

OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS

A careful study of the Old Testament will reveal the fact that in Old Testament times, as in New Testament times, those who accomplished great things for God were first anointed by the Holy Spirit, and endowed with power from on high. No great work has ever been accomplished except through the power of the Holy Spirit, who is the great Executive of God, carrying out the will of God in all things. From the first chapter of Genesis we learn that "the Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters," and that He created all things in obedience to God's commands. The Holy Spirit is the source of all life, both spiritual and temporal. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth," or giveth life (John 6: 63), so that in God "we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Scientists have sought in vain to discover the secret of life, not knowing that the Holy Spirit is the great source of all life. But the patriarch Job knew that it was through the power of the Spirit that God created all things, when he said, "By his Spirit he hath garnished the heavens" (Job 26:13). Elihu also understood it when he said, "The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life" (Job 33:4). Not only did the Holy Spirit bring all things into being at God's command, but He gave the tabernacle builders the wisdom to perform their work (Exodus 28 : 3 ; 31 : 2, 3 ; and 35:30, 31), and he qualified all the great patriarchs, prophets, judges, and kings for the work God had for them to do.

THE PATRIARCHS.

That it was the power of the Holy Spirit which made the Old Testament patriarchs such princes with God and men is very evident. Enoch must have been filled with the Spirit of God, because he "walked with God" (Genesis 5: 22, 24), and prophesied (Jude 14), and was translated (Hebrews 11:5); and we know that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to give grace, to reveal things, and to translate people to heaven (see 1 Corinthians 15, and so on). Noah must also have been endued with the Holy Spirit's power, because he also "walked with God" (Genesis 6:9); he talked with God (Genesis 6: 13; Hebrews 11:7); and it seems that the Spirit of God spoke through him to those who lived during the flood, and that they are now imprisoned in hell because they refused to hear him (1 Peter 3: 18-20). Abraham also must have been filled with the Holy Spirit, as he had many visions and special revelations from the Lord (Genesis 15: 1; Acts 7:2; Hebrews 11:8). Other Old Testament patriarchs were doubtless endued with the Holy Spirit's power in a similar manner; but the deeper experiences of Jacob and Joseph are more fully described in the Word of God than those of the other patriarchs.

JACOB.

In the Bible account of Jacob's life, as perhaps in that of no other Old Testament saint, we have revealed the power of God to change and transform character. Before God met Jacob at Bethel there was little to love and admire in his weak, vacillating character. His name, Jacob, means supplanter, or deceiver, and such was his character. By deception he obtained his brother Esau's birthright, and he then started away to a strange land to escape his brother's wrath. But God, who foreknows all things, knew that Jacob rather than Esau was prepared to abandon the life of selfishness and sin, and to become a chosen vessel in His service (Romans 9:11). One night as he lay asleep on the lonely mountains north of Jerusalem, then called Jebus, with the stones for his pillow, the Lord began to reveal Himself to him. In a dream the Holy Spirit revealed to him a little of the glories of heaven. He saw a ladder reaching toward heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending on it ; and the Lord promised him great blessings (Genesis 28). His experience is described in the well known words,

“Though like a wanderer, the sun gone down,
Darkness be over me, my rest a stone,
Yet in my dreams I would be.
Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee.”

Jacob called the name of the place Bethel, which means house of God, and said, “This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven” (Genesis 28: 17): But it was only the "gate," or beginning, of Jacob's spiritual experience. It was not at Bethel, but at Peniel, that his life was completely transformed. After he had served Laban many years, and Laban became envious of him, Jacob started for his old home. Laban pursued him with an army, and he also heard that his brother Esau was coming with another army to meet him. Hemmed in between the two armies, he seemed to be completely at their mercy, and was at the end of his own resources. But "Man's extremity is God's opportunity," and the darkest hour is often before day. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles ; they shall run, and not be weary ; and they shall walk, and not faint " (Isaiah 40: 31). Such was the case with Jacob. He knew that God only could deliver him from the extremity in which he had placed himself by his evil deeds. So he spent the night alone with God, crying for deliverance. Doubtless it was a night of bitter repentance and tears. He wrestled with the angel of the Lord until the breaking of the day, and said to him, " I will not let thee go, except thou bless me” (Genesis 32:26). Having touched his thigh and made him a cripple, to punish him for his sins and to keep him humble before God, the angel pronounced upon him one of the greatest blessings that man has ever experienced. He said, " Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince thou hast power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." Israel means prince of God, and from that night at Peniel until his dying day, Jacob was truly a spiritual prince, and had power with God and with men. In one night God transformed him from a weak, vacillating deceiver, into a prince with God and men; from Jacob (deceiver) to Israel (prince of God) ; and from a refugee to a ruler. This wonderful change was wrought in answer to prayer, and because Jacob said, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”

JOSEPH.

Another Old Testament saint whose deeper religious experiences have been a help to many was the patriarch Joseph. In his youth God revealed to Joseph, through dreams and visions, that He would greatly bless him (Genesis 37). But the blessings of God did not come to Joseph until he was prepared by suffering to receive them. Human nature is such that we cannot bear great blessings or prosperity without some "thorn in the flesh," or humiliating experiences, to keep us from being " exalted above measure". Paul had to be kept humble through some "thorn in the flesh" lest he "should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations."(2 Corinthians 12: 7). "The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold" (Proverbs 17 : 3 ; and 27 : 21). Silver can be melted and refined in a pot, but the gold must be put right into the fire before it can be melted and refined. Those who are only to be silver vessels in the house of God may only have to go through the melting pot of affliction to be refined; but those who are to be golden vessels in the house of God often have to go through the furnace fire of affliction, as did Job, Madam Guyon, and many others. Joseph was to be a golden vessel for the Master's use, and he had to be greatly humbled before he could bear the great honors and blessings that God was about to shower upon him. He was betrayed by his brethren, sold as a bond-slave, carried away into the strange land of Egypt, falsely accused of an horrible crime, and finally thrown into an Egyptian dungeon. Thus he lost friends, and property, and reputation, and liberty, and everything that is held dearest in this life. This did not look like the prosperity and blessing that God had

promised him, but his faith in God never wavered. Like the patriarch Job, in the midst of his trials, he could say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). Although Joseph lost everything except his faith in God, he did not doubt God nor forsake him, as most men would have done under similar circumstances. After the Lord had sufficiently humbled him, so that he could bear the honor, blessings and honor began to pour in upon him. He was delivered from prison, placed on the throne of Egypt as the virtual ruler, had his friends and relatives restored to him, and above all this God gave him such wisdom and understanding that even Pharaoh marveled at it. -'And Pharaoh said unto his servants. Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath showed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art" (Genesis 41: 38, 39).

MOSES, JOSHUA, AND THE ELDERS.

In the life of Moses, the first and greatest of Israel's judges, the Holy Spirit's power was manifest in a preeminent degree. Over five hundred times in the Word of God we are told about God speaking to Moses or Moses speaking to God. When the Lord first called Moses to lead the children of Israel from Egypt to Canaan, he went in his own strength to deliver Israel, and killed two Egyptians. Then he got frightened, and fled into the wilderness, and spent forty years feeding sheep for his father-in-law. By that time all his pride and self-reliance had left him. When God again called him to go and deliver Israel from Egypt, he felt his own weakness as he had not when the Lord first called him to that mission. " Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth "(Numbers 12: 3). He pleaded that he was "slow of speech," and was not qualified to lead Israel. But God, Who chooses and uses humble instruments, said, " I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say" (Exodus 4: 12). Moses still pleaded that the Lord would send someone else, and then the Lord gave him Aaron as his spokesman. After this the Spirit of God worked through Moses and Aaron in a marvelous manner. At the sway of Moses' rod the plagues of blood, frogs, lice, flies, murrain, boils and blains, locusts, and darkness were sent over the land of Egypt, the Red Sea was divided, water was brought from the smitten rock, and so on. Under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, Moses also wrote more of the Bible than any other person, the five books of Moses being larger than the fourteen letters of Paul. When he came down from the mount, after communing with God, his countenance was so resplendent with the glory of God that he had to veil his face while talking with the people (Exodus 34:33).

When Israel increased to a great nation, and the burden of judging the people was too great for Moses, seventy elders were selected to assist him in judging the people. The Spirit of God fell upon these seventy elders, and they began to prophesy. Joshua was afraid that they would take the leadership away from Moses, and asked Moses to rebuke Eldad and Medad, two of the seventy, who were prophesying in the camp. Moses said to him, "Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them!" (Numbers 12:29).

When God was about to call away Moses, he prayed that the Lord would raise up someone to take his place. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him" (Numbers 27:18). After Moses had prayed for him, Joshua was given great power and wisdom by the Spirit of God. He conquered seven nations and thirty-one kings in the land of Canaan, and took possession of the land.

OTHER JUDGES OF ISRAEL.

Not only Moses and Joshua, but all the other great judges of Israel, were qualified by the Holy Spirit's power for the work to which God had called them. They were farmers and others from among the people, and were raised up and anointed by the Holy Spirit to become judges over Israel. Again and again Israel were delivered into the hands of their enemies because of their sins, and when they repented God always raised up a great judge to deliver them from their enemies and to rule over them. We are expressly told concerning many of these judges that the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and prepared them for the work God had for them to do. Thus, in Judges 3:9, 10, we read concerning Othniel, "And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel," and so on. Likewise we read, "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon" (Judges 6:34), after which he had power, with a little band of three hundred men, to put to flight the great army of the Midianites who were "like grasshoppers for multitude." Again, we read how "the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah" (Judges 11:29), a man of humble birth, and of how mightily God used him to deliver Israel from the Ammonites. From the book of Judges we also learn that the strength of Samson was the strength of the Lord, and that when he grieved away the Spirit of God he was weak like other men. "And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol" (Judges 13:25), and he began to perform deeds of valor. One day he met a lion, "And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand" (Judges 14:6). The "Spirit of the Lord came upon him," and he went to Ashkelon and slew thirty of the wicked Philistines (Judges 14:19). "And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands. And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand and took it, and slew a thousand therewith" (Judges 15: 14, 15). When the Spirit of the Lord left him his power was gone (Judges 16: 20); but when he prayed the power returned to him again (Judges 16:28). The last and one of the greatest of the judges of Israel was Samuel. As a child he grew, "and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men" (1 Samuel 2 : 26). The Lord spoke to him, and revealed many things to him by the Holy Spirit "And all Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord" (1 Samuel 3:20, 21).

THE KINGS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH.

As the great patriarchs and judges were filled with the Spirit, so were the greatest and best kings of Israel and Judah. All the good kings of Israel were anointed for their office by the Spirit of God, and were thus qualified to rule over the people. The anointing oil poured upon them at their coronation symbolized the Holy Spirit's anointing, just as did the anointing oil poured upon the high priest at his consecration. Everywhere in the Scriptures oil is used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit and His anointing. The prophet Samuel told Saul, who was the first king of Israel, that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon him, and that he would be turned into another man (1 Samuel 10:6). When the Spirit of God came upon Saul and he began to prophesy, the people were astonished and said, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (1 Samuel 10:11). But someone who knew that the same God who had made the others prophets had also made Saul a prophet, said, "But who is their father?" "The Spirit of God came upon Saul" (1 Samuel 11 : 6), and he prospered until he sinned by sparing Agag; and then "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him" (1 Samuel 16:14).

When the prophet Samuel poured the anointing oil on David, the next great king of Israel, "the Spirit of the Lord came on David from that day forward" (1 Samuel 16: 13). Through the inspiration of the Holy

Spirit David wrote the noblest songs that ever were sung, and he foretold the coming of Christ both in humiliation and glory. The shepherd boy on Judea's hills was made one of the world's greatest poets, prophets, and kings. "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue" (2 Samuel 23:2), says David; and the apostle Peter said that the Holy Ghost spake by David (Acts 1 : 16). After David sinned, he feared that he had sinned against the Holy Ghost, and he prayed, ""Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit: Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee" (Psalm 51:11-13).

When Solomon, the third king over Israel, was a youth, he chose wisdom from God, rather than long life, riches, or honor; and because he made this choice God gave him a wise and understanding heart, so that no one else was so wise as Solomon (1 Kings 3). His fame went out over all the earth; and when the Queen of Sheba came to see him and hear him for herself, "there was no more spirit in her" (1 Kings 10:5). She said, "the half was not told me" (verse 7). The wisdom of this world paled into nothingness before the marvelous wisdom which the Spirit of God imparted to King Solomon. Wisdom and knowledge are still the gifts of God's Spirit (1 Corinthians 12: 8; James 3 : 17), and God can give us wise and understanding hearts (James 1:5). The wisdom of Solomon, the wisest man, like the strength of Samson, the strongest man, was a direct gift of the Holy Spirit.

THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS.

As the Holy Spirit anointed and qualified the great judges and kings of Israel, so He anointed and qualified the Old Testament prophets. Without the anointing of the Holy Spirit they would have been only ordinary men. Isaiah was only " a man of unclean lips" unable to speak with divine power, until God touched his lips with the fire of His Holy Spirit (Isaiah 6); and then he became the world's greatest and most sublime prophet. Jeremiah felt that he was but a child, and could not be a prophet (Jeremiah 1); but God so anointed him with the Holy Spirit's power that he became "a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls" (verse 18) against sin, "to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down " the evil, and "to build, and to plant" the good (verse 10). He became the greatest prophet of woe and denunciation against sin that the world has ever had. The Lord said to him, "I will make my words in thy mouth fire" (Jeremiah 5: 14), and they were like a fire, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces (Jeremiah 23:29). Over and over again we read about the Spirit of the Lord being upon Ezekiel, and inspiring him with heavenly visions and revelations (Ezekiel 1:1, 3; 2:2; 3:12, 14, 22, 24; 8:1, 3; 11 : 1, 5, 24; 33: 22; 37: 1 ; 40: 1 ; 43- 5)- The great prophet Elijah was so anointed with the Spirit of God that Elisha longed for a double portion of his spirit (2 Kings 2:9), and " the spirit and power of Elijah " became proverbial (Luke 1: 17). When the mantle of Elijah fell upon Elisha, the Spirit of God anointed Elisha to become a great prophet (2 Kings 2), and the sons of the prophets said, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha" (verse 15). Daniel was only a Hebrew captive in a heathen land, but the Spirit of God gave him greater wisdom than all the wise men of the great Babylonish empire (Daniel 1:17; 4:8, g, 18; 5:11-14; 6:3) ; and like Joseph he was made the real ruler of a world-empire. The Holy Spirit revealed to him the rise and fall of all the empires of the world (Daniel 2 and 7). As the Holy Spirit anointed and qualified the major prophets, so He also anointed the minor prophets. Balaam was enlightened by Him (Numbers 24:2); so also were Saul's messengers (1 Samuel 19:20-23); and Micaiah (1 Kings 22:24; 2 Chronicles 18:23); and Amasai (1 Chronicles 12:18); and Azariah (2 Chronicles 15:1); and Jahaziel (2 Chronicles 20: 14) ; and Zechariah the son of Jehoiada (2 Chronicles 24:20) ; and Elihu (Job 32:8, 18, 19) ; and Micah (Micah 3:8); and all the others. The Spirit of the Lord was in all the true prophets (Nehemiah 9: 30; 1 Pe-

ter 1 : 10, 11) : " For 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 " (2 Peter 1 : 21).