

Not by Might or Power, but by My Spirit-Pt 7| Holy Spirit/144,000

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In this series of studies, we have considered some ways the Holy Spirit operates and how the Holy Spirit influenced Bible characters. Ever since the day Adam and Eve sinned, the Holy Spirit has been striving to connect fallen man with God because our sinful nature is *naturally* hostile toward Him. (Romans 8:5-7)

I cannot close this study without considering the life of Jesus and His relationship with the Holy Spirit. Jesus was born with a sinless nature, the same nature given to Adam and Eve when they were created. Jesus did not have a propensity for sin. To make His sacrifice for us equitable, the Father designed that Jesus was not only tempted in every way just as we are (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15), but He was tempted *far beyond* anything human beings will ever face. For example, Jesus grew into the realization that He was the Son of God. He had no recorded visions or dreams. Jesus learned of His identity through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Even though Jesus is a coeternal member of deity, it appears that memories of His preexisting life were largely kept from Him while on Earth.

The first time the Father acknowledged Jesus as His Son was at His baptism. Immediately, after Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit led Him into the wilderness to contemplate His calling and mission. It was November/December and there was no food. After Jesus fasted 40 days, the devil confronted Him. Because the devil is no fool, he knew his life was at stake; if Jesus did not fall for his temptations, his death as a sinner was assured. Therefore, Lucifer carefully planned his first temptation for Jesus. The devil tempted Jesus to *prove to Himself* that He was, in fact, a member of deity, the Son of God, by turning stones into bread. This temptation proves that Jesus did not have memories of His preexisting life. Jesus could have turned the stones into bread by “breaking out” of His humanity because Jesus is a member of deity, having the very nature and power of God. (Philippians 2:5-7) To be clear, Jesus was not and is not a human being like us. Jesus is a member of deity who wore the form and limitations of humanity for about 33 years.

Just before His crucifixion, Jesus willingly endured a cruel beating when He could have “broken out” of His humanity and turned the table on His enemies! He could have escaped the cross because He had the power within Himself. The *greatest* temptation Jesus faced happened *every day*. Would He stay on Earth and live within the limitations of humanity? Would He use divine power for personal benefit? The plan of salvation required Him to remain continuously submissive to the Father’s will and, incredibly, He did! The life of Jesus is a profound study. His life and His teaching show us how patience, love, faith, grace, and law work together. The life of Jesus reveals the great gulf that exists between being filled with the Holy Spirit and being controlled by the sinful nature.

The Holy Spirit in the 144,000

Very soon, Jesus will select and seal the 144,000. Like Jesus, they will demonstrate what is possible through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Before they are selected and sealed, the 144,000 will be “honorable sinners,” doing their best to please God in all aspects of life. Jesus will handpick each of the 144,000 for the same reason that He handpicked David, Jeremiah, and Paul. Jesus sees characteristics in them needed for the task He is going to assign. After He selects the 144,000, they will be sealed; that is, He will remove their sinful nature, a propensity for doing wrong. When the 144,000 begin their ministry, they will have a sinless nature like Jesus, Adam, and Eve. There is a very important reason for this.

Jesus will give the 144,000 a task people having a sinful nature cannot do! The 144,000 will speak the “testimony of Jesus” without regard for any consequences. If their sinful nature were not removed prior to their ministry, they would fail because sooner or later man’s sinful nature acts in a way displeasing to God. Remember, Moses striking the rock? The sinful nature springs up unexpectedly and causes accidental, even willful, sin. Remember, David and Bathsheba?

The judgment of the living will begin shortly before “Day One” of the Great Tribulation. The first people to be judged will be the 144,000. Once Jesus passes a favorable judgment on them, He will remove their sinful nature and place God’s seal of approval in their forehead so they will live the rest of their days without sinning. They will be free of the law of sin. (Romans 7:14-25) Each person on Earth will have his faith in God tested during the Great Tribulation. When Jesus passes a favorable judgment on a person, he will be sealed just like the 144,000. The sinful nature has to be removed from the living during the Great Tribulation because when the door to salvation closes, there will be just two groups of people; those sealed with a sinless nature and those who have chosen the mark of the beast. The law of sin declares it is impossible for people born with a sinful nature to live without sinning. (Romans 7) Therefore, after the saints are sealed, they will no longer sin.

When Jesus was on Earth, He spoke the “testimony of the Father,” that is, He spoke whatever words the Father gave Him to speak. (John 12:49) Jesus spoke without hesitation and suffered greatly as a result. The 144,000 will suffer greatly for speaking the “testimony of Jesus.” Like Jesus, the 144,000 will be killed because of the things they will say. The 144,000 will not only proclaim the gospel of Jesus to “every nation, kindred, tongue and people,” but will also be a *living* demonstration of what each person can have through faith (a sinless nature). The 144,000 are called “firstfruits” in Revelation 14 because they are sealed first. Because of their ministry, an innumerable harvest will follow.

This will be so exciting to witness! Jesus will speak from Heaven’s throne and His words will come through the mouths of the 144,000. This is how the gospel of Jesus will be shared around the world in a mere 1,260 days. Of course, we can expect the devil to respond, because he is consumed with hatred for Jesus. I am sure Satan will select and empower an even greater number of messengers through whom he will speak. The devil will create a wide assortment of lies which will be confirmed with counterfeit signs, miracles, and wonders. However, Jesus will respond to every deception through the 144,000 and the Holy Spirit will impress the “honest in heart” with truth. When Jesus was on Earth, the religious leaders did not realize the Father was speaking through Jesus. The same thing will occur during the Great Tribulation. The religious leaders of the world and those who love wickedness will not recognize

that Jesus is speaking through the 144,000.

We cannot begin to imagine the interesting things the Holy Spirit will accomplish through the 144,000. For example, when travel is very difficult or limited, will the 144,000 be “teleported” to other locations like Ezekiel and Phillip? Will the 144,000 have power to condemn someone to death like Peter when Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit? Will the 144,000 have power to heal the sick and raise the dead like Elijah, Elisha, Peter, and Paul? The 144,000 will perform these and even greater miracles because God will use them to give His *last* call for salvation. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Jesus will save to the utmost. While Jesus is speaking through the 144,000, the Holy Spirit will give the “testimony of Jesus” penetrating power. The Spirit will convict people that it is God’s will, even though it will be a punishable offense, to worship the Creator on His holy Sabbath and by faith, receive the salvation that Jesus offers. The Holy Spirit will deeply trouble every unrepentant soul in an effort to save sinners because as a member of deity, He loves us with the same love that the Father and Jesus have for us.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit Has Not Changed

Before Jesus ascended, He promised He would send the Holy Spirit to His disciples: **“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor [Holy Spirit] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt [prove the world to be wrong] in regard to [its definition of] sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in Me [the truth about sin comes through Jesus, He said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” John 14:6]; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see Me no longer [during My absence the devil will obscure the fact that salvation requires a righteousness that man cannot produce.]; and in regard to judgment [our response to the Holy Spirit determines our eternal destiny. At the appointed time I will judge every person and consider his response to the Holy Spirit. I will separate the sheep from the goats.], because the prince of this world now stands condemned. . . But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come.”** (John 16:7-11,13, insertions mine)

This passage from John 16 contains many interesting points. Please consider three: First, Jesus knew He would soon leave Earth. Therefore, by sending the Holy Spirit to His disciples, He could be near them wherever they went, through the omnipresent ministry of the Holy Spirit. Jesus also wanted His disciples to mature and live “Spirit-led lives.” He wanted each one to learn to *depend* upon the Holy Spirit just as He did. Therefore, He said, **“It is for your good that I am going away.”** Second, Jesus summarized the sanctifying and transforming work of the Holy Spirit when He said, **“He [the Holy Spirit] will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment.”** Jesus knew that in His absence, men would corrupt and distort His gospel. He would direct the Holy Spirit to keep the truth alive in the hearts of “truth seekers” until the end of the world. Finally, Jesus assured His disciples of two exciting concepts. First, there was much He wanted to tell the disciples, but the time had not come. Therefore, Jesus declared the revelation of truth would be progressive. **“He [the Holy**

Spirit] **will guide you into all truth.**” Second, Jesus declared that the Holy Spirit would give His disciples prophetic understanding, a “head’s up,” revealing what is yet to come! **“He will tell you what is yet to come.”**

Beginning and Ending of Christianity Marked by Holy Spirit Power

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the future outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the 144,000 have interesting parallels.

- 1. Timing.** You have heard me say, “With God, timing is everything.” Notice how this story unfolds: Jesus was resurrected early Sunday morning (which happened to be in A.D. 30, the first day of fifty days counting down to the Feast of Weeks, also called Pentecost). Jesus ascended to Heaven that morning and was presented to the Father as a “firstfruits” of the dead. (1 Corinthians 15:20) The resurrection of Jesus as a “firstfruits” assures us of the resurrection of the “dead in Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16) Jesus returned to Earth that Sunday afternoon and walked with two of His disciples to Emmaus. Forty days later, Jesus ascended to Heaven and has remained there. Ten days after His ascension, Pentecost occurred in Jerusalem. (Pentecost always fell on Sunday.) Suddenly, the disciples’ worship service was interrupted by violent wind, tongues of fire rested on the heads of the disciples, and they spoke in languages unknown to them. The Holy Spirit enabled them to speak in unknown tongues because there were thousands of worshipers in Jerusalem who spoke many languages. Each man was privileged to hear the gospel of Jesus in his own tongue! (Acts 2:1-13) The disciples plainly spoke the gospel of Jesus and there was a great ingathering of souls at Pentecost. About three thousand Jews were baptized! These people, together with the believers in Jerusalem are the “firstfruits” of Christianity. Now, zoom forward in time to the Great Tribulation. Jesus will give Holy Spirit power to the 144,000 who will speak the “testimony of Jesus” for 1,260 days. (Revelation 11:3) The result will be a “numberless” group of people who are saved. (Revelation 7:9-14) The Bible says the Two Witnesses will be killed and remain dead for three and a half days. For reasons beyond the scope of this study, the Two Witnesses personify the powers that will be given to the 144,000. When the Two Witnesses are killed, so are the 144,000. When the Two Witnesses are resurrected and taken to Heaven, so are the 144,000. The 144,000 will be resurrected and taken to Heaven prior to the Second Coming because they are “firstfruits” of the coming harvest. Therefore, I believe the 144,000 will be resurrected on Sunday morning (local time) and taken to Heaven. I say this because Jesus was presented on Sunday as the “firstfruits” of the dead in Christ and most of the “firstfruits” of Christianity were baptized on Sunday at Pentecost. Quite possibly, the 144,000 will be presented in Heaven as “firstfruits” on a Sunday (the 1,264th day of the Great Tribulation). Of course, time will tell.
- 2. Multiple People Speaking the Same Message.** Because Pentecost was one of three required feasts, **“God-fearing Jews from every nation under Heaven [were attending the Pentecost service when Holy Spirit power was given to the disciples]. . . each one heard them speaking in his own language.”** (Acts 2:5,6, insertion mine) Jesus sent the Holy Spirit that Sunday morning to put all Israel on notice that His disciples had been chosen and empowered to teach His gospel. The disciples spoke with Holy Spirit

authority and power because the gospel of Jesus is a gospel that offers sanctifying power and transformation. Similarly, the Holy Spirit will enable 144,000 individuals to speak with the same authority and power. Even though few, if any, of the 144,000 will know one another, they will all speak the “testimony of Jesus” and deliver the same four messages, which are represented in Revelation 14 and 18 as messages carried by angels. The gospel commission will end with the deaths of the 144,000.

3. **Goals.** Before the Feast of Pentecost occurred in Acts 2, the number of believers in Jesus around the vicinity of Jerusalem may have numbered less than seven hundred. (1 Corinthians 15:6, Acts 1:15) Just before Jesus ascended, He gave the disciples an awesome challenge they did not understand. They were tasked with taking His gospel to the then-known world. (Acts 1:8) From this small beginning, Christianity now comprises nearly one-third of the world’s population. Of course, Christianity is a “label” and many Christians are Christians in name only. This is not a problem for Jesus because *our response to the Holy Spirit determines our eternal destiny*. God looks into the heart. If we compare the few disciples of Jesus at His ascension with the population of the world at that time and the 144,000 with the population of the world today, the gospel commission remains impossible. Neither group could/can do the task without a dramatic infusion of Holy Spirit power! Pentecost was a local event. The ministry of the 144,000 will be a global event. This is why the selection, sealing, and empowerment of the 144,000 is crucial to understanding how the final harvest will be a numberless multitude comprised of Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Atheists, Heathen, Catholics, and Protestants who worship Jesus as Creator, Lord, and Savior on His Sabbath day!

Our Response to the Holy Spirit

It would be inappropriate to close this series of studies on the Holy Spirit without asking, “Do I hear and obey the voice of the Holy Spirit?” Our answer to this question is most important because our eternal destiny (mine included) is at stake.

The Father sent John the Baptist to preach a gospel of sanctification to prepare for the Messiah and the establishment of God’s kingdom. John’s gospel tested his listeners with genuine repentance and a total commitment to God’s two commandments of love. For example, John declared that sinners had to be free of all guilt in order to enter the kingdom of God. **“John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? *Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have [the righteousness of] Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.’ ”*** (Luke 3:7-9, italics and insertion mine)

The “good fruit” that John spoke about is repentance, reformation, and restitution. (Matthew 3:8) God requires all three. True restitution is important because it is life changing. True restitution is based on sorrow for committing the sin and love for the victim. When a person becomes convicted of his guilt and the reality of the penalty for his sin (being destroyed with fire at the end of the age), and when a person becomes convicted that he should *choose to love* his victim as he loves himself, God requires action. The sinner is showing his love to the person he

violated by humbling himself, asking for forgiveness, and providing restitution. Jesus said before we ask God to forgive us, we *have to ask* our brother or sister to forgive us: **“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar [that is, if you are offering a sin offering to God at the Altar of Burnt Offering for your sins] and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”** (Matthew 5:23-24, insertion mine) This matter cannot be more plainly stated.

Jesus requires sinners to make wrongs right *before* asking God for forgiveness because God wants to know that we love the victim as much as we love self. **“And the second [commandment] is like it [the first]: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ”** (Matthew 22:39, insertions mine) It is foolish to think that offering money or “restitution in kind” cancels the second commandment. When a born-again person sins again against someone, the Holy Spirit convicts him of breaking the two commandments of love. The *only* solution God accepts is that we humble ourselves, confess our sin to the person we wronged, and provide restitution as needed. James wrote, **“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”** (James 5:16, italics mine) Also, John wrote, **“If we confess our sins [to those we wronged and to God], He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”** (1 John 1:9, insertion mine)

John the Baptist (John the baptizer) taught that preparing for the Messiah and the kingdom of God required baptism. The importance and meaning of baptism has been significantly watered down today. (Pun intended.) For many parents, baptism is such a gratifying event. They reason this may help their child to “stay in the church” and of course, staying in the church is important. However, from God’s point of view, baptism is far more serious than staying in a church.

John’s gospel required baptism as a prerequisite for entering the kingdom of God. This created a nasty problem for the Jews. It made the threshold for citizenship in God’s kingdom humiliating because baptism was beneath their dignity. *They* were the offspring of Abraham and, as such, did not need baptism because God had credited righteousness to Abraham because of his faith. (Genesis 15:6) They reasoned that if Abraham was regarded as a righteousness man by God, so were his offspring. This is why John said, **“And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have [the righteousness of] Abraham as our father.’ ”** (Luke 3:8, insertion mine)

If you remember, at the time of the Exodus, all Israel was baptized with the “baptism of Moses” (1 Corinthians 10:2) when they “crossed over” through the Red Sea on dry land. After the Exodus, baptism was reserved for Gentiles. If a Gentile wanted to intermarry and become a citizen in Israel, he/she had to be baptized with the “baptism of Moses.” This act represented “crossing over,” that is, washing away the past and embracing a new life. It was also accompanied with a new date of birth! John’s baptism contained the same idea of “crossing over” and washing away the past, but this requirement was inflammatory to the Jews. Why should a Jew need baptism? It made their religion and biological heritage meaningless. Therefore, John’s baptism was met with much resistance and he called the religious leaders a brood of vipers because they were doing their best to discredit His gospel. You should also

know that John *did not* baptize Jesus to wash away His sins because He had none. (Hebrews 4:15) Jesus was baptized to show that being a biological descendant of Abraham was not sufficient to enter the kingdom of God.

In closing, there are two simple tests which reveal whether or not a person *is living* the born-again life. Notice, I did not say two simple tests to see if a person *has been* born again. Living the born-again life is similar to Peter walking on the water. He could only do so as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus and kept walking toward Him and further away from the safety of the boat. So it is, when you choose to love those you have wronged and you make it right, restoring them in whatever way you would want to be restored, the Holy Spirit is at work within you and sanctifying your life. True restitution, motivated by humility and love, is not something the sinful nature will do voluntarily. Second, if you have a love for spiritual things, if God's Word has become a priceless treasure, if the world and its tinsel has lost its gloss and appeal, you are experiencing the life of Christ. If you trust Him to cleanse you from all unrighteousness, if you trust Him to transform your life and character, and if you have seen victory over your sinful nature and its sickening ways (Galatians 5:19-21) and tasted God's goodness, then you are ready to declare that you have spiritually "crossed over" from being a slave of your sinful nature to freedom in Jesus. (John 8:36) Now, you are ready for baptism into the family of God (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit).

The priests of ancient Israel did not understand that to become a member of God's promised kingdom, a miracle wrought by the Holy Spirit was required. It is a great shame that so many religious leaders today have made the same mistake. Jesus said all citizens in God's coming kingdom have to be born again and be baptized! (John 3:3-7) Unless you are hanging on a cross (that is, circumstances make baptism impossible), sanctification and transformation through Holy Spirit power are still required. But be wary, the sanctification and transformation that God requires must come through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is a ministry of love. It is the Holy Spirit who brings conviction, nurtures love for God and our neighbors, and transforms our minds through faith in Jesus. If you attempt to achieve these things through the works of the flesh, you will become a miserable legalist. This is why the theme of this series is important to remember: “ **‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.**” (Zechariah 4:6)