

## CHAPTER I

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### THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The early phases of the work of the Spirit are traced through the Pentateuch, the Histories, and Wisdom Literature, for throughout the Old Testament, throughout the Old Testament era, He is adapting human nature to be the temple of God.

The Spirit of God is not so clearly set forth in the Old Testament as in the New, but He has His place from the very beginning of creation, although we shall see that long centuries of the history of the people of God must pass before the Spirit's personhood is filled out in vastly larger degree in the knowledge of the Old Testament Church. As Bavinck rightly remarked: 'The Old Testament conveys only an inexplicit indication of God's Trinitarian existence. It is [the first part] of the record of the gradually unfolding doctrine of the Trinity.'<sup>1</sup> And we must never forget that true doctrine merely follows the unfolding work of God in His creation, and the redemptive experience of His presence in and with His people over thousands of years.

Gregory of Nazianzus, who was also well aware of this slow development of divine truths, expressed succinctly (in the fourth century) this 'gradual unfolding' of complex truths in the growth of Scripture: 'You see lights breaking upon us gradually; and the order of theology, which is better for us to keep, neither proclaiming things too suddenly, nor yet keeping them hidden to the end ...'<sup>2</sup>

As far as the Holy Spirit, in the earliest parts of the Old Testament, the two main words for 'spirit' are connected to 'breath'. As Henry B. Swete wrote: 'The Hebrew *ruah*, like the Greek *pneuma* and the Latin *spiritus*, originally had a physiological and not a psychological value, denoting the human breath.'<sup>3</sup> He adds: 'The Spirit of God is the vital power which belongs to the Divine Being, and is seen to be operative in the world and

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1. H. Bavinck, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

2. Gregory Nazianzus, *op. cit.*, *The Fifth Theological Oration*, XXVII.

3. Henry Barclay Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament: A Study of Primitive Christian Teaching* (MacMillan and Co. Limited: London, 1919), p. 1.

in men. It is the Divine Energy which is the origin of all created life, and especially of human existence and the faculties of human nature.<sup>4</sup>

### The Gift at Work in Creation

We first meet the One whom we come to know as the Holy Spirit in the very first chapter of Genesis, and in the second verse: 'And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.' What we call 'absolute creation' took place as described in Genesis 1:1, when God brought all things out of nothing by the word of His power. And then verses 2-31 chronicle the process in which the material, spatial mass is shaped into a beautiful, structured form. Going, as it were, from a sort of 'chaos' to a well ordered 'cosmos' (to use the words of Gerhard Von Rad).<sup>5</sup>

Aalders suggests that the term 'waters' refers to the same substance as 'the deep'.<sup>6</sup> Wolfgang Capito writes that the condition of the early earth as first created must have been something like 'an abyss "filled with a confusion of undifferentiated water and mud" in complete darkness, which would unhinge any human mind that attempted to penetrate it.'<sup>7</sup>

Into this dark, watery mass, Genesis 1:2 tells us that 'the Spirit of God was moving upon the face of the waters'. The participle 'moving' means something like 'hovering' or 'brooding', as it does in the Pi'el stem of the Hebrew verb in Deuteronomy 32:11, where it pictures God's guidance of His people like an eagle brooding over its nest. This 'hovering' over the waters by the Spirit of God shows that the biblical world view is profoundly different from the philosophical dichotomy that Deism places between God and the material world. God's hand and presence are never lifted from the elements and working of the material realm.

This 'hovering' demonstrates that God, through His Spirit, is immediately involved with the complex, and as yet inchoate material elements, shaping them into a beautifully ordered structure, that will be the perfect home for human and animal life. Leupold suggests that 'The germs of all that is created were placed into dead matter by [God]. His was the preparatory work for leading over from the inorganic to the organic.'<sup>8</sup>

Other commentators have supplied an impersonal translation of 'Spirit' at this point. Claus Westermann translated it as 'God's wind'.<sup>9</sup> Von Rad translates it as 'fearful storm'.<sup>10</sup> But I think it preferable to follow

4. Ibid., p. 2.

5. Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1973), pp. 49-51.

6. G. Ch. Aalders, *Genesis, Volume 1*, Translated by William Heynen (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 1981), p. 54.

7. Wolfgang Capito, *Hexameron, Sive Opus Sex Dierum* (Argentinae [Strasburg], 1539), p. 36.

8. H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis, Volume I* (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids MI, 1965), p. 50.

9. Claus Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary*, Translated by David E. Green (William B. Eerdmans Publ. Co.: Grand Rapids, MI, 1987), p. 4.

10. Von Rad, op. cit., pp. 49, 50.

E. J. Young, who lists three reasons why ‘Spirit’ may not be reduced to wind.<sup>11</sup> First, Moses could have used the ordinary expression for wind, which is found in Jonah 1:4 and Job 1:19, but rather he uses the word for Spirit. Secondly, the participle (‘hovering’) does not describe the blowing of a wind. Thirdly, the mention of a mighty wind at this point would be out of place. He adds: ‘If the third clause simply states that a mighty wind was blowing ... it does not contribute to showing that the earth was uninhabitable.’<sup>12</sup> Hence, the presence and working of the Spirit, as He brooded over the waters, demonstrates the wonders of the infinite God forming the inchoate mass into a place of beauty for human habitation. This tells us much about who the Spirit of God is: He executes and brings to perfection the counsel of God, and does so with infinite power.

Pierre Viret rejoices in how the Lord makes nature so beautiful, like a sort of natural symphony, and, at the same time, so useful: ‘... He wished to join an excellent beauty to their profit and usefulness ... the little birds walking, flying and singing in the middle of [lovely spaces], by a great melody and natural music.’<sup>13</sup> ‘Since God shows marvels in all these things ... what will it be when we come to consider their natures, their properties, and virtues, both most useful, and remedies for men who make use of them.’<sup>14</sup>

### The Gift at Work in the Human Race

In addition to creation, the early parts of the Old Testament show the working of the Spirit in dealing with a recalcitrant human race, and especially in equipping God’s people for service.

The Spirit largely withdrew from the rebellious human race just before the Flood, as we see in Genesis 6:3: ‘And the LORD said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man ...’ That clearly implies that the Spirit had been at work in the human race, to move them towards obedience to God, but there came a point of no return, and after that, disaster fell upon all but one chosen family. To reject the promptings of the Holy Spirit is to reject God, and to leave ourselves exposed to the open wrath of God. Similarly, the Spirit withdrew from Saul after his severe disobedience (1 Sam. 16:14).

But to follow His leadings is to find ourselves equipped to glorify God. Fourth-century Athanasius appositely summarized much of the work of the Spirit throughout the long reaches of the Old Testament as follows:

... In Numbers, Moses says to the son of Nun, ‘Be not jealous for me. Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, when the Lord bestows his Spirit upon them.’<sup>15</sup> In Judges it is said of Gothoniel [Othniel], ‘And the Spirit of

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11. E. J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.: Philadelphia, Pa, 1964), pp.36-42.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

13. Pierre Viret, *L’Exposition du Symbole des Apôtres*, in *Instruction Chrétienne, Tome Troisième* (L’Âge d’Homme: Lausanne, 2013), p. 547 (My translation).

14. *Ibid.*, p. 359.

15. Numbers 11:29.

the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel.<sup>16</sup> “And again: ‘The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah.’<sup>17</sup> And concerning Samson: ‘The child grew,’ it says, ‘and the Spirit of the Lord began to accompany him,’ and ‘The Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily.’<sup>18</sup> David sings: ‘Take not thy Holy Spirit from me’;<sup>19</sup> and again, in the one hundred and forty-second Psalm: ‘Thy good Spirit shall lead me in a plain country, for thy name’s sake, O Lord.’<sup>20</sup> In Isaiah it is written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me.’<sup>21</sup> And before this it was said: ‘Woe to you, rebellious children! Thus saith the Lord: You took counsel, but not from me, and made covenants, but not through my Spirit to add sins to sins.’<sup>22</sup> And again: ‘Hear these things. From the beginning, I have not spoken in secret. When it was, I was there. And now the Lord hath sent me, and his Spirit.’<sup>23</sup> A little later he speaks thus: ‘And this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord, My spirit which is upon thee’;<sup>24</sup> and again in what follows he adds: ‘Neither envoy nor angel, but the Lord himself saved them, because he loved them and had mercy on them; he himself redeemed them and took them up and exalted them all the days of the age. But they were disobedient and provoked his Holy Spirit, and he was turned to enmity toward them.’<sup>25</sup> And Ezekiel speaks thus: ‘And the Spirit took me up and brought me to the land of the Chaldeans, to the Captivity in a vision, by the Spirit of God.’<sup>26</sup> In Daniel: ‘God raised up the Holy Spirit of a young man whose name was Daniel, and he cried with a loud voice, I am clear from the blood of this woman.’<sup>27</sup> Micah says: ‘The house of Jacob provoked the Spirit of the Lord’;<sup>28</sup> and by Joel, God says: ‘And it shall be after these things that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.’<sup>29</sup> Again, through Zechariah the voice of God says: ‘But receive my words and my commandments which I charge by my Spirit to my servants the prophets,’<sup>30</sup> and when the prophet rebukes the people a little farther on, he says: ‘They make their hearts disobedient, lest they should hear my law and the words which the Lord of hosts has sent by his Spirit in the hands of the prophets of old.’<sup>31</sup> These few examples we have collected and set down from the Old Testament.<sup>32</sup>

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16. Judges 3:10.

17. Judges 12:29.

18. Judges 13:24,25; 14:6.

19. Psalm 51:11.

20. Psalm 143:10.

21. Isaiah 61:1.

22. Isaiah 30:1.

23. Isaiah 48:16.

24. Isaiah 59:19.

25. Isaiah 63:9,10.

26. Ezekiel 11:24.

27. Not in the Masoretic nor Septuagintal text of the canonical book of Daniel, but it is found in The First Letter to Serapion, Chapter 5: from Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical additions to Daniel: Susannah 45-46.

28. Not found in the canonical book of Micah. But perhaps abstracted from Micah 3:8-12.

29. Joel 2:28.

30. Zechariah 1:6.

31. Zechariah 7:12.

32. Athanasius, *op. cit.*, pp. 32, 33.

In these and many other references in the Old Testament, we see that the Spirit of God helps to bring to completion the plan of God, as in the work of creation and within humankind. As Bavinck notes, there is a direct connection between the Holy Spirit and beauty: ‘... it is through his Spirit that he is immanent in the creation and vivifies and beautifies it all.’<sup>33</sup> Basil the Great had spoken similarly in his *De Spiritu Sancto*, where he describes ‘the Spirit as the perfecting cause’, and ‘perfecting through the Spirit’.<sup>34</sup> He adds: ‘All the glorious and unspeakable harmony of the highest heavens both in the service of God, and in the mutual concord of the celestial powers, can therefore only be preserved by the direction of the Spirit.’<sup>35</sup>

As the verses used by Athanasius show us, within the created order, Scripture pictures the Spirit of God exerting mighty power in bringing the world into being, and then in upholding it. Psalm 33:6 says: ‘By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.’ (Here again, we see ‘breath’ and ‘word’ used in an interchangeable fashion). Job 26:13 shows the interchangeability of Spirit and ‘hand of God’ in creation: ‘By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens: his hand hath formed the crooked serpent.’

The Spirit of God is involved in the giving of physical life. ‘Breath’ conveys a direct imparting of the energy of life that comes from God. Job 33:4 makes this connection explicit: ‘The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.’ Ecclesiastes 12:7 shows that when the spirit departs from a human, he or she must return to the lifeless dust: ‘Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it.’ (This assumes that the human spirit, which was breathed into man by the action of the Spirit of God, can depart at the given time, thereby removing the organizing principle of the ‘dust’, so that the body begins its decomposition.)

Ezekiel saw the ‘Spirit of life’ guiding the strange chariot of history with its wheels (Ezek. 1:20), and later saw that same Spirit breathing upon the valley of dry bones (Ezek. 37:1-10) and making them alive. In Ezekiel 37:14, God told the prophet that ‘I shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live.’ We notice that Ezekiel uses the Hebrew possessive suffix (of the Lord), ‘my spirit’ (37:14). Habakkuk 2:18-20 speaks of the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. This power is not to be found in dumb idols.

The creation and sustenance of the natural realm, including the human body and spirit, are all directly dependent upon the presence of God, working all things according to His will. But, as John Calvin’s colleague, Pierre Viret, pointed out in the midst of a vast and mind-expanding meditation on God’s presence in all creation and all its functioning, it is necessary to have ‘the eyes of faith’ to see and contemplate ‘this

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33. Bavinck, *op. cit.*, p.262.

34. Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 16.38.

35. *Ibid.*