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[L. A. BUSHINSKI]

## SPIRIT OF GOD

The expressions "the spirit of Yahweh" (*rûah Yhwh*) and "the spirit of God" (*rûah, "Ēlohim*) are common in the Old Testament. "His holy spirit" and "Your holy spirit" (in reference to God) are also found. The absolute use, "the spirit" or "spirit," seldom occurs. In late Judaism it was a practice to avoid use of the divine name by means of circumlocutions. Thus in the Greek versions of the Old Testament there are found such expressions as "divine spirit," "the holy spirit," or simply, "holy spirit." The most common expression in the New Testament is "the Holy Spirit" (τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον). "Holy Spirit" (πνεῦμα ἅγιον) and simply "the Spirit" (τὸ πνεῦμα) or "Spirit" (πνεῦμα) are also found. God's spirit was originally called "holy" in the same way as His word [Jer 23.9; Ps 104(105).42], His arm [Is 52.10; Ps 97(98). 1], and His name (Am 2.7; Ez 36.20) were called holy, because God is by nature holy. 'Holy spirit,' therefore, means "divine spirit."

This article treats the spirit of God as it is presented in the Old Testament and Judaism, and in the New Testament. Consideration is given in each of these sections to the spirit of God as a power and as a Person.

### Spirit of God in the Old Testament

The specific implications of the phrase "Spirit of God" must be deduced from the operations ascribed to it in the Old Testament.

**God's Spirit as a Power.** "Spirit of God" is used in the Old Testament to signify "God's breath" (Jb 33.4). Just as the ancient Israelites spoke anthropomorphically of God's arm, hand, and face, so they also spoke of His breath, i.e., His vital power or spirit, which was as active and as efficacious as God Himself. This use has its foundation in the original meaning of the word *rûah*—"breath" or "wind." The breath, which was regarded by the ancients as the vital force in man and animals, and the wind, which in Palestine can blow with sudden violence, were looked upon as mysterious, powerful, and terrifying forces. Consequently, it is not surprising that they attributed to the breath or spirit of God the manifestations of extraordinary mysterious powers in man or in nature.

*A Power Affecting Man's Soul or Mind.* Certain individuals manifested occasional extraordinary power (e.g.,

Jgs 14.6, 19), heroic courage (e.g., Jgs 3.10), or the gift of prophecy (e.g., 1 Sm 10.6-13). These transitory phenomena were regarded by the Israelites as manifestations of God's spirit. In other cases God's spirit appeared as a permanent force bestowed on individuals because of their office. This was true of the great founders of the nation: Moses (Nm 11.17, 25), Joshua (Dt 34.9), David (1 Sm 16.13; 2 Sm 23.2). It was particularly the messianic king upon whom the spirit would rest (Is 11.2; 42.1). Finally, the spirit of God was the organ that, through the Prophets as intermediaries, constantly delivered Yahweh's orders to His people (Zec 7.12; Neh 9.30), and for the same purpose it was also imparted to the sages (Wis 7.7). It is noteworthy that the psychic rather than the moral activity of God's spirit was emphasized. However, there are moral overtones, for by these transitory or permanent gifts God made fit His chosen instruments to establish and preserve His covenant. There is a similar substratum in Acts ch. 1-2.

*A Life-giving and Creative Power.* The concept that the breath of life comes from God is very old (Gn 2.7; 6.3). However, it is only in relatively late texts that one finds God's spirit as the cause of man's normal life and activity (Ez 37.1-14; Jb 27.3; 33.4; 35.14-15). God's spirit as a creative force is more commonly found in poetic passages where it is synonymous with "wind" (Ex 15.8, 10; Jdt 16.17).

*A Morally Effective Force.* According to the Old Testament, the chief characteristic of the future new covenant would be a religious and moral transformation of all mankind. So the Prophets, particularly Isaiah (61.1-4; 32.15-20), frequently spoke of God's spirit accomplishing this work in the coming new age. Not only the community, but every individual would be morally re-created by the spirit of God (Is 59.21; Ez 36.25-27). The Psalmist [Ps 50(51). 12] prayed that this inner re-creation should be accomplished in his own time; however, as in Wis 1.4-5, this renewal was asked for only the just man. In Ezechiel and in the New Testament a change from a sinner to a just man was envisaged. In other Old Testament passages, God's spirit is conceived more as a teacher or guide—the source of all intellectual and spiritual gifts—than as an efficacious force [Ps 142(143). 10; Neh 9.20; Dn 5.15].

**God's Spirit Not Presented as a Person.** **The Old Testament clearly does not envisage God's spirit as a person, neither in the strictly philosophical sense, nor in the Semitic sense. God's spirit is simply God's power. If it is sometimes represented as being distinct from God, it is because the breath of Yahweh acts exteriorly (Is 48.16; 63.11; 32.15).** Very rarely do the Old Testament writers attribute to God's spirit emotions or intellectual activity

(Is 63.10; Wis 1.3-7). When such expressions are used, they are mere figures of speech that are explained by the fact that the *rûah* was regarded also as the seat of intellectual acts and feelings (Gn 41.8). Neither is there found in the Old Testament or in rabbinical literature the notion that God's spirit is an intermediary being between God and the world. This activity is proper to the angels, although to them is ascribed some of the activity that elsewhere is ascribed to the spirit of God.

**Spirit of God in Judaism.** In Judaism God's spirit was generally called "the holy spirit" (without capital letters because no personification is indicated). It was regarded primarily as the divine power that gave the Prophets insight into the future and knowledge of hidden things (Sir 48.24-25) and inspired the writers of sacred books (4 Esdras 14.22-48). To it also were ascribed extraordinary psychic phenomena, such as ecstasy and prophetic vision (Enoch 71.11; 4 Esdras 5.22). God's spirit was frequently the divine power that was granted to the pious Patriarchs to strengthen them in the exercise of virtue (Testament of Simeon 4.4); it will be poured out on all Israelites at the messianic renewal (Testament of Juda 24.2; Testament of Levi 18.11). It was generally thought that the holy spirit belonged to the past, having been withdrawn from Israel at the close of the ministry of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi (1 Me 9.27). The sins of Israel were assigned as the cause of this disappearance of the spirit. It was hoped that the messianic age would bring with it prophecy and the renewal of heart.

### Spirit of God in the New Testament

As in the Old Testament, so also in the New Testament, the spirit of God comes down from on high (Mk 1.10). He "falls" or is "poured out" upon those who believe in Christ (Acts 10.44-45; 11.15), for He is "sent" or "given" by the Father (1 Jn 3.24; Gal 4.6). He "fills" a man (Lk 1.15) and He "dwells" in him (Rom 8.9).

**God's Spirit as a Power.** As a result of the teaching of Christ, the definite personality of the Third Person of the Trinity is clear. However, in most cases, the phrase 'spirit of God' reflects the Old Testament notion of 'the power of God.'

*God's Spirit Acting on Man's Soul.* In the New Testament, the holy spirit effects such wonders as the expulsion of devils (Mt 12.28) and a miraculous pregnancy (Mt 1.18,20; Lk 1.35). He also effects such supernatural phenomena as the CHARISMS, and the miracle of Pentecost (1 Cor 12.4-11; Acts 2.4; 19.6; Lk 1.67). Such manifestations of the spirit, however, are usually transitory. The holy spirit is especially instrumental in the right exercise of certain offices, and in these cases the recipients are permanently endowed with the divine spirit. This is especial-

ly true in the case of the Apostles in fulfillment of the promise of Christ (Jn 14.16-17, 26; (see also Acts 1.8; 6.5-11; 1 Cor 12.28). Indeed, by the Apostles, the Holy Spirit governs the Church (Acts 1.8; 13.2; 15.28; 1 Tm 4.14; 2 Tm 1.6).

A focal point in Biblical history, given prominence in the summaries of Jesus' work (e.g., Acts 10.36-41), was His baptism. It was then that He was solemnly installed in His office as the "anointed" and "chosen" by the descent of the Holy Spirit (Mt 3.16; Mk 1.10; Lk 3.22; Acts 10.38). (At Christ's baptism, the Holy Spirit was symbolized by a dove.) His work began and remained under the influence of the Holy Spirit (Jn 1.33; Mt 4.1; Mk 1.12; Lk 4.1, 18). All this was in fulfillment of the words of the Prophets and the expectations of His contemporaries (Is 11.2; 42.1; 61.1).

*God's Spirit as a Sanctifying Power.* John the Baptist is presented in the New Testament as the link between the Old and New Testaments. He prepared a faithful remnant of Israel for the messianic baptism (Mt 3.11)—a baptism by the Holy Spirit and fire (baptism by fire meaning a great messianic purification). The messianic baptism brought about the moral and religious re-creation of the people of the new covenant that was promised by the Prophets (Ez 36.35-27; Jer 31.31-34). The actual outpouring of this Holy Spirit at the first Christian Pentecost was a sign for the Apostles that the final days had come (Jl 2.28; Is 44.3; Acts 2.17) and that Jesus, who had bestowed on them power from heaven, was revealing His royal power at the right hand of the Father (Acts 1.8; 2.33). It is especially in the theology of St. Paul and St. John that the possession of the spirit is a sign that the old relationship to God had been abolished and that an entirely new world had been born. The Holy Spirit had not been given previous to Pentecost, for Jesus was not yet glorified (Jn 7.39); but, from the day of Pentecost onward, the Spirit has been active (1 Cor 2.12-16), primarily as the one who brings eternal life (1 Cor 6.11; Jn 3.5-8). The Spirit is said to be the *ἄρραβών*, the "pledge," that guarantees our full inheritance, eternal glory (Eph 1.13; 2 Cor 1.21-22). The new covenant is characterized by this Spirit, not by the letter of the law (2 Cor 3.6). A Christian has the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8.9) and the love of God that is poured forth in his heart by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5.5); God dwells in him (Rom 8.9, 11), and he is led by the Spirit (Rom 8.14). There is such an intimate connection between Christ and the Holy Spirit in the act of sanctification that they can be spoken of interchangeably (cf. 1 Cor 1.2 and Rom 15.16).

There is conferred on man a new life by Baptism (Rom 6.3-11). Man, however, who is flesh and blood, cannot be elevated to this life, unless he is born again

from on high of a divine principle, namely, the Spirit (Jn 3.3, 5; Ti 3.5). The Holy Spirit also comes upon the baptized by the laying on of hands (Acts 8.17; 19.6) in order to confer special charismatic gifts (cf. 1 Tm 4.14).

**The Spirit of God as a Person.** Although the New Testament concepts of the spirit of God are largely a continuation of those of the Old Testament, in the New Testament there is a gradual revelation that the Spirit of God is a Person.

*In the Synoptic Gospels.* **The majority of New Testament texts reveal God's spirit as something, not someone; this is especially seen in the parallelism between the spirit and the power of God.** When a quasi-personal activity is ascribed to God's spirit, e.g., speaking, hindering, desiring, dwelling (Acts 8.29; 16.7; Rom 8.9), one is not justified in concluding immediately that in these passages God's spirit is regarded as a Person; the same expressions are also used in regard to rhetorically personified things or abstract ideas (see Rom 8.6; 7.17). Thus, the context of the phrase "blasphemy against the spirit" (Mt 12.31; cf. Mt 12.28; Lk 11.20), shows that reference is being made to the power of God. The only passage in the Synoptic Gospels that clearly speaks of the person of the Holy Spirit is the Trinitarian formula in Mt 28.19.

*In the Acts of the Apostles.* In Acts, the use of the words "Holy Spirit," with or without an article, is rich and abundant. However, again, it is difficult to demonstrate a personality from the texts. The Spirit continues the work of Jesus and is the link between the earthly and heavenly Jesus. The same Spirit that descended upon Jesus at His baptism is given to the Apostles "in parted tongues as of fire" (Acts 2.1-4) and is transmitted beyond these original witnesses to all members of the Church by means of chosen leaders such as Paul, Barnabas, Stephen, and Philip. Reception of this power by the faithful is the principal testimony to the truth of the apostolic preaching. The Spirit is manifested by "tongues," prophecy, and other unusual phenomena. Emphasis is placed on the role of the Spirit in the spread of the Church (Acts 1.8). The statement in Acts 15.28, "the Holy Spirit and we have decided," alone seems to imply full personality.

*In the Pauline Epistles.* St. Paul uses the word πνεύμα 146 times. Sometimes it means man's natural spirit, but more often it signifies the divine sanctifying power (2 Cor 3.17-18; Gal 4.6; Phil 1.19). However, the Trinitarian formulas employed by St. Paul (e.g., 2 Cor 13.13), indicate a real personality.

*In the Theology of St. John.* St. John's theology of the Holy Spirit is very rich in meaning. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (Jn 14.17; 15.26; 16.13; cf. 1 Jn 4.6;

5.6), and "another helper," the "Paraclete" (Jn 14.16). The Spirit is "another" helper because, after Christ's Ascension, He takes Christ's place in assisting the disciples, in teaching them all that Jesus Himself had not yet told them, in revealing the future to them, in recalling to their minds that which Jesus had taught them, in giving testimony concerning Jesus, and in glorifying Him (14.26; 16.12-16; 15.26; 1 Jn 2.27; 5.6). So clearly does St. John see in the Spirit a person who takes Christ's place in the Church, that he uses a masculine pronoun (ἐκεῖνος) in reference to the Spirit even though πνεύμα is neuter in gender (16.8, 13-16). Consequently, it is evident that St. John thought of the Holy Spirit as a Person, who is distinct from the Father and the Son, and who, with the glorified Son and the Father, is present and active in the faithful (14.16; 15.26; 16.7).

*See Also:* TRINITY, HOLY (IN THE BIBLE).

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[L. A. BUSHINSKI]

## SPIRITISM

Belief in the possibility of communication with the spirits of the departed, and the practice of attempting such communication, usually with the help of some person (a medium) regarded as gifted to act as an intermediary with the spirit world. In popular speech the word "spiritualism" is more commonly employed to express this meaning, but its use is here avoided to prevent confusion with SPIRITUALISM in its philosophical sense.

**Moral Evaluation.** Catholic theologians reject the idea that disincarnate spirits can be evoked at will, but