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## ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN ESSENTIALS SERIES

The volumes in this series have been adapted from a video seminary curriculum produced by Third Millennium Ministries. Because Third Millennium writes and produces this curriculum for a global, multilingual, evangelical audience, some aspects of this series may surprise readers. For example, we don't always follow Western pedagogical and andragogical traditions. We often organize and address subjects differently from more traditional texts. We also tend to prefer language that is easily translatable into languages that don't yet have robust theological vocabularies. As a result, we use fewer academic and theological terms than do traditional works on the same subjects.

Finally, while we don't promote ideas that contradict our doctrinal standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith, together with its Larger and Shorter Catechisms), we value and include the thoughts, insights, and wisdom the Holy Spirit has provided to those outside the Reformed tradition. We sincerely believe that Bible-believing Christians of every evangelical tradition are united by far, far more than they are divided by. For this reason, the interviews found in the sidebars throughout these volumes often come

from professors and pastors in traditions different from our own. We hope that readers will find in these interviews opportunities for valuing, admiring, and learning from our brothers and sisters in different traditions.

For more information on our video curriculum, please visit [thirdmill.org](http://thirdmill.org).

Ra McLaughlin  
General Editor

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## INTRODUCTION: A NOTE TO THE READER

Did you know that the sixteenth-century Reformer John Calvin is often known as “the theologian of the Holy Spirit”? A robust understanding of the Holy Spirit’s person and work has always been central to Reformed theology. We haven’t always dedicated large chapters to him in our systematic theologies, though. Nor have we tended to write on more popular and controversial topics like the charismatic gifts. Nevertheless, our doctrine of the Holy Spirit influences everything else we believe. So, even when we’re not talking about him, we’re still assuming that he’s foundational to our understanding of Scripture, theology, history, and practical Christian living.

In this present work, we’re not just going to assume his presence. Instead, we’re going to call explicit attention to it—often and blatantly. If this isn’t your first book on the Holy Spirit, you may notice that the contents aren’t organized in the traditional way. All the normal systematic topics are still there, but I’ve tried to collect them within a larger framework that draws attention to the vast scope and depth of the Spirit’s work in all areas of creation and life.

Finally, while I’m Reformed in my theology, I’m deeply appreciative of the wisdom that the Holy Spirit has granted to every faithful

branch of his church. I've worked hard to make this, as much as possible, a theology of the Holy Spirit by a Reformed writer, and not a Reformed theology of the Holy Spirit.

Ra McLaughlin

## **THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE TRINITY**

There once was a man who was in a serious accident and lost his memory. He forgot every detail of his life: his name, his friends, even his family. It took him months to recover from his injuries. During that time, he was tended to most faithfully by one particular nurse. At first, he only knew her as “nurse,” but he soon learned her name, and then her schedule, and then her personality. He grew to care for her. They often spent time together just laughing and talking. One day, during one of these visits, the man’s memory returned, and he suddenly recognized the nurse. With great delight, he exclaimed, “I remember you. You’re my wife!”

In some ways, this story is like the relationship between the Holy Spirit and God’s people. God’s Holy Spirit has always loved his people and cared for them faithfully, but in the Old Testament they didn’t even know who he was. It wasn’t until the New Testament that Jesus began to reveal the Holy Spirit as a distinct person within the Trinity and as the person of the Godhead who is most intimately involved in our lives.



## OLD TESTAMENT

In systematic theology, we refer to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as *pneumatology*. The word *pneumatology* comes from two Greek roots: *pneuma*, meaning “spirit,” and *logos*, meaning “study.” So, in a broad sense, *pneumatology* refers to “the study of spirits” or “the study of spiritual things.” In Christian theology, however, *pneumatology* has a much narrower meaning. Specifically, it refers to “the study of the Holy Spirit,” the third person of the Trinity.

Traditionally, systematic theologians have defined the Trinity by saying that God has three persons but only one essence. The term *person* refers to a distinct, self-aware personality. The term *essence* refers to God’s being, his fundamental nature, or the substance of which he consists.

God has always existed in Trinity, so the personal distinctions between the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit have always been true of him. All three persons are, and always have been, uncreated and fully God. Nevertheless, during the days of the Old Testament, God’s people didn’t understand that he existed in three persons. They simply knew and worshiped him as the one true God. We can see hints throughout the Old Testament that the Holy Spirit is a distinct person, but it’s only with the clarity of the New Testament that we can recognize these hints.

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit as the distinct, uncreated third person of the Trinity took millennia to develop. This was due largely to the fact that God chose to reveal this aspect of his being over time. The Old Testament hinted at the reality of the Trinity, but only the person of the Father was expressed with much clarity. In the New Testament, all three persons of the Trinity were fully revealed: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The nature of their relationship with each other was also defined. Finally, in the early church, all those details were formulated into theological doctrines that Christians have embraced ever since.

The theologian B. B. Warfield (1851–1921) compared the Old Testament to a room that’s richly furnished but poorly lit. When we introduce better lighting, it doesn’t change what’s in the room. It simply enables us to see the things that were already there. He applied this idea to the Trinity, saying, “The mystery of the Trinity is not revealed in the Old Testament; but the mystery of the Trinity underlies the Old Testament revelation, and here and there almost comes into view. Thus the Old Testament revelation of God is not corrected by the fuller revelation which follows it, but only perfected, extended and enlarged.”<sup>1</sup>

God didn’t reveal himself as the Trinity in the Old Testament—at least not in a way that his people could recognize clearly. Even so, because God really does exist in Trinity, and because the Old Testament really does reveal him, the Old Testament contains clues about the Trinity. When we read the Old Testament with the insight we gain from the New Testament, we can see these clues more clearly.

The Old Testament is telling us the story of God’s work in preparation for the coming of the Messiah, so you find all through the Old Testament an introduction not only of God’s name but of God’s work associated with his name.

1. Benjamin B. Warfield, “The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity,” in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (repr., Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1952), 30–31.

When God works, he works in multiple forms in the text, so where there is more than one identification of how this work is being done—by means of his Son or by means of his Word (in Psalm 33), or by means of his Spirit—the idea is introduced that there are multiple persons in the Godhead, without having to be explicit.

The New Testament picks up right where the Old Testament leaves off. It focuses on God’s work in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and at Jesus’s baptism the Father, the Son, and the Spirit all appear together. So, there’s not a modalism where different names are attributed to the same person or the same individual. The Father and the Son and the Spirit are distinct persons, and the New Testament is able to take the work of God that’s promised in the Old Testament, with all its different terms, and bring it to fruition and to fulfillment. **Steve McKinion**

## NAMES

The Old Testament uses several names for God’s Spirit, including “Holy Spirit,” “Spirit of God,” “Spirit of the LORD,” and sometimes (when God is speaking) “my Spirit.” In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word translated as “spirit” is *rûah*. *Rûah* can refer to a variety of things. It can be wind or breath. In animals, it can be the principle of life that animates them. In human beings, our *rûah* is often our immortal soul. *Rûah* can also refer to spirits that don’t have material bodies. But when used of God, the word *spirit* is generally a synonym either for God himself or for his personal presence and active engagement with creation.

In the names “Spirit of God,” “my Spirit,” and “Spirit of the LORD,” *rûah* is combined with a name or pronoun for God, indicating that God’s Spirit is associated with God in some way or that it actually is God. The Old Testament name “Holy Spirit” couples *rûah* with the Hebrew word *qôdeš*, meaning “holiness.” God’s holiness is his “otherness” or “apartness,” his quality of being different from his creation. It includes things like his absolute moral purity, as well

as the splendor of his appearance. The same word is also reflected in other names for God, like “the Holy One” (2 Kings 19:22; Isa. 30:11–15; Hos. 11:9–12).

It can be tempting to think that these Old Testament names refer directly to the third person of the Trinity, but we need to remember that God didn’t explain his existence in three persons until the New Testament. In the Old Testament, these names refer to God without clearly distinguishing between his persons. Even so, these names helped prepare God’s people to learn about the Trinity in the New Testament. As a result, theologians have commonly applied these references to the Holy Spirit’s nature and work.

## DIVINITY

When we speak of the Holy Spirit’s divinity or deity, we have in mind that the Spirit is the uncreated God himself, and not simply one of God’s agents. Old Testament references to God’s Spirit sometimes identify God himself and sometimes describe his various engagements with creation. In each case they point to his eternal, uncreated divinity.

### God Himself

After describing the ways God had saved and redeemed Israel, the prophet Isaiah criticized the way Israel had responded to God, saying, “They rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them” (Isa. 63:10). Isaiah applied the name “Holy Spirit” to God himself, probably to emphasize that God’s holiness was what caused him to take offense at their sin. In response, God punished his people by fighting against them. Isaiah continued by saying, “Then his people recalled the days of old, the days of Moses and his people—where is he who brought them through the sea . . . who set his Holy Spirit among them, who sent his glorious arm of power to be at Moses’ right hand, who divided the waters before them, to gain for himself everlasting renown, who led them through the depths? . . . They were

given rest by the Spirit of the LORD. This is how you guided your people to make for yourself a glorious name” (Isa. 63:11–14).

Isaiah referred to the miracles God had performed when he rescued Israel from Egypt. These included dividing the Red Sea, allowing the Israelites to cross unharmed, and drowning Pharaoh’s army (Ex. 14–15). Compare Isaiah’s words to Moses’s account of these events: “The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name. Pharaoh’s chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea. . . . Your right hand, O LORD, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O LORD, shattered the enemy” (Ex. 15:3–6).

In Exodus, it’s clear that the Lord himself performed these works. So, when Isaiah attributed them to God’s “Holy Spirit” and to the “Spirit of the LORD,” he intended his original audience to interpret these as names for God himself. Furthermore, when Moses spoke of God’s “right hand” winning the victory, he was using metaphorical language that compared God to a human warrior. His point was that God himself had directly entered and won the battle. In the same way, when Isaiah equated God’s Holy Spirit to God’s “glorious arm of power,” he meant that God himself was invisibly present as a warrior fighting on behalf of his people.

The name “Spirit of God” also refers to God himself. For instance, the Spirit of God hovered over the waters at creation (Gen. 1:2). The Spirit of God is the creator of human beings (Job 33:4). He is God, the Lord, against whom the Israelites rebelled and grumbled at Meribah (Ps. 106:32–33). The same thing applies to the name “Spirit of the LORD,” using God’s covenant name *Yahweh* in place of the more generic name *God* (Isa. 63:14; Mic. 2:7). Also, when God is speaking, the phrase “my Spirit” directly identifies him. God’s Spirit contends with humanity (Gen. 6:3), and God remains present with his covenant people through his Spirit (Hag. 2:5).

Through the activities of the Holy Spirit that we read about in the Old Testament, we become sure that he is God. Take, for example, his role in creation.

In Genesis 1, Moses never wrote that the Holy Spirit was created. On the contrary, he said that the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. The idea is that he was embracing the creation like a bird embraces its nestlings, and he was giving life and power to the creation. The same idea is found in Psalm 104, which says, “When you send forth your Spirit, they are created” (v. 30 ESV). The Holy Spirit has the ability to create, and this proves that he is God himself. **Emad A. Mikhail (translation)**

### Prophecy and Visions

The divinity of God’s Spirit in the Old Testament is supported by the fact that the Spirit empowered prophecy and visions. When the Spirit of God inspired Old Testament prophecies and visions, he often revealed knowledge that only God could possess. He also delegated authority to the prophets to speak on God’s behalf. In some cases, God’s Spirit even controlled the spirits of human prophets in spectacular ways that resembled the Holy Spirit’s gift of prophecy in the New Testament. For instance, the Spirit’s divine authority and power were demonstrated this way when Saul and his men were temporarily given the gift of prophecy (1 Sam. 19:20–24), when the prophet Zechariah was empowered to speak God’s words on his behalf (2 Chron. 24:20), and when the Spirit of God gave Ezekiel a prophetic vision (Ezek. 11:24). In all these situations, it’s reasonable to conclude that the Spirit of God was God himself.

One of the most dramatic movements of the Spirit of God happened to the wicked prophet Balaam (Num. 22–24). Balaam was willing to curse Israel on behalf of Israel’s enemy Balak, king of Moab. Yet Balaam admitted that he could only curse Israel if the Lord permitted it. Under the Lord’s control (and contrary to Balak and Balaam’s intentions), the only prophecies Balaam could deliver were blessings on Israel. God so overwhelmed Balaam that the prophet was incapable of saying anything God hadn’t commanded. Consider this example of Balaam’s encounter with the Spirit of God: “When Balaam looked out and saw Israel encamped tribe by tribe,

the Spirit of God came upon him and he uttered his oracle: “The oracle of Balaam . . . the oracle of one who hears the words of God, who sees a vision from the Almighty” (Num. 24:2–4). The Spirit of God provided Balaam with the words of God and a vision from the Almighty. This explained why Balaam failed to curse Israel—God himself provided the words that Balaam was compelled to speak.

Like the “Spirit of God,” the “Spirit of the LORD” was also the source of prophecies, indicating that this name also could refer directly to God. Moses revealed that the Lord’s Spirit was the source of his own prophetic gift, as well as of the gifts of other Israelite prophets (Num. 11:29). Similarly, the Spirit of the Lord put God’s words in the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. 11:5). David’s last words before his death also directly equate the Spirit of the Lord with the God of Israel himself when David said, “The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue. The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me . . .” (2 Sam. 23:2–3). Here, the parallelism of David’s poetry suggests that the Spirit of the Lord and the God of Israel are one and the same.

Finally, God himself used the name “my Spirit” to describe the pouring out of the spiritual gift of prophecy on all his people during the last days: “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days” (Joel 2:28–29).

The apostle Peter taught that this prophecy was fulfilled when God poured out the Holy Spirit on the church at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–29). In other words, Joel’s Old Testament mention of God’s Spirit ultimately referred to the person of the Holy Spirit. Joel’s prophecy didn’t explicitly declare the existence of the third person of the Trinity. Even so, the Spirit in Joel’s prophecy was none other than God himself.

### **Special Skill and Knowledge**

The Old Testament records that God’s Spirit imparted special skill and knowledge to select human beings to empower them to

perform ministry tasks, indicating the Spirit's divinity. For example, God filled the craftsmen Bezalel and Oholiab with his Spirit so that they could craft the tabernacle and its furnishings (Ex. 31:3; 35:31). The idea was that God personally blessed them with enhanced abilities and knowledge to ensure that their work would please him. This was particularly important because the craftsmen were to pattern the earthly tabernacle after the heavenly one (Ex. 25:9, 40). So, they had to have sufficient skill and knowledge of all the crafts necessary to complete this task, such as metalworking, woodworking, stone-cutting, embroidery, art, and every other craft necessary to build the tabernacle.

A parallel to this type of gifting can be seen in the various spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit provided to the church in the New Testament (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4). Just as spiritual gifts were provided by the divine Holy Spirit in the New Testament, they were also provided by God's divine Spirit in the Old Testament.

### **Anointing and Empowerment**

God's Spirit in the Old Testament also anointed and empowered kings and other leaders among God's covenant people. When the Spirit of God anointed kings, he acted as the suzerain or great emperor of the covenant in order to delegate authority to a vassal or servant king. In the structure of the covenant, God himself ruled over everything, and he appointed lesser kings to rule over portions of his kingdom on his behalf. For instance, Saul and David were kings over God's servant nation Israel. They ruled on God's behalf and were completely under his authority. That's why David's throne in Jerusalem is referred to as the throne of the Lord (1 Chron. 29:23). So, when the Spirit of God anointed kings, he was exercising authority that belonged to God himself. This indicates that the Spirit was himself God.

Most of the Old Testament's references to this kind of anointing and gifting refer to the Spirit as the "Spirit of the LORD," using his covenant name *Yahweh* for "LORD." This was probably to emphasize the covenantal nature of these offices, which reported directly to

God as their suzerain. An example of this can be found in the transfer of this anointing from Israel's first king, Saul, to his successor David: "Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed [David] in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power. . . . Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul" (1 Sam. 16:13–14).

David received the Holy Spirit when he was anointed as king, even though he hadn't yet ascended to Israel's throne. Similarly, Saul lost the Holy Spirit's supernatural blessing and gifting, even though he still ruled as king. Later, after David sinned with Bathsheba, David feared the same thing might happen to him. So, he begged to keep God's Holy Spirit (Ps. 51:11). He wasn't asking to keep the throne—he expected to be able to keep that, just as Saul had kept it even when he sinned. Instead, David asked to keep God's empowering presence that enabled him to carry out God's royal will.

The New Testament sheds some light on this activity of the Spirit in the gospel accounts of Jesus's baptism and anointing for his office of Messiah or Christ (Matt. 3:14–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22). In all these accounts, Jesus's baptism prepared him for ministry, the Holy Spirit descended on him bodily in the form of a dove, and the Father spoke from heaven to confirm that he was pleased with Jesus. Without question, the Spirit of God at Jesus's baptism is the third person of the Trinity. This helps us see that the same Holy Spirit performed the same function in the Old Testament.

Of course, the Old Testament's original audiences wouldn't have interpreted this to mean that the Spirit of the Lord was a distinct person within the Godhead. Nevertheless, they should have been able to see that when the Spirit anointed and gifted people, it meant that God himself was interacting with the world. We see this in the anointing of Saul (1 Sam. 10:6) and in the gifting of David for his rule as king (1 Sam 16:13). It's apparent in Micah's gifting for his office of prophet (Mic. 3:8). The Spirit of the Lord also appointed and empowered Israel's judges. In the book of Judges, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Othniel (Judg. 3:10), Gideon (Judg. 6:34), Jephthah (Judg. 11:29), and Samson (Judg. 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14).

The Old Testament suggests that the Spirit is God without fully, explicitly saying so. In Genesis 1:2, we have the Spirit of Elohim hovering over the waters. This seems ambiguous, but when you turn to Psalm 104, the psalmist says that the Spirit is the one who gives life to creation. And then we move on to a passage like Ezekiel 36, where, in the context of God's promise of a new covenant, God says to his people, "I'm going to put my Spirit in you, and I'm going to move you to want to follow and do my decrees." This is saying that the Spirit in them will create a new kind of person, one who's bent not toward disobedience but toward obedience. When we wonder what the Spirit is doing in the Old Testament, one of his basic acts is giving life. He's the life-giving principle. He's the one who gives new creational life. We know that the only one who gives life is God himself, and so the Old Testament itself suggests that the Spirit is God the Almighty. **Uche Anizor**

## PERSONHOOD

The Old Testament clearly shows that God is personal. But it doesn't indicate how many persons he has, or whether or not his persons are distinct from each other. So, when we say that the Old Testament demonstrates the Spirit's personhood, we don't mean that it points to him as distinct from the Father and the Son. We just mean that the Old Testament proves that the Holy Spirit is a fully divine, uncreated person.

It's sometimes argued that in the Old Testament God's Spirit was presented as an impersonal force or power. Yet many references to the Spirit are direct references to God himself, and God is definitely not an impersonal force. So, every passage that equates God's Spirit with God himself demonstrates that the Spirit is personal. In addition to this, there are also passages that ascribe personal qualities specifically to the Spirit—qualities that could never be used to describe an impersonal force.

When the Old Testament uses the language of *Spirit*, it's usually in the context of God's presence and God's power. Because the references are to a relationship with a God who is personal, it seems we should understand them as referring to the personal presence of the God who is. Although it's possible to read those texts isolated from the overall testimony of the Scriptures, if we look at the Old Testament canon as a whole, and if we see the Spirit's work connected to the empowerment of God himself, we see this implies that the Spirit of God is a person. As we move to the New Testament, it becomes clear and explicit that the third person of the Godhead is a person like the Father and the Son. **Glenn R. Kreider**

### Emotions

As we know, impersonal forces don't exhibit emotions. Only persons do. In our own lives, we experience grief, anger, joy, and many other emotions, and Scripture describes the Holy Spirit in similar ways. For instance, Isaiah wrote that Israel's rebellion against God grieved the Holy Spirit: "They rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them" (Isa. 63:10). Similarly, Scripture teaches that the Lord's Spirit can be angry (Mic. 2:7).

### Relationships

The Spirit also actively engages in relationships with humanity in a personal way. For instance, in the story of the flood of Noah's day, God's Spirit contended or strove with humanity (Gen. 6:3). This contending was personal because it involved evaluating and intelligently responding to humanity's sin. There may even be a suggestion that God's Spirit flooded the world only after his patience had run its course. Impersonal forces don't contend with us, respond intelligently, or demonstrate patience. In order for the Spirit to do these things, he had to be a person.

### Authority

The Spirit's personhood is demonstrated by people's responses to his authority. As just one example, consider the people's rebellion at the waters of Meribah (Ex. 17:1–7). The people complained to Moses that there was no water for them to drink, and they “put the LORD to the test” (Ex. 17:2). Psalm 106:33 recalls this event, and says that the people “rebelled against the Spirit of God.” It's true that people can rebel against impersonal laws and institutions. However, when Psalm 106 says that the people rebelled against God's Spirit, it means that they rebelled against the Lord who had authority over them, not just against his rules.

### Volition

The Old Testament also shows the Spirit's speaking of his own volition and making choices about what prophets should say on his behalf. For example, David claimed that the Spirit of the Lord spoke through him (2 Sam. 23:2). That is, David was giving voice to what the Spirit wanted him to say. Similarly, the Spirit of the Lord spoke to the prophet Ezekiel and told him what to tell his people (Ezek. 11:5). Again, impersonal forces don't have conversations, let alone ideas they want to express; only persons do.

In the Old Testament, God's Spirit is both fully God and fully personal. These Old Testament references don't identify any of God's persons *specifically*. After all, God's existence in three persons wasn't revealed until the New Testament. Nevertheless, the New Testament often identifies the third person of the Trinity with God's Spirit in the Old Testament. So, as Christians, it's right for us to conclude that these Old Testament references foreshadow the revelation of the Holy Spirit as a full member of the Trinity.

## KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

anointing

divinity

empowerment

essence  
 holiness  
 “my Spirit”  
 person  
 personhood  
 pneumatology  
 prophecy  
 special knowledge  
 special skill  
 Spirit of God  
 Spirit of the Lord  
 Trinity  
 visions  
 Yahweh

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Define the term *pneumatology* in both a broad sense and in Christian theology. Why did the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as a distinct, uncreated person of the Trinity take so long to develop?
2. List and explain several names the Old Testament uses to refer to God’s Spirit.
3. At least four characteristics of God’s Spirit in the Old Testament point to his divinity. Select one characteristic, and describe in detail how this characteristic indicates the Spirit’s divinity. Cite specific Scripture references to support your answer.
4. How does the Old Testament point to the personhood of the Holy Spirit? Include references from Scripture to support your answer.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Systematic theologians traditionally define the Trinity by saying that “God has three persons but only one essence.” In your own

words, how would you explain the Trinity to someone who is struggling to understand it?

2. In “The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity,” B. B. Warfield compared the Old Testament to a room that is richly furnished but poorly lit. What did he mean?
3. Do Old Testament names like “Spirit of God” or “my Spirit” directly refer to the third person of the Trinity? Explain your answer.
4. Why is the Spirit’s personhood important for us in the church today?

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

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## CHAPTER QUIZ

<https://thirdmill.org/quiz?SPR1>