

## **The Holy Spirit**

### ***Lesson 1: God's Presence With His People***

#### **Preliminary matters**

I don't know all there is to know about the Holy Spirit, and I'm Ok with that. I'm not trying to make excuses, just being up-front and honest about the matter. In starting this discussion of the Spirit I hope we can all acknowledge that there are some things we do not know about the Spirit or else we may find ourselves in the position of the theologians who argued and debated how many angels could fit on a pin's head (I think it's 857). Moses reminded Israel that "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). There are some things regarding the Spirit that God has not revealed to us, but those He has revealed we can know and appreciate. We need to bear that in mind as we proceed in these lessons lest we argue and disagree about things we do not know. Our aim in this series is to establish what can be known because God revealed it to us. Looking at what God revealed will rule out some notions of how the Spirit works, will help us to see the historical and ongoing significance of the Spirit's work and help us appreciate what the Spirit means in the life of every Christian.

One other matter needs to be addressed before we move on: the danger of reactionary thinking. So many erroneous things have been said historically about the indwelling of the Spirit that some have reacted negatively to any notion of the Spirit being actively involved in our lives today. I can sympathize in part seeing as John Calvin's misguided understanding of the Spirit served as justification for his doctrine of predestination and the Pentecostal movement's misrepresentation of the Spirit continues to confuse many. Likewise, many are concerned by the preponderance of modern day teachers who speak of the Spirit "moving" and "leading" them, even though some of what those teachers say is in conflict with plain Bible teaching. However, we must not react to distortion of the Scriptures by distorting or ignoring them ourselves.

In short, our goal and aim is to be Biblical. If our understanding of the Spirit matches what the Bible says, good. If the Bible reveals that our understanding is incomplete, then our understanding needs to grow. And if the Bible doesn't answer all of our questions about the Spirit, then we need to accept that there are just some things we are not suppose to know.

#### **God's Presence Among Israel**

"For we are the temple of the living God..." (2 Corinthians 6:16). It is Biblical to say that God dwells with, even in, His people. Questions are raised over exactly how this occurs, questions we will examine later, but the Bible is clear that it does occur. Three times in the Corinthian correspondence Paul refers to this indwelling in terms of believers being God's temple (see also 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). To understand the significance of Christians being God's temple we must return to the Old Testament Scriptures and examine the importance of first the tabernacle and then the temple, to see what it meant for God's presence to be among the nation of Israel.

It was at Sinai that Israel would enter into covenant relationship with Jehovah, the One who delivered them from bondage (Exodus 19:5-6). A fundamental part of the covenant relationship was the Law, God's instructions to the people that would prompt holy and

consecrated lives. The preamble to the Law, the Ten Commandments, were famously issued by the voice of God in Exodus 20, but note that as God was about to descend on Mt. Sinai, Moses was warned that no one was to approach or touch the mountain. Anyone who did so would die (19:10-13). **The Point: Israel was unfit to be in God's presence.** Chapters 20-24 form the basis of Israel's covenant with God, the book of the covenant is read to the elders of the people, fidelity is sworn, sacrifice is made and the blood applied to ratify the covenant (24:3-8). Immediately following this scene, Moses receives instructions for God's sanctuary, a place "that I may dwell among them," (25:8). Moses was then given a pattern to follow (25:9) in constructing the tabernacle, God's sanctuary (see chapters 25-31). If you have not read these chapters in a while, do so to be impressed with the qualities of the materials that were to be used in making a sanctuary fit for God and to see the sacrifices required to consecrate the articles of the tabernacle and the men who would serve as priests. **The holiness of God's tabernacle was clearly demonstrated in its divine pattern, the costly materials and the blood spilt for its consecration.**

Sadly, Israel broke its covenant with Jehovah immediately after those instructions were given, constructing a golden calf and worshipping it (chapter 32). Moses' throwing the tablets to the ground and breaking them (32:19) wasn't simply an act of righteous anger, it was symbolic of Israel's forsaking their covenant with God! The Lord was ready to righteously punish the nation, but the intercession of Moses stayed God's anger. The Lord relented, but note this words to Moses: "Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for *I will not go up in your midst*, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way" (33:3). Moses was terrified by the prospect and entreated the Lord: "If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here. For how can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? *Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the other people* who are upon the face of the earth?" (33:15-16). **Law alone would not distinguish this people, but the presence of God with them. However, His presence with them depended on fidelity to the covenant, keeping His Law.**

Exodus 35-39 records the construction of the tabernacle while Israel was at Mt. Sinai. In chapter 40 the tabernacle is erected and sanctified by blood sacrifice, all culminating with the glorious event recorded in vs. 34-35, "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." Significantly, these events are referred to in Isaiah 63:11-14 as the time when God "put His Holy Spirit in the midst of them". God's presence, the Holy Spirit, was now in a holy sanctuary. His presence was now with the people. His presence as symbolized by the ark of the covenant would lead the people into the promised land (Joshua 3:13-17) and give them victory over their enemies (cf. Joshua 6:6-11).

## **The Temple**

Approximately 500 years after the tabernacle's construction, a permanent temple was built by Solomon. No expense was spared in its construction and to consecrate God's new dwelling place, Solomon "sacrificed so many sheep and oxen they could not be counted or numbered," (1Kings 8:5). As with the tabernacle before, God's presence filled the new sanctuary (1Kings 8:10-11). Solomon's prayer of dedication recorded in vs. 22-53 shows that he understood the significance of God's presence with the people. He did not presume that God

could be contained by such a structure (vs. 27) and recognized that God's presence among the people was essential to their future blessings and well-being. Significantly, Solomon reminded the people that for the Lord to "maintain the cause of His servant and the cause of His people Israel," (vs. 59) the people must "Let your heart therefore be wholly devoted to the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments, as at this day," (vs. 61).

Tragically, Israel failed to keep Solomon's charge, repeatedly violating the Lord's covenant. Solomon's unfaithfulness to the covenant resulted in the dividing of the Kingdom after his death in ~931 B.C. (1Kings 11:9-13). The Assyrian Empire removed the northern kingdom of Israel some 200 years later, because God's people "rejected His statutes and His covenant which He made with their fathers and His warnings with which He warned them," (2Kings 17:15). The southern kingdom of Judah, the kingdom still ruled by the Davidic line, would hang-on for 100 years longer, but ultimately God used the Babylonians to remove the majority from the land, destroying the capital of Jerusalem and the temple. As horrible as the punishment seems, it was just for the people "despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, until there was no remedy," (2Chron. 36:16).

Ezekiel was God's prophet to the Jews in captivity before Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. His was a difficult charge as he spoke God's word to a people who were rebellious (Ezekiel 2:3-5), a people who had misplaced confidence in the fact that the temple still stood in Jerusalem (see Jeremiah 7:4). However, Ezekiel had a stark message for the captives: the temple may exist, but it's Glory is gone. Chapters 7-11 are significant in understanding God's message to this stubborn people:

- Their covenant breaking, continued wickedness, was denounced in chapter 7.
- Their rampant idolatry, in the temple no less, was cataloged and condemned in chapter 8.
- God's vengeance on the city of Jerusalem is pictured in chapter 9.
- The Glory of the Lord, His presence, departs the temple (10:18-19) and then the city (11:23).

**God's presence cannot be with a people who disregard His word, who violate His covenant. And as is seen in the captivity, when God's presence is not with a people, the result is disaster!**

God promised that the temple would be rebuilt, declaring some 200 years before the event that the Persian king Cyrus would rebuild Jerusalem and the temple (Isa. 44:28). Ezekiel's prophecies end with hope for the people, even seeing the glory of the Lord returning to Jerusalem and inhabiting the temple (Ezekiel 43:1-5). The opening chapters of Ezra records how the first group of returning captives undertook the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, it's completion noted in Ezra 6:15. "This temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar; it was the sixth year of the reign of King Darius." Note the contrast in this temple's completion with the completion of Solomon's temple and the completion of the tabernacle. **The Lord's presence did not enter this temple!** In addressing those who built this second temple, God said through the prophet Haggai, "How is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison?" (Haggai 2:3). Yet, He promised that a day would come when "The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former... and in this place I will give peace," (2:9). As we will see, the Lord had something better and more glorious in mind for how His presence would dwell among men in the future.

## **The Promised Spirit**

The Old Testament prophets spoke during some of the darkest times in the history of God's people, times when Israel had utterly rejected their Lord and were suffering the consequences of their failure to keep covenant. While the Lord used the prophets to warn the people and foretell the coming destruction, He revealed to them glimpses of a glorious future. In this future a branch (descendant) of David would rule as King and would save the people of Judah and Israel (Jeremiah 23:5-6). This future would be based on a new covenant in which God's law would be put into the very hearts of the people and all could know Him (Jeremiah 31:31-34). But what of the Spirit in this future? Where would God's presence be, His presence that once resided in the tabernacle and the temple? **God revealed that no longer would His presence be found in a man-made temple, rather His Spirit would be "poured out" on flesh!** Through Isaiah and Ezekiel it was revealed that the pouring out of His Spirit would bring about the restoration of the people:

- "For I will pour out water on the thirsty land And streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring And My blessing on your descendants; And they will spring up among the grass Like poplars by streams of water.'" (Isaiah 44:3-4, NASB95)
- "Then they will know that I am the LORD their God because I made them go into exile among the nations, and then gathered them again to their own land; and I will leave none of them there any longer. "I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I will have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel," declares the Lord GOD." (Ezekiel 39:28-29, NASB95)

Through Ezekiel and Joel it also was revealed that the Spirit would be involved with the cleansing and salvation of the people:

- "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances." (Ezekiel 36:25-27, NASB95)
- "It will come about after this That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions. "Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. "I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, Blood, fire and columns of smoke. "The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood Before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. "And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD Will be delivered; For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem There will be those who escape, As the LORD has said, Even among the survivors whom the LORD calls." (Joel 2:28-32, NASB95)

**What a glorious future! Restoration and salvation brought about by God's Spirit being poured out!**

## **New Testament Significance**

The last two lessons in this series will examine in greater detail how the promise of the Spirit operates in our lives through revelation and confirmation, but there are some lessons to be

gleaned from this historical look at God's presence among His people. In closing, let's examine a few New Testament passages that gain added significance when viewed in historical context.

**“Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” (John 3:5, NASB95)**

Jesus' words to Nicodemus are clearly taken from the Lord's promise in Ezekiel 36:25-27. The implication being that true rebirth, the creation of a new creature worthy of the heavenly kingdom, requires baptism (being born of water), but also the Spirit. Only with the coming of God's Spirit can the restoration and salvation promised in the prophets occur. That there is a tie between baptism (water) and the Spirit also has significance in the tabernacle and temple of Israel. Recall that God's presence entered those structures only AFTER they had been sanctified and consecrated by sacrifice. In baptism one is sanctified and consecrated by the blood of Christ making one an acceptable dwelling for the presence of God. Having been baptized and now possessing God's Spirit, we are fit for God's kingdom. (Note: we've not yet defined what possessing God's Spirit means. We will seek to do so in the final lesson).

**“Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38, NASB95)**

Sincere brethren have long debated what is meant by receiving “the gift of the Holy Spirit,” some concluding that the gift is what the Spirit gives, while others believe with equal conviction that the “gift” is the Spirit. For most of my life I believed that the gift was from the Spirit, that the gift was salvation. Perhaps this was some reactionary thinking on my part. After all, some have taken Acts 2:38 to infer that if we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, then we should be able to speak in tongues, heal the sick and do any other miracle that the apostles could perform. Peter's use of Joel 2 earlier in the text clearly indicates that the Spirit coming upon the apostles resulted in miraculous works, but even that prophecy carried the promise that the Spirit would be poured out on all flesh. That promise combined with the promises found in Isaiah 44 and Ezekiel 39 show that God's gift of the Spirit was necessary for restoration and salvation. Therefore, seeing the Spirit as the gift is the most natural way to look at the text, particularly from the standpoint of Peter's Jewish audience. They knew that the pouring out of God's spirit had been promised, now they were told that by being baptized they could receive the promised Spirit. Again, we see the same image of consecration/sanctification occurring before God's presence can dwell within a person. (Note again: we've not yet defined what receiving God's Spirit means. All we are establishing is that God promised that baptized believers would receive His Spirit.)

**“For we are the temple of the living God...” (2 Corinthians 6:16, NASB95)**

The weight of these words should be apparent, having examined the historical significance of God's presence in the temple and tabernacle. Those who have been baptized for the remission of their sins have been consecrated/sanctified and are thus prepared to be the habitation of God. This is readily apparent from Paul's use of similar wording in 1Corinthians 6. He states in vs. 11 of that passage that we are “washed... sanctified” by Christ and then in vs. 19 states that our “body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.” Let the gravity of these words sink in: **WE ARE WHERE GOD DWELLS AMONG MEN!** Now, consider what we have learned from

Israel's history. God could only dwell among the people so far as they kept covenant with Him. When Israel broke covenant with God, they made it impossible for His presence to remain with them, so the Glory of the Lord departed from His sanctuary. It is significant that all three occurrences of temple language in Paul's Corinthian correspondence occur in the context of covenant violation. Division was the context of 1Cor. 3:16-17, fornication in 1Cor. 6:19 and evil companionship in 2Cor. 6:16. Paul's point was simple and emphatic: **break covenant and that has serious ramifications for God's dwelling place!**

Let us conclude with that admonition. Whatever understanding we reach concerning the indwelling of God's Spirit, the fact is that we serve as God's temple. So, it matters what we do with this temple. Our faithfulness to His covenant matters, because there lies our assurance that God will dwell with us!