

# THE HOLY SPIRIT



# THE Holy Spirit

ONE OF THE MOST firmly held doctrines of almost all the denominations which may be described collectively as 'Christendom' is the doctrine of the Trinity. This affirms that the Holy Spirit is the third person of a triune God, being coequal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son. It is further asserted that a belief in such a 'Trinity' is essential for salvation. It is, therefore, most important that we should have a clear understanding as to what is meant by the term 'the Holy Spirit', and the purpose of this booklet is to examine the teaching of the Bible on the subject.

The term 'Holy Spirit', or 'Holy Ghost' as it is often translated in the Authorised Version of the Scriptures, is to be found almost exclusively in the New Testament. The equivalent phrase in the Old Testament is 'the Spirit of God' or 'the Spirit of the Lord'. This becomes clear if we look at passages in the New Testament where passages from the Old Testament are quoted. Two examples will illustrate the point:

1. In Acts chapter 2 is an account of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost. Peter explained to the wondering crowd that this was a fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel, from which he makes the following quotation

'And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of *my Spirit* upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of *my Spirit*; and they shall prophesy.' (Acts 2. 17, 18, quoted from Joel 2. 28, 29).

It will be seen that the prophecy of Joel speaks of 'my Spirit', but it is clear from Peter's application of the prophecy that it has reference to the Holy Spirit poured out on the day of Pentecost.

2. Luke chapter 4 records in verse 1 that Jesus, 'being full of the Holy Spirit', returned from Jordan. Later in the same chapter (vv. 18, 19) he quotes from Isaiah a prophecy foretelling this bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon him. The passage reads, 'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound' (Isaiah 61. 1). Having read the passage, Jesus affirmed (v. 21), 'This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears'. So the prophecy that 'the Spirit of the Lord God' would come upon him was fulfilled in the pouring out of the 'Holy Spirit' upon Jesus: the terms are identical in meaning.

In order to understand the teaching of the Scriptures concerning the Holy Spirit, then, we need first to turn to the Old Testament to find out what it has to tell us about the Spirit of God.

## THE SPIRIT OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

### GOD'S CREATIVE POWER

In the opening verses of Genesis we read:

'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the *Spirit of God* moved upon the face of the waters.

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.' (Genesis 1. 1-3).

The chapter then goes on to describe how various acts of creation were performed-the formation' of the heavenly bodies; the division of land from water; the creation of fishes, birds, animals, and finally man. In the book of Job we find these events described in the following words:

'He divideth the sea with *his power*, and by his understanding he

smiteth through the proud.

***By his Spirit*** he hath garnished the heavens; his hand hath formed the crooked serpent" (Job 26. 12, 13).

It is evident from this passage that the Spirit of God is the power by which all the works of creation were brought into being; and this is confirmed by the Psalmist, who declares:

`O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.'

'Thou sendest forth ***thy spirit***, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth' (Psalm 104. 24, 30).

It is this same power which pervades the whole universe, sustaining it in being; the Psalmist again declares:

`Whither shall I go from ***thy spirit***? or whither shall I flee from ***thy presence***?

If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there' (Psalm 139. 7, 8).

### WISDOM, SKILL AND STRENGTH

The term `the spirit of God' is, however, used much more widely than in relation merely to God's creative power. In Exodus we are told how the people of Israel were about to make the Tabernacle and its furnishings, and we read that God told Moses:

`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, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship" (Exodus 31.2-5).

In this case the effect of the spirit of God upon Bezaleel was to give him wisdom and skill which he would not otherwise have had.

Again, in the book of Numbers we read

‘Moses went out, and told the people the words of the Lord, and gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people, and set them round about the tabernacle.

And the Lord came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of *the spirit* that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders; and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease’

(Numbers 11. 24, 25).

In this case the spirit of God resting upon these seventy men gave them the power to prophesy.

In the case of Samson the spirit of God gave him exceptional strength. We are told

‘And *the Spirit of the Lord* came upon him (Samson), and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil...’

‘And when he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him and *the Spirit of the Lord* came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands’ (Judges 14. 19; 15. 14).

These are but a few examples from the Old Testament showing that the spirit of God is the power by which he works, whether it be in creation, in the giving to men of unusual gifts of wisdom, skill or strength, or inspiring them with the gift of prophecy.

## INSPIRATION

On the question of prophecy, the apostle Peter makes an interesting observation, which confirms the point made earlier, viz. that the phrase ‘the spirit of God’ in the Old Testament is the equivalent of the phrase ‘the Holy Spirit’ in the New Testament. He writes:

‘We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private

interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were *moved by the Holy Spirit*' (2 Peter 1. 19-21).

We have seen from the passages quoted that these men prophesied when the spirit of God rested upon them; Peter describes that spirit as 'the Holy Spirit'.

The same point is made by the apostle Paul, although he does not use the phrase 'the Holy Spirit'. He writes:

'All scripture is given by *inspiration of God*, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works' (2 Timothy 3. 16, 17).

The word 'inspiration' which the apostle uses here has the same root meaning as the word 'spirit'. 'Spirit' means 'wind' or 'breath', while the phrase 'inspiration of God' means, literally, 'God-breathed'. These men who wrote the Scriptures did so under the power, or spirit, of God, which guided them in all that they wrote, so that the writings produced were, in fact, the Word of God. If we turn to the Old Testament we find that its writers acknowledged this fact:

'Now these be the last words of David . . . *The Spirit of* the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue' (2 Samuel 23.2).

'Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning: from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord God, and *his Spirit*, hath sent me' (Isaiah 48.16).

'Then came *the word* of the Lord to Isaiah, saying . . . ' (Isaiah 38.4).

'Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But *his word* was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay' (Jeremiah 20. 9).

These are a few examples of how the spirit of God operated in Old Testa-

ment times. In every case it was a manifestation of God's power: whether in creation; or in sustaining the universe in being; or for endowing men with special powers; or for inspiring them to deliver His message to mankind, whether orally or in the written records which have been preserved for us to read.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

With this in mind, we can now look at the New Testament, where the phrase used is normally 'the Holy Spirit' or 'Holy Ghost'.

One of the most important aspects to look at is the use of the term in relation to Jesus Christ, for many believe him to be the second person of the Trinity, of which the Holy Spirit is alleged to be the third person.

## THE BIRTH OF JESUS

In Luke chapter 1 we have the account of the announcement of the forthcoming birth of Jesus. We are told:

'In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women.

And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS' (Luke 1. 26-31).

Mary questioned how this could be so, seeing that she was not married. The angel replied:

'*The Holy Spirit* shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God' (v. 35).

It will be seen that the term 'the Holy Spirit' is used as a parallelism of the term 'the power of the Highest', thus confirming what we have already learned from the Old Testament. In this case the power of God came upon Mary, enabling her to bear a child although no man was involved. Because it was through God's power, the Holy Spirit, that the child was conceived, the child would be 'the Son of God'.

In the light of this statement of the angel, how untenable is the concept of the Holy Spirit as expressed in the doctrine of the Trinity, of a person co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son! In what possible sense could it be that such a person came upon Mary, enabling her to bear a son, in consequence of which that son, already co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and with the Holy Spirit, should be called the Son of God? The doctrine of the Trinity affirms that Jesus has been the Son of God eternally. The account given by Luke makes it clear that before his conception by the power of God he had no existence at all.

#### FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

While looking at the first chapter of Luke, there are some further references to the Holy Spirit which are worth noting. In the earlier part of the chapter is recorded the announcement of the forthcoming birth of John the Baptist, and we are told that the angel said to his mother:

'He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be *filled with the Holy Spirit*, even from his mother's womb' (Luke 1. 15).

Again, when Mary visited Elisabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, we are told that

'It came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was *filled with the Holy Spirit*:

And she spake with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb' (verses 41, 42).

Later, after the birth of John the Baptist, it is recorded that

‘His father Zacharias was *filled with the Holy Spirit*, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people' (verses 67, 68).

After the birth of Jesus, we read that

‘There was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the *Holy Spirit was upon him*.

And it was revealed unto him *by the Holy Spirit*, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ' (Luke 2. 25, 26).

What do these passages tell us about the Holy Spirit? They tell us that all of these people, John the Baptist, Elisabeth, Zacharias and Simeon, were filled with the Holy Spirit, and thus enabled to speak the words of God. John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus and prophesied of his coming, and the work he would do; Elisabeth, by the power of the Spirit, uttered that wonderful song of thanksgiving, in which she spoke of the work of redemption which would be accomplished in Christ; Zacharias was moved to speak in the same strain, relating Christ's work to the promises made to the Jewish fathers; while Simeon, by the same power, was shown that he would not die before he had seen Jesus. In every case it was the power of God working in them, giving them an insight and understanding which they would not otherwise have had.

## MIRACLES

In the case of Jesus himself, the power of God working in him had even more remarkable results. Reference has already been made to the record of the bestowal of the Holy Spirit in Luke chapter 4 verse 1. The power thus given enabled him to go through the cities and villages of his native land healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, giving hearing to the deaf, and even raising the dead to life again. All these things he was able to do through the power of God resting upon him. As he said himself, ‘The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do' (John 5. 19) ; and again, ‘The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works' (John

14. 10). Jesus does not attribute his power to a third person of the Trinity, but to the Father working in him by His Spirit. (That Jesus had no power 'of himself' clearly indicates he was not part of a Triune Godhead.)

## THE WORK OF THE APOSTLES

It was this same power which operated through the apostles. Before he ascended to heaven Jesus promised them: 'Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth' (Acts 1. 8). The fulfilment of this promise is recorded in Acts chapter 2, where we are told that this power was bestowed upon them in the form of tongues of fire, which rested on them. The immediate result was that they were able to speak in many foreign languages, so enabling them to preach the gospel to the large number of foreigners who were visiting Jerusalem at that time:

'They were all *filled with the Holy Spirit*, and began to speak with other tongues, as the spirit gave them utterance . . . And the multitude were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language . . . Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians' (Acts 2. 4-11).

Furthermore the apostles, like Jesus, were able to perform acts of healing. In the next chapter, chapter 3, we are told how Peter healed a man who had been lame from birth; and there are many other such miracles recorded in the Acts.

This same power was also with them in their preaching. We read

'Then Peter, *filled with the Holy Spirit*, said unto them.. . ' (Acts 4. 8).

'They were all *filled with the Holy Spirit*, and they spake the word of

God with boldness' (Acts 4. 31).

This power was given to them to demonstrate the fact that they were, indeed, the messengers of God-to give proof of the Divine authority with which they spoke.

Perhaps most importantly of all, it was the power of the Spirit which enabled these men to pen, accurately and reliably, what we know as the New Testament. Jesus had promised them that it would be bestowed for this purpose

‘*The Comforter*, which is *the Holy Spirit*, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you' (John 14. 26).

## THE LANGUAGE OF PERSONIFICATION

It is sometimes claimed that the use of the word ‘Comforter’, and of the personal pronoun, in this verse and in verses 16 and 17 of this chapter, is proof that the Holy Spirit is a person. But to put this interpretation upon Christ's words is to make them contradict all the other passages of Scripture which describe the Holy Spirit as a power. In fact, Jesus made clear reference to the Holy Spirit as the power of God in another passage foretelling its bestowal upon the apostles

‘Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued *with power* from on high' (Luke 24. 49).

Why, then, did Christ speak of the Holy Spirit as ‘the Comforter’, and use the personal pronoun ‘he’ in referring to it?

The answer appears when we look into the exact meaning of the word ‘Comforter’. The word (‘parakletos’) in the original text meant one who was called to another's aid, especially in a court of justice. In brief, an advocate. How did the Holy Spirit act in this way?

The Acts of the Apostles tells us how the Jewish religious authorities were moved with bitter hatred against the apostles, because the latter, having the gifts of the Spirit, could work mighty miracles. These miracles gave practical evidence to the people that the apostles were speaking with divine authority.

The elders and priests arrested the apostles on several occasions; but they had no need to engage a defending advocate. Because of the power of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon them, they were aided by something far more effective than human oratory. The Lord had forewarned them before his crucifixion: `they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten; and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them . . . But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Spirit' (Mark 13. 9, 11).

One example of the fulfilment of these words of Jesus is to be found in Acts chapter 4. Peter and John had been arrested and brought before the Jewish elders. Peter made his defence before the court; but he spoke as the power of the Holy Spirit directed him: `Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel . . . ' (Acts 4. 8). He declared that the miracle of healing he had performed had been done in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom they had crucified but whom God had raised from the dead. The effect on the court was remarkable: `Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus' (Acts 4. 13).

We see then how appropriate was the figure Christ used concerning the power of the Spirit. The apostles were enabled to defend the Gospel under the guidance of the Spirit; it also enabled them, as Jesus had promised in John chapter 14, to recall accurately all that Jesus had both said and done, in the writing of the gospel records.

## IS THE HOLY SPIRIT POSSESSED TODAY?

This aspect of the subject is dealt with more fully in the booklet 'The gifts of the Spirit-Are they possessed today?'. It is sufficient to say here that there is no evidence that anyone today possesses the Spirit powers that Jesus and the apostles had. No-one today can, with a word, give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, or life to those who are dead. This power was given to Jesus and the apostles to demonstrate the divine authority with which they spoke. Today our authority is the Word of God, written under divine inspiration; so that when these Scriptures had been completed about the end of the first century, the witness of the Holy Spirit working in men was no longer necessary.

This withdrawal of the gifts of the Spirit was clearly foretold by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians, where he writes concerning them:

“whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, (the gift of knowledge) it shall vanish away.” 1 Corinthians 13. 8, .

The fulfilment of these words is true to experience. After the days of the apostles and their contemporaries, there is no authentic record of the miraculous use of these powers; and the claims of those who have pretended to have them do not bear close investigation.

## SUMMARY

It will be seen from the foregoing that the Holy Spirit is not a person—it is not an entity distinct from the Father. It is the power by which God works; and when bestowed upon men it gives them the power to do things, and say things, beyond their natural abilities. Jesus himself was not only born as the result of the operation of the Holy Spirit upon Mary: during his life he was filled with the Holy Spirit, thus enabling him to speak with divine authority, and do works which no other man could do. It is God's promise that those who believe and obey Him will likewise receive the powers of the Spirit in the age to come, when they will be clothed upon with immortality, and made like the One whom they serve.