

# Breath of Life I

Arklow 21st July 2019

We've been looking at encounters with Jesus and last week Nick started us off looking at encounters that happened after Jesus returned to the Father, through the experiences of Barnabas. He brought out some great applications from that, too, about God using who we are, that visible results are not the measure of faithfulness, about the different roles we play at different seasons of our lives, that disagreements don't need to mean the end of a friendship. There's a lot to take from those points.

I want to back up just a little bit and look at how it was that Barnabas, and Saul, and John Mark, and all the others mentioned in Acts, and indeed how we ourselves can have meaningful, life-forming encounters with Jesus now that He has returned to the Father and we can't talk to him face to face as the disciples did.

Of course, you'll all be able to say, 'Duh - by the Holy Spirit!' Yes, that's right, and I want to take a few weeks to look at who the Holy Spirit is and what He does because I want us to increasingly be encountering Him and helping others to encounter God as the Holy Spirit works in us. We identify ourselves as a church that believes that the Holy Spirit is at work in the church today and that He gives gifts to Jesus-followers to help them to worship and serve Him. In other words, we are 'charismatic' in that we believe in the charismata – the gifts of the Holy Spirit given by grace. But how much do we actually live that out? How often in the last month could we confidently say, "That was the Holy Spirit at work right there, or that was one of his gifts in operation! I don't mean to condemn or discourage anyone here."? [I've had one since I wrote that question!] I believe it's more a case of asking God to open our eyes to what he IS doing than striving to make more happen, and that's what I want to do by looking at how the Holy Spirit is revealed in the Bible, which of course was inspired by Him...

I think sometimes we can talk as if the Holy Spirit arrived on the scene at the day of Pentecost and that everything started from there. Of course, it was a hugely significant day, and we'll get there, but it couldn't be further from the truth to say that it was the beginning.

The Spirit of God is first seen in the very first paragraph of the Bible

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 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. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. **Genesis 1:1-3** (NIV)*

Different phrases are used throughout the Old Testament: Spirit of God, the Spirit of the LORD, 'my Spirit' but the word for Spirit is *RUAH* = wind, breath, spirit. **[Breathe in, breathe out]** And here he is 'hovering' or 'brooding' over the seeming chaos of the early formation of earth, moving and covering in order to bring something to birth. God hadn't made a mistake in making something that was 'formless and empty' – it was just the early stages, the first rough sketch or lump of clay on the table, and the Spirit was part of planning what came next. He was part of bringing change, because the action continues with that great phrase "And God said..." God's breath formed words that impacted creation. His Spirit moved at one with the Father's intention, his declaration and His creative power. If we want to start understanding who the Holy Spirit is, we have to start there. And probably finish there, too, because everything else is encompassed in that picture. The Spirit is the life-force of God, the means by which God can express himself to creation, the active power that puts His intentions into effect. He is awesome!

And when God formed man, it says he *breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. **GE 2:7** (NIV)* The same idea is there, that it's God's breath that gives life to everything that He has made, and that there is a special relationship with mankind, made to reflect His nature/image, ruling the earth as God's delegated authority. But it's all dependent on His Spirit. The belief is that without Him, we'd simply run out of breath:

*If God were to take back his spirit  
and withdraw his breath,  
all life would cease,  
and humanity would turn again to dust. Job 34:14-15 (NLT) [It's your breath in our lungs...Breathe in, breathe out]*

So how does he interact with people beyond this life-giving foundation?

**Individual** If you've ever done the Alpha course, you'll have heard that in Old Testament times the Spirit came on specific people at specific times for specific purposes. God put his Spirit in Joseph to give him endurance and wisdom to interpret dreams and lead a nation. He gave his Spirit to Moses and Joshua to lead his people, on Bezalel and Oholiab to make the tabernacle (actually the first mention, so it's not all about 'spiritual leadership'), he anointed [oil image] Aaron and the Levites to be priests. Through the books of Judges, Samuel and Kings you see the expression 'The Spirit of the LORD came on XX (with power) to...' He empowered individuals to take a lead in Israel, to win victories in battle, to bring God's message to people. And when Israel asked for a king, the Spirit was given to empower the kings to rule God's people in a godly way. The most famous of these is David, and one particular encounter illustrates the power of God's Spirit within the lives of individuals.

**2 SA 11-12** Sin with Bathsheba...God sent Nathan to confront him...David is conscience-struck, but Nathan prophesies both God's punishment and his restoration. In the midst of this David writes  
*Do not banish me from your presence,  
and don't take your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and make me willing to obey you. Psalm 51:11-12 (NLT)*

So we have the Spirit speaking to Nathan, giving him the courage to confront the king and also revealing something about God's plans for David despite his terrible actions. And we have David, anointed to be king, pleading with God not to withdraw his breath (i.e. not to kill him) and not to remove his supernatural help, as he'd seen happen with his predecessor, King Saul. This verse shows us that David knew that the Holy Spirit was absolutely essential for his

- **PHYSICAL life**
- **CONNECTION with God**
- **EFFECTIVENESS** in his given role
- **internal JOY**
- **RIGHT living**

If you want to have encounters with the Holy Spirit, they will be linked with one or more of these areas.

**Corporate** But that's not the whole picture in the Old Testament. It wasn't just about individuals, it was also about God interacting with groups of people, especially those he chose, the descendants of Israel. Towards the end of Isaiah's prophecies, he examines Israel's current problems by looking back through their history, including when Moses led them to freedom:

*He said, "They are my very own people.  
Surely they will not betray me again."  
And he became their Saviour.*

*9 In all their suffering he also suffered,  
and he personally rescued them.  
In his love and mercy he redeemed them.  
He lifted them up and carried them  
through all the years.*

*10 But they rebelled against him*

and grieved his Holy Spirit.

So he became their enemy  
and fought against them.

11 Then they remembered those days of old  
when Moses led his people out of Egypt.

They cried out, "Where is the one who brought Israel through the sea,  
with Moses as their shepherd?

Where is the one who sent his Holy Spirit  
to be among his people?

12 Where is the one whose power was displayed  
when Moses lifted up his hand—

the one who divided the sea before them,  
making himself famous forever?

13 Where is the one who led them through the bottom of the sea?  
They were like fine stallions

racing through the desert, never stumbling.

14 As with cattle going down into a peaceful valley,  
the Spirit of the Lord gave them rest.

You led your people, Lord,

and gained a magnificent reputation." **Isaiah 63:8-14** (NLT)

What can we see here? That the Holy Spirit

- **CARES about the ACTIONS of God's people** (to the point of being grieved)
- **Was sent to LIVE AMONG God's people**, to be God's presence (not just Moses & Aaron)
- **Gave REST to God's people** (the original state of Eden)

The actions of the Holy Spirit are not just about individuals for specific purposes. You could call those 'concentrations' or particular examples, but the Spirit is about forming and leading and resourcing the people of God as well, making them into a people who will demonstrate the effects of living under His influence.

The Holy Spirit is eternal, unchanging, as part of God. So those attributes still apply to all those who have been brought into God's family. We can expect him to care how we live together. We can expect him to bring God's presence among us. We can expect him to lead us into a rest in God.

### **Hope: Abundance, Restoration, Messiah**

That was Isaiah looking back, but around that time, in the period just before and around the time that Israel and Judah were taken into exile, Isaiah and several of the other prophets were looking forward, too. And there are a number of promises involving the Holy Spirit.

As the prophets predicted the catastrophe of the exile, they also gave hope that God would restore the nation:

*The palace and the city will be deserted,  
and busy towns will be empty.*

*Wild donkeys will frolic and flocks will graze  
in the empty forts and watchtowers*

*until at last the Spirit is poured out  
on us from heaven.*

*Then the wilderness will become a fertile field,*

*and the fertile field will yield bountiful crops. **Isaiah 32:14-15** (NLT)*

*The Lord who made you and helps you says:*

*Do not be afraid, O Jacob, my servant,*

*O dear Israel, my chosen one.*

*For I will pour out water to quench your thirst  
and to irrigate your parched fields.*

*And I will pour out my Spirit on your descendants,  
and my blessing on your children. **Isaiah 44:2-3** (NLT)*

Here we have another picture of the Spirit, as water poured out to quench the spiritual thirst of people living under God's discipline.

And in case you are wondering if this is just Isaiah's thing, Jeremiah also promises a new start after the exile.

*The new covenant that I will make with the people of Israel will be this: I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. None of them will have to teach a neighbour to know the Lord, because all will know me, from the least to the greatest. I will forgive their sins and I will no longer remember their wrongs. I, the Lord, have spoken." **Jeremiah 31:33-34** (GNT)*

This promise doesn't explicitly mention the Spirit, but it dovetails perfectly with other promises through Ezekiel (during exile).

*"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. **Ezekiel 36:26-27** (NIV)*

This promise is not just about restoring the land and fortunes of the people, but about changing them from the inside. Just as David prayed in PS 51, it's the Spirit that makes us want to and gives us the ability to follow God's ways. Because he breathed breath into us and wants that breath not just to animate our bodies but to guide and empower our lives. **[Breathe in, breathe out]**

*"Then my people will know that I am the Lord their God, because I sent them away to exile and brought them home again. I will leave none of my people behind. And I will never again turn my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit upon the people of Israel. I, the Sovereign Lord, have spoken!" **Ezekiel 39:28-29** (NLT)*

**Zechariah 12:10, 13:1** (after exile) also speaks of a time when God's presence will be among his people, when everyone will know Him, and when God will pour out a Spirit of grace and prayer on his people, opening up a fountain that will cleanse them from sin and impurity.

All of these promises relate to the people of Israel, to their restoration to their land and to a right way of living under God. The image of the 'pouring out' of God's Spirit spoke of something like a national revival, a time when things would be going right in God's people. And it became associated with the coming and the rule of the promised King, the Messiah.

The Spirit is linked with rescue, with restoration, with a salvation from the effects of sin, from the time that Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden to when Israel was exiled from their land and needed things to change if they were to return and stay there. Just as he first brooded over the chaos of the early creation, spoke God's word into that to bring order and breathed life into all living creatures, so He is still looking to bring order and life to a world made chaotic by the rebellion of people against God, to refresh the weary souls that chaos produces.

One last prophecy, from the book of Joel, takes these promises one level further. Again the theme is of a nation in turmoil and under the thumb of invading armies, even ones of locusts eating up the crops, and the call is for the people to humble themselves and cry out to God for help. And the promise is that God will restore:

*Now you will have plenty to eat, and be satisfied.*

*You will praise the Lord your God,  
who has done wonderful things for you.*

*My people will never be despised again.*

*27 Then, Israel, you will know that I am among you  
and that I, the Lord, am your God*

*and there is no other.  
My people will never be despised again. Joel 2:26-27 (GNT)*

This is similar to the other promises of restoration, but it goes on....

*28 "Afterward I will pour out my Spirit on everyone:  
your sons and daughters will proclaim my message;  
your old people will have dreams,  
and your young people will see visions.  
29 At that time I will pour out my Spirit  
even on servants, both men and women.  
30 "I will give warnings of that day  
in the sky and on the earth;  
there will be bloodshed, fire, and clouds of smoke.  
31 The sun will be darkened,  
and the moon will turn red as blood  
before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.  
32 But all who ask the Lord for help [call on the name of the LORD] will be saved. Joel 2:26-32a (GNT)*

Now we seem to be going beyond the borders of Israel to 'all people' even though the context is largely about the nation. Even if we take it to be only for the Jewish people, it is certainly not just 'individuals for specific times and purposes,' the promise is for everyone who calls on the Lord for help.

So a whole raft of prophecies promised that the Holy Spirit would be part of God bringing restoration, hope, peace and abundance back to his people. These were the promises that hung in the air and were held in the hearts of faithful people as they waited to see their fulfilment, through times when it seemed God had gone silent and through further invasion and rebellion.

If there was ever a poster boy for this faithfulness, it was a man called Simeon, who we meet in the early pages of the gospel of Luke, and we're going to finish today with him:

*At that time there was a man named Simeon living in Jerusalem. He was a good, God-fearing man and was waiting for Israel to be saved. The Holy Spirit was with him 26 and had assured him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's promised Messiah. 27 Led by the Spirit, Simeon went into the Temple. When the parents brought the child Jesus into the Temple to do for him what the Law required, 28 Simeon took the child in his arms and gave thanks to God:*

*29 "Now, Lord, you have kept your promise,  
and you may let your servant go in peace.  
30 With my own eyes I have seen your salvation,  
31 which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples:  
32 A light to reveal your will to the Gentiles  
and bring glory to your people Israel." Luke 2:25-32 (GNT)*

The Holy Spirit, from hovering over the waters, to breathing God's words, to empowering individuals, to bringing God's presence to his people, to being the promise of restoration, led Simeon to this moment when he saw the beginnings of the fulfilment of all that had gone before, the Anointed One. And next week we're going to look at how Jesus related to and spoke about the Holy Spirit.

## **Response**

Wonder at the awesomeness of Holy Spirit

Repentance for any neglect or indifference towards him

Invitation for Him to affect me personally and us as His people today



## The Breath of Life

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 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.*

*And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light.* **Genesis 1:1-3 (NIV)**

*If God were to take back his spirit and withdraw his breath, all life would cease, and humanity would turn again to dust.* **Job 34:14-15 (NLT)**

### Individuals: David, Bathsheba & Nathan—2 Samuel 11 & 12

*Do not banish me from your presence,  
and don't take your Holy Spirit from me.*

*Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and make me willing to obey you.*

**Psalms 51:11-12 (NLT)**

### Holy Spirit is essential for:

- \_\_\_\_\_ life
- \_\_\_\_\_ with God
- \_\_\_\_\_
- internal \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ living

### God's People: Isaiah 63:8-14

#### The Holy Spirit

\_\_\_\_\_ about the \_\_\_\_\_ of God's people

Was sent to \_\_\_\_\_ God's people

Gave \_\_\_\_\_ to God's people

### Hope

**Isaiah 32:14-15, 44:2-3; Jeremiah 31:33-34**

*"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*

**Ezekiel 36:26-27 (NIV)**

### Joel 2:26-29

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*"Now, Lord, you have kept your promise,*

*and you may let your servant go in peace.*

*With my own eyes I have seen your salvation,*

*which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples:*

*A light to reveal your will to the Gentiles*

*and bring glory to your people Israel."*

**Luke 2:25-32 (GNT)**

## Good News and Prayer

Key to Bible translations

NIV New International Version, NLT New Living Translation, GNT Good News Translation

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