

Not by Might nor by Power, but by My Spirit - Part 2

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The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is a separate, distinct, co-eternal member of the Godhead. (Matthew 28:19; Luke 10:21; Luke 11:13; John 14:26; Hebrews 9:14) When we study the Holy Spirit we have to approach the topic with a humble spirit and an open mind because He is the member of the Godhead who leads us into all truth. (John 16:13) This means that if we want to know more about the Holy Spirit, we have to depend on Him as we study Scripture! The Holy Spirit is an infinite being and even though it is impossible for finite beings to fully understand the ways of infinite beings, the Holy Spirit will enable us to know all that we need to know!

- The Bible teaches the Holy Spirit is sent to every person so that, if possible, we can be drawn into an intimate fellowship with the Godhead! *His first work* is to draw us to Jesus so we will love God with all our heart, mind, and soul and our neighbors as ourselves. *His second work* is to mature us spiritually so we will grow into the fullness of Jesus, glorifying God with our words and actions. (Ephesians 4:13,15) God is not willing that anyone should perish (2 Peter 3:9), so He sends the Holy Spirit to convict us. Even though the Holy Spirit is invisible, we can observe the fruits of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22,23)

In Part I of this study, we saw how the Holy Spirit can give special abilities to people. This is an exciting principle: God's plans and purposes are accomplished through ordinary people who are enabled or filled with Holy Spirit power! Paul recognized the church could only endure to the end as the Holy Spirit enabled ordinary people. Paul identified one gift of the Holy Spirit, prophecy, to be more important than the others. (1 Corinthians 14:1; Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:10,28; Ephesians 4:11) Unfortunately, the gift of prophecy does not currently exist as it did during Bible times.

If we study the different works of the Holy Spirit, manifested in God's prophets, we discover fascinating elements about the Holy Spirit. For example, the Holy Spirit revealed the deception of Ananias and Sapphira to Peter in Acts 5 and the Holy Spirit killed them! (Acts 5:3-5)

The Bible uses the titles, "His servants the prophets" or "prophet" to describe whom the Lord chooses to speak for Him. The prophet only speaks the revelation that God gives. Interestingly, Abraham is the first person to be identified as a prophet. The book of Genesis gives the history of Abraham providing multiple instances of the Lord directly speaking to him, physically appearing to him, and contacting him through visions or dreams. (Genesis 12-24) However, the Bible does not identify Abraham as a prophet in any of these contacts. Instead, the Bible says God gave King Abimelech a dream in which God called Abraham "a prophet."

We know that Abraham was a man of great faith. When God told him to leave the land of his forefathers, he did so without knowing where he was going. (Hebrews 11:8) Unfortunately, the Bible reveals a man of great faith can stumble. On two occasions, Abraham's faith in God

failed. When he entered Egypt, he misled Pharaoh by telling him Sarah was his sister and Pharaoh took her for his wife because she was a beautiful woman. (Genesis 12:11-20) Later, Abraham misled King Abimelech by telling him that Sarah was his sister and the king took Sarah for his wife. (Genesis 20) Abraham tried to protect himself by misleading these kings. To remedy Abraham's failure, God appeared to Abimelech in a dream and said, "**Now return the man's [Abraham's] wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live.**" (Genesis 20:7, insertion and italics mine) In spite of Abraham's failings, God declared he was a prophet.

Many prophets and prophetesses are identified in the Bible. Sometimes Bible characters such as Moses' sister Miriam, Isaiah's wife, Silas, and even Judas (not the Judas who betrayed Jesus) were called prophets without providing evidence that they had the gift of prophecy. (Exodus 15:20; Isaiah 8:3; Acts 15:32) However, the Bible has many references concerning prophets who revealed important messages from God. Consider this information about the Holy Spirit who gives the gift of prophecy:

- The Holy Spirit can come upon a person to give a single prophetic message. "**Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke with him [Moses], and He [the Lord] took of the Spirit that was on him [Moses] and put the Spirit on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did not do so again. However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the Tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp.**" (Numbers 11:25-26, insertions and italics mine)
- The Holy Spirit can provide revelations through a single prophet for a lifetime. " 'Therefore prophesy against them; prophesy, son of man.' Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon me, and He told me to say:" (Ezekiel 11:4-5) "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) "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." (Zechariah 7:12)

When it comes to choosing His prophets, the Lord looks within the heart. Bible prophets were a diverse group of people. Some were poor and others wealthy. Because Israel had an agrarian economy during Bible times, it is likely that many of the Old Testament prophets were farmers or shepherds. In fact, Amos was a shepherd and took care of sycamore fig trees. (Amos 7:14) Ezekiel was a priest (Ezekiel 1:3), Deborah was a judge who held court (Judges 4:5), Asaph and other worship leaders served as musicians in the tabernacle (2 Chronicles 29:30; 1 Chronicles 25:1-7). God has called people of all ages to serve as prophets. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote that Samuel was eleven years old when God called him. It could be possible that some of the antediluvian patriarchs were prophets. The patriarch Noah died at 950 years of age and he prophesied before the flood.

- The Holy Spirit speaks to prophets through visions and dreams. "**Listen to my words: When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I**

“speak to him in dreams.” (Numbers 12:6) God chooses prophets for service and the Bible gives us examples of how prophets learned of their calling. In the Old Testament, dreams and visions were the most common way God called prophets. When Jacob fled from Esau, Jacob was given a dream showing a stairway to Heaven. (Genesis 28:10-15) Joseph was given a dream prophesying his older brothers would someday bow down to him. (Genesis 37:6-11) Solomon was given a vision and he received his request for wisdom from the Lord. (1 Kings 3:5-15) Other prophets received visions (dreams while awake – Numbers 24:4) calling them into the Lord’s service. The Lord called Ananias (not the Ananias that was killed in Acts 5) in a vision telling him to heal Saul. (Acts 9:10) Cornelius, the centurion, received a vision during which an angel of God gave instructions to find Peter. (Acts 10:3-7) God also used a vision to call the boy-prophet Samuel. (1 Samuel 3)

Most Christians know the story of Samuel’s calling, but let us review some of the highlights. The story begins in 1 Samuel 3:1 which states, **“The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.”** (italics mine) Following verses describe Samuel’s call and verse 15 concludes by calling his vision a revelation. The Lord called Samuel three times and he did not recognize who was calling him. Eli finally recognized the Lord was calling Samuel, **“So Eli told Samuel, ‘Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’ ”** (1 Samuel 3:9) The story of Samuel reveals how the Holy Spirit calls prophets.

- When the Holy Spirit contacts someone, that person may not know at first who is calling. Samuel did not recognize who was calling him and thought Eli had called him. (1 Samuel 3:4-8)
- The Holy Spirit may call someone to be a prophet who is very young and does not know the Lord well. The Bible says, **“And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with men.** (1 Samuel 2:26) Samuel’s mother, Hannah, had dedicated Samuel to the Lord, but Samuel did not yet know the Lord’s voice. The Bible explains it this way: **“Now Samuel did not yet know the [voice of the] LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.”** (1 Samuel 3:7, insertion mine)
- A person should be open and receptive to the Holy Spirit’s voice. Samuel actually heard the Lord’s voice three times before he replied. When the fourth call came, **“The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ Then Samuel said, ‘Speak, for your servant is listening.’ ”** (1 Samuel 4:10)
- The Holy Spirit uses characteristics which people already possess. People are born with genetic characteristics inherited from their parents. Many people display special talents in areas such as sports, music, arts, public speaking, leadership, and technology. The Holy Spirit assists in developing these skills whether the person becomes a prophet or not. However, the Holy Spirit often enhanced these skills when God called a character to be a prophet. Moses was raised in Pharaoh’s court and he learned leadership principles that would prove helpful later. After Moses lived 40 years as a shepherd, the Lord called him and infused him with Holy Spirit power so he could lead the children of Israel out of Egypt; an impossible mission from a human perspective.
- The Holy Spirit can provide people with abilities necessary to accomplish the Lord’s will.

Of course, the reason Bible characters are called prophets is because they do prophesy! However, God gave many prophets abilities beyond their prophetic gift. These abilities were necessary for the Lord's plans to be fulfilled. Noah built an ark. (Genesis 6:22) Joshua led a campaign to occupy the Promised Land. (Joshua 1:1-5:1) Gideon led a small army to destroy the Midianites and Amalekites. (Judges 7-8) Solomon received an extra measure of wisdom. (1 Kings 3:10-12) Joseph and Daniel could interpret dreams. (Genesis 40-41; Daniel 1:17) John the Baptist and Phillip were evangelists. (John 1:23; Acts 8:4-5)

Please consider these concluding thoughts:

- The Holy Spirit puts words in the prophet's mouth. The Lord called Jeremiah as a young man to be a prophet. However, Jeremiah thought he was too young and he did not know how to speak eloquently. The Holy Spirit resolved both problems: **"Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, 'Now, I have put my words in your mouth.'**" (Jeremiah 1:9) Two other texts illustrate this type of divine action: Before his death, Moses uttered this Messianic prophecy: **"I [the Lord] will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him."** (Deuteronomy 18:18) Before his death, David testified: **"The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; His word was on my tongue."** (2 Samuel 23:2) These texts will encourage any person who does not feel able or qualified to share God's Word!
- The Holy Spirit speaks to others through the **"I [the Lord] spoke to the prophets, gave them many visions and told parables through them."** (Hosea 12:10, insertion mine) **"When the people heard this [Peter speaking on the Day of Pentecost], they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'"** (Acts 2:37, insertion mine)
- The Holy Spirit reveals God's plans to His prophets. **"Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets."** (Amos 3:7)

Because there are people claiming to have received a dream or vision from the Lord, many Christians are uncomfortable when a person announces the Lord has spoken to him. This is understandable because there is no way to tell whether a purported dream or vision is the truth or a lie. Of course, we can compare a dreamer's testimony with Scripture, but this can be difficult depending on the dream.

The Bible identifies over 200 people who have prophesied, but no prophets have appeared during the past century. During the past 150 years, various church groups have claimed to have a prophet. Many Christians are skeptical of these claims and rightly so. The Bible points forward to a time when everyone will witness Holy Spirit power. **"I [the Lord] will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."** (Joel 2:28,29, insertion mine)

We have a paradox which requires deep examination. Joel's prophecy will be fulfilled very soon, but it is reasonable to be skeptical of anyone claiming to be a prophet. We will consider

the challenge of identifying true and false prophets as we continue our study of the Holy Spirit.