

## The Spirit in the Old Testament

As was mentioned in the last three issues of *A&C*, the revelation of the Triune God—the Father, Son, and Spirit—is hidden yet implied in the Old Testament. God is manifested in three aspects: in His status as the transcendent, invisible Creator, the aspect of God as Father is emphasized (Gen. 1:1); in His manifesting of Himself as a physical, visible, immanent, yet limited man, the aspect of God as Son is emphasized (Gen. 18:1-33; 32:24-30; Josh. 5:14; Judg. 13:6; Ezek. 1:26-28; 8:1-3; 43:7, 9; Dan. 8—12; Zech. 1:8; 2:1); and in His status as an invisible, immanent, omnipresent, and realizable being, the aspect of God as Spirit is emphasized. In this article we consider the revelation of God as Spirit in the Old Testament by looking at the meaning of the words translated “Spirit,” the titles of the Spirit, the functions of the Spirit, and symbols and types of the Spirit in preparation for the revelation of God as the consummated Spirit in the New Testament to sanctify and transform, mingle with, and incorporate Himself with human beings to make them the same as He is.

### The Meaning of the Words Translated “Spirit”

The words translated “Spirit/spirit” (in Hebrew mostly *ruah* and occasionally *neshamah*) refer to God being Spirit (*ruah* only) as well as to the human spirit, the faculty created by God to contact and contain Him (*ruah*, e.g., Zech. 12:1; and *neshamah*, e.g., Prov. 20:27; Job 26:4). *Neshamah* refers mostly to breath, whereas *ruah* carries the notion of breath also, as well as a blast, wind, and even atmosphere. The notion of breath indicates life, whereas the notion of wind indicates power, and the notion of atmosphere indicates the far-reaching ubiquity or omnipresence of the Spirit.

Both *ruah* and *neshamah* are related to verbs indicating the notion of breathing, *ravah* and *nasham*. They also indicate a close connection between God’s breath/Spirit and the formation of the human spirit as related in Genesis 2:7: “Jehovah God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed [*naphah*] into his nostrils the breath [*neshamah*] of life, and man became a living soul.”<sup>1</sup> The breath of God formed the human spirit (*neshamah*, Prov. 20:27; cf. Zech. 12:1), animated the human soul, and made the human body a living breathing being.

### The Significance of the Titles Associated with the Spirit

*The Spirit* in the Old Testament frequently occurs with other (especially genitive) modification, such as *the Spirit of God* (14 times), *the Spirit of Jehovah* (24 times), *the Spirit of the Lord Jehovah* (Isa. 61:1), *the Spirit of holiness* (Psa. 51:11; Isa. 63:10-11), *the Spirit of wisdom and understanding*, *the Spirit of counsel and might*, *the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of Jehovah* (11:2), *the Spirit of the living creature* (Ezek. 1:20-21; 10:17), *the Spirit of grace and of supplications* (Zech. 12:10), and pronominally as *My Spirit* (Gen. 6:3; Isa. 30:1; 42:1; 44:3; 59:21; Ezek. 36:27; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28; Hag. 2:5; Zech. 4:6; 6:8), *Your Spirit* (Neh. 9:30; Psa. 51:11 [of Your holiness]; 104:30; 139:7), *His Spirit* (Num. 11:29; Job 26:13; Psa. 106:33; Isa. 34:16; 48:16; 63:10-11 [of holiness]; Zech. 7:12), as well as without modification as *the Spirit* (18 times).<sup>2</sup>

The titles *the Spirit of God*, *the Spirit of Jehovah*, and *the Spirit of the Lord Jehovah* indicate not only that the Spirit belongs to God or Jehovah (possession) but also that the Spirit is God or is Jehovah (apposition). This is seen in the interchange of expressions that indicate that the actions of the Spirit are actually the actions of Jehovah or God; e.g., the Spirit entered into or came upon Ezekiel and said “thus says the Lord Jehovah,” and Ezekiel addresses Him later as Jehovah (Ezek. 3:24-27; 11:5, 13). Lee Roy Martin also points out that *the Spirit of Jehovah* (or *Yahweh*) speaks of the “personal presence of Yahweh” (27), especially when He indicates that He will be with someone, e.g., Moses (Exo. 3:12), the judges (Judg. 2:18), and Gideon (6:16). We later hear that Jehovah’s Spirit is with them (Num. 11; Judg. 3:10; 6:34).

Grammatical incongruence regarding *the Spirit* may also indicate that the Spirit is considered as God or Jehovah. About ten times, *the Spirit* (grammatically feminine in Hebrew) is modified by a masculine verb form or adjective, indicating that the writers considered the Spirit as a masculine entity in agreement with the masculine genitive modification (e.g., *the Spirit of Jehovah* in 2 Sam. 23:2; 1 Kings 18:12; 22:24; 2 Kings 2:16; 2 Chron. 18:23; Micah 2:7; so also *My [Jehovah’s] Spirit* in Gen. 6:3; *the Spirit* in Isa. 32:15; and *His Spirit* in 34:16).

The pronominal *Spirit* perhaps most naturally indicates

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possession but also can carry the notion of apposition. i.e., “My Spirit” equals “Me as the Spirit.”

In the expression *the Spirit of holiness*, the noun *holiness* (*qodesh*) modifies *the Spirit*. Holiness refers to the character, nature, and quality of being holy, which is an attribute of God. He is holiness Himself.<sup>3</sup> *The Spirit of holiness* indicates that the Spirit has the character and quality of holiness to bear and preserve God’s holiness among His people. In the three times that the expression occurs, *holiness* is also modified by a pronoun *Your* or *His* referring to God or Jehovah. David was concerned that God would take the Spirit of His holiness from him after his sin (Psa. 51:11), and Isaiah recounts the history of Jehovah’s interaction with the children of Israel in which they grieved His Spirit of holiness, who was in their midst (63:11-12). The term *the Spirit of holiness* refers to God’s working to separate His people to Himself as holiness and, according to Psalm 51:11, could be withdrawn. It is different from the term *the Holy Spirit*, which is a New Testament term used in the incarnation and mingling of God and man to make humanity not just objectively holy, or separated unto God, but intrinsically holy, the same as God is in His holy nature. This was not possible before the Lord’s process of incarnation, death, and resurrection to become the life-giving Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

The title *the Spirit of holiness* used here and in Isa. 63:10-11 is not the same as *the Holy Spirit* used in the New Testament. The Spirit of holiness in the Old Testament is for God to make His people holy by separating them unto Himself. The Holy Spirit at the initiation of the New Testament age was for God’s incarnation, in which God in His divine nature was imparted into humanity and mingled with the human nature (without forming a third nature) to produce a God-man who was intrinsically holy (Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:35). (Recovery Version, Psa. 51:11, note 2)

The Spirit of Jehovah resting on the sprout from the stump of Jesse is referred to as *the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of Jehovah* (Isa. 11:2). These expressions indicate that the Spirit manifests all these attributes (a total of seven if *the Spirit of Jehovah* is included), imparting them into the Messianic ruler.<sup>5</sup> *The Spirit of the living creature* refers to the operating of the Spirit within the living creature to lead, guide, and move the four living creatures in harmonious coordination (Ezek. 1:20-21).

*The Spirit of grace and of supplications* refers to Jehovah pouring out His Spirit at the end of the age upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the descendants of those who cried out for the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 27:22, 25) and who remain in the

rejection of Him as the Messiah until the end of the age (Zech. 12:10). *The Spirit of grace* refers to the Spirit as grace or as God being enjoyed by them, and *the Spirit of supplications* refers to a Spirit of supplication or prayer being poured upon them to pray, to seek for God as grace.

In Acts 2, at the beginning of the age of grace, the church age, the Spirit was mainly the Spirit of power, but in this verse, at the end, the consummation, of the age of grace, the Spirit will be mainly the Spirit of grace for the enjoyment of the Triune God. The Jews on the day of Pentecost were stubborn and hard; hence, the Spirit of power was poured out to inspire them to repent. But the half of the inhabitants of Jerusalem that survive the attack of Antichrist and his armies (Zech. 14:2) will have lost their taste for everything other than God and will have already repented. Therefore, the Spirit of grace will be poured out upon them so that they can receive the Triune God as their enjoyment. (Recovery Version, Zech. 12:10, note 1)

Most of the modifications of the noun *Spirit* indicate apposition; i.e., the Spirit is God or Jehovah. Even when *the Spirit* is modified by an attribute, it can have the sense of apposition; i.e., the Spirit of wisdom is the Spirit as the reality of wisdom (although it does not discount the notion of source; e.g., the Spirit supplies wisdom, or the Spirit brings about supplication).

### The Functions of the Spirit in the Old Testament

The main functions of the Spirit in the Old Testament are to carry out creation and maintain its proper expression and to supply power, authority, and prophetic utterance for the proper representation of God on earth through His people. As the Spirit, God creates the heavens (Job 26:13), the earth, and its creatures (Psa. 104:30), and He restores the earth under waters of judgment by hovering over them, or brooding like a bird (Gen. 1:2; cf. Isa. 32:14-15). He also creates and sustains humanity and other living things (Gen. 2:7; 7:22; Job 33:4). The Spirit is also involved in the divinely inspired creative activity of people. Bezalel is filled with the Spirit—with wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and all kinds of workmanship—for the building of the tabernacle and its furnishings (Exo. 31:3; 35:31); David is given the pattern of the temple by the Spirit (1 Chron. 28:12), and the Spirit is needed for rebuilding the temple (Zech. 4:6).

The Spirit is also God’s presence striving with man (Gen. 6:3), accompanying the children of Israel (Isa. 63:11), enduring them (Hag. 2:5), instructing and testifying to them (Neh. 9:20, 30), being grieved by them, and causing them to rest (Isa. 63:10, 14). The Spirit is omnipresent, as the psalmist says, “Where shall I go, away from Your [Jehovah’s] Spirit, / And where shall I flee from Your presence?” (Psa. 139:7).

The Spirit supplies power and authority, particularly in leadership and sometimes with prophetic utterance. The Spirit is upon Moses and the elders of Israel (Num. 11:17, 25-26, 29), Joshua (27:18; Deut. 34:9), Othniel (Judg. 3:10), Gideon (6:34), Jephthah (11:29), Samson (13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14), Saul (1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 11:6), and David (16:13; 2 Sam. 23:2; 1 Chron. 28:12; cf. Ps. 51:11). The Spirit also comes upon the prophets for prophetic utterance (Zech. 7:12), including Balaam (Num. 24:2), Elijah (1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16), Azariah (2 Chron. 15:1), Zechariah (24:20), Jahaziel (20:14), Ezekiel (Ezek. 2:2; 3:24; 11:5, 24; 37:1), and Micah (Micah 3:8).

**T**he Old Testament also speaks prophetically of the New Testament times, with the Spirit's resting upon Christ as the Messiah (Isa. 11:1-2; 42:1; 48:16; 59:21; 61:1; cf. Luke 4:18), His indwelling (Ezek. 36:27; 37:14), and His outpouring upon the house of Israel (39:29; Isa. 44:3; Zech. 12:10) and upon all flesh (Joel 2:28-29).

The Spirit mostly comes upon people, clothes them, but only rarely works within them (cf. Gen. 41:38; Num. 27:18; Ezek. 2:2; 3:24; Dan. 4:8-9, 18; 5:11-12, 14; 6:3). This is compared to His more intrinsic work in the New Testament of not only coming upon the believers (Acts 2:4, 17) but also being born in their human spirit (John 3:6), joining to (κολλάω) or mingling with them (1 Cor. 6:17), and indwelling them (Rom. 8:11). It is the work of the Spirit to sanctify (15:16) and transform the believers (2 Cor. 3:18) and make them a new creation fully expressing and representing God on this earth (Gal. 6:15-16; 5:25).

### The Symbols and Types of the Spirit

The two aspects of the Spirit coming upon and indwelling the believers are also indicated by symbols and in type in the Old Testament, particularly when the Spirit is symbolized either as gas (breath, wind, cloud, and fire) or as liquid (water and oil). Breath and wind are obvious symbols of the Spirit since they are the same word (Ezek. 1:4; John 3:8; Acts 2:2). The wind blows upon people, and breath enters into them (Ezek. 37:9). Paul considered the cloud under which the children of Israel were as a symbol of the Spirit (Exo. 13:21-22; 14:19-24; Num. 9:15-23; 1 Cor. 10:1-2; Ezek. 1:4), especially in the aspect of being baptized or clothed with the Spirit. The Spirit is also symbolized by seven lamps of fire burning before God's throne (Zech. 4:2, 6; Rev. 4:5), which are the seven Spirits of God, the eyes of the Lamb (1:4; 5:6).

Water is a symbol of the Spirit according to John 7:37-39, which cites Scripture (i.e., the Old Testament), implying that many of the aquatic symbols point to the Spirit, e.g., the river in Eden becoming rivers (Gen. 2:10), the water from the rock (Exo. 17:6; Num. 20:8-11; 1 Cor. 10:4; 12:13; cf. John 19:34), the fountain of living waters (Jer. 2:13;

17:13; Ps. 36:9; Zech. 13:1; John 19:34), the river out of the house extending to the city and beyond (Ezek 47:1-12; Ps. 46:4; 36:8; Rev. 22:1), and the (early and late) rain from heaven (Joel 2:23, 28-29; Zech. 12:10; cf. Gen. 2:5). Oil, in particular olive oil, is another liquid symbol of the Spirit. The action of anointing with oil is associated with the Spirit coming upon King David: "Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers, and the Spirit of Jehovah rushed upon David from that day forward" (1 Sam. 16:13). It is also associated with the anointing of the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon Me, / Because Jehovah has anointed Me" (Isa. 61:1-3). The anointing of Isaiah prefigures the Lord Jesus in His comings (Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38).

**T**he greatest type of the Spirit is the type of the anointing ointment that was used to anoint the tabernacle and its furnishings and the priesthood necessary to carry out its daily functioning (Exo. 30; cf. 1 John 2:20, 27). Olive oil (symbolizing the Spirit of God) is the base of the anointing ointment. It is compounded with four spices—myrrh, cinnamon, calamus, and cassia—to produce the holy anointing oil, or the compound ointment. This ointment typifies the Spirit, and its compounding typifies the process that the Lord Jesus went through in His incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension. Myrrh signifies death (it was frequently used as a fragrant embalming agent—John 19:39-40); cinnamon is a heart stimulant and signifies the sweetness and effectiveness of Christ's death (which touches and stimulates our heart); calamus is a reed standing up out of a muddy swamp or marsh and signifies resurrection (lit., "standing up/again"); and cassia is a repellent of snakes and insects and signifies the effectiveness of Christ's resurrection to repel negative things. The significance of the compound ointment is that the Spirit now contains the elements of the Lord's death and resurrection and is therefore effective to take care of all our intrinsic problems, such as terminating the sin in our nature (the power within that causes us to do what we should not do—Rom. 7:17, 19, 23) and swallowing up death (the inability to do and be what we should do and be—vv. 18, 24; 8:3) with resurrection life.<sup>6</sup>

The Spirit represented symbolically as liquid points to the mingling of substances, particularly of liquids with solids. Oil is mingled with fine flour (Exo. 29:40) and with spices (30:23-25). The Spirit represented as a liquid can also indicate mutual indwelling in the sense of being in water (being immersed or baptized) and having water in us (drinking) (1 Cor. 12:13). The Spirit represented symbolically as gas points to the mutual indwelling or incorporation of solids and gases (air is with us, and we are enveloped with the air). These symbols of the Spirit testify of God's economy to dispense Himself into, mingle Himself with, and incorporate Himself into human beings.

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## Conclusion

The Spirit in the Old Testament mostly indicates God or Jehovah as Spirit coming to carry out the works of creation and restoration or to maintain His creation for its proper expression. God also comes as the Spirit to anoint leaders and prophets and give them utterance to speak for Him or speak Him forth to represent Him. His ultimate intention is to fully saturate and transform humanity with Himself so that they become the same as He is in life and nature. A number of symbols in the Old Testament are used to indicate this, particularly those where the Spirit is symbolized as a gas or liquid. The greatest type of the Spirit is the compound ointment in Exodus 30 which signifies the compounding of the Spirit through the Lord Jesus' process of incarnation, death, and resurrection to bring the elements of humanity, death, and resurrection into the Spirit so that God as Spirit can remove the negative elements in the believers' being and indwell, mingle with, sanctify, and transform them so that they become the same as God in life and nature but not in the Godhead. This can be seen in a preparatory stage in the Old Testament revelation of the Spirit of God.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>It is interesting that the Greek word usually translated "spirit," πνεῦμα, also embodies this relationship in its origin. Πνεῦμα comes from the verb πνέω (breathe) combined with the -μα suffix, which has the notion of the result of an action. Hence, *spirit* is the result of the action of breathing. The human spirit was produced by God's breathing into man's nostrils (Gen. 2:7), and the Holy Spirit was imparted through the breathing of Jesus into the disciples (John 20:22).

<sup>2</sup>In the New Testament the Spirit is also referred to as *the eternal Spirit* (Heb. 9:14), *the Holy Spirit* (87 times), *the Comforter* (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), *the Spirit of reality* (14:17; 15:26; 16:13), *the Spirit of truth* (1 John 4:6), *the Spirit of life* (Rom. 8:2; cf. Gen. 7:22), *the Spirit of glory and of God* (1 Pet. 4:14), *the Spirit of the living God* (2 Cor. 3:3), *the Spirit of your Father* (Matt. 10:20), *the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead* (Rom. 8:11), *the Spirit of Jesus* (Acts 16:7), *the Spirit of Christ* (Rom. 8:9; 1 Pet. 1:11), *the Spirit of Jesus Christ* (Phil. 1:19), *the Spirit of His Son* (Gal. 4:6), *the Spirit of the Lord* (Luke 4:18; Acts 5:9; 8:39; 2 Cor. 3:17), *the Lord Spirit* (v. 18), *the life-giving Spirit* (1 Cor. 15:45), *the seven Spirits* (Rev. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6), and without modification, *the Spirit* (80 times).

<sup>3</sup>To indicate the notion of holiness, Hebrew prefers to use the genitive of the noun *qodesh* (holiness) (approximately 470 times) rather than an adjective *qadosh* (holy) (approximately 117 times). The noun *qodesh* modifies things more often than

persons, but it is mostly translated as the adjective *holy* in English, e.g., holy ground (ground of holiness), mountain, city, house, habitation, temple, sanctuary or the Holy Place (lit., the *place of holiness*), the Holy of Holies (lit., the *place of holiness of the place of holinesses*), chambers, anointing oil, incense, garments, crown, offerings, covenant, memorial, and arm. The Hebrew adjective *qadosh* mostly modifies *God* (e.g., *the Holy One* [of Israel]) or people such as priests, Nazarites, holy ones, saints. Occasionally, the adjective *qadosh* modifies the noun *maqom* (place) (Exo. 29:31; Lev. 6:16). For the few nouns that use both kinds of modification, the adjective is used for predicate modification, e.g., "the day is holy" (Neh. 8:9-11), while a "holy day" is literally a "day of holiness" (10:31; Isa. 58:13); so also His name "is holy" (Psa. 99:3; 111:9) compared to "His holy name," literally, "the name of His holiness" (1 Chron. 16:10; cf. Lev. 20:3). Occasionally, people (*'am*) are referred to as *'am ha-qodesh* (the people of [Your] holiness, Isa. 62:12; 63:18; Dan. 12:7), but more commonly the people are referred to as *'am qadosh* (a holy people, Deut. 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19; 28:9).

<sup>4</sup>The Septuagint translators translate the expression *the Spirit of holiness* in these three verses with an adjective following the noun *Spirit* (τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον), which is one of the ways to indicate the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. Many English translations also translate this expression "Holy Spirit." According to the New Testament, the Old Testament saints (especially David three times) also have some relationship with the Holy Spirit: "David himself said in the Holy Spirit, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand until I put Your enemies underneath Your feet'" (Mark 12:36; Acts 1:16; 4:25). However, this could indicate the influence of the Septuagint on the New Testament writers. Alternatively, this could indicate a pre-incarnation experience of the Holy Spirit similar to 1 Peter 1:11, which indicates that the Spirit of Christ was operating in the Old Testament prophets, making clear and testifying beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glories after these.

<sup>5</sup>In a similar way, the Spirit of God ("a divine spirit" in the LXX) who fills Bezalel also fills him with wisdom, with understanding, and with knowledge, and with all kinds of workmanship to build the tabernacle and make its furnishings (Exo. 35:31). This can also be compared to Bezalel and Joshua being filled with a spirit of wisdom (28:3; Deut. 34:9), referring to their human spirit endowed with divine wisdom (Exo. 31:6).

<sup>6</sup>The compound ointment is covered in more detail in an article by Ed Marks, "The Compound Spirit," *Affirmation & Critique* II:1 (January 1997): 15-27.

## Works Cited

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