

As God's people, we want to be guided by His Word and empowered by His Spirit to look more like Jesus. This Scripture Guide is based on this morning's passage to further equip you with what God's Word says.

Week 2 - Acts 1:1-11

A Theological Primer on the Holy Spirit

From the beginning of Acts, the person of the Holy Spirit is more overt than any other book of the Bible. The Spirit is previously mentioned in Luke's earlier work, The Gospel of Luke, empowering Jesus' ministry. In the Gospel of John, Jesus' farewell discourse speaks of the promised Holy Spirit at length, going so far as to say His followers will be able to do more than He did through the power of His Spirit (John 14:12). If the Holy Spirit is *that* important to the author Luke, the apostles, and even Jesus, then who is the Spirit and where has the Spirit been prior to Pentecost? What does the Spirit do? What does that mean for us today?

Who and where is the Spirit?

The Spirit is seen all throughout the Hebrew Bible, also known as the Old Testament, you just need to know where to look. For example, the first mention of the Spirit is found in Genesis 1:2 where the Spirit of God is seen hovering over the face of the chaotic waters. The Hebrew for "Spirit of God" is *ruach elohim* and can be translated as "wind" or "breath" of God. God is before creation and His *ruach* is seen as both God and from God.¹ This dynamic is seen elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as well. To cite, note the Son of Man acts on behalf of God and is being worshiped as God in Daniel 7, or the angel of YHWH is seen blessing and making promises to people (e.g. Gen 16, 18-19, 21:17, 21:11ff, 28:10ff), or the pillar of smoke leading Ex 13:17-22. Prior to the coming of Jesus, by looking at the Old Testament alone the Jews already had a worldview to understand God in a multi-personal way while never denying monotheism (Deut 6:4).²

Elsewhere in the Old Testament God's Spirit (*ruach*), is first explicitly seen temporarily dwelling in the temple artists Bezalel and Oholiab (Ex 28:3, 31:3, 35:21, 35:31). Later we see God's *ruach* dwelling in both Moses and his elders. In Judges, we see once again God's *ruach* temporarily anointing the Israelite judges to lead God's people. In the life of David, God's *ruach* anoints him upon his coronation as king (1 Sam 16:13). While these are just a few snapshots of the Spirit dwelling in individuals, the impression given to the reader is that God's Spirit at this point in human history dwells temporarily over individuals in order to accomplish God's mission, in particular, the Spirit works in those who serve either a priestly, prophetic, or kingly role.

To cite a previous verse, Moses looks forward to a day when *all* of God's people would be indwelt with His Spirit, not just a select few (Num 11:16-30). The Old Testament builds on this prophetic hope, especially in the Prophets. The most overt of these is Joel 2:28-29. Here the prophets envision a day when Moses' hope will be a reality and all of God's people will be filled with the Spirit to fully carry out God's

¹ This language of "God from God" is pulled from the Nicene Creed written in 325 AD to describe God as Trinity. While it is true that the early church coined the term Trinity, (the word Trinity is found nowhere in the Bible), it's widely been understood that the Trinity, recognized by Nicea, is a sort of "theological shorthand" to simply communicate a complex biblical topic: God is one in essence and three in persons, Father, Son, and Spirit. For a fun resource on what the Trinity is and is not, check out "St. Patrick's Bad Analogies" by Lutheran Satire on Youtube.

² For an accessible and thorough resource on this the Spirit, check out *Knowing God in the Old Testament: Three Volumes in One* by Christopher Wright or chapter 14 "God in Three Persons: The Trinity" and chapter 30 "The Work of the Holy Spirit" in *Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem. You can also find more resources on this topic through our Acts sermon series page.

mission to spread His name to the ends of the earth. This prophecy in Joel is picked up by Luke in Acts 2:17-21. Moses' hope is finally coming true. God's Spirit is now available to all who call on the name of the Lord.

What does the Spirit do?

While this is a *very* brief overview of the Spirit in the Old Testament, what does the Holy Spirit actually do? Why is He so important? Notice in all of the previous verses mentioned the Spirit's role is to make known the name of God to accomplish His will. For the temple artists in Exodus, their filling of the Spirit was to communicate God's heavenly reality through creating art and artifacts. For Moses and the elders, their filling was to communicate God's wisdom and justice. The prophecy in Joel is pointing to God's people making God's name known to the nations. In other words, the Spirit does not exist purely for Himself, His role is to empower a people for God's purposes.

This unique role of the Spirit to shine a light on God is carried along in the New Testament. Every time the Spirit shows up in a narrative or a letter, it's always in the context of glorifying God and displaying His beauty and worth, now most exclusively seen in the name of God's Son Jesus the Messiah. When God's word is proclaimed in speech, when God's power is made manifest in miracles, even when God's word is written, it's never to say, "Look at the person making manifest the Spirit." The refrain is always "Look at who God is and what He's able to do."

This discussion of the Spirit's role never once implies that the Spirit is *less than* the other persons within the Godhead. The Spirit is God, is a person of God, is equal in *every* respect to the Father and Son, and proceeds from the Father and Son. Whenever the Bible speaks of the distinction between the different persons of the Trinity, it is always and only in respect to their roles within creation and salvation.³

What does this mean for us today?

So what does the Holy Spirit's outpouring mean for followers of Jesus today? Namely, wherever we go and whatever we do, we are never alone. Period. When we are on mission we are not alone. God goes before us, God is with us, and God is in us in every conversation. When we are suffering, we are not alone. God's Spirit who rose Jesus from the dead, and who brought us from death to life, comforts us in our pain. When we are battling sin, we are not alone. The same Spirit that descended upon the apostles 2,000 years ago now dwells inside everyone who calls on the name of the Lord has the power to fight sin. And just as this promised Spirit is now fulfilled, so too will God's promise to one day wipe away sin, suffering, and death.

³ Also known as the "economic Trinity." The Athanasian Creed, written in the fifth century, further expounds on the "economy" of the Trinity: <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/creeds/athanasian-creed>