

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

Part 1

Judges 11:29 Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites.

This week, I want to deal with a couple of issues concerning the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. There are three separate, although related issues: 1) The relationship of the Holy Spirit to Jephthah's vow, 2) answer the question concerning whether Old Testament believers were indwelt by the Holy Spirit and 3) the relationship of the Holy Spirit to Old Testament believers in general.

Previously, I gave you some cursory summary points on the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.

1. God sovereignly bestows the Holy Spirit. This is without regard for spiritual status.
2. The "endowment" of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament is not a permanent indwelling like the New Testament or Millennium. It is temporary.
3. In other words, the "endowment" of the Holy Spirit could be lost.
4. God the Father has a plan that is advanced by the impartation of the Holy Spirit. It is meant to accomplish something.
5. Contrast these points with the one passage on the Holy Spirit in the Millennium. Joel 2:28-32.

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament Part 1

The Old Testament

The functions of both the 2nd person of the Trinity and the 3rd person of the Trinity differ between the dispensations of Law and Church. But the Plan of God is consistent. Here is a quote from R. B. Thieme III which I find insightful. It is from his Master's Thesis.

“The Bible speaks of God as dwelling with man (Lev. 26:11-12; Jn. 1:14; II Cor. 6:16). This divine presence is a guarantee of the covenant blessings promised in the Old Testament (Lev. 26) and of the “unfathomable riches” of invisible assets provided for every church age believer (Eph. 3:8; cf. Col 1:27). But, between Israel and the Church there is an obvious difference in the manifestation of that presence. Yahweh is presented as a tabernacling God who first dwelled in a tent in the wilderness, and subsequently in a series of sacred buildings. The incarnate Christ dwelled with His people in a body which He described as a temple. In the Church Age the Holy Spirit indwells the temple of the believer's body. In spite of these changes in residence the continuity of God's presence is readily discernible. Is, therefore, the dwelling presence of God a unifying theme between the Old and New Testaments?”

Concerning Jephthah, there is an issue in some peoples' minds that the Holy Spirit would not allow someone endued with Him to engage in human sacrifice. It is a valid question.

Here are some quotes from Robby Dean's Master's Thesis on the vow of Jephthah.

“It is at this point in the narrative that Jephthah prepared to go against the Ammonites in war and the writer of Judges records that Jephthah was given special divine enablement. The text says that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah. Since this is in such close proximity to the record of the vow, some have concluded that the vow was closely associated with the ministry of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, the vow could not have involved anything contrary to the Mosaic Law, especially a human

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament Part 1

The Old Testament

sacrifice. However, this seems to misconstrue the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.”

“Several aspects of the ministry of the Holy Spirit need to be noted here. First, the ministry of the Holy Spirit appears to center around the establishment and preservation of the theocratic state. He enabled the craftsmen in their design and construction of the tabernacle (Ex. 31:3; 35:31). He indwelt Joshua (Num. 27:18); he enabled Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samuel to deliver the nation from its various oppressors. One of the major emphases of his ministry in the Old Testament appears to be for “imparting warlike energy and executive and administrative power. A second observation concerns the use of the verbs which describe the Spirit’s activity.”

This second observation deals with three different Hebrew words. One word deals with the Spirit’s activity with Othniel and Jephthah. Another deals with the Spirit’s activity with Samson. A third word is used for the Spirit’s activity for Gideon.

“Concerning Samson, the verb can mean “rush,” or a sudden abrupt action. This is used in reference to Samson (Judges 14:6, 19; 15:14), Saul (1 Samuel 10:10-11, 11:6), and David (1 Samuel 16:13). “The meaning is illustrated by the accompanying simile in Amos 5:6 where the house of Israel is exhorted to seek YHWH “lest He break forth like a fire.” The action of the Holy Spirit then is similar to the sudden rushing effect of a blazing fire. This is how the action of the Holy Spirit on Samson is described.”

“Concerning Othniel and Jephthah the verb can mean “to fall out,” “come to pass,” “become” or “be.” When used of the Holy Spirit it has the idea of “come.” One lexicon (Brown-Driver Briggs) “understands this to involve the conferring of strength and efficiency to Othniel and Jephthah...”

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament Part 1

The Old Testament

The third word, used concerning the Spirit's activity for Gideon means "to put on" as to put on clothing. Commentators suggests that the Spirit clothed itself with Gideon.

"From examining the various verbs involved in describing the activity of the Holy Spirit during the period of the Judges, two conclusions can be reached. First, there appears to be different levels at which the Spirit worked which is seen in the difference" between two of the Hebrew words. "The clothing ministry seemed more permanent and was performed on men needed 'to give Godly leadership.'" The "rushing" ministry appears to have been more temporal and designed more to give physical ability and wisdom to defeat an enemy. Therefore, it seems that the work of the Holy Spirit on Jephthah was designed to enable him to defeat the Ammonites and not to enable him to lead a moral and holy life."

Now I want to shift the discussion on the Holy Spirit to another topic that is an issue among conservative Christians: The indwelling of the Holy Spirit. There are some that say the Old Testament believers each had the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

So let's delve a little deeper than previously in the actions of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. The topic of the Holy Spirit takes up an entire volume of L. S. Chafer's Systematic Theology. So for here, let me limit my explanation to a misconception concerning indwelling. In this church and others like it, the pastors teach that indwelling of the Holy Spirit was something new in the Church Age. Previous to Jesus Christ, no one had a permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. But there are some that think there was a permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. I do not want you to be totally surprised if you hear or read this.

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament Part 1

The Old Testament

John de Hoog is an Australian College of Theology, Old Testament, Faculty Member. Here is his perspective on this.

“The conclusion I wish to defend in this paper is that we must affirm a regenerating and indwelling work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of everyday believers in the Old Testament. It is impossible to account for godliness and belief and trust in God apart from the renewing and continuing indwelling work of the Holy Spirit, and this is true in the OT as much as in the NT.”

It would appear that he is approaching this from the New Testament perspective and reading that back into the Old Testament.

Here is one from Leon Wood in his book “The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.” On the other hand, a strong argument that Old Testament saints were indwelt may be built on the fact that they were regenerated as shown above. It was argued that, since they were regenerated, it must have been the Holy Spirit who brought this about. Now it may be argued that, since these Old Testament saints certainly remained in a regenerated condition, it must have been the Holy Spirit who kept them so. The New Testament is clear that the Christian is incapable of keeping himself, any more than he is capable of saving himself. He must be “kept by the power of God” (1 Peter 1:5). One must ask, then, Did the Old Testament saint possess an ability for perseverance not known to the New Testament saint? The answer is clear: They did not possess such an ability and were not able to keep themselves. But, if not, they must have been kept by God, and this means, surely, the Spirit of God. One might argue that the Spirit could have kept them, whether continually indwelling them or not. Since He keeps the New Testament saint by indwelling, however, it seems reasonable to believe that He kept the Old Testament saint in the same way.”

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament Part 1

The Old Testament

This argument is based upon logic from the perspective of Church Age believers. I didn't see a reasoning from Old Testament passages. Here is more by John de Hoog in "The Holy Spirit's work in the Old Testament. "I have been arguing for an internal work of the personal Spirit of God in the personal spirit of OT believers. I have been trying to provide evidence that a proximate work by which the Spirit only dwells with his people but not in his people in the OT cannot sufficiently explain the existence of true faith and obedience in the OT. If this is true, we can always speak about both faith and obedience on the one hand, and rejection and rebellion on the other hand, as personal responses to a personal God. Sin does not only break the commandments of God, it also breaks the friendship and fellowship we have with God as it grieves the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. Faith and obedience do not only fulfill the commandments of God, they also bring delight to God who dwells in us by his Spirit."

Again, he reasons from the perspective of the Holy Spirit's work and relation for the Church Age believer, not from specific Bible passages. But there are some issues likely driving his reasoning.

1. Likely he is a Covenant theologian, not a Dispensational theologian. The dispensationalist understands that there are different rules for the different dispensations. The Gospel of John in particular, as well as Paul's epistles indicate that there is a change between the Dispensations of the Law and the Church concerning the Holy Spirit. The Covenant theologian understands the Church as a continuation and often a replacement for Israel.
2. What didn't seem to factor into the reasoning is the difference between "indwelling" and "filling." The indwelling does not provide spirituality. The filling does. The Holy Spirit can work outside of a person. As some Old Testament passages say the Spirit came upon a

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament Part 1

The Old Testament

person. Also, there is the “clothing” analogy. The Holy Spirit does not have to be inside a person to influence him/her.

3. As Robby Dean stated in his Master’s Thesis, the documented actions of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament were for leadership, etc. “One of the major emphases of his ministry in the Old Testament appears to be for “imparting warlike energy and executive and administrative power.”
4. The impartation of the Holy Spirit was given sovereignty by God independent of the individual’s volition.
5. This is contrasted with New Testament passages that indicate the Church Age impartation of the Holy Spirit is based upon faith in Jesus Christ, salvation. The indication is, this is something new, not a continuation of Old Testament Holy Spirit activity.

Here is an instructive quote from Mike Stallard. Michael Stallard is Dean, Director of Ph.D. Studies, and Professor of Systematic Theology and Director of the Ph.D. program at Baptist Bible Seminary, where his research and teaching interests include Dispensational Premillennialism, ecclesiology, Baptist distinctives, and theological method. Some of his material is located on Robby Dean’s website.

“The Spirit of Yahweh comes upon Othniel (3:10) as God used him to deliver the children of Israel from Chushan-rishathaim. In perhaps the pivotal section in Judges, the Spirit of Yahweh comes upon Gideon (6:34) as he gathered and led the people against the oppression of the Midianites. The Spirit of Yahweh also comes upon Jephthah (11:29) as he leads the Israelites in victory against the Ammonites.”

“However, the most instructive section of Judges on the issue of the Holy Spirit is the account of Samson's life and leadership in the nation (13-16). Samson, dedicated as a Nazirite, enjoyed the blessing of the LORD

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament Part 1

The Old Testament

(13:24). The text affirms that the Spirit of Yahweh began to "move" Samson "at times" (13:25). This general statement explicitly teaches that the work of the Spirit in Samson's life was not a continuous, permanent work. The specific examples cited later show that, in fact, the Spirit seems to come upon Samson and leave Samson according to the purposes of God. In 14:6, the Spirit of Yahweh comes upon him to give him strength to slay a lion. In 14:19, the Spirit of Yahweh comes upon him to slay thirty Philistines. An even greater feat is the slaying of a thousand Philistines with a donkey's jawbone, a feat that is caused by the Spirit coming upon him (15:14-15).”

“What is unique about the Samson story is that God's Spirit comes upon him while he is in the midst of lust and sin. That means that the coming of the Spirit upon a man is not necessarily conditioned upon his holy life. Throughout the passage it is God's sovereign purpose among the people that is in view (14:4, 16:28-30). There is no way in which Samson earned the right for the Spirit to come upon him. It is also true that the Spirit was no longer available to give him strength, a condition he did not realize for a time (16:20). Finally, it is important to know that Samson's strength was entirely of the Spirit. Had he been a strong man physically in comparison to other Israelite men, it is doubtful that the Philistines would have sought the reason for his great power.”

Now, let us start on a journey exploring the relationship of the Holy Spirit to Old Testament believers. I intend to cover this in several parts, perhaps spread over time. In other words, I intend to return to the book of Judges next week.

There are two articles which I am finding are good sources of information:

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament Part 1

The Old Testament

1. Mike Stallard's article on the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, previously mentioned. It is found on several websites including: <https://www.our-hope.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/HolySpiritOT.pdf>

2. Daniel Block's article titled "Empowered by the Spirit of God: The Holy Spirit in the Higraphic Writings of the Old Testament. It can be found at: https://sbts-wordpress-uploads.s3.amazonaws.com/equip/uploads/2010/02/sbjt_011_spr97_block.pdf

The word for "spirit" in the Old Testament is *ruach*. But, this word can refer to many things: "wind," "compass point," "breath," disposition," "seat of cognition" and spirit. And remember, there is God's Holy Spirit and the human spirit. So whenever encountering this word, one must be very careful to understand what it is referring to.