



Lesson 20

GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT

Reading Mark 1

"And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Genesis 1:3)

It sounds so easy. But think of the tremendous power and knowledge needed before light could be created.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and earth" (Genesis 1:1).

Think again, of all the work that has to be done in order to build a house. Think of all the planning and preparing; the need for men skilled in different trades, all working together. What a lot of thought and energy it takes!

How much thought and energy, then, must it have taken to create the heaven and the earth? Where did the power come from for this great work?

We are told in the Psalms:

"By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth... for he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast" (Psalm 33:6,9).

Genesis 1:2 shows us that God's Spirit was used in creation:

"The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

Inspiration and the Spirit of God

God's power was also used to direct the minds of the men who wrote the Bible. This is known as 'inspiration'. God used men to write His words.

So we read in 2 Peter 1:21:

"The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost".

Prophecy does not always mean telling the future. In the Bible it means speaking God's words. whether about the past, present or future.



At least 30 writers wrote the words of the Bible over about 1500 years. If God had not inspired the writing of the Bible then it would be a complete mixture of ideas and standards. Instead the Bible is consistent with great themes running all the way through. It never contradicts itself.

Here are some of the things we are told about God's Spirit:

1. God's Spirit can create	As in Genesis 1:2
2. God, by His Spirit, knows everything	Psalms 139:2-12
3. God keeps the creation alive by His Spirit	Psalms 104:29-30 and Job 26:13
4. God's Spirit helped people to do His will	Judges 6:34; 11:29; Galatians 5:16
5. The prophets knew what to say through God's Spirit	Micah 3:8; Zechariah 7:12; Nehemiah 9:30; 2 Peter 1:21

What Is meant by the words "Holy Ghost"?

The phrase 'Holy Ghost' is sometimes found in the Bible.

Holy means "set apart" or "separated" for a special purpose.

Ghost means "spirit". We usually use the words "Holy Spirit" because the use of the word "ghost" can easily be misunderstood today.

So we refer to God's great power as "The Holy Ghost (or Spirit)", as the Apostle Peter did in 2 Peter 1:21:

"The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

In the Bible the Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost or the Holy Spirit, is the Power of God; the power by which God carries out His purposes and plans

The Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus Christ

It was the Holy Spirit that brought about the birth of the Lord Jesus. So Mary was told by the angel:

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 1:18).

At his baptism in the River Jordan, Jesus was given the Holy Spirit without measure (that is, without any limit). We read in John 3:34:

"He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him."

All power was given to Jesus. To other men of Old and New Testament times, God has given a portion of His power - but no other man has ever been fit to possess such powers God gave to Jesus. Jesus was able to use this great power to work miracles and it helped his preaching.

Look at these words from Isaiah 61:1, 2:

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD hath anointed me to preach... to bind up the brokenhearted... to proclaim liberty to the captives ...to comfort all that mourn."

Read the whole passage from your Bible. This is a picture of Jesus using God's Spirit in his work. He did not use the Spirit to serve himself, but to help others.

The disciples were promised the Holy Spirit

Jesus promised his twelve disciples that they also would be given the Holy Spirit, after he had gone away from them into heaven. In John 14:25, 26 he says to them:

"These things I have spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said to you."

After the Lord Jesus had left them the disciples would need help in their preaching and in setting up the early Church. God would also use His Holy Spirit to inspire them to write the New Testament. Note In the passage above that the Holy Spirit (or Comforter) would be there to teach them and to remind them of all that Jesus had said and done during his life on earth.

The word 'Comforter' means 'one called alongside to help'.

Jesus sometimes speaks of the Holy Spirit as if it were a person. But we have already seen quite clearly from the Bible that the Holy Spirit is the power of God.

Why, then, does Jesus in some places speak of the Holy Spirit as if it were a person?

Just turn to Psalm 65, and read verse 13, which says:

"The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing."

Now, when we read this, it gives us a beautiful picture of the ripe corn standing high in the valley; but we do not think for one moment that the valley is really shouting and singing - that is just the Psalmist's way of describing the picture.

So when Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as if it were a person doing this or that, he is just showing us what a very real thing this Spirit or power of God is.

Another example of this sort of language is in Proverbs 3:13-19. Read these verses and you will see that the writer is talking about wisdom as if it were a beautiful and virtuous woman. This is a powerful and vivid way to explain that the true wisdom about God is not only right but also beautiful and complete.

The Scriptures use similar language for the Spirit of God to indicate how total and complete is the power and activity of the Almighty God.

(You will see other examples of this use of language later in the course.)

The spirit came to the disciples

We have seen that Jesus promised power to his disciples, before he went into heaven. He told them to stay in Jerusalem, and

"... wait for the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4).

He promised them that they should

"... be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (verse 5).

In Acts 2 we read how, as they were waiting together, the Holy Spirit came with a sound

"as of a rushing mighty wind", shaking the house where they were gathered together. Tongues of fire were seen over each one of them; and this was a sign that the Holy Spirit had been given to them. From then on, they were able to work miracles, as Jesus had promised them.

How the spirit comes to us

The special power needed for building up the first churches is no longer needed. (There is more about this in the next lesson.) Today, God speaks to us through His Word.

We have seen that those who wrote the Bible did so by the power of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, Jesus once said:

"The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

When we read the Word of God, we are in a sense receiving the Spirit of God. This can cause a wonderful change in our lives, helping us to grow more pleasing to God.

Let us, then, read the Word of God diligently and prayerfully, remembering the words of Peter in his first epistle:

"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2).

Summary - what have we learnt about the Holy Spirit?

1. The Holy Spirit is the power of God.
2. The Bible was written by the power of the Holy Spirit.
3. Jesus was born by the power of the Holy Spirit.
4. All God's prophets had a measure of His Spirit, but to Jesus it was given "without measure".
5. The special powers given by the Spirit in the first century were later withdrawn.
6. God now speaks to us in His Word, the Bible, which is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Chapters to read

Acts 10:34-43; John 14

Learn by heart

Mark 16:15, 16

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."