

Spirit Regeneration and Indwelling of OT Saints: A Study in Dispensational Distinctions¹

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Introduction

Sometimes in class, after a discussion about some minor doctrinal dispute, a student will invariably ask, “Does it matter which view we take on this? Is it really that important?” More often than not my answer goes something like this, “If you mean whether this is an essential doctrine and by taking the opposing view you are unorthodox, the answer is no, this is not that important. However, if you mean whether any interpretive issue is important if we want to know everything the Bible teaches, then the answer is yes, this is important.”

This is how I feel about the subject of this paper. It is a rather minor point of pneumatology in my view, and there is plenty of room for disagreement among evangelicals, including dispensationalists, as we will see. We all have our own views on the subject, and the discussion is important in the second sense stated above. However, each view I will discuss is orthodox and held by dispensationalists. Nevertheless, I will be defending the view that OT saints were neither regenerated nor indwelt by the Holy Spirit, although they were saved by faith and the Spirit was active in their lives.² Before presenting the major views and defending mine, I will accomplish two preliminary tasks. First, I will define Spirit regeneration and Spirit indwelling. Second, I will clarify what should be areas of agreement among all parties in this discussion.

Definitions of Regeneration and Indwelling

According to the relevant NT passages, regeneration is the work of the Spirit at conversion which gives the believer new life in Christ.³ The idea of “new life” comes from the “birthing” imagery of the NT regarding our salvation experience. The *locus classicus* is Titus 3:5, where Paul describes our “regeneration”⁴ (παλιγγενεσία) and renewal of the Holy Spirit at salvation.⁵ Related passages are those that speak of our being “born” (γεννάω) at salvation—born of God (John 1:13; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,

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² The subtitle of this paper is thus a play-on-words, since I present “dispensational distinctions,” that is, different views dispensationalists take on the subject, and I hold to “dispensational distinctions” regarding the Spirit’s ministry, in particular, that regeneration and indwelling are distinctly post-Pentecost.

³ Regeneration as new “life” is the flip side of definitive sanctification, whereby we experience “death” to the power of sin at the moment of conversion (see Rom 6:1, 6, 7, 11–14).

⁴ Unless Otherwise noted, Scripture quotations in this paper are from the NASB.

⁵ The only other NT use of the word παλιγγενεσία is in Matt 19:28, where Jesus uses it for the general renewal of the Millennial Kingdom.

4, 18), born of the Spirit (John 3:5, 6, 8), or born again (John 3:3, 7; 1 Pet 1:3, 23). Finally, according to Jas 1:18 God “brought us forth” (literally “gave birth to us,” from ἀποκυέω) by the word of truth.

Indwelling is the Spirit’s permanent presence in the believer beginning at conversion. The idea of “presence in” comes from the NT’s “indwelling” imagery regarding the Spirit and the believer. Jesus predicted in John 14:17 that once the Spirit came He would be “in” Jesus’ disciples. Paul speaks to believers of the Spirit being “in you” in 1 Cor 6:19. According to 2 Tim 1:14 the Spirit “dwells in us” and in Rom 8:9 He “dwells in you.” Finally, Paul declares in 1 Cor 12:13 that all of us have been made to “drink of one Spirit,” seeming also to indicate His presence within us as believers. Since these ministries of the Holy Spirit of regenerating believers at conversion and indwelling them permanently from that point on appear in the NT after Pentecost, I take them to be just that: post-Pentecost ministries of the Holy Spirit on behalf of believers in Jesus during the current era. Nevertheless, regardless of where we land on the Spirit’s regeneration and indwelling of OT saints, there are some points on which we all should agree.

Areas of Agreement

Regarding the experience of OT saints, all parties in this discussion should agree on three things. First, we should all agree that OT saints experienced salvation. In Ps 32:1–2 David exclaims how blessed is the person “whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity.” Paul cites this passage to prove that OT saints were justified by God (Rom 4:6–8). In Ps 23:6 David expresses confidence that “goodness and lovingkindness” would follow him all the days of his life, and that he would “dwell in the house of the LORD forever.” OT saints could be confident that they would experience a future bodily resurrection and receive their reward in the coming kingdom of God (Job 19:25–27; Dan 12:2, 13; Matt 8:11).

Second, all should agree on how OT saints were saved: by faith apart from works. When Paul wants to support his assertion in Rom 4:1–5 that justification comes by faith apart from works, he looks to David in Ps 32:1–2 as an example of “the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works” (Rom 4:6). Paul also cites the account of Abraham in Gen 15:6: Abraham “believed in the Lord, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Rom 4:3, 9, 22). According to Paul this principle has always held: “to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness” (v. 5).

Third, we can all agree that the Holy Spirit was present and active in the lives of OT saints. This was true for individuals and in a corporate sense. Corporately, Isaiah recalls how the Lord put His Holy Spirit in the midst of Israel at the time of Moses (Isa 63:11) and how the Spirit of the Lord gave them rest (v. 14). Nehemiah likewise reflects on the Exodus in his prayer to the Lord, who had given His “good Spirit to instruct” Israel (Neh 9:20). The Spirit was likewise active in individuals for revelation (Ezek 2:2; 8:3; 11:1, 24), prophecy (Num 11:25; 1 Sam 10:10; 2 Sam 23:2; Acts 1:16; 4:25), inspiration (Zech

7:12; 2 Pet 1:21), empowerment for leadership (Gen 41:38; Deut 34:9; Judg 3:10; 6:34; 14:19; 1 Sam 11:6–7; 16:13), craftsmanship (Exod 31:3–5), and construction (Zech 4:6). Finally, Ps 143:10 shows individual awareness of Spirit involvement, where David prays, “Let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground.”⁶

So OT saints were saved, they were saved by faith apart from works, and they experienced the presence and involvement of the Holy Spirit in their lives. This much seems beyond dispute. However, the question before us, as Pettegrew makes clear, is, “Were the Old Testament saints regenerated? Were they born again and made into new creations in the same way as New Testament saints?”⁷ Furthermore, “Did they have the permanent indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit as do New Testament saints (Rom 8:9)?”⁸ Scholars take three main positions on this issue: (1) there was both regeneration and permanent indwelling; (2) there was regeneration but no permanent indwelling; and (3) there was neither regeneration nor permanent indwelling.⁹ I will present these three views and defend the third.

Position 1: Regeneration and Permanent Indwelling

The view that OT saints were both regenerated and permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit is usually, though not always, associated with covenant theology. Two examples are J. Barton Payne and B. B. Warfield.¹⁰ Covenant theologians tend to emphasize the continuity of salvation across the testaments. They likewise tend to give theological priority to the NT and interpret the OT in the light of NT theology. Recently, however, Ferguson takes a more careful approach, acknowledging the “danger of flattening the contours of redemptive history, and of undermining the genuine diversity and development from old to new covenants.”¹¹ He wonders whether “regeneration may well connote to a specifically new covenant activity of God.”¹² In the end, however, he favors OT regeneration because of John 3 and the fact that, “Already in the old covenant the

⁶ It might be argued on grammatical-historical grounds that we should not use OT references to the Lord’s Spirit in discussing the Third Person of the Trinity, since the full revelation of the Triune God was not known until the NT. However, since the NT clarifies that the Spirit active in the OT was indeed the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity (e.g. see Mark 12:36; Luke 4:18 [cf. Acts 10:38]; Acts 1:16; 2:17–18; 4:25; 7:51; 28:25; Heb 3:7; 9:8; 10:15; 1 Pet 1:11; 2 Pet 1:21), it does not seem illegitimate to claim at the level of theological integration that the referent of Spirit in the OT was in fact the Holy Spirit. Hill and Walton agree, “we need not doubt that the Spirit of the Lord in the Old Testament was actually a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Only we cannot assume that the Israelites thought in those terms” (Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009], 244).

⁷ Larry D. Pettegrew, *The New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 24.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ As we will see, there are two variations within view (2), the alternative to permanent indwelling being either selective indwelling of some OT saints or abiding with all OT saints.

¹⁰ J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 174; B. B. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1952), 127–56.

¹¹ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1996), 26.

¹² Ibid., 25.

Lord circumcised the hearts of the people (Deut 30:6).¹³ VanGemeran likewise equates the OT phenomenon of heart circumcision with regeneration.¹⁴

Leon Wood is an example of a dispensationalist who believes OT saints were both regenerated and permanently indwelt by the Spirit. His evidence is twofold: (1) OT saints lived in a way only possible for those who have been regenerated; (2) our NT theology tells us that such a life is possible because of regeneration. Wood then asserts that regeneration must include permanent indwelling.¹⁵ Although a dispensationalist, Wood gives theological priority to the NT in a way that resembles the approach of covenant theology: start in the NT and read its theology back into the OT without clear exegetical warrant. Pettegrew concurs, “Wood’s interpretation of the Spirit’s ministry to old covenant saints is similar to the view commonly held by the covenant theologians.”¹⁶

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Willem VanGemeran, *The Progress of Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 167. One way to argue theologically for OT Spirit regeneration is by holding that regeneration precedes faith, for if regeneration is necessary for faith, and OT saints exercised faith, then they must have been regenerated. Surprisingly, some theologians who believe that regeneration precedes faith do not make the logical connection to the regeneration of OT saints. For example, while Shedd claims that regeneration “had previously been taught in the Old Testament” (William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 2 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.], 494), and he later asserts that regeneration “is the cause of conversion” (ibid., 509) and “immediately exhibits its fruit in the converting acts of faith and repentance” (ibid., 508n1), as far as I can tell he does not explicitly connect the two. Likewise, Berkhof assumes OT regeneration (he cites two OT passages when describing its characteristics) and a few pages later claims that it precedes conversion. However, he does not logically connect the latter to the former (Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 468, 471). Grudem is a clear exception. While he claims a “less-powerful work of the Holy Spirit in the old covenant,” and does not think “believers’ experience of regeneration in the old covenant was exactly the same as that of new covenant believers ... the fact that there was any saving faith at all in old covenant believers requires us to think that there was some kind of regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in them, enabling them to believe” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 769–70n14). Grogan argues similarly, “If faith is a gift of God and evidence of the inner working of the Spirit, and if the men of the OT were justified by faith, it is hard to resist the inference that they were regenerate” (Geoffrey W. Grogan, “The Experience of Salvation in the Old and New Testaments,” *Vox Evangelica* 5 [1967]: 13, cited in Gary Fredricks, “Rethinking the Role of the Holy Spirit in the Lives of Old Testament Believers,” *TrinJ* 9 NS [1988]: 86 [database online]; available from EBSCOhost, Full Text from ATLA, Item No. ATLA0000819470). In my view, this is the strongest theological argument one can make for regenerated OT saints. However, since I do not believe Scripture teaches that regeneration must precede faith, I do not think the argument is valid.

¹⁵ Leon J. Wood, *The Holy Spirit in Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 64–65, 70.

Averbeck likewise claims, “it seems difficult to suggest that regeneration could take place in the Old Testament without the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer” (Richard E. Averbeck, “The Holy Spirit in the Hebrew Bible and Its Connections to the New Testament,” in *Who’s Afraid of the Holy Spirit?* ed. M. James Sawyer and Daniel B. Wallace [Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2005], 32).

¹⁶ Pettegrew, *New Covenant Ministry*, 26. Following Wood, Fredricks offers purely theological reasons for embracing OT regeneration and indwelling: “it is inconceivable that OT believers were saved apart from the working of the Spirit in regeneration,” and, “if holiness is a requirement for all believers, and Romans and Galatians inform us that this can only be accomplished by the power of the indwelling Spirit ... [then] OT saints were enabled to live their lives through the power of the Spirit” (Fredricks, “Rethinking the Role,” 86–87). See similar theological argumentation in Robert V. McCabe, “Were Old Testament Believers Indwelt by the Spirit?” *DBSJ* (2004): 215–64.

Position 2: Regeneration but No Permanent Indwelling

Other dispensationalists hold that OT saints were regenerated, but that this does not necessarily entail permanent indwelling.¹⁷ For example, Walvoord seems to grant that all OT saints were regenerated.¹⁸ However, he believes that only a few, men such as Joseph, Joshua, David, and Daniel, were permanently indwelt.¹⁹ We may call this alternative to permanent, universal indwelling the “selective indwelling” of OT saints.²⁰

Pettegrew agrees with Walvoord that OT saints were regenerated. Like Ferguson and VanGemenen, Pettegrew believes that the OT figure of speech “circumcise your heart” implies “an internal renewal. This could be a simple Old Testament way of referring to regeneration.”²¹ Pettegrew also argues for OT regeneration based on John 3: since Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again to enter the kingdom, and we know that OT saints will be in the kingdom, at some point in their life, “surely when they exercised faith, they were indeed regenerated.”²² I will come back to OT heart circumcision and John 3 later in this paper.

Pettegrew also agrees with Walvoord that the permanent indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit in all believers is a post-Pentecost phenomenon. However, he differs from Walvoord in that he does not believe the Spirit selectively indwelt certain OT saints. Rather, for Pettegrew the Spirit was present with all OT saints. We may call this alternative to permanent indwelling the Spirit’s “abiding” with OT saints.²³ For Pettegrew

¹⁷ According to Pettegrew, “Perhaps most dispensationalists believe that the Old Testament saints were regenerated, but not permanently indwelt” (*New Covenant Ministry*, 26). If regeneration and indwelling go hand in hand, as they do in views 1 and 3, then in the eyes of those holding views 1 and 3 this second view might be the least consistent theologically.

¹⁸ While Walvoord does not come right out and say this, he implies it in two ways: first, he references Kuyper approvingly to the effect that the work of the Spirit spanning the testaments includes the quickening of life vis-à-vis salvation; second, he notes that regeneration was not a necessary prerequisite to Spirit indwelling in the OT, implying that OT saints were regenerated but might not be indwelt, and that an OT individual could be indwelt without being regenerated (John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991], 71–72).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 71. Walvoord sees three features of OT indwelling: it was not related to a person’s spiritual qualities; it was for a specific task; and it could be temporary (*ibid.*, 72).

²⁰ Pettegrew, *New Covenant Ministry*, 26. Selective indwelling is also Pentecost’s view; he likewise believes the indwelling was only for special service and was temporary (J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Divine Comforter* [Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1963], 59–61). For the same view see Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, rev. and expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 271–72.

²¹ Pettegrew, *New Covenant Ministry*, 26.

²² *Ibid.* Pettegrew also offers the theological argument of Wood: “it would have been impossible for the old covenant saints to have been as genuinely spiritual as they were if there were no regeneration” (*ibid.*). Pentecost seemingly equates regeneration with salvation: “You ask me, ‘Do you believe men were born again before the day of Pentecost?’ Of course, I do! No man ever came into the family of God apart from being born into that family. No man ever came into the family of God apart from the work of the Holy Spirit” (*The Divine Comforter*, 64).

²³ Pettegrew, *New Covenant Ministry*, 28.

it is not a matter of OT selective indwelling versus NT universal and permanent indwelling, but rather OT abiding versus NT indwelling.²⁴

Pettegrew offers four lines of argumentation to support his view that OT saints were not permanently indwelled by the Spirit. First, “there is really no biblical evidence of permanent soteriological indwelling of Old Testament saints.”²⁵ Second, Jesus promises in John 7:38 that rivers of living water would flow out of the one who believes in Him. John adds in v. 39 that Jesus “spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” Pettegrew concludes, “These verses imply that at the time Jesus spoke, believers, still under the old covenant, were not ‘receiving’ the Holy Spirit.”²⁶

Third, Jesus promises His disciples in John 14:16–17 that the Father would give them another Helper, “that He may be with you forever.” This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world does not know, but the disciples know Him “because He abides with you, and will be in you.” Jesus uses two phrases in v. 17 to describe the relation of the Spirit to the disciples. The first phrase uses the present tense: “He abides with you” (παρ’ ὑμῶν μένει). The second uses the future: “He will be in you” (ἐν ὑμῶν ἔσται).²⁷ Pettegrew explains later, “So, although the disciples had the Spirit with them in an old covenant sense, they

²⁴ Erickson similarly states, “While [OT saints] did not experience the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they were certainly under his influence” (Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 994). Ryrie seems to take a mediating position between Walvoord and Pettegrew. Although Ryrie claims that the Spirit selectively indwelled OT saints, he calls this ministry limited and uses John 14:17 to support the distinction between OT abiding and NT indwelling (Charles C. Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, rev. and expanded ed. [Chicago: Moody, 1997], 53–55).

²⁵ Pettegrew, *New Covenant Ministry*, 27.

²⁶ Ibid. Fife says, “this reference in John 7 (and many others) makes it clear that before the Holy Spirit could be poured out, and all God’s children become dwelling places of the Holy Spirit, there had to be the cleansing and atoning work of Jesus Christ” (Eric S. Fife, *The Holy Spirit* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978], 55).

²⁷ While there is a textual variant of ἔστιν for ἔσται, the sense of the passage appears to require the future (Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1994], 208). Carson explains: “the Holy Spirit, even as Jesus spoke with his disciples, was living with them inasmuch as Jesus was present with them, for to him the Father had given the Spirit without limit (3:34). But the time would come, after Jesus had been glorified and had petitioned His Father to send ‘another Paraclete’, when the Spirit himself would be in the disciples themselves” (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* [Leicester, England: IVP; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 510). Ryrie speculates that perhaps the present tense was introduced to harmonize this verb with the two preceding present verbs “know” and “abide” (*The Holy Spirit*, 58n1).

did not have His ministry as the paraclete, intimately and personally living in them, in the new covenant sense.”²⁸

Fourth, during the transition from old to new covenant programs as recorded in Acts, Paul’s “test question” to believers was, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (Acts 19:2). If they had not, then they were still old covenant saints who “needed further instruction and ministry (vv. 3–7).”²⁹ They were believers in the OT sense, but not yet indwelled by the Spirit in the NT sense.

I agree with Pettegrew on the Spirit’s not indwelling OT saints. His lines of argumentation are persuasive. There is no clear evidence in Scripture of the permanent soteriological indwelling by the Spirit of OT saints, and John presents this ministry as a post-Pentecost phenomenon based on the work of Christ. However, I do not follow Pettegrew, Walvoord, and others on OT regeneration for reasons I will give below.

Position 3: No Regeneration and No Permanent Indwelling

Still other dispensationalists believe that both regeneration and permanent indwelling are NT ministries of the Holy Spirit not operative before Pentecost. “Respecting regeneration,” says Chafer, “the Old Testament saints were evidently renewed; but as there is no definite doctrinal teaching relative to the extent and character of that renewal, no positive declaration can be made.”³⁰ Chafer notes the NT corollaries of regeneration—impartation of the divine nature, actual sonship, joint heirship with Christ, and placement in the household and family of God—and concludes that none of these

²⁸ Pettegrew, *New Covenant Ministry*, 70. Pettegrew holds that the Spirit abided with all OT saints in a communal sense, as indicated in Hag 2:5: “As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!” Pettegrew links this abiding experience to the regeneration enjoyed by all OT saints. He further claims that in the OT “regeneration was connected with the community,” and therefore “its experience might not have been as dramatic as is often the case today” (*ibid.*, 28). I am not sure what Pettegrew means by community regeneration since he does not explain it further. Nevertheless, I find interesting Pettegrew’s concession that OT regeneration might have been of a different character than NT regeneration (cf. also Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 769n14).

²⁹ Pettegrew, *New Covenant Ministry*, 27.

³⁰ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary, 1948), vol. 6, 73. Chafer believes there are five ministries of the Spirit to the NT believer—regeneration, indwelling, baptizing, sealing, and filling—that were not experienced by OT saints. In his view, “Old Testament saints are invested with these blessings only theoretically, and without the support of the Bible, by those who read New Testament blessings back into the Old Testament” (*ibid.*). I agree with Chafer on the number five, but disagree on the identity of one. Contra Chafer I believe filling was a pre-Pentecost ministry of the Spirit (see Luke 1:15, 41, 67). In its place I put the Spirit’s gifting ministry to the church (Rom 12:6–8; 1 Cor 12:4–13). One can remember these five by the acrostic BRIGS.

resulted from the spiritual renewal of OT saints, “whatever its character may have been.”³¹

Likewise, according to Chafer, “The conception of an abiding indwelling of the Holy Spirit by which every believer now becomes an unalterable temple of the Holy Spirit belongs only to this age of the Church, and has no place in the provisions of Judaism.”³² The Spirit’s presence with OT saints according to Chafer was sovereign and transient; the Spirit came and went according to sovereign purpose.³³

Conceptually, Chafer’s position on regeneration is similar to Pettegrew’s on indwelling: the OT saints had something, but it was not regeneration in the NT sense. It is a matter of OT renewal versus NT regeneration. Note also that Chafer’s line of reasoning on regeneration is similar to Pettegrew’s on indwelling: there is no clear biblical evidence of the regeneration of OT saints, and the NT presents it as a post-Pentecost ministry of the Spirit resulting from the work of Christ. I concur with this reasoning.³⁴

The following chart summarizes the main views and their representative dispensational proponents:

³¹ Ibid. Erickson claims that Chafer’s position “is an inferential conclusion drawn from the belief that regeneration can take place only in connection with indwelling by the Holy Spirit” (*Christian Theology*, 992–93). On the contrary, Chafer sees no clear OT evidence for regeneration, although he grants some sort of renewal in conjunction with salvation. The OT evidence that Erickson offers for regeneration is mainly future oriented passages predicting God’s work of circumcising the hearts of His people (Deut 30:6) and giving them a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19–20, 36:25–26) (*Christian Theology*, 993). Packer rightly says, “In OT *prophecies* regeneration is depicted as the work of God renovating, circumcising, and softening Israelite hearts, writing his laws upon them, and thereby causing their owners to know, love, and obey him as never before (Deut 30:6; Jer 31:31–34; 32:39–40; Ezek 11:19–20; 36:25–27)” (J. I. Packer, “Regeneration,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], 925, emphasis added).

³² Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 74. Hill and Walton agree with Chafer. Regarding the ministry of the Spirit in Judges they say, “Another point of discontinuity is the understanding that the Spirit of the Lord did not explicitly indwell believers in Old Testament times as the Holy Spirit did after Pentecost. The text speaks of the Spirit’s empowering individuals. This empowerment was not the same as the baptism of the Holy Spirit and need not imply spiritual regeneration” (*A Survey of the Old Testament*, 244).

³³ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 74.

³⁴ On the Spirit’s indwelling of OT saints, Fredricks presents what he sees as the difficulties of each main view. He says the difficulties with the indwelling view are the numerous NT passages that indicate this ministry came after Pentecost, and the lack of OT passages supporting this ministry. On the other hand, the difficulty he sees with the no indwelling view is how OT saints could be saved and sanctified to live a godly life without this ministry (“Rethinking the Role,” 83–84). The problems with the indwelling view appear to be exegetical while the problem with the no indwelling view is theological. I believe the same is true regarding regeneration. I would rather hold a view that enjoys clear exegetical support than one that purports to solve an apparent but not necessarily real theological problem.

	Regeneration	(Alternative)	Indwelling	(Alternative)
Wood	Yes		Yes	
Walvoord	Yes		No	Selective Indwelling
Pettegrew	Yes		No	Abiding
Chafer	No	Renewal	No	Sovereign Presence

Three Challenges to the No Regeneration and No Permanent Indwelling Position

I follow Chafer and others that the Spirit neither regenerated nor permanently indwelt OT saints. However, there are at least three serious challenges to this view that warrant a response: OT “indwelling” language; OT heart circumcision; and John 3.

OT “Indwelling” Language

The first challenge deals specifically with the indwelling ministry of the Spirit. Several OT passages seem to describe the Spirit as being “in” someone. Joseph is someone “in whom is a divine spirit” (Gen 41:38). Joshua is “a man in whom is the Spirit” (Num 27:18). Daniel is a man “in whom is a spirit of the holy gods” (Dan 4:8; cf. v. 9, 5:11). These passages seem to support at least Walvoord’s view that certain OT saints were permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In the cases of Joseph and Daniel a pagan is making the evaluation, which we must consider. However, with Joshua it is the Lord who describes him as “a man in whom is the Spirit” (אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־רוּחַ בּוֹ). One possibility is that this phrase “means that Joshua was Spirit-endowed as the leader of the people (see Deut 34:9).”³⁵ However, Deut 34:9 makes clear that Joshua was filled with the Spirit because Moses had laid his hands on him.³⁶ This laying on of hands took place after the Lord’s declaration that the Spirit was in Joshua (Num 27:18–23). So in some sense the Spirit was present in Joshua. Was this presence the same as NT permanent indwelling? I must come back to the NT texts that Pettegrew uses to distinguish OT abiding from NT permanent indwelling—John 7:38; John 14:16–17; and Acts 19:2—which all seem to

³⁵ Ronald B. Allen, “Numbers,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), vol. 2, 946.

³⁶ NASB translates “spirit” here with a small s, perhaps because according to Num 27:18 the Spirit with a capital S was already in Joshua before Moses laid his hands on him. It seems clear, though, from the account in Num 27:15–23 that while the Spirit was already present in Joshua, He gave Joshua a special measure of wisdom and skill through the laying on of the hands of Moses, to equip Joshua for the special task of leading the nation into possession of the Promised Land. I would prefer, therefore, to translate “Spirit” with a capital S in Deut 34:9.

indicate that a new and permanent indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit resulted from the cross work of Jesus Christ and did not begin until Pentecost. Whatever the Spirit's presence in Joshua's life was it seemingly fell short of this.³⁷

OT Heart Circumcision

What about the argument of Pettegrew, Ferguson, VanGemerren and others that heart circumcision is the OT's way of describing regeneration? In some passages OT heart circumcision looks quite different from NT regeneration. For one thing, God *commands* the people of Israel to circumcise their hearts (Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4). In the NT, God never commands us to be regenerated, or to regenerate ourselves. Further, when it is commanded by God, OT heart circumcision is clearly linked with *repentance*. According to Deut 10:16, to circumcise the heart is to stop stiffening the neck in rebellion against God. According to Lev 26:41, to humble one's uncircumcised heart is to repent of one's sins (cf. v. 40). This link to repentance carries into the NT, where in Acts 7:51 Stephen accuses the Jews of being stiff-necked, uncircumcised in heart and ears, and always resisting the Holy Spirit.

However, does not Deut 30:6 describe a sovereign work of God in the hearts of His people that sounds like regeneration? While this *could* be a description of regeneration, this is not at all self-evident. It might be a portrayal of conversion in a more general sense. Furthermore, those who use this verse to prove OT regeneration fail to point out its future orientation: it describes not what was currently happening in the OT, but rather what God promised to do in the future for the nation of Israel. In conjunction with restoring them to the Promised Land He will circumcise their hearts, so that they will "love the LORD [their] God with all [their] heart and with all [their] soul, so that [they] may live." God will do this when the people listen to the voice of the Lord with all their heart and soul (v. 2). Even if heart circumcision here does signify regeneration, it is used in this verse to describe a *future* experience for Israel, not one they were enjoying under the old covenant. The future experience here is the Lord's eschatological restoration of national Israel.

The prophets use language similar to Deut 30:6 in describing the future conversion of Israel: Jer 24:7 says, "And I will give them a heart to know Me ... for they will return to Me with their whole heart." This heart work will be the result of a new covenant between God and Israel (Jer 31:31–34). In Ezek 36:26 the Lord promises, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you." This future work in the heart is linked to a special work of the Holy Spirit, as v. 27 goes on to state, "And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances." These passages predict the future conversion of Israel wrought by the work of the Spirit in their hearts. Paul picks up on the OT language of circumcision and speaks of the

³⁷ I might also add that according to Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 196, "The diversity of the senses of ׁ is remarkable," and it can simply mean "with" in a general sense.

present NT salvation experience as a circumcision of the heart by the Spirit through the death of Christ for our sins (Rom 2:29; Col 2:11–14).

My conclusions about OT heart circumcision, then, are as follows. When God commands heart circumcision in the OT, it appears to stand for humility and repentance. Moreover, the heart circumcision that God promises to perform is a special future work in conjunction with God's restoration of national Israel. The OT never describes anyone as having undergone heart circumcision resulting in a particular spiritual state.³⁸ Finally, in the NT Paul draws a general analogy between circumcision and the salvation experience of the church-age believer.

John 3

The third and perhaps most difficult challenge to the no regeneration and no permanent indwelling position is John 3. In this passage Jesus tells Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (v. 3; cf. vv. 5–8). When Nicodemus expresses incredulity, Jesus asks, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?" (v. 10). Theologians, dispensationalists included, take Jesus' teaching on the new birth in John 3 as proof that OT saints experienced regeneration. For example, according to Pettegrew, "Jesus carefully explained to Nicodemus the fact that to enter the kingdom, everyone had to be 'born again,' or regenerated (John 3:1–21). We know that old covenant saints will be in the kingdom (Matt 8:11), so at some point in their existence, surely when they exercised faith, they were indeed regenerated."³⁹

In response, it is not necessarily the case that Jesus assumes here a ministry of the Spirit that was already taking place under the OT economy. It is true that as Jesus speaks of the new birth here He is still living under the old covenant. However, I take His words as looking *forward* to something that is to come, even as He expects Nicodemus to understand the new birth based on OT predictions.

³⁸ What about Saul in 1 Sam 10:9 of whom it is said, "God changed his heart"? This even occurred through a work of the Spirit (v. 10). However, what happened to Saul here? Was he regenerated by the Spirit? The context is clearly focused on Saul's prophesying, as v. 6 shows, "Then the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you mightily, and you shall prophesy with them and be changed into another man." Later in v. 9 when God changes his heart, Saul prophesies among a group of prophets when the Spirit comes upon him. As Pache points out, whatever God did to Saul's heart here, "this does not necessarily mean that He regenerated it" (René Pache, *The Person and Word of the Holy Spirit*, trans. J. D. Emerson [Chicago: Moody, 1954], 32). Garrett is able to claim that OT saints were regenerated only by creating the broad category of "new life" under which he joins a variety of OT references to heart, including eschatological ones, to the NT data to create a unified Spirit ministry that allegedly spans the testaments (James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 278).

³⁹ Pettegrew, *New Covenant Ministry*, 26. Stallard notes further that Jesus expected Nicodemus as a teacher of Israel to understand His claim that everyone who wants to enter the kingdom of God must be born again. Stallard concludes, "It is thus relatively easy to argue from the teaching of Jesus to Nicodemus in John 3 for regeneration in Old Testament saints" (Mike Stallard, "The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament," available online at: <http://faculty.bbc.edu/mstallard>).

Regarding the OT predictions, What should Nicodemus have known about the new birth as the teacher of Israel? I would suggest OT predictions of the new birth in passages like Ezek 36:25–27, where the Lord promises to give His people Israel a new heart and spirit and to put His Spirit within them.⁴⁰ As for the forward glance, John goes on to describe the coming work of the Spirit in regeneration and indwelling. Jesus promises that the one “who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive, for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:38–39). At the time Jesus is speaking, to be saved one must believe in Jesus, and those who believe in Jesus for salvation will experience the regenerating and indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit once He comes.⁴¹ These believers will experience the new birth and ultimately enter the kingdom of God.⁴² This is the message of the Gospel of John.

Later Pettegrew seems to agree with my assessment. He believes that in John 3 Nicodemus represents old covenant theology and Jesus new covenant theology. Jesus’ explanation of being born of the water and Spirit may have brought to Nicodemus’ mind the prophecy of Ezek 36:24–27, where God promises to “inaugurate the new covenant form of His kingdom with Israel by pouring out water from above for cleansing (Ezek 36:25) and by pouring out His Spirit from above for a new obedience (vv. 26–27). This heavenly outpouring is the prior necessity to entering the kingdom under the new covenant.”⁴³ Pettegrew concludes,

So, Jesus explains to Nicodemus that each person must participate in this outpouring from above to enter the kingdom. Specifically, to be “born of the Spirit,” therefore, refers to the divine act beyond human comprehension that regenerates a human being and makes him a new spiritual

⁴⁰ “The combination of water, spirit, and Spirit [in John 3] recalls the same elements in Ezek 36:25–27 ... and the relationship between them” (Averbeck, “The Holy Spirit in the Hebrew Bible,” 28). Although Enns acknowledges that Ezek 36:25–27 predicts Israel’s regeneration in the millennium, he believes OT saints experienced regeneration based on Ezek 18:31, where God tells Israel to “make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit” (*Moody Handbook of Theology*, 271). In response, Israel is being commanded to do something here, and the NT never commands a person to regenerate himself. Furthermore, in the first part of the verse God commands the Israelites to cast away from themselves all their transgressions, so a repentant heart is what God seems to be asking for here. Towns suggests Ps 143:10–11 as another potential background passage on regeneration for John 3 (Elmer Towns, *The Gospel of John* [Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2002], 31). However, David’s plea throughout the psalm is that God spare his life and cut off his enemies, and it is in this sense that we should probably understand v. 11.

⁴¹ Jesus presents His teaching on the new birth clearly in the context of His being lifted up and the need to believe in Him for eternal life (John 3:13–16). Thus “it was after the resurrection and glorification of Jesus that the age of the Spirit and of birth from above began” (C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* [London: S.P.C.K., 1958], 169).

⁴² “To a Jew with the background and convictions of Nicodemus, ‘to see the kingdom of God’ was to participate in the kingdom at the end of the age, to experience eternal, resurrection life” (Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 188). There is a sense in which NT believers have already been transferred into the kingdom of God’s beloved Son (Col 1:13), and their citizenship is already in heaven (Phil 3:20).

⁴³ Walt Russell, “The Holy Spirit’s Ministry in the Fourth Gospel,” *Grace Theological Journal* 8 (fall 1987): 231–32, cited in Pettegrew, *New Covenant Ministry*, 64.

creature. Thus, the Holy Spirit is the one who gives kingdom life (i.e., life from above) *to those who believe and accept Christ's words* (John 6:63).⁴⁴

Note the implications of what Pettegrew says here. If Jesus is referencing a regenerating work of the Spirit that was only predicted in the OT, if that work will come now to those who believe in Jesus, and if that work is necessary for those now hearing Jesus to enter into His coming kingdom, then why must we think that this regenerating work was operative before the coming of Jesus? Pettegrew's earlier assertion, "We know that old covenant saints will be in the kingdom (Matt 8:11), so at some point in their existence, surely when they exercised faith, they were indeed regenerated,"⁴⁵ need not be the case. If, as John seems to imply, regeneration would come to those who believe in Jesus, and that would only be after Jesus was glorified and the Spirit given (John 7:38), then regeneration was simply not operative before Pentecost.⁴⁶

Conclusion

As I close let me clarify what I am and what I am not saying in this paper. I am not saying that OT saints were not saved, or that the Holy Spirit was not active in their lives. Scripture is clear that both were the case. I am also not saying that all dispensationalists who believe that OT saints were regenerated and/or indwelled by the Spirit employ a non-dispensational hermeneutic. It is, however, possible to argue for these ministries in a way that resembles covenant theology's tendency to prioritize theologically the NT at the expense of the OT. Wood and Pettegrew seem to do this.⁴⁷ Chafer is right that it is possible "without the support of the Bible [to] read New Testament blessings back into the Old Testament."⁴⁸ For some scholars the driving force of their view seems to be the problem of OT saints being saved and living godly lives without Spirit regeneration and indwelling. However, I think it is better to hold a position that enjoys the clearest exegetical support rather than one that professes to solve an alleged theological problem. Finally, I am not saying that there are no exegetical arguments for OT regeneration and/or indwelling. Perhaps the strongest one at least for regeneration is

⁴⁴ Pettegrew, *New Covenant Ministry*, 64–65, emphasis added.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴⁶ In arguing for OT regeneration from John 3 Ferguson inadvertently makes my point. He says, "Nicodemus should have been able to understand the need for a work of renewal, and the promise of a new covenant in which it would be effected, from his Hebrew Bible (John 3:7). He should not have been surprised. Already in the old covenant the Lord circumcised the hearts of the people (Deut 30:6)" (Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 25). However, notice that his OT references are to predictions of future work, not realities under the old covenant, which is my point exactly.

⁴⁷ See footnotes 16 and 22 above.

⁴⁸ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 73.

John 3.⁴⁹ However, I am convinced that John 3 can be understood in a way that affirms, along with the rest of John and the NT, the newness of the Spirit's work in regeneration and indwelling (not to mention baptism, sealing, and gifting) as a result of the saving work of Jesus Christ and His sending of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

What I am saying is that I believe the strongest exegetical arguments of the Bible as a whole favor the no regeneration and no indwelling position. I believe that any apparent theological weakness of the position is outweighed by its exegetical strength. However, I am also saying that the other two positions are possible, held by good and godly dispensational scholars, and certainly within the realm of orthodox theology. Finally, although I have my position and have attempted here to defend it, I am not dogmatic about my view. I maintain that the Spirit's regeneration and indwelling of OT saints is a relatively minor issue of pneumatology and should not be the cause of undue animosity among fellow dispensationalists.

⁴⁹ Another passage that at first glance seems to prove the regeneration of OT saints is Gal 4:29, "But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also." Paul seems to be saying that Isaac, the child of promise (v. 28) by the free woman Sarah (v. 22), was "born according to the Spirit," since the passive participle "born" (γεννηθείς) in v. 29a is implied in v. 29b. However, Paul is speaking allegorically in this passage (see v. 24). He uses NT terminology to describe an OT story to draw a sharp contrast between those of the Law, the Judaizers, and those of the Spirit, the Galatian believers. Paul uses a similar method 1 Cor 10:3–4 when he describes Israel's wilderness experience using terms of the Lord's Table ("spiritual food" and "spiritual drink") to warn the Corinthians against thinking they were immune from the Lord's judgment for their idolatry (vv. 11–12, 14–16, 21–22).