

# The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

by John F. Walvoord

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*The Holy Spirit's work in the Old Testament is essential to understanding His role in the overall plan of God, including His obedience, role in creation, and covenant responsibilities.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:2

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit", "Old Testament"

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## Description

John F. Walvoord delves into the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, starting with His involvement in eternity past, creation, and revelation. The preacher emphasizes the importance of divine guidance and the delicate nature of revealing the inmost secrets of God. He warns against interpreting Scripture through personal experience and highlights the need for careful induction to avoid error. The sermon explores the Holy Spirit's obedience to the Father and the Son, His role in creation and preservation, His ministry to the incarnate Second Person, and His application of grace to man, including imparting eternal life, divine wisdom, indwelling presence, enablement for spiritual service, sanctification, intercession, and the formation of the Church.

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## Transcript

[Author's Note: Following the introductory article on the Person of the Holy Spirit, this discussion will begin the consideration of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. Included in this article are the first three divisions: (1) The Work of the Holy Spirit in Eternity Past; (2) The Work of the Holy Spirit in Creation; (3) The Work of the Holy Spirit in Old Testament Revelation. To follow in a later article will be the discussion of the work of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration of the Old Testament, in working miracles in the Old Testament, and His ministry to man in the Old Testament.]

Introduction.

The great Dutch theologian of the last century, Abraham Kuyper, in beginning his classic work, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, struck a note which every careful student of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit will echo when he wrote, "The need of divine guidance is never more deeply felt than when one undertakes to give instruction in the work of the Holy Spirit—so unspeakably tender is the subject, touching the inmost secrets of God and the soul's deepest mysteries. We shield instinctively the intimacies of kindred and friends from intrusive observation, and nothing hurts the sensitive heart more than the rude exposure of that which

should not be unveiled, being beautiful only in the retirement of the home circle. Greater delicacy befits our approach to the holy mystery of our soul's intimacy with the living God."<sup>1</sup>

The subject of the work of the Holy Spirit is frequently based on explicit revelation, the contemplation of which affords the devout soul exquisite delight. Some aspects are revealed in less detail, requiring on the part of all who study them most careful induction to avoid error. Frequently a great field of truth is revealed in a few scattered Scriptures. We all must share some feeling of futility in endeavoring to display the beauties of infinite truth, the field being so vast, the danger of warping or slighting the truth ever being present.

Two great dangers in interpretation are apparent as illustrated in the literature on the subject. First, we are ever prone to interpret Scripture through experience, instead of interpreting experience through Scripture. The factor of human experience is very close to some aspects of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, but experience may not be normal, and if normal may not be properly interpreted. Much harm has come through arbitrary doctrines established in the last analysis on experience rather than revelation. A second danger, in the opposite extreme, is to limit the doctrine of the Holy Spirit to facts accepted by all. Much that is spiritual is not subject to proof sufficient to satisfy all. Inductions carefully made, and in keeping with all known revelation, are often necessary to bring out all the beauty of doctrine. The Scriptures have been expressly formed to be apparent to those who are taught by the Holy Spirit Himself while a closed book to cold reason and precise deduction. One who appreciates these dangers comes with a renewed sense of dependence on the Holy Spirit Himself to teach the intimate truths relating to His works.

It is natural that more attention should have been given to the New than to the Old Testament, with which we are primarily concerned at present. The Old Testament, however, affords an important introduction to the revelation of the New Testament. The similarities and contrasts bring out the truth of the New Testament in greater beauty. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is not complete until viewed as a whole from eternity to eternity. It may then be seen that His work is all part of one majestic purpose of God to display His own attributes and work His own will.

## I. The Work of the Holy Spirit in Eternity Past

It is fundamental to any doctrine that it be related to the sovereign purpose of God. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is no exception. Behind the work of the Holy Spirit in time is the work of the Holy Spirit in eternity. While possibly distinct from the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, in that its major revelation is found in the New Testament, the work of the Holy Spirit in eternity past is considered here as a proper introduction to His work in the Old Testament period. No attempt will be made, therefore, to limit the discussion to the Old Testament in this foundational subject.

All events of every classification are properly included in the one eternal decree of God. For the purpose of analysis and study, however, they may be conceived as falling into certain divisions, among them, the work of the Holy Spirit. While theologians have given surprisingly little attention to this important aspect of the eternal decree, all who accept the sovereignty of God will agree that the work of the Holy Spirit is vital and essential to the whole and may be safely inferred. An examination of this field of truth will reveal at least four major phases of the work of the Holy Spirit as directly involved in the covenant of redemption.

### 1. The Holy Spirit Became Obedient to the First and Second Persons.

The doctrine of procession states that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son as the Son proceeds from the Father. Based on this eternal relationship of the Persons of the Trinity, it may be inferred that in the eternal covenant of redemption, the Holy Spirit undertook to be obedient to the First and Second Persons. The obedience of the Holy Spirit as revealed in a number of Scriptures (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 13) is not confined to any one dispensation, but it is rather the norm for every age and proceeds from the eternal covenant. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments never reverse the order of obedience. As the Son is always obedient to the Father, so the Spirit is always obedient to the Father and the Son. This must not be taken to infer any inferiority of the Holy Spirit as to His Person, but rather a willing subordination in keeping with His Person and the unity of purpose of the Godhead. This subordination of the Holy Spirit is essential to all His ministry and characterizes all that is revealed. As it behooved Christ to be obedient even unto death, so it is harmonious with all that we know of God and His work that the Holy Spirit should be the unseen obedient servant of God, speaking of Christ rather than Himself, glorifying the Father rather than His own Person directly. Yet, as Christ in humiliation brought to Himself the added glory of being the Savior, so the Holy Spirit will ultimately bring to Himself the glory of being ever subordinate to the will of the Father, thus glorifying the eternal Godhead and fulfilling the fundamental purpose which underlies all the details of events.

## 2. The Holy Spirit Undertook His Part in Creation and Preservation.

From the use of **■ ■ ■ ■ ■** in the creation narrative, it may be assumed that the Holy Spirit had a part in creation. This inference is sustained by explicit Scriptures which will be subject to later discussion. From the fact that the Holy Spirit had a part in creation, it may be inferred that He undertook this phase of His work on the basis of covenant grounds in the original decree. It is in keeping with all that is revealed about Him in Scripture. Not only in creation, but also in preservation of creation the Holy Spirit undoubtedly has His part. While the distinct features of this work are not revealed, we may assume that one who is immanent in the world bears a sustaining relation to it. All this is a part of the original undertaking of the Holy Spirit.

## 3. The Holy Spirit Undertook to Minister to the Incarnate Second Person.

Under all circumstances the Persons of the Trinity are mutually sustaining, being one in Essence. During the period of kenosis, however, a special problem arises in relation to the Second Person. As a part of the eternal covenant between the Persons of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit undertook all the ministry necessary to sustain the Second Person during the period in which the outward display of glory and power was laid aside in some measure. In the covenant, the Third Person undertook to beget the Second Person of the Virgin Mary, to fill Him, and to supply all necessary enablement to sustain the Son in the sphere of His humiliation and empower Him for His life among men. This important subject in its several aspects will be considered in detail in a later section.

The fact that the Holy Spirit undertook this ministry is not explicitly revealed, but may be inferred from the nature of the eternal covenant which is based on specific revelation (Acts 2:23; Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 2:7; 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 1:2). As essential to the program of redemption and the salvation of the elect, the Holy Spirit must have assumed this part of the covenant. In its place, it is as essential to the whole as any other major aspect of the covenant purpose of God.

## 4. The Holy Spirit Undertook to Apply the Benefits of Grace to Man.

Major emphasis is usually given the part of the Father and the Son in the eternal covenant, the part of the Holy Spirit being assumed but seldom defined. Both A. A. Hodge<sup>2</sup> and Charles Hodge<sup>3</sup> fail to discuss the part of the Holy Spirit in the covenant of redemption. While the emphasis naturally falls on the part of the Father and the Son, in view of the attention the Scriptures give to these contracting Parties to the covenant, the part of the Holy Spirit in applying the benefits of grace secured through the death of Christ is of great importance and without it the covenant would not be complete. The ministries of the Holy Spirit in the ages are sufficient proof of the importance of this aspect of the eternal covenant. All of the work of the Holy Spirit is related to the purpose of God as contained in the covenant, but certain features of His work are especially significant and may be considered in brief here.

(1) Eternal Life. The impartation of eternal life is essential to the fulfillment of the covenant of redemption. The Scriptures reveal all three Persons of the Trinity as being related to it. The First Person becomes the Father of the believer (1 Cor 8:6; Eph 4:6). The life of the Second Person becomes the possession of the believer (John 11:25; 14:6; 1 John 5:12). The Third Person is said to regenerate (John 3:5; Titus 3:5). The efficient agent in regeneration is manifestly the Third Person. His work is essential to the bestowal of eternal life.

(2) Revelation. The whole field of impartation of divine wisdom to man is peculiarly the area of ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is God's eternal purpose to make Himself known, and it is the work of the Holy Spirit to carry out this purpose. As in other important ministries, the other Persons of the Trinity are vitally related to revelation. Christ, for instance, in His life and ministry revealed God. In every age, however, the Holy Spirit is active in revealing God, even during the lifetime of Christ in the flesh.

Three phases of revelation are observed in the Scriptures. First, the Holy Spirit gives revelation in the primary sense of making known the will of God and His wisdom. As will be seen in later discussion, this took the form of oral prophecy and various means by which God made known His will to man. This field of revelation had to do with facts about God and creation which would not have been known apart from divine revelation. This form of revelation was especially prevalent before the time of Moses, but is found throughout Scripture to some extent. A second aspect of revelation is found in the inspiration of the written Word. The work of the Spirit here had sometimes to do with revelation in the primary sense, as in the case of prophecy or events prior to human history, and in other cases in infallible guidance in recording the history of man. In it all, the work of the Spirit is observed in the final record which is equally inspired in all parts regardless of source of knowledge, guaranteeing accuracy and finality in revelation. A third phase of revelation has to do with the illumination of the inspired Word, making it known to man, applying it to specific problems. The objective of all forms of revelation is to impart to man the wisdom of God in such measure and in such detail as harmonizes with the purposes of God. This field of doctrine is subject to extended discussion and will be treated more at length in later sections. Sufficient here is the statement that the work of imparting divine wisdom is peculiarly the work of the Holy Spirit and a part of His covenant responsibility.

(3) Indwelling Presence of the Holy Spirit. While the Holy Spirit is omnipresent in every dispensation, it is part of His ministry to indwell the saints living in the Church age and in the Millennium. The personal presence of the Holy Spirit as indwelling the saint is an evident mark of divine grace and the seat of many of His ministries. While both the Father and the Son are said to indwell believers in this age, the preponderance of Scripture revealing the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the believer demonstrates that while the Godhead is present, the ministry thereof is committed in large measure, though not exclusively, to the Holy Spirit. He is Their agent, and through His ministry Their purposes are realized. These truths are in

harmony with the nature of the Third Person, and His relation to the other Persons of the Trinity.

(4) Enablement for All Spiritual Service. Throughout various dispensations, a work of the Holy Spirit may be observed in the form of enablement for spiritual service. Because of the fall, man in himself cannot please God or serve Him. The work of the Spirit in every age provides the power and wisdom necessary for various works. Enablement is especially related to the work of the Holy Spirit in filling individuals. In the Old Testament, this work was sovereign and not universal among believers. In the New Testament, during the Church age and the Millennium, the ministry of the Spirit in filling the saint is possible for all saints. Differences in kind of enablement and extent of enablement may be observed, in keeping with dispensational distinctions. In it all, a sovereign work of God for man may be observed, an essential part of God's program in fulfillment of the covenant of redemption. Without question, these several aspects are a part of the covenant on the part of the Holy Spirit. This important field of truth will be discussed at length in later sections.

(5) Sanctification. A most important part of God's purpose for man is his ultimate sanctification. The Holy Spirit, according to the Scriptures (Rom 15:16; 2 Thess 2:13), has a vital ministry in sanctifying the believer. All three Persons of the Trinity are related to sanctification in Scripture, but the Holy Spirit is particularly active in effecting the progressive or experiential aspect of it. Practically all His ministry to the believer is related more or less to the believer's sanctification.

(6) Intercession. The nature of the intercessory work of the Holy Spirit is revealed in only one passage (Rom 8:26). The limited reference is no token of limited significance, however, as the importance of this ministry is apparent. Not only does the Holy Spirit guide the believer when he prays, but He intercedes on behalf of the believer. As Christ intercedes for the believer in heaven, so the Holy Spirit intercedes for the believer on earth, Both being effective, and Each mutually sustaining the ministry of the Other.

(7) Formation of the Church. This ministry of the Holy Spirit, confined to the dispensation of grace, is one of the supreme manifestations of the sovereign purpose of God to effect complete reconciliation of believers to Himself. By the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the Church becomes one in eternal life, united with that intimacy and indivisibility that characterizes the Trinity (John 17:21).

The unfolding of these major undertakings of the Holy Spirit is the task before us, with consideration of the variations and contrasts that prevail in different dispensations. All are involved in the eternal covenant between the Persons of the Trinity. The fulfillment in time of these undertakings is evidence of the majestic movement of God's eternal plan. In the discussion of details of the work of the Holy Spirit which follows, it must ever be borne in mind that each part is essential to the whole purpose of God, that the ministry of the Holy Spirit in its place is just as essential as the work of the Father and the work of the Son, each without the other being incomplete. All sense of emergency or rising to meet contingency must be removed in the work of the Holy Spirit, even though much of it is occasioned by the entrance of sin and the redemptive purpose of God. If viewed from eternity, the work of the Holy Spirit could be seen to reveal the same righteousness, love, omnipotence, omniscience, and grace which characterize the work of Christ.

## II. The Work of the Holy Spirit in Creation

In the Old Testament revelation of creation, in most instances the creative act is traced to God, without distinction as to Persons. In all major works of God, a part is ascribed to each Person, though often one Person is given prominence and special emphasis. While in the work of creation God the Father is probably given the most prominence, in the Old Testament most references speak of the Creator as God

without personal distinctions, and in the New Testament revelation the creative work is frequently ascribed to Christ (John 1:3; Col 1:16, 17). A very definite relation of the Holy Spirit to creation is revealed in Scripture, however, with sufficient detail to include creation as one of the great undertakings of the Spirit of God.

Two extremes of interpretation must be avoided. In an attempt to establish the work of any one Person of the Godhead, some have tended to minimize the work of the other Persons, and have made distinctions which do not hold throughout all the revelation of Scripture. If one should take the statements of John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16, 17 as excluding from consideration any work by the other Persons of the Trinity, one would arrive at the conclusion that all the work of creation was accomplished by the Son. This, however, does not explain other Scriptures ascribing similar works to the other Persons. Likewise, while the work of the Holy Spirit can be adequately sustained, it must not be interpreted as destroying or minimizing in any way the work of the other Persons. The other extreme is to neglect the diversity of operation of the Persons of the Trinity, taking the position that the Father is the Creator, and that the Son and the Spirit are merely agents of the Father. This view likewise does violence to the Scriptures. While the problem of distinguishing the works of the Trinity can never be finally solved, it is in keeping with all Scripture to ascribe the work of creation to all three Persons of the Godhead, pointing out only such distinctions as are made in the Scripture revealing the nature of their creative work.

#### 1. Proof of the Creative Work of the Holy Spirit.

At least three lines of argument sustain the doctrine of the creative work of the Holy Spirit. The first and most explicit proof is found in specific references to the Holy Spirit as having a part in creating (Gen 1:2; Ps 33:6; 104:29-30; Job 26:13; 33:4; Isa 40:13). The Hebrew word translated spirit is ■■■■, probably arising from the original meaning of breath or wind, being significant of life and power and the immaterial nature of the Holy Spirit. The same word is used in other connections in the Old Testament. An examination of the various references will reveal a number of interesting facts.

The first reference to the Holy Spirit is in the scene of darkness and chaos described in Genesis 1:2. The Spirit of God is revealed to have "moved upon the face of the waters." John Owens in his incomparable work on the Holy Spirit speaks of this revelation as definite proof of the creative work of the Spirit. He states: "The word moved (merachepeth) signifies a gentle motion, like that of a dove over its nest, to communicate vital heat to its eggs, or to cherish its young. Without him, all was a dead sea; a rude inform chaos; a confused heap covered with darkness: but by the moving of the Spirit of God upon it, he communicated a quickening prolific virtue. The principles of all those kinds and forms of things, which in an inconceivable variety compose its host and ornament, were communicated to it."<sup>4</sup>

Confirming this first revelation is Psalm 33:6, "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth." The word for breath is the same word translated Spirit in Genesis 1:2. The term Spirit of God is a proper designation of the Third Person, while the term breath is metaphorical, so translated to carry out the meaning of the phrase, of his mouth. This passage reveals that all the host of heaven were made by the Holy Spirit.

Psalm 104:30 bears a similar testimony, "Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth." While the context does not indicate definitely that original creation is in view, the use of ■■■■, translated "they are created," points to original creation. The passage reveals that the Spirit, upon being sent forth, is engaged in the work of creation, a doctrine in keeping with other

passages. Not only is creation in the realm of His works, but the renewal of nature is as evidenced in the sustenance and revival of life in the seasons of the year.

In Isaiah 40:12-14, the Spirit is revealed as the Creator by implication: "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?" The Holy Spirit is described as the untaught, uncounselled, and omnipotent God, who without need of instruction or assistance measured the waters, the heavens, the dust of the earth, and the mountains. His intimate connection with the plan and management of the universe is apparent.

Job bears his interesting testimony in several passages. In Job 26:13, for instance, "By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens; his hand hath formed the crooked serpent." By the expression crooked serpent, Job probably meant the Milky Way in the heavens, according to Owens.<sup>5</sup> Job believed that the Holy Spirit had garnished or decorated the heavens and formed the order and beauty of the stars. It is of course true that the doctrine of inspiration does not necessarily affirm the truth of the statements made by Job, but rather guarantees their accurate statement as Job made them. It seems, in view of other Scripture, that Job is here indicating knowledge given to men before Scripture was written. His view is in harmony with other Scripture in any case.

In Job 33:4, Elihu is revealed to have said, "The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life." The same problem exists here as in Job 26:13. It is probable that his statement is entirely accurate as it is in keeping with the Genesis account of creation. Coupled with the other explicit references to the creative work of the Spirit, the Scriptures examined sustain the doctrine and furnish sufficient proof for the spiritual mind.

A second important line of proof for the creative work of the Holy Spirit is found in the use of the word **■■■■■** for the Creator. The term is patently plural as evidenced by its use in reference to the plurality of heathen gods. During the last century many have tried to explain away this evidence for the Trinity in the Old Testament, speaking of this use of the plural as the plural of majesty, citing the English idiom of waters (plural) for water (singular) in poetic expression to give the impression of greatness or extent. In view of the abundant testimony to the Trinity not only in the New Testament but in the Old Testament as well, it is incredible that a name for God should not be used which should express the plural idea of the Persons of the Godhead. Not a single good reason has ever been advanced for not regarding this plural as genuine. The arguments against it have been largely assumption, and in some cases, prejudiced-an effort to sustain the unscriptural idea that the revelation of God in the Bible is evolutionary, the Old Testament being inferior to the New. It is true that revelation is progressive, but the God of Genesis is the same God as is revealed in Revelation. The plural term for God thus found so prominently in the creation narrative constitutes an important contribution to the creative work of the Holy Spirit. Every use of the term implies a work not only of any one Person, but of all three Persons. Hence, in Genesis 1:1, where it speaks of God creating, it is speaking of the Trinity explicitly, not only conceived of as one Essence, but as the Triune God. Every work attributed to God under this term is accordingly an assertion of a ministry of the Holy Spirit. If we had no other reference to the creative work of the Holy Spirit than this use of the plural term, it would justify the doctrine, even though it would not reveal anything distinctive concerning the Spirit.

In addition to the explicit references of Scripture and the argument from the plural title of God in the creation narratives, a third line of evidence must be considered as offering further witness to the creative work of the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures reveal the Holy Spirit as being immanent in creation. His presence presumes the assumption of a great work, as for instance, the presence of Christ in the flesh on earth presumed a work in the flesh for man. The presence of the Holy Spirit is expressly mentioned in Genesis 1:2.

It is clear from Scripture that, in addition to a relation of being the Cause for all creation, God bears to creation the twofold relationship of transcendence and immanence. In relation to creation, God is greater than and beyond all finite and material bounds and thus is transcendent. His transcendence is essential to the cosmological argument. His immanence is essential to His work in creation, not only in the original act, but in the preservation of it and in all His providential dealings with it. The deists, of course, held that God is Creator, and that He is transcendent without being immanent. The pantheists on the other hand have affirmed His immanence without His transcendence. Both affirm His relation to creation, however imperfectly, but neither view has stood the test of either reason or Scripture, as both His transcendence and immanence are essential to creation in the last analysis.

In relation to the Godhead, without distinction as to Persons, the doctrine of immanence has a vital bearing on the doctrine of creation. It is generally accepted that God was present in the realm of that which He created. If this argument is sustained in relation to the Trinity, it is equally applicable to any Person of the Trinity. On the basis of the doctrine of the immanence of the Holy Spirit, we may assume that the Holy Spirit had a part in the creative work. The express declaration of immanence in connection with the creation narrative (Gen 1:2) is convincing. While this argument might not be sufficient alone, it does add to the strength of other evidence.

From the threefold proof of the creative work of the Holy Spirit, we build the doctrine of His work in creation. Further examination of Scripture texts will reveal a definite character to His creative work.

## 2. The Nature of the Creative Work of the Holy Spirit.

The nature of the creative work of God does not lend itself to distinctions of Persons in various works to the extent this is revealed in undertakings of God in the New Testament. A close examination, however, will reveal certain aspects of creation which are specifically referred to the Holy Spirit. In creation itself, four things may be noted. First, the Holy Spirit has a definite relation to the order of creation. In Genesis 1:2, the Holy Spirit is revealed to have moved upon the chaos revealed in the first part of the same verse. In the revelation which follows, chaos is reduced to a cosmos, to an ordered, directed world. Psalm 33:6 confirms this aspect by referring the creation of the hosts of the heavens to the Holy Spirit. A number of inferences may be drawn from this passage, but an important one is that the heavens more than any other portion of God's creation reveal His order. The regularity of movement, the perfection of organization, the infinity of control are all found in the heavens. The Holy Spirit is related to life as the Giver of life. A similar operation may be observed in regeneration, where the life imparted is the eternal life abiding in the Son, and the act of imparting life, the regeneration, is a work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is probably the Person who imparts life to all creation, particularly to man. In the case of human life, the Holy Spirit gives special significance and quality to life. God had said, "Let us make man in our own image, after our own likeness" (Gen 1:26), and in this work, the Spirit imparts life in an operation distinct from the creation of all other life. Owens in speaking of this aspect writes: "Into this formed dust, 'God breathed the breath of life;' (divinae aurae particulam) a vital immortal spirit; something of himself; somewhat immediately of his own;

not of any pre-created matter. Thus man became a middle creature, between the angels above, and the sensitive animals below. His body was formed as the beasts from matter; his soul was an immediate production of divine power, as the angels were."<sup>8</sup> Human life in the original creation seems, therefore, to have a specific relation to a work of the Holy Spirit, even though Genesis 2:7 speaks of God as the Bestower of life without personal distinctions.

A fourth important element in creation is found in the revelation that it is designed to bring glory to God. Reference has been made to Psalm 33:6 with its statement that the host of the heavens was made by the Holy Spirit. In Job 26:13, a beautiful picture is painted of the heavens being garnished by the Holy Spirit, as if the final beauty and glory are the work of the Holy Spirit. The psalmist wrote, "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1), and in this fact we find mention of the result of this work of the Spirit. It is fundamental to an understanding of creation as a whole to comprehend that all things have been brought into being to bring glory to God. The work of the Holy Spirit has the distinctive characteristic of being designed to bring glory to the Father and the Son. Thus, in the present age, in reference to the Holy Spirit, Christ said, "He shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you" (John 16:13b-14). The work of the Holy Spirit ever bears this characteristic, as it reflects the glory of God, the Holy Spirit in His Person not being in the foreground.

In the work of creation itself, then, the Holy Spirit is revealed to have a distinct character of operation. He brings order to creation; He effects the design of creation; He is the Giver of life; and shapes creation to achieve its significant purpose of bringing all glory to God.

In addition to the primary work of creation, which may be considered finished, the Holy Spirit is revealed to bear a most important relation to the preservation and renewal of creation. The doctrine of His immanence is significant in demonstrating a continued work in the world. The Scriptures give explicit revelation on this aspect of His work. We find reference not only to original creation, but to the preservation of that creation. In Psalm 104:29-30, for instance, "Thou hidest thy face, they art troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth." The passage in addition to affirming the creative work of the Spirit in general adds the thought of the renewal which is constantly seen in the world, particularly in spring. Creation is ordered by God in such a way as to be self-sustaining to some extent, the design of animal and plant life being such that species are self-perpetuating. Behind the outward phenomena, however, is the work of the Holy Spirit, sustaining, directing, and renewing. Much more, then, than an undirected, unintelligent process can be seen in the preservation and renewal of the natural world. As in the spiritual realm, revival and new life are intimately related to the Holy Spirit, so in the natural realm also, the beauty of new life in all its varied forms is a testimony to the work of the immanent Holy Spirit. of direct revelation. Sometimes through a prophet, sometimes through events, sometimes through great wonders God made known His will to His people. We possess only a fragment of this great work of God, our only source of authentic information being the written Word and its occasional reference to this form of revelation. The field of truth to be considered is vast, and has been practically neglected. Of point in this discussion is the work of the Holy Spirit in giving this revelation.

#### 1. The Extent of Old Testament Revelation.

Properly, this field of Old Testament revelation includes everything revealed by God in the period prior to the coming of Christ in the flesh. In the limited boundaries of the present discussion, revelation is to be

considered only in its primary sense of direct communication of God to man, without the necessary aid of written documents. The sources of information divide into two well-defined categories. First, there is the revelation given to man before inspiration of the Scriptures was known. At least two books of the Old Testament, Genesis and Job, deal with periods of time in which there was no inspired Scripture. While the records of these books are inspired, they reveal God's dealings in a period before inspiration. Anything known of God and His ways, any revelation in this period is evidence of a great work of God to make His truth known. The knowledge of Job and his companions about God and His ways is proof that prior to written Scripture God had revealed Himself in definite form. The book of Job furnishes sufficient material in itself for a well-rounded systematic theology. The knowledge of revelation on the part of Job and his friends indicates God had not left Himself without adequate testimony.

Second, there is the revelation given to men during the period from Moses to Christ, in which portions of the Old Testament were available, and written revelation had its important place. Throughout this period, also, God saw fit to reveal Himself directly to His prophets and speak through them. Only a fragment of their spoken message has been preserved. The methods of revelation indicated in Genesis as God spoke to men from Adam down are not essentially changed throughout the Old Testament. While the written Word had its primary purpose in preserving revelation in infallible accuracy for future generations, direct revelation had to do largely with contemporary problems and need for truth and guidance which would later be afforded by the completed written Word.

## 2. The Old Testament Prophet.

Throughout the Old Testament period, God, in His sovereign will, gave direct revelation in most cases to those who were publicly known as prophets. It is an error, however, to limit revelation to those who were prophets. Prophecy had to do with revelation given forth in the form of a message to the people, while revelation was the reception of that message from God by the prophet. As Kuyper writes, "God spoke also to others than prophets, e.g., to Eve, Cain, Hagar, etc. To receive a revelation or a vision does not make one a prophet, unless it be accompanied by the command to communicate the revelation to others. The word 'nabi,' the Scriptural term for prophet, does not indicate a person who receives something of God, but one who brings something to the people. Hence it is a mistake to confine divine revelation to the prophetic office."<sup>9</sup> The Old Testament prophet, however, was an important medium of revelation as the Scriptures bear abundant testimony.

A study of Old Testament prophecy will reveal at least seven divisions in the historical development of the prophetic office. While these periods are somewhat arbitrary and often blend from one into the other, their distinctive character can be easily observed.

(1) In the period before Abraham, revelation was frequently given to man. There were a few who had the distinctive character of prophets as Enoch and Noah, but revelation was more frequently given to those who had no part in the prophetic office. We find God speaking at various times to Adam and Eve, to Cain, and probably to many others of whom we have no record. The primary idea is that of direct revelation, rather than the impartation of a message to be delivered subsequently to others. We can observe particularly the extended revelation and the prophetic ministry of Noah. The New Testament adds the ministry of Enoch (Jude 14). It is interesting to note the detailed and advanced nature of the doctrine which is the subject of Enoch's prophetic message of which the Old Testament bears no record. Can we not infer that there was a far richer prophetic ministry during this period than appears on the pages of Genesis?

(2) The period of Abraham's life affords an advance in the history of prophecy. Abraham is known distinctly as a prophet to whom God speaks and who is blessed by God (Gen 20:7). To him is given abundant revelation of his own peculiar place in history and of God's great purpose to be realized through him. Notably absent, however, is the command to deliver a message. He received, but had no message to be communicated to others, except insofar as it is recorded in the Scriptures. Following Moses, and in the same period, God spoke to Isaac and Jacob confirming the revelation given to Abraham and adding to it.

(3) The lifetime of Moses brings a period of larger prophetic ministry as well as more extended revelation. Not only were the Scriptures of the Pentateuch written during this period, but abundant revelation was needed in the whole course of action relative to freeing Israel from the bondage of Egypt. Moses enjoyed the distinctive call of a prophet when God appeared to him in the burning bush. His office was recognized by all the people. To him God spoke, not in vague visions, but "mouth to mouth" (Num 12:8). While the major contribution of Moses as a prophet is his written ministry consisting in the inspired Scriptures, his prophetic office was by no means confined to this aspect. In him we have a full display of the nature of a prophet and his work. Moses was assisted by Aaron and Miriam, both of whom were prophets in their own right, but lower in rank and privilege than Moses (Exod 7:1; 15:20). Miriam is the first to be noted specially as a prophetess.

(4) The period of the judges is quite in contrast with the lifetime of Moses. It was a period of defeat and demoralization. With the exception of Samuel, the last of the judges and the first of prophets of the larger prophetic periods, no prophet is mentioned by name during the period of the judges. Deborah is mentioned as a prophetess (Judg 4:4), and a nameless prophet prepares the way for Gideon (Judg 6:8). It was a time of "no open vision" (1 Sam 3:1). Occasionally, however, God spoke to individuals, as to Gideon (Judg 6:12ff), and references without details as to the method of revelation are found indicating God had given special revelation (Judg 2:20-22; 10:11-14; 13:3-20; 20:18, 23, 28), but no outstanding prophet appears.

(5) In the period of the kings of Israel, beginning with Samuel, and ending with the advent of the so-called writing prophets, a definite advance is made in prophetic history. Distinct personalities arise, without peer in their generation as the medium of authoritative revelation. The prophet comes into his own. He is regarded not only as a seer, one to whom visions and revelation are given, but also as a divinely chosen representative of God, set apart in many cases to an entire lifetime of prophetic ministry. The birth and childhood of Samuel, while unusual, are illustrative of God's method. Without doubt, the prophetic ministry of Samuel made possible the rise of David and Solomon and the attendant glory of their kingdoms.

During the lifetime of Samuel, the schools of the prophets came into being (1 Sam 19:18-24). Their rise was probably occasioned by the natural attraction of the prophets to young men of pious minds. Instruction was given by the prophets, and often revelation from God and supernatural manifestations characterized these schools of prophets. Even Solomon was educated by Nathan the prophet, though probably he was never enrolled in a school of prophets.

During the period of the kings, the authority of the prophet is frequently noted. Saul was brought to his downfall because he failed to recognize prophetic authority (1 Sam 13:13-14). David was openly rebuked by the prophet Nathan (2 Sam 12) and Gad (2 Sam 24:13). Ahijah, Jehu, Elijah, and Elisha are also prominent in this period. An occasional prophetess appears, such as Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14; 2 Chron 34:22). Prophetic utterances, however, deal largely with contemporary problems. The extended discourses of Isaiah and Jeremiah did not come until later. The importance of the ministry of prophets of

this period cannot be overestimated. They were often greater personalities than kings, and their word and support essential to the success of any ruler. To them, in part, was committed the writing of the history of their periods, though in all probability this was done to a large extent by the scribes and priests, and the prophets played a minor role.

(6) The period of pre-exilic prophetic literature including that written by the exiles Ezekiel and Daniel was the greatest period for prophetic utterance as well as literary effort. During this period the great prophetic books were written, with their partial record of what was said and done by the prophets. The darkening clouds of approaching judgment brought forth the prophetic warnings of the coming exile with the accompanying revelation of the glory of the future kingdom. The great prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel are examples of the Old Testament prophet at his greatest period. Their testimony was not always heard, but there was abundant evidence of their prophetic gift. In scope and grandeur, their messages exceed any other period. Accompanying the greater prophets was the ministry of others such as Azur, Hananiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. In all probability there were many others whose names have not been preserved, whose contribution was chiefly contemporary. Scant mention is made of the ministry of women prophets, who as in other periods played a less important part. The wives of prophets shared the work of their husbands to some extent as in the case of Isaiah's wife (Isa 8:3). references, also, indicate a work of the Holy Spirit in revelation. As Owens says, "Where it is said, that God spake by the prophets, or that the word of God came to them, the immediate work of the Spirit is intended."<sup>10</sup> The reference to this work of the Holy Spirit is, therefore, well established on the basis of direct statement in the Old and New Testaments, on the inference from the work of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration of the Old Testament, and on the basis of the many references to revelation as coming from God.

At least four methods of special revelation were used by God in making known His mind to His prophets. To what extent the natural and the supernatural combined no one can finally estimate. The emphasis is ever on the result, the revelation given, rather than on the means or the method employed. A study of the methods does indicate, however, the supernatural character of the revelation.

(1) The most prominent means of revelation is that of the spoken word. "Thus saith the LORD" is found in hundreds of instances in the Old Testament. A comparison of such passages as Isaiah 6:9-10 and Acts 28:25 will demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is the Person of the Trinity speaking in these instances. While the Old Testament uses LORD as the speaker, the New Testament uses the title, Holy Ghost. The question of the exact nature of God's speaking cannot be finally settled. It is clear from such New Testament instances as the baptism of Christ, the transfiguration, and the appearance of Christ to Paul that God can speak vocally and did so on several occasions. In the Old Testament God spoke in a similar way. At Mount Sinai, for instance, God spoke in such a way to Moses that the people could also hear, with the express purpose of validating Moses as a prophet of God (Exod 19:9). In the case of the call of Samuel (1 Sam 3:1-14), the voice of the Lord was mistaken for that of Eli's in the first three instances, so real was it, and so similar to a human voice. Anyone accepting the Scripture terminology as accurate must conclude that God spoke in a way resembling the human voice and used actual words which issued in actual sounds. It may be admitted that God did not need to confine Himself to this method. Between men, the medium of human voice or other means of transmitting words is essential to communication. God is able, however, to speak to the heart of man with such reality that the effect is produced without the need of actual words. Such is the experience of the Christian who is frequently taught by the Holy Spirit the truths of God, and yet the Christian would have difficulty finding words to express all that the Spirit had

made known. It may be concluded that God used in some instances a medium of communication similar to a human voice, and in other instances He may have spoken directly to the heart.

It is of great significance that words were used. Revelation was far more than mere guidance of the natural reasoning of the mind. God had a definite message to reveal and communicate to man. The person received this message in accurate terms. It was more than a mere impression or a feeling. The message was tangible and unmistakable. If God had written the message on a scroll and brought it to the recipient, the revelation would not have been more real and accurate. It fulfilled all the purpose of God in making His will known.

(2) A secondary means of revelation was that of dreams. This method of revelation was commonly accepted as a normal way for God to speak. Many express instances are revealed in Scripture (Gen 20:3-7; 31:10-13; 31:24; 37:5-20; 40:5-16; 41:11-13, 15-32; 42:9; etc.). In most instances, the one to whom God speaks is not a prophet, as illustrated in the case of Abimelech, Laban, the butler and baker of Pharaoh, and in the dream of Pharaoh himself. It was considered, however, a valid way for a prophet to receive his message. In the rebuke delivered to Miriam and Aaron for murmuring against Moses, God said, "If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream" (Num 12:6). In contrast, God said he would speak to Moses face to face, as proving his greater position as a prophet. In some cases, the revelation was given during a sleep supernaturally imposed, as in the case of Abraham (Gen 15:12), and Daniel (Dan 10:9). False prophets were accused of claiming to have received a revelation in a dream when they had not (Jer 23:25). It is prophesied in Joel 2:28-32 that the future period would involve many instances of this kind of revelation. Peter seems to claim partial fulfillment of this in Acts 2:16-21, though the ultimate fulfillment is no doubt reserved for the period of the future kingdom. The important place of this kind of revelation is evident from the many references.

(3) Closely associated with dreams as a means of revelation were visions. The very term seer as applied to prophets had reference to seeing visions. These were no doubt a part of the revelation given in dreams in some instances. In others, however, there is no evidence that the prophet was asleep, the vision occurring during a time when the person involved was fully conscious. Such probably was the case of Isaiah in the two instances noted (Isa 1:1; 6:1). Ezekiel had a similar experience (Ezek 1:3). Micaiah's vision of heaven belongs in the same category (1 Kgs 22:19). Unlike the method of direct communication by speaking, as in the case of some dreams, visions were not always immediately clear in their import. It may well be questioned whether Ezekiel understood his visions. In every case, however, insofar as the vision applied to contemporary problems, it was apparent to the recipient.

(4) A fourth element, often present in supernatural revelation, was that of trances. In themselves, the trances did not reveal anything. They were incident to the impartation of the message of God, and they often accompanied seeing visions as in the case of Ezekiel (Ezek 8:3; 11:24). It is difficult to distinguish trances and dreams in some cases as the supernaturally imposed sleep was similar to a trance (Gen 15:12; Dan 10:9). It is clear that trances as such were not important in the transmission of revelation.

Such were the methods of revelation. As in the case of all supernatural acts, human reason cannot fathom all the details, and human experience cannot rise to the understanding of all that took place. Suffice it to say that God effectively in His own way brought His message to men. His methods were suited to the age in which they were used. They took the place later filled by the completed Bible and the normal ministry of the Holy Spirit to believers in this age. His desire to make Himself known is evident in every dispensation.

Dallas, Texas

(To be continued in the October-December Number, 1940)

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The Holy Spirit cannot dwell on aught but Jesus. Of Him He delights to testify. He delights in setting forth His attractions and excellencies. Hence, when a man is ministering by the power of the Spirit of God there will always be more of Christ than anything else in His ministry. There will be little room in such a ministry for human logic and reasoning. Such things may do very well where a man desires to set forth himself; but the Spirit's sole object, be it ever remembered by those who minister, will ever be to set forth Christ.-Selected.

1 Op. cit., p. 3.

2 Outlines of Theology, p. 372.

3 Systematic Theology, Vol. II, pp. 354-366.

4 A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit, p. 56.

5 Loc. cit.

8 Loc. cit.

9 The Work of the Holy Spirit, p. 70.

10 Op. cit., p. 71.

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