

## The Role of The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.

### Introduction:

Today is Pentecost Sunday on the Christian calendar. It marks and celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. However, the Holy Spirit that we meet is such power in the New Testament- whether in the ministry of Jesus, or in Acts, or with Paul is none other than the spirit of the Lord God of Israel in the Old Testament. So, I thought we would take a journey through the Old Testament acknowledging and honouring the work of the Holy Spirit.

He is the spirit that breathed all life on Earth. He is the spirit who empowered the mighty acts of those who served God over many generations. He is the spirit who spoke through the prophets, inspiring their commitment to speak the truth and to stand for Justice. He is the spirit who anointed Kings and ultimately anointed Christ the servant King. And he is the spirit through whom the whole of creation will finally be renewed in, through and for Christ.

### The Creating Spirit

The Holy Spirit makes his first appearance in the second verse of the Bible. **Genesis 1: 1-2; 1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 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.**

In Genesis chapter one and verse one of the Bible we see that the one living God created everything that we see around. The whole universe exists because God made it. In the second verse we see a picture of chaos and darkness. The stuff of creation was all there but had not yet been shaped as the world we know.

The spirit of God is there to. We see the spirit hovering ready for action. Ready to play its role. The original in the Hebrew gives us this idea of an eagle hovering in the sky, poised, alert and watchful ready to act in an instant. This action comes in **verse three; 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God spoke into the darkness.** There is a close link in the Bible between the spirit and the word of God. The powerful, creating, breathing word of God. This is what comes into action.

**Psalm 33:6-9: 6 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. 7 He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses. 8 Let all the earth fear the LORD; LET all the people of the world revere him. 9 For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.**

The Holy Spirit has been there right from the beginning. Even for the early Israelites -life on earth was sustained by the Holy Spirit of God.

**Psalm 104:27-30 27 All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time. 28 When you give it to them, they gather it up when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things 29 When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.**

**30 When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.**

So, the creator spirit is also the provider spirit. So, the Bible affirms that the whole of creation and affirms the whole of God, including his spirit is involved in its origin, sustenance

and future. It is the work of the spirit in human life that makes our lives so special. We see this in the book of Job.

**Job 32:8<sup>8</sup> But it is the spirit in a person, the breath of the Almighty, that gives them understanding.**

**Job 33:4<sup>4</sup> The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life.**

The Holy Spirit, who lives in you through faith in his son Jesus. This is the same Holy Spirit who hovered over the very beginning of God's creation as it was spoken into existence. The universe itself owes its being to the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit is the one who has been constantly sustaining and renewing creation so that the sun rose this morning for another new day.

The Holy Spirit is the one who gives life to every mortal creature that breathes on the planet and who is the energy behind every breath you take in this life.

He is the one who will hold you in eternal life if you have put your faith in the crucified and risen Christ. This is the Holy Spirit, the spirit of the God of the Bible.

### **The Empowering Spirit**

Power is neither good or bad. It's actually neutral. It simply means the ability to do things. Power is the capacity to accomplish goals or be a person of influence. That is, to influence events and processes. That's why, when you find you are unable to participate you can literally feel power-less. So, power influences events' and brings about change.

So, it's not surprising that the God of the Old Testament is commonly linked with power. Because God brings about change. When the Israelites spoke of the spirit of God or Yahweh- it was often a simple way of saying; that God himself was exercising his power on earth. The Spirit of God is God's power at work either in direct action or empowering people to do what God wants done.

Now, the trouble starts when God empowers people. Because we are not machines or robots. We are those who God himself has given the very risky capacity for making up our own minds. We get to choose. We are also corrupted by sin.

Yet, despite this God chooses to empower us through his spirit. In the book of the Judges, the Spirit of the Lord would come upon them. When this happened, it was time for action.

**The Spirit of the Lord came upon (Othniel), so that he became Israel's judge and went to war. Judges 3:10.**

**Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. Judges 6:34**

**Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah.....He advanced against the Ammonites. Judges 1:29.**

Moses: When the Israelites looked back, they were in no doubt at all that God had been very powerfully active through the Spirit in the life of Moses

**<sup>11</sup> Then his people recalled the days of old, the days of Moses and his people— where is he who brought them through the sea with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he who**

**set his Holy Spirit among them,<sup>12</sup> who sent his glorious arm of power to be at Moses' right hand, who divided the waters before them, to gain for himself everlasting renown,<sup>13</sup> who led them through the depths? Like a horse in open country, they did not stumble;<sup>14</sup> like cattle that go down to the plain, they were given rest by the Spirit of the LORD. This is how you guided your people to make for yourself a glorious name. Isaiah 63: 11-14**

So, for the Israelites they link Moses being a leader with the power of the Holy Spirit. So, then, Moses gives us a model of Spirit-filled leadership. He was clearly a leader of great power, given by God. He served God faithfully as Hebrews testifies.

**<sup>5</sup> "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house," bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. Hebrews 3:5**

I wanted to touch on a few of the marks of the Spirit of God in the life and leadership of Moses.

**<sup>3</sup> (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.) Numbers 12:3**

If you cast your mind back to our series on the book of Philippians, Paul talks a lot about humility

**<sup>29</sup> But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!" Numbers 11:29.**

In Moses we see an example of power without pride. Power without jealousy. Power without ambition. Even when God became so angry at the Israelites Moses interceded on their behalf.

**<sup>29</sup> But they are your people, your inheritance that you brought out by your great power and your outstretched arm." Deuteronomy 9: 29**

He could have said you know what God you are right. I have had it with these people. One step forward and 100 steps back. Do with them whatever you want. And by the way I will be waiting to see what happens. He says remember these are your people, your inheritance.

So, what can we learn from Moses. The greatest evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in his life was precisely the absence of those things that are commonly linked with great and powerful people. Pride, a defensive posture and driving ambition. What we saw with Moses was the power of the Holy Spirit in a human life. This is the power of humility. Christian power should not resemble how the world assesses leadership.

**<sup>6</sup> So he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty. Zechariah 4:6**

### **The Prophetic Spirit**

<sup>20</sup> Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. <sup>21</sup> For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:20-21

Peter makes it clear that the prophets of the Old Testament did not make up their own messages out of their heads or imaginations. Actually, he affirms the double authorship of the Scriptures: Men spoke from God. Peter also says that it was the power of the Holy Spirit, carrying these prophetic speakers and writers along. I love how Chris Wright in his book *Knowing the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament* puts it; **“God’s Spirit, then, is the agent of communication from God’s mind, with God’s word, through God’s prophets to God’s people” (page 63).**

Of course, prophets weren’t the only ones who communicated God revelation. God’s Spirit was at work in those who wrote the narratives, those who framed the law sections, those who composed the Psalms, the words of wisdom and so forth. All Scripture is breathed out by God through the Holy Spirit.

**<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. 2 Timothy 3:16.**

However, the distinctive mark of the Old Testament prophets is that they made the direct verbal claim, “Thus says the Lord”. Meaning that the message they were bringing was the direct message from God. There are plenty of examples.

**“As for me, I am filled with power, with the spirit of the Lord”. Micah 3:8**

One of the real challenges of God’s prophets was the presence of many false prophets amongst God’s people. **“Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing!”** declares God through **Ezekiel (Ezek 13:3)**. Of course, we need to take care about those even in our day who claim to speak from God. The Holy Spirit is not honoured by, or even present in those who use his name to feed their own lusts or line their own pockets.

I would suggest that there must be a clear determination to walk in integrity, to live by the moral standards of God’s word, to repent and humbly and quickly when we fail and to put things right in the sight of God and the church.

Perhaps Jesus warning in **Matthew 7: 21-23** is apt, <sup>21</sup> **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and, in your name, perform many miracles?’ <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’**

However, there were true prophets of God who did indeed perform their ministry through the Holy Spirit of God. So, what were the marks of the true prophets who were filled with the Holy Spirit. There are some texts that where a connection is specifically made between the prophets and the Spirit of God.

Two things stand out. Firstly, they had a compulsion to speak the truth. Secondly, they had the courage to stand for Justice. As Christians we go to the Bible for Truth. For the prophets of the Old Testament the Torah, the law was their biggest guide to truth. This drew the

Israelites again and again back to God through his law which they often seem to break and flout with ease.

The courage to stand for Justice. God sent his prophets to expose the wickedness of his people and to warn them of its dire consequences. This was an unpopular message and sometimes had dire circumstances. Far easier to be cheerful full of peace and prosperity.

**<sup>7</sup> Are these not the words the LORD proclaimed through the earlier prophets when Jerusalem and its surrounding towns were at rest and prosperous, and the Negev and the western foothills were settled?" <sup>8</sup> And the word of the LORD came again to Zechariah: <sup>9</sup> "This is what the LORD Almighty said: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. <sup>10</sup> Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.'**

**<sup>11</sup> "But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and covered their ears. <sup>12</sup> They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So, the LORD Almighty was very angry. Zechariah 7: 7-12**

We notice here that it is a later prophet who can speak of the role of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of the earlier ones. We should also note that the major feature of the earlier prophets, sent by God's Spirit were the requirements of God's law. That is; to do justice, to show mercy and compassion and to reject the exploitation of the needy.

Truth and justice are the very characteristics of God. His Spirit inevitably highlights truth and justice whenever he speaks. For Micah, to be filled with the spirit was to be filled with Justice which in his context meant this; passion for the just cause of the poor and exploited.

**But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin. Micah 3:8**

Anyone who truly has the Spirit of God will love what he loves, will value what he values and care for those he cares for. Justice and knowing God go hand in hand.

**<sup>23</sup> This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, <sup>24</sup> but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth for in these I delight," declares the LORD. Jeremiah 9: 23-24**

These prophets under the spirit-filled compulsion to speak the truth did it with courage. Amos suffered anger from the priests of Israel and deportation, Jeremiah suffered family hostility and death threats, physical abuse and life-threatening incarceration. One of Jeremiah's contemporaries was actually put to death for the same message. A comfortable life was not what a prophet expected. If the Spirit of Yahweh called you, it called for the courage to stand for justice.

So, we see that true prophecy in the Old Testament was inspired by the Holy Spirit. This is why we believe in the inspiration of the Bible and in its double authorship. Words of human beings and words of God. Prophets spoke the truth and stood for Justice. Perhaps I could conclude this part by reissuing the challenge from the prophet Micah.

**He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.**

**Micah 6:8.**

### **The Anointing Spirit**

So far, we have seen that the work of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament in empowering leaders, in giving the law and enabling people to stand up for Justice. Kings in Israel were supposed to do all three. They were expected to be strong leaders in order to defend their people like the judges. Kings were expected to know and serve the law and to give wise decisions when cases were brought before them. Most of all they were expected to provide justice for the weak and the poor.

### **Psalm 72**

**Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. May he defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; may he crush the oppressor. For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. Psalm 72: 1,4, 12-13.**

Such high expectations could not be met with human strength alone. This is why Kings needed the Spirit of the Lord God and that is what their "anointing" symbolized. Kings in Israel were anointed with oil. This was their commissioning and empowering through Yahweh gave them his Spirit.

We must remember that anointing is a sign of office not a special sense of status or privilege. It is given for tasks and responsibilities. So, an anointed one was somebody chosen by God to do a job that God wanted done and then enabled by the power of God's Spirit to get on and do it.

So, we will now see how the Holy Spirit anointed Israel's kings and what that meant and then look at the anointing of the one whom the Old Testament anticipated as the coming servant King. This is of course points to the Christ, which means anointed one who fulfilled this mission as servant King.

However, we must remember that Christ himself commissioned the church by sending the Holy Spirit of God at Pentecost.

Saul was Israel's first King and you can read about him in 1 Samuel, chapter nine and ten. **Then Samuel took a flask of olive oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, "Has not the LORD anointed you ruler over his inheritance? The Spirit of the LORD will come powerfully upon you, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person. When he and his servant arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he joined in their prophesying.**

### **1 Samuel 10: 1, 6, 10.**

Anointing was both a physical act, olive oil poured over Saul's head but also a spiritual anointing. The power of the Holy Spirit clearly affected Saul very deeply and visibly. This gave Saul his authorisation as a King. His early actions clearly demonstrated the power of God rested upon him.

However, this anointing did not guarantee his success as a leader or his faithfulness. He eventually squandered his anointing and self-destructed. King David did not gloat over Saul's failure but actually grieved for his King. Eventually Samuel was asked to anoint David.

The LORD said to Samuel, **"How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king."** 1 Samuel 16:1

**<sup>12</sup> So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; this is the one."<sup>13</sup> So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah. 1 Samuel 16: 12-13**

Now David, unlike Saul is a King who is, after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). However, he is not by any means a moral person and is capable of great sin. He is simply the one who will obey and accomplish what Saul had disobeyed and failed. Many of the Kings of Israel were anointed on their heads with oil but were not obedient in their lives. They failed to grasp and fulfil the significance of this anointing.

The historical Kings of both Israel and Judah continued to miss the mark and this led to increasing hopes of a coming anointed one in the line of David who would be obedient and fully carry out the saving work of God in the power of God's spirit. We know him to be Jesus Christ.

**A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.**

**<sup>2</sup> The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—**

**<sup>3</sup> and he will delight in the fear of the LORD He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; <sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he will judge the needy with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked**

**<sup>5</sup> Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.**

**Isaiah 11:1-5.**

**The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, <sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God to comfort all who mourn,<sup>3</sup> and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a**

**spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendour. Isaiah 61: 1-3.**

Filled with the spirit, Jesus ate and drank with the poor and the marginalised. Fed the hungry, talked with children, taught the crowds, comforted the bereaved, restored the ostracised, released the demon oppressed, challenged the rich and the authorities, brought people forgiveness of sins, healed relationships as well as bodies and in all this was declared that God reigns, here and now and still to come.

**<sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." <sup>22</sup> And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.**

**John**

**20:21-22.**

So, as we disembark from our very quick tour of the role of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, we remember that the Spirit of God was there from the very beginning sustaining the earth. He was empowering Israel's leaders and prophets to protect and guide this new people. He also gave the prophets the courage to speak the truth and demand justice even at the cost of their very lives. He anointed the Kings of Israel and when they all ultimately failed looked to the coming servant King-Jesus Christ, who sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to be poured on all people and to do his favourite work drawing people to repentance and salvation in Jesus Christ.