

Don Stewart :: How Did the Holy Spirit Work during the Old Testament Period? Aa



There are no direct statements in the Old Testament about the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the believer. Thus it is difficult to arrive at any conclusion about the work of the Holy Spirit during the Old Testament period.

There are those who believe the Holy Spirit did not work in the same manner during the Old Testament age as He does today. Although it has been the same Holy Spirit all along, His methods have changed from age to age. They contend that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament was not universal to every believer, but was available only to certain believers.

**No Promise Of Indwelling**

There is no promise in the Old Testament to the believer that he will be indwelt with the Holy Spirit.

And the Lord said to Moses: "Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, lay your hand on him" (Numbers 27:18).

This verse seems to indicate that the Holy Spirit is not to be found in everyone. By stating that the Holy Spirit is in Joshua, it infers He is not universally given. The Spirit is said to have come upon other individuals, such as Othniel:

The Spirit of the Lord came upon him and he judged Israel (Judges 3:10).

The reason this view-that only certain individuals were indwelt with the Holy Spirit - is held is based upon an understanding of a statement made by Jesus:

Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you (John 14:17).

This verse is interpreted to mean that the Holy Spirit was only with believers during Old Testament times but now dwells within each believer in the New Testament age.

Not only was the Spirit limited to certain individuals; the extent of the indwelling was limited. He could leave an individual after He had indwelt them. The life of Saul serves as an example:

When they came to there to the hill, there was a group of prophets to meet him; then the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them (1 Samuel 10:10).  
  
But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, a distressing Spirit from the Lord troubled him (1 Samuel 16:14).

Yet there is another way to understand this difficult passage and the Old Testament references to the Holy Spirit. It is possible that the references to the Holy Spirit being upon Joshua and others refer to a "special anointing" and not the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The reason for holding this view is because it is difficult to see how anyone could have entered a right relationship with God without the Holy Spirit indwelling them. The Bible teaches that we all have a sinful nature and need to be saved from our sins. If the Holy Spirit did not indwell individuals during the Old Testament period, how were they saved and how did they lead a godly life? It seems impossible for them to be able to do so without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told Nicodemus:

Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5).

According to Jesus, everyone has to have a spiritual rebirth to enter God's kingdom. Furthermore, no one can serve God in his own strength. It seems more consistent to say that the Holy Spirit indwelt everyone who believed in the promises of God.

**Special Ability**

The Old Testament records the Holy Spirit giving special ability to certain individuals:

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship" (Exodus 31:1-3).

The Holy Spirit's ministry to the world has existed from the beginning of time as a

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restraining influence. This is as true today as it was during the Old Testament period. The Holy Spirits influence kept sin from running entirely rampant.

We may conclude that the Old Testament teaches the following regarding the Holy Spirit:

1. The Bible does not give a comprehensive picture about the work of the Holy Spirit during the Old Testament period.
2. Some people believe the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit could leave those whom He did indwell.
3. It seems more plausible that the leaving of the Holy Spirits was the leaving of the Spirits anointing rather than His indwelling.
4. During the Old Testament period the Holy Spirit gave some believers special skills to perform certain tasks.
5. With regard to the unbelieving world, the Holy Spirit acted as a restraining influence.

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