

16. IS THE HOLY SPIRIT A PERSON?

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1. The primary Old Testament word for the Spirit is *ruah* (mostly in the feminine), used approximately 388 times. The primary New Testament word for the Holy Spirit is *Pneuma* (neutral), used 378 times.¹
2. The Greek word *pneuma* is neutral ('it') but John refers to the Holy Spirit in the masculine when he calls the Holy Spirit *the Paraclete* (ὁ δὲ παράκλητος).
3. The image of the Holy Spirit as a woman and mother comes from
 - 3.1. the fact that the Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac words for 'spirit' are almost always feminine.
 - 3.2. the link between the figures of the Holy Spirit and Wisdom
 - 3.3. the link between Holy Spirit and the Jewish feminine concept of the Divine Presence or Shekinah.²

4. *Ruah* is a breath, which is seen as the principle of life,

Genesis 1:2: 1In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters

Job 33:4: "The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life"

Ezekiel 37 1-14: 1The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. 2And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry [...] 5Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. 6And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD." 7So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling,^ε and the bones came together, bone to its bone. 8And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. 9Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." 10So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the

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¹ Daniel Henderson, "The Holy Spirit In The Old Testament", <https://www.strategicrenewal.com/the-holy-spirit-in-the-old-testament/>

² Johannes van Oort, "The Holy Spirit as feminine: Early Christian testimonies and their interpretation", <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/hts/v72n1/26.pdf>

breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

5. In the Old Testament, the Spirit's most notable work is empowerment for specific tasks or assignments:
 - 5.1. the Spirit of the Lord "came upon" judges (Judges 3:10, 6:34, 11:29, 13:2 514:6 and 19, 15:14).
 - 5.2. The Spirit also came upon craftsmen chosen by God to work on the tabernacle or Temple (Exodus 31:3-6; 1 Chronicles 28:11, 12; 1 Kings 7:13, 14).
 - 5.3. Moses and the 70 elders (Numbers 11:17)
 - 5.4. Joshua (Numbers 27:18)
 - 5.5. Saul (1 Samuel 11:6)
 - 5.6. David (1 Samuel 16:13)

"Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward".
6. The Spirit also filled Old Testament prophets for their assigned tasks (2 Chronicles 15:17, 20:1, 14-17.22, 23, 24:20; Numbers 24:2; 1 Chronicles 12:18).
7. In the Old Testament the spirit is perceived as a dynamic power and yet the image of breath and empowerment suggests the ability to become part of who human beings are, "in-spire" them, allow them to be/do *more* from within.
8. In the New Testament there is a gradual shift in the way the Holy Spirit is portrayed.
 - 8.1. In the **Synoptics** it still is seen mostly as a divine power that guides and enables the Messiah to fulfill his work
 - 8.2. **Paul** discerns a similarity between the Risen Christ and the Holy Spirit
 - 8.3. In the **Acts of the Apostles** the Holy Spirit is portrayed as an autonomous acting subject
 - 8.4. The **Gospel of John** develops the relation of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son/Jesus both in the Trinity and in the lives of Christians.³
9. Synoptics
 - 9.1. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus himself is the only bearer of the Spirit during his earthly ministry.
 - 9.2. Although Jesus commissions the disciples with some itinerate preaching and exorcising activity during his earthly ministry,
 - i. their power over the demons (Luke 10:17, 20) is not explained by any reference to the Spirit, but only by the commissioning from Jesus himself (Luke 10:19)
 - ii. During Jesus' earthly ministry there is no hint of the disciples having a proper share in the Spirit.
10. Paul

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³ Jorg Frey, 'How did the Holy Spirit Become a Person?', in *The Holy Spirit, Inspiration, and the Cultures of Antiquity* (De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 343-71 2

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- 10.1. Paul was acquainted with prophecy (1 Thess 5:19), ecstatic speech (glossolalia; cf. 1 Cor 14:18), visionary experiences (2 Cor 12:1), and auditory revelation (2 Cor 12:4), and he could also claim that his preaching was accompanied by “signs and wonders” (1 Thess 1:5–6; Gal 3:5; Rom 15:18–19)
- 10.2. However he stresses the revelatory function of the Spirit that leads those visiting the congregation to repent
 - 1 Cor 14: 23If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? 24But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, 25the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.
- 10.3. He addresses his readers as πνευματικοί, that is, as people who are given the Spirit or live by the Spirit
 - Gal 6:1: If anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted
 - Rom 8:9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to hi
- 10.4. The Spirit is thought to shape their ethical conduct and their understanding
 - i. 1 Cor 2:13: And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.
- 10.5. The Spirit represents a mindset or a way of thinking
 - Rom 8:6, 27 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.
 - And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

11. He proclaims

- 11.1. the fundamental relevance of the cross, which reverts all human values (1 Cor 1:18–25),
- 11.2. the additional criteria of the edification of the community (1 Cor 14:26)
- 11.3. the common good (1 Cor 12:7)
- 11.4. the criterion of love
 - 1 Cor 13 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.
 - 4Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. 9For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 11When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

12. The work of the Spirit is set in an analogy with the work of the exalted Christ:

- 12.1. God has sent the Spirit (Gal 4:6) as he also sent his Son (Gal 4:4).
- 12.2. The Spirit indwells believers (Rom 8:9, 11) as does Christ (Rom 8:10; Gal 2:22).
- 12.3. The Spirit intercedes for those who believe and pray in God's realm, as does the exalted Christ (Rom 8:34; cf. 1 John 2:1).
- 12.4. The Spirit liberates from the deadly power of the Law (Rom 8:2) just as Christ sets people free from the Law (Gal 5:1);
- 12.5. The Spirit teaches (1 Cor 2:13), moves and leads those who are under his influence (Rom 8:14), and enables them to cry "Abba," that is, to pray to the Father in analogy to Jesus' own words of prayer (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15).
- 12.6. In Rom 15:14–22, Paul stresses that it is Christ himself who has accomplished the Apostle's work "by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God" (Rom 15:19). In other words, Christ himself is present and effective in the Spirit and through the Spirit.
2 Cor 3: 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.
- 12.7. The sentence "the Lord is the Spirit" could be seen as suggesting an identification between the exalted Christ and the Spirit, except for the immediate continuation "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." This phrase marks the subordination of the Spirit to the Lord (the exalted Christ) and thus the clear distinction between the two.

13. In the Acts of the Apostles, the Spirit appears as an acting subject

- 13.1. The Spirit speaks to the assembly in prayer
Acts 13:2: While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."
Acts 10:19: 19And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. 20Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them."
- 13.2. He inspires prophetic announcements and directions (Acts 11:28; 20:23; 21:4, 11),
- 13.3. guides the steps of the witnesses, opens and closes doors (Acts 16:6–7, 9–10), and actively intervenes in the progress of the mission.
- 13.4. In Acts 10:44 the Spirit fills the people listening to Peter so that they begin to speak in tongues, and this convincingly demonstrates to Peter and the

Jerusalemites that the inclusion of the Gentiles is in accordance with the divine will.

- 13.5. In Acts 13:4 it is the Holy Spirit who sends the messengers,
- 13.6. in 20:28 he appoints to the office of an overseer, and
- 13.7. in 15:28 he is co-author of the apostolic decree, introduced by the formula “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us... .”
- 13.8. In the story of the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 the Holy Spirit takes Philip away (8:39).

14. The Johannine concept of the Spirit differs considerably from the views of Paul and Luke.

- 14.1. The “charismatic” phenomena are almost totally missing. Here we find no idea of miracles performed through the power of the Spirit and nothing about ecstatic speech phenomena.
- 14.2. The Spirit merely reminds the words and work of Jesus, he teaches the disciples (John 14:26), as the Paraclete he assists them like an advocate, convicts about the truth of the faith in Christ (John 16:8–11), and guides them in all truth (John 16:13–15).
- 14.3. The Spirit’s activities are almost completely word-centered: reminding, teaching, guiding.
- 14.4. In the farewell Discourses, there is a subtle differences with regard to the one who sends the Spirit
 - i. in the first two sayings (John 14:16 – 17; 14:26), the Father shall send the “other Paraclete” to the disciples upon Jesus’ request,

John 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, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

John 14:26: the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you
 - ii. in the following three sayings—in the context of the second Farewell Discourse (John 15:1–16:33)—it is Jesus who, after his departure, will send the Spirit-Paraclete to the disciples (John 15:26; 16:7).

John 15:26: when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

John 16:7 I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.
- 14.5. In John 20:22 Jesus himself is the giver of the Spirit that enables the disciples to continue his salvific work. Jesus breathes into the disciples as God had breathed into the figure of clay to bring it to life (Gen 2:7).

John 20 19On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews,^s Jesus came

and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." ²²And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

15. The Johannine statements on the Spirit provide the most important Scriptural basis for the later view of the Holy Spirit as a divine person in specific correlation with, and distinction from, the Father and the Son.
 - 15.1. Although triadic formulae are documented already in earlier periods of early Christianity (cf. 1 Cor 12:4-6; 2 Cor 13:13) and in the end of Matthew (Matt 28:18, which is almost contemporary with John)
 - 15.2. the Johannine reflection clarifies the relationship between God and the Logos (John 1:1, 18), the Father and the Son (John 10:30; 14:9 etc.)

Why is it important that the Holy Spirit is a person?

16. Saint Augustine, *On The Trinity* 15.36

The gift of the Holy Spirit is nothing but the Holy Spirit. So he is the gift of God insofar as he is given to those he is given to. But in himself he is God even if he is not given to anyone, because he was God, co-eternal with the Father and the Son, even before he was given to anyone. Nor is he less than they because they give and he is given. He is given as God's gift in such a way that as God he also gives himself.
17. This says something about the nature of grace:
 - 17.1. we receive it not as a power (or superpower!) but as a gift
 - 17.2. not as the gift of something but as the self-giving of a person.
18. Receiving authority and a power: it becomes mine
19. Receiving a superpower: it become my attribute.
20. The gift of the Holy Spirit remains a relation, a gift in the act of giving itself
21. Just as a person can be a gift: "I give myself to you" means "I promise to keep giving myself to you".