



# The Spirit of Yahweh

By Dr. Mark Ross

*The Spirit of the LORD was upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand. And his hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. So the land had rest for forty years (Judg. 3:10-11 ESV).*

The words above tell us briefly the story of Othniel, the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. He was the first of the judges whom the LORD raised up to deliver Israel from their oppressors. The book of Judges narrates many stories built on this same pattern, a pattern first described in general terms for us in Judges 2:11-23. Basically, that pattern is this: The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and went after other gods. This provoked the LORD to anger and He delivered them over to their enemies. Then in their misery they cried to the LORD and He raised up judges and empowered them by the Holy Spirit to deliver the people of Israel.

Our focus in this study will be on just one element of this pattern: the empowerment of the "judge" (or savior) to deliver the people from their oppressors. This power comes from "the Spirit of the LORD." As you will know from previous studies in this column, or from elsewhere, the use of "the LORD" in the printed text of the Bible is a substitute for the use of God's personal name Yahweh. This practice goes back to the time of the second temple in Israel, when the Jews stopped pronouncing God's personal name for fear of taking His name in vain. In its place they substituted the Hebrew word *Adonai*, which means "lord" or "master." When the Old Testament was read to the people, *Adonai* was read in place of "Yahweh." When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, this same substitution was employed. Nearly all English translations have done the same. It is important, however, that we note that the personal name of God is being used here. The variations in the way God is named or described are

not for the purpose of just literary variation. Each of God's names and titles puts emphasis on a particular aspect of His character, and His personal name Yahweh is closely tied to the covenant He makes with Abraham, and to the keeping of that covenant when He delivered the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt (see Gen. 15:7, Exod. 6:2-8; 20:2), or delivers them from other bondage. So in our present passage, when "the Spirit of Yahweh" comes upon Othniel, we are to remember that God is once again keeping covenant love with His people, hearing their cries for deliverance, and coming to rescue them as He did when they cried to Him from Egypt.

It is by "the Spirit of Yahweh" that this deliverance comes, and the repeated emphasis upon this fact is to teach us that there is deliverance by no other means. This emphasis also prepares us for the Old Testament's picture of the Messiah, the greatest "judge" or savior of all. He too is to be anointed with "the Spirit of Yahweh" (Isa. 11:2, 61:1). At the baptism of our Lord Jesus, the Spirit descends upon Jesus in bodily form like a dove. Then "full of the Holy Spirit," He returns from his baptism in the Jordan and is led by the Spirit into the wilderness (Luke 4:1). Speaking in the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah concerning the Messiah's anointing with the Spirit of the LORD, and boldly declares that this prophecy has been fulfilled in their hearing (Luke 4:16-21).

Given this development within the biblical narrative, Othniel's deliverance of Israel by the power of "the Spirit of Yahweh" is a foreshadowing of the ministry of Jesus, who likewise comes to deliver His people. In addition to the other judges who follow Othniel, kings Saul and David are also described as anointed with the Spirit (1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 16:13) that they too might deliver Israel. Jesus is the fulfillment of all these "types" and is *par excellence* the anointed one of Israel, filled with Holy Spirit and power, to perform the whole work of salvation.

Jesus is, however, not merely the last and greatest of those upon whom the Spirit of the LORD comes; He is also the one who sends the Spirit upon others—indeed, upon all those who belong to Him. John announced Him as the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16), and that great work has its most dramatic fulfillment when the promised gift of the Holy Spirit is poured out upon His people, that they might be empowered to be His witnesses in all the earth (Acts 1:8).

It is, then, by "the Spirit of Yahweh" that our Lord Himself completed His work of salvation for us, and it is likewise by the Spirit that we fulfill our work for Him. For that reason the New Testament demands that we "be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Eph. 5:18), and warns against "grieving" or "quenching" the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30, 1 Thess. 5:19). We must walk by the Spirit if we are to win our battles against the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). Victory belongs to the Lord, and He achieves it for us and in us by the power of His Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of Yahweh," who works deliverance for His people and brings them into rest and refreshment. Thanks be to God.

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