

## Excursus: The Theocratic Anointing of the Old Testament

It is significant that Joshua is identified here as “a man in whom is the Spirit” (Num 27:18). The reference is to a very important Old Testament ministry of the Holy Spirit,<sup>1</sup> identified by McClain as a “special enduement” which “had to do primarily with the regal functions of those who stood as mediators of the divine government of Israel.”<sup>2</sup> Bright acknowledges this Holy Spirit enablement as appropriate to the theocratic arrangement, which he defines as “the direct rule of God over his people through his designated representative.”<sup>3</sup>

This distinctive ministry, which might be termed a “theocratic anointing,” was a special intervention by the Holy Spirit by which an individual was equipped to fulfill some responsibility pertaining to the theocratic kingdom. At the inception of the theocratic arrangement between Israel and Yahweh, God’s Spirit enabled craftsmen to manufacture all the accouterments of the nascent levitical system – the tabernacle which would serve as the throne room of King Yahweh, the vestments of the high priest, the implements and utensils to be employed in the sacrificial services. Those men had lived their entire lives as slaves; they evidently possessed no skill other than making mud bricks. But the Lord filled them 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” (Exod 31:3-5; cf. 28:3; 31:6-11; 35:31-35; Neh 9:20; Isa 63:11).

The theocratic anointing is most often referenced in connection with the individual (or individuals) given the responsibility of ruling over the covenant people in the name of Yahweh. Although there is no record of the Spirit coming thus upon Moses, implicit evidence of such a ministry can be found. When the lawgiver grew weary and asked Yahweh for help in judging the people, God told him to select seventy elders, and then promised, “I will take of the Spirit who is upon you, and will put Him

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<sup>1</sup>To be sure, there is some ambiguity concerning the sense of “Spirit” (רוּחַ) here. Some have taken it to refer to Joshua’s own spirit, perhaps to his capacity for leadership. Thus, for instance, the lower-case reading of the NIV, “a man in whom is the spirit.” Cf. S. H. Kellogg, *Leviticus, The Expositor’s Bible*, 25 vols. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900), 2:341, who takes the phrase to mean, “the sincere will, the faithful heart;” cf. L. Elliott Binns, *The Book of Numbers* (London: Methuen & Co., 1927), 191. Noth, *Numbers*, OTL, trans. J. D. Martin (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 214-15, acknowledges that the term is not defined precisely, but avers that “it means some kind of ability given by God, here certainly the ability generally to carry out his new task.” It is instructive that the noun is indefinite in the Hebrew אִישׁ אִשְׁר־רוּחַ. Allen, *Numbers*, 2:946, states that “the term may be regarded as inherently definite when used as a reference to deity.” If not a reference to deity, the phrase would better be translated, “a man in whom is a spirit.” Such a reading seems so ambiguous as to be meaningless. But the use of this term with reference to the leaders of the theocracy, traced above, militates strongly in favor of taking it here as a reference to the Holy Spirit (as allowed in the marginal reading of the NIV).

<sup>2</sup>Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), 93. The reference to “mediators of the divine government” relates to the reality of the Theocracy, in which “originally and primarily all civil and religious law proceeded from God; and others in the government were subordinates to carry into execution the supreme will of the King, i.e., God” (George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom* [New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1972], 1:217).

<sup>3</sup>John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (NY: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), 32. Bright speaks of this ministry of the Spirit as a “charisma.”

upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you shall not bear it all alone" (Num 11:17, 25, NASB). Later, Moses momentarily forgot his place and suggested that he was in some sense responsible for bringing water from the rock (Num 20:1-13); in the Psalter it is recorded that he "rebelled against His Spirit, so that he spoke rashly with his lips" (Ps 106:33). Moses had been vouchsafed the enabling Spirit to equip him to function as the representative of Yahweh; when he spoke words suggesting that he deserved some of the honor for what was being done, it was interpreted as rebelling "against the Spirit."

Not only is Joshua identified here as "a man in whom the Spirit is" (Num 27:18), but later as well ("full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him," Deut 34:9). Of four of the judges, the book of Judges is explicit that they were capable of great works only because "the Spirit of God came upon them" (Othniel, 3:10; Gideon, 6:34; Jephthah, 11:29; Samson, 13:25; 14:6,19; 15:14).

It is in the days of the united monarchy that the record of the theocratic anointing is most apparent. That ministry descended upon Saul (1 Sam 10:6, 10; 11:6) and transformed a cowardly young man unable to keep track of his father's donkeys (1 Sam 9:3; 10:21,22) into an able leader and courageous warrior (1 Sam 14:47, 48; 11:1-15). When that ministry departed Saul (1 Sam 16:14), he was rendered unfit for all of the duties of the throne.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, that anointing came upon young David (1 Sam 16:13) and equipped him as warrior (1 Sam 17:1-58),<sup>5</sup> enabled him as "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Sam 23:1-2), and directed him as he drew up the intricate plans for the temple which God had not allowed him to actually construct (1 Chr 28:11-12).<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, David had experienced the sorry results of sinning away this enabling of the Spirit; after the Spirit had departed from Saul, that melancholy monarch had spent years pursuing David, hoping to eliminate the divinely appointed pretender to the throne of Israel. Thus, in confessing his own horrible sin, David begs God not to punish him as he had Saul by depriving him of the enabling Spirit (Ps 51:11, 12; cf. Ps 139:7; 143:10).

There is no explicit record of such an enabling on any of the kings after David, but it is possible to find a reference to the concept in Solomon's request for "an understanding heart to judge Your people" (1 Kgs 3:9; cf. 2 Chr 1:10). God answered that request by promising Solomon, "I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you

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<sup>4</sup>Saul does experience the theocratic anointing one time after the Spirit had departed. When he goes to Ramah to capture David, "the Spirit of God was upon him," resisting him in his wicked mission and causing him to prophesy all night and to humiliate himself by tearing off his clothes (1 Sam 19:22-24).

<sup>5</sup>The Spirit also comes upon David's mighty men (2 Chr 12:18).

<sup>6</sup>Scripture is explicit concerning David's preparation for the temple, stating that "the plans for all that he had by the Spirit" (1 Chr 28:12). Just as Yahweh had provided the plans for the tabernacle through Moses (Exod 24-31), so through David He provided explicit instruction for the temple finally built by Solomon.

arise after you” (1 Kgs 3:12 NKJ); those qualities could certainly be interpreted as an extra measure of the theocratic anointing.<sup>7</sup> But after David, explicit mention of the ministry of the Spirit is reserved for prophets (2 Chr 15:1; Dan 4:8, 9, 18; 5:11, 14; Neh 9:30; Zech 7:12) and for priests and Levites (2 Chr 20:14; 24:20).<sup>8</sup>

Note: This brief essay is excerpted from “The Urim and Thummim In Relation to the Old Testament Theocracy,” the dissertation written by Dr. Doug Bookman in completion of the requirements for the PhD degree at Dallas Theological Seminary (2001).

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<sup>7</sup>In the wisdom curriculum originally framed by Solomon to prepare his son to inherit the throne, the king began by confronting the heir apparent with the promise of the Lord, “Turn to my reproof: Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you” (Prov 1:23, NASB). Perhaps Solomon is encouraging his son to avail himself of the remarkable enablement provided by King Yahweh.

<sup>8</sup>It is interesting that when Jesus comes to offer the kingdom to Israel once again, the Spirit comes upon Him and thrusts Him into that ministry (Matt 3:16; 4:1). The Old Testament anticipated concerning Messiah that “the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him” (Isa 11:2; cf. Isa 42:1; 48:16; 61:1).