

## Not by Might nor by Power, but by My Spirit - Part 1

God appeared to Abraham and made a covenant with the patriarch when he was 99 years old. The covenant stipulated among other things that Abraham would become the father of many nations and kings. God also promised to give Abraham's descendants the fertile land of Canaan to possess. (Genesis 17:1-14)

About 190 years later, Abraham's great-grandson, Joseph sat on Egypt's throne, second only to Pharaoh. Joseph invited his father Jacob and his brothers to Egypt because of a severe famine in Canaan. God blessed Abraham's descendants in Egypt by making them so "fruitful," they quickly filled the land. After Joseph died, a Pharaoh came to power who feared the Israelites – there were too many of them! To secure his throne, he made slaves of Abraham's descendants and for the next 200 years, many of Abraham's descendants gave up hope. They doubted God's covenant with Abraham, they thought their suffering and hardship would never end.

When God sent Moses to deliver Abraham's descendants from slavery, Pharaoh was not impressed with the authority of Israel's God. However, after ten devastating plagues (including the death of every Egyptian firstborn son, Exodus 11:5), the king grudgingly allowed the Israelites to leave Egypt. About three months later, they camped at Mt. Sinai and heard God speak the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 20:1-17) The glory and power of God's presence was so intimidating that everyone trembled. (Exodus 19:16) The Israelites feared they would die if God continued speaking to them. (Exodus 20:19) They asked Moses to approach God and speak with Him. Moses met with God and God gave him a comprehensive set of laws that Israel must follow. Moses recited God's words and the Israelites vowed to obey everything God had said. Afterwards Moses built an altar and sacrificed the blood of bulls on it and then sprinkled some of the bull's blood on the people to affirm the covenant which God made with Abraham's descendants. (Exodus 24:8)

Later on, God summoned Moses to meet Him on the mountain top. During this visit, God gave Moses a set of plans. He wanted an Earthly tabernacle constructed for a precise and intricate plan of services to be conducted. God also told Moses that He had chosen a specific person to create the items for the tabernacle. **"See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts."** (Exodus 31:2,3)

God chose Bezalel and **"filled him with the Spirit of God."** Obviously, the Spirit of God filled other Bible characters who lived before Bezalel as well. In fact, the Pharaoh who promoted Joseph to his throne recognized Joseph was filled with **"the Spirit of God!"** (Genesis 41:38) However, Bezalel is the first person mentioned in the Bible where God declares that He filled a person with the Holy Spirit.

This article is the first in a multi-part series on the Holy Spirit and how this unique member of the

Godhead works within people. We will consider the work of the Holy Spirit during Bible times; we will examine different descriptions of the Holy Spirit; and we will study the relationship that exists among the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and the Father. As this study unfolds, we will identify key characteristics of the Holy Spirit so that we can better understand how the Holy Spirit will work during the Great Tribulation.

The story surrounding Bezalel provides a starting point in our quest to learn what the Bible teaches about the Holy Spirit. Please consider the following:

- The Holy Spirit can fill a person. The Holy Spirit filled Bezalel and enabled him **“to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship.”** (Exodus 31:4,5)
- The Holy Spirit gives specific gifts to people. (1 Corinthians 12:11) The Holy Spirit gave Bezalel wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and skills to do the work which God wanted done.
- From time to time, God chooses specific people to fulfill the roles necessary for accomplishing His goals. He chose Bezalel to build the sanctuary and He chose others to assist Bezalel. **“Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, to help him. Also I have given skill to all the craftsman to make everything I have commanded you.”** (Exodus 31:6)
- The Spirit of God is a separate entity from Jesus and the Father. Notice the language: **“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘See, I have chosen Bezalel. . .and I have filled him with the Spirit of God.’** For reasons beyond the scope of this article, this text suggests the existence of three divine entities, “the Lord,” “the Spirit of God,” and “God” the Father. I believe the Bible teaches there are three separate, distinct, co-eternal Gods. The Hebrew word for “Lord” used in Exodus 31 is Jehovah. Jehovah is a title meaning “eternal God” and this title is used to describe both Jesus and the Father. (Psalm 45:7; Hebrews 1:9) We know from Scripture that Jesus is the Creator of everything that exists. (See Exodus 20:1,2, 8-11, John 1:1-14, 1 Corinthians 10:4 and Colossians 1:15,16.) It is interesting to know Jesus sent the Spirit of God to enable Bezalel to do what needed to be done in 1437 B.C. in the same way Jesus later sent the Spirit of God to His disciples in A.D. 30 so they could accomplish His goals. (John 16:7-15)

Since Jesus is the Jehovah in Exodus 31, a third party is necessary because Jesus did not send “the Spirit of Himself” to fill Bezalel. Jesus identified the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of God. Jesus is referring to God the Father.

Some people claim the Holy Spirit is not a separate being, distinct from the Father and Jesus. Advocates of this view claim the Holy Spirit is just another component of the Father and the Son. In future studies, we will examine this issue in detail. Meanwhile, if you are willing to consider what the Bible teaches on this topic, I will share some verses which lead me to believe the Holy Spirit is a separate, distinct, co-eternal member of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit has many capabilities and responsibilities. He is the only God who can be everywhere at once. He is the God that enables the will of Jesus and the Father to be carried out. He is the God that connects every child of God with Jesus and the Father. (Romans 8:26) Sometimes, God the Father directs the Holy Spirit. (See Luke 11:13; Acts 5:32; 2 Corinthians 5:5 and Ephesians

1:17.)

The Spirit of God is mentioned in 47 of the 66 books of the Bible. The Bible does not always use the title, "Holy Spirit." In fact, the Old Testament uses this title only three times; but it references titles such as "Spirit" and "the Spirit of God" eighty-eight times. The New Testament mentions the "Holy Spirit" many times and He is mentioned in all but three of the New Testament books (Philemon, 2 John, and 3 John).

- The Bible indicates the Holy Spirit was present before Creation Week began. **"In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth. Now the Earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."** (Genesis 1:1,2) This text refers to the Holy Spirit as the "Spirit of God." This is the same language found in Exodus 31:3. Before we go further in our study on the Holy Spirit, please consider some background information.

The Hebrew words that are translated into "Spirit of God" are "*Elohim Ruach*." The Hebrew word "*ruach*" means "breath," "wind," or "spirit." When these words are associated with God in the Bible, they point to a divine power that is real, but unseen. (John 3:8) The word "*ruach*" can also apply to a human being. For example, the word "*ruach*" is found in the following texts: Job said, **"As long as I have life within me, the breath [*ruach*] of [from] God in my nostrils, my lips will not speak wickedness, and my tongue will utter no deceit."** (Job 27:3,4, insertions mine) Solomon wrote, **"And the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit [*ruach*] returns to God who gave it."** (Ecclesiastes 12:7) Both verses use "*ruach*" to mean "the breath from God in my nostrils."

- The Holy Spirit may be invisible or use any physical form. He can enter into a person like Samson and fill him with incredible strength. (Judges 16:20) He can enter a person like Bezalel and give him awesome skills; and He can enter a person and give him the gift of prophecy, like King Saul. (1 Samuel 10:6) Genesis 1:2 indicates when Creation Week began, **"The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."** The Bible does not say what His physical form (if any) was at Creation, but there are three physical descriptions of the Holy Spirit in Scripture. The first is when John the Baptist baptized Jesus. All four of the gospels describe the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus in the form of a dove. (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32) A second physical form occurs when the apostles received the Holy Spirit. **"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be *tongues of fire that separated* and came to rest on each of them."** (Acts 2:1-3, italics mine) Finally, the four living creatures in Revelation 4:6 are a representation of the Holy Spirit. (For more information on this topic, please see: <https://wake-up.org/?p=4735>) The Holy Spirit can appear or disappear in different ways at different times. Therefore, it is impossible to develop a meaningful physical description of the Holy Spirit.

On the sixth day of Creation, the Lord created Adam. Genesis 2:7 describes it this way: **"The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and *breathed into his nostrils the***

***breath* [neshamah] of life, and the man became a living being [soul].**” (Italics and insertions mine) Despite the fact that this text and the previous one from Job use a different Hebrew word for breath (“*ruach*” versus “*neshamah*”), Job uses both words to identify the Holy Spirit. (For deeper study, compare the Hebrew words for breath and spirit used in Job 27:3 and Job 33:4) This is so meaningful. Jesus got down on His hands and knees and breathed His own breath into Adam. This divine act brought Adam to life. This divine act created an intelligent soul and immediately, the Holy Spirit entered Adam. The Spirit of God entered him so that Adam had continual access and fellowship with His Creator and the Father.

The Holy Spirit lived within people prior to Noah’s flood. The Bible says Enoch and Noah walked with God. (Genesis 5:24; 6:9) How can a person walk with God if he will not allow the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit? The world was destroyed in Noah’s day because all but a handful of people refused to listen and obey the voice of the Holy Spirit. Consider Paul’s words in Hebrews 11. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses were commended for their faith in God. Obviously, these ancient men could not have had faith in God if the Holy Spirit was not living within them. One of the gifts of the Spirit is faith. (Romans 12:3; 1 Corinthians 12:9) These and many other Biblical heroes could not have achieved all they accomplished unless the Holy Spirit had entered and empowered them.

During the Great Tribulation, the work of the Holy Spirit will be profoundly evident for 1,260 days. He will empower the 144,000 and He will strongly impress those who are honest in heart with conviction. In this time of extreme distress, the Holy Spirit will be poured out on all people! (Joel 2:28-30) Although the Bible only mentions the Holy Spirit 94 times, it mentions Jesus 1,275 times. Therefore, it is easier to develop a greater understanding about Jesus because so much was written about Him. But the irony is this: If it weren’t for the Holy Spirit, we could not know Jesus! If we want to know God’s character, ways, and plans we have to allow His Spirit to live within us. If we are willing to do this, we can walk with God and enjoy the wonderful fruits of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22,23) My prayer is that the Holy Spirit will fill each of us every day. Many people have accomplished great tasks for God and so can we if the Spirit lives within us. **“This is the word of the Lord to [king] Zerubbabel: [The temple will be built, but] ‘Not by might nor by [human] power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.”** (Zechariah 4:6, insertions mine)

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

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.

## Not by Might nor by Power, but by My Spirit - Part 3

From previous studies, we have learned that the Holy Spirit is given to everyone; every person feels His promptings and presence. The Holy Spirit's activity within us is dependent on two principles: First, God has a purpose for every person. (Jeremiah 1:5) Second, our willingness to follow the Spirit's promptings determines the activity of the Holy Spirit within us. (Romans 8:14) There is a tendency to place prophets on a higher level than the average person because of the miracles which the Holy Spirit works through them. However, do not forget, Bible prophets were ordinary people until the Holy Spirit made them extraordinary! **“Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the Heavens gave rain, and the Earth produced its crops.”** (James 5:17,18)

Some prophets in the Bible lived remarkable lives. Enoch and Noah walked with God, and nothing evil was written about prophets such as Elisha, Daniel, and Isaiah. On the other hand, some prophets failed to always please God. The prophet Abraham (Genesis 20:7) lied twice about his wife. The prophet Moses (Deuteronomy 34:10) disobeyed God when he struck the rock; (Numbers 20:11) The prophet Aaron (Exodus 7:1) participated in making the golden calf; and Jonah ran from God to avoid going to Nineveh, then became angry when God did not destroy it! (Jonah 4:1)

An exceptional story in 1 Kings 13 highlights the humanity of prophets. One day, God sent a prophet from Judah up to Bethel to condemn an altar King Jeroboam built. (The king had set up the altar to compete with the altar in Jerusalem and he knew that he was defying God's command in Deuteronomy 12:14.) When the prophet arrived in Bethel, Jeroboam was conducting a service at the altar (which God also forbade) and became furious when the prophet severely condemned him and his altar! Jeroboam angrily reached out his hand toward the prophet and suddenly the king's hand became leprous. This caused Jeroboam to have a change of heart. After the prophet healed the king's hand (through Holy Spirit power), the humbled king invited the prophet to dinner. The prophet declined because God had commanded him not to eat or drink anything while he was in Bethel. (1 Kings 13:8-9)

The sons of an old prophet saw these events and rushed home to tell their father about it. So, the old prophet mounted a donkey and caught up with the younger prophet who was resting under a tree. The old prophet said an angel had spoken to him and he was supposed to take the younger prophet back to his house for “bread and water.” While the younger prophet was eating and drinking, the Holy Spirit came upon the old prophet who then denounced the younger prophet for defying the Lord, saying his body would not be buried with his fathers! The younger prophet left and a lion killed him, but did not eat his body or hurt the donkey he was riding. The moral of this story is that messages from angels and prophets cannot cancel a plain “thus saith the Lord!” During the Great Tribulation, there will be thousands of false prophets contradicting the testimony of Jesus spoken through the 144,000.

## The Ministry of Elijah

The Old Testament often uses the phrase, “*The word of the Lord came,*” because this is how God communicated with His prophets. God spoke in Heaven and the Holy Spirit delivered the very words which God had spoken. The word of the Lord came as clearly as any phone call. Elijah often heard from the Lord in this way. (1 Kings 17:2)

During the days of Elijah, Israel was in apostasy. Elijah prayed for a famine hoping that hard times would cause God’s people to repent and worship the true God who controlled the rain. (Leviticus 26:3,4) During the famine, a widow in Zarephath was gathering a few sticks to build a fire to prepare a final meal for herself and her son. When Elijah arrived in her village, the Holy Spirit spoke through him and instructed her to make Elijah a meal. On a human level, this command would have been outrageous, but the Holy Spirit enabled the woman recognize that Elijah was a prophet. *By faith*, she obeyed, and her faith was richly rewarded. Her “empty” barrel of flour did not run out during the rest of the famine! Later, the widow’s son died and, again, the Holy Spirit worked through Elijah to resurrect her son!

The Holy Spirit worked through Elijah on Mt. Carmel in a most spectacular way. He challenged the 450 false prophets “that ate at Jezebel’s table” to a contest to see which God (Baal or Jehovah) would answer their prayers by fire. The prophets of Baal were put to shame (and later executed) after God responded to Elijah’s prayer by sending fire from Heaven! After Elijah’s victory on Mt. Carmel, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him and he ran ahead of King Ahab’s chariot for 17 miles! When Ahab’s wicked wife, Jezebel, learned that Elijah had killed her prophets, she became furious and determined to kill him. When he learned that his life was in danger, he immediately began walking and running and traveled about 100 miles to Beersheba, an area not controlled by Ahab and Jezebel. (2 Kings 19:3) Despite the awesome victory which the Holy Spirit gave Elijah on Mt. Carmel, the prophet was so frightened that after reaching Beersheba, he continued another day’s journey into the desert. (1 Kings 19:4) It seems incomprehensible that Elijah went from victory on the mountaintop to hiding in a cave in the wilderness to escape Jezebel.

When the Holy Spirit was upon Elijah, the man was invincible. When the Holy Spirit was not at work, Elijah was an ordinary man as James wrote, “**just like us.**” (James 5:17) The Holy Spirit gives uncharacteristic boldness, human prowess alone is temporary. Totally exhausted from his travel, Elijah begged for the Lord to take his life. (1 Kings 19:4-7) Twice, an angel brought Elijah food and drink to strengthen him for another journey. After the angel’s second visit, the Bible says, “**Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights** [about 200 miles] **until he reached Horeb** [Mt. Sinai], **the mountain of God.**” (1 Kings 19:8, insertions mine)

Please consider three points:

- The Holy Spirit is very tender-hearted. He deeply loves us and God speaks through Him when we are most likely to accept what God has to say! About forty-three days after Mt. Carmel, Elijah wanted to die. Instead of turning to God for wisdom, strength, peace, and courage to deal with Jezebel’s threat, the prophet’s humanity succumbed to fear. (1

Kings 19:3) After running his legs off and arriving at a desolate place where no one could survive, God found Elijah in a position to listen and learn.

- The Holy Spirit speaks softly. God told Elijah to come out of the cave where he was sheltering and to stand on the mountain because the presence of the Lord would pass by. Elijah witnessed a mighty wind which tore the mountain apart and shattered rocks, but the Lord was not in the wind. Then, there came the deep groaning and rumblings of a powerful earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. Finally, there appeared a roaring fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. God used these powerful displays to let Elijah know that He can marshal forces at any time, but God will not overrule a person's free will. For God, it is more important that we listen to the Holy Spirit's gentle whisper (1 Kings 19:11-12) than to be overwhelmed with amazing power. After this, and with a twinkle in His eye, the Lord may have asked Elijah, "What on Earth are you doing out here?" Elijah thought he was the only soul in Israel defending God's holy name. However, God told him, **"Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel – all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him."** (1 Kings 19:18)
- The Holy Spirit does not abandon those who have a heart for God when they make mistakes. Elijah was just like us; he allowed his human nature to separate himself from God, but the Holy Spirit did not abandon him. In fact, after Elijah learned this lesson, God strengthened Elijah's faith by sending him on a mission to Damascus.

Later, God gave Elijah another mission to go meet some traveling messengers from the king of Samaria. They were on their way to ask Baal-Zebub if their injured king would recover from an accident. Elijah intercepted the king's messengers and told them the king would die from his injury. When the messengers returned to their king and reported what Elijah had said, the king asked his messengers to describe the man they met. The king was sure his messengers had met "Elijah the Tishbite" because Elijah was known to be a perennial pest. Because Elijah was nearby, the king **"sent to Elijah a captain with his company of fifty men [to capture Elijah].**

**The captain went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, 'Man of God, the king says, "Come down!" ' Elijah answered the captain, 'If I am a man of God, may fire come down from Heaven and consume you and your fifty men!' Then fire fell from Heaven and consumed the captain and his men."** (2 Kings 1:9-10, insertion mine)

Again, the king sent a group of fifty men who suffered the same fate. On the third attempt, the captain **"fell on his knees before Elijah. 'Man of God,' he begged, 'please have respect for my life and the lives of these fifty men, your servants! See, fire has fallen from Heaven and consumed the first two captains and all their men. But now have respect for my life!'**" (2 Kings 1:13,14)

Knowing the king could kill him, Elijah waited for the Lord's instructions. **"The angel of the Lord said to Elijah, 'Go down with him; do not be afraid of him.'**" (2 Kings 1:15) Even though Elijah was an extraordinary prophet, he was susceptible to fear, but Elijah listened and learned. He put his trust in the Lord instead of fleeing and the Holy Spirit gave Elijah peace and boldness to stand before a hostile king.

## Moses Failed

Without a doubt, the Jews revered Moses more than any other Bible character. No other person had more miraculous events associated with his ministry. However, Moses was a fallible human. When the Children of Israel were in the wilderness, the Lord led them to a place that had no water. After all the Israelites had been through and all of the miracles they had witnessed, the people blamed Moses and the Lord for guiding them to a location that was uninhabitable. We have to appreciate the frustration that Moses had faced daily for years. Because there was no water, Moses and Aaron faithfully asked the Lord what they should do. They listened for God to speak and “the word of the Lord came.” **“Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. *Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink.*”** (Numbers 20:8, italics mine)

Moses took the staff and gathered the assembly together at the rock, but lost control of his emotions. The Bible does not specifically say what happened. Maybe someone cursed Moses and Aaron or said something inflammatory; but we do know that Moses became very angry and responded, “ **‘Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?’ Then Moses raised his arm and *struck the rock twice with his staff.*”** (Numbers 20:10-11, italics mine) This situation raises two aspects regarding the work of the Holy Spirit.

First, no one should ever appropriate the work of the Holy Spirit to himself for personal exaltation. (See Acts 8:18-20.) Moses acted as though he and Aaron were responsible for bringing the water out of the rock. Second, Moses ruined a very important object lesson the Lord had prepared. Earlier when camped at Mt. Sinai, Moses had been commanded to strike the rock so water would come from it. (Exodus 17:6) The rock represented Jesus who would be smitten once *and only once* for our sins. (1 Corinthians 10:4; Isaiah 53:4) At Meribah, God plainly told Moses to speak to the rock and water would flow! God prepared this object lesson to teach His people that the “rock” can hear! The Rock of the Ages sees our needs and hears petitions from His people. Ironically, the Bible also says that Moses was more humble than anyone on Earth. (Numbers 12:3) Yet, even this humble man reached a boiling point, lost his temper, took credit for something only God could do, and ruined His profound object lesson – all at the same time!

## Summary

Prophets have the same temptations and weaknesses that confront ordinary people. Prophets are human. Humans are fallible. Humans make mistakes. Even though we humans make mistakes, God will work around our failures to achieve His plans for our lives if we are willing to listen for that still, small voice of the Holy Spirit. God makes lemonade out of lemons. He does not want to give up on anyone and we ought not to give up on Him! Great is His faithfulness.

## Not by Might nor by Power, but by My Spirit – Part 4

Earlier in this series, we discussed the fact that the Holy Spirit is sent to every person at birth. As we mature, we detect His influence. Since we are free will beings, we can choose to reject or obey His prompting. Many people obey the Holy Spirit even though they have no knowledge of Him or His ministry. (Romans 2:14,15) On the other hand, Christians look to the Holy Spirit as their guide into all truth (John 16:13) and desire His presence in their lives because He brings love, joy, happiness, forgiveness, and many other wonderful qualities. (Galatians 5:22,23) We have also discussed how the Holy Spirit works through those whom the Lord calls to be His prophets. We have found that as a group, Bible prophets were not perfect. Last month, we discussed a prophet who disobeyed “a plain thus saith the Lord” and he paid for his transgression with his life!

The book of Acts is filled with stories about the work of the Holy Spirit. The ministry of the Holy Spirit was very evident during the first century A.D. The Holy Spirit enabled the apostles to do miracles that validated the gospel of Jesus. (Acts 14:3) The beginning of Christianity was marked by manifestations of Holy Spirit power. When the Great Tribulation begins, the ministry of the Holy Spirit will be poured out more demonstrably than ever witnessed before as the 144,000 proclaim the revelation of Jesus!

The Holy Spirit will work through the 144,000 with all kinds of signs and wonders. There will be healings and exorcisms! Many wicked people will repent of their sins, live by faith, and be transformed into saints! The 144,000 will be empowered to cause their adversaries to be speechless with the same wisdom that Jesus spoke when He was on Earth. When the 144,000 speak, the Holy Spirit will give weight and authority to the testimony of Jesus and a numberless multitude will be saved! (Revelation 7:9-14) This is not all! The Holy Spirit will give courage and strength to God’s people; He will comfort those who languish in prison; He will encourage and inspire those who are persecuted for their faith; and, most of all, the Holy Spirit will bond together a huge number of people who love the truth. These people will experience fellowship, love, and comradery in Christ words cannot describe. The 1,260 days of Holy Spirit power are imminent. If you anticipate His coming ministry, you will quickly recognize His work.

A Bible story about the prophet Balaam provides additional enlightenment about the Holy Spirit. The story begins when the inhabitants of Canaan became terrified as they saw the Children of Israel (appearing as a great horde of millions) approaching. Israel had recently defeated the Amorites and won a great victory at Bashan over King Og. Balak, king of Moab, noted this and became very concerned that his tribal nation was about to become Israel’s next conquest.

To understand Balak’s response, you first have to understand that in those days, military victories were treated as divinely granted. (Deuteronomy 20:4) Everyone understood the God of the victor was greater than the God of the defeated, so war was understood to be a battle between the gods. After Israel’s decisive victories over Og and the Amorites, King Balak sought a divine solution to ensure his victory over the Israelites. He knew of a prophet living in another

country whose reputation had extended to Moab. The king thought that perhaps if he could get the prophet to curse the Children of Israel, his kingdom would be spared.

Like Melchizedek before him, Balaam was a servant of the Most High God even though he was not a descendant of Abraham. King Balak sent messengers to Balaam asking him to come to Moab and place a curse on the Children of Israel because Balak said, **“For I know that those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed.”** (Numbers 22:6) Balaam told the king’s messengers to wait overnight while he inquired of the Lord. That night, **“God said to Balaam, ‘Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed.’ ”** (Numbers 22:12) The next morning, Balaam said, **“Go back to your own country, for the Lord has refused to let me go with you.”** (Numbers 22:13) Balaam’s response to the king’s messengers reveals a defect in Balaam’s heart. Balaam did not tell Balak’s messengers that the Lord had blessed the Children of Israel.

When the messengers returned without Balaam, Balak was disappointed. He sent higher level ambassadors to Balaam with this message, **“Do not let anything keep you from coming to me, because I will reward you handsomely and do whatever you say. Come [quickly] and put a curse on these people for me.”** (Numbers 22:16-17, insertion mine) Balaam told the second group of emissaries to wait overnight so he could ask the Lord about Balak’s request. The Lord relented because He saw that Balaam *really* wanted to go. God permitted Balaam to go with this caveat: **“Since these men have come to summon you, go with them, but do only what I tell you.”** (Numbers 22:20, italics mine) The Lord allowed Balaam to go with Balak’s messengers because He would use the situation to accomplish His goals. For example, the Lord saw Balaam’s interest in Balak’s promise of hefty reward *and* the Lord wanted to teach the prophet an important lesson.

The next morning, Balaam left on his donkey, **“But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the Lord stood in the road to oppose him.”** (Numbers 22:22) You may wonder, why would God be angry when He permitted Balaam to go? Some Bible commentators suggest that God wanted Balaam to wait for King Balak’s messengers to approach him in the morning. Numbers 22:20 (KJV) says **“If the men come to call thee, rise up *and* go with them.”** I do not believe this explanation is correct. The Lord is not petty; Balaam’s departure has nothing to do with the Lord’s anger. I believe the Lord’s anger with Balaam was because of the prophet’s greed. The Lord had told Balaam that Israel was blessed and he was not permitted to put a curse on Israel. Knowing this, Balaam still wanted to go and curse Israel because he wanted the money. It angered the Lord that Balaam would “sell his services” as a prophet of the Lord for money. (See Acts 8:20.)

When the Lord confronted Balaam on the donkey, He did not kill Balaam because He wanted the prophet to know that *God knew* he was doing wrong. God said, **“I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before Me.”** (Numbers 22:32) According to His infinite wisdom, God allowed Balaam to go to Balak because the Lord wanted to bring these two men together. God wanted Balak and all the Moabites to know that He had blessed the Children of Israel and there was nothing that Balaam or Balak could do about it. Each time Balaam tried to curse Israel, the prophet pronounced a huge blessing which Balak and his princes heard. The blessings pronounced by Balaam were not the meaningless words of a

voodoo witchdoctor. The blessings uttered by Balaam were wonderful promises showing the Lord's purposes for Israel! After Balaam repeatedly failed to curse Israel, I think Balak and his princes realized they could not thwart God's plans for Israel!

The Jewish historian Josephus indicates that after Balaam failed to curse Israel, the prophet told Balak the only way to defeat Israel was to make the God of Israel angry with His own people. Since the God of Israel did not allow Israel to worship other Gods and He hated sexual immorality, Israel could be defeated if Balak sent beautiful women to seduce the young soldiers of Israel. If the young men became involved with the women and worshiped the Moabite gods, Israel would be cursed by its own God! (Antiquities of the Jews, Book IV, Chapter 6)

Weeks later, **“While [the army of] Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. So [the young men of] Israel joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor. And [as Balaam predicted] the Lord’s anger burned against them.”** (Numbers 25:1-3, insertions mine)

When Moses heard what was going on, he rushed over to Shittim and asked the officers of the army, **“ ‘Have you allowed all the women [prostitutes] to live?’ he asked them. They [the prostitutes] were the ones who followed Balaam’s advice and were the means of turning the Israelites away from the Lord in what happened at Peor, so that a plague struck the Lord’s people [and 24,000 were killed].”** (Numbers 31:15-16, insertions mine)

Consider this for a moment. It appears that God not only went along with Balaam's greed to teach the prophet a lesson (he returned home empty handed), but also God knew that some of the Children of Israel were wicked. They would worship other gods and engage in prostitution with the Moabites if the opportunity existed. Therefore, God was able to reprove Balaam for his reckless ways; He was able to inform King Balak and the Moabites that He had blessed Israel (a point that surrounding nations also needed to know); and God was able to purge Israel of 24,000 people who were sexually immoral and/or willing to worship other gods. (Numbers 31:7-8) I think these are the reasons that God allowed Balaam to go see King Balak!

I am so thankful the Lord is longsuffering with mankind. He remembers that we are made of dust. (Psalm 103:14) Before I close, please review the misadventure of another prophet. Jonah lived during the seventh century B.C. One day the Lord told Jonah, **“Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”** (Jonah 1:2) Nineveh was a great city in Assyria, having a population of over 120,000; at that time, the Assyrians detested the Jews. (In fact, the Assyrians destroyed the ten tribes of Israel, located in the northern kingdom around 722 B.C.) If we put Jonah's call in perspective, it would be like the Lord telling a Christian to go to a city controlled by ISIS and assert among the Muslims who live there that Jesus Christ will destroy their city within 40 days unless they repent of their wickedness. When Jonah considered the odds of getting out of Nineveh alive, he made a choice that human nature understands. To save his life, **“Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.”** (Jonah 1:3)

Instead of traveling overland to Nineveh, Jonah went to Joppa (about 55 miles from home), and quickly boarded a ship headed in the opposite direction! Of course, you know the rest of the story. The Ninevites repented and the city was spared from destruction for about 160 years!

The stories of Balaam and Jonah have been briefly examined to highlight the following points:

The Lord may call us, as Jonah, to perform a task we would rather not do. The Lord sent Jonah to Nineveh because the Lord knew the king had a good heart. The Holy Spirit was able, through Jonah, to impress the king with the validity of God's threat. The Holy Spirit also touched the hearts of unbelieving Ninevites when they saw the king's humility. The king decreed: **"Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from His fierce anger so that we will not perish."** (Jonah 3:8,9)

Balaam had a defect of character, yet God used his recklessness to accomplish important objectives in ways we could not have imagined!

Jonah and Balaam are good examples showing us what the Holy Spirit accomplishes when an ordinary person is willing to obey His prompting.

One final point:

When the 144,000 begin their ministry, God is going to remove their sinful natures so they will faithfully obey the Holy Spirit's direction without carnal influence. This has never happened before! They will speak the testimony of Jesus, regardless of the consequences. They will be persecuted and suffer in the extreme for Jesus. Nothing will deter them and no defect will be in them because the Holy Spirit will empower them to overcome the world as Jesus overcame the world. Because the temptations and challenges which the 144,000 will face will be far greater than people with sinful natures can overcome, the Lord will perform a miracle within them. He will complete the deposit and seal them. **"Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a *deposit*, guaranteeing what [the completion that] is to come."** (2 Corinthians 1:21,22, insertion and italic mine)

## Not by Might nor by Power, but by My Spirit – Part 5

In this series of articles, we are exploring how the Holy Spirit works with prophets and individuals. We have considered how prophets can make mistakes either through willful disobedience (like Jonah) or allowing their sinful natures to overcome their spiritual natures (like Balaam). We have also learned disobeying God can have severe consequences, even death (which the younger prophet experienced after the older prophet lied to him). Fortunately, the Lord is gracious and slow to anger, and His love for us knows no bounds. (Psalm 103:8) God wants no one to perish (2 Peter 3:9); but His patience has limits. If a person consistently rebels and rejects the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit will leave and demons will have free reign.

After the Children of Israel occupied Canaan and Joshua died, the Lord raised men and women as judges to lead Israel. The prophet Samuel was one of Israel's final judges (1 Samuel 7:15-17) and the reach of the Philistines were subdued during his administration. (1 Samuel 7:13) When Samuel was near the end of his life, he appointed his two sons to be successors. This was a serious mistake because they were ungodly, totally unlike their father. The elders of Israel could see Israel's future was in jeopardy. So they went to Samuel and said **"Give us a King to lead us."** (1 Samuel 8:6) During the time of the judges, Israel was a theocracy with God as Israel's king. However, the elders did not want to continue a system of governance where various judges ruled, they wanted a king (1 Samuel 8:7,19) so Israel's government would be similar to neighboring nations. The elders rejected God, but He graciously accepted their request. Little did they know their request for a king would have grim, long-term consequences for the nation.

Shortly after, God told Samuel he had chosen a thirty-year old man to be Israel's first king. Events leading up to Saul's anointing indicate the selection process should have been a faith-building experience for the new king. (1 Samuel 9 & 10) Saul belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, the smallest of the twelve tribes. He was handsome and a head taller than anyone else in Israel. One day, his father Kish, sent him to perform a menial task of searching for some donkeys that had strayed. While searching, Saul's servant recommended a nearby "seer" might help find the donkeys. When they inquired of Samuel, the seer assured Saul the donkeys had been found. Later, Samuel told Saul that God had chosen him as Israel's king and privately anointed him. Then, Samuel gave Saul very specific instructions and foretold some upcoming events: Saul would meet two men on the road who would tell him the donkeys had been found; he would meet three men with goats, bread, and wine; the Holy Spirit would come upon him outside Gibeah enabling him to prophesy; finally, Samuel predicted Saul would be changed, through the power of the Holy Spirit, into a leader of men. (1 Samuel 10:6) These events occurred exactly as Samuel described; and when people who formerly knew Saul saw him prophesying, they were astonished, asking if he was also a prophet! (1 Samuel 10:11)

Later, Samuel summoned Israel to Mizpah so the Lord could show the nation His choice of king. The process to reveal Saul as "the Lord's chosen" began by casting the lot, narrowing

the possibilities – first by tribe, then clan, and then family. (1 Samuel 10:20) This process left no room for speculation. Israel knew it was the same process used to condemn Achan of stealing. (Joshua 7:14) Saul had a commanding appearance, but was naturally shy and hid among the travelers' baggage. He was reluctant to accept the position of king. True, God had changed his heart, but Saul, like Samson, was only a leader of men for as long as the Holy Spirit dwelled within him. After Saul was found, Samuel presented him to the crowd, **“Samuel said to all the people, ‘Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people.’ Then the people shouted, ‘Long live the king!’ ”** (1 Samuel 10:24) However, some detractors at the meeting disputed his qualifications to be king.

The Lord gave Holy Spirit power to Saul and helped Saul get started as king. Saul defeated the Ammonites and his victory silenced the claims of his antagonists. (1 Samuel 11:6) Saul knew the victory was from the Lord and he gave the Lord credit saying, **“for this day the Lord has rescued Israel.”** (1 Samuel 11:13) After Israel defeated the Ammonites, Samuel called the people to Gilgal to reaffirm the Lord had chosen Saul as king. Samuel also used this event to give King Saul and everyone present a dire warning: **“If you fear the Lord and serve and obey Him and do not rebel against His commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the Lord your God – good! But if you do not obey the Lord, and if you rebel against His commands, His hand will be against you, as it was against your fathers.”** (1 Samuel 12:14,15)

To admonish Israel's evil in demanding a king, Samuel said God would send thunder and rain that same day. There was so much thunder and rain that the gathering feared for their lives. Some of the elders realized they had made a mistake in demanding a king (an earthly king cannot command rain to fall), but Samuel encouraged them to serve the Lord faithfully: **“Be sure to fear the Lord and serve Him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things He has done for you. Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will be swept away.”** (1 Samuel 12:24,25)

You may think God chose Saul because he was a great person and the Holy Spirit enabled him to prophesy because he was a righteous man. You may also think the Holy Spirit changed Saul from a bashful man into a leader of men because he recognized his dependence on God. Unfortunately, this was not the case. The story of King Saul is one of the saddest in the Bible. Saul was a person whom the Holy Spirit could have blessed immeasurably, but instead, he rejected a Spirit-filled life and allowed his sinful nature to take control.

Saul was impatient and this defect of character showed up early in his administration. One day, his son Jonathan attacked a Philistine outpost at Gibeah and in retaliation, many Philistines gathered, **“as numerous as the sand on the seashore,”** to fight Israel. Saul assembled Israel at Gilgal to repel the Philistines, but the size of the horde struck fear in every Israelite as well as its king. (1 Samuel 13) Previously, while they were at Gibeah, Samuel had told Saul to wait seven days at Gilgal so he could arrive and offer a burnt offering to the Lord before going into battle. (1 Samuel 10:8) Meanwhile, during those seven days Saul's army began to melt and scatter out of fear. Seeing his strength disappear and fearing defeat and humiliation, King Saul made an “executive decision.” He offered a burnt offering before the Lord, directly violating Samuel's instruction and God's command that only priests from the tribe of Levi were

appointed to present sacrifices to the Lord. (Leviticus 1:7) On a few occasions and to fulfill His plans, God did select non-Levites such as Gideon, Elijah, and Samuel to offer sacrifices. Samuel was from the tribe of Ephraim. He was not a priest descended from the tribe of Levi, but he was dedicated to God at birth and God chose him to serve as the judge and priest in Israel after Eli's death. Samuel was a forerunner of Jesus who would later appear from the tribe of Judah, but Jesus would serve as man's High Priest in Heaven's temple. (Hebrews 8:1-7)

Saul's impatience prevented his sons from succeeding him. (1 Samuel 13:13,14) The Lord's punishment may seem extreme unless you understand two things. First, Saul violated a fundamental statute God established from the time of Moses separating church from the state. Moses was appointed as a judge, Aaron was appointed as a priest. Judges and later, kings, were appointed to take care of matters pertaining to government. Priests took care of matters pertaining to God. God did this because the sinful nature is selfish, self-seeking, and predatory. When the authority of church and state is invested in one person having a sinful nature, the result always becomes an oppressive church/state because the ruler has absolute authority (meaning, there is no appeal). Saul violated the separation of church and state and it cost his offspring their claim to succeed as king. Saul reigned as king for forty-two years. Second, Saul lost his faith in God when he saw the great horde of Philistines. He focused on what was visible instead of Holy Spirit power which is invisible. Rather than wait for Samuel and depend on the Lord for victory, Saul did what seemed best from human perspective. The problem is God's ways and our ways are not the same! God was prepared to give Saul and the Israelites a resounding victory over their enemies. Israel prevailed, but not gloriously or as completely as the Lord wanted.

During his reign, even though Saul had military victories, the Bible reveals more about his foolish choices. During the battle at Gibeath, Saul asked Ahijah, the priest in charge of the Ark of the Covenant, to bring the Ark to the battle. Bible translators do not agree whether Saul requested the Ark or the linen ephod (the priestly robe containing the urim and thummim to answer questions and reveal God's will). I favor the idea Saul wanted the Ark, the very presence of God, on the battlefield because Israel's army knew of these instructions: **“Hear, O Israel, today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not be terrified or give way to panic before them. For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory.”** (Deuteronomy 20:3-4)

Saul's son, Jonathan, along with his armor-bearer, did not wait for Saul to start the battle. The Holy Spirit moved Jonathan and his armor-bearer to initiate a skirmish which disrupted the Philistine army. When Saul saw the Philistines in a panic, he told the priest, Ahijah, to withdraw his hand (1 Samuel 14:19) so he could immediately battle the Philistines in their weakened state. Despite the fact Saul had asked for the assistance of the priest, he did not wait to see what the Lord would have him do. Saul anticipated the possibility of victory and this was more important than building a “trust and obey” relationship with God.

Most people who know anything about King Saul have heard about the event which caused the Lord to permanently turn His back on Saul for the remainder of his reign. One day, Samuel gave Saul a specific message from the Lord, **“Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally**

**destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.”** (1 Samuel 15:3)

This command has tormented Christians for centuries and because of it, many Christians think the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New Testament. How could a God of love command the death of innocent children and infants? In fact, how could a God of love drown all of the human race, including children and infants, in Noah’s flood?

The answer is quite simple if you understand the [Full Cup Principle](#). The principle works this way: When a group of people become so wicked that extended grace has no redemptive effect, God destroys that group of people because He loves the oncoming generation just as much as He loves the present generation. By destroying a group of rebellious people, the land is set free of their evil and seductive influence. This means oncoming generations are not contaminated by the sins of the previous generation. Additionally, the destruction of children and infants does not mean they are lost. In fact, it is just the opposite. *All* who die as children and infants will be saved at the Second Coming! God’s saving grace covers them because He does not assign guilt to minors. (For more information on this topic, refer to *The Wake Up Report!*, [“Will Children be Saved or Lost?”](#))

Saul knew what the Lord wanted, but chose to do otherwise. When confronted by Samuel, Saul defended his disobedience saying his men had saved the best of the animals for a burnt offering to the Lord. Later, he said he was afraid of his soldiers because they wanted to keep the best of the animals. I suspect Saul did not kill Agag the Amalekite king because Saul had a mean streak within him and wanted to parade Agag before Israel before torturing him to death in retaliation for his military conquests against Israel. Samuel told Saul, **“You have rejected the word of the Lord [spoken to me by the Holy Spirit], and the Lord has rejected you as king over Israel!”** (1 Samuel 15:26, insertion mine) After this event, the Lord had nothing more to do with the king whom He had chosen!

Saul’s life is recorded for our benefit. Saul experienced the power and presence of God in his life, but he did not totally surrender to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was able to influence and impress Saul at various places and times in his life, but the moments passed and Saul forgot them. If Saul ever experienced the miracle of being born again, he abandoned it. Saul did not seek a “trust and obey” relationship with the Lord each day; consequently, when tested, Saul was not able to resist temptations. Finally, after years of endeavor to win him over, Saul committed the unpardonable sin and the Holy Spirit left him. The Bible simply says, **“Now the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul.”** (1 Samuel 16:14)

In closing, there are three points I hope you will consider: First, God chose a defective man to be the first king of Israel. To help him overcome his defects and be the king Israel needed, God sent Samuel to help him. Second, God occasionally gave Holy Spirit power to this defective man. Saul prophesied and he was changed from a bashful man into a leader. The Lord also gave him compelling victories over his enemies, but Saul gained no victory over himself. Saul did not surrender each day to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Saul committed the unpardonable sin by allowing his sinful nature to have control. Paul wrote, **“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. . . . the sinful**

**mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.**" (Romans 8:5-8) Finally, what does it mean to have a relationship with God? Jesus said **"True worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks."** (John 4:23) Saul did not develop a relationship with God because he shut out the Spirit and rejected almost every truth the Holy Spirit tried to show him. Saul's life was ruled by his flesh. Next month, we will examine Saul's descent into demonic torment.

## “Not by Might nor by Power, but by My Spirit” - Part 6 | The Unpardonable Sin

WUAS continues to receive questions and requests for help regarding demonic torment and possession because there is increasing fear and awareness of this phenomenon. My recommendations for achieving freedom from demonic torment are presented in this short video series. ([youtube.com/playlist?list=PLCjTA\\_z\\_\\_Ocqw-RibYLRNjUD9ORBZXclq](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLCjTA_z__Ocqw-RibYLRNjUD9ORBZXclq))

During the past two months, we have studied King Saul's descent into demonic torment. Ultimately, he committed the unpardonable sin and the Lord refused to speak to him again. (1 Samuel 28:6) Two years ago, I spoke with a woman who was worried she had committed the unpardonable sin. She believed she had rejected the Holy Spirit and thought she was forever lost. She could not sleep; she was paralyzed with fear. She wanted to know if she could be saved. Can a demon possess a person who has not committed the unpardonable sin?

### **Deliverance from Demon Possession is Possible!**

A person can slide into demonic territory and be tormented by demons without committing the unpardonable sin. A story found in Mark 5:1-20 and also Matthew 8:28-34 illustrates this point. A demon-possessed man (or two men, depending on the gospel account) lived among the tombs on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. If anyone tried to subdue him, the demons would use supernatural strength and break the chains. **“Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.”** (Mark 5:5) When Jesus arrived, the man bowed before Him and a demon spoke through his mouth shouting, **“ ‘What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? [Notice, the demon knew who Jesus was even though Israel did not.] Swear to God that You won't torture me!’ For Jesus had said to him, ‘Come out of this man, you evil spirit!’ ”** (Mark 5:7-8, insertion mine)

Jesus sent the demons into a nearby herd of pigs which immediately rushed down a steep bank into the lake and drowned. The townspeople who saw or heard about the event were amazed and frightened and pleaded with Jesus to leave town. The key element in this story is after Jesus cast the demons out, **“The man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with Him [Jesus]. Jesus did not let him, but said, ‘Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you.’ So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis [a large area on the eastern border of the Roman Empire] how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.”** (Mark 5:18-20, insertions mine)

From outward appearances, this man had committed the unpardonable sin. A demon possessed and controlled him. Yet, even in his darkest and most painful hour, the Holy Spirit was still present. After Jesus set him free, the Holy Spirit did a great work within him. He had a firsthand testimony that attested to Jesus' divinity. This story should encourage individuals who worry they have traveled too far down the path of sin to ever find a way out!

## Corporate Blasphemy

Certain groups of people have become so hardened by sin (Mark 5) redemption is impossible. For example, when the Holy Spirit sees a nation or city reach a point where degeneracy is overpowering, He tells the Father and God's wrath breaks out. Often, God's judgments are mixed with mercy because He wants to save those who will repent. God's management of the curse of sin explains the rise and fall of many nations. Even Nineveh, which repented for a time, had to be destroyed because it reverted to its sinful ways.

We must not forget the Lord destroyed the world in Noah's day because the antediluvians were unwilling to repent. The Lord offered a plan for safety, but only eight persons took advantage of His mercy. The Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. And, if you properly understand Daniel 9 and Matthew 23, the Lord destroyed His own people and Jerusalem in A.D. 70 for rebellion. When God destroys a group for degenerate behavior, He does not necessarily condemn everyone within the group even though the righteous perish with the wicked. When Jesus judges the victims of God's wrath, each person is judged on his own merits, according to his life's record. Therefore, God provides mercy for individuals in a condemned group even when there is no mercy for the group. Incidentally, we are about to experience this scenario. The Lord will soon kill approximately two billion people (one fourth of Earth's population – Revelation 6:7,8) because the world has reached a point of no return. However, in God's mercy, He will save righteous individuals killed by the coming judgments!

It takes much rebellion and defiance to commit the unpardonable sin. The Holy Spirit loves us immensely, as does the Father and Jesus. The Bible does not say much about the unpardonable sin, but Jesus gave us a clear definition for both this age and the age to come! Jesus said, **“And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.”** (Matthew 12:31-32, *italics mine*)

## **BOLO = “Be On the Look Out” for Demonic Activity!**

Demonic activity will continue to increase until Jesus returns. The devil is furious with God because he has failed to usurp God's throne and Satan knows as surely as Jesus died on the cross, he and his demons will receive God's justice. **“But woe to the Earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”** (Revelation 12:12) Satan will utilize any foothold to gain control of a person's life. Be sober and vigilant, because the devil lurks behind every temptation. Some Christians believe they are not susceptible to demonic torment because the Holy Spirit has placed a “security fence” around them. Do not be fooled; demons are actively working to break the fence. They specialize in areas where we are most vulnerable. The devil will do everything possible to ruin a Christian because it “kills two birds with one stone!” First, there may be one less person receiving eternal life. Second, when a Christian falls, his example negatively impacts others. The devil knows one Christian's failure has the potential to make others within his circle of influence also fall. Non-Christians are sometimes jubilant when a “so-called”

Christian fails, especially if he is a religious leader. Of course, the family and friends of fallen Christians are sorrowful when they see a brother or sister fall. Sin always creates turmoil in the church; social consequences follow because of differences on Christian discipline. (See [wake-up.org/?p=3878](https://wake-up.org/?p=3878) and [wake-up.org/?p=3910](https://wake-up.org/?p=3910).) We must always be on guard! BOLO!

## **Have I Committed the Unpardonable Sin?**

We often receive this question, "Have I committed the unpardonable sin?" This is often followed by a second question, "Will Jesus save me since I am so unworthy of being saved?" Satan uses these questions to discourage people. We have seen in this study Jesus does rescue people who seem to have no chance of being saved.

If you are concerned you may have committed the unpardonable sin, you have not! Those who have committed the unpardonable sin, do not have spiritual interest because they are spiritually dead. Therefore, if you are worried about the unpardonable sin, it is the Holy Spirit working within you. He has not given up on you! Jesus calls us to repentance when we are most likely to respond and the Holy Spirit relays the call! Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Jesus encourages us to understand and accept the wonderful gifts of sanctification and justification.

If you are a captive of your sinful nature or demonic torment, if you are burdened with guilt and self-loathing, stop and ask Jesus to send the Holy Spirit so you can be transformed and set free. Do it today! The name of Jesus has power! Each day, ask Jesus to heal you of your rebellion and give you victory over sin. Then believe He has heard your prayer. Surrender your life to Jesus and follow the Holy Spirit's guidance. Tell the Lord you want to learn and exalt His teachings; you want to live and love as He did. The Holy Spirit can make a born-again saint out of a sinner in no time! Of course, if a person repeatedly insists on living and dying in his sin, the Holy Spirit has to accept his exercise of free will. Only when the Holy Spirit has done everything possible short of violating the power of choice, will He cease working for that person's redemption.

The Great Tribulation will soon begin. There will be 144,000 servants of God speaking for Jesus and performing miracles. There will also be at least 144,000 false prophets speaking for Lucifer and performing miracles. The Holy Spirit will work through God's servants with great power to convince people they need to comply with four testing messages sent from God's throne. Complying with these four messages will be difficult because of persecution. Be encouraged, the Holy Spirit will give us strength and courage as needed if we obey the gospel of Jesus! This is how the sheep will be separated from the goats!

## **Would You Have Thought Jesus Committed Blasphemy?**

If you were alive when Jesus began His ministry, what would you have thought of Him? Imagine you are living in A.D. 27. First, Jesus is homely and unremarkable in appearance. (Isaiah 53:2) He is 30 years old and still a pauper! He is a common laborer... a carpenter. He is from a village known for rebellion (Nazareth) and we know His mother and brothers. (John 2:12) He claims to have come from Heaven, but He was born in Bethlehem. By worldly standards, He

is uneducated (John 7:15) and so are His young disciples. (Acts 4:13) Although He speaks with sincerity and works miracles, His words are difficult to understand and the significance of His parables makes no sense. You have to ask yourself how He can claim to be the Son of God when His claim violates the Scriptures which states there is only *one* God. If He actually is the "Son of God," He is a second God which is impossible. Everyone in Israel knows when Messiah comes, He will overthrow the Romans and establish God's kingdom. Jesus makes no effort to do this. Finally, the high priest with all the priests, scribes, and experts reject His claims saying He is blasphemous. What would you say?

This little description of the environment that confronted Jesus hopefully shows you how easy it must have been to reject Him. What we see with our eyes is rarely the whole story. We need Holy Spirit discernment or we will make horrible decisions that have eternal consequences! Paul wrote, **"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and cannot understand them, because they are spiritually [Holy Spirit] discerned."** (1 Corinthians 2:14, insertion mine)

Very few people received Jesus as the Messiah when He was on Earth because most people did not have Holy Spirit discernment. Most people do not have Holy Spirit discernment today. When the 144,000 begin their ministry, they will look like ordinary people. They will be speaking the testimony of Jesus the same way Jesus spoke the testimony of the Father. **"For I did not speak of My own accord, but the Father who sent Me commanded Me what to say and how to say it."** (John 12:49) The whole world will be confronted with God's truth; the wicked will persecute and torture and kill the 144,000 just like Israel's leaders crucified Jesus.

Of course, all who are led by the Spirit (Romans 8:14) will eventually recognize Jesus is speaking through the 144,000. They will rejoice and embrace God's messages and overcome the world through faith! When Jesus sees saints passing testing truths, He will put His seal of ownership in their foreheads and rescue them from bondage of the sinful nature. This freedom will be far more extraordinary than being delivered from Egyptian or Babylonian slavery. What do you think?

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

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 1,264<sup>th</sup> 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)