

CHRISTIAN STUDIES

A Publication of the Institute for Christian Studies

Volume 16 / 1996-97

CHRISTIAN STUDIES

Volume 16

FOREWORD 4

ARTICLES

THE SPIRIT OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT
R. Mark Shipp 5

SPIRIT OF HOLINESS OR SPIRIT OF THE AGE?
THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE TEACHING OF PAUL
Jeffrey Peterson 17

HOW DOES GOD GIVE GUIDANCE BEYOND
THE ILLUMINATION OF SCRIPTURE?
Allan J. McNicol 33

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY:
BIBLICAL AND POST-MODERN
Michael R. Weed 55

BOOK REVIEWS

ONCE AGAIN: THE BOUNDARIES OF FELLOWSHIP
A Review Essay of F. Lagard Smith's *Who Is My Brother?*
by Allan J. McNicol 69

The Moral Vision of the New Testament by Richard B. Hays
Reviewed by Jeffrey Peterson 79

OBITER DICTA 83

CONTRIBUTORS 87

Foreword

After over 200 years of rationalism and the dominance of technology and bureaucracy, many are finding modern life shallow and meaningless. We are living in a time of widespread curiosity about religion and the supernatural. Unfortunately, modern interests cover everything from witchcraft and astrology to Eastern mysticism.

Nonetheless, this climate provides Christians with opportunities perhaps unmatched since the first centuries of the church. Many who were formerly hostile to religion are now willing to listen. These conversations are leading many Christians back to the Bible and the historic faith of the church for wisdom and insight; especially needed in the current American climate is a recovery of the biblical witness to the work of God's Spirit and its implications for a genuinely Christian understanding of religious experience.

These essays are presented to encourage Christian reflection on God's presence in the world and in the church, and to enable responsible Christian voices in the broader society.

Michael R. Weed, Editor

The Spirit of God in the Old Testament

R. Mark Shipp

Few concepts in the Bible are as fraught with difficulties and misunderstandings as that of the Spirit of God. Just to mention the words "Spirit of God" conjures up mental images of the unusual, the numinous, or the paranormal. Over the past several generations the term "Spirit of God" has almost become equivalent to emotional experience in some church circles or to some form of paranormal religious experience in others. Some deny the present, active role of the Spirit in the world, as if the Spirit of God did His work in the past and then went on a long vacation. Generally lacking in these debates over the presence and function of the Spirit of God in the life of the Church is much discussion about what the presence of the Spirit is intended to produce in the life of the believer and the church.

While not as immediately relevant or obvious to this discussion as the New Testament texts, the Old Testament mentions the spirit, a spirit, or God's Spirit some 394 times. The irony is that there are few books and articles which treat this subject written in the latter half of this century in the English language. It is my conviction that a study of the Old Testament's view of the Spirit can help us clarify our understanding

of his function and role in the New Testament, for it is on these Old Testament concepts that it builds.

“Spirit” in the Old Testament

We normally think of the word “spirit” as referring to a disembodied being, whether of the dead or divine beings such as angels. The word has as wide a range of meaning in Hebrew as it does in English. It can refer to the mode of existence after death, an attitude or character trait, a divine or supernatural being, or animated behavior, whether in English or Hebrew. In addition, in Latin (*spiritus*), Greek (*pneuma*), and Hebrew (*rûach*), spirit can also refer to the wind, movement of air, or the breath an animal or human takes.¹ It is important, therefore, to define what one means by spirit. It is perhaps not too misleading to suggest that all of these meanings relate to dynamic, animating, or creative power or the manifestation of such power in living beings or natural processes. We are going to survey now, however, not the general usage of the term spirit, but the meaning and function of the term “Spirit of God.” There are at least three significant ways that the term “Spirit of God” is used in the Old Testament: Spirit as the wind or breath characteristic of life and its maintenance, Spirit as influence on character, and Spirit as the empowering presence of God.

The Spirit of God as Breath or Wind

The first significant category relates to spirit as a natural force, “breath,” or “wind.” The breath that we take into our lungs is the *rûach*

¹Lloyd Neve, *The Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Tokyo: Seibunsha, 1972) 3–4 suggests that there are three main definitions of the term “spirit” in the Old Testament: wind, the spirit in man whether breath or spirit, and the spirit of God.

as is the unseen movement of air we know of as wind. It is an unseen force which is nevertheless evident by the affect it has on its surroundings. This is probably the reason why the same term is used of the Spirit of God. It is unseen and yet its affects are manifest. At stake in these occurrences is whether just a natural force is involved or God's active presence. In Gen 1:1-2, perhaps the "wind of God" and the "Spirit of God" are the same:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and the spirit/wind of God was hovering over the surface of the abyss.

To distinguish between the effect of God's presence and the means he uses to manifest that presence may not be the best approach in Genesis one. Notice the ambiguity even in John 3:8 in the New Testament, where wind and spirit are compared much as in the Old Testament:

The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, and you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

The unseen wind or Spirit also dwells in living and breathing beings. The breath they draw is the "wind" or spirit which comes from God and returns to God. It is the life force which proceeds from God and as such belongs to Him.

The Spirit as Influence on Character

One of the most striking ways in which God works His will in the Old Testament is through the sending of "a" spirit, but not always represented as "the" Spirit of God. It would be better to characterize these instances as "influences on character." For example, God sends a lying spirit to the false prophets so that Ahab might believe their prophecy in 1 Kings 22. God sends a spirit of confusion on the Egyptians in Isaiah 19 so they might be destroyed by the Assyrians. Joshua

(Deuteronomy 34) and the coming Messianic king (Isaiah 11) possessed spirits of wisdom, in the first instance imparted by Moses and in the second coming directly from God. We might interpret these manifestations of spirit in the Old Testament in our day as personality or character traits or bad or good influence.² They may refer to innate human character or be bestowed or sent by God to effect His will.

The Spirit as God's Empowering Presence

In several cases in the Old Testament, the Spirit of God is the special visitation of his presence which empowers an individual to carry out a particular task or do extraordinary things.³ I think especially of the Spirit of God which comes upon Samson in the book of Judges. Samson is empowered by the presence of God's Spirit to be a war leader and hero. When the Spirit of God came upon him, he became extraordinarily strong and was able to defeat the Philistines. This was not contingent upon his moral uprightness or his faithfulness to Israel's laws or traditions, but seems to be related strictly to the fact that he was set aside for God's service as a Nazirite and was used as a deliverer in spite of his unsuitability in other aspects of life.

Other examples of this kind of empowering include Gideon and Othniel. It is said of Othniel that the Spirit of God "came upon him" and in the case of Gideon, "clothed" him. In these instances, the Spirit of God was external to the judges' own spirit and enabled them to do

²Neve points out that these occurrences of spirit are generally modified, such as a "lying spirit," "angry spirit," "spirit of power," etc. (3).

³Leon Wood suggests that empowering for a particular task is the fundamental reason for the bestowing of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament. See Leon Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 63.

extraordinary deeds. Such special empowering ought not to be thought of as ordinary or common. Gideon, as is the case with most heroes of the faith in the Old Testament, is skeptical and reluctant to take on this role, indicative of the extraordinary nature of the commissioning.

More important to biblical history is the way in which God empowered His servants the prophets through the spirit of inspiration. At times the Spirit so overpowers the prophet that he is overcome and his personality is subsumed under or taken over by the Spirit of God, as is the case with the ecstatic prophesying of the sons of the prophets and Saul (1 Samuel 9). This, however, is not the norm, even for prophets.

The typical way in which the prophets manifest God's Spirit is by empowerment through the presence of the Spirit to speak boldly, to give surprising words of judgment in periods of prosperity and apathy, to give comfort in times of despair, and to suffer on behalf of the people of God. The Spirit descends on Micah, a spirit of power and bold speech in a time of corrupt speech and scoffing rulers. Jeremiah is chosen before he is born to faithfully speak God's word in a time of crisis and disbelief. Isa 61:1-2 says, relative to the prophet's endowment with the Spirit and commission, that

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn...

The Spirit of God as his empowering presence is never intended primarily to benefit the prophet or as a proof to the prophet that God will follow through with his promises to him. Rather, it is to empower the prophet

to speak judgment to sin, comfort to the afflicted, and to do acts of kindness and faithfulness.

The thing which ties all of these various manifestations of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament together is that all are ways in which God extends his active presence. The wind or Spirit of God hovering over the waters in creation was the extension of God himself, active and present even in creation. The spirit which God sends of confusion or wisdom or delusion is the active extension of his presence to affect his will. The Spirit which called and empowered the prophets was the extension of his presence to call his people through the mediation of the prophets to repentance and faithfulness.

Though the Spirit is depicted at times as a force, or a character trait, or an influence, the Spirit of God in the Old Testament is on the whole not limited to these activities, nor is he somehow separate from God himself. God invariably sends the Spirit, bestows the Spirit, influences behavior or creates by means of the Spirit. One could say that the Spirit of God in the Old Testament is not dissimilar from the hand of God (the demonstration and extension of his power) nor from the glory of God (the visible manifestation of the presence of God in theophany). Yet the extension of the presence of God is at the same time distinct from God himself. This is why I say that the Spirit of God is the active extension of the presence of God in sinful human history to fulfill his will and carry out his purposes to save his people and judge human sin.

A Test Case: 1 Samuel 16

I can think of no single passage in the Old Testament which lays out more clearly the meaning and function of the Spirit than 1 Samuel 16. Note the words of David's investiture with the Spirit of God:

Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.

Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him.

First, we can see two ways in which the term “spirit” is used in this passage: first, the Spirit of God comes upon David, much as we saw above with the prophets, empowering him and setting him aside as the true king over Israel; and second, the spirit is an influence on character in the case of the evil spirit tormenting Saul.

From the moment of David’s anointing, it is clear in the history who is truly king, as 2 Sam 5:2 makes plain: “For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel.” For all intents and purposes, David was the Anointed and Saul was king in name only. The use of the term “Spirit of God” here relative to David is to designate clearly who had been chosen and set aside as king.

More than this is in view, however. Notice what the servants of Saul tell him about David and his skill:

And Saul’s servants said to him, “Behold now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you.

Let our lord now command your servants, who are before you, to seek out a man who is skillful in playing the lyre; and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will be well.”

So Saul said to his servants, “Provide for me a man who can play well, and bring him to me.”

One of the young men answered, “Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the LORD is with him.”

Not only is David designated king, he is also endowed with God's presence and empowered with the capability of fulfilling the role of king in warfare, diplomacy, and even aesthetics. The Spirit of God coming mightily upon David, therefore, established him as the legitimate king and furnished him with the capability of fulfilling that role.⁴

Later on, David attributes his kingship and right character to the Spirit of God. In David's last words in 2 Sam 23:1-7, he said:

The Spirit of the LORD speaks by me, his word is upon my tongue.
 The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me:
 When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God,
 He dawns on them like the morning light,
 Like the sun shining forth upon a cloudless morning,
 Like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.

Righteous kingship was intended to provide blessing to God's people. In a powerful metaphor, righteous kingship was like rain on the grass, providing blessing and sustenance. The presence of the Spirit of God sanctified and empowered the king to bring such blessing. Jesus, the latter-day son of David, could think of no better analogy to use of his own commissioning than that of Isaiah 61 (quoted in Luke 4:18): "The Spirit

⁴There is no indication here that the endowment with the Spirit of God is temporary or situational, as was apparently the case with Samson, Othniel, etc. The endowment with the Spirit in David's case appears to be a permanent endowment, as the tradition reflects in 2 Sam. 23:1-7, where in "David's last words" he says, "The Spirit of God speaks through me..." Furthermore, the endowment with the Spirit occurs in the case of David at the time of the anointing. It is not separate in time or space from that event and apparently continues throughout David's life. The closest analogy to this permanent endowment would be the practice of baptism in the New Testament, at which time the believer is given the "gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). As is the case with Saul, and potentially David, the Holy Spirit can be "quenched," but the intent is to permanently endow the prospective king with the Spirit of God at the time of the anointing. The point is to enable him to carry on the task of righteous kingship.

of the Lord is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives.” This king came not to be served but to serve, and the Spirit of God sanctified and empowered him to fulfill his role as Messiah to Israel.

Saul is depicted in altogether different terms. He also receives a spirit, but this spirit is one of torment, an “evil spirit from the Lord.” The first thing to notice is that this spirit is not the empowering presence of God, as David receives, but serves to underscore the point made above. This spirit — whether a force to influence character or a spiritual tormentor is immaterial — is not God's empowering presence but still attributable to God's agency. The Spirit had come upon Saul in 1 Samuel 9, as it would come upon David. Saul rallied all Israel and won battles against his enemies, as David was to do. The impossible possibility, however, is that once sanctified and equipped to do God's will on behalf of Israel, Saul could still reject his role and seek his own convenience, glory, and honor.

The second thing to notice is that nature hates a vacuum. When the Spirit of God left Saul and came upon David, it is not only that Saul was left like someone who still has to clean out his office after he has been fired. The loss of the Spirit of God not only deprives him of the qualification for kingship, but also in significant ways deprives him of aspects of his humanity and leads to his rejection by his own people and eventual death on the field of battle.

Conclusion

To summarize, the Spirit of God creates and sustains life, influences character, sanctifies for service and empowers the fulfilling of that service. The Spirit is never endowed for the personal benefit or experience of the individual, but rather for the blessing and the service of the people of God. It demarcates those who are anointed by it and equips them for ministry.

The implications of these functions of the Spirit of God are many. First, the Spirit still creates and sustains life. In fact, the Spirit of God is called the Spirit of life. Note the words of Rom 6:8 and 11:

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you.

Jesus mentions in John 6:63 that "It is the Spirit that gives life." The Spirit that hovered over the waters and was active in creation in Gen 1:2 is the same Spirit which re-creates us (see Rom 7:6).

Second, the Spirit influences character. This is especially evident in 1 Sam 16:18, where one of Saul's men says "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the LORD is with him." In New Testament parlance, we might refer to this aspect of the Spirit's work as the "fruits of the Spirit."

A final implication is that the Spirit empowers for ministry on behalf of the people of God. David's endowment with the Spirit was intended to enable him to rule the people of God well. The Spirit was never given for the personal benefit of the recipient, but rather for the

benefit of the community of faith. Perhaps this is why Paul says gifts were given through the spirit of Christ to equip the saints for ministry:

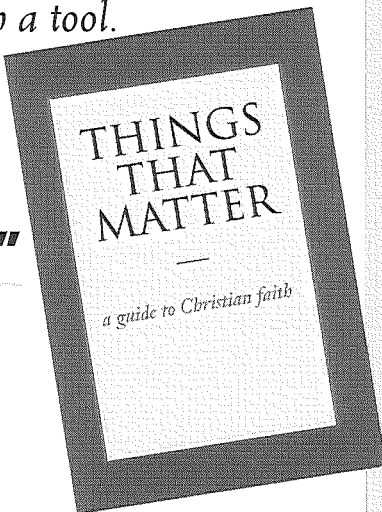
And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Eph 4:11-13).

**" Simple, yet
Substantive.**

I have often wished for an introductory guide to Christian faith to share with an earnest inquirer or a new Christian. Things That Matter is such a tool.

*It's excellent!
Simple, yet
substantive.
I heartily
recommend it!"*

Harold Hazelip
Lipscomb University



Written by the faculty
of the *Institute for Christian
Studies* for:

Small Groups
Evangelism and
Outreach
Campus and Youth
Ministry
Teen and Adult
Bible Classes
Baptismal and
Graduation Gifts
New Member's
Classes
Hospital Visitation
Prison Ministry

Order 20 booklets for
group studies for only
\$2.50 per copy.

Also available from
Christian Studies Press:

For I Am Holy
by Pat Harrell


Institute for Christian Studies

Christian Studies Press
1909 University Avenue
Austin, Texas 78705
512. 476-2772
InstChrSt@aol.com
<http://www.ics.edu>

Contributors

All contributors to this issue of *Christian Studies* are members of the faculty of the Institute for Christian Studies.

Allan J. McNicol is A. B. Cox Professor of New Testament.

Jeffrey Peterson is Assistant Professor of New Testament.

R. Mark Shipp is Pat E. Harrell Associate Professor of Old Testament.

Michael R. Weed is Billie Gunn Hocott Professor of Theology and Ethics.