

THE SPIRIT ABOVE THE WATERS

*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 1:2)*

"In the beginning God created." With these five majestic words, the Bible declares that God Himself stands alone before the creation of the universe. How does He create the world? What is His first step? Genesis 1:2 informs us that the Holy Spirit was "hovering" above the waters. The word "hovering" suggests a bird tenderly protecting her helpless children in the nest.

Although much is shrouded in mystery, we may be sure of this: God's Spirit was there in the beginning, taking the formless mass, moving through the darkness, filling the emptiness, preparing the way for God to speak the creative word and bring light into the world.

Think of it! The mighty Spirit of God hovers over all creation. Without the Spirit, nothing that is made will come into being. He is there in the beginning, He moves through the chaos and darkness, He protects the prenatal creation.

We may be encouraged that God's Holy Spirit still hovers over the darkness today. Though we may not see Him or feel Him or reach out and touch him, yet He is there. He still moves through the emptiness of life, preparing the way for God to bring us out of the darkness and into the light once again.

O Lord, as Your Spirit once hovered over the dark chaos of creation, help me to believe that in the darkness of my life You are still there, still watching, still protecting. Thank You that the light of Your presence will shine again in my life. Amen.

BREATH OF LIFE

And the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)

The Hebrew word *ruah* can be translated "breath" or "spirit." The phrase "breath of life," therefore, refers to more than simply the air that Adam breathed. It is the animating life force that comes only from God's Spirit. By itself, the body is simply "the dust of the ground"—a collection of chemical elements bound together as water and protein. But life comes only from the inbreathing of God's Spirit.

All that we are and have we owe to God who has brought us to life by His Spirit. What a contrast to many who boast of their worldly achievements—money, fame, and power. But those things do not last forever. All of it returns to the dust eventually.

Life comes only from God—a fact true both on the physical and spiritual planes. Just as we owe our physical life to the Spirit of God, we also owe our spiritual life to Him as well. For without the "inbreathing" of God's Spirit in the work of regeneration, we could not be born again.

Thank You, Father, for giving me the breath of life. Thank You also for the gracious work of Your Spirit in breathing into me new life through Jesus Christ. Amen.

MY SPIRIT

Then the Lord said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years." (Genesis 6:3)

Racing across the generations, we come to the evil days before the great Flood. Instead of getting better, mankind had gone steadily downward. From the beauty of Eden, man swam in the gutter of open sin. The mighty sons of God (perhaps human rulers indwelt by evil spirits) saw the daughters of men (women willing to give themselves to immorality). The result of this ungodly union was the "nephilim"—mighty heroes who were themselves "fallen ones" (the literal meaning of the Hebrew word). Though powerful and mighty and able to "fall upon" others, they were sinners doomed to death like all other men.

The world was ripe for judgment because God saw evil covering the earth like a dirty blanket. Every thought of man's heart was rotten and corrupt. But even in this desperate situation, God's Spirit was not absent. He was "striving" or "contending" with mankind. Because He is the Spirit of truth, He constantly strives with men to move them toward truth and righteousness.

But the warning is clear. God's Spirit will not strive with man forever. Those who refuse His voice will eventually face God's judgment. In the days of Noah, God withheld final judgment for 120 years, but the rains of judgment finally fell from heaven,

and a mighty flood covered the entire earth. Only Noah and his family were saved.

No one knows when judgment will finally fall, but sooner or later those who reject God's mercy will face His wrath.

Spirit of God, give me listening ears to hear Your voice speaking to me. May I never take You for granted, but respond quickly to Your leading in my life. Amen.

THE SERVANT

So he said, "I am Abraham's servant."

(Genesis 24:34)

A quick scan of Genesis 24 reveals that the Holy Spirit is mentioned nowhere. What we find instead is a delightful story of the aged Abraham sending his servant five hundred miles to find a bride for his son Isaac. Where is the Holy Spirit in this story? Many Bible students see the servant as a beautiful illustration of the Holy Spirit's work in salvation. In a general sense, we know that Abraham's offering of his son Isaac on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22), is a picture of the Father offering His Son at the cross. A similar symbolism may be seen in Genesis 24. Just as Abraham sought a bride for Isaac, even so our Heavenly Father seeks a bride for His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:26-27). Furthermore, the servant was sent on a particular mission—to find a bride. He travels a great distance with but one goal in mind—to find a bride for his master's son. In the same way, the Holy Spirit moves across the earth wooing and winning men and women for Jesus Christ. The servant says nothing on his own behalf but takes every opportunity to speak well of Isaac. Even so, the Holy Spirit speaks not of Himself but glorifies Christ (John 16:13). When the servant found Rebekah, he gave her gifts just as the Spirit gives gifts to those who are in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:11). Finally, the servant

personally accompanied Rebekah on the journey to meet Isaac. In the same way, the Holy Spirit draws us into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Perhaps the very length of Genesis 24 (67 verses) shows us something of God's heart for sinners. It was not an easy thing for the servant to find a bride for Isaac. It entailed a long and dangerous journey into unfamiliar territory. But the servant would not be turned away. Neither will the Holy Spirit be turned aside from His holy calling to find a bride for the Son of God.

Thank You, Father, for sending Your Spirit into the world to draw me to the Savior. Amen.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD

So Pharaoh asked them, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?" (Genesis 41:38)

In this case, Pharaoh spoke beyond his own wisdom. As a pagan ruler, he could hardly be expected to know about the Holy Spirit. Yet he recognized something different in Joseph's life, a power that gave him the ability to correctly interpret dreams. Perhaps Pharaoh thought that Joseph was following one of the many gods worshiped by the nations surrounding Egypt. Or perhaps he did in fact know (because Joseph told him) that this was the work of the Spirit of God.

But Pharaoh saw something in Joseph that couldn't be explained through any natural means. It was partly the ability to interpret dreams and partly the wisdom of the man himself. Both came from the Spirit of God.

When the Holy Spirit moves in our lives, even unbelievers will know the difference. Just as Joseph was promoted to become the Prime Minister of Egypt, even so the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives will open doors for greater service to God and man.

Holy Spirit, fill me with Your power so that even those who don't know You may see the difference You make in my life. Amen.

OIL

So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power. (1 Samuel 16:13)

Once the Lord rejected Saul as king, that meant a new ruler had to be found. But where should Samuel begin looking? The Lord directed him to go to "Jesse of Bethlehem," for the Lord had chosen one of his sons to be the next king. But which one would it be? One by one, Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel. Each time the Lord told Samuel, "Not this one." Only one son was left, the youngest, a boy named David, but he was out tending the sheep. When David was brought before Samuel, the Lord said, "He is the one." Whereupon Samuel anointed David with oil, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in great power.

Oil is a familiar biblical symbol of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, priests and kings were anointed with oil as a means of setting them apart for special service to God. Oil also was used as fuel for lamps and for cleansing and sanctifying. In the New Testament, Jesus sent out the Twelve to minister in His name. They cast out demons and anointed sick people with oil (Mark 6:7-13). In James 5:14 we find instructions regarding elders anointing the sick with oil.

Just as the priests and kings must first be anointed with oil before service can begin, so the power

of the Holy Spirit is necessary for all effective service for God. Just as oil is necessary for the lamp to give off light, so it is the Holy Spirit who gives us power to shine as the light of the world. Just as oil sanctifies priests and lepers, so the Holy Spirit sanctifies the children of God. Anointing the sick with oil reminds both the sick and the well that all true healing rests in God's hands alone.

Psalm 133 compares the oil running down Aaron's beard with the blessing of unity among the people of God. The oil of the Holy Spirit lubricates the body of Christ, bringing together Christians who would otherwise be separated from one another.

Psalm 45:7 mentions the "oil of joy," while Psalm 104:15 speaks of oil that makes the face shine. In Psalm 23:5, David praises God who anointed his head with oil. These passages typify the ministry of the Holy Spirit in bringing joy to the heart of the believer.

Father, Thank You for the oil of the Holy Spirit. May the "good oil" of the Spirit flow through me today. Amen.

THE DOUBLE PORTION

*"Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,"
Elisha replied. (2 Kings 2:9)*

*The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha.
(2 Kings 2:15)*

Why did Elisha ask for a "double portion" of Elijah's spirit? The answer lies in the inheritance laws of the Old Testament. According to Deuteronomy 21:17, the firstborn son was entitled to a "double share" of the father's possessions. Although Elisha was not literally Elijah's son, he was truly his "firstborn" heir in terms of spiritual power.

Elisha was thus asking for a "double share" of the spiritual power Elijah possessed, power which came directly from the Holy Spirit at work in his life. He was not asking for material possessions, nor for a ministry twice as great as Elijah or the power to work twice as many miracles. All those things were secondary to the basic request: "May I receive a double portion of the spiritual power given to you by the Holy Spirit so that I may continue your ministry after you are gone." It was a godly request from a young man who loved his mentor.

To this request Elijah wisely replied that the power was not his to grant; the issue rested solely with God's sovereign will. No man can promise spiritual power to another. Only God can do that.

Yet the request was indeed granted. When Elisha picked up Elijah's cloak and struck the water

of the Jordan River, he cried out, "Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" (2 Kings 2:14) At those words, the waters parted, just as they had done earlier for Elijah. Seeing that, the prophets from Jericho correctly concluded that the spirit of Elijah had indeed been given to Elisha.

The secret of Elijah's ministry was the power of the Holy Spirit working in his life. When Elisha asked for the "double portion," he was asking that the same Holy Spirit work powerfully in his own life.

God granted Elisha's request because it came from a pure heart. If our motives are pure, we may freely ask God to do great things through us. God is honored when we seek the Holy Spirit's power in order to serve the Lord effectively.

Lord, as You poured out Your Spirit on the prophets of old, do it again in our day. Amen.

HAND OF GOD

Also in Judah the hand of God was on the people to give them unity of mind to carry out what the king and his officials had ordered, following the word of the Lord.

(2 Chronicles 30:12)

One of the greatest revivals of the Old Testament is recorded in 2 Chronicles 29–31. It happened when a godly king named Hezekiah repaired the temple doors and summoned the Levites to purify the house of God. He then reinstated the yearly Passover celebration, even sending a letter inviting the northern tribes to come to Jerusalem to join in the observance. He told them not to be stubborn, but to return to the Lord who is gracious and full of compassion. Many people from the north ridiculed his offer, but some men humbled themselves and went to Jerusalem. At the same time, the “hand of God” was on the people of Judah, giving them unity of spirit to welcome their separated brethren from the north.

When all the people came together from north and south, they removed the pagan altars from Jerusalem and threw them in the Kidron Valley. Then all the people ate the Passover together. For seven days there was great rejoicing, so much so that the celebration was extended for another seven days. In 2 Chronicles 30:26, we find that “There was great joy in Jerusalem,” for this was the first unified Passover since the days of King Solomon, some two hundred years earlier.

How did such a great reconciling event come about? Only because the "hand of God" stirred the people to come together in unity. It would never have happened otherwise. Ancient hostilities ran too deep; the memories of past separation kept the people of Israel and Judah from reaching out to each other. No edict of the king could have overcome the years of mistrust. Only the "hand of God" could bring the people together.

The Holy Spirit is the "hand of God" that changes hearts and minds from the inside out. Because He sees us as we are, because He knows us intimately, because He understands our fears, He can reach down within a closed heart and begin, little by little, to open it up. He is the only one who can overcome the fear built up through years of repeated injustice. His power can break down the walls that separate us from one another.

Spirit of God, You came to bring peace and unity in the body of Christ. May the hand of God bring us together and teach us to love one another. Amen.

YOUR GOOD SPIRIT

You gave your good Spirit to instruct them.
(Nehemiah 9:20)

The time: 445 B.C. The place: Jerusalem. The occasion: A day of repentance for the people of God. After Nehemiah led in rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem, Ezra led the nation in a time of spiritual renewal. Nehemiah 9 records a lengthy prayer by the Levites in which they recount the hand of God at work in the life of Israel across the generations. Despite the unbelief of the people, God had again and again shown Himself faithful.

Nehemiah 9:13–21 tells the story of God's faithfulness during the forty years in the wilderness. God gave the law and the sabbath (vv. 13–14) and sent manna from heaven and water from the rock (v. 15). He even forgave the people when they began to worship the golden calf (vv. 16–18). He led them with the cloud and pillar (v. 19), instructed them by His Spirit (v. 20), and sustained them for forty years in the desert so that they lacked for nothing (v. 21).

Verse 20 mentions "Your good Spirit" that instructed Israel in the wilderness. This may refer to those occasions in Exodus 28 and 31 where He gifted certain men who were helping to build the tabernacle and to design the priestly wardrobe. Or it may refer in a larger sense to all that God did during the wilderness experience to instruct Israel in the ways of holiness.

In any case we know that God's Spirit is a *good* Spirit. Because He is God, goodness is part of His character. All that He does is good and everything that He produces is good. Galatians 5:22 lists "goodness" as part of the fruit of the Spirit.

He is the same Spirit today because His nature is unchanged. He longs to produce in us the gracious generosity that the Bible calls goodness.

All He needs is a willing heart, and the Good Spirit of God will begin His gracious work in us.

Lord, how quickly I doubt Your goodness while traveling through the wilderness. Thank You for never leaving me even when I feel alone and overwhelmed. Amen.

YOUR SPIRIT

By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets. (Nehemiah 9:30)

This verse refers to all the prophets of Israel who faithfully warned the nation of coming judgment. It includes Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, and a host of other godly men who courageously spoke God's Word to an uncaring nation.

How did these men find the strength to carry on in a society that had chosen to reject God? They knew ahead of time that their words would be largely disregarded and they themselves would be rejected, hated, persecuted, and sometimes put to death. Being a prophet was not a good career choice in ancient Israel. It was much easier to be a baker or a farmer or a shepherd.

No one likes being rejected. Most people would rather be loved and appreciated. The only possible explanation for the prophets of Israel is that they had been called by God and empowered by God to deliver His Word.

Jeremiah spoke of the Word being like a fire in his bones that he could not hold in any longer (Jeremiah 20:9). The prophets often mentioned a "burden" from the Lord. When God calls us, He also puts a passion in our hearts for the thing He has called us to do.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit. He gives us the supernatural strength to do God's will in the face of unrelenting opposition. Are we in a similar

situation today? Fear not. The Holy Spirit will provide us with strength when we really need it.

Spirit of God, give holy zeal to Your servants today. May Your people speak Your truth without fear of the consequences. Set me afire with holy desire to do Your will. Amen.