

The Spirit Abides

Introduction:

A Divided Canon, A Divided People, A Divided Spirit? Or Not

In this volume, I propose we rehear texts about the Spirit across the Old Testament (OT). I will not be comprehensive in my coverage of OT texts, but selective, as I note several key ways in which the church seems to have missed the abiding Spirit testified to in Israel's and the church's scriptures we call "Old Testament".¹ I am writing for undergraduate and graduate students, pastors, and churches concerned about the life of the Spirit from the creation of the world to the end of the age.

One paradigmatic text used by the church for pointing to the Spirit as only temporary in the OT era is 1 Samuel 16:14, which describes the Spirit departing from King Saul. This has traditionally been heard as if it were indicating the *normal* experience of OT saints: the Spirit is only temporary and thus departs after some short period of empowerment for a particular need. What is thus said of King Saul in this passage is the expected experience of OT saints according to much contemporary thought in our day.

However, this fails to properly grapple with the verse previous, where David is described as having the Spirit come powerfully upon him "from that day on" (1 Sam 16:13). I contend verse 13 is the paradigm for understanding the intended experience of the Spirit across the OT: *the Spirit abides*. For the Spirit to depart is to reach a point never intended, but only the result of persistent failure to yield to the ever-present life of the Spirit. In this way, David's experience as testified to in the words of the narrator, that he experienced the Spirit upon him "from that day on" is precisely what the expectation was to be for all experiencing the life of the Spirit in every age.

It is my contention that *the unfolding revelation of the Spirit is to abide* in the earth, within and among creation, and particularly in and among the people yielded to the Spirit. The abiding Spirit was not simply the experience of a couple of individuals in the OT, as if they were uniquely pointing ahead to the NT experiences of the Spirit for everyone. Instead, I argue their experiences represent how God has always encountered his creation: in his abiding Spirit. The main chapters in this book offer key texts to make a cumulative case for the Spirit abiding in and with creation from the very beginning, and particularly in and with the people of God throughout the OT. As a cumulative case, it is not offered as if any one of the texts might stand on its own for the argument. Instead, it is meant to demonstrate that the texts of the OT point in this direction from many different angles.

¹ There are numerous works on the Spirit in the OT that address matters from a similar level of engagement as this book is seeking to do (and also within specific texts and corpora within the OT) including Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament* (IVP Academic, 2006); David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner, eds., *Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (IVP Academic, 2011); Jack Levison, *The Holy Spirit before Christianity* (Baylor University Press, 2019); several articles of mine; and my book *A Theology of the Spirit in the Former Prophets: A Pentecostal Perspective* (CPT Press, 2018). However, none of these seem to expound upon the idea of the abiding Spirit as central to the expected experiences of the Spirit in the OT. Jack Levison's recent book, *A Boundless God* (Baker Academic, 2020), discusses all manner of activities and representations of the Spirit in the OT and even indicates his own brief contention of the potential of the Spirit abiding in the OT rather than this awaiting the NT era (p. 171). However, this book means to expand upon this idea and trace it further across the OT toward what this may mean (in short form) for the theology and life of the church today.

Why should this matter? What difference does it make? It is a matter of addressing the continuity between the OT and NT. Both are part of the church's scriptures. Both show where the same Spirit from the beginning, persists in being present to give, preserve, protect, nurture, etc., the life of God in creation and specifically in and among the people of God. The traditional distinction that the Spirit in the OT was *only temporary* or for only accomplishing a short task seems to ignore the very language of the texts of the OT themselves. Such a mishearing concerning the Spirit in the OT suggests a sort of cessationist approach to hearing Scriptures that fails to appreciate the language of the texts themselves and what they seem to testify to about the Spirit.

This book will seek to address that mishearing as a way of hearing the same Spirit abiding in the OT as abiding in the NT and in our own day. The continuity of the two testaments regarding the Spirit is meant to point to the aims of the texts overall: the Spirit abides until all is full of the Spirit.

Chapter one seeks to rehear Genesis and Exodus, where the Spirit and waters appear to point to the Spirit abiding. Genesis 1 and 6-9 present the Spirit in relation to the waters of chaos that are uninhabitable. In chapter one, the Spirit seems to be present for the formation of the chaos called into form and function. In chapters six through nine, the Spirit is the one sustaining a world now turning itself back to chaos in rebellion against the creator. Thus, the Spirit will not "abide," and the face of the earth is swept away by the waters of the deep until the Spirit again is upon the waters and again life is restored to the earth. In Genesis, the Spirit present is life remaining; the Spirit removed is death. The Spirit is also the divider of the waters for the deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Exod. 15:8) as an account which canonically echoes back to the primordial waters of the beginning (Gen. 1:2) and the waters of the flood (Gen. 6) and is heard reverberating in the prophets (cf. Isa. 63:11-12). These reverberations reinforce that the abiding presence of the spirit means life while the absence of the spirit means death.

Chapter two carries the readers by the Spirit to the dwelling of Yahweh in the Wilderness in Exodus. There, the Spirit is the one not only giving and preserving life, but also creating the sacred space for the presence of Yahweh in the midst of the people. The Spirit fills the craftsmen who possess creativity and skills to build a fitting dwelling for Yahweh (Exod. 31:3; 35:31). They accomplish this through demonstrating existing skills that are not indicated to be temporary, but whose exercise is a witness to the intent of the infilled Spirit.

The Spirit and the prophets are taken up in chapter three by rehearing Numbers and Deuteronomy. In this chapter, I discuss the prophetic in relation to the Spirit in Numbers 11 as it comes on elders of Israel to prophesy and lead (I briefly discuss whether they never prophesied again or never ceased from prophesying), in Numbers 26 as it comes on Balaam to prophesy, and in Numbers 27:18//Deuteronomy 31 as it comes on Joshua as the prophet like Moses. I argue that those en-Spirited in these passages are enabled not only for a temporary function, but for a lifetime of service. The presence of the Spirit is no guarantee of their faithfulness, but it is a witness to the endowment to reveal the will of Yahweh in an ongoing manner for the life and flourishing of the people of Israel. The indication of the Spirit upon them is only meant as a particular indication of endowment for what they are to do and not an indication of the Spirit only now coming upon them while previously not having been upon/with/in them (which is not stated in these texts). The Spirit abides upon the prophets as meant for the entire community. The prophesying becomes a witness to that abiding in describing such as "coming upon" all the while the need is for the leading of the people into the flourishing life their God has intended for them.

Chapter four offers a rehearing of Judges and the Spirit. I note four out of twelve judges are explicitly described as having the Spirit come upon them or as being clothed by/with the Spirit: Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson (four times just for Samson). Othniel serves as a paradigmatic example of the judge who saves Israel in order to bring about “peace” (wholeness and flourishing) in the land. Further, Judges 2 indicates the way in which the judges are meant to serve in restoring and maintaining life in the land as spelled out in the succeeding stories by the Spirit bearing witness in “coming upon/clothing”. In all of these cases, the judges are emphatically enabled for a long period of time in preparations and implementation of their deliverances as well as leading the people of Israel following such. However, I argue they are said to experience the onrushing/clothing Spirit not as indicating the Spirit was not previously upon them, but as a way of describing a particular lived experience of the empowering Spirit to assure of life and Israel flourishing in wholeness.

The judges appear to set the stage further (after Moses and Joshua in particular) for those who were testified to as being Spirit-endowed to deliver and to lead Israel into shalom: Kings Saul and David (1-2 Samuel). Here in chapter five, I show how these texts indicate moments of Spirit empowerment for Saul and David prophesying and delivering Israel from enemies. In these texts, we find the paradigmatic claim of the temporary nature of the Spirit in the OT. The Spirit of the LORD departs from Saul after the account states the Spirit of the LORD had come upon David from that day forward (1 Sam. 16:13-14). I argue that David’s experience was meant as normative for the OT rather than Saul’s experience (which I regard as the abnormal experience). Following Hildebrandt, “The manifestation of the Spirit of Yahweh at this important transition period to the monarchy is consistent with the Old Testament emphasis that all leadership must be Spirit-empowered.”² This empowerment must therefore be intended as abiding.

The books of 1-2 Kings and the Spirit in relation to the sons of the prophets are the focus of chapter six. The collection of Elijah and Elisha stories contrasts their testimonies of the same “Spirit” upon each of them with the “sons of the prophets” (with the “double portioned” Spirit of elder sonship upon Elisha to become the father in Israel in place of Elijah taken into the heavens). I argue the Spirit upon Elisha is not meant only now to be indicative of the Spirit coming upon him, but of a unique experience of the abiding Spirit in order to deliver Israel and lead them into flourishing in the life of the LORD. Enfolded within the Elijah and Elisha accounts is the account of Micaiah, son of Imlah, and the court prophets of Ahab (1 Kings 22). These offer additional examples of the Spirit’s infilling not being momentary, giving further witness that this was normative for the Spirit even if it surprises us. The Spirit is expected to abide with the prophets (and the sons of the prophets), yet there are still unique experiences of the Spirit bearing witness to special presence in specific moments.

A rehearing of both the Psalms and 1-2 Chronicles seeks to attune the readers to the Spirit and song is found in chapter seven. Picking up on the demonstration of the Spirit upon Saul and David to prophesy in song (e.g., 2 Sam. 23:2, cf. 2 Sam. 22/Ps. 18), the Psalms and Chronicles carry their own indications of the Spirit abiding. In Psalm 51:11, for example, the psalmist (narratively ascribed to David) pleads for the Spirit not to be taken from him, implying that the Spirit abides, but that abiding could end. Further, it was the Spirit (though not stated emphatically) who would prophesy through the Levitical composers, instrumentalists, conductors, and singers under the supervision of David (1 Chron. 25:1-6). The prophetic Spirit

² W. Hildebrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit* (Baker Academic, 1993), 121.

upon David had given him instructions for the place of abiding worship for Yahweh (1 Chron. 28:12). In this sense, the Spirit was not temporary, but somehow abided even in the prolonged processes of compositions, planning, and implementation for the worship of Israel (including specifically the hymnody and songs). The Spirit abides that the LORD may abide in the midst of his people.

Chapter eight turns to the Spirit and the future by rehearing Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Joel as part of the latter prophetic writings. The en-Spirited Davidic heir of Isaiah (Isa. 11:1-5; 32:1-5; 42:1-4; 61:1-11) casts a shadow over the Davidic heirs of Israel who, up to this point, have failed to live into the justice and righteousness of this prophetic promise. The oracles of Isaiah judge those kings who failed to live into the Spirit-filled life, even as the hope of another remains for the future. Yet this future orientation is not meant to indicate that the Spirit was not upon the others. Rather, it indicates they did not yield to the overflowing life of the Spirit as to walk in the ways of wisdom, justice, righteousness, etc. that Yahweh demanded and intended for his people, the nations, and the earth. That intent was the outpoured Spirit (Isa. 32:15-20; 44:1-5; 59:21; Joel 2:28-32), the Spirit of obedience (Ezek. 36:26-27), the Spirit of resurrection (Ezek. 37:1-14). The future hope and promise of such experiences of the Spirit were not themselves relegated to the future, but belonged already as present possibilities (and realities, cf., Ezekiel and the Spirit “in” and “upon” and “lifting” him as the “son of man”, obedient Israel enlivened to the obedience of the LORD).

The final chapter seeks to answer what all this might mean for the Church rehearing these texts of the Spirit abiding? In this chapter, I do not anticipate that the claims of this book will alter practices for the church today, per se. Instead, I make a more fundamental claim that the Spirit has always abided and that testimonies of the Spirit in the OT belong to specific experiences of the Spirit and not to commentary on whether the Spirit was previously present. I hope this alters the ways in which the Spirit’s presence is not only noted across the OT and the canon of the Bible, but in the world today. I mean to call us to see and hear the Spirit abiding in the world today, even as there are particular experiences that testify to the Spirit “coming upon,” “filling,” “clothing,” etc. Such testimonies are witnessing to the already abiding Spirit who is carrying out some particular work for the life of God to bear upon and within the world toward flourishing in shalom life.

Even more important to the shift regarding the Spirit is the shift of the direct witness of the Spirit to the one who is the abiding of God with us...the one conceived by the Spirit, baptized by the Spirit, sent by the Spirit, testified to by the Spirit, and sending the Spirit. The witness of the abiding Spirit in the OT points to the abiding Spirit in Jesus who now pours out that same Spirit as the Spirit bringing God’s life to bear upon and in the world through those who bear faithful prophetic witness to the dwelling of God with us (already and yet to come again).

An appendix takes up the challenge of one particular writing that would likely emerge in the minds of readers as countering the entire claim of this book. It is another (brief) rehearing... this time of the Gospel according to John. How are we meant to hear Jesus’s claims about the Spirit in the Gospel of John? This appendix particularly follows the articles of Fredericks, Goldingay, and Kaiser on the continuity of the Spirit in the OT and how one may better hear John’s witness of the Spirit “not yet” or not “in” the disciples.³

³ G. Fredericks, Rethinking the Role of the Holy Spirit in the Lives of the Old Testament Believers,” *Trinity Journal* 9 (1988): 81-106; J. Goldingay, “Was the Holy Spirit Active in the Old Testament Times? What Was New About the Christian Experience of God?,” *Ex Auditu* 12 (1996): 14-28; W.C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Indwelling Presence of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 82.4 (2010): 308-315.