

Did Anyone Have God's Holy Spirit in the First Covenant?

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Some believe that God's Holy Spirit was not given to anyone until the commencement of the Second Covenant, following the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this study, a number of scriptures will be examined to determine whether this belief is correct.

Shortly before the birth of Jesus Christ, the individual who would come to be known as John the baptizer received God's Holy Spirit,

But the angel said to him (Zacharias), "Fear not, Zacharias, because your supplication has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear a son to you, and you will call his name John." ¹⁴ "And he will be your joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵ "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will drink no wine or fermented liquor, and he will be filled of holy spirit, even from his mother's womb (Lk. 1:13-15; RNT; Ed. note in parenthesis).

As John received God's Holy Spirit shortly before the birth of Jesus Christ and as the First Covenant period was still in effect, God's Holy Spirit was available to some prior to the commencement of the Second Covenant,

Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom (God's Holy Spirit; cf. Isa. 11:2), for Moses had laid his hands on him (Deut. 34:9; cf. Nu. 27:18; *NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted*).

During the Second Covenant, anyone who has repented of sin must be baptized (see study series on Baptism) and hands must be laid upon them just as Moses did with Joshua,

Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit (Ac. 8:18).

And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying hands on him (Saul who became known as Paul) he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ac. 9:17; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance (of sin; cf. 1Jn. 3:4), telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' ⁵ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands upon them... (Ac. 19:4-6a; NASB; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Jacob's son Joseph had God's Holy Spirit, and this was recognized by a Gentile ruler,

And Pharaoh said to his servants, 'Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?' (Gen. 41:38).

During the time of Moses, the nation of Israel numbered over two million people and it was impossible for one human leader to judge all the issues that required attention. Consequently, Moses was instructed to gather seventy of the elders of Israel so that they could be given God's Holy Spirit for the purpose of wisely judging any cases that came up between individuals or groups within the nation,

So the Lord said to Moses: 'Gather to me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting that they may stand there with you. Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone' (Nu. 11:16-17; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted).

Then the Lord came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy elders; and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied (cf. Ac. 2:1-4), although they never did so again (Tg. Vg. and they did not cease) (Nu. 11:25; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Then Moses said to him (Joshua), "Are you zealous (jealous) for my sake? Oh, that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!" (Nu.11:29; Ed. notes in parentheses).

God's action during the time of Moses is recorded in the book of Isaiah,

Then he remembered the days of old, Moses and his people, saying: "Where is He who brought them (nation of Israel) up out of the (Red) sea with the shepherd of His flock? Where is He who put His Holy Spirit within them (Isa. 63:11; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

A second witness to this event is recorded in the book of Nehemiah,

You (Almighty God) also gave Your good Spirit to instruct them (nation of Israel through Moses and the elders), and did not withhold Your manna from their mouth, and gave them water for their thirst (Neh. 9:20; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Yet for many years You had patience with them, and testified against them by Your Spirit in Your prophets (Neh. 9:30a).

During the time of Haggai the prophet, God reminded His people that He is faithful to His promises even when they are not faithful to theirs, and a vital aspect of His faithfulness is related to His Holy Spirit being available to those He chooses within the nation at any given time in their history,

According to the word that I (Almighty God) covenanted with you (nation of Israel) when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear! (Hag. 2:5; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

It was because the prophet Daniel had God's Holy Spirit that he was able to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dreams. This fact was also recognized by a Gentile ruler,

But at last Daniel came before me (his name is Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god; in him (Daniel) is the Spirit of the Holy God, and I told the dream before him, saying: ⁹ 'Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I (Nebuchadnezzar) know that the Spirit of the Holy God is in you, and no secret troubles you, explain to me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and its interpretation' (Dan. 4:8-9; Ed. notes in parentheses).

This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you Belteshazzar (Daniel), declare its interpretation, since all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, for the Spirit of the Holy God is in you' (Dan. 4:18; cf. 5:11; Ed. note in parenthesis).

During the First Covenant period, when the nation of Israel repented, Almighty God raised up a ruler and empowered him with the holy spirit through which he led them out of various afflictions,

When the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the children of Israel, who delivered them: Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. ¹⁰ The Spirit of the Lord came upon him (Othniel), and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the Lord delivered Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand: and his hand prevailed over Cush-Rishathaim. So the land (of Israel) had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died (Jdg. 3:9-10; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Prior to David becoming king over Israel, Almighty God had his prophet Samuel anoint David so that he would receive the holy spirit,

Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him (David) in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward (1Sam. 16:13; Ed. note in parenthesis).

It is a pre-requisite for anyone, who wants to receive God's Holy Spirit, that they have a deep desire to follow and obey the word of God, which includes His law and commandments. Almighty God begins this process of conversion by leading an individual, with His Holy Spirit, to the point where they begin to see their sins and then make a decision to repent and start living in accordance with God's law and commandments (Rom. 2:4). Throughout this process of calling an individual, God always allows freedom of choice. No one is forced by God to repent of sin. After repentance, baptism and the laying on of hands, Almighty God grants His Holy Spirit to an individual (see studies on Baptism). At this point they have assistance from Almighty God, through His Holy Spirit that now dwells within them (Rom. 8:26-27, 34), to resist sinful practices and embrace God's law and commandments on an ongoing basis,

And we (Christ's disciples) are His (Almighty God's) witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit which God has given to those who obey Him (Ac. 5:32; cf. 1Pet. 1:2; Ed. notes in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Those, who believe they do not have to obey God's law and commandments, will have to repent of this attitude if they want to receive everlasting life,

Salvation (which includes everlasting life) is far from the wicked, for they do not seek Your (Almighty God's) statutes (Ps. 119:155; Ed. notes in parenthesis).

Jesus Christ stated the same thing during his earthly ministry,

But he (Jesus Christ) said to him (a rich young man), "Why do you ask me about good? **Only One is good; and if you desire to enter life (everlasting), keep the commandments**" (Mt. 19:17; RNT; cf. Ps. 14:3; 53:1; 143:2; Ed. notes in parentheses).

This deep desire to obey Almighty God was present with seven thousand people during the time of Elijah, and the apostle Paul commented on the fact that this was another example of faith combined with obedience during the First Covenant,

God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel (because they were sinning), saying, ³'Lord, they (Israel) have killed your prophets and torn down your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life?' ⁴But what does the divine response say to him? 'I have reserved (set apart) for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.' ⁵Even so (in like manner) then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. ⁶And if by grace (God's mercy), then it is no longer by works (animal sacrifices with related ordinances; cf. Heb. 10:1-4; Rom. 9:30-33); otherwise grace is no longer grace (Rom. 11:2-6a; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

As there were seven thousand men who had not succumbed to the false religious system in ancient Israel, and as they were set apart by Almighty God in the same manner that others were during Paul's time, it can be concluded that the seven thousand were also in receipt of God's Holy Spirit. If not, they would have been hostile toward God's word, which includes His law and commandments,

Because the carnal mind (mind without the presence of God's Holy Spirit) is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. ⁸So then, those who are in the flesh (seeking worldly values; cf. Rom. 12:2; Gal. 1:4) cannot please God. ⁹But you (those set apart by God's Holy Spirit) are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His (Almighty God's) (Rom. 8:7-9; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Based on Romans 8:9, the seven thousand during the time of Elijah could not have been reserved (set apart) by Almighty God, unless they were in receipt of His Holy Spirit. If they did not have God's Holy Spirit they would not have been His.

As Almighty God does not change, the action of His Holy Spirit does not change. In the Second Covenant, God's people are warned not to do things that could quench (extinguish) the action of the holy spirit,

Do not quench the Spirit (1Thess. 5:19).

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put him to an open shame (Heb. 6:4-6).

In the First Covenant period, King Saul received God's Holy Spirit, and later quenched it by his rebellious actions,

So it was, when he (Saul) had turned his back to go from Samuel (God's prophet), that God changed his heart (Eze. 36:26-27; 2Cor. 3:3); and all those signs came to pass that day. ¹⁰ When they came there to the hill, there was a group of prophets to meet him; then the Spirit of God came upon him (Saul), and he prophesied among them (1Sam. 10:9-10; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Saul quenched God's Holy Spirit by breaking God's clear instructions,

Then Saul said to Samuel, 'I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people (instead of God) and obeyed their voice (1Sam. 15:24; Ed. note in parenthesis).

But Samuel said to Saul, 'I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel (1Sam. 15:26).

Had Saul genuinely repented and accepted his punishment for sinning, he could have been restored in his relationship with Almighty God, but he did not. Instead, he was determined to destroy the next king of Israel, David (1Sam. 18:6-11; 19:1). Because of this attitude, God's Holy Spirit departed from Saul,

But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul... (1Sam. 16:14a).

In contrast, God's Holy Spirit was given to David, and because David repented when he recognized sin in his life (2Sam. 12:13; Ps. 51:1-4), God's Holy Spirit remained with him,

Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him (David) in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward... (1Sam. 16:13a; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

King David's deep desire to repent, whenever he sinned, was a characteristic that Almighty God recognized, and it is an integral part of living in accordance with God's will for anyone who considers themselves a follower of Almighty God,

And when He (Almighty God) had removed him (King Saul), He raised up for them (ancient Israel) David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will' (Ac. 13:22; Ed. notes in parentheses).

All those people named in the eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews had faith in God's promises, even though they were severely tested in many cases. Their

faith, or trust in Almighty God, was confirmed by their obedience to His commands, no matter how difficult it was for them,

By faith Abraham when he was tested (by a command from Almighty God), offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten (only-born) son (Heb. 11:17; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Because all these people in the First Covenant trusted and obeyed God, no matter what they were commanded to do, they would have received God's Holy Spirit. God is not a respecter of persons and He does not change. Therefore, if some in the First Covenant obeyed, they would have received the gift of His Holy Spirit just as those during the Second Covenant (Ac. 10:34; Jas. 1:17),

And we (Christ's disciples) are His (Almighty God's) witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit which God has given to those who obey Him (Ac. 5:32; cf. 1Pet. 1:2).

God's law and commandments is the yardstick by which a person's faith is measured. If someone believes that God's law and commandments is done away, they have no means of determining whether they trust God.

Abraham obeyed God's command to sacrifice his son Isaac, and it was by his obedience that he learned to trust Almighty God. If Abraham was not given this difficult command, he would never have known how much he trusted Him. It is no different for God's people today,

Was not Abraham our father justified by works (obedience to God's command) when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? ²² Do you see that faith (trust in God) was working together with his works (obedience), and by works (his) faith was made perfect? ²³ And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness' (cf. Ps. 119:160, 172). And he was called the friend of God. ²⁴ You see then that a man is justified by works (obedience), and not by faith only (Jas. 2:21-24; Ed. notes in parentheses).

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works (obedience) is dead also (Jas. 2:26; Ed. note in parenthesis).

But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works (obedience to God's commands), and I will show you my faith by my works (Jas. 2:18; Ed. note in parenthesis).

But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works (obedience to God's commands) is dead? (Jas. 2:20; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Going back to the holy spirit being given to those who obey Almighty God, a scripture in the book of John has been used by some to state that the holy spirit was not given to anyone until Christ died and was resurrected. Upon closer examination, it will be shown that this is not a correct interpretation,

But this he (Christ) spoke concerning the spirit (of God) that those having believed in him were about to receive; for the spirit was not yet (given to Christ's disciples), because Jesus had not yet been given glory (Jn. 7:39; RNT; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Christ promised to give the holy spirit to his disciples following his death and resurrection (Jn. 16:7), but this did not occur immediately. Instead it came on the Day of Pentecost, which is one of God's commanded Holy Days (Ac. 2:1). This was a pivotal event in Almighty God's plan of salvation because it was the commencement of a prophecy given by the prophet Joel. The apostle Peter commented on this fact,

But Peter, standing up with the eleven (other disciples of Christ), raised his voice and said to them, 'Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. ¹⁵ For these (people speaking in various languages) are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day (9:00 am approx.). ¹⁶ But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel (Ac. 2:14-16; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Peter went on to explain that Joel prophesied God's Holy Spirit would eventually be given upon repentance, in a progressive manner, to all who have sinned (Ac. 2:38); this activity commenced on the Day of Pentecost. However, according to many scriptures and comments recorded during the First Covenant, it is clear that God's Holy Spirit was available to some who had faith in the sacrifice of God's anointed one, Jesus Christ, even before he was born as a man (Ps. 2:1-12; 20:6; 28:8). Therefore, the fact that God's Holy Spirit was withheld from Christ's disciples until the Day of Pentecost following Christ's death and resurrection has no bearing on the fact that some received it during the First Covenant based on their faith in God's word and obedience to His law and commandments.

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor. 11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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