

The Holy Spirit and God's Plan (4)

Messiah Fulfils the Scriptures through the Spirit

JESUS' VIEW OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

We need not doubt that Jesus knew the events attending the birth of John the Baptist and his own birth. He would have known of the evidences of this special work of the Spirit. Our view of him when he is in the temple, talking with the learned doctors, is enough to show his consciousness of his being. He talks about 'my Father's house', which to say the least is an unusual phrase. At his baptism he would have been conscious of the anointing, and this would be verified by the Father's, 'Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased' (Mark 1:11). His Messianic designation is linked with the anointing of the Spirit.

This must be the reason that he accepts the leading of the Spirit immediately, and enough to be led into the wilderness (cf. Rom. 8:14). His experience there was one of triumph and we saw that he returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee.

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Yet it is from other passages that we see his high regard for the Spirit. It is not too much to say he submits to the Lordship of the Spirit. A comparison of Matthew 12:31f., Mark 3:28f., and Luke 12:10 (cf. Luke 11:18ff.) shows us that Jesus claims that if one speaks a word against the Son of Man he will be forgiven, but whoever speaks a word against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, not only in this life, but also in the next. Such speaking is called blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. In this sense Jesus places the Holy Spirit far above himself as the Son of Man.

The reason for this is seen in Matthew 12:28 where Jesus says that if he casts out demons by the Holy Spirit then has the kingdom of God come upon the people. Luke 10:9 supports the same principle, especially when linked with Peter's explanation of Acts 10:38. In other words, where Jesus is the kingdom is, and is in action. However it is only where the Spirit is present that Jesus can be the King-Messiah, for his very anointing is of the Spirit, and indeed, the Spirit himself.

We can draw the conclusion, then, that Jesus saw himself as the fulfilment of the prophecies, but knew such fulfilment was only through the power, direction and enablement of the Spirit himself. As we have pointed out, Luke 10:21 shows a very high moment when he is conscious of the Father, and the Father's will, and praises his Father for that will, when in fact some of it seemed to indicate rejection of himself, failure to understand him by those who were wise and prudent!



**JESUS THE FULFILMENT OF
THE PROPHECIES**

In another volume I have expounded the prophecies and their fulfillment in Christ.¹ What I propose to do here is show that Christ and the apostles understood he had fulfilled these prophecies. If then we keep in mind that the Spirit was the author of those prophecies, we can see how intimate is his connection with Christ in leading, empowering and enabling him to fulfil them. This would constitute part of fulfilling the large program of salvation history.

In Luke 24:25–27 Jesus speaks of having fulfilled all that the prophets have spoken. This, he pointed out, was what it was all about! In Luke 24:44 he says, ‘These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms *must be fulfilled*’. Having said this he opened their minds to understand (these Scriptures). He then added, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem’.

Notice that not only in his life, ministry, death and resurrection has he fulfilled the Scriptures, but that *further fulfilment of these* will be the preaching of repentance and remission of sins across the world. The gospels show us, and often in meticulous detail, how Christ fulfilled the Scriptures, so much so that often their fulfilment seems almost mechanical, although of course it is not. Jesus then walked every step of the prophetically laid out path. He also fulfilled all the offices we have referred to of Messiah, Son of man, Messianic King,

¹ Geoffrey Bingham, *The Person and Work of Christ*.

Suffering Servant, and so on. These details are many, and the working out of them quite complicated. Yet they are there; that is what matters. Christ is the fulfilment of the Scriptures.

Shortly we will see that their fulfilment is not simply in order to justify the prophecies for that would be futile. The prophecies are there because their fulfilment is primarily indispensable to the plan of God and the salvation of mankind. Their fulfilment certainly 'authenticates' Messiah, if that is called for, but it is what their fulfilment accomplishes that is the real point. Before proceeding to this, let us see whether Christ's followers, after his resurrection and in their proclamation, understood and proclaimed him as the fulfilment of the prophecies.

This is so. The book of the Acts, particularly in the sermons given by such as Peter, Stephen and Paul, constantly reiterates this point. These speakers keep quoting actual prophecies in relation to the life and ministry of Jesus. They see them as authenticating the cross, resurrection and ascension. Acts 17:2f. says, 'And Paul went in [to the synagogue], as was his custom, and for three weeks he argued with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead'. In his first recorded sermon Paul says of the Jewish rulers: 'because they did not recognise him nor understand the utterances of the prophets . . . *fulfilled these by condemning him* . . . And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus [from the dead]; as also it is written.' Later Paul claimed he was 'saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass' (Acts 13:27, 32-33; 26:22). Similarly in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 Paul says, 'For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins *in accordance with the scriptures*, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day *in accordance with the scriptures*'.

THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

We conclude then that the early church saw Jesus as the fulfilment of the Scriptures. Far from making these prophecies redundant, it shows their dynamic, and through them conducts us to deeper views of Messiah. More than this, it reminds us that the Spirit who is both behind the utterances or the prophecies and then their fulfilment is indeed the Lord the Spirit, God's unrelenting and active agent in the fulfilment of His plan.

THE OUTWORKING OF THESE PROPHECIES

Wonderful, and even curious as it would be for a person in history to fulfil prophecies concerning him, it could conceivably be pointless also. Therefore it is the *nature* of the prophecies which really matters. These, in the Old Testament, are of such high level and value that their fulfilment is not only astonishing but eminently useful. We must limit the variety and details of these to certain basic headings. They are: (i) Messiah and the kingdom; (ii) the new covenant; and (iii) the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on 'all flesh'. These three in turn relate to further themes such as the people of God, the forgiveness of sins, the universal reign of Christ as Lord, and yet more elements implied by these we have just stated. They involve the redemption of man, his sanctification and glorification. They involve theodicy, the justification of God, and the ultimate revelation of His glory. It may not be easy, at first sight, to see the connections, but they are there.

Christ, Messiah–King and His Kingdom

This is the theme proclaimed by John. The kingdom was at hand. In Mark 1:14 Jesus takes it over from John. As we have seen, his being acclaimed Messiah–Son by the Father and

anointed for that ministry means that the kingdom is in operation wherever he works through the Spirit or, perhaps better still, the Spirit through him.

However, whilst this is good, it is not good enough. The victory of the kingdom must be sealed for all time. Satan, the prince of this world, must be defeated. This was the thrust of the original prophecy of Genesis 3:15. Jesus claims to be the stronger-than-the-strong-man (Luke 11:21ff.), and pronounces the doom of Satan in John 12:31 (cf. 14:30–31). Hence the cross constitutes the defeat of evil, principally. In this sense the kingdom is secured.

John the Baptist allied the baptism of repentance *for* the remission of sins with the kingdom. Messiah then has to deliver his people from Satan by bearing their sins. This victory is indicated in Hebrews 2:14–15, and Colossians 2:14–15. All enemies are defeated, and especially death (Rom. 5:10; cf. 1 Cor. 15:55–56), so that when Christ rises from the dead his people can be (and are) transferred from the powers of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love (Col. 1:13). This is linked with the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:14).

We would expect this message of the kingdom to be proclaimed as a result of Messiah fulfilling the Scriptures, and so it is in the book of Acts, with references to it, often, in the epistles.

An allied theme with this victory becomes the primary point of proclamation by the early church. It is this: '*Jesus is Lord!*' Later we will see how the Lord through the Spirit, and the Spirit through the Lord, work out the Father's plan to fulfilment. However, at this point we must see that there is no kingdom unless Jesus is 'King of kings and Lord of lords' (Rev. 1:5; 17:14; 19:16; cf. Acts 2:36; 10:36). He must be the King of Psalms 2:1–7 and 110. We must note that it is not simply the eternal Son or Logos who is Lord, but Jesus—that is, his

humanity has gained this title and authority, through the cross and the resurrection.

Christ and the New Covenant

Nowhere in the Old Testament is the covenant with Abraham rescinded. It is by nature of the case in the ultimate, universal. The covenant with Israel, as Israel, especially as it relates to Palestine, has conditions about it. Some scholars consider God has rescinded it; others do not. However this may be, Jeremiah 31:31–34 and related passages make it clear God will make a new covenant with the house of Israel which is ‘not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke’ (Jer. 31:31ff.). It is to be a new covenant. It is to be a covenant which evokes spontaneous obedience in accordance with the law internalised in the heart. Out of this heart thing will come true (relational) knowledge of God. This will come from the free and total forgiveness of sins which has no reference to the Mosaic sacrificial ritual and cultus.

The Benedictus in Luke 1:68–79 makes it clear that the new covenant is really the flowering out of that made with Abraham. Matthew 26:28 also makes it clear that the cross fulfils this covenant. The writer of Hebrews develops his theme of the better covenant, better mediator of covenant, better sacrificial structure and better outcome—mainly full forgiveness and complete access to God. Later we will see how the Spirit *applies* the covenant, but here we see that by his ministry in and through Christ the Spirit brings the mediator (Jesus) to full pitch as the covenant mediator. It is also interesting to note that kingdom victory through the cross and resurrection brings the forgiveness which becomes the covenant-gift.

**THE UNIVERSAL OUTPOURING
OF THE SPIRIT**

This promise—the universal outpouring of the Spirit—is closely connected with the promise of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. The restoration of the kingdom to Israel in the Acts and epistles does not simply embrace Israel but takes on universal character, and this, too, is in accordance with the prophecies of the Old Testament. In this sense the kingdom, the covenant, and the outpouring of the Spirit are inter-related prophecies, especially in respect of their fulfilment. For example the restoration prophecy of Ezekiel 36:24–28 accords very closely with the covenant promise of Jeremiah 31:31–34. Again, the restoration of Israel and of its kingdom is described in the full chapter of Ezekiel 37. In the first half the outpouring of the Spirit on Israel is described, and in the second half the uniting of Israel's kingdom under the Davidic king. Also God will make a covenant of peace with them, and they will constitute His sanctuary—a theme which is taken up at the end of Ephesians 2, relating to the church, and in the opening verses of Revelation 21 where His people constitute His sanctuary.

We have already seen that there are many promises of the outpouring of the Spirit and the renewal of Israel's kingdom. Such passages are Isaiah 32:14ff., 35:1–10, 43:18ff., and 44:3ff. In these, the Spirit is directly referred to. In other passages such as Isaiah 55 and 59 the reference is not direct but the principle is the same. Hence in Acts 1:3–8 we see the theme of the kingdom being spelled out by the risen Messiah, and also the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit. The apostles naturally enough connect the two and ask whether there will be an *immediate* restoration of the kingdom to Israel. Jesus does not deny there will be a restoration but says that the times and

seasons are in the Father's hands. Their job is, having received the kingdom, to be about the kingdom's business and leave the outworking to the Father Himself.

When John the Baptist promised that Messiah would baptise his hearers in (or, with) the Holy Spirit he was pointing to *a ministry of Jesus*. Jesus taught his disciples that the Spirit would come primarily from the Father, but that he too would be involved. He would ask the Father, who would send the Spirit (John 14:16). The Father would send him in Jesus' name (John 14:26). In fact the Son will send him from the Father (John 15:26). Jesus must go or the Spirit will not come (John 16:7). In Acts 1:5 Jesus says they will be baptised in the Spirit shortly, and in Acts 1:8 says the Spirit will come upon them.

When the Spirit comes at Pentecost, Peter explains the event from Joel 2. This too is a chapter embracing both the restoration of Israel's kingdom, and the outpouring of the Spirit. In this case it is 'upon all flesh'. The interesting point, however, is in Acts 2:33 where Peter says of Messiah, 'Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, *he has poured out* this which you see and hear'. That is, Messiah is the one who pours out the universal gift of the Holy Spirit! The man of the Spirit has now become the man who pours out the Spirit, so that *the Spirit is now the Spirit of this man*.

It is impossible to calculate the significance of this change. To this point the Spirit has always worked in creation, through history, sustaining the life of man, and working through prophets and persons to usher in the day and events of Christ. This too he has done, and has so enabled the man Jesus to be the true Messiah and Lord of the kingdom, and the mediator of the covenant, that true salvation has become the new order of the world, rightly understood. Now that man, Jesus, being

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raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of God has received the gift of the Holy Spirit to give to all men. Not simply as before will he anoint certain leaders, kings, judges, prophets, artisans and priests, but he will come to all men in a new and unprecedented manner.

This, in the eyes of the Holy Spirit, must be one of the greatest elements of fulfilment of the prophecies. Somewhere behind this lies the principle, 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy' (Rev. 19:10).

And of course the testimony of the Son is in reality the testimony of the Father.