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The Spirit in the Christian Bible

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The Spirit in the Christian Bible

John (Jack) R. Levison

With nearly 800 references to *ruah* and *pneuma* in Christian scripture, it is a consequential task to distil the scriptural uses of these words into themes that can unite them in a coherent summary. After a discussion of terminology, with particular attention to *ruah* and *pneuma* in cosmology and anthropology, this article explores three key themes. The first – the spirit and the sanctity of life – demonstrates that *ruah* is never mere breath or wind but rather God's spirit-wind in the world and spirit-breath within human beings. The second – the spirit, wisdom, and the interpretation of scripture – explains that biblical authors attributed wisdom and, eventually, an inspired interpretation of scripture to the spirit. The third theme – the spirit and the origin of pneumatology – explains how the earliest understanding of the spirit as an agent is found in Hag 2:4–5 and Isa 63:7–14, both of which portray the spirit as an agent of the exodus; therefore, the origin of pneumatology – understanding the spirit as an agent rather than an impersonal power – lies within the literature of Israel.

Keywords: Holy Spirit, Spirit, Bible, Old Testament, New Testament, Interpretation, Pneumatology, Wisdom, Inspiration, Biblical imagery, Intertextuality, Exodus, Glossolalia (speaking in tongues)

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1 Introduction

The *ruah elohim* appears as early as the second verse of canonical scripture, as it broods or hovers above the abyss (Gen 1:2). The *pneuma* appears just a few lines from the end of canonical scripture, when the spirit and the bride offer a generous invitation to the hungry and thirsty (Rev 22:17). In between those first and last references to these Hebrew and Greek words typically translated as ‘spirit’, ‘wind’, and ‘breath’ occur nearly 400 references to *ruah* in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament (OT) and nearly 400 to *pneuma* in the New Testament (NT). A conception such as spirit cannot be limited to a study of words alone, however multivalent and significant those words may be, but numbers can indeed expose complex realities. With nearly 800 references to *ruah* and *pneuma* in the Bible – apart from hundreds in early Jewish literature (e.g. the Dead Sea Scrolls or the writings of Philo of Alexandria) – it becomes a consequential task to find themes that can be distilled into a coherent summary.

1.1 Lexical diversity

Complications arise not only from the presence of nearly 800 scriptural uses of *ruah* and *pneuma* but also from the lack of clear terminological precision when those words are used. The expression ‘Holy Spirit’ occurs only twice – with very different connotations – in the OT. In Ps 51:13 (Masoretic text [MT]), the Holy Spirit (*ruah qodshkha*) exists within an individual as a lifelong presence. However, in Isa 63:10–11, God places the Holy Spirit (*ruah qodsho*) within the community of Israel during the exodus. These two occurrences show how similar terminology can reflect two different conceptions of how and with whom the spirit is present.

In the OT, the spirit could also be identified in many ways: ‘spirit’ without qualifiers (e.g. Isa 34:16; 1 Chr 12:18); ‘spirit of God’ (e.g. Gen 1:2; Exod 31:3; 2 Chr 15:1); ‘spirit of wisdom’ (e.g. Exod 28:3; Deut 34:9); ‘spirit of the LORD’ (e.g. Judg 3:10; Mic 3:8); ‘good spirit’ (Ps 143:10; Neh 9:20); ‘my [God’s] spirit’ (e.g. Gen 6:3; Isa 42:1; Ezek 39:29); ‘spirit of the holy gods’ or ‘spirit of the holy God’ (e.g. Dan 4:8); extraordinary spirit (e.g. Dan 5:12).

In the NT, terminology is even more malleable. The most typical phrase is ‘holy spirit’, *pneuma hagion* (e.g. Matt 28:19; Mark 1:8; 3:29; 12:36; Luke 1:15, 35, 41; 2:25–26; John 20:22; Acts 1:2, 5, 8, 16; 2:4; 1 Thess 4:8), yet the word ‘spirit’, without qualifiers other than a definite article, occurs frequently (e.g. Matt 22:43; Mark 1:10; Luke 2:27; John 1:32; 3:8; Acts 2:4; Rom 7:6). In Revelation, the spirit is referred to as ‘the spirit’ (e.g. Rev 2:7, 11, 17; 14:13; 22:17).

Often reference is, in one form or another, to God’s spirit: ‘my [God’s] spirit’ (Matt 12:18, in a citation of Isa 42:1); ‘spirit of your father’ (e.g. Matt 10:20); ‘spirit of the Lord’ (Luke 4:18,

in a citation of Isa 61:1; Acts 5:9; 2 Cor 3:17); ‘spirit of God’ (e.g. Matt 12:28; Rom 8:9; 14; 15:19; 1 Pet 4:14; 1 John 4:2); ‘spirit that is from God’ (1 Cor 2:12); ‘spirit of our God’ (1 Cor 6:11); ‘spirit of the living God’ (2 Cor 3:3); ‘spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead’ (Rom 8:11); ‘his [God’s] spirit’ (1 John 4:13). ‘Holy’ and ‘of God’ are combined once: ‘holy spirit of God’ (Eph 4:30).

In other passages, the reference is to Jesus: ‘spirit of Jesus’ (Acts 16:7); ‘spirit of Christ’ (Rom 8:9; 1 Pet 1:11); ‘spirit of Jesus Christ’ (Phil 1:19); ‘spirit of his [God’s] son’ (Gal 4:6). On still other occasions in the NT, the nature of the spirit is depicted by an adjective: ‘spirit of slavery’ (Rom 8:15); ‘spirit of adoption’ (Rom 8:15); ‘spirit of stupor’ (Rom 11:8, in a citation of Isa 29:10); ‘one spirit’ (Eph 2:18); ‘spirit of life’ (Rom 8:2); ‘eternal spirit’ (Heb 9:14); ‘spirit of truth’ (John 14:17; 16:13); ‘spirit of holiness’ (Rom 1:4); ‘spirit of grace’ (Heb 10:29); possibly ‘spirit of gentleness’ (1 Cor 4:21) and ‘spirit of cowardice’, as opposed to a ‘spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline’ (2 Tim 1:7). Some of these may refer to an attitude or quality – though it would be misleading to entirely distinguish, for example, a spirit of gentleness from *the* spirit of gentleness.

Naturally, there is substantial overlap between these expressions. In 1 Cor 12:3, for example, Paul uses Spirit of God and holy spirit synonymously: ‘Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Let Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit’ (1 Cor 12:3).

This brief survey indicates that the range of references to spirit in scripture is rich and robust. Given this diversity, it is no simple matter to generate a coherent pneumatology rooted in scripture, and it is certainly no easy task to distinguish – were it even desirable – the spirit of God from the human spirit, particularly in light of the frequent absence of definite articles.

1.2 Canonical diversity

The challenge of cultivating a coherent analysis of the spirit is also complicated by the vast variety of modes of the spirit’s presence. In the OT alone, the *ruah* comes to human beings in a variety of ways. *Ruah* may rush upon the judges (e.g. Judg 3:9–10), rest quietly upon an anointed ruler (Isa 11:1–9), be poured out like a rainstorm (e.g. Isa 32:14–15), fill someone as spirit–breath (e.g. Job 32:8), be passed on from one person to another (e.g. 1 Kgs 22:24), and stand guard (e.g. Hag 2:4–5). In the NT, *pneuma* is active and evident in a vast array of ways. For example, in Mark’s Gospel, the spirit baptizes John the Baptist’s hearers (1:8), descends upon Jesus (1:10), drives him into the wilderness (1:12), is blasphemed against (3:29), is said to have inspired David to declare Ps 110:1 (12:36), and speaks through persecuted believers (13:11). This *pneuma* is present in myriad other ways throughout the remaining gospels, Acts, the NT letters, including the inventive pneumatology of Hebrews, and Revelation. The *paraclete* of John 14–16 accomplishes

strikingly different actions from the spirit that descends onto Jesus (e.g. Mark 1:10). Taken together, the OT and NT offer a collection of usages that cannot readily be reduced to key theological themes.

There is also a distinction in usage between the testaments, though this distinction is often overdrawn. The spirit is thought to be a power in the OT, but a person in the NT. The spirit is believed to have come intermittently upon people (e.g. the judges) in the OT, but come into them permanently in the NT. These distinctions are mistaken, yet other distinctions are important, such as in filling with the spirit. In the OT, a person can be filled with *ruah* from birth (e.g. Job 32:8), while in the NT, in general, a person is filled at a later point in life, such as when followers of Jesus are filled with *pneuma* at Pentecost (Acts 2:4–5).

If the testaments can be distinguished from one another in some ways, it is also possible to discern diversity within the testaments themselves. This is especially apparent in the NT. Scholars have long pointed to the distinction between the book of Acts, in which the spirit principally inspires mission, and the letters of Paul, in which the spirit principally inspires ethical transformation that is joined to salvation. Mission and transformation are not mutually exclusive, but they are not the same effect of the spirit. In the same vein, the spirit in Acts inspires speaking in *other* tongues (comprehensible languages) at Pentecost, but according to 1 Corinthians the spirit inspires merely speaking in tongues; these are not the same phenomena. These distinctions within the NT render it still more difficult to generate an analysis of the spirit in the Bible.

The challenge of generating a coherent pneumatology from scripture is also heightened by the acknowledgment that it is not always possible to know when *ruah* or *pneuma* refer to what Christians often call the Spirit or Holy Spirit, as opposed to wind or breath. This will be dealt with in detail in sections 2.1–2.4, but the point is worth considering from the start. *Ruah* at times simply means wind, and no more. *Pneuma* at times refers to the human spirit as opposed to the divine, as in Rom 8:16, in which the spirit believers receive bears witness ‘with our spirit that we are children of God’. By the same token, some passages point to the spirit of God without use of the words *ruah* or *pneuma*. For instance, Hag 2:4–5 and Isa 63:7–14, which will be dealt with in detail in sections 4.1–4.3, introduce *ruah* into the exodus tradition; this exegetical move suggests that the angel and pillars of the exodus tradition were understood, at least by some ancient Israelite authors, to be identical with the *ruah* of God.

The implication of this realization is that, while there is certainly an overlap between these approaches, a study based upon words is not exactly the same as a theological study. It might have been possible to begin with theological formulations, such as those developed by the Cappadocians or in early Christian creeds. In that case, this article would begin with texts from the NT. However, in this article, the emphasis is upon clear references

to the spirit, so as to allow theological formulations to arise from discrete biblical texts, and those texts are first from the OT since the OT precedes the NT both historically and canonically. It is also an assumption of this article that the NT does not supplant the OT vis-à-vis the Holy Spirit, but that NT conceptions grew out of the fertile soil of the OT and Early Judaism. Consequently, it is essential to allow historical and canonical priority to determine the approaches and topics that generate a pneumatology that is both biblically sound and theologically coherent.

1.3 Theological diversity

These considerations arise from the character of scripture, while other considerations arise from the arena of presuppositions. Theological assumptions are a key factor in determining how one views the spirit throughout the Bible. One mode of reading theologically discerns in the OT the presence of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – for instance, in the words, ‘let us make’, (in Gen 1:26) or the angels that visit Abraham and Sarah (Gen 18:1–15). When the spirit appears, this is the Spirit – read from the perspective of later Christian theology – of the Trinity. A more historically-orientated mode of reading sees *ruah* in the OT as an Israelite and Jewish reality that cannot be suffused with conceptions of the Trinity. *Ruah*, from this perspective, should be read on its own terms apart from the influence of later Christian theological developments. This second mode of reading tends also to be more minimalistic in its discernment of the Trinity in the NT; the few possible glimpses of Trinity in the NT (e.g. Matt 28:16–20; 1 Cor 6:11), from this perspective, are not substantial enough to claim that there is a well-developed trinitarian perspective on the spirit in the NT.

There is also the matter of biblical starting-points for pneumatology. With so many references to spirit in scripture, a plethora of possible starting points present themselves, each of which will lead in a distinctive direction. If one were to start, in the OT, with *ruah* as spirit-breath, one would discover a vein in scripture that underscores individual experiences (e.g. Job 32:18–19). If one were to start with the outpouring of the spirit, one would discover a communal vein in scripture – of global renewal (e.g. Joel 2:28–32 English; 3:1–4 MT), national renewal (e.g. Ezek 39:28–29), and renewal of a community for mission (Acts 2:1–21). If one were to start with the resting of *ruah* on the anointed ruler (Isa 11:1–9), one would be led to transformation of the poor and the oppressed (e.g. Isa 61:1–4; Luke 4:16–31). If one were to start with the onrushing of the spirit in the book of Judges, one might tend to emphasize intermittent, spectacular experiences of the spirit (e.g. Judg 3:9–10; 14:6). If one were to begin with the pastoral letters (Tit 3:5–6), the salvific effects of the spirit would be paramount. These starting points are not mutually exclusive, but they do lead along different veins in scripture. The choice of a starting point therefore determines the sort of pneumatology a reader cultivates.

1.4 Translational diversity

In order to convey the significance of the spirit in scripture, translators have to decide whether to capitalize the word, and they generally make this decision based on whether the word is thought to refer to the human or divine spirit. If they think the biblical authors are referring to physical life, translators tend to render *ruah* or *pneuma* as 'breath' or 'spirit'. If they think the authors understand *ruah* or *pneuma* as the divine spirit of God, they capitalize 'Spirit'. Sometimes translators are unable to decide. For instance, in a description of Joshua in Deut 34:9, the *New International Version* contains the words, 'Joshua [...] was filled with the spirit', though a footnote reads: 'Or Spirit'. In the NT, the apostle Paul includes 'holy spirit' in a list of virtues that describe his life's work: 'in patience, in kindness, in holy spirit, in genuine love' (2 Cor 6:6). The phrase 'in holy spirit' occurs without the definite article (and without a clue to capitalization) in the Greek. The translators of the *New Revised Standard Version* think Paul refers to his own integrity, so translate the words as 'holiness of spirit'. In contrast, the translators of the *New International Version* think Paul is referring to a distinct gift of the Spirit, so translate the words with 'in the Holy Spirit'. These are strikingly different interpretations of Paul's reference to *pneuma hagion*. Both are possible in this context: Paul may be describing his way of life either in terms of integrity (in holiness of spirit) or inspiration (in the Holy Spirit).

Translators must choose one interpretation over another, sometimes with a note when a decision is too difficult to make, but the biblical authors need not. Consequently, this article represents *ruah* and *pneuma* by the lower case 'spirit'; exceptions occur in citations and when the views of others are represented. This practice recognizes a reader's prerogative to determine how these words should be interpreted. No disrespect to religious traditions is intended by the absence of capitalization; the decision is based upon the acknowledgment that English is constrained by the need to capitalize certain words while ancient Hebrew and Greek were not.

1.5 Emergent themes

Despite nearly 800 occurrences of *ruah* and *pneuma* in scripture, their fluidity of terminology, distinctions between the testaments, diversity within each testament, tension between a lexical study and a theological one, the inevitable impact of divergent theological assumptions, the influence of the choice of a starting point, and challenges of translation, it is still possible to outline themes that rise to the surface of a study of the spirit in Jewish scripture (OT), Second Temple Judaism, and the NT. Not all of these have equal purchase in both the OT and the NT, but each of them is significant in a study of the spirit in Israelite, Jewish, and Christian antiquity. These themes include: spirit and the sanctity of creation; spirit and the inspired interpretation of scripture; and spirit and the origin of pneumatology. Given the brevity of this entry, each theme can only be sketched

with reference to select biblical texts, but enough can still be written to underscore the significance of each theme.

2 Spirit and the sanctity of creation

2.1 Spirit and anthropology

On several occasions, spirit represents a core dimension of human beings. In the story of Noah, for example, humans and animals with the breath of the spirit of life in them (*kol asher nishmat-ruah hayyim be'appayv*) are drowned in the flood waters (Gen 7:22). The author of Lamentations describes the king in intimate terms, as 'the breath of our life [*ruah*, 'appenu]' (Lam 4:20). *Ruah* can also represent an aspect of being human that can be troubled or elated. Pharaoh, for instance, awakens with a troubled spirit after having a disturbing dream (Gen 41:8), and Jacob's spirit is revived when he learns that Joseph is still alive (Gen 45:27).

In the NT, *pneuma* once represents breath, in 2 Thess 2:8: 'the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth [*to pneumati tou stomatos autou*]' . More often, *pneuma* represents the core or heart of a human being. In Mark 2:8, for instance, 'Jesus perceived in his spirit' that scribes were discussing whether he could forgive sins. In Luke 23:46, Jesus at his death commends his spirit to God. In an explanation of how the spirit of God knows the things of God, the apostle Paul explains by way of analogy how the spirit of a human being (*to pneuma tou anthrōpou*) knows the things that are truly human (1 Cor 2:11; see also Acts 17:6; Col 2:5; 1 Cor 5:5).

It would be unwise to distinguish the spirit in a human being from other anthropological elements. Frequently, spirit and soul occur in tandem, as if synonymous. Job complains, 'I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul' (Job 7:11). Isaiah claims, '[m]y soul yearns for you in the night, my spirit within me earnestly seeks you' (Isa 26:9; see 57:16). During the Graeco-Roman era, an Alexandrian author could indict idol-makers for failing 'to know the one who formed them and inspired them with active souls and breathed a living spirit into them' (Wis 15:11; see 16:14; Bar 3:1; 4 Ezra 5:22; 6:37). Composed late in the first century CE, 4 Ezra 6:37 reads, '[f]or my spirit was greatly aroused, and my soul was in distress'.

Similarly, the apostle Paul offers this benediction without clarification: 'May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Thess 5:23). In contrast, in a somewhat puzzling text, the author of the letter to the Hebrews describes the word of God as 'living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart' (Heb 4:12). Soul and spirit can be divided in this passage, but how is not clear; it possibly

follows the contours of Alexandrian thought, in which the rational mind was related to the soul that is fed by human appetites, and the truly rational mind separates from that soul (e.g. Philo, *De opificio mundo* 139; *Legum Allegoriae* 1.31–32).

Spirit in the OT can also occur in close parallel with the heart, though this association does not necessarily indicate that the soul is actually the heart. In these instances, the association represents what can be colloquially referred to as the heart and soul of a human being. For example, the artisans who designed and produced Aaron's vestments were depicted as the wise of heart who were filled with a spirit of wisdom (Exod 28:3; see 35:21). Deut 2:30 says of King Sihon of Heshbon that 'God had hardened his spirit and made his heart defiant'. When the Amorite and Canaanite kings heard that Israel had crossed the Jordan, 'their hearts melted, and there was no longer any spirit in them' (Josh 5:1). The psalmist prays, '[c]reate in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me' (Ps 51:10), and recognizes, '[t]he sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise' (51:17; see 77:6; 78:8; 143:4). In Proverbs, 'by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken' (Prov 15:13; see 17:22). God, in Isa 57:15, is able 'to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite' (57:15; see 65:14). In the book of Ezekiel, God promises: 'A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh' (Ezek 36:26; see 11:19; 18:31; 21:7). In literature from the Graeco-Roman era, a similar association is apparent (e.g. Dan 5:20; 2 Macc 1:3), though in the NT this association evaporates. The human heart can resist or lie to the holy spirit (e.g. Acts 5:3; 7:51), and the love of God can be poured into hearts through the holy spirit (Rom 5:5), but heart and spirit are not joined at the hip in the NT, as they are in the OT and Judaism during the Graeco-Roman era.

A key interpretative challenge posed particularly by the OT is the relationship between spirit and breath. *Ruah* often refers to breath. In the Isaiah corpus, for instance, an imagined ruler will kill the wicked with the *ruah* of his mouth (Isa 11:4). Job complains that God 'will not let me get my breath, but fills me with bitterness' (Job 9:18). By extension, *ruah* represents the ephemeral nature of life, which is nothing more than a breath (e.g. Job 7:16).

In many other instances, the need to distinguish spirit from breath, which may be necessary in English translations of the OT, is misleading when it results in a bifurcation of spirit and breath. This is nowhere more apparent than in the book of Job, in which *ruah* is breath but not mere breath. Job tells his companions to ask the animals, birds, plants, and fish to declare that in God's hand 'is the life [*nephesh*] of every living thing and the breath [*ruah*] of every human being' (Job 12:7–10). This sounds at first blush as if *ruah* is mere breath. Yet Job then protests: 'as long as my breath [*nishmati*] is in me and the spirit [*ruah*] of God is in my nostrils', he will have integrity (Job 27:3). Breath is spirit, and spirit is the

source of integrity. Only truthful words will come from his mouth as long as the spirit-breath of God can roll over his parched tongue.

In agony, Job approximates a truth that young Elihu, who has listened impatiently to his elders, claims to understand:

But it is truly the spirit [*ruah*] in a mortal,
the breath [*nishmat*] of the Almighty
that makes for understanding.
It is not the old that are wise,
Nor the aged that understand what is right. (Job 32:8–9)

Breath is not mere breath but the spirit of the Almighty. Admittedly, Elihu grasps this truth – breath is spirit, the source of wisdom and, for Job, integrity – but does not implement it, for he crushes a battered Job with tactless and thoughtless words. Insensitive, impatient, and unwise, Elihu meets Job’s plight with callous words. Still, he understands that breath is not mere breath but a font of wisdom. What one says in breath-infused words has very much to do with the source from which one speaks.

Sometimes *ruah* is physical breath. But no reader of Isaiah, Job, or the Psalms can say easily that ‘*ruah* is mere breath’. From this vantage point, no one who lives and breathes should ever imagine that the life-breath within is other than the divine spirit, a gift of life, embraced moment by moment and day by day. No one should imagine that the spirit-breath within is anything but the pulse of a virtuous life.

2.2 Spirit and cosmology

There is yet another consideration with respect to spirit in the Bible. The words *ruah* and *pneuma* occupy diverse semantic domains in scripture. Both can be part of the cosmos. *Ruah*, in more than a third of the OT references, is a wind or breeze: the wicked are like chaff the wind drives away (Ps 1:4); a great wind causes Job’s house to collapse (Job 1:19); the north wind brings rain (Prov 25:23); much of life is vanity and chasing after wind (e.g. Eccl 1:14, 17); the east wind blows fiercely and frequently (e.g. Ezek 17:10); sin, like the wind, carries people away (Isa 64:5); and while wind can be a light breeze, cool respite in a garden (Gen 3:8), it is typically strong enough to carry chaff or to scatter ships (e.g. Ps 48:8).

Only once in the NT, in Heb 1:7, in an allusion to Ps 104:4 (103:4 in the Greek Septuagint [LXX]), is *pneuma* wind. More often in the NT, wind is represented by the words *anemos* and *pnoë*. Thus *ruah* is more likely to mean wind in the OT than *pneuma* in the NT. Yet *pneuma* is not therefore a word devoid of cosmic significance. In Stoic thought, which was probably the dominant popular philosophy during the NT era, *pneuma* represents the cohesive element that unifies the entire creation. As a result, the rational mind, which

comprises the most pneumatic portion of the human being, is naturally drawn upward, to the highest regions of the cosmos. For example, the first-century philosopher Philo of Alexandria writes

[n]ow while others, by asserting that our human mind is a particle of the ethereal substance have claimed for man a kingship with the upper air; our great Moses likened the fashion of the reasonable soul to no created thing, but averred it to be a genuine coinage of that dread Spirit, the Divine and Invisible One. (*De plantation* 18; see 18–26)

He goes on to cite both the inbreathing of Gen 2:7 and the image of Gen 1:27, and continues by describing the natural ascent of the human mind, with its affinity to the world above.

To say that *ruah* in the cosmological realm is wind is not, from a biblical perspective, to set it in a material realm void of divine presence. Such a distinction is the result of a modern Enlightenment bifurcation between the spiritual and material worlds. A fundamental shift of thought took place during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in which God was effectively evacuated from the natural world, which became understood as being fully knowable to the natural sciences (or natural philosophy), with God posited as an outsider, either passive or occasionally intruding. This tendency to divide the spiritual from the material world effaces the biblical dynamic, which lacks such dichotomies. To recapture the deep resonance of the biblical *ruah* is to rekindle an appreciation for the spiritual character of the material world.

This is evident in Gen 1:2, in which *ruah 'elohim* occurs in scripture for the first time, yet there is disagreement over how to translate these words. The *New Revised Standard Version* translates them as ‘a wind from God’. The *New International Version* translates them as ‘the Spirit of God’. *The Message* reads ‘God’s Spirit’. In the context of creation, *ruah 'elohim* can readily be conceived of as a wind from God blowing over the abyss. This translation is suggested by a parallel between darkness and spirit in Gen 1:2:

and darkness covered the face of the deep,
and a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

In these lines, ‘darkness’ and ‘wind from God’ lie in parallel, as do ‘face of the deep’ and ‘face of the waters’. Even if understood as an elemental wind, akin to primeval darkness, *ruah* is not mere wind. It is wind of God – a phrase that elsewhere in the OT points to a dynamic divine presence (e.g. Exod 31:3; 2 Chr 15:1). The debut of *ruah 'elohim* disallows the division of natural from supernatural, or material from spiritual. Wind and spirit are indistinguishable from each other in this first appearance of the word *ruah*,

This realization sets the tone for other passages focused upon spirit in the OT. In Numbers 11, God takes from the *ruah* that is on Moses and distributes it to seventy elders (plus two others who receive *ruah* outside the normal chain of command) so that they can help him carry the burden of leadership and lawsuits (Num 11:18–30). In the next scene, *ruah* reappears when ‘a wind went out from the LORD’ (*veruah nasa’ me ’et yhwh*) and brought knee-deep quail to satisfy the Israelites’ hunger (Num 11:31). This is clearly a wind – but not mere wind. This is a wind that set out from its place with God. In fact, the juxtaposition of these stories – the elders who prophesy when they receive *ruah*, and *ruah* from God that brings quail – complicates the distinction between natural and supernatural worlds. It is not the *ruah* which prompts prophesying in Numbers 11 but the *ruah* which delivers quail around the camp that has exclusive rights to being identified as the *ruah* that set out ‘from the LORD’.

Other instances in the OT defy efforts to distinguish the natural from the divine spheres. When clouds, wind, and rain fill the sky in Elijah’s sight following a drought, these are God’s doing (1 Kgs 18:45). In Hebrew poetry the earth reels and rocks, smoke ascends from God’s nostrils and fierce fire from God’s mouth; in this context, God ‘rode on a cherub, and flew’ and ‘was seen upon the wings of the wind’ (2 Sam 22:8–11). In the Psalms, clouds are God’s chariot and winds are God’s angels or messengers, while fire and flame are God’s servants or ministers (Ps 104:3–4). *Ruah* can, then, be wind – but not mere wind. The world in which wind blows is not a wholly natural world; it is a world in which wind – *ruah* – can come from God or be the chariot upon which God rides.

2.3 Spirit and the fusion of realities

This *ruah* is also wind-as-breath, God’s breath. At the heart of the exodus, Israel’s defining memory, God’s breath is depicted as *ruah* rather than *neshama*: ‘With the spirit-breath [*ruah*] of your nostrils the waters were piled up [...] You blew with your spirit-breath [*ruah*], the seas covered them’ (Exod 15:8, present author’s translation). Here *ruah* is wind, pushing back the waters, but not mere wind; it is God’s wind-breath – what came from God’s nose, what God blew.

This intersection of wind and divine breath is apparent in the words of a voice in exile: ‘the grass withers, the flower fades, when the *ruah* of the LORD blows upon it’ (Isa 40:7). A scorching wind causes grass to wither and flowers to fade, but this is no ordinary wind. This wind is God’s breath blown over them. The psalmist grasps this as well: ‘God sends out God’s word and melts them; God makes God’s *ruah* to blow, and the waters flow’ (Ps 147:18, present author’s translation). Both Isa 40:7 and Ps 147:18 connect God’s *ruah* with God’s word. So too does Ps 33:6–7: ‘By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the *ruah* of his mouth’ (see also Ps 18:16). In the book of Job, in a context rich with the mythology of creation, it is said that by God’s *ruah* ‘the heavens

were made fair' (Job 26:7–13, especially 13). In such a context, which catalogues God's activities, this *ruah* is not mere wind; *ruah* is the breath God blows in the form of creative wind. God hangs, binds, covers, rebukes, stills, strikes down, pierces – and blows *ruah* into the heavens to make them wondrous.

The most luminous illustration of the rich understanding of *ruah* as divine breath and wind occurs in Ezekiel's vision of dry bones. Ezekiel is instructed to prophesy to the bones: 'I will cause *ruah* to enter you, and you shall live' (37:5; all translations of Ezek 37 used here are the author's own). The bones rattle, sinews and flesh grow, but there is no *ruah* in the bones. So again, Ezekiel is instructed: 'Prophecy to the *ruah* [...] "Come, *ruah*, from the four *ruhōt*"' (Ezek 37:9). As a result, '*ruah* entered them', and the bones 'came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army'. Here, in Ezekiel's vision of a revitalized nation, *ruah* as *breath* enters into the bones only when it comes from the four *ruhōt*, the four winds at the corners of the earth.

The result is a magnificent promise: 'I will put my *ruah* in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD' (Ezek 37:14). Though translators by necessity opt for 'spirit' or 'Spirit' in this final reference to *ruah* in Ezekiel's vision of dry bones, the promise gains traction only in light of the reality that God has already filled the bones with breath, *ruah*, when the winds, *ruhōt*, converged on a valley of dry bones.

It is not possible to capture in English translation the drama of the original Hebrew, where all three English words – breath, winds, and spirit – are one: *ruah*. Ezekiel repeats this word in order to emphasize that the one and only *ruah* of God inspires the resurrection of Israel – a resurrection that is at once a creation like Adam's (*ruah* as breath), a rush of vitality (*ruah* as winds), and a promise of fidelity in their homeland (*ruah* as life-giving spirit). The drumbeat of *ruah* is simultaneously personal, cosmic, and national; to subdivide this word, as translators are compelled to do, is to lose the power of connotations Ezekiel piles on top of one another in order to convey the promise of resurrection.

The association of God's breath, wind, and spirit came to fullest expression during the menacing decade that followed the deportation of Judah's leaders in 597 BCE. As Israel intoned the threnody, '[o]ur bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely' (Ezek 37:11), Ezekiel imagined the highest intensification in Israelite literature of *ruah* as breath, wind, and the source of national restoration. Historic crisis prompted literature of unequalled hope in the power and potential of God's *ruah* to breathe new life into a defeated and dislocated community.

These stories, oracles, and poems defy efforts to divvy up *ruah* into wind or breath as opposed to spirit. When L. R. Neve (2011: 3–4) talks about the need for trifurcation –

wind, breath, Spirit – he means to distinguish the spirit of God from the wind and the spirit in creatures. However, this is not sufficient; neat categorization, as natural as it may seem, does not do justice to the mysterious world of *ruah*. A penchant for categorization, bifurcation, or trifurcation may cause readers to miss the sanctity of the cosmos, the sacredness of a world filled with God's *ruah*.

2.4 Implications

Gen 1:2 offers an entry to the fusion of the material and spiritual worlds. In the Bible's opening lines, *ruah* transcends the trifurcation of breath, wind, and spirit, and, with this, the dichotomy between creation and salvation. To say this is not to deny that throughout much of the NT spirit is connected to salvation. The apostle Paul claims that 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us' (Rom 5:5). The pastoral letters encapsulate salvation:

but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour. (Tit 3:5–6)

The Gospel of John narrates the encounter between Nicodemus and the rabbi Jesus, in which Jesus instructs him, 'very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit' (John 3:5–6). Many passages suggest that the essential feature of the spirit is salvation.

Yet, in light of the OT, the spirit is not only tied to Christian salvation. In theological terms, the *spiritus vivificans* – the life-giving spirit – comes too easily to be separated from the *spiritus sanctificans* – the saving spirit, or the spirit that gives life. Several preeminent twentieth-century theologians have seen the liability in this distinction, none more urgently than Jürgen Moltmann, whose effort to connect *spiritus vivificans* with *spiritus sanctificans* was, in an era of environmental change, prescient:

In both Protestant and Catholic theology and devotion there is a tendency to view the Holy Spirit solely as *the Spirit of Redemption*. Its place is in the church, and it gives men and women the assurance of the eternal blessedness of their souls. This redemptive Spirit is cut off both from bodily life and from the life of nature. It makes people turn away from 'this world' and hope for a better world beyond. They then seek and experience in the Spirit of

Christ a power that is different from the divine energy of life, which according to the Old Testament ideas interpenetrates all the living. (Moltmann 1992: 8)

Moltmann recognized that the Jewish scriptures are essential for the correction of this false and potentially lethal dichotomy between creation and salvation. Progressive and promising theologies, noted Moltmann, ‘start from the Hebrew understanding of the divine Spirit and presuppose that the redeeming Spirit of Christ and the creative and life-giving Spirit of God are one and the same’ (1992: 9–10). He insisted that, ‘[f]aced with “the end of nature”, the churches will either discover the cosmic significance of Christ and the Spirit, or they will share the guilt for the annihilation of God’s earthly creation’ (1992: 10).

Pentecostal theologian Frank Macchia has chided Pentecostals for focusing upon the question of subsequence, that is, baptism in the holy spirit subsequent to salvation, or upon the difference between Paul’s emphasis on salvation and Luke’s on mission:

There is in the Scriptures a deeper tension in relation to the issue of ‘subsequence’, which makes any difference between Paul [the spirit and salvation] and Luke [the spirit given subsequently for mission] seem like small potatoes. I speak of the tension between the pneumatologies of the two Testaments. The subsequence issue [...] is not between faith and post-faith experiences but rather between the human vitality granted at birth and any further endowment of the Spirit! Spirit filling in the Old Testament is not a subsequent endowment but rather the expansion of the Spirit of life given to all humans from the time of Adam (Gen 2:7) and even present in some sense in all flesh or creaturely life (Gen 6:17). (Macchia 2011: 70–71)

Moltmann and Macchia have pinpointed foundational insights about the spirit that are rooted in the OT. They contend together, from the standpoint of the Christian Bible, that the spirit of salvation is none other than the spirit of creation. If these are sequestered from one another and attention is paid only to the spirit of salvation, the world – a world God so ably created and sustains – is doomed to annihilation.

3 Spirit, wisdom, and the inspired interpretation of scripture

3.1 Glossolalia in moderation

During the mid-nineteenth century, German Idealists including influential NT scholar F. C. Baur (1875: 126–128; 161–163) understood *Geist* (spirit) as absolute self-consciousness. Spirit came to be understood as the conscience, a permanent reality within a person. Then, in the mid 1880’s, the precocious young scholar Hermann Gunkel brought this perception to a halt with a necessary corrective. Gunkel (1979, first published 1888)

focused upon the effects – mysterious and overpowering symptoms – that led ancient observers to identify the work of the holy spirit with supernatural activities of the holy spirit that occur in the NT, such as speaking in tongues or glossolalia. Gunkel captured something significant about early Christianity, though he did not explore the moderation with which glossolalia was met in the book of Acts and the letters of Paul.

When the apostle Paul treats glossolalia, the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues, in 1 Corinthians 12–14, he offers several correctives to Corinthian practice. First, he gives priority to other gifts. In a list of spiritual gifts, Paul refers first to wisdom and knowledge and last to speaking in tongues and their interpretation (1 Cor 12:4–11). In another list, Paul again locates speaking in tongues and their interpretation late in the list (12:27–28). In still other lists of spiritual gifts (Rom 12:3–8; Eph 4:11–12), Paul does not mention speaking in tongues at all. Second, Paul advises the Corinthians to pursue prophecy rather than tongues in order to build up the community because ‘those who speak in a tongue build up themselves, but those who prophesy build up the church’ (1 Cor 14:4). Prophecy is comprehensible, even if glossolalia is not. Third, he limits the exercise of speaking in tongues to two or three times in an assembly (14:27). Fourth, Paul counsels the Corinthians to allow speaking in tongues only when someone with the gift of interpretation of tongues is present; if no one is present to interpret, silence should be the rule (14:5, 13–19, 27–28). Fifth, Paul cautions that mindlessness can dissolve into worthless chatter, which benefits no one but the speaker (14:2, 8–9, 11); when the whole church speaks in tongues, it risks alienating an unbeliever who happens to enter the community and concludes that believers are out of their minds (14:23).

Still, despite the imprudent way in which the Corinthians elevate speaking in tongues above other spiritual gifts, the disorder glossolalia can cause, its potentially negative impact on unbelievers, and Paul’s clear preference for comprehensible prophecy, Paul embraces the incomprehensible quality of speaking in tongues. He recognizes that this is a form of private prayer in which ‘my spirit prays but my mind is unproductive’ (1 Cor 14:14).

Luke, in the book of Acts, presents speaking in tongues as a phenomenon that is comprehensible – or at least moderated by comprehensible speech acts. In Acts 2, Luke conveys the experience of Jesus’ earliest followers on the day of Pentecost: they ‘were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues’ (Acts 2:4 NIV). Luke writes that the earliest believers spoke in *other* tongues. With this adjective, the miracle of Pentecost becomes one of comprehensibility, though speaking in other tongues is only a word away from glossolalia. With the insertion of this word, Luke does not excise speaking in tongues altogether; he joins it at the hip to the comprehensible recitation of God’s praiseworthy acts.

In the second instance in the book of Acts, the holy spirit comes upon Cornelius and his Gentile friends. Peter and his followers hear them ‘speaking in tongues and praising God’. The association of speaking in tongues with praise draws the reader back to speaking in other tongues in Acts 2, where the recitation of God’s praiseworthy acts in other languages is comprehensible. The verb ‘praise’ (*megalunein*) in Acts 10:46 is related to the noun describing powerful or praiseworthy acts (*megaleia*) in Acts 2:11. This literary parallel suggests that this second instance also consists of praise in languages that Peter and his group could comprehend.

In the third instance of speaking in (other) tongues, Luke’s readers meet a band of ‘disciples’ who had not heard of the holy spirit; when Paul laid his hands upon them, ‘the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied’ (Acts 19:6). Prophesying in Acts, like praise, is comprehensible. Prophets punctuate the history of the early church with occasional but certain clarity about the future. For example, the prophet Agabus correctly predicts a famine (Acts 11:27–28). Judas and Silas, themselves prophets, are sent to Antioch with a letter to interpret the Jerusalem Council’s decision ‘by word of mouth’. When they arrive in Antioch, they encourage and strengthen the believers; this speech is comprehensible (15:22, 27, 32). In this third sort of speaking in tongues, the direct association of this speech act with prophecy suggests, yet again, that this is comprehensible speech.

Luke’s portrayal of speaking in (other) tongues is dramatically different from what comprised the Corinthians’ experience of incomprehensible speech. In Acts 2, believers speak in ‘other’ tongues. In Acts 10, Gentiles speak in tongues and praise. In Acts 19, John the Baptist’s disciples speak in tongues and prophesy. All of these are comprehensible speech acts. With this tendency towards associating glossolalia with comprehensible speech, Luke differs from the Corinthians themselves, with their penchant for the incomprehensible; in this respect, Luke allies himself with Paul, who prefers five comprehensible words in worship to any number of incomprehensible ones (1 Cor 14:19).

3.2 Spirit and inspired wisdom

Early in the OT canon, in the story of Joseph, an Egyptian Pharaoh asks: ‘Can we find anyone else like this – one in whom is the spirit of God [*ruah elohim*]?’ (Gen 41:38). He answers his own question: ‘Since God is making known all of this to you, there is no one discerning and wise like you’ (41:39). The connection between *ruah* and wisdom is patent in this question and answer.

This association between inspired insight and *ruah* emerges again in the book of Exodus (Exod 25:1–31:11 and 35:4–36:3). God tells Moses, ‘And you shall speak to all the wise of heart whom I have filled with a spirit of wisdom, [*ruah hokhma*] and they will make Aaron’s vestments’ (Exod 28:3, present author’s translation). The association of the spirit with

wisdom – God fills artisans with a spirit of wisdom – is incontestable in this instruction, even if translations tend to obscure the connection by translating *ruah* as skill rather than spirit (e.g. NRSV; NIV).

The association of the spirit with wisdom, which was characteristic of Joseph and the artisans, also characterizes the story of Daniel, which probably originated during the Maccabean era, sometime during the second century BCE. In the second of three stories, this association is particularly evident in parallel descriptions of Daniel:

ruḥa yattira ... in him (5:12)
hōkhma yattira ... in him (5:14).

The correspondence between wisdom and spirit is clear in this story, in which Daniel exhibits extraordinary wisdom because of the extraordinary spirit within him for the three generations his story encompasses.

In the stories of Joseph and Daniel, some of the earliest and latest in Jewish scripture, both men possess extraordinary wisdom because they are filled with the spirit of God. It has been argued that *ruah* in the OT stories of Joseph, the artisans, and Daniel is spirit-breath, the lifelong locus of virtue rather than an influx of inspiration (Levison 2009: 48–65). Whether or not this is accepted, it is enough to recognize the tight association of spirit and wisdom.

The attribution of wisdom to *ruah* also appears in prophetic literature. For instance, the figure of Isa 11:2 is depicted principally as a person of the spirit: ‘The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD’.

This association persisted well into the Judaism of the Graeco-Roman era. Ben Sira, who led an academy for young men in Jerusalem during the early second-century BCE, described the ideal scribe as ‘filled with the spirit of understanding [*pneumati syneseos*]’ who ‘will pour forth words of wisdom of his own’ (Sir 39:6). Nearly two centuries later in Alexandria, in northern Africa, the author of a text placed in the mouth of Solomon explicitly attributed wisdom to the spirit. He recalled: ‘Therefore I prayed, and understanding was given me; I called on God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me’ (Wis 7:7). More generally, he asks: ‘Who has learned your counsel, unless you have given wisdom and sent your holy spirit from on high?’ (9:17).

The NT is also not void of this association of spirit and wisdom. When it comes time to appoint leaders in the early church to attend to the equitable distribution of food to widows, the apostles instruct the church: ‘Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom [*plēreis pneumatos kai sophias*],

whom we may appoint to this task' (Acts 6:3). Paul adopts this association, too, though obliquely, when he rejects the wisdom of this world for words inspired by the holy spirit. What Paul says, by implication, is full of *inspired* wisdom (1 Cor 2:4, 13).

In all of these passages, wisdom is the product of inspiration by an extraordinary spirit. In some, that spirit is a lifelong presence; in others, that spirit is a gift given; in still others, the character of that spirit is not altogether evident. What is clear is that in all cases wisdom is attributable to the spirit given by God, whether at birth or later in life.

3.3 Spirit and the inspired interpretation of scripture

While the attribution of inspired wisdom to the spirit appears in the stories of Joseph and Daniel, as well as the prophecy concerning the imagined ruler of Isa 11:1–9, a new wrinkle in the understanding of inspiration appeared during the Persian era, in literature composed after the Babylonian exile had ended. In this literature, Israelites began to look retrospectively at their traditions and, eventually, texts that would later become Jewish scripture. The spirit, whether imparted through the presence of a lifelong spirit or a spirit that comes or rests upon an individual, became the source of an inspired interpretation of scripture. This developed later in Israel, during the Persian and Graeco-Roman eras, when authors had a body of literature to which they looked back, tapped, alluded to, and modified to heighten its relevance to new situations.

This phenomenon surfaced in the book of Chronicles, whose authors adopted the language of Judges and 1 Samuel, in which the spirit 'is upon' Othniel and Jephthah (Judg 3:10 and 11:29), 'clothes' Gideon (6:34), and 'rushes upon' Samson (14:6; 14:19; 15:14; see also 1 Sam 11:6–7). In each of these stories, violence is never far from view. The book of 1–2 Chronicles similarly describes the spirit's coming or rushing – but a new pattern emerges, in which there is a connection between the spirit and wisdom. In 2 Chr 20:14, for example, the author adopts the formula familiar from the book of Judges, 'the spirit of the LORD was upon Jahaziel' (present author's translation). What follows, however, is not violence but a sophisticated inspired speech, in which Jahaziel fuses military strategy and priestly encouragement, though Jahaziel is not himself a priest.

Jahaziel's speech concludes with priestly instructions: the battle is not Judah's to fight but God's. These instructions are reminiscent of the priestly instructions of Deut 20:2–4. The speech contains allusions to other Israelite texts as well. The words, 'the battle is not yours but God's', recall David's final words to Goliath before he kills the giant: 'the battle is the LORD's' (1 Sam 17:47). The command, '[f]ear not [...] This battle is not for you to fight; take your position, stand still, and see the victory of the LORD on your behalf', recollects Moses' monumental words to Israel on the edge of the sea, with Egyptian horses and chariots in hot pursuit: 'But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today"' (Exod 14:13).

This speech testifies to the power of the growing relationship between the spirit and interpretation. In the book of Judges, the spirit inspires acts of liberation through figures such as Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson. In 1–2 Chronicles, the spirit inspires a prophet to compel the people of Judah, through highly persuasive speech, *not* to fight. During the Persian era, when Judah could cast a backward glance at Israel's literary tradition, the spirit came to be increasingly understood as a source of inspiration by which ancient traditions could become relevant to the new situation in which Judah found itself.

This conception of inspiration as the source of interpretation persisted in the literature of the Graeco-Roman era, in the writings of Ben Sira (Sir 39:1–6), Philo of Alexandria, (e.g. *De specialibus legibus* 3.1–6; *De migratione Abrahami* 34–35; *De cherubim* 27–29; *De somnis* 2.252), the Dead Sea Scrolls (e.g. 1QHa 20:13–16) and Josephus (*J.W.* 3.351–53), each of which draws a connection between inspiration and the proper understanding of ancient texts. This propensity led Martin Hengel to surmise that

the influence of the Spirit was more frequently felt via the charismatic interpretation of Scripture [...] only someone who was filled with the Spirit could really adequately interpret the words of Holy Scripture which were inspired by God, but were often very obscure. (Hengel 1989: 234)

Hengel describes here what might loosely be called charismatic or inspired exegesis (Aune 1993).

An emphasis upon the inspired interpretation of scripture also dots the landscape of NT literature. As early as the second chapter of Luke (2:22–32), when Mary and Joseph brought their son Jesus to be dedicated at the temple, an old man, an inspired figure, Simeon, recognized Jesus' significance. The holy spirit was said to be on Simeon, to reveal the significance of Jesus to him and to guide him. When Simeon spoke, his inspired words were filled with the language of Isaiah, which promised consolation for Israel (Isa 40:1–2) and for which, Luke says explicitly, an elderly Simeon had waited (Luke 2:25). Simeon's prayer about salvation, 'which you have prepared in the sight of all nations' (Luke 2:31 NIV), mirrors Isa 52:10: 'The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations'. Simeon's knowledge that Jesus would be 'a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles' (Luke 2:32) is adopted from Isa 42:6: 'I will keep You and give You [...] as a light to the Gentiles'. Simeon's belief that Jesus was the 'glory of your people Israel' (Luke 2:32) echoes Isa 46:13: 'And I will place salvation in Zion, for Israel My glory'. What came out of Simeon's inspired mouth when he saw Jesus was a scripture-laced promise acknowledging the future impact of Jesus. Simeon recognized the ageless vision he had

read repeatedly: the salvation of God for all nations, now in a Nazarene baby brought by peasant parents into the precincts of the temple.

Such a combination of inspiration and interpretation is also encapsulated in the book of Acts, in the narrative of Pentecost. When the followers of Jesus are depicted as being filled with the holy spirit, with tongues as of fire settling upon each of them, they speak in other tongues or languages that are comprehensible to the hearers gathered in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1–13). The content of their speech is described as the powerful or praiseworthy acts of God, *ta megaleia tou theou* (2:11). This is a shorthand expression used in the LXX of such passages as Deut 11:2–5 for God's powerful acts in Israel's history. In Deuteronomy, Moses tells Israel that what God did in Egypt is not for a generation gone by but for the generation he now addresses, which is about to enter the promised land. This generation is to acknowledge God's 'magnificent works [*ta megaleia autou*] and his strong hand and his high arm and his signs and his wonders that he did in the midst of Egypt to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and to all his land' (LXX Deut 11:2–3 [NETS]). This expression, in the story of Pentecost, represents the inspired interpretation of scripture – a recitation of God's praiseworthy acts, which are not just past actions but also present realities.

The character of the inspired interpretation of scripture also occurs when Peter stands before the Sanhedrin, who put him and John on trial for a healing performed on the sabbath (Acts 4:8–12). Peter, filled with the spirit, delivers what is clearly an abbreviated speech, at the centre of which lies a citation of Ps 118:22. 'This Jesus', claims Peter, 'is "the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone"' (Acts 4:11). At first this narrative seems to present inspiration as spontaneous, but this is not the case. According to the gospels, Jesus himself had cited Ps 118:22 in his parable of the evil tenants (e.g. Luke 20:9–19). It is probably for this reason that Peter's hearers recognized that Peter and John were companions of Jesus (Acts 4:13). Filled with the holy spirit, according to the book of Acts, Peter preached a sermon with a scriptural text learned from Jesus at its core. In this way, Peter proved himself to be an inspired interpreter of scripture.

The letters of the apostle Paul contain a similar understanding of the spirit as the source of inspired interpretation. Paul, a teacher and, like the hymnwriter of the Dead Sea Scrolls, a revealer of mysteries (1QH^a 20.13–16), frequently adopts the language of Jewish scripture to encourage, teach, and offer insight to the communities he addresses in his letters. On occasion, he offers a glimpse of his method of inspired interpretation. This occurs in 2 Corinthians 3, in which Paul offers a complex interpretation of the story of Moses and the Israelites. Paul interprets the text from Exodus, modifying its words and interpreting the veil of Moses on several levels at once; the veil Moses wore as he descended the mountain to shade the brightness of his face comes to also mean the veil over synagogue readers in Paul's own day, over Jesus' believers, even over the gospel itself. 'Paul's understanding of Moses' veil', Francis Watson notes,

is ultimately concerned not with matters of history or biography but with 'Moses' as a text that is read, and with 'the sons of Israel' as the (non-Christian) Jewish community of the present, gathered each sabbath to hear it being read. This shift from past to present occurs in verses 14–15, where it is underlined by the repeated use of the phrase, 'to this day'. (Watson 2004: 295)

The topic of 2 Corinthians 3, and what it means to see 'the glory of the Lord', is to be 'transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit' (2 Cor 3:18). Transformation by the spirit, in short, transpires through the inspired interpretation of the story of Moses, which Paul presents in 2 Corinthians 3 to the Corinthians.

Four passages in the Gospel of John (14:15–17; 14:25–26; 15:25–26; 16:7–15) depict the spirit as a paraclete, who 'will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you' (14:26). The spirit, after Jesus' death and resurrection, teaches by reminding, drawing readers back to the life of Jesus in light of the OT. The spirit reminds the disciples of what Jesus said and interprets Jesus' life for them against the backdrop of Jewish scripture.

Twice this process appears in the John's Gospel. Jesus' saying, '[d]estroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up' (John 2:19), is misunderstood as a reference to the Herodian temple which took forty-six years to build: 'But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken' (2:21–22). John's narrative aside illuminates the process of recollection: interpreting Jesus' words in the light of OT. Later, Jesus enters Jerusalem (12:12–19), and as in the synoptic gospels, John regards this triumphal entry as the fulfilment of Zech 9:9. John, however, explains how the disciples came to see this event in relation to scripture: 'His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him' (John 12:16). Here the essence of inspiration is evident: there is recollection and increased understanding when Jesus' words and actions are set, after his death and resurrection, in the context of the OT. The paraclete, in other words, is at work, reminding Jesus' followers of what Jesus said and did and leading them into still further understanding, into deeper truth.

The writings of Luke, Paul, and John testify to the pervasive conception of the holy spirit as the source of the inspired interpretation of scripture. However, this conception is best illustrated by the NT letter to the Hebrews, in which the holy spirit seems at first to be the author of Jewish scripture. On closer examination, it becomes clear that the holy spirit does not inspire the origin of scripture (the Old Greek or LXX) but its application to the

community of faith which receives the letter. There are three indications of this. First, the present tense, not the past, is used to describe the spirit's activity: in Heb 3:7–8, the author does not argue that the holy spirit spoke Psalm 95 but that the holy spirit speaks it. Heb 9:8 does not say that the holy spirit indicated something about the behaviour of the high priest, but rather that the holy spirit indicates. Heb 10:15 does not say the holy spirit testified about Jer 31:31–34 but that the holy spirit testifies – meaningfully – ‘to us’. Second, twice (Heb 3:7–8; 9:8) the citation of scripture is modified to meet the needs of the letter's readers. The spirit takes scripture and heightens its relevance for the community reading the letter. Third, the citation of the biblical text is followed by an extended word of exhortation without the slightest indication that the spirit has stopped speaking. The transition from inspired text to inspired exhortation is seamless. The holy spirit in Hebrews, then, is the inspired interpreter of scripture – citing, modifying, and applying the text to a new context through the author's writing of the letter.

The book of Revelation may also be another example of the inspired interpretation of scripture. Identified as a prophecy (Rev 22:18–19), Revelation is divided into four sections, probably four visions, each of which begins, ‘in [the] spirit’ (*en pneumati* in 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). At two points the spirit is said to speak, both times in formulaic language. In the first, the spirit affirms a cited extrabiblical beatitude by claiming: ‘Yes [...] they will rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them’ (14:13). Further, the spirit and the bride, in the book's conclusion, offer an invitation to the thirsty, which is infused with the language of Isa 55:1's own, more ancient invitation: ‘Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!’. In an apocalypse that is an affirmation and application of Jewish scripture, including the books of Ezekiel and Daniel, the spirit speaks a last word of grace to a battered community that reminds them of the grand invitation to exiles battered by the dislocation of malignant empires.

3.4 Implications

It is in the popular realm, as opposed to the scholarly world of Hermann Gunkel, where experiences of incomprehensible speech and spontaneous actions take place. A litany of revivals attests to the persistence of this tendency in popular religiosity during the last three centuries: the Cane Ridge revival in Kentucky in 1801; the Irvingite revival in the British Isles in the 1830s; the Welsh revival of 1904; the Mukti Mission revival in Kedagon, near Pune, India, in 1905; the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles in 1906; the Toronto Blessing in 1996; and the ongoing worship services of many Pentecostal and related churches in the Global South. In all of these, phenomena such as speaking in tongues or physical jerking feature prominently. The popular force of such experiences naturally leads to a high valuation of incomprehensible phenomena. This brief analysis of OT, early Jewish literature, and the NT suggests that more characteristic of the Bible is the moderation of speaking in tongues. This could be through the placement of limits on its

practice, as in the letter of Paul to the Corinthians, or, as in the book of Acts, through the addition of the word 'other' or the association of speaking in tongues with comprehensible praise and prophesying.

More prevalent in scripture than glossolalia and related incomprehensible phenomena is a belief, expressed in a variety of narratives and letters, that inspiration transpires in the context of learning scripture. The conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is that both comprehensible and incomprehensible speech are valuable, but that inspired comprehensible speech is more desirable and beneficial than inspired incomprehensible speech.

4 Spirit and the origin of pneumatology

The final theme to which it is necessary to attend is the acknowledgement that pneumatology began, not with the NT or early Christian theologians such as the Cappadocians, but with the exodus tradition. As Israelites remembered the story, refugees from Egypt had not wandered alone during the exodus: God was present in agents that led them along the way. They were led by pillars of cloud by day and fire by night (Exod 13:21–22; 14:19–20, 24; 33:9–10); clouds that lifted and descended on them (e.g. 40:34–38); a terrifying angel (23:20–23; 32:24; 33:2); even God's face, the *panim* (33:14–17). This lasted until they reached a land flowing with milk and honey, where they lived, if not happily, at least with sporadic solace, for centuries. The presence that did not accompany them, according to their memories, was the *ruah*.

These memories of agents of the exodus, disordered though they may have been, are the ancestral home of the holy spirit. Israel would change over the centuries but still carry the conviction that God was present in an array of agents. A sea-change, however, occurred in two prophetic writings – Hag 2:5 and Isa 63:7–14 – to which it is possible to trace a new vein in Israel's understanding of the holy spirit. The authors of these texts introduced the spirit into the traditions of the exodus, in which God had rescued Israel from Egypt through a group of divine agents – pillars, an angel, and God's own face or *panim*. What this move meant for Israel's conception of the spirit is momentous.

4.1 Spirit standing in Hag 2:4–5

'Work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, according to the word that I cut with you when you came out of Egypt', urges Haggai (2:4; this is the present author's translation, which preserves the verb 'cut', even though it creates an awkward English expression. The verb evokes the ancient conception of cutting a covenant). He then adds promise to command, '[m]y spirit stands among you; do not fear' (2:5). This word of assurance is baffling. God had spoken many words to Israel when they came out of Egypt: the Ten Words (also known as the Ten Commandments, Exod 20:1–17); the designation of Israel

as a kingdom of priests, holy, set apart (19:3–6); commands to follow; sacrifices to make; offerings to give; tents to build. But this statement – my spirit stands among you – is something God did not previously say, nor was it part of the covenant God cut when they came out of Egypt.

Another puzzling aspect of Hag 2:5 is that, among the nearly four hundred other references to *ruah* in the Hebrew Bible, not a single reference is to *ruah* standing, yet that is the word lying at the heart of Haggai's word of assurance. Why Haggai adopts this word is not hard to determine. The verb 'stand' evoked the divine presence at a particularly threatening moment in Israel's distant past when Israel came out of Egypt. Pinned between the Egyptian army and the sea, Israel faced annihilation, yet pillars of cloud and fire accompanied them and, all of a sudden, as evening approached and peril reared its head:

The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and *stood* behind them. It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night. (Exod 14:19–20)

The pillar of cloud stood between Israel and the pursuing Egyptian army and protected Israel who were on the cusp of escape. Without this movement from in front to behind, without the pillar's shift from guide to rear-guard, Israel would never have crossed the sea, traversed the wilderness, or settled in the land of promise. This was a singular moment of salvation.

For Haggai, there is no palpable pillar to which he can point during the early years of rebuilding after Cyrus' mandate to return and rebuild, no cloud that exists to signal God's presence. But there is something else that stands in Israel's midst and signals God's presence. There is spirit, standing, like the pillars on the shore of the sea, in order to stay the hand of enemies perceived or real. In this way, Haggai transforms the first exodus into the exodus of his contemporaries: my spirit stands among you. It is Haggai's people, not just a generation long past, that are the recipients of God's word, the object of his protection, and the beneficiaries of his spirit.

4.2 Spirit as the angel of God's presence in Isa 63:7–14

Another creative appropriation of Israel's tradition occurs in a lament tucked into a passage of uncertain date: Isa 63:7–14. This lament reads:

In all their distress, the angel of his presence saved them;
in his love and in his pity he redeemed them;

he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.
But they rebelled and grieved [or rebelled against] his holy spirit;
therefore he became their enemy;
he himself fought against them.
Then they remembered the days of old, of Moses his servant.
Where is the one who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock?
Where is the one who put within them his holy spirit,
who caused his glorious arm to march at the right hand of Moses,
who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name,
who led them through the depths?
Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble.
Like cattle that go down into the valley,
the spirit of the Lord gave them rest
Thus you led your people,
to make for yourself a glorious name. (Isa 63:7–14, present author's translation)

Several allusions to the exodus tradition appear in this lament. The first occurs in the unique phrase, 'the angel of his presence'. This simple phrase is an amalgamation of two figures from Israel's traditions: the angel of the exodus and the presence or *panim* of God. God had promised Israel an angel with divine authorization – God's name was in the angel – to lead them to the promised land (Exod 23:20–23). Later, however, in a tense discussion with Moses, God distanced the angel from God's own leading: the angel would go, but God would not. After serious negotiation between Moses and God, God offers God's presence or *panim* (33:14–15). Thus, angel and presence seem to be at odds with one another in Exodus 33.

The author of the lament in Isaiah 63 resolves this tension by fusing the angel of the exodus and God's presence-face, and writing that the angel of God's presence rescued Israel from Egypt. These two figures – God's angel and God's presence – become one in Isaiah 63: the angel of God's presence.

This is only the beginning of the metamorphosis that occurs in this lament. The prophet next identifies the angel of God's presence with the holy spirit. He does this by shifting imperceptibly, without alerting the reader, from the angel of God's presence to the holy spirit: Israel 'rebelled and grieved his holy spirit; therefore he became their enemy; he himself fought against them'.

The identification of the angel of God's presence with God's holy spirit is apparent not only in this shift from angel to spirit but also in the initial verb associated with this holy spirit – Israel 'rebelled against' God's holy spirit – which has its roots in the first promise of the angel delivered at Mount Sinai (Exod 23:20–23). What is said of God's holy spirit in the lament was said earlier of God's angel in the divine promise, in which God warned Israel not to rebel against the promised angel: 'be attentive to him and listen to his voice; do not

rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression; for my name is in him' (Exod 23:21).

What characterized the promise of Haggai now characterizes the prophetic lament; the spirit has taken on the role of an agent in the exodus tradition. For Haggai, this agent was the pillar which had stood in Israel's midst; now the spirit stands in its place. For Isaiah 63, this is the angel of God's presence against which Israel was warned not to rebel; now the prophet laments that Israel had rebelled, not against this angel but against God's holy spirit. The angel of God's presence and the holy spirit are one.

A few lines later, the prophet raises further lament:

Where is the one who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock?
Where is the one who put within them his holy spirit,
who caused his glorious arm to march at the right hand of Moses,
who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name,
who led them through the depths? (Isa 63:11–12)

Wedge into this context and its preoccupation with deliverance through the sea is the plea, 'Where is the one who put within them his holy spirit?' The difficulty with this question is simply that God did not put the holy spirit within Israel during deliverance through the sea – at least not according to the exodus story itself. The agents of deliverance were the pillar and the angel, which 'moved and went behind them' to shelter them from the advancing Egyptian army (Exod 14:19). Yet now, for the prophet of lament, it was the holy spirit set in Israel's midst rather than a pillar or angel.

A final transformation of the exodus tradition occurs in the last lines of this lament: 'like cattle that go down into the valley, the spirit of the Lord gave them rest' (Isa 63:14). There is no place in the exodus tradition for a spirit that gave Israel rest. Yet again, however, the negotiation between Moses and God provides a point of origin for the prophet's belief that 'the spirit of the LORD gave them rest'. In the to and fro of negotiation lies an intimate association between the *panim* of God and rest: 'My presence-face [*panim*] will go with you, and I will give you rest' (Exod 33:14, present author's translation). This promise is the sole plausible precursor to the recollection in the lament, 'the spirit of the LORD gave him [them] rest'. What the presence-face or *panim* of God was to accomplish in the exodus tradition – to give rest – the spirit now achieves in the later lament. Once again, the spirit has taken on the role of a guiding agent in the exodus tradition.

This lament therefore contains a dramatic incorporation of the holy spirit into the exodus tradition. First, the author merges two distinct agents of the exodus: the angel (Exod 23:20–23; 32:34; 33:2) and God's presence (33:14–15). In Isaiah 63, the two become one: the angel of God's presence. Second, the holy spirit takes on the role of the angel of the

exodus: rebellion against the angel in Exod 23:21 becomes in Isaiah 63 rebellion against the holy spirit: 'The angel of God's presence saved them [...] but they rebelled against God's holy spirit' (Isa 63:9–10, present author's translation). Third, the spirit is identified yet again with the angel as the one whom God put within Israel, in the question, '[w]here is the one who put within them his holy spirit'. Finally, the spirit of the LORD takes on the role of the *panim* or presence-face of God: the rest that God's presence or *panim* would give in Exod 33:14–15 becomes in Isa 63:14 the rest the spirit of the LORD gave.

4.3 Implications

Prior to the composition of Hag 2:4–5 and Isa 63:7–14, Israel's poets, prophets, and storytellers deemed the spirit to be active – but not an agent acting on God's behalf. This scenario changed when the author of an otherwise typical communal lament, at some point after 587 BCE, and the prophet Haggai, at some point after 539, accomplished something unique. Drawing on the exodus tradition, in which a pillar had stood in Israel's midst, Haggai encouraged his compatriots with the claim that now, centuries after the exodus, the spirit stood in their midst. Drawing as well on the exodus tradition, a prophet of lament expanded the scope of the spirit. In this lament, the prerogatives of the agents of the exodus become the prerogatives of the spirit, God's holy spirit: where the angel – now the angel of God's presence – was once met with hostility, now the holy spirit is the object of rebellion; where God had once set the angel in Israel's midst, now the holy spirit is within Israel; where the *panim* had once been promised to give rest, now the spirit gives Israel rest.

This conception of the origin of pneumatology does not rest on the OT alone. Levison (2020b: 116–121) has traced the influence of the pneumatology in Isaiah 63 upon the gospels and the writings of Paul. The temptation scene, Jesus' warning against blasphemy, and Paul's conception of the work of the spirit, set in the exodus tradition, show the impact of this interpretation of the spirit long after Persia fell to Greece and Greece to Rome.

The implications of this realization – that the holy spirit was deemed to be an agent of the exodus rather than an impersonal power as early as the neo-Babylonian and Persian eras – are many, but three in particular are important. First, Christians ought not to refer to the spirit as a hypostasis, because it would seem to indicate the metamorphosis of an internal attribute (breath) into an external entity (spirit). In a similar way, it has been suggested that divine wisdom became a hypostasis, an independent reality known as Wisdom. This, however, is a deficient way to portray the origin of pneumatology. The spirit was not conceived as an independent agent through a process of hypostatization, contrary to the pioneering work of Paul Volz (1910). The spirit was conceived as an independent agent when two prophets melded a belief in the presence and power of *ruah* with the tradition

of the exodus. The earliest understanding of the spirit as an agent was exegetical to the core – perhaps even an instance of what ancient prophets may have conceived of as the inspired interpretation of scripture for a new day. Second, broadly speaking, pneumatology was originally an Israelite enterprise. Therefore, Christian pneumatology should begin where – from an historical standpoint – pneumatology began in the world of Israel, which precipitated an understanding of the spirit as an agent. Third, the origin of pneumatology lay in historical crisis. Christian theologians may locate pneumatology in a triune God, but they should not begin there. If contemporary pneumatology is to develop out of its point of origin, then it ought to explore as one of its central loci the relationship of the spirit to historical crisis, to catastrophe, to agonizing exile and fragile restoration. This is the birthplace of the holy spirit.

5 Conclusion

Other themes could draw the attention, such as the meaning of blasphemy against the holy spirit (Levison 2020b: 97–114); the significance of baptism in the holy spirit (Dunn 1970); whether the spirit fills individuals as a lifelong presence or in a charismatic endowment (Levison 2009); or the resting of the spirit upon rulers, prophets, and Jesus (e.g. Isa 11:1–9; 61:1–4; Luke 4:16–21). Nonetheless, this entry has focused upon three themes, in part at least because of their implications.

The first theme, spirit and the sanctity of creation, unmask superficial – and unwarranted – distinctions rooted less in the rich world of Hebrew *ruah* and Greek *pneuma* than in the vocabulary of the English language. The world is sanctified by the realization that the winds are chariots on which God rides and the east wind delivering sustenance to the hungry is a *ruah* from God. Equally important are the ways in which ancient authors saw the human spirit, the life-breath within, as a holy spirit – as *the* holy spirit. No one who lives and breathes should ever imagine that the world is merely material or that life-breath within is other than the divine spirit, a gift of life, embraced moment by moment.

The second theme, spirit, wisdom, and the interpretation of scripture, traces the predisposition of OT, Second Temple Jewish, and the NT authors to experience a holy spirit that would lead them backwards, deep into traditions and texts, and then forward into an uncertain future in light of those texts. To acknowledge this is not to argue that the impulse toward incomprehensible speech disappeared altogether in early Christianity. An embrace of incomprehensible speech in the NT did not fade altogether, but it was subordinated to the belief that the spirit's role is to foster an understanding of Jesus by setting his story into the context of the OT. Speaking in tongues, if it was celebrated, was inevitably put into service to edify, to build up, and to understand Jesus better.

The third theme, spirit and the origin of pneumatology, demonstrates that the earliest understanding of the spirit as an agent or angelic presence rather than an impersonal

power was Israel's – not Christianity's. This understanding of the holy spirit, which seriously influenced the NT authors, calls into question the Christian tenor of some contemporary pneumatology. Pneumatology began, in short, deep in the heart of Judaism, and it is with Israelite and early Jewish literature that a Christian understanding of the holy spirit should begin.

Attributions

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