

Our Greatest Need, Part 1

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Clairemont Seventh-day Adventist Church April 13, 2013

Ellen White, one of the founders of our church, had a dream one night. In the dream an angel stood at the gate of the golden city, the New Jerusalem. Of those who sought admission, only one question was asked. Can you think of what that might have been? It wasn't, "Did you attend church? Did you pay tithe? Can you explain the prophecy of Daniel 8?" As important as those things might be, that wasn't the question that was asked. What was the question? It was, "Have you received the Holy Spirit?" All other questions are included and answered in that one!

The reception of the Holy Spirit is indispensable to our salvation and spiritual growth. And this vital truth might be lost even on those who have been religious for a long time. Said Jesus to Nicodemus during a night interview, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." John 3:5-8.

Nicodemus had been a respected teacher in Israel for many years, yet he seemed to be ignorant on this most important teaching. By the way, some translations use the term "Holy Ghost" instead of "Holy Spirit." There's nothing wrong or sinister in that. It is because the word "ghost" comes from a root related to "gust" or "ghast," which means "wind," or "breeze." To be "aghast" is to be breathless.

Nicodemus interpreted Jesus' words in an "earthly" way, and stumbled over how a person could be born again. He asked, Would they have to re-enter their mother's womb? He didn't comprehend what Jesus was talking about. Unfortunately, he has many friends and acquaintances today. We must be born from above, born of the Spirit and hear His voice!

It might surprise some people to know this, but the teaching of the Holy Spirit is not something limited to the New Testament, as some suppose. It is true that the Spirit was poured out in greater abundance on that Pentecostal Day, empowering the small group of believers to brighten the globe with the message of Christ's resurrection. The small flame of fire appearing on their heads became a great conflagration and set ablaze the entire world. But the doctrine (and by the way, the word "doctrine" simply means "teaching") of the Holy Spirit is watermarked on every page of Scripture. We're going to take a look this week and next at the Holy Spirit as revealed in the Old Testament, and then at the New Testament teaching of the Holy Spirit as revealed in the life of Jesus. Later we'll

note the Spirit's vital influence in formation of the New Testament body of Christ, the Christian Church. Today, we'll take a look at a number of occurrences in which the Spirit is mentioned in the Old Testament. As we read them, we'll discover more about His ways and methods. In each of them there is something to learn.

We'll start in Genesis 1. In the beginning of creation, reported in the second verse of the Bible we read, "The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." Take special notice of that word "hover." It's a very beautiful and picturesque word! We'll get an excellent idea of the meaning of this word by comparing another scripture in which it appears. It's the same word that Moses used in his last speech when he said, "As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the LORD alone led him (Israel)." Deuteronomy 32:11, 12. It's a picture of protective and loving parenthood. I like the way the King James translates this verse. "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over its young." That's a picture of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is sometimes called the "Third Member of the Godhead." The Bible doesn't use the word "trinity," which simply means a "unity of three," but it does mention the word "Godhead" in Colossians 2:9 and it does support the teaching that Father, Son and Holy Spirit compose the Godhead Whom we worship. In Genesis 1 we are given clear evidence of that, in two separate ways. In the first verse, the name for "God" is the Hebrew "Elohim," coming from the Hebrew word *el*, meaning "power." So, Elohim means "Powerful Ones." It is in the plural form, with the *im* ending as in "cherubim." In Hebrew, plural indicates "three or more," unlike our plural form which designates "two or more." In Hebrew there is a separate "dual" form. (If you do a search on your computer looking up "Hebrew grammar dual form" you'll find lots of information on this.) The name of God first used in the Bible suggests the triune Deity.

Secondly, we read in verse 26 of Genesis 1 that "God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image.'" The pronouns in that verse are also plural, indicating that the Godhead, Father, Son and Spirit, were involved in the creation of the world.

The Spirit was active at creation, and participated in the creative process that birthed this world, taking a formless glob and making it "very good." We may well meditate on this picture in Genesis and apply it to the process of re-creation, which is the new birth by the Spirit. Genesis 1 is the story of the creation of the world; it's also the template for the re-creation of the soul. In a similar way, the Spirit is "hovering" over God's children, assisting in bringing order from chaos, beauty from sin's shapeless deformity.

The Spirit's presence is introduced in Genesis 1; it is amplified in Genesis 3, after sin entered the picture. The Spirit is the Agency through which the

"enmity" promised by God when mankind fell is planted in the heart of man. When Satan seduced Eve into transgression, and then she induced Adam to sin, Satan felt that he had conquered the world. They had disobeyed God, and he had won! It was simple! It was over! "Not so fast," the Lord said as He came to the Garden later that day. Satan was shocked to hear the words that breathed forgiveness and redemption for the human family; doom for him. God promised to put something called "enmity" between those of His kingdom and Satan's.

Look carefully at the words God spoke in the Garden. He said "I will put *enmity* between you (the serpent, Satan) and the woman (Eve and her descendants)." The word "enmity" simply means "hatred." What God was saying was that though man's nature had fallen and become corrupted through sin, He would undertake to bring restoration. He would put a restriction, a limitation on Satan's influence over mankind. He would make it possible that mankind, though fallen, could have a "hatred" for sin. This would require a miracle, since man in his fallen state would naturally possess love of sin, not a hatred of it.

The truth is, without divine intervention, man would have absolutely no interest in spiritual matters, and would have no weapons with which to combat the influence of Satan. Mankind would be under the complete control of the evil one, which is exactly what Satan anticipated when he successfully accomplished their disobedience. But God promised to counteract the influence of Satan and plant "enmity," or "hatred," through the action of what we might call "conscience" or the gentle voice and powerful influence of the Holy Spirit.

This is a most important principle to understand as we study the role of the Holy Spirit. Without that indispensable Gift of His presence, we, every one of us, would be under the complete control of Satan. No matter how civil and moral a person might look, no matter how highly educated or talented, no matter what station of life one might occupy or what degrees one might possess; without God's Spirit every single one of us is no match for the apostate angel Lucifer. We have fallen natures which are prone to sin. Our "natural" desire is toward self and selfishness. Only the implantation of God's power through the Spirit can change that and give us any chance at moral correction.

Take careful note of this: one day as we continue our study, we'll see that this great Gift will be removed from the world (not believers), and the universe will see what Planet Earth *would have been all along* without the gracious intervention of God's Holy Spirit. We'll have more to speak about that later. It will help us see God's great Plan for this Planet in a broader perspective.

In addition to bringing a Power to counteract the influence of Satan all through the history of this world, one day Satan's influence would be completely removed and destroyed. Satan, the serpent, would bruise the head of the "Seed," Jesus, but the "Seed" would crush his head. Those words caught Satan by total surprise and he knew that they spelled his ultimate doom.

Continuing our look at the Spirit in the Old Testament story, we see that the Spirit was active throughout those generations between Adam and Noah. Sadly for the most part they pushed away His influences toward righteousness and instead cultivated wickedness. A most important aspect of what the Bible reveals concerning the Spirit is brought to view in the Flood story, when the Lord told Noah, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever." Genesis 6:3. There is a point beyond which we cannot receive His help; not because God's love has been exhausted, but because we've developed a callous on our spiritual ear and have built up resistance so strong that we are out of range of hearing His voice. What is the name that the Bible uses to describe this hopeless condition? It calls it the "unpardonable sin."

God's patience is long; His forbearance mighty. But there is a limit to even divine tolerance. The world in Noah's day reached that point, and before Jesus returns our present world will likewise have passed that unseen barrier. Those outside the door of the ark had reached that fateful boundary. His Voice is soft and sweet; pray that you never turn away His loving voice! Listen to Paul's advice: "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God (by the way, this text confirms that God's Spirit is a Person, not just the power or force of God), by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Ephesians 4:30.

God's Spirit was active at creation, at the time of the Flood and at the time of the Exodus, all major events in the story of Planet Earth. We're told that those who fabricated the wilderness tabernacle were imbued with a special measure of God's Spirit in order to do their work. "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship.'" Exodus 31:1-5. What a beautiful illustration and lesson is this!

The New Testament has much to say about Spiritual gifts; those talents and abilities given by God for the purpose of building up the tabernacle of the church. But see this parallel: we should note that this teaching has its root in the Old Testament. Bezaleel and his associate Aholiab, along with the others who worked with them, were endowed with special abilities by the Spirit in order to build the tabernacle of the Lord. Doesn't the New Testament tell us about "building" or "edifying" the church through Spirit-endowed gifts of ministry? What we read in the book of Acts, such as the amazing ability to speak in other languages or healing miracles that caused the church to grow was foreshadowed 15 centuries before when God filled Bezaleel with His Spirit in order to fashion the sanctuary.

Nor were these gifts given on a temporary basis. Centuries after they

entered Canaan these gifts of the Spirit still clung to their descendants who became sought-after artisans when Solomon constructed the more permanent structure of worship. We're told in Exodus 31:6 that Aholiab was of the tribe of Dan. So it was that from among the descendants of Aholiab that masons and craftsmen were selected for the building project in Solomon's day, some 400 years later. Hiram, king of Tyre, responded to Solomon's request for help by saying, "I have sent a skillful man endowed with understanding, Hiram my master craftsman (the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan)." II Chronicles 2:13. Hundreds of years later those talents were still present within the family line of Aholiab of the tribe of Dan.

But here's a note of sadness. While the wilderness tabernacle was assembled with a conscious spirit of willing generosity, so much so that Moses had to eventually restrain them from giving more, that was not the same spirit that filtered through the encampment when it came time to build the house of the Lord in Solomon's time. In fact, we'd say today that the workers "struck for higher wages." Greed and avarice tarnished the beauty of that edifice. How sad when those who have been endowed by God with talents for ministry begin to think that they have acquired them by their own doing and demand higher remuneration for their services. This is the spirit of selfishness that Satan is imbuing in labor unions by which he intends to bind together his captives for destruction. It is not the spirit of Christ that leads to labor strikes and disruption.

Is it possible that mistake could be repeated in our church? Consider this thought: there was a time when the concept of remuneration in our church for all its workers was on a "missionary scale." That is, one received compensation not in accordance with their talent, education or experience, but they received a "fair living wage," which if managed skillfully could pay ones bills. As our church began to grow, outreach through medical missionary work became a successful approach to winning souls. Seventh-day Adventists became known for their practice of sound wisdom in health matters and preventative medicine. Health institutes and medical schools began to flourish.

The doctors who graduated from these schools held the lofty title of "medical missionary." One of the schools from which they graduated was called the "College of Medical Evangelists," a name in keeping with its spiritual objectives. This was later replaced by the indistinct name "Loma Linda University." Back in the early days, these medical evangelists were paid the same amount as the ministers. They were both sharers of the Gospel; the minister sharing through the Word, the doctor through healing. The Lord blessed this church with unusual wisdom in the field of physiology, health and medicine. God-inspired industries were developed the proceeds of which to advance the Gospel. Today few people know the history of how corn flakes or peanut butter were born.

Today the medical world has come to recognize the beneficial effects of a

diet absent of flesh foods, animal fats, excessive sugar and salt. "Going vegan" has become much in vogue, even among some of those of the New Age movement and the jet-setters of Hollywood. But Adventists were given these concepts a century and half ago! Today, the "world" has stolen the "thunder" of healthful living, and Adventists don't receive the attention that God intended through the teaching of true health principles. Back then, Seventh-day Adventists were known as the ones on the cutting edge of medicine, offering the very finest and most up-to-date treatments. The most famous and influential people of the world, including presidents of the United States, entered the doors of those health institutes.

Unfortunately, through the process of time, a different philosophy began to take root. Doctors, seeing what physicians on the "outside" made, began to slide away from the denomination pay scale and demand remuneration commensurate with their colleagues in the world. Hospital administrators used to be paid on the same missionary basis, but not anymore. How sad that the Gifts of the Spirit would be used to foster selfishness!

How sad that the Gifts of the Spirit, given to build the tabernacle, would be turned completely upside down and become a tool of the devil, to tear down the church and build the synagogue of Satan! Let's sit in on an imaginary conversation between Bezaleel and someone who's traveled quite a distance to ask him a question. Let's listen. "Mr. Bezaleel, I understand that you have unusual talent in temple construction. I've heard that you are a genius in carving objects and designing tapestries. You're just the person we're looking for! We're right now in the process of planning a brand new temple for Baal up here in Syria. We'll offer you a handsome salary to work on it with us, much more than you received in the project you just finished. What do you say?" Answer "A" might be, "No thank you! The talents I have are a direct gift from Jehovah God, to be used in the building of His house of worship. It would be sacrilege to use them to build a temple for Baal!" Answer "B" might be, "Your offer sounds pretty good. I guess it wouldn't be so terrible if I worked for you for a while. I could always come back and do more work for Jehovah if He needs me."

The gift of music is one of the greatest gifts ever given to mankind. How many have been blessed with voices with which to praise God, who have used them to praise the enemy of God! How many began by singing in the church choir who then were drawn by the neon lights of the world and abandoned their spiritual roots for a heavier purse. Names that come to mind include Elvis Presley and Aretha Franklin. We're told that the artist known as Prince and Ozzie Osborne were both raised in Seventh-day Adventist homes. We're informed that the group "Black Sabbath," of which Osborne was leader, took their name because of his Seventh-day Adventist upbringing.

Modern-day Bezaleels and Aholiabs, gifted with unusual talents to build the sanctuary have turned the gifts into a curse, offering praise instead to Satan.

I was having a conversation one time with whose name would probably be familiar to some of you because he's sung on 3ABN often and was featured in some of our major evangelistic efforts. It was with keen disappointment that I that heard him say that he routinely collects about \$2,500.00 a night to sing popular love ballads in nightclubs and lounges. Where are you, Bezaleel? Stand up, Aholiab! Whatever gift He has given to you; whatever talent you have, use it wisely! Use it for God! Use it to build up His kingdom!

Our greatest need is to be filled with the Spirit; to be changed from within, to be recreated in His image. The Spirit today is "hovering," "fluttering" over your heart and mine seeking entrance. He is leading us to righteousness through conviction, repentance and faith. He is there to empower us against the enemy. "When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD will lift up a standard against him." Isaiah 59:19. He is ready to give us gifts, talents and abilities which can be used to build up His tabernacle.

All we need to do is ask, and be willing to open our hearts to Him. Will you receive Him today? Will you covenant to spend time each day in His sacred writings, the "God-breathed" scriptures which will lead you to a friendship with Jesus?