. In works on the Holy Spirit such as Kuyper, Smeaton, Moule, Cummings, and Simpson there is practically no mention of the doctrine. The chief factor causing this defect is the three-way division in the treatment of eschatology itself. The postmillennial theory holds that the prophesied millennium will be fulfilled in the present age through preaching the Gospel or a "spiritual" return of Christ. If this theory be held, of course, the present ministries of the Spirit will continue through the age and culminate in the conclusion of all things in the final judgment. There is, in this theory,

no need of treating the eschatology of the Holy Spirit. A similar situation is found among the writings of the so-called amillennialist view, i.e., that the present age will continue and issue into the eternal state without any millennium. Only the premillennialist, who anticipates a millennium on earth after Christ returns to set up His kingdom, can be expected to consider the doctrine and furnish an exposition of it.

In the writing of premillennial teachers and theologians there is also, however, a surprising neglect of this doctrine. Among the older premillennialists, such as Van Oosterzee, there is little exposition and defense of the premillennial position, and practically no attention is given the prophesied ministries of the Spirit in the millennial period. More attention has been given to the other great themes of prophecy. The result has been that there has been little understanding of the nature of the ministries of the Spirit in the prophesied period of tribulation and in the millennium which follows. It is to this task that we now turn.

The usual premillennial position is assumed as the basis for the discussion. The Scriptures prophesy that immediately after the return of Christ for the Church a period of unprecedented trouble will follow, a period of approximately seven years according to Daniel 9:27, shortened a little (Matt 24:22), and divided into two halves of three and one-half years each. The latter half is known as the great tribulation and in it is an unprecedented display of sin and of divine judgment upon sin. The return of Christ to set up His kingdom abruptly closes the tribulation, and the millennium follows in which Christ will rule and establish universal righteousness and peace. The millennium itself closes with another outbreak of sin and the final judgment of the wicked, and the establishment of the new heavens and new earth brings in the eternal state. It is amidst these stirring events that the Holy Spirit ministers in fulfillment of prophecy. It is clear that in the nature of the circumstances His work will be quite different than His present undertaking for the Church. While the body of Scripture is not large, it does speak with certain voice on important points.

I. The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Tribulation

One of the popular misconceptions of the prophesied period of tribulation is that all who enter this period are irrevocably lost. It is true that individuals who have had opportunity to hear the Gospel and receive Christ during this present dispensation of grace are unlikely to accept Christ in the difficult days of tribulation. On the other hand, it is obvious that many will be saved, some of them surviving the horrors of the tribulation to enter the millennium, and others to die the death of martyrs. The rapture of the Church at the beginning of the seven-year period of tribulation removes every Christian from the world. Immediately, however, Israel's blindness is removed (Rom 11:25), and thousands among Israel turn to their long-neglected Messiah. Among Gentiles, too, there will be conversions from every nation and tongue (Rev 7:9-17). While the tribulation period is characterized by wickedness and apostasy, it will be a period of great harvest of souls. In the light of these facts, one might expect to find the Holy Spirit ministering during this period.

1. The Work of the Holy Spirit in Salvation.

A notable prophecy of the Old Testament is quoted in the New Testament by Peter in the opening of his sermon on the day of Pentecost: "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit: and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above; and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire and vapour and smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and

notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:16-21; cf. Joel 2:28-32). The prophecy is first of all related to the present age and the phenomena of the day of Pentecost. A careful study of the passage will reveal that this is only a partial fulfillment. The prophecy of Joel will have its ultimate fulfillment in the consummation of God's purpose for Israel. The wonders in heaven and in earth (Acts 2:19-20) obviously did not occur on the day of Pentecost or any succeeding day of the Christian dispensation. It remained for the tribulation period as described in Revelation to fulfill these details.

An important aspect of this passage is found in Acts 2:21, "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." This is the order during the dispensation of grace, and it will continue throughout the tribulation period. In view of the natural blindness of the human heart, and the inability of the natural man to understand the Gospel sufficiently to believe, apart from the convicting work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-11), it must be assumed that there is a continued work of the Holy Spirit in revealing to the lost the way of salvation. This ministry of the Holy Spirit is especially needed in the spiritual darkness which will characterize the tribulation period. We can expect that there will be mighty conviction, especially among Israel, that Christ is indeed the Savior and the Messiah.

The discourse of Christ with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21) may be understood to confirm that there will be salvation during the tribulation, and that it will be a work of the Holy Spirit. For an Israelite, entrance into the kingdom was more than becoming a part of the spiritual kingdom of God. The kingdom idea for Israel anticipated a reign of Christ on earth in which there was political, visible, and moral government as well as spiritual elements. Israel's hope was not in heaven. We look in vain for such a hope in prophecies of the Old Testament prophets. Their hope was the kingdom of righteousness on earth, a new earth, but not a spiritual existence in heaven. While their conception was not without the realization of the need for being within the fold of salvation and spiritual regeneration, this was conceived of as a means to the end of entering the future earthly kingdom. The advocates of postmillennialism and amillennialism would eliminate the thought of a political kingdom in favor of a purely spiritual kingdom, such as now exists in the present mystery form of the kingdom in the age of grace, but the many Scriptures which speak eloquently of a kingdom on earth cannot be really explained away (cf. Isa 11). When, therefore, Christ told Nicodemus that it was necessary that he be born again to enter the kingdom, and expressed surprise that Nicodemus did not already know this fact, He was referring not only to the immediate necessity of the new birth to enter the spiritual kingdom of all true believers, but to the necessity of regeneration for entrance to the millennium itself. Accordingly, it may be deduced that the Spirit of God will not only convict men of their need of Christ and reveal the way of salvation, but He will also regenerate those who believe. They will immediately receive eternal life, and will enter the millennium if they survive the tribulation period.

Israel, in particular, is given the blessed promise of regeneration as a part of the blessing of her restoration into favor with God. That only those who believe will receive this blessing is evident from the judgments which fall on Israel during the tribulation, in which two-thirds of Israel are killed and only one-third survive (Zech 13:8, 9). The extent of these blessings is prophesied by Ezekiel: "For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I give you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them...." (Ezek 36:24-27). The exact conditions spoken of here are those at the beginning of the millennium, but as those who enter the

millennium in the flesh will have been saved in the tribulation period, it can be easily seen to be a revelation of the nature of the Spirit's working in believers during the tribulation.

2. The Work of the Holy Spirit in Believers in the Tribulation.

Much of the revelation concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit to those saved in the tribulation is based on inference, but a continued ministry of the Holy Spirit to believers in this period, though somewhat restricted, is evident. There is some evidence that believers may be indwelt by the Spirit during the tribulation as, according to Ezekiel 36:27, they will be indwelt before they enter the millennium. Against this, however, is the revelation of 2 Thessalonians 2:7, that the one restraining the world from sin, i.e., the Holy Spirit, will be "taken out of the way" during the tribulation. Unrestrained evil characterizes the tribulation, though the lack of restraint is not total (cf. Rev 7:3; 12:6, 14-16). It has been assumed by some that the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the saints in itself contributes to the restraint of sin, and that it, therefore, is taken away. The tribulation period, also, seems to revert back to Old Testament conditions in several ways; and in the Old Testament period, saints were never permanently indwelt except in isolated instances, though a number of instances of the filling of the Spirit and of empowering for service are found. Taking all the factors into consideration, there is no conclusive argument against the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in believers in the tribulation. If believers are indwelt during the tribulation, it also would follow that they are sealed by the Spirit, the seal being His own presence in them.

Whether or not the Spirit permanently indwells the believers of this period, it is clear that some believers are filled with the Spirit and empowered to witness. This is evident, first, from the fact that there will be world-wide preaching of the gospel of the kingdom during the tribulation (Matt 24:14). The power to bear witness has ever been a result of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and is related to the filling of the Spirit, which may be temporary, not necessarily to His indwelling, which by nature is permanent. The spiritual victory achieved by the martyrs to the faith could hardly be accomplished apart from the spiritual enablement of the Holy Spirit. The general phenomena of the tribulation make any any sort of spiritual achievement unthinkable apart from the power of God. While, therefore, we do not have extended Scripture references on the doctrine, it is, nevertheless, sustained by every approach to the subject.

3. The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Tribulation Limited.

The characteristics of the tribulation period are not conducive to an unlimited manifestation of the Spirit's ministries. In contrast to the age of grace which precedes and the millennium which follows, the tribulation is a period of unprecedented sin and rebellion against God. While salvation is possible for those who believe, we must conclude that the saved will be in much greater minority than at present. False doctrine will reach new heights of deception. Apostasy will reach its acme. The restraining work of the Holy Spirit will be almost totally removed (2 Thess 2:7).

A notable lack in the ministries of the Holy Spirit is the work of the Spirit in baptism. It is highly significant that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is always regarded in Scripture as future until the day of Pentecost when the believers were baptized by the Spirit; that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is never found after the rapture of the church either in the tribulation period or in the millennium. We search the prophetic Scriptures in vain for any reference to baptism of the Spirit except in regard to the Church, the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13). While, therefore, the Spirit continues a ministry in the world in the tribulation, there is no longer a corporate body of believers knit into one living organism. There is rather a return to national distinctions and fulfillment of national promises in preparation for the millennium.

II. The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Millennium

The millennium will undoubtedly be the most glorious of all the dispensations. There will be the fullest display of righteousness, and universal peace and prosperity will characterize the period. Christ will rule all the earth, and every nation will acknowledge Him. The knowledge of the Lord will be from sea to sea. Throughout the millennium, Satan will be bound, and there will be no demonic activity. Man will continue to possess a sin nature with its inherent weakness, but there will be no outside temptation to arouse it. The ministry of resurrected saints in the earth will add its distinctive touch to the unusual situation. It is manifest that in such a period the Holy Spirit will have a ministry which exceeds previous dispensations in its fullness and power, even though the millennium will be legal in its government instead of gracious as in the present dispensation.

1. The Work of the Holy Spirit in Restraining.

From the general nature of the period it may be learned that there will not be the spiritual conflict with forces of darkness which characterizes the present period. The work of the Holy Spirit in restraining sin will operate only against the manifestation of sin which is latent in the human heart. If all who enter the millennium in the flesh are saved, as the Scriptures seem to indicate, the Spirit will empower from within and, accordingly, will have little need for His general ministry of restraining sin as exercised in the wicked world of today. Children will continue to be born during the millennium, and these will probably constitute the bulk of human population before the first century of the millennium passes. They will need to be saved through willing faith in Christ even as their parents exercised faith before them. Conditions in the world will be such that any open rebellion against Christ will immediately be put down, and all will make at least outward profession of faith in Him. It is from this professing element that the rebels of the final outbreak of sin at the close of the millennium will be drawn. The work of the Holy Spirit will no doubt be correlative to the sovereign rule of Christ. There is little Scripture, however, upon which to base the doctrine, and inference must be drawn from the characteristic activity of the Spirit in previous dispensations. It is possible that Isaiah 59:19 has reference to the millennium.

2. The Work of the Holy Spirit in Salvation.

As previously indicated, there will be need of salvation from sin in the millennium on the part of the children born during the period. There can be little doubt that a larger percentage of the world's population will be saved during the millennium than during any other period. Many Scriptures indicate the fullness of that salvation. Ezekiel 36:25-31 pictures the fullness of salvation for Israel. They will be cleansed from sin, given a new heart, and saved from the power of sin. The universality of salvation, particularly at the beginning of the millennium, is pictured in Jeremiah 31:31-34, and many other references support the same view (Isa 44:2-4; 60:21; Jer 24:7). The blessings will also extend to the Gentile world (Zech 14:16).

The nature of salvation will clearly include regeneration, as indicated in Ezekiel 36:25-31, and in John 3:1-21. The condition of salvation will remain faith in Christ, whose visible presence and power will make it easy to understand His power to save. The work of the Spirit remains necessary to saving faith, however, as even in the millennium men before salvation are subject to the same limitations inherent in men to-day, though freed from the hindering power of Satan. The millennium will be the final display of the power of God to save souls.

3. The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Believer in the Millennium.

The prophecies picturing the millennium, to which reference has already been made, unite in their testimony that the work of the Holy Spirit in believers will be more abundant and have greater manifestation in the millennium than in any previous dispensation. It is evident from the Scriptures that all believers will be indwelt by the Holy Spirit in the millennium even as they are in the present age (Ezek 36:27; 37:14; cf. Jer 31:33).

The filling of the Holy Spirit will be common in the millennium, in contrast to the infrequency of it in other ages, and it will be manifested in worship and praise of the Lord and in willing obedience to Him as well as in spiritual power and inner transformation (Isa 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 39:29; Joel 2:28-29). In contrast to present-day spiritual apathy, coldness, and worldliness, there will be spiritual fervor, love of God, holy joy, universal understanding of spiritual truth, and a wonderful fellowship of the saints. The spiritual unity and blessings which characterized the early church assemblies are a foreview of the fellowship of saints throughout the world in the millennium. The emphasis will be on righteousness in life and on joy of spirit.

The fullness of the Spirit will also rest upon Christ (Isa 11:2) and will be manifest in His Person and in His righteous rule of the earth. The millennium will be the final display of the heart of God before the bringing in of the eternal state. In it God is revealed again as loving and righteous, the source of all joy and peace, and in the period also, at its close, man is revealed as at heart in rebellion against God and unwilling to bow even before such glorious evidence of His power.

From such revelation as is found in the Scriptures, all the ministries of the Spirit known to us in the present age will be found in the millennium except the baptism of the Spirit-which has already been shown to be peculiar to the dispensation of grace, from the day of Pentecost to the rapture. Though in the midst of growing apostasy in the world and indifference to the Spirit even among those in whom He dwells, we can envision the coming day; and as we wait for Him whose right it is to reign, we can by yieldedness and by dependence on the indwelling Spirit find in our own hearts and manifest in our own lives the fragrance of the fruit of the Spirit.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-f-walvoord/the-eschatology-of-the-holy-spirit/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net