

# Jesus, The Man of the Spirit

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, <sup>16</sup>John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup>His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.' (Luke 3:15-17)

Familiarity with the stories about Jesus sometimes stops us asking some questions about what is written. But here is a question: Why did John the Baptist tell the people that the coming one would 'baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire'? A reading back from our knowledge of the Scriptures or from our varied experiences might cause us to assume that he said it because that is what happened; that is, we read back from what we know into what was said earlier. We use some sort of 'sanctified hindsight'. That, for example, is what we do with the doctrine of the Trinity. We know from the New Testament, although to a certain extent we are reading back from much later still, that God is three and one. So we read the Old Testament as if that is what the Old Testament writers intended.<sup>1</sup>

The question, however, needs more than a cursory answer. Luke has given us a quite dramatic description of John the Baptist's birth and the relationship of his ministry to that of Jesus, so we should see that, when he appears on the scene, what he says and does is particularly significant.<sup>2</sup>

It was promised that 'even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit' (Luke 1:15) and then this is further defined as 'the spirit and power of Elijah' (Luke 1:17) an obvious reference to Malachi 4:5-6 as the rest of verse 17 indicates. John the Baptist will be the one to fulfil the promise of a messenger who will prepare the way before the LORD (Mal. 3:1), and the preparation will be very much like Elijah's task of confronting false worship and causing a powerful transformation within Israel. The reason was simple: 'the great and terrible day of the LORD' is coming (Mal. 4:5). Later, Jesus told the crowds, 'if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come' (Matt. 11:14). Evidently not all were 'willing to accept it', for the following conversation took place between Jesus and his disciples after the transfiguration:

And the disciples asked him, 'Why, then, do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?' <sup>11</sup>He replied, 'Elijah is indeed coming and will restore all things; <sup>12</sup>but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man is about to suffer at their hands.' <sup>13</sup>Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them about John the Baptist. (Matt. 17:10-13)

Whether or not the people understood John the Baptist, they certainly flocked to him (Matt. 3:5). One possible reason for them doing so relates to the popular thinking that prophecy as they had known it in the Old Testament was a thing of the past. Malachi's promise of Elijah coming was the promise of great restoration. K. E. Corley has the following statement:

Theologically speaking, it may be argued that God would never leave himself without a witness. And among historians of the period 'it has become increasingly recognized that

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<sup>1</sup> See the July 2002 study, *The Maturity of the Son*, p. 3 for another form of this argument. The study is available at <http://www.newcreation.org.au>

<sup>2</sup> As an example of the significance of John the Baptist, see my *The Baptism of John: Its significance for the understanding of Christian baptism*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1987.

prophecy did not disappear in Judaism during the Hellenistic and Roman periods' (Aune). Nevertheless, the popular opinion at the beginning of the NT era, fed no doubt by important OT texts, some authoritative teachers, as well as other Jewish literature, seems to have been that God's prophets were no more, and prophecy was a thing of the past.

The Talmud illustrates this opinion: 'When Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, the latter prophets, were dead, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel' (b. Sota 48b). Josephus also maintains, '...From Artaxerxes to our time our history is also depicted, but it does not deserve the same credibility as the earlier work, since the prophets have no true successors' (Josephus, Ag. Ap. 1.8; cf Ps 74:9; Dan 9:24; Zech 13:2-6; 1Macc 4:46; 9:27; 2 Apoc. Bar. 85:3).<sup>3</sup>

John came, then, as a prophet, as Elijah, and as a man filled with the Holy Spirit from before his birth, and the crowds were profoundly stirred, so much so that the chief priests, scribes and elders in Jerusalem were unable to argue with Jesus effectively (see Luke 20:1-8).

With the pregnancy of Elizabeth, John's mother, the Holy Spirit is then described as coming on Mary to enable her to be pregnant (Luke 1:35), filling Elizabeth (Luke 1:41) and Zechariah (Luke 1:67) and being richly active in Simeon (Luke 2:25-27<sup>4</sup>), even if these people were not conspicuous. Something new was happening.

But if what was happening in John the Baptist was impressive, what would yet take place was to be quite stupendous. John preached that people should repent and be baptised with a view to the forgiveness of sins.<sup>5</sup> The judge is coming, the axe is lying at the root of the trees ready to cut down for burning any tree that does not bear good fruit, and, to change the metaphor, there will be a great sifting, with the grain saved and the chaff burned without hope. John could only warn and baptise with water but the coming one would baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Within the context of John's preaching, it is the fire of judgment which is prominent (see verses 9 and 17). But within the context of Luke's previous description of the work of the Holy Spirit in John and others, we are led to see that the coming one will be one who immerses<sup>6</sup> people in the Holy Spirit as well as pouring out the fire of judgment.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Prophets, Prophecy' in Joel B. Green *et al* (Eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, IVP, Downers Grove, 1992, p. 637.

<sup>4</sup> The Holy Spirit evidently rested on Simeon for some time prior to his seeing the baby Jesus, as the imperfect tense of the verb 'to be', ἦν (*ēn*) in verse 25 indicates. Luke would probably not agree that the Holy Spirit had departed from Israel.

<sup>5</sup> The phrase 'for the forgiveness of sins' translates the Greek εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν (*eis aphesin hamartiōn*). I have put it that repentance was *with a view to* forgiveness because John's preaching was in expectation of the coming judgment (Luke 3:7-9, 17) and, when the Lord came, those who had repented and signified that by baptism would find forgiveness from the judge. To what extent forgiveness was an immediate experience for those baptised is not clear; however what is plain from the New Testament message is that forgiveness would always depend on the (later) death of Christ. Mark 1:4 uses the same words as Luke, while Matthew's version makes no mention of forgiveness. Matthew does use the phrase εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, however, in Matt. 26:28.

<sup>6</sup> I want to suggest that there are a number of words, synonymous in practice, used to describe the gift of the Spirit. The use of the phrase 'baptise in [the] Holy Spirit' (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33) is one of them and is used only in contexts where the ministry of John the Baptist is being compared. In both Matthew, Mark and John, the same preposition is used of both John's baptism *in water* and baptism *in the Spirit* to enforce the imagery. Possibly, the fact that Luke uses the simple dative to describe John's baptism with water (ῥόδατι *hudati*) in Luke 3:16, Acts 1:5 and 11:16 may only point to Luke's individual style and not to some theological purpose. On the use of 'in' (Greek ἐν, *en*) see footnote 17 below.

## WHY THE SPIRIT?

If we tend to think backwards from the New Testament to the Old then we will assume that every reference to the ‘spirit’ of God in the Old Testament is to be understood as a reference to the Holy Spirit, and we would be correct. But we would not necessarily be reading the text of the Old Testament as its authors intended. For them, the spirit of God was never anything else than the breath, wind or presence of God himself, just as his word was God speaking. But that should not diminish the wonder of seeing that men and women have been created to have personal intimacy with God.

We could follow the story of creation: In Genesis 1: 2 tells us that ‘a wind from God swept over the face of the waters’. The word ‘wind’ is the Hebrew רוּחַ (*rûach*), which has the meaning of breath, that which proceeds from the nostrils or mouth (Ps. 18:15; Ex. 15:10), or wind (Ex. 10:13; 15:8<sup>7</sup>), spirit, as in the seat of emotion or desire (Job 21:4<sup>8</sup>; Isa. 26:9) or the essential person, that which animates (Prov. 16:18, 19; Isa 19:3).<sup>9</sup> Here at creation there is a formless void which is dark and turbulent but never out of control since it is God’s wind which is blowing so strongly. However it is not always a fierce blast, as the next use of the word *rûach* indicates. Genesis 3:8 speaks, literally, of ‘the spirit of the day’, usually translated as ‘the cool of the day’ or, as in the *NRSV*, ‘the time of the evening breeze’.

As in Genesis 1, the *rûach* is closely associated with God speaking (see Gen. 1:3) as the man and the woman in the garden heard God’s voice. God’s *rûach* was present in the garden, even after the sin of Adam and Eve and God continued to speak.<sup>10</sup> We can go further and see that, within the Old Testament, God’s *rûach* is identified with his presence. Thus:

Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence? (Ps. 139:7)

Do not cast me away from your presence,  
and do not take your holy spirit from me. (Ps. 51:11)

This may seem merely technical, but we should not lose sight of what is being said. Men and women are actually in the presence of God and know it! What is more, to be out of the presence of God, cut off from his spirit, is a terrible torment. To make this more understandable, there is also the description of the creation of the man himself, in Genesis 2:7.

then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

Although the word ‘breath’ here is a different Hebrew word (נְשָׁמָה *neshāmāh*), it is synonymous with *rûach* and there are statements which say that the breath of man is nothing less than the *rûach* of God.

as long as my breath (*neshāmāh*) is in me and the spirit (*rûach*) of God is in my nostrils (Job 27:3)

<sup>7</sup> Note the proximity of the two meanings in Ex. 15:8 and 10.

<sup>8</sup> Most translations have ‘Why should I not be impatient?’; the *AV* has the more literal: ‘why should not my spirit be troubled?’

<sup>9</sup> For a full listing see *BDB*, p. 924ff.

<sup>10</sup> See the April 2002 Study, *Going on to Maturity*, pages 2-3, available at <http://www.newcreation.org.au>.

When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath (*rûach*), they die and return to their dust.<sup>30</sup> When you send forth your spirit (*rûach*), they are created; and you renew the face of the ground. (Ps. 104:29-30)

Human beings are totally dependent on the spirit of God for life in every sense. Therefore, the statement that, 'in the day that you eat of it you shall die' (Gen. 2:17) has far wider meaning than mere physical death.<sup>11</sup> Humanity is now both utterly dependent upon God and yet separated from his presence. Death is wide ranging in its effects. The man and the woman are put out of the garden, the place of intimate worship and, later, their son Cain complains of his judgment:

Cain said to the LORD, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear! <sup>14</sup>Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me.' (Gen. 4:13-14)

Then, when men and women begin to fill the earth, the judgment pronounced by God was that 'My spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh...' (Gen 6:3). Although there is no certainty as to what this verse means, the overall implication is plain. Mankind no longer has the continuous intimacy with God's spirit that was theirs in creation and this is not merely a deprivation which they can learn to live with: it is their death.

The Apostle Peter called God 'a faithful creator' (1 Pet. 4:19), a phrase which recognises that God, while he must judge the creation and purge it from all evil, will see that the whole creation comes to the goal he has set. That can mean nothing less than the restoration of the spirit to creation, so that God in his grace restores to creation, and to humanity in particular, all that was lost at the fall.

This is what lies behind such promises as Joel 2:28-32; Ezekiel 36:25-27 and 37:1-14; Isa. 32:14-20 etc. The promise in Joel 2 especially links the pouring out of the spirit with convulsions in creation as the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. The restoration of the spirit is directly related to the restoration of the creation or, to use a theological term, the spirit is God's eschatological gift. Far from being 'icing on the cake of salvation', the gift of the spirit is what salvation for humanity is all about.

## ISRAEL AND THE SPIRIT

The means by which salvation would come to the whole world was to be the seed of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:5; 17:4-7 cf Gal. 3:16). God chose Abraham and, through him, Israel to be the means by which creation would come to its goal. Abraham and Sarah were to be a new Adam and Eve,<sup>12</sup> with even a somewhat sad parallel in Genesis 3:17 and 16:2.

Israel, as God's servant, must therefore be a people of the spirit. To a certain extent they were. Thus Isaiah 63:11-14:

Then they remembered the days of old, of Moses his servant. Where is the one who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is the one who put within them his holy spirit, <sup>12</sup>who caused his glorious arm to march at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, <sup>13</sup>who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble. <sup>14</sup>Like cattle that go down into the

<sup>11</sup> As it was, Adam is described as living 930 years (Gen. 5:5), so whatever we may make of the longevity, the writer of Genesis hardly thought of the warning of Genesis 2:17 as implying immediate demise.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993, pp. 18-40.

valley, the spirit of the LORD gave them rest. Thus you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name.

Nehemiah 9:20, speaking of Israel in wilderness, said,

You gave your good spirit to instruct them, and did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and gave them water for their thirst.

Throughout Israel's history there were many people of the spirit. Moses (Num. 11:17), Joshua (Num. 27:18) and the seventy elders (Num. 11:25-26), Saul, initially (1 Sam. 16:14), David (1 Sam. 16:13) and many others.<sup>13</sup> As one example of the prophets, Micah announced:

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 and to Israel his sin. (Mic. 3:8)

The prophet Haggai told those who had returned from Babylon:

Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the LORD; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the LORD; work, for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts, <sup>5</sup>according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. *My spirit abides among you*; do not fear. <sup>6</sup>For thus says the LORD of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; <sup>7</sup>and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the LORD of hosts. (Hag. 2:4-7)

But there needed to be more. For Israel, at whatever stage, was still a rebellious people (Isa. 48:8b), more like Adam after the Fall than before. 'They rebelled and grieved his holy spirit' (Isa. 63:10). As we saw in a previous study, there had to be a great moral work by the servant of the LORD<sup>14</sup>, and so Isaiah promised:

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. <sup>2</sup>The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. <sup>3</sup>His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. (Isa. 11:1-3).

As the prophecy develops, Isaiah indicates that Israel is the servant of the LORD, the offspring of Abraham (Isa. 41:8; cf. Gen. 17:7-8), adding:

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. (Isa. 42:1)

The God who has done this is the God who created mankind for the spirit in the first place.

Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath (*n<sup>e</sup>shāmāh*) to the people upon it and spirit (*rūach*) to those who walk in it: <sup>6</sup>I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, (Isa. 42:5-6).

The servant will announce the great day of salvation:

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; <sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; (Isa. 61:1-2)

<sup>13</sup> On this point, but also relevant for this whole topic, see Geoffrey Bingham, *The Day of the Spirit*, NCPI, 1985, p. 32ff.

<sup>14</sup> See the July 2002 Study, *The Maturity of the Son*.

Here, like the promise of John the Baptist, is a word to be brought by one who has the spirit, and it is a word both of salvation and judgment.

## JESUS AND THE SPIRIT

Luke's account of John the Baptist's ministry concludes with the note that Herod responded to John's rebukes 'by shutting up John in prison' (Luke 3:19-20). After that there is the paragraph:

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened,<sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.' (Luke 3:21-22).

It might almost have been a private moment, although John 1:33-34 makes it plain that John the Baptist saw what happened. It was certainly a very personal moment. Here is Jesus praying, after his own baptism with water, and the Holy Spirit<sup>15</sup> descended on him in bodily form like a dove. 'Like a dove' must surely imply that descriptions are somewhat inadequate (cf. Acts 2:3, '*as of fire*'), but since the coming of the Spirit upon Jesus was accompanied by the voice of God declaring Jesus to be 'my Son, the Beloved', it could hardly have been a minor matter for Jesus. Those who ask concerning Jesus' self-awareness of his person and ministry must take into consideration that this anointing was a momentous event. Since Luke follows the account with a genealogy that links Jesus with 'Adam, son of God' (Luke 3:38), we should see this coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus as the establishment of 'Adam at last' (cf. 1 Cor. 15:45).

Until his baptism, the only reference to Jesus and the Holy Spirit was concerning his conception (Luke 1:35), but from this moment Jesus is a man, *the* man, filled with the Spirit (Luke 4:1). The conflict which came was because he was led by the Spirit in the wilderness. Should we see this as a parallel of Israel's experience? Certainly, Jesus quickly demonstrates that the function of Israel in the plan of salvation is his alone.

After the temptations in the wilderness, 'Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee' (Luke 4:14). Small wonder that his teaching caused him to be 'praised by everyone' (Luke 4:15) and that 'he spoke with authority' (Luke 4:32). The first example given by Luke of Jesus' preaching was in the synagogue at Nazareth where he identified himself as the one of whom Isaiah wrote:

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read,<sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:<sup>18</sup> 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'<sup>20</sup> And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.<sup>21</sup> Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' (Luke 4:16-21).

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<sup>15</sup> I have up till this point used a small 's' for spirit when referring to the Old Testament. However, in the New Testament there is a fresh revelation, not only of the eternal word but of the Spirit. Now the Spirit is revealed as a person in relationship with the Father and the Son, though they remain together one God. Hence the use of the capital 'S' in these contexts.



Some puzzle over Jesus ability to great things coupled with his apparent limitations. For instance, He could raise the dead, cast out demons, heal the sick and multiply loaves and fishes, while at the same time he was unable to know certain things without asking, desperately needed sleep after a long day's interaction and so on. This puzzlement derives from a misunderstanding of who Jesus was.

John tells us that 'the word became flesh' (John 1:14). Paul said that God sent 'his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh' (Rom. 8:3), having said that the 'Son ... was descended from David according to the flesh' (Rom. 1:3; cf. 9:5) and that he was 'born of a woman, born under the law' (Gal. 4:4). 'In the likeness of sinful flesh' obviously means not that Jesus was not truly human but that he was in appearance *like* sinful people, 'yet without sin' (Heb. 4:15).

The New Testament is quite clear that Jesus was fully human. The Word who was God became flesh. As flesh (and bones, Luke 24:39), Jesus was obliged to be precisely what God intended for humanity. He was, therefore a man who was totally dependent upon God for everything. That is what he insisted on in John 5:19.

Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise.'

Of himself, the Son of God in flesh had no strength. Humanity was never created to be strong but to find all its needed resources in God. That was the lesson that Paul needed to learn, as he describes his experience in 2 Corinthians 11:30–12:10: 'whenever I am weak, then I am strong'. That is why Jesus responded to Satan's temptation to turn stones into bread with the insistence that 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God' (Matt. 4:4).

Then, as we have seen, true humanity must be filled with and led by the Spirit. Not to be so would be to deny the whole truth of God and his creation. So what we see is Jesus continually filled by and led by the Holy Spirit. He was conceived through the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35), anointed by the Spirit (Matt. 3:16 etc), led by the Spirit (Matt. 4:1 etc), he cast out demons by the Spirit<sup>16</sup> (Matt. 12:28).

The moral conflict of the cross would not have been possible apart from the Holy Spirit. What human being could, of himself, ever move into that realm where evil will be confronted in all its vicious and destructive force and not be overwhelmed by it? Thus the writer of Hebrews put it this way:

how much more will the blood of Christ, who *through the eternal Spirit* offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God! (Heb. 9:14)

Unless Jesus was the man of the Spirit he could not have accomplished his great work of salvation. It was the Spirit who enabled him to obey the Father and go to the cross (John 10:17-18; 14:30-31).

Jesus' resurrection was also the work of the Holy Spirit, though the language of the New Testament is not precise about it. However, Romans 1:4; 8:11, also possibly 1 Timothy 3:16<sup>17</sup> and 1 Peter 3:18<sup>18</sup> do give support to it. What is plain, though, is

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<sup>16</sup> Luke 11:20 has 'But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you'. The phrase, 'the finger of God' is taken from Ex. 8:19, where the magicians of Egypt were helpless before the power of God. Luke is evidently putting Jesus' actions in casting out demons in the same light as Moses confronting and completely disarming the powers of the Egyptian gods.

<sup>17</sup> 'He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit ...' Both phrases use the Greek preposition ἐν (*en*). However this, the most frequently used preposition, has such a range of meaning that simply to insist on 'in' as the only translation does no justice to the language. See C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*,

that after his resurrection Jesus gave ‘instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen’ (Acts 1:2). What this means is that Jesus never did anything, either before or after his death and resurrection, apart from the Holy Spirit. This is not because Jesus had some special access to the Holy Spirit denied to others but because he is true man. Indeed, as true man, he stands in the place vacated by the first Adam, as head of the race, the people whom God called ‘my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise’ (Isa.43:21 cf v. 7).

If Jesus is the Man of the Spirit, then the question with which we commenced this study is not hard to answer. Why did John the Baptist say, ‘He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire’? It was because Jesus came to restore creation to newness. There must be the fire of judgment, a judgment so dreadfully worked out on the cross (see John 12:31) but also being worked out within history now (see Revelation 6, 8-9 and 16-17) and coming to its climax when all that is impure is finally and completely removed from the creation (Rev. 20:11-15; 21:8). There *must* also be, because both are of the one, the restoration of the Spirit, as men and women are once again immersed in the Spirit, filled with the Spirit.

What could be the greatest thing for which men and women could ask God? If salvation means of necessity the restoration of the Spirit, then Jesus’ statement in Luke 11:9-13 makes it clear:

So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. <sup>10</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. <sup>11</sup>Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? <sup>12</sup>Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? <sup>13</sup>If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, *how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*

Jesus said that prior to his death and resurrection and prior to his ascension. To ask for the Holy Spirit was the equivalent to seeking the kingdom of God.<sup>19</sup> But once the kingdom has come (Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20 cf. Mark 9:1), what happened?

This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. <sup>33</sup>Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear. (Acts 2:32-33)

What was seen and heard was the gift of the Spirit in the lives of the new believers (Acts 2:44 cf. 11:17). Here is Jesus, the head of the race whom God has redeemed, receiving the Spirit as his to give to those in him and then, with the Father (John 14:16, 26), pouring out the Spirit on those who believe in him. So here is the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17)!

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Cambridge University Press, London, 1968, pp. 75-81. As in note 18 (below), I cannot see that ‘vindicated *in spirit*’ has a clear meaning, whereas to translate this as ‘revealed in (or ‘by’?) flesh, vindicated *by Spirit*’ is at least possible.

<sup>18</sup> ‘He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit’ (NRSV) uses simple datives for ‘in the flesh’ and ‘in the spirit’. There are no definite articles and the Greek simply has θανατωθεῖς μὲν σαρκὶ ζῶποιοῦθεῖς δὲ πνεύματι (*thanatōtheis men sarki zōpoiōtheis de pneumati*). The two datives could quite possibly be instrumental, so that the text would read, ‘He was put to death by flesh, made alive by Spirit’. This, even if not completely satisfactory, would at least help us to understand what ‘made alive in spirit’ could possibly mean, since the testimony of Scripture is that Jesus was raised *bodily* from death.

<sup>19</sup> Compare John 7:37-39, where those who are thirsty and who come to drink from Christ find that they are not only personally satisfied but that ‘rivers of living water’ flow through them. John’s point was that Jesus ‘said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet [given], because Jesus was not yet glorified’ (v. 39).



## BEING PEOPLE OF THE SPIRIT

From what has been said so far, it proves no difficulty at all to recognise the meaning behind such a question as Galatians 3:3, ‘Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard?’ Believing and receiving the Spirit go hand in hand. How could it be otherwise? I have suggested elsewhere<sup>20</sup> that when Paul met the ‘disciples’ in Ephesus, his question to them was prompted by what was so obviously an incongruity, namely that here were people called, or calling themselves, disciples but who had not even heard of the coming of the Spirit. That the Spirit would come they understood, because they were disciples, as it turned out, of John the Baptist, but as soon as they hear about and were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus, and Paul laid his hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit in his fulness.

It is tempting to think of these disciples, now genuine disciples of Jesus, as those receiving the letter to the Ephesians<sup>21</sup>, where Paul wrote:

In [Christ] you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; (Eph. 1:13).

In any event, he reminded the readers that both Jews and Gentiles together have access to the Father ‘*in one Spirit*’ (Eph. 2:18) and that they are all ‘a holy temple in the Lord ... a dwelling place of God *in the Spirit*’ (Eph. 2:21-22). What they know from Paul, they know because God has revealed himself ‘to his holy apostles and prophets *by the Spirit*’ (Eph. 3:5). When Paul prays for them, it is that ‘according to the riches of his glory, [the Father] may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power *through his Spirit*’ (Eph. 3:16). He then urges them ‘to maintain the unity *of the Spirit*’ (Eph. 4:3).

The matter of maturity, as we have seen, is the matter of growing up into Christ (Eph. 4:15), since the truth is in the man Jesus. What is true of Jesus, the man of the Spirit, the last Adam, must then be true of us. To be men and women of the Spirit means we must clothe ourselves ‘with the new man, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness’ (Eph. 4:24) having been taught to put off all that pertains to the first Adam, the old man (Eph. 4:22) and to have our thinking renewed (Eph. 4:23).

Much of what that means on the moral level is then spelled out from Ephesians 4:25 to the end of the letter. But at the heart of it, is the exhortation to be wise.

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise,<sup>16</sup> making the most of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup>So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup>Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but *be filled with the Spirit*,<sup>19</sup> as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, <sup>20</sup>giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph. 5:15-20)

‘Be filled with the Spirit’ may well be translated, ‘Go on being filled<sup>22</sup> with the Spirit’. God ‘goes on supplying<sup>23</sup> the Spirit’ (Gal. 3:5). The true human being is

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<sup>20</sup> See the June 2001 study, *Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?* available at <http://www.newcreation.org.au>.

<sup>21</sup> Certain technical issues, discussed in commentaries and introductions to the New Testament, must hold us back from any definite conclusion.

<sup>22</sup> The Greek is the present passive imperative, *πληρουσθε* (*plērousthe*), carrying a continuous sense.

<sup>23</sup> *ἐπιχορηγῶν* (*epichorēgōn*) is another use of the present tense.

continually, and joyfully, dependent on God's continuous giving, so the continuous supply of the Holy Spirit to the whole body and to the individual members ought to be the deepest longing and richest experience any could have. This is what it means to be the new creation. The matter of worship and fellowship, of submission within relationships, all flow from the ongoing fulness with the Spirit. And in the battle which we face continually, the weapon to be used is 'the sword of the Spirit' (Eph. 6:17).

When we pray, it ought to be 'in the Spirit at all times, in every prayer and supplication' (Eph. 6:18). There can be prayer that is not in the Spirit. That does not mean that we must continually be examining each prayer to see if we 'got it right'. Rather it means that as we are going on being filled then we pray. This is what we see in Jesus, the man of the Spirit, freely and joyfully doing the Father's will (Ps. 40:8; Heb. 10:9) in the utter dependence of love.

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John the Baptist promised that the coming one would baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire. We can now say, 'He has done it!' The fire of the judgment of the cross has come into us and burned up the guilt that polluted us as individuals and as a race. Paul put it that

*God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. <sup>8</sup>God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:5, 8).*

It was the Holy Spirit, given to us, who brought the judgment of the cross into each one so that we are now clean.

*...you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:11)*

John the Baptist proclaimed the coming kingdom, with forgiveness and the outpouring of the Spirit. Jesus did no less:

*After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup>While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. 'This,' he said, 'is what you have heard from me; <sup>5</sup>for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' (Acts 1:3-5)*

In fact, when the disciples responded to this teaching concerning the kingdom by asking if this, then, was the time when the kingdom would be restored to *Israel* (Acts 1:6). Jesus' reply, in terms consistent with the whole purpose of God declared in the call of Abraham, was not to deny their concern but to show them that the gift of the Spirit was for far more than Israel, it was for the whole world.

*He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' (Acts 1:7-8)*

Luke 24:45-49 anticipated this:

*Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup>and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup>and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup>And see, I am sending upon you what*

my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.' (Luke 24:45-49)

The gift promised by the Father will lead them to understand that they are witnesses to the fulfilment of all that was written, so that they are now to be participants in the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations.

It has often been said, correctly, that the Holy Spirit is given for mission. But the nature of that mission is, perhaps, far greater than we might have thought. For instance, in John 14-16 Jesus spent the last evening with the disciples explaining the meaning of the coming of the Spirit to prepare them for what lay ahead. The Spirit would come as 'another Advocate' (John 14:16), that is all that Jesus was to them the Spirit would be. He said to them: 'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you' (John 14:18). In Jesus pouring out the Spirit, the Father was sending Jesus to them. In fact, the coming of the Spirit would be the coming of the Father and the Son who will abide in them (John 14:23). So it can be said that when Jesus, the man of the Spirit, ascended the Spirit was sent as the Spirit of the man.<sup>24</sup> 'The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit' (1 Cor. 15:45).

To be a witness *of* Christ, then, means more than just being a witness *about* him. It is that, but it means also that those who receive the Spirit are those through whom Christ himself continues his work. Hence such statements as:

So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through *the word of Christ*. (Rom. 10:17)

...since you desire proof that *Christ is speaking in me*. (2 Cor. 13:3).

Then I fell down at his feet to worship [the angel], but he said to me, 'You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades who hold *the testimony of Jesus*. Worship God! For *the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*.' (Rev. 19:10).

It is Christ Jesus who continues to work until the end. While ever the Father is working the Son is working (John 5:17). So he told the eleven, 'I am with always, to the end of the age' (Matt. 28:20).

The new creation has come, but for now it is seen only by faith. That does not make it any less genuine, but there will come the day when the climax accomplished at the cross will be seen and 'the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God' (Rom. 8:21). At present there is the struggle, but we have the guarantee within us, the seal of the Holy Spirit, the pledge of our inheritance (Eph. 1:13-14).

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; <sup>23</sup>and not only the creation, but *we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit*, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom. 8:22-23).

In the gift of the Spirit we have 'the first fruits', the harvest has begun and we are equipped to witness to all that Christ has done, is doing now and will yet consummate. Our maturity lies in being what we are, men and women in unity in Christ, living as those who have indeed received the Spirit. All the wisdom of God is for those who are thus mature for they are the ones willing to receive it, having no agenda but the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16).

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<sup>24</sup> I am grateful to Geoff Bingham for both the phrase and for pointing out the implications of this to me.