

B. Union with Christ – the Coming of the Spirit

If it is true that the recovery of sacred space involves the ushering in of a new creation, it is equally true that that renewal uniquely implicates the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Whether one considers the matter of God’s creative activity or His purpose and work respecting His kingdom (both of which play a central role in the concept of sacred space), the scriptural record places the Holy Spirit in the forefront. This is as true of Old Testament promise as it is of New Testament fulfillment: The promise of the kingdom had a core emphasis in the coming of the Spirit, first and foremost in relation to the Lord’s messianic Servant and Davidic Branch.

1. The Spirit and Sacred Space in Promise

- a. The place to begin with the promise of the Spirit in relation to sacred space is the creation itself. The reason is that the creation account provides the Bible’s first indication and representation of sacred space, and there the Spirit is introduced as the direct *agent of God’s creative activity*. But more than simply the effective power behind the material creation, the Spirit was the point of its ordering and expansion. The Genesis account indicates that God’s ultimate goal for His creation was harmonious perfection and fullness and the blessedness of shalom in Creator/creature intimacy: *His goal was that the created order should become sacred space, and it was the Spirit through whom He determined to accomplish this glorious work* (Genesis 1:1-25; cf. also Psalm 104:24-31).

The Spirit brought forth and ordered the various spheres of dominion and the rulers of those spheres, and the crowning work of that enterprise was the creation of the supreme creaturely lord who bears in himself the divine image and likeness. The divine Spirit who, on Elohim’s behalf (“let *us* make man in *our* image”), brought forth the **image-son**, did so by communicating to him the breath of divine life (ref. 1:26-27, 2:7). In this way, the First Adam was already at the outset pointing toward and anticipating the Last Adam (Matthew 1:18-20; Luke 1:35).

At the time of the original creation, man, the image-son, was brought forth in distinction from the rest of the creatures and uniquely endowed for communion with his Creator-Father by the power of the Holy Spirit. Later, this same dynamic was reproduced in the calling and establishment of **Israel** as the singular “son of God” (cf. Luke 3:38 with Exodus 4:22-23; Hosea 11:1). The Old Testament narrative broadly attributes Israel’s “creation” as a covenant nation to the power of Yahweh Himself (ref. Genesis 15:13-14; Exodus 3:7-8, 15:1-18; cf. also Deuteronomy 32:7-14; Ezekiel 16:1-4; Hosea 11:1; etc.), but certain biblical commentary on that episode identifies the Lord’s Spirit as the agent of that work (ref. esp. Isaiah 63:7-14; also Haggai 2:4-5).

- b. As the Spirit was the effective agent of God’s creative activity, so also, in the salvation history leading up to the coming of Christ, He was *God’s presence and power within the creation*. This is most evident in relation to God’s involvement with His covenant people Israel.

- 1) The first thing to note in this regard is that the Holy Spirit was the present power of God for **constructing His dwelling** in the midst of His people. First of all, the *nation itself* was preeminently the Lord's dwelling place in that He determined to reside in their midst as their God and Father (cf. Exodus 29:45-46; Numbers 5:1-3, 35:34; Haggai 2:4-5). The Spirit "built" and inhabited this dwelling by being Yahweh's personal presence among the community of Abraham's covenant seed (Isaiah 63:11).

But the Spirit also constructed the Lord's dwelling by empowering Yahweh's chosen craftsmen to build His *physical sanctuary* in the wilderness (cf. Exodus 25:1-8 with 31:1-11 and 35:30-35). And while the text doesn't explicitly associate the Spirit with the later construction of Solomon's temple, it does implicate Him indirectly. For Solomon was the chief architect and overseer of that project (1 Kings 6:1-2) and, being Yahweh's chosen king, He would have anointed Solomon with His Spirit (1 Samuel 16:13-14). Beyond that, it's not unreasonable to attribute Solomon's unique wisdom and understanding to the Spirit's endowment. In the case of Zerubabel's temple, however, the text leaves no doubt that it was the product of the Spirit's power (Haggai 2:4-5; Zechariah 4:1-10).

- 2) The Spirit who constructed Yahweh's dwelling place in the midst of His covenant people was also responsible for **sustaining and preserving that dwelling**. Once again, He did so by means of His active presence and power among them – first in relation to *Moses*, then the *elders of Israel*, and then Moses' successor *Joshua* (Numbers 11:1-29; 27:15-21). After that, the Spirit continued to direct and preserve Israel through the nation's *judges* (Judges 3:10, 6:34, 13:24-25, etc.), *kings* (1 Samuel 16:13-14) and *prophets* (2 Chronicles 15:1, 18:12-27, 20:14, 24:20; cf. Nehemiah 9:30). Even the prophet Balaam, who was poised to pronounce a curse on Yahweh's covenant "house," was restrained from doing so by His Spirit and compelled instead to proclaim Israel's blessing (Numbers 24:1-9).

c. This background of the Spirit's role in the material creation and in the formation, development, and preservation of Yahweh's dwelling place is foundational to the Scripture's presentation of Him as a **central figure in the promise of the recovery of sacred space**. The Holy Spirit was God's presence and power behind the germinal Edenic expression of sacred space as well as its more developed manifestations in the Israelite kingdom. For that reason it isn't at all surprising that the prophets would speak of the promised, ultimate form of sacred space as being the work of Yahweh's Spirit.

- 1) Just as the Spirit was the effective agent of the first creation, so He would be with respect to the promised re-creation. He had brought forth the earth and its living inhabitants as an *ex-nihilo* fiat, and that sort of life-out-of-death creational activity was to be repeated in the case of the renewal of the latter days (ref. Ezekiel 36:22-37:14; cf. also 43:1-5 with 47:1-12).

- 2) Man, the image-son, had been the apex of the Spirit's work of creation. If the Spirit's mandate was to bring order and fullness to the created order such that it would be suitable for rightful, blessed relation with its Creator-God, that shalomic work had its focal point in the creation of man. For God's intention was that man would administer and uphold the shalomic order of His creation in the context of his own filial communion with his Creator-Father. While sacred space embraced the relation between the Creator and the whole of His creation, it was to be centered in the relationship between divine Father and image-son. *Sacred space meant God relating to the created order through man.*

So it was that the prophets' promise of the coming comprehensive renewal was conspicuously focused on the renewal and restoration of the human race. The Spirit would indeed overthrow the curse and renew the creation, but the preeminent goal of that work was the recovery of man. For what good would it do for the Lord to renew the material creation if the image-son appointed to administer His lordship remained estranged from Him? Indeed, given God's determination regarding the nature and function of sacred space, creational renewal presupposed and necessitated that His Spirit impart life to Adam's dead race. *A new creation meant a new humanity* (Joel 2:28-29; also Isaiah 32:15-20, 44:1-5, 60:1-3, 66:19-23).

- 3) In the developing salvation history, the Spirit's role had been relational as well as creational. That is, the Holy Spirit constituted God's power and presence in His creation, specifically in relation to man. Notably, these twin realities of divine presence and power converged in the concept of the Lord's dwelling place: Whether man, the bearer of the divine image, Eden, God's sanctuary-garden, the tabernacle, or the Jerusalem temple, each expression of God's dwelling was the fruit of the Spirit's power. The Spirit secured and preserved the divine residence in the material creation, *but specifically that God should dwell with His image-son.* The creational work of the Spirit had a relational goal.

This is evident early in the biblical storyline and it becomes the centerpiece of the prophetic promise regarding sacred space. God was going to send His Spirit to renew His creation, the heart of which would be man's renewal. But man is more than another creature – he is the Creator's *son*, and thus the prophets insisted that his regeneration was to serve his reconciliation and recovery to his divine Father. By virtue of the Spirit's renewing work, God would once again dwell in the midst of His people in shalomic intimacy. Once again the Spirit would wield His power to build a house for the Lord (Zechariah 4), and once again the Spirit would be God's presence in that dwelling place. *But unlike previous expressions of sacred space, in the coming renewal the Spirit wouldn't be present in a limited way; rather He would indwell all of Yahweh's people* (cf. Ezekiel 36:24-27 with 37:1-28; also Isaiah 44:1-5; Joel 2:28-29).

4) It is in this regard that the prophetic theme of *Messiah* comes to the forefront. In the most intricate and marvelous fashion, the Old Testament scriptures weave together in Him all of the above concepts and motifs.

- If Adam was the first of God's dwellings by virtue of bearing in himself the divine image and likeness, the *conquering Seed* pledged to Eve would be preeminently so. He would not only come into the world in connection with the Spirit's presence (Isaiah 48:16), the Spirit would indwell Him in order to empower Him for His messianic work (Isaiah 11:1-5, 42:1-7, 59:15-21, 61:1-7).
- So also the nation of Israel later became the Lord's "dwelling in the Spirit" (ref. again Exodus 29:45-46; Numbers 5:1-3, 35:34; also Haggai 2:4-5 and Isaiah 63:11), and that reality was to be reproduced in the One who is the *true Israel* (Isaiah 49:1-6).
- Abraham's singular Seed would fulfill Israel's calling, but He would do so as the *Branch of David*. In this role, and in fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, the Branch was to build an everlasting house for Yahweh (cf. again 2 Samuel 7:1ff and Zechariah 6:9-15). The implication that arises from the prophetic convergence of these themes is profound: *God was going to bring forth His Servant as a new Israel in order to recover and regather to Himself Adam's fallen race. But, through this ingathering, the Isaianic Servant – who is equally the Davidic Branch – would also construct Yahweh's everlasting sanctuary in the context of His own enthronement as the Melchizedekian king-priest.*

Beyond that, Zechariah declared that Branch would build the Lord's true and final dwelling in conjunction with the contribution of men: "*Those who are far off will come and build [with respect to] the temple of the Lord*" (6:15).

Every previous incarnation of God's dwelling had its source in the presence and power of the Spirit, and His final sanctuary was to be no exception. First of all, the Davidic *Builder* was to be a "man of the Spirit," empowered by the Spirit to accomplish His work. Isaiah is especially emphatic in this regard. But the Old Testament also reveals that Yahweh's *house* would at that time uniquely reflect the Spirit's presence and power. For the very men in connection with whom the final temple was to be erected were themselves to be indwelled by the Spirit. In its final expression, sacred space – the realm in which God is present in relation to His creation – would assume the most profound intimacy. Building upon the quintessential Man of the Spirit, the renewed race of Spirit-filled men were to be built together to be the "dwelling of God in the Spirit." Moses' longing for Yahweh's people would at last be satisfied (Numbers 11:29).