

Holy Spirit P1

The Spirit of the OT vs. The Spirit of Christianity

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The Spirit of the OT vs. The Spirit of Christianity

Jon: This is Jon from The Bible Project. Today's episode is the first in our series on the Holy Spirit. We've got a new video on the Holy Spirit coming out soon, and this conversation helped us prepare for that

Tim: This is one of those things in the Christian faith where it's almost impossible for us to come to talking about the Spirit with a blank slate.

Jon: The role of the Holy Spirit in Christianity today, differs from tradition to tradition. Tim and I focus on what the ancients believed about the Spirit.

Tim: Reading the Bible is always a cross-cultural experience. We need to check our worldview categories at the door and understand what they meant.

Jon: And we discuss what our worldview might look like if we think of the Spirit the way they did.

Tim: It invites us to almost have a kind of a reenchanting view of creation.

Jon: Here we go.

Tim: So, we're getting ready to begin a Bible Project video about the Spirit of God.

Jon: The Holy Spirit.

Tim: The Holy Spirit, this is one of those things in the Christian faith where it's almost impossible for us to come to talking about the Spirit with a blank slate. Most people come with premade categories or experiences with Christians or church communities that have a lot to say about the Spirit.

And so, one of the most difficult things to do is to come back to the scriptures and expect to hear something new, because we kind of think we maybe already know. There's something about the charismatics and Pentecostals and baptism of the Spirit that's a big thing. But truly discovering what the Bible is actually saying about the Spirit, for me, personally, has been one of the most surprising, mind opening, life-transforming things in the last number of years.

Jon: Wow.

Tim: I really, really love this theme.

Jon: Cool.

Tim: It's going to be hard for me to distill it all into one video, personally.

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Jon: Should we talk about what our paradigms were growing up just to get that on the table or is that not helpful?

Tim: Oh, sure.

Jon: Should we pretend we have no paradigms?

Tim: Well, actually, I think it might be helpful because our growing up experiences, our interactions with church about the Spirit are really different, I know. And that probably represents a spectrum of most people of people who might be listening to this. So yeah, why don't you talk about it?

Jon: Well, mine's pretty straightforward. My church tradition came from Baptist roots. It's a non-denominational church, but basically, it's cessationist. Is that what it is? Cessationist?

Tim: Cessationist.

Jon: We were cessationists.

Tim: Technical term meaning?

Jon: Meaning the Holy Spirit doesn't really do anything nowadays. Right? I don't know. That's probably—

Tim: That's not technically it. That view sees the Holy Spirit as primarily working through the Scriptures and God's people speaking truth into each other's lives based on the Scriptures, and the experiential presence of Jesus, and worship and so on.

Jon: Sure. But the miraculous stuff that happens.

Tim: Sure. Miraculous powers and even just something, experiences that might seem a little more on the mystical...

[crosstalk 00:04:01]

Jon: The prophecy and those kinds of thing. They are not needed anymore so those won't happen. There's a belief the Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity, and super important. I think there was always confusing for me what the difference between Jesus living in you and the Spirit living in you was, but we would talk about both of those things.

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The Holy Spirit helps you, but the Holy Spirit was always very clear. The Holy Spirit will never tell you something that's not in the Bible already.

Tim: Yeah, sure.

Jon: I think there was a bit of a fear that you could use the Holy Spirit to do things that were unorthodox, so you have to have the seat belt up there.

Tim: Yeah, you confuse your own imagination for the Holy Spirit.

Jon: So, very downplayed. Didn't talk about the Holy Spirit a lot. That was my experience.

Tim: That was your experience. My experience growing up, our family attended church and it was mostly in the charismatic or Pentecostal tradition. Foursquare was the kind of church our family attended for most of my growing up.

So from a young age, my memories about what Sunday gatherings are were very energetic and action-packed with people yelling out in the worship gatherings in unknown languages. And sometimes then somebody would yell out what they thought that that person said. I'm just a little kid taking all this in.

People coming up to the front for prayer and then falling over. There was a whole crew of people who would come for women who fell over while they were praying if they were wearing dresses.

Jon: If they jump?

Tim: Yeah, there'd always be someone to catch them, but if they're wearing dresses, there was a whole crew of people who would come with these clothes and lay these clothes over their legs in case their dress had fallen off. Anyway. I don't know.

Jon: And that was normal?

Tim: As a little kid, that was like, "Hey, this is what Christianity is."

Jon: We had a church like that down the street. I knew the kids in their youth group, and they were a little bit more punk rock than us. That youth group was. Some cool kids.

I remember, we started this Bible study in high school like in the cafeteria. I don't remember. It's like, we all got excuse from class at some point to do this Bible Study. I don't remember how this even worked. But one time they lead it and did like a slain in the spirit. And it was the first time I had experienced that firsthand. And I was really uncomfortable. I just remember it being weird.

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Tim: That's what's interesting for me too. Even though my earliest memories of church were that kind of thing. When I got older, like junior high, I didn't like it. I thought it was very weird. I remember I didn't like the youth group. I thought it was stupid. I never went.

But one event I went to, and there was like a Holy Spirit time where they were inviting people who hadn't been, quote, baptized in the spirit. And so, they just started praying, and then somebody came up and asked me if I'd received the Spirit.

Jon: What did that mean to you at that point?

Tim: Had I had one of those experiences that the people did up front on Sundays? And I was like, "No." Then they asked if they could pray for me, and I was kind of standoffish and then they started to do it anyway. Put their hands on my head, applying pressure. They were trying to push me over and I was having none of it.

Jon: You're like, "I'm a skateboarder. I have really good balance. Good luck pushing me"

Tim: Yeah. All that to say, and then after that, I just hate to go into church. I started sneaking out of my room. I'd mysteriously disappear to my friend's house on Saturday night so that I wouldn't have to go to church on Sundays. My parents finally picked their battles and quit forcing me to go.

When I became a Christian through the Ministry of Skatechurch, later the church community I became a part of was more like what you grew up in, Jon. I've had to sort through my baggage because I realized I've had a chip on my shoulder against that upbringing. And some of it is just prideful. So I've had to, like, "What part of, you know, is my suspicion of that? Is there anything that's legitimate, and how much is it I'm just reacting against my childhood? And I need to get over it."

That's why, for me, this rediscovery of the Spirit over the last maybe six years or so, just started with a sermon series that I put together on the Spirit because I was like, "Well, I'm just going to go at this as an adult with new learning and categories."

Jon: We kind of come from different places. Your suspicions arise from the slain in the Spirit kind of stuff, and my suspicions arise from this almost ignoring the Spirit. And so, my rebellion would be like, "Come on, let's get mystical." The Spirit's got to be doing something way more interesting than I can imagine.

Tim: Interesting.

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Jon: But I think the problem is, is, however, I've learned this, I live in my head. Like I live life thinking, not feeling, not experiencing what's happening the moment.

Tim: It's your temperament, you are saying.

Jon: It's my temperament. And I've been trying to fix this over the last couple years. It's just what I've learned. And so, it's really hard when I'm worshipping, singing songs or anything to have something that feels like mystical or feels like the Spirit. I'm always just, everything's just rational thought.

Tim: Well, sure. I hope maybe by the time we finish this conversation you could have some different categories for that because that's been one of the areas where the use of the word and the concept of God's Spirit in the Bible, I think, has some surprising things to say about those categories.

So you know me, a good Bible trivia. I used it at a party this Friday night. Where in the story of the Bible does this Spirit appear for the very first time? It staged already because I just saw you look at the notes.

Jon: I did. I would have known this one.

Tim: You would have known this already?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Probably most people did.

Jon: The Spirit of God hovered over the waters.

Tim: Yeah. Not only page 1 but the second sentence of the Bible. The Spirit appears front and center.

Jon: Hovering over the water.

Tim: This is such a great example. We'll camp out on this for a little bit because right here, there's so much unlearning you have to do, I think to then relearn what's happening here in the opening verses in the Bible.

Here are the first three verses of the Bible. "In the beginning, God created the skies and the land. Now, the land was wild and waste — tohu wa-bohu."

Jon: Tohu wa-bohu. I remember that from Lay [S].

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Tim: "Darkness was over the surface of the deep abyss, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light, and there was light.'" An ongoing sequence of God speaking and so on.

So whatever your view of Genesis 1 is, it begins with the summary statement, God creates all that is - what's up there and what's down here.

Then the focus of the story is that things began with what's down here being wild and waste, darkness. Then in the middle of that darkness, and wild waste is God's Spirit hovering there. You were going to say something?

Jon: Yeah, it might be a tangent. But the earth's there, so land is there. It's waste in some way, formless and void. What's the Hebrew word?

Tim: Tohu wa-bohu.

Jon: Tohu wa-bohu which is cool.

Tim: Yeah, it's great. It's great little rhyme.

Jon: It's a rhyme I guess. So waste and wild is the way to capture that in English, something like that. So, something's there, it's a waste and wild and the Spirit of God is there hovering over the waters. What am I supposed to have in my mind? Am I supposed to have just like a desert landscape and some seas?

Tim: Well, there are two things, and it depends on how you interpret the first sentence of the Bible. Whether it's a summary statement, like a title almost for all that follows or if it's actually the first main action, God making everything.

I think the first view is more likely that it's a summary title. So that the story actually begins in the second sentence, "Now the land was tohu wa-bohu, which means this. That from the framework of the author of Genesis 1, creation doesn't begin with God making something out of nothing. It doesn't begin with nothing and now God's going to make something. It begins with something.

Jon: The land.

Tim: It begins with the land. Yeah. But the land is in the form of chaotic disorder. It's very difficult for us to not impose our modern view of the universe or Big Bang Theory. I mean, we don't really even have...we have a theoretical concept of nothing. Nothing.

Jon: Like space, maybe?

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Tim: Yeah.

Jon: But even space is something.

Tim: But even space is within the framework of the space-time continuum. But the concept of something and nothing, we think of existence and creation as something coming into physical existence, but before which there was nothing. And that's not the biblical author's framework at all.

Jon: They didn't have a perspective of, "Oh, at one point, there was nothing?"

Tim: Correct. That's a concept.

Jon: As far back as you could go, well, it was here, it was just waste and wild. It was tohu wa bohu.

Tim: Yeah. The author of Genesis one, and this is consistent with the view of creation in the Psalms and Proverbs and Job, is that creation begins with a state of disorder and chaotic disorder. And what creation is, is God bringing order beauty purpose, meaning - a garden out of the chaos. That's Genesis 1.

And so who is there hovering in the midst of the dark chaotic wilderness? Oh, sorry, you asked what's the picture you're supposed to have in your head

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's a paradox of images I think on purpose. Tohu wa bohu is vocabulary used to described empty desert - Wasteland.

Jon: Tohu wa-vohu?

Tim: Tohu wa bohu.

Jon: Wa bohu?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: It's vocabulary used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible to describe wilderness — empty, uninhabitable wilderness. But then right and the next line its "darkness was over the surface of the deep abyss of the waters."

Jon: So it's a desert water?

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Tim: Right. It's a watery desert, which is a contradiction on the literal level, but on an image-driven level, it makes perfect sense. The Wilderness is uninhabitable, uncultivated, space.

Jon: Not only is it wilderness that you can't survive in because it's barren land, it's also the chaotic seas where you will get destroyed by sea monsters and things.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. There are two kinds of spaces in the imagination of the Hebrew Bible that are dangerous, chaotic, untamable. One's the wilderness, and for Israelites were talking about the huge stretch of desert between Israel and the Persian Gulf. Just by the compass, as the crow flies between Jerusalem and the Persian Gulf, is a gigantic desert. It's in the northern edge of the Saudi Arabian, Peninsula. It's just sandy desert.

Jon: And you're not going to survive out there?

Tim: No. That's *tohu wa bohu*. You're not ever going to try and...I mean Las Vegas—

Jon: We can put out casinos there.

Tim: Yeah, now we can put casinos in the middle of *tohu wa bohu* but back then that was unimaginable. So there's that. Then the other most untamable space is, of course, the ocean, which we still don't really have a handle on. Yes, we can build oil rigs out there but...

Jon: But for them, you go out in the ocean and it's dangerous. You get killed by the waters the storms. Then, let's not get into this because it's not really part of the Spirit but in the other creation - is that Psalms that we're talking about?

Tim: Psalm 74 depicts that...

Jon: Yeah, the sea dragon.

Tim: ...as the seven-headed sea dragon.

Jon: That God has to tame.

Tim: That God has to slay.

Jon: To slay while He creates.

Tim: He crush the head of the sea dragon.

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Jon: The seven heads.

Tim: Yeah. And that's tapping into ancient Near Eastern mythological imagery.

Jon: So not only can you get hit up by the waves and the wind, but there are sea dragons out there too.

Tim: Totally. Genesis 1 within that worldview, that cultural worldview, depicts the story of creation beginning in empty, untamable disorder.

Jon: I love that there's a paradox there. There's this like conflict in the story.

Tim: Oh, of the water and the desert.

Jon: Yeah. There's this desert, waste the wild, *tohu wa bohu*, but its water. Watery desert.

Tim: Yes. So it raises the question, okay, so God's going to create sky and land and order out of this desert wasteland ocean depth. How?

And the first positive sign, it's kind of like a little bit like in a mountain top, and then just ski jump. "In the beginning, God created sky and the land. "Yay, we love it." "But it's *tohu wa bohu*, when darkness over the surface." And you're like, "Oh, no. What's going to happen?"

And then, who's there to bring the created order out of the chaos? The Spirit of God hovering in the midst of the dark, untamable chaos. What's that about?

Two things. One is the Greek and Hebrew vocabulary here; Genesis 1 is in Hebrew. It's a word, you have to kind of clear your throat, almost spit a little bit when you say at *ruakh*.

Jon: *Ruakh*.

Tim: We have these little covers in front of the microphone so we don't spit on them. But it's kind of like those covers spit out a little bit.

Jon: Nice and moist.

Tim: Then in Greek, the first Jewish translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek called the Septuagint, they translated "*ruakh*" with the Greek word "*pneuma*," which is the same root word from what should we get like pneumatic drills. That kind of thing. So, *ruakh* and *pneuma*. And they overlap in meaning.

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Jon: Pneumothorax is when your lungs collapse.

Tim: Whoa.

Jon: I know that because it's happened to me.

Tim: It's happened to you. That's right. You told me that story once.

Jon: Pneuma.

Tim: Pneuma. Also, if you misspell it, it turns into a collection of videos by Rob, bell Nooma.

Tim: That's right. An exercise I do when I'm teaching to help get our minds around what ruakh means in Greek and Hebrew is to have people put their hand in front of their mouth. Have you ever been around when I've done this before? I don't know. People put their hand over their mouth and just say something like hello.

Jon: Hello.

Tim: Hello. Hello. If you're listening the podcast, put your hand in front of him and say, "hello." You feel something on your fingers, of course. In English, the word we have for that is breath. Breath. In Hebrew, the word for that is ruakh. Ruakh. Ruakh, its first and most basic meaning throughout the Hebrew Bible is breath. There are loads of uses. I've just kind of picked out a handful in the notes here.

So, in Genesis 2, this is significant, but God breathes the ruakh into the humans.

Jon: Does He ruakh the ruakh into the humans?

Tim: No, it's a different...I forget what was that verb in Genesis. Actually, it's a cool verb in Genesis 2. I guess naphach. It just sounds like a breathing word.

Jon: Like if you have a snoring problem.

Tim: That's right. Or Job in chapter 27, he talks about the ruakh of God in my nostrils. Now, we'll talk about why he calls it God's ruakh. In his nostrils, he breathes in and out. But it's ruakh. What he breathes in and out is ruakh.

Jon: What is the other one? naphach or whatever. The snoring one.

Tim: Oh, that's a verb to breathe out.

Jon: But it's a different word completely?

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Tim: Yeah.

Jon: What's the difference between those two words?

Tim: Naphach is the act of breathing in and out. Ruakh is what it is you're breathing in and out.

Jon: Okay. So we don't have two different words for that but in Hebrew there are different words.

Tim: Oh, we have. You're right. We have breathe and breath. Those are related in English, not in Hebrew.

Jon: Breathe, and breath. But it is two different words technically.

Tim: Technically. But they're from the same root. Not in Hebrew. In Hebrew, you naphach as a verb.

Jon: You naphach and you have ruakh.

Tim: And the thing that you naphach is your ruakh. There's no verb.

Jon: You naphach ruakh. You breathe breath.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Actually, you breathe air.

Tim: Well, in English that's how we say it. Yeah.

Jon: And you breath.

Tim: We say, "You have breath."

Jon: "Your breath smells bad" is something I hear a lot from my wife.

Tim: It's a noun. It's the thing.

Jon: The air coming out of your mouth is breath.

Tim: The air coming out of you, we call it breath.

Jon: But coming in, we call it air.

Tim: Yes. I haven't quite thought about that.

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Jon: In Hebrews, is it both ways?

Tim: Ruakh.

Jon: Ruakh in, ruakh out.

Tim: Ruakh in, ruakh out. I've never thought about that distinction in English. But that's it. Yeah, that's exactly right. Okay, so breath. Here's something else interesting about ruakh. That's this first and most basic meaning.

Another interesting thing, we don't have windows in our recording room, but if you were to look out the window, and you were to see trees out in your front yard, or something, and they were moving but you can't see anything moving them, like they're dancing, our English word to describe what it is that's moving the trees is wind. In Hebrew, you would call that the ruakh. ruakh. It's the ruakh moving the trees.

So the common denominator between the ruakh coming in and out of you and the ruakh moving the trees...

Jon: Is it animates things.

Tim: Yes. It animates things and it's invisible. You cannot see what it is. You can't see your breath.

Jon: But it's really cold.

Tim: This is really cold. And you can't see the wind. And it's connected with energy and power and animation. So we're talking about an invisible energy that animates things that makes them move.

And so, think about in English, we have totally disassociated the thing that animates the trees with the thing that animates me. But in Hebrew, it's the same thing. That then is grounded in a deeper level, a deeper idea that's underneath both of those.

Namely, where did I get my ruakh? What moves the trees, what also makes the rabbits and the birds, what animates them because they are around the trees too? And then what is it the animates me because sometimes I go around the trees? So there's something invisible that animates the trees and the birds and me. In the Old Testament worldview, the thing that is doing all of that is also ruakh but it's God's ruakh.

Jon: God's ruakh is doing all that.

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Tim: God's ruakh is animating everything. This is interesting. There are many, many places in the Old Testament—

Jon: And they don't mean, sorry. By that they don't mean God's breath? They just mean this energy?

Tim: Invisible presence and power that is divine. God.

Jon: If I'm an ancient thinker and you're talking about that, am I picturing some being like blowing and then that breath coming into me and the rabbit and wrestling the wind? Or am I just thinking more abstractly and thinking, "There must be this kind of power?"

Tim: Again, try and, 3000 years ago, put yourself what in your imagination could wind be? So from the Exodus story chapter 14, the main actor, how does God act to part the great Red Seas? He sends a strong east wind and turns the sea into dry land.

Jon: Is that ruakh there?

Tim: He sends a strong eastern ruakh. There are many, many Psalms and proverbs that talk about God bringing out the ruakh to send the rain and to water the farm fields, and so on. So God's connected to what we call wind, but in Hebrew thought, it's God's ruakh that orchestrates the ruakh that commands the weather, essentially. It's a way of them seeing that God providentially sustains and is involved in all of animated life, including the invisible wind.

Jon: This is so difficult, because I don't think that way. I know what wind is. It's like pressure changes in the air. I know what breath is. I know that I'm breathing in oxygen, and all sorts of other things, but then I'm using the oxygen and breathing out - what is it?

Tim: Carbon dioxide.

Jon: Carbon dioxide. I know that that's part of keeping me alive because I need the oxygen. I don't know why I need the oxygen actually.

Tim: Yes, blood. Yeah, it's blood. Our blood cells.

Jon: Blood cells need it. For?

Tim: For oxygenating our muscles or some something like that. Kind of embarrassed I don't understand that more.

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Jon: I bet a lot of people don't know. But we know that you hold your breath long enough and you're not—

Tim: Yeah, you're done for.

Jon: But I know that's not the only thing animating me. I know that I need calories and—

Tim: Proteins. Yeah.

Jon: I guess I'm trying to say I have a more sophisticated view of the world. When I say sophisticated, I'm more advanced, more technical.

Tim: Yeah, it's informed by a whole body of information that we have accessible to us that the biblical authors did not.

Jon: I don't even really understand it. It's accessible to me, but I don't really understand it.

Tim: Totally.

Jon: I guess here's my point. In order for us to even begin this conversation, I have to try to unlearn that and then begin to think how humans would have thought before they knew that. I have to start to imagine that the wind is ruakh and what's in and out my mouth is ruakh. It's just I have to get into a different mind space.

It takes a lot of imagination, it takes a lot of focus in clearing my brain, all for us to even be able to begin to talk about what on earth the Bible means by God's Spirit.

Tim: Correct. That is what I'm telling you.

Jon: It's a lot.

Tim: It is a lot. Two things. One is, I think to have it a sympathetic reading of what the biblical authors are trying to say when they use this word, we need to check our worldview categories at the door and understand what they meant. But what we then have to do at some point is come back and relate it to our view of the universe. I mean, we could do it later or we could do it now; I would argue that ultimately, we end up in the same place.

Jon: Sure.

Tim: You have a different understanding of the physical mechanisms and processes by which the universe works, but ultimately, this is a way of talking about God as the originator and author of existence. And they are all of existence in the created order

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originates and is sustained by the Creator God. Ruakh is a way of talking about how that God is personally present, sustaining and orchestrating His world.

[00:32:12]

Jon: I think the thing that I was tripping out on is that, for me to understand...this isn't some tangential - is that the right word? Tangential? This isn't some...

Tim: Secondary.

Jon: ...topic. This is the Holy Spirit. This is really, really important. This isn't like angels or something where it's like, "Well, maybe I understand and maybe I don't really care. I'd like to." This is the Holy Spirit that's supposed to be living in me and making me a new creation. Doesn't Paul talk about it like groaning on my behalf and all this stuff? I'm supposed to be intimately involved with the Holy Spirit.

And for me to begin to appreciate how the Bible views the Holy Spirit, I have to get to a different mindset, a different worldview from the one I'm accustomed to, just to get on a level playing field with the metaphors that it's using.

It's important for me to understand the metaphors that it's using, not because those are the exact...That's not exactly how it works. That's the metaphors they were using to describe something much bigger and much more interesting. But if I want to understand the way they're describing it, I have to think within their metaphors. And those are the metaphors they think in.

Tim: Yeah, they're not natural to you.

Jon: They're not natural. So, for me to get to that with this topic, I have to like—

Tim: It's interesting the way you're putting it. That's right.

Jon: It's a massive imaginative effort.

Tim: We've been here before, where it's the fact that what the Scriptures are is God revealing Himself in and through people. Actually, the Spirit's role in that is really important. We'll talk about that. And so, that happens through language that from a particular people in time. And for them to even talk about God, they are going to do it in their language and their frame of reference.

That's why Genesis 1 talks about a chaotic desert ocean and not quarks and dark matter. So yeah, you're right, reading the Bible is always a cross-cultural experience. For the Spirit, I think the reason why it's difficult is because this is such a core part of

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following Jesus. The Spirit is a really big deal and it involves adopting a new and different type of worldview, at least to get my mind around what the Spirit is and what the Spirit does.

Jon: I have emphasized how difficult it is, but let me try to make sure I'm there. So, I breathe in ruakh. I breathe out ruakh. To me, that is an energy that's animating me. I know this because when I see people stop breathing, they stop animating.

Tim: That's right. It's very intuitive.

Jon: Very intuitive.

Tim: If you see somebody collapsed on the ground, the first thing you're checking for is their pulse or if there's any ruakh. It's one of the most basic signs of...

[crosstalk 00:35:27]

Jon: So I just noticed that everyone is alive is ruakh-ing.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: I've observed that. And then, I'm looking around and I see leafs wresting in—

Tim: Or clouds moving.

Jon: Clouds moving, and dandelion seeds floating around, and I don't know why, but I could feel it. I can't see it, and I go, "You know what? That's the same substance that's keeping me alive and everyone else I know - human non-human alive." That's ruakh.

Then when I want to understand God, I think, "Well, all this energy, this is coming from God. That's God's ruakh." When I say it's God's ruakh, I don't mean like He's up there breathing all this technically, but it's just that this power comes from Him.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. It's the question of where did I get my ruakh? Did I make it for myself? Like, what is this animating energy? Which is a 3,000-year-old way of asking, where did this all come from? Why are we here? What's driving all of this?

The biblical explanation for that is right there in the second sentence of the Bible, it's God's own personal life animating energy.

Jon: It was hovering over the creation before it was even ordered?

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Tim: Yeah. It raises a bit of a puzzle, because the first sentence says, "God created sky and land." But then the second sense of the Bible, who is it that is there in the midst of *tohu wa bohu*? That's the instrument through which God creates. And it's God's *ruakh*.

So right there in the first two sentences, you're like, "Wait, so who created God or God's *ruakh*?" I mean, the story, are they different? Are they the same?" It's intentionally connected. Third verse of the Bible is then, what does God and God's *ruakh* do to bring order? And verse three begins, "And God spoke."

Of course, speaking is precisely what you do to breathe out your *ruakh*. So you have Spirit of God and God speaking a word that releases the *ruakh* out to bring order in creation. So there's already this complex depiction of even the God of the Bible, of how is God present here in the world doing His work? It's God's *ruakh*. That's God. Yes, it's God's *ruakh*.

There's some complexity to God's identity that's beginning to be explored even in this vocabulary that's really interesting.

God's *ruakh* comes in the story of the Bible, then to have an independent character like *ruakh* is its own being and character out there doing stuff. We'll see this again in the New Testament where it's the spirit, but sometimes the Spirit of God, sometimes it's the Spirit of Jesus, or sometimes it's just Jesus. Sometimes there's this overlapping within God's identity.

But all that to say, the rule is, in the Old Testament a way of talking about the Creator God's, personal life, energy and presence here with me, which goes back to that question, "Where did I get my *ruakh*?" And right all across, it's a gift of God. So that's the image in Genesis 2, God breathes.

So God takes dirt forms the human, but they're still not fully human, so God breathe the breath of life and animates. So the vision of humans is that humans are creatures. They come from dirt, they also go back to it. But there is also something about humans that is heaven and earth.

Jon: That's divine.

Tim: That's divine. And it doesn't say what that is, it just uses the image of divine *ruakh* that animates and energizes humans.

Jon: So, the same energy, the same force that hovered over creation turning it from chaos to order, enters humans and so now they are combination of earthlings and—

The Spirit of the OT vs. The Spirit of Christianity

Tim: This spark of divine breath. Actually, it's not just humans.

Jon: Animals also.

Tim: All creatures have divine ruakh. Humans, for sure. Job talks about the breath of God in my nostrils. Ecclesiastes says, "When you die, the dust returns to the ground, and your ruakh returns to God who gave it." So it doesn't mean some immaterial version of you floats up to God. That's not what he's talking about.

Jon: Really?

Tim: No. He's talking about your ruakh. The animating life energy that you've been borrowing.

Jon: It wasn't you. It's not your identity?

Tim: No.

Jon: So it's not like a soul that you identify with?

Tim: No.

Jon: It's just the energy that was keeping you alive.

Tim: Is now given back to God, who gave it. Your batteries. God gave you batteries for a while, and then you died, and He took them back. Which is Job 34, he says, "If God decides to take back his ruakh and gather His ruakh back to himself, all mortal creatures would expire." So even the ruakh that I'm breathing right now isn't actually mine.

Again, this is all very intuitive. If you've ever seen a human born you watch them inhale their first ruakh. So ruakh is something from the first breath that we receive from outside ourselves, and it is the thing keeping us alive. And the last thing human does is breathe out, breathe it back out. This is all very intuitive to the human experience.

Jon: There's something essential to our life that we didn't come with. We had to receive it as a gift when we were born, and it stays with us our entire existence. And this is ruakh. Then when we die, we exhale it and it's gone out of our bodies. But it was never ours.

Tim: Never ours.

The Spirit of the OT vs. The Spirit of Christianity

Jon: It was always something we were rent.

Tim: Yeah, yeah, it was rented to us. That's the vision of human ruakh, which is actually God's ruakh. This is different than Eastern Pantheistic worldviews where "I'm God, your God, the rabbit's God." Because I'm not God, even though God's ruakh is what animates me. I'm a creature who has received ruakh as a gift.

That's why Job says, "It's God's ruakh in my nostril." He didn't have to give it to me, but He does. And then when he chooses, He will take it back.

Jon: So this isn't your soul?

Tim: It's not your soul. Yeah.

Jon: And so, animals have it, we have it. It's the wind around us.

Tim: When we come down then to our English word, Spirit, the Spirit of God, we're talking about—

Jon: Because ruakh is often translated to Spirit. Or usually.

Tim: Yeah, the ruakh of God.

Jon: Is it ever translated in our English translations as anything else, but Spirit breath?

Tim: Yeah. When Job says, "The ruakh of God is in my nostrils," is translated, "the breath of God is in my nostrils," but it's the same exact phrase as the second as in Genesis.

Jon: Genesis 1:2, this Spirit of God hovering.

Tim: The Spirit of God. The ruakh of God.

Jon: Is this weird to say, "The Spirit of God is in my nostrils."

Tim: Yeah, totally. It doesn't make any sense for us. This is why it's hard for us. There's one Hebrew word to talk about my breath, the wind in the trees, God's energy that He lends me to keep me alive, and His animating presence that sustains all of creation. Then, all of that is rooted in a concept of who God is, namely, that God is ruakh.

Jon: God is ruakh.

The Spirit of the OT vs. The Spirit of Christianity

Tim: God is ruakh. He's invisible and He is everywhere animating invisible energy and personal presence that authors all that exists. But when we use Spirit, what we're doing is we're saying it's personal. It's a person, not just simply an energy.

So, the Pantheism would be an impersonal energy which you and I all participate and exist, so we are all divine. And that's not the biblical words.

Jon: Spirit is? Where does that word come?

Tim: Do your online Oxford Dictionary search.

Jon: Anglo-French spirit, modern French, spirit. Latin spiritus. I think Latin.

Tim: Latin word?

Jon: Spiritus means breathing and wind.

Tim: Oh, spirit like expiration?

Jon: Yeah, that would all come from the same—

Tim: Yeah, Spirit.

Jon: Spirare, to breathe. And then from Proto-Indo-European European, they think it comes from peis - to blow. So, it all comes from that metaphor of wind in Latin as well.

Tim: It does. In modern English, Spirit, which comes from the same breath word, refers to a personal being that is invisible. And so, that came to be the English translation of ruakh when it was talking about not breath or wind, but about God Himself when He is invisibly personally present somewhere.

Here are a couple examples that are really interesting. Psalm 104. This is so cool. Verse 29, the poet says, If you, God, if you hide yourself face from a creature, they are dismayed. When you take away their ruakh, they die and return to the dirt. But when you send forth your ruakh, they are created and you revitalize the surface of the ground."

So when a creature breezes out it's ruakh, dies, but when you send your ruakh, creation...So it's this connection—

Jon: But their ruakh is his ruakh

The Spirit of the OT vs. The Spirit of Christianity

Tim: Right. Yeah, exactly. So it's their ruakh that you take it away their ruakh, it becomes God's again. That's what he's saying. But then when God sends forth his own ruakh, that's when creation happens. Now, this isn't talking about Genesis 1. In the context, it's talking about the life and death of animals like deer, and lions and so on.

Like, imagine a pregnant they're squatting in the field giving birth to its young. This poet would call that creation and that that is God's ruakh creating new life there as it takes its first breath. But it comes from a person. It's a way of thinking about life. Where did life come from? Which, as I understand it, modern biology is still puzzling over that one.

Jon: Sure.

Tim: And it's a way of saying, God is the ultimate originator of life, and that it's a personal being that stands behind all of this. That's the idea.

Jon: It says, "When you send your ruakh, they are created — the animals — and you revitalize the surface of the ground." Now it's talking about just like compost. Right?

Tim: Yeah, totally.

Jon: Like the biology of the earth.

Tim: We would call it like the ecological cycle or something like that.

Jon: So the ruakh is responsible, not only forgiving breath to the animals but for the harvest or the vegetation in there.

Tim: The energy that causes the plants to spring up around. Which is almost certainly what Psalm 33 means when it says, "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the ruakh of his mouth. Similar idea, except here, it's up in the heavens.

Jon: So even the stars populate out of ruakh?

Tim: Yeah. Their movements, what makes them move and what ordered them. Why aren't they always flying around like the shooting stars? What makes those certain ones stay fixed and move in these orderly patterns?

Jon: When it says, "Made here," it doesn't mean like up here or formed in the same way that like animals made?

Tim: I think made in terms of where did they come from, who is responsible for them.

The Spirit of the OT vs. The Spirit of Christianity

Jon: This is interesting, because it's like the ruakh is responsible for an animal being alive, it's responsible for vegetation coming up out of the ground, it's responsible for the stars appearing in the sky and the order they are in, and it's responsible for keeping this all going.

Tim: Yes, yeah. So it's not creation, and then the sustaining and ordering and continue the order of creation. Those aren't separate ideas in the Old Testament. That's why a deer being born in a field can be described as creation in Psalm 104. Creation is God's ongoing work in developing and sustaining the world, as opposed to when we think of it as a moment.

Jon: It wasn't there, now it's there.

Tim: Yes.

[00:50:34]

Tim: Maybe a way to tie all this together is to say, in the Old Testament, there's this, I think, beautiful. aesthetically, it's beautiful. It's much more similar to Eastern and mystical worldviews than kind of a modern Western materialist worldview of that God's personal presence is what animates and energizes all of creation from its first moments of origin right on through. And that there is a personal divine presence that animates everything that exists.

Or it's as Paul says, "In him, we live and move and have our being," He says in Acts chapter 17. That's exactly right. But statement of Paul's comes from a mind saturated in the Old Testament.

Jon: It's much more a mystical mindset to think that I'm breathing in God, I'm looking out and seeing God animating branches.

Tim: I'm breathing in the energy God is lending to me. I'm not breathing God; I'm breathing in what the energy He's let me borrow. It's similar to Eastern pantheism, but it's different in that the ruakh isn't God, or the rabbit, we all are creatures dependent on God, who's not an energy but the person.

Jon: So there's this distinction between God and His energy, and I am breathing in His energy and His energy is animating the trees, his energy has ordered the stars, it keeps them in motion, and allows stuff to grow out off the ground. All of this is it's saturating creation.

Tim: There's something that makes all this go. It's what my son Roman—

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Jon: In him, I live and move and have my being.

Tim: Yes. It's what my son Roman asked me when we are first...There were no slugs in Wisconsin when I was finishing my PhD in Wisconsin. He was born and there are no slugs there. When we moved here, when he turned three, he noticed slugs for the first time.

We were watching one go, and he asked me — I swear, this is what he meant because these are the words that he used. He said, "Dada, what makes it go?" I was stunned. I was like, "really? He's asking me this question."

Jon: How old was he?

Tim: He was three. And I was like, "Yeah, what does make it go, buddy? What makes anything go?" Then, the moment that I was like, "Is he really asking me that," the next thing he wanted to do was a spit on it. And then he moved on. Like his mind had already moved on. So I don't know what he really meant by that question. But he had never really seen it.

Jon: It has no leg, how was it moving? Maybe that's what he meant.

Tim: I'd like to think he was a philosopher too. But that's the question, what makes it go?

Jon: What makes things go? So you're saying there's a distinction between God and His energy. But when Paul says, "For in him we live and move and have our being, he says, not in His energy do we live and move and have our being.

Tim: That's true.

Jon: In God, we live and move and have our being.

Tim: In God's own self. Okay. All right. I'll maybe step back from that one a little bit. We'll talk about this when we talk about Paul and Spirit. But he believes that human life and all of life, there's just a very thin veil separating us from the life of the divine.

Jon: Because if we fast forward, we know that the Spirit of God in Christian Orthodoxy is part of the Trinity, so it is God. But this point in the narrative it's His breath.

Tim: His personal invisible presence that energizes things.

Jon: So I wouldn't say I'm breathing in God. I would say I'm breathing in God's ruakh.

The Spirit of the OT vs. The Spirit of Christianity

Tim: The ruakh of God is in my nostril" as Job would say. It invites us to almost have a kind of reenchanting view of creation.

Jon: Yeah, it is very enchanting.

Tim: I think it's exactly the view of our existence that was lost in the enlightenment because we're tempted to just view our emotions as chemicals in our brain, or view the sunset merely as the interaction of light or —

[crosstalk 00:55:23]

Jon: Our view of air as cocktail of different - is it chemicals?

Tim: Molecules and on so. What we've done is given names to the physical components and processes of the material world. But what we haven't answered by those is the metaphysical questions of where did it come from, what makes it go, and why is it here?

That's what the language of ruakh is asking us to see that there is a person behind the sunset and the air that I breathe, and watching the birth of my child and the slug. Through the story of the Bible, that is a person who wants to be extremely close to us and for us recognize that closeness and embrace it and live with it.

Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode of The Bible Project podcast. In the next episode, we're going to continue our discussion on the Holy Spirit. Really looking forward to that.

Our video on the Holy Spirit is slotted to come out in mid to late March of 2017. You can find it on our website, thebibleproject.com, and on our YouTube channel, youtube.com/thebibleproject.

Hey, it is 2017, and this year, we're going to be a lot more diligent on our release schedule for this podcast. We're hoping to start releasing a podcast episode every week. Up until now, it's been a little bit random when we drop them.

Thank you for your reviews on iTunes. Those are really helpful. Thanks for saying hi to us. We're on Facebook and Twitter and just thank you for being part of this.