

PAUL'S THEOLOGY

Lesson 11

The Holy Spirit – Background

This holiday season gave us a great opportunity to enjoy our family – all four generations still living. Amidst the gifts, the frantic eating, the laughing, the frantic eating, the playing, and the frantic eating, we had time to reflect on Christmas's past.

As I enjoyed time with our 24-year-old son, I reflected on his evolving tastes over the decades. This year, Will's interests went to books, binoculars for stargazing, and a digital camera. When Will was quite young, his big love was Legos, those interlocking blocks from which one could build anything – castles to cars.

Lego toys came marked with an "age appropriate" label like many toys do. One interesting aspect of Lego's, however, is the box marked "Age 6-8" has the same basic Lego as the box marked "Age 8-10." The difference that mandates the varying age label is in the complexity of the designs. The same Lego blocks can be used to build something rather simple or something highly complicated. One would not expect a four year old to follow the directions necessary to construct the castle buildable by a ten year old.

This memory struck me as a wonderful illustration of what we read as we study the Holy Spirit in scripture. Like so much theology, the oldest passages of scripture teach rudimentary concepts that, over time, became more complex and intricate. Scholars call this aspect of scripture, "progressive revelation." It refers to the manner in which God has progressively revealed more and more of himself, his truth, the human condition, and his plans as time passed. As God's people aged from generation to generation, the information and revelation of God grew.

That is not to say that the older aspects of God's revelation were inadequate or wrong. Rather, like the Lego blocks, more and more truth was given as mankind was ready for it, and with that greater truth came the chance to build greater understanding of God.

Perhaps nowhere is that better illustrated than in the area of the Holy Spirit. We originally read in the creation account that the "Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the deep" (Gen. 1:2). Yet, that reference hardly provides enough information for humanity to understand charismatic gifts in the church, much less the Trinity!

With this class, we begin our study of the Holy Spirit in Paul's theology examining the material Paul had at his disposal to add to his personal experience to help us better understand his writings on the subject.

Some might ask, "Why study the Holy Spirit?" In short, the Holy Spirit, is fully God, a part of the Trinity, and the source of power in the life of the believer as well as the church. It is "the Spirit of life" that "set me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:1). We study carefully as our knowledge of the Spirit has unfolded through the Old Testament times, the New Testament times, in church history, and even in our personal experiences. So we start our study where Paul started his -- in the Old Testament.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

We know from our studies that Paul was first and foremost a Hebrew scholar.¹ As such, Paul was studiously aware of the Old Testament writings on God's Spirit. Paul was fluent in Hebrew and we begin our study with the Hebrew word for "spirit," *ruach* (רוח) (pronounced roo - as in kanga-roo, and ach - as in the last bit of Bach but with a guttural gargle with the *ch*).

The Hebrew *ruach* occurs 389 times in the Old Testament.² Its core meaning is "wind" or "breath" but not simply the moving air of wind or breath. In its essence, *ruach* is "the power encountered in the breath and the wind."³ We can read many passages where *ruach* is used as "wind" and uncover keys to the word that help us understand its usage also for God's Spirit. Consider:

- Exodus 10:13 "So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind (*ruach*) upon all the land all that day and all that night."
- Jonah 1:4 "But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up."

The Hebrews had no real concept of air apart from the wind. It was the movement of wind and its effects that gave meaning to *ruach*. So, the **invisible power of the wind at work was the invisible power of *ruach*.**

¹ See our lesson on Paul the Hebrew downloadable from our website www.Biblical-Literacy.com

² It occurs in every Old Testament book except Leviticus, Ruth, Esther, Song of Solomon, Obadiah, Nahum, and Zephaniah.

³ Ernst Jenni, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Biddle translation (Hendrickson Publishers 1997) Vol. 3 at 1203.

Think of it like a windmill. The point of the *ruach* is not that there is a breeze, but rather that the breeze is doing something. It is turning a windmill. It is making a difference. It is seen and noted in its effects.

This is where we find the word at work in the threshing of wheat:

- Psalm 1:4 “The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind (*ruach*) drives away.”

Old Testament prophets captured this **visual of *ruach* wind blowing away chaff from useful wheat as a metaphor for how God would destroy the enemies of Israel:**

- Isaiah 17:13 “The nations roar like the roaring of many waters, but he will rebuke them, and they will flee far away, chased like chaff on the mountains before the wind (*ruach*) and whirling dust before the storm.”

Not just the enemies, but **also an unrepentant Israel was also subject to the judging wind (*ruach*) of God:**

- Jeremiah 4:11-12 “At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem, ‘A hot wind (*ruach*) from the bare heights in the desert toward the daughter of my people, not to winnow or cleanse, a wind (*ruach*) too full for this comes for me. Now I speak in judgment upon them.’”

Another aspect of the word *ruach* centers on **the inability of humans to control it**. Consider going to Lubbock, Texas, or some other windy place on a windy day. Next, try to stand still in the middle of a field and make the wind stop blowing. It cannot be done. This is a thrust of the Hebrew idea of *ruach*.

- Ecclesiastes 8:8 “No man has power to retain the wind (*ruach*),⁴ or power over the day of death.”

Jesus used the Aramaic equivalent of *ruach* in the same way when he taught:

- John 3:8 “The wind (*ruach*) blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.”⁵

There was not a great deal known about wind before the scientific age brought about a study in atmospheric sciences. At a time when elemental air, oxygen, and

⁴ Some translators, like the ESV, use the English “*spirit*” here to translate *ruach* rather than the word wind.

⁵ As John wrote this passage decades later, John wrote in Greek. John uses the Greek for wind, which, just as in Hebrew and Aramaic, is also the word for wind. This will get more discussion later in this lesson.

other aspects of invisible elements were little understood, the invisible blow of wind was understandably mysterious. To the Old Testament Jews, the **“mysterious power at work in the wind and its unknown origin [was] particularly suggestive of God’s activity.”**⁶

In this vein, humanity’s subjection to the wind’s dictates underscored a difference between God and man. While humans are unable to control the wind, the Hebrews understood that the **wind obeyed the dictates of the Creator. God caused the wind to move, commanded it, and sent it forth, using the wind to deliver or punish:**

- Genesis 8:1 “And God made a wind (*ruach*) blow over the earth, and the waters subsided.”
- Psalm 107:25 “For he commanded and raised the stormy wind (*ruach*), which lifted up the waves of the sea.”
- Amos 4:13 “For behold, he who forms the mountains and creates the wind (*ruach*)...”
- Ezekiel 13:10-11 “Precisely because they have misled my people, saying, ‘Peace,’ when there is no peace, and because, when the people build a wall, these prophets smear it with whitewash, say to those who smear it with whitewash that it shall fall! There will be a deluge of rain, and you, O great hailstones, will fall, and a stormy wind (*ruach*) break out.”

God uses **the *ruach* wind as his messenger:**

- Psalm 104:4 “He makes his messengers winds (*ruach*), his ministers a flaming fire.”

In many passages, **the *ruach* wind is actually synonymous with the breath of God:**

- Exodus 15:8, 10 “At the blast (*ruach*) of your nostrils the waters piled up... You blew with your wind (*ruach*); the sea covered them”
- Psalm 18:15 “Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare at your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath (*ruach*) of your nostrils.”

This moves us to a second core meaning of *ruach* beyond wind. *Ruach* also is the Hebrew word that was used to indicate **“the particular process of breathing that**

⁶ Jenni at 1205.

expresses the human being's **dynamic vitality**.”⁷ In other words, *ruach* was not a simple ordinary breath; Hebrew had another word for breath (*n'sama*). *Ruach* was used to focus on the effect of or to emphasize the breathing rather than the simple process in ordinary inhaling and exhaling. Consider in this light the way the Queen of Sheba lost her breath when she saw the treasures of Solomon:

- 1 Kings 10:4-5 “And when the Queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his cupbearers, and his burnt offerings that he offered at the house of the LORD, there was no more breath (*ruach*) in her.”

This sense of **ruach as breath emphasized the life it brought into the body**. Ezekiel used the word over and over in writing about the dead bones prophesy in Ezekiel 37:

- Ezekiel 37:4-10 “Then he said to me, “Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: behold I will cause breath (*ruach*) to enter you, and you shall live. And I will...put breath (*ruach*) in you and you shall live...So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath (*ruach*) came into them and they lived.”

Just as *ruach* took the meaning of the vitality that was in life's breath, it also was used as indicating **the part of humans that was the center of action and choices**.⁸ In this sense Ezekiel writes of the need for a “new spirit.”

- Ezekiel 11:19 “And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh.”
- Ezekiel 18:31 “Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!”

The invisible breath, *ruach* spirit within man brought forth the actions. People could not see the *ruach*, but they could see the results! *Ruach* had a similar usage in reference to God. We read in multiple passages of God's invisible Spirit (*ruach*). We should note that these passages do not capitalize *ruach* as we capitalize Spirit in English when referencing it as God's Spirit as distinct from the spirit of man. There is nothing in the Hebrew (or the Greek, for

⁷ *Ibid.* at 1207.

⁸ Again, the *ruach* breath or spirit was not the only term for the part of man that makes choices. The heart (Hebrew *leb*) was also a seat of emotions and mental decisions.

that matter) that indicates when *ruach* is referencing God's Spirit as opposed to a wind or breath. That determination is made by simple context.

The Hebrew has *ruach yhwh* ("Spirit of the LORD") 27 times and *ruach elohim* ("Spirit of God") 16 times. Sometimes it means "wind" or "breath:"

- Isaiah 40:7 "The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD (*ruach yhwh*) blows on it."
- Isaiah 59:19 "So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD (*ruach yhwh*) drives."

Some passages are not so clear. Genesis 1:2, referenced early in this lesson could be "wind" or "spirit:"

- "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the *ruach elohim* ("wind" or "Spirit" of God) was hovering over the face of the waters."

There are other passages where the *ruach* of God (or the LORD) is clearly referencing an invisible working of God where **the effects are seen, even as the *ruach* remains as invisible as the wind.**

We read of God's *ruach* as the true source of Samson's strength:

- Judges 14:6 "Then the Spirit of the LORD (*ruach yhwh*) rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat."
- Judges 14:19 "And the Spirit of the LORD (*ruach yhwh*) rushed upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon and struck down thirty men of the town."
- Judges 15:14-15 "When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him. Then the Spirit of the LORD (*ruach yhwh*) rushed upon him, and the ropes that were on his arms became as flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands. And he found the fresh jawbone of a donkey, and he put out his hand and took it, and with it he struck 1,000 men."

God's *ruach* was seen as the source of the prophet's ecstatic proclamations:

- 1 Samuel 10:6 "Then the Spirit of the LORD (*ruach yhwh*) will rush upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man."
- 1 Samuel 19:20 "Then Saul sent messengers to take David, and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as head

over them, the Spirit of God (*ruach elohim*) came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied.”

- 1 Samuel 19:23 “And he [Saul] went there to Naioth in Ramah. And the Spirit of God (*ruach elohim*) came upon him also, and as he went he prophesied until he came to Naioth in Ramah.”

There were also *ruach* spirits that, while portrayed as present before God, were not themselves from the mouth of God. In the account of King Ahab and the false prophets, whether reading from 1 Kings 22 or from the account in 2 Chronicles 18, we find a “lying *ruach*” sent from God to the false prophets:

- 1 Kings 22:19-23 “I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him...and the LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’...Then a spirit (*ruach*) came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, ‘I will entice him.’ And the LORD said to him, ‘By what means?’ And he said, ‘I will go out and will be a lying spirit (*ruach*) in the mouth of all his prophets.’...Now therefore behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit (*ruach*) in the mouth of all these your prophets; the LORD has declared disaster for you.”⁹

The Hebrew used a number of different verbs to discuss how God’s Spirit worked among people. The Spirit was “given,”¹⁰ it was said to “rest on,”¹¹ and even “penetrate.”¹² But **the key to the Lord’s Spirit interacting with humanity was that God was always selective as to who received his Spirit.** Even among the holy men, not all had the Spirit and not all had it at all times.

We see this “selectivity” of the Spirit in scriptures like Joel 2:28-30 where the current state of Israel (where the Spirit was given to the chosen few) was contrasted with **the future time when God will give his Spirit to all his people:**

⁹ This passage poses wonderful questions about how a truthful God could send a lying spirit. Those questions are beyond the scope of this lesson; however, it is instructive to note that while the lying spirit went forth, God also sent his prophet who declared the truth to Ahab. Ahab chose what he wanted to hear rather than the truth.

¹⁰ God “put it on the seventy elders” in Numbers 11:25 using the Hebrew *ntn* meaning “give.” This is the same word used in Isaiah 42:1 translated “Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him.”

¹¹ When Elijah had passed on his mantle to Elisha, the people saw the same spirit “rest” on Elisha in 2 Kings 2:15.

¹² The ESV translates the Hebrew “penetrate” (*shlh*) as follows: “Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD (*ruach yhw*) rushed upon [penetrated] David from that day forward” (1 Sam. 16:13).

- Joel 2:28 “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.”

Peter quoted this same passage in explaining the experience at Pentecost in Acts 2.

We also see this concept of selective indwelling of the Spirit prior to Pentecost in the teachings of Jesus. In John 14, Jesus spoke to his disciples about the Holy Spirit:

- Jn 14:16-17 “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth... You know him, for he dwells **with** you and **will be in** you.”

We should notice the tense of the verbs Jesus used. He spoke of the Spirit as currently *with* the apostles, and indeed he was. For the Spirit was in Jesus and so since Jesus was with the apostles, so was the Spirit, yet there was coming a time in the future when the Spirit would actually be *in* the apostles. History shows this occurring at Pentecost in Acts 2.

Finally, we should note that there are a few times (three) in the Old Testament when the *ruach* Spirit of God is called the “Holy Spirit:”

- Psalm 51:11 “Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.”
- Isaiah 63:10 “But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; □ therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them.”
- Isaiah 63:11 “Then he remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people. Where is he who brought them up out of the sea □ with the shepherds of his flock? Where is he who put in the midst of them □ his Holy Spirit”

This usage of the word emphasizes that God’s Spirit is unique and special, set apart from other winds, spirits, or breaths.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN PAUL

Where does this help us in understanding Paul’s writings on the Spirit? We shall explore this further in the weeks to come, but we should stop and see the similarities we would expect in Paul’s writings as they complement that of the Old Testament.

As we consider Paul’s writings, we should stop first and note two things. First, our writings of Paul are in Greek, not Hebrew. The Greek word for spirit is not

ruach but is *pneuma* (πνεῦμα). Interestingly, however, *pneuma* has the same reach of meanings as *ruach*. The Jews who translated the Old Testament into Greek in the centuries before Paul used the Greek *pneuma* to translate *ruach*. The Greek word in classical usage mirrors that of the Hebrew word. We remember in this vein that Paul considered the Old Testament authoritative in both its Hebrew and Greek versions.

Second, Paul always taught out of the Old Testament. In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul wrote that the Old Testament was “given by inspiration of God” (King James Version). More recent translations give the phrase “God-breathed” (NIV) or “breathed out” (ESV). This is a prime example of Paul using the word “spirit!” Paul puts the word “spirit” with the word “God” (*theos*) and produces a word that means God breathed out (*ruach/pneuma*) scripture. It could also be translated that God-Spirited scripture.

As we look to Paul, we are not a bit surprised to see his usage and understanding of spirit to align with the usage in the Old Testament, modified by the changes since Pentecost. The changes since Pentecost will be examined next week as we then discuss whether the purpose of the Holy Spirit was different in the Old and New Testament times as well as how the Spirit works to achieve his purposes. This week, however, we take the points of the Old Testament usage of *ruach* discussed earlier in this lesson and apply them to Paul’s writings.

The Spirit is God’s invisible power at work.

We see the results, even as the Spirit is unseen. The emphasis is not on the Spirit, but on the resulting work. To use the earlier analogy, that the windmill moves is the emphasis, not that the atmosphere is causing the windmill to turn.

- Romans 15:18-19 “For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, **by the power of the Spirit of God**—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ.”
- Galatians 5:22-23 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

It is in this sense that we have a chance to work with the Spirit. The effective results of the Spirit at work are where we are encouraged to participate:

- Philippians 2:1-2 “So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,

complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”

The Spirit is used by God in judgment, both to destroy the enemies and to make his people holy.

- 2 Thessalonians 2:8 “then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the **breath** (*pneuma/ruach*) of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.”
- Ephesians 2:22: “In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the **Spirit.**”

Paul even uses spirit in this sense referring to his own spirit as opposed to God’s Spirit:

- 1 Corinthians 5:3 “For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing.”

Humans do not control the Spirit; the Spirit has its own mission and work.

- 1 Corinthians 2:10 “These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.”
- 1 Corinthians 2:11 “For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.”
- 1 Corinthians 2:14 “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”

Like the wind, **God commands the Spirit, sends him forth, and uses him for his purposes.**

- Romans 5:5 “and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy **Spirit** who has been given to us.”
- 1 Corinthians 12:7 “To each is given the manifestation of the **Spirit** for the common good.”
- Galatians 4:6: “And because you are sons, God has sent the **Spirit** of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

The **Spirit is God’s messenger**, taking his message forth.

- Ephesians 3:4-5 “When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.”

We do not see the Spirit, but we see the results of its working!

- Titus 3:5 “he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy **Spirit**.”
- 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same **Spirit**; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the **Spirit** for the common good.”

There are **other spirits besides God’s that God uses to his own ends**.

- Romans 11:8 “as it is written, "God gave them a **spirit** of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.”

While **God selected those who experienced his Spirit** in the Old Testament, **God’s selection extends to all believers** in the New Testament.

- Galatians 3:14 “so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised **Spirit** through faith.”
- 2 Corinthians 13:14 “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy **Spirit** be with you all.”
- 2 Corinthians 1:22 “who has also put his seal on us and given us his **Spirit** in our hearts as a guarantee.”
- 1 Corinthians 12:7 “To each is given the manifestation of the **Spirit** for the common good.”
- 1 Corinthians 6:19 “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy **Spirit** within you, whom you have from God?”
- 1 Corinthians 2:12 “Now we have received not the **spirit** of the world, but the **Spirit** who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.”

As we consider the Spirit in Paul’s writings, we will focus next week on the changes that have come about in the work of the Spirit since the resurrection of Christ.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit”* (Eph. 2:22).

We can see God by looking at his works! Watch how he works in you. Many Christians regret that they see very little activity of God in their life. Yet, we have the assurance that the God of power who raised Jesus from the dead is at work in us. Often, especially when we are hurting and in times of tribulation, we do best to look back in history and see how God has worked to hold, sustain and bless us. We should also remember to walk after the Spirit, hence point for home 2:

2. *“If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit”* (Gal. 3:25).

Make the decision to honor and walk by God’s Spirit. That includes walking in the power that God has for us to live victoriously over sin and death! “For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2). We might wonder less about God working in our life if we make conscious decisions to follow his lead!

3. *“Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”* (Eph. 6:17).

The Spirit is active and ready for aggressive use in our life! Think about it. God’s power, God’s mind, God’s message, all ready to go in your life. Why do we not tap into it? Come back next week for more!