



Spirit of God (Reboot) E4: The Spirit and Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible

Official Transcript

Speakers

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[Recap and the Breath and Word of God in Creation (0:00-10:33)]

[BibleProject theme]

Jon: This is BibleProject podcast, and we're talking about the Spirit of God. The biblical authors have a word that can be translated "wind," or "breath," or "mind," and "spirit." It's the Hebrew word *ruakh*. In Greek, it's *pneuma*. It's the personal, invisible, divine presence of the creator God. It sustains all of life, and it gives us wisdom so we can fulfill our callings as humans.

Tim: [Audio clips from the episode below] God's *ruakh* animates people to represent God, to rule on God's behalf. I wouldn't be surprised then that one of the ways they're going to rule would be to talk and represent God in speech.

Jon: As we talk about prophecy, we need to appreciate how the *ancients* understood and experienced prophets in Israel and around Israel's neighbors. The prophets were commonly experienced as maniacs, people out of their minds. They channeled the voice of the gods while losing their sense of self.

Tim: [Audio clips from the episode below] This conception of prophecy is like: If a god is going to speak through a human, their human agency has to be canceled or overpowered by the divine agency speaking through them.

Jon: In the Hebrew Bible, we have stories of people acting this way. But alongside this portrait is a mode of prophecy that the biblical authors want to highlight. It doesn't require you to lose yourself. It's a way to speak on behalf of God as a true human and divine partner. A key example of this is the prophet Ezekiel.

Tim: [Audio clips from the episode below] He very much had this experience of something beyond himself influencing him. But all the depictions of him speaking—sometimes of him sitting down and writing—show him in full possession of his faculties. [laughs] It's a heightening of Ezekiel's mind so that he has clarity. He can see things that no one else can see.

Jon: Today, Tim Mackie and I look at the biblical portrait of prophecy, humans in partnership with the Spirit as they speak for God. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

[Musical break (2:05-2:14)]

Jon: Hi, Tim.

Tim: Hello, Jon Collins.

Jon: Hello. It's good to be here with you.

Tim: It is. We are exhaling *ruakh* as we speak these greetings to each other.

Jon: [chuckles] This is true.

Tim: And it's what we are talking about. That's pretty meta.

Jon: [laughs] God's *ruakh* in your nostrils.

Tim: *Ruakh*. Yep. Mhm. Yeah. God in my nose [chuckles] is one—

Jon: Is an odd way to think about God.

Tim: [laughs] —crass way to think about it. But the biblical authors want to mess with our categories and word things in ways that force you to think about the nature of God and of human life, and all through this language about breath or wind or—

Jon: Yeah, you latched on to “breath” as kind of a centering aspect of it.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: That is the most intimate part of *ruakh*—

Tim: Mmm. Mhm.

Jon: —that you breathe it in.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. When I see it blowing the trees, you know, above me as I walk around my neighborhood—I mean that—yeah, it’s not intimate, but it feels like—

Jon: Very present.

Tim: “*Whoa, that’s something powerful.*”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: “*It is moving that tree. I couldn’t do that to that tree. It’s more powerful than me.*”

Jon: Yeah. [chuckles]

Tim: But then it’s also intimate, coming in and out of my body and all my neighbors, keeping us alive.

Jon: And then at some point, we begin to talk about it as “ours.” “*It’s my ruakh.*”

Tim: Mhm. Yes, but that “my” is always, like, in scare quote marks because it’s been loaned to me or it is made available to me to keep me alive, but it’s not mine. I didn’t generate it, and I have no control over how long it’s available to me. So it’s kind of mine in quote marks, you know?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: *Ruakh* provides the biblical authors with a pretty rich palette of ideas: non-visible, but more real than anything else actually because everything else is temporary and material and breaking down and—right?

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: But man, whatever energy that originated and is sustaining all of creation, that’s got to be the most real thing there is because it never changes. It’s like the constant underneath all of the flux and change.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] So it’s invisible. It’s ultimate reality. And what I wanted to do is walk us through the three most consistently connected ideas with *ruakh*

throughout the Hebrew Bible specifically. And so the first one is “life,” which is just right there on pages 1 and 2. God’s breath brings about living creatures. The second was “wisdom.” So we looked at the Joseph story, the creation of the tabernacle, Joshua, Daniel—we didn’t even look at the Spirit in the book of Proverbs, but we could have. Lady Wisdom—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —has a *ruakh* that she pours out on people—

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: —to fill them with wisdom. So it’s a very vivid image of God’s wisdom becoming like a liquid that gets poured into people, like, they drink it.

[Jon laughs]

Tim: Anyway, we didn’t even look at that.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But we could have, but there wasn’t time. So I want to take us now to the third most consistent idea that’s associated with *ruakh*. So we had “life,” and we had “wisdom,” and now we move to God’s “word.” Speech is deeply connected to God’s *ruakh* in the storyline of the Bible, both God’s own speech, but then primarily what I want to look at is God’s speech happening through human speech.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: The biblical word for that in English is “prophecy.”

Jon: Prophecy.

Tim: Prophecy. A human speaking the word of God.

Jon: Hmm. All right, let’s get into that.

Tim: And we’ll do an episode here on this for Hebrew Bible, then later in these conversations, we’ll come back to it specifically for the New Testament because there’s a few more layers to it there. So prophecy and the Spirit of God and the word of God in the Hebrew Bible. So let’s just start with the basics. As always, page 1, paragraph 1—

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: “In the beginning, God created the skies and the land. Now the land was wild and waste, and darkness was over the face of the deep abyss waters. And the *ruakh* of God was there hovering over the surface of the waters. And God said. . .” Dot dot dot. Well, what he says is, “Let there be light.”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And there was light, and that kicks off the activity of—

Jon: Day one.

Tim: —day one, when God separates light from dark. And then the next days to follow, making up the six days of creation.

Jon: Right. And God says a lot of things.

Tim: God speaks, yeah, more than seven times, you know, over the seven days.

Jon: Seven days, but more than seven times.

Tim: Ten words.

Jon: Ten words.

Tim: Ten times where the narrator says, “And God said.”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. So the word “said” here is just the Hebrew verb *vayyo’mer*, connected to the verb *’amar*, which is “to speak” or “to say.” Then there’s another Hebrew word for “word” or “speak”—

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: —*davar*.

Jon: Yeah, we talked about that in the 10 Commandments series.

Tim: Exactly, yeah. So maybe—they’re so close to—

Jon: *Davar* and *’amar*?

Tim: —*davar* and *’amar*, mhm—they’re like our English words “speak” and “say.”

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And it’s very interesting, and Jewish and Christian readers have noted this little connection for millennia right here in these opening sentences of Genesis, that right after the *ruakh* of Elohim, God, is hovering over the surface of the waters, God *spoke*.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: There’s an intimate connection between speaking and breath.

Jon: Because you could translate this, “The breath of God hovered over the surface of the waters, and God said. . .” Ooh—

Tim: That's right.

Jon: —that's interesting.

Tim: Yeah. So what's fascinating is there was an ancient Israelite poet that saw the connection. The author of what we call Psalm 33 begins with a meditation on the nature of creation. And one key line from it is verse 6: "By the word"—the *davar*— "of Yahweh, the skies were made, and by the *ruakh* of his mouth all of their inhabitants." Or: "all their host."

Jon: Is that usually translated "breath"?

Tim: Yes, I think it probably is. NIV: "breath of his mouth." ESV: "breath of his mouth." King James: "breath of his mouth." New American Standard: "breath of his mouth." NRSV: "breath of his mouth." I think because of the mouth.

Jon: Yeah, it would be very awkward to say "the spirit of his mouth" or "the wind of his mouth."

Tim: Oh. Yeah, exactly. Right.

Jon: Right?

Tim: Yep, that's right. Yeah.

Jon: But it's the *ruakh*.

Tim: But it's the *ruakh*. So this poet—

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: —saw a deep connection between the *ruakh* blowing—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —in the chaos, and then God's breath penetrating the darkness and beginning to bring order.

[Jon exhales]

Tim: That's two sides of the same coin.

Jon: Hmm. I think we can just end right here, and I can just kind of reflect on this for the rest of the day. [laughs]

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: And actually, notice this about Psalm 33, verse 6. The "word" is associated with the making of the skies. The "*ruakh*" is associated with the making of—

Jon: Oh, the host of the heavens.

Tim: —creatures, “all of their host.”

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Mhm. Creatures. Creatures are things that move. That means they have *ruakh*, energy.

Jon: Ohhh.

Tim: Whereas “word” is often about purpose or order.

Jon: Ohhh. Okay. Okay.

Tim: And so notice that “word” is associated with the making of the sky-roof, the blue roof.

Jon: Yeah. Right, the *raqia’*.

Tim: That’s day two—

[Music fades in]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —of creation, separating waters above from waters below. Waters above are called the skies.

Jon: You bring order with your word—

Tim: Yep.

Jon: —but you create life with your breath.

Tim: You energize—

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Whew.

Tim: Isn’t that cool?

Jon: That is cool.

Tim: But they’re put in parallelism.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: God's word and *ruakh* are intimately connected.

[Musical break (10:02-10:33)]

[Ancient Prophets as Madmen and Maniacs (10:33-24:47)]

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] So in the biblical imagination, humans are appointed on the land as images, representatives of the creator God, specifically to rule on God's behalf. And to represent God's purpose or will will involve them speaking words to each other, ideally words that represent what God desires. So I'm just trying to paint a category for prophecy.

Jon: Yeah. Right.

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] Because I say the word prophecy, and a whole bunch of things come to our mind that may or may not be associated with what the biblical authors care about. So I'm just trying to build from the ground up from the Genesis 1 story, which is: God's *ruakh* is behind anything that moves, and then God's *ruakh* animates these specific creatures to represent God, specifically, to rule on God's behalf. So I wouldn't be surprised then, or I would expect that one of the ways they're going to rule would be to talk and represent God in speech.

Jon: Yeah. Okay.

Tim: So real quick, kind of vocabulary intro: People who speak the word of God in the Hebrew Bible are called by a variety of titles. One is the Hebrew word *navi'*, connected to the Hebrew word *nava'*, which probably, in its Semitic root, means something like "to announce," or "proclaim."

Jon: Okay. Proclaimers?

Tim: Mhm. Proclaimers. But it specifically became a sign to people who announce a word from a deity to people.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: But then, there are all kinds of other titles given to a *navi* throughout the Hebrew Bible. One of them is “the one who sees,” or “a seer,” or “a man of Elohim.” “Ish Elohim.”

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: “Elohim’s man.” “A messenger of Yahweh.” Which can—

Jon: I thought that was for the angels.

Tim: It is. For spiritual beings.

Jon: Oh, for spiritual beings.

Tim: It can also refer to human messengers of Yahweh.

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: In fact, it often does.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: And one interesting one in Isaiah and Habakkuk is “the watchman”—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: —which is what you call somebody who stands on the city walls by the front gate—

Jon: Oh.

Tim: —scanning for who’s coming. The watchman.

Jon: Hmm. The watchman.

Tim: But these are all ways of talking about somebody who sees more than your average person. They are closely connected to the divine and then are marked out to speak or announce on behalf of God.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Because when I say the word “prophecy”—

Jon: Sure.

Tim: —I don’t know, you tell me what pings in your mind.

Jon: Uhm, yeah. I guess, growing up—I actually grew up in a tradition that didn’t think prophecy happened.

Tim: Ah, yeah.

Jon: And so it probably wasn't until—oh, it was my first year of marriage. Tristen and I were in Greece, and we were working on a sailboat, and we were having a really hard time. And one of the people on the boat came up to me, and it was the very first time someone said, "I have a word for you from God."

Tim: Ah, meaning a word of—

Jon: Prophecy.

Tim: —prophecy, that is, a word from God for you.

Jon: Yeah. Yeah.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And they came from a tradition where that was just normal. You just *did* that.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: That was my first encounter with that.

Tim: Yeah. So my hunch is that person was not, like, quivering or shaking with their eyes rolled back in their head.

Jon: Right, no.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Nope.

Tim: They were in full possession of their faculties. [chuckles]

Jon: [chuckles] Yeah. And they gave me—

Tim: But they really had a sense that God wanted to say something to you, and that they were—

Jon: [Tim agreeing throughout] Right. God gave them a picture. They wanted to give that to me. They didn't want to interpret it for me. They just wanted to give it to me.

Tim: Yeah. So what you experienced on the sailboat is a unique contribution that the Hebrew Bible and then messianic Christianity gave to the world, which is somebody representing God's speech who's in full possession of their faculties with a sound mind telling you what they think God is saying.

Jon: Yeah. Right.

Tim: That is not at all how many cultures imagine prophecy working.

Jon: Oh, right. Okay.

Tim: And definitely not in the ancient world.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: So what came to mind for many, if not most ancient people when they thought of the prophets was a raging person out of their mind, as if possessed or taken over by some mind other than their own.

Jon: Okay. Those were the prophets.

Tim: Yes. Yeah.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: And not only that, but there are many depictions of that kind of prophecy in the Bible itself.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So let's look at some.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Because there actually is a diverse portrait of people speaking the prophetic word of God under the influence of "*ruakh*." And I think part of the challenge throughout the history of readers of the Bible is, like, how to sort out all these very different portraits of the prophetic word, the word of God being spoken through people.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So let's look at some wild ones first.

Jon: Okay. Okay.

Tim: Okay. So I'm just going to go to one well-known story and kind of set the pattern here. Israel's first king is the guy named Shaul, or Saul, "the one who was asked for." In chapter 19, what we're told is, Saul's going down a road—and what he's doing and why is super interesting. We don't have time to talk about it. But we're told, "the *ruakh* of God rushed upon him." And this word "rush" is really interesting because it's used elsewhere to describe, like, [Jon backchanneling throughout] a mob rushing down a hill, or a fire breaking out quickly rushing upon a bush. So like, to break out.

Jon: Okay. It's like a breaking out.

Tim: Mhm. And this is a word used about a dozen times throughout the Hebrew Bible. When somebody has a powerful, *sudden* encounter with God's *ruakh*, this is the verb used.

Jon: Mmm. Okay.

Tim: And so he went along the road prophesying. He stripped off his clothes. And he ended up going to Samuel the prophet, prophesying in front of Samuel, and just laid down naked on the road all day and all night, so much so that people begin to say, “Whoa, is Shaul, like— [Jon backchanneling throughout] is he joining the merry band of the prophets who go around, like, playing music and speaking words from God?”

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So the whole picture here is of suddenness—

Jon: Crazy.

Tim: —and kind of like lack of control, losing control.

Jon: Yeah. Is Saul king at this point?

Tim: He is.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. Which is why people are scandalized.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And a big portrait of Saul’s story is he does begin to lose his mind in the story as David becomes king in his place. So this behavior of some prophets of God in the Hebrew Bible or the nation Israel became known and described with a variety of words. One of them is a phrase you’ll come across a handful of times in the Prophets. It’s a word that gets translated either as “maniac” or “madman.”

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So Elisha, the prophet, *Elisha*, the protege of *Elijah*—

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: God tells *Elisha* just like he told Samuel to go anoint a new king over Israel because the current one’s really bad. And it’s a guy named Yehu or Jehu. This is in Second Kings chapter 9. And so Elisha comes to visit Jehu, and he’s like, “Hey, you’re going to become king. Stuff’s about to go down. I just want to get you ready.”

[Jon laughs]

Tim: And so Elisha leaves the tent that they’re, like, talking in, having this conversation, and Jehu comes out, and his officers are all standing outside the tent. And they ask him,

like, “Is everything okay?” What they say is: “Is there *shalom*?” They say, “Why did this *madman* come to you?”

Jon: Referring to Elisha?

Tim: Yeah, they call him the madman. It’s the Hebrew word *meshugga’*.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So it can also refer to somebody who got so mad, like, literally angry—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: —that they lose self-control of their body.

Jon: Wait, what’s the word in Hebrew?

Tim: *Meshugga’*.

Jon: *Meshugga’*.

Tim: Yeah. [laughs]

Jon: It’s related to anger?

Tim: Yes, like an outbreak of rage.

Jon: Wow.

Tim: Mhm. So it becomes like a pejorative term.

Jon: Ahh.

Tim: It’s like: “*That crazy guy.*”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: “*He lost his mind.*”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That’s this word, *meshugga’*.

Jon: Okay. *Meshugga’*.

Tim: So this was a popular term attached to prophets. So that’s a thing in the Hebrew Bible. And we could look at more passages where prophets gained this reputation as madmen.

Jon: Huh.

Tim: A loss of self-control.

Jon: Okay. So this was typical of not just prophets of Yahweh, but prophets of all the gods in Canaan.

Tim: Yes. Yeah, think of the well-known story—ooh—of Elisha's predecessor, *Elijah*, his showdown with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. This is First Kings 18. Israel under King Ahab's leadership is following now two gods, Yahweh and the god Baal, who's like a patron god of the people of Tyre and Sidon up in the north, north of Israel. And so *Elijah*, who's a prophet of Yahweh, says, "No more of this. We're going to have a showdown on Mount Carmel"—"Mount Garden"—

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: —"and the God who answers the prayers of their followers with fire from the sky that lights up the sacrificial altar"—like—

Jon: *"That's who we'll follow."*

Tim: "That's how we'll know who the real God is."

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So he lets the prophets of Baal do their thing first. And so there's this kind of well-known description in First Kings 18 where the prophets are doing their thing all day, calling out to Baal. And they start leaping—dancing?—

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: —leaping around the altar.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And then they start self-mutilating, like, cutting themselves with blades—

Jon: [surprised] Ooh.

Tim: —and crying out in loud voices for hours on end.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then this word "to prophesy" or "to act as a prophet" is used in association with this kind of crazy activity.

Jon: Hmm. So this is just the culture of the land.

Tim: Yeah. So—and you can kind of see—what it speaks to is a way of viewing the world that: If and when a human becomes a vehicle of a god or a spiritual being to speak to people, it has to, as it were, cancel out or put on pause that human's mind and self-control and body.

Jon: That was the common idea?

Tim: Yeah, it's a way of imagining the world to say: God and humans are so opposite and different, that if a god's going to speak through a human, the human consciousness just has to go on pause.

Jon: And there was something about even the Israelite prophets like Elijah—

Tim: Mhm, this was a conception of prophecy and a way that certain Israelite prophets were viewed.

Jon: They were *viewed*.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Did they see themselves as a different type of mouth of God?

Tim: So here's where I'm going to go. The next step is to say: I think the biblical authors want us to see this portrait of prophecy, but they also want to put another portrait in front of us that they think is the real deal or the more authentic. [chuckles]

[Jon laughs]

Tim: A view of prophecy grounded in the worldview of Genesis chapters 1 and 2—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: —which they think is different than this.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: But what I'm trying to highlight is: This conception of prophecy is like: If a god is going to speak through a human, their human agency has to be canceled or overpowered by the divine agency speaking through them.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And it speaks to a conception that the divine and the human can't go together.

Jon: Okay. So for Saul, he does kind of lose his mind.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: And the story just says *ruakh* of Elohim rushed on him.

Tim: Yeah. Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: So the story doesn't allude to any sense of, like: "*Yeah, and this is not really legit.*"

Tim: No. That story itself doesn't give you that clue. What we—

Jon: I just wanted to state that.

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] What we haven't looked at is all these other descriptions of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible that are more common that speak to a prophet being in full possession of their faculties and that the Spirit is actually brought in to talk about a heightening or an elevating of their consciousness, not a canceling of their consciousness.

Jon: Hmm. Okay. And so when Elijah was called the madman, that was just because they're lumping him in with a crew.

Tim: Yeah, it's a popular conception.

Jon: It's a popular conception.

Tim: Yeah. And it still is in our day.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So this concept of prophecy was also widely held in the Greek and Roman world.

Jon: That you lose your mind?

Tim: That you lose your mind. If you want to know that a human is genuinely giving a word of God to you, like on that sailboat experience—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: —that you had, the fact that, like, the person talking to you didn't start, like—

Jon: Didn't strip naked. [laughs]

Tim: Strip naked and, like, you know, be taken over, eyes rolling back in the head—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That would be a sign of, like, *"Oh, I need to take this seriously."*

Jon: Right.

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] *"Because, like, the gods took over that person's body to talk to me. That's how I know it's genuine."*

Jon: Right.

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] So we need to imagine that context: *"I know it's genuine if the human speaking to me is, like, gone"*—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: *“If they’re changed into another person.”*

Jon: [Tim backchanneling throughout] Okay. So—this is great. So we’re going to the ancient world. We’re getting into that culture, understanding from ancient eyes. That’s just what was normal to think about prophets.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And then from that perspective—

[Music fades in]

Jon: —that framework, let’s see what the Bible is doing.

Tim: Yeah. Okay. So that’s established. Let’s look at some other depictions of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible. And actually, these are depictions that are way more frequent.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So we’re just going to sample, but this represents a much more common conception. So we’re turning a corner right now.

Jon: Okay.

[Musical break (24:18-24:47)]

[The True Prophet Template in Ezekiel (24:47-38:29)]

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] So let’s start with Ezekiel. The word *ruakh* appears more times in the book of Ezekiel than in any of the other prophets. He is often called the prophet of the Spirit. It’s just a lot of Spirit going on. He’s a priest.

[Music fades out]

Tim: He's trained to become a priest. And the book begins with his thirtieth birthday, which would've been the day that he would have been installed to start serving as a priest in Jerusalem—

Jon: Oh.

Tim: —but he is sitting by an irrigation canal in Babylon in exile because he got taken there by the first wave of exile. So bummer for him.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And what he sees is a *ruakh* animating a storm cloud coming towards him. That's the first thing he sees.

Jon: Yeah, okay.

Tim: A storm cloud driven by a *ruakh*.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And then it passes over him, as it were—he's enveloped into it as it approaches him, and he starts seeing all the famous visions of Ezekiel, which is essentially a mobile conception of God's chariot throne—

Jon: [chuckles] Mhm.

Tim: —and a humanoid divine figure sitting on the throne above the cherubim. It's sort of like he's seeing the living version of—

Jon: What's in the holy of holies?

Tim: What the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies was a, you know, a metal symbol.

Jon: He's seeing like a—do you call it a living version?

Tim: Yes. In fact, it's called “the living creature.”

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Jon: The chariot itself?

Tim: Yeah, it's got these four angelic figures that are all, like, multi-animal form—

Jon: Mmm. Okay.

Tim: —and they're carrying a platform and they have wheels, but that's flying.

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: And then there's a throne on top, and then a glowing, fiery human on the throne who speaks to him.

Jon: Mhm. Okay.

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] The creatures are full of *ruakh*, animating them and moving them. The whole cloud-fire itself is driven by *ruakh*. So it's just *ruakh* from the get-go. And then out of the cloud from the humanoid figure sitting on the throne, he calls this in chapter 1, "the appearance of the likeness—"he's using the word from Genesis 1: "Let us make humans in our image and our likeness."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] So he's seeing the likeness of the glory of Yahweh. And "He—"that is, that glory-of-Yahweh-human-figure on the throne—"said to me, 'Son of Adam, stand on your feet so that I can speak to you.'"

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: "As he spoke to me, the *ruakh* entered me and stood me up on my feet."

Jon: Okay. This feels kind of wild.

Tim: It does. So he's having a dream, a vision.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] And it's so interesting. He's hearing a word. He's hearing someone speak to him. And as he hears the word, the *ruakh* goes into him. And what the voice said to him was, "You stand on your feet." And then the *ruakh*—

Jon: Just does it for him.

Tim: —enters him, and "the *ruakh* stands me on my feet." So you're like, "*Whoa, which is it?*"

Jon: Okay. [chuckles]

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] "*Is it him standing up or is it ruakh?*" And you're like, "*Well, okay, we're kind of back to where we started, which is, like: Is it my ruakh or is it God's ruakh when I speak or do anything?*" So we're playing with that. So "He said to me, 'Son of Adam, I am sending you to the sons of Israel. They're a rebellious people. . .'" Dot, dot, dot. "And you will say to them, 'This is what Yahweh Elohim says . . .'" So it's kind of setting up the basic paradigm. This guy is going to become a vehicle for—

Jon: The word of God.

Tim: —the word of God. But we’re already playing with divine and human agency with: “*You* stand on your feet.” “*You* speak to them.” But: “The *ruakh* entered *me*” —

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: —“and it stood *me* on *my* feet.” [Jon agreeing throughout] So he’s feeling compelled by something outside himself, but then the voice speaking to him is saying, “*you* say,” “*you* speak,” “*you* stand up.”

Jon: Hmm. Okay.

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] There’s an interplay of divine and human agency. And it’s so interesting: This porous boundary between divine and human agency just continues right throughout the book of Ezekiel, both when he talks about his own experiences—so sometimes, he’ll talk about “the *ruakh* of Yahweh falling on me.” That’s how he’ll describe it sometimes. [chuckles]

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And then he’ll start speaking, “thus says Yahweh.” Other times, he’ll talk about “the hand of Yahweh grabbing me.” So he very much had this experience of something—

Jon: Something beyond him.

Tim: —beyond himself influencing him.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: But all the depictions of him speaking—sometimes of him sitting down and writing—show him in full possession of his faculties—

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: —in the stories connected to him in this book.

Jon: Okay. He’s not dancing around cutting himself.

Tim: He does these sign-acts—right?—these bizarre kind of street theaters—

Jon: Yeah. He’s a wild man. Yeah.

Tim: —you know, making little models of the city—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —and cooking bread over, you know, cow dung. But people don’t think about him as insane or crazy because the person speaking to them when he’s doing these weird behaviors—

Jon: He's in his right mind.

Tim: [enthusiastically] He's in his mind.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So Ezekiel's breaking the mold here.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: He's like—he's kind of the wild man, but he's actually—

Jon: Okay. He's kind of what you would expect from a wild man, but then you're like, "*Oh, wait, you're a reasonable dude.*" [laughs]

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] And the poetry he writes is *brilliant*. I mean, it's all —this is all communicated in very highly crafted narrative and poetry that [laughs] somebody made—you know?—

Jon: Yeah. It's not gibberish.

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] —who's, like, super intelligent. So what we're seeing here is a display of the Spirit of God and prophecy, but with a human whose mind doesn't go away. It's rather that their mind gets supercharged of hyper clarity and hyper passion and intensity. And so isn't it interesting that, in passages we'll look at more in future episodes, when Ezekiel imagines the restoration of God's people Israel on the other side of exile—and this is God speaking through Ezekiel—what God says through Ezekiel is: "I'm going to give my people a new heart, a new center of desire and purpose and will, and I'm going to put a new *ruakh* in you." "A new heart and a new *ruakh*"—

Jon: A new *ruakh*.

Tim: —"in my people."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] "And I'll remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." So the idea is that your heart, that is, your mind and your desires, have become hard and impenetrable like a rock, and you need to take that out and give you a soft, impressionable heart. And then, look at this: "I'm going to put my *ruakh* in you, and"

—

Jon: Which would—okay, but—

Tim: Oh, go ahead.

Tim: —now in this context, it's like—for an ancient Hebrew thinker, it'd be like: “*Your ruakh is already in me. It's all around.*”

Tim: Yes, yeah, exactly.

Jon: Like, “*What do you mean, you're going to put it in me?*”

Tim: Right. That's right. So yeah, what he's not saying is “I'm going to make you breathe,” because—

Jon: Right.

Tim: Like, alive.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So we're talking about—so there's life 1.0—

Jon: Yeah, okay.

Tim: —like just basic livin'—

Jon: Right.

Tim: —doing my thing. But apparently, there is available—

Jon: Which is God's *ruakh*.

Tim: That's right, which *is* animated by God's *ruakh*. But then there's also, like, a life 2.0, an even more intense, a more ideal form of life that is—speaks to an even closer bond of intimacy between a human creature and God—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: —and that's this new *ruakh*. God calls it a new *ruakh*. “I'm going to put a new *ruakh* in you.” And—Ezekiel chapter 36, verse 27—this line's so important—“I'll put my *ruakh* in you and make it so that you walk in my statutes and so that you're careful to observe my—”

Jon: Oh, the *ruakh* will make you walk.

Tim: It's—yeah, so it's highlighting divine agency there, but then “You will live in the land that I gave your forefathers. You will be my people. I'll be your God.” And it goes on to say, “And you'll farm your land, and there'll be so much fruit, and—the land will be like a new garden of Eden.” That's what Ezekiel—

[Jon chuckles]

Tim: That's what he says. So there's a porous boundary—

Jon: Hmm. Okay.

Tim: —between divine and human mind and agency here in Ezekiel’s own experience. But then when Ezekiel imagines, like: “*What will have to happen for the whole of the people of God to really live as one with God’s mind and purpose and will? I guess we just need a whole new ruakh.*”

Jon: A new ruakh.

Tim: A new ruakh.

Jon: I mean, it’s still God’s ruakh.

Tim: [laughs] Yeah, totally. Yeah.

Jon: So in what way is it new?

Tim: Mmm. [inhales]

Jon: Or let me ask it this way.

Tim: Yeah, yeah.

Jon: When we talked about Joseph, you used the language of 1.0 2.0—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: —ruakh 1.0.

Tim: Yes. Yeah.

Jon: [Tim agreeing throughout] So Joseph is breathing. He’s got God’s ruakh. But then there’s something about him, the way that he lives in line with this ruakh of God that makes him different. And then also God even just supercharges that with his ruakh. And so you called that, like, 1.0 and 2.0. So did Joseph have the new ruakh that Ezekiel’s talking about?

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] I think—yeah, as we look back, we’re like, “*Whoa, all along, there’s these depictions of somebody who’s already living and breathing, but then there’s these additional statements that the ruakh of Yahweh filled them with this ruakh of wisdom.*” And then they built a little Eden outpost, like of the tabernacle, like Bezalel. So 1.0 2.0 is my cultural—

Jon: [laughs] Yeah.

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] —translation of that. And maybe that doesn’t do justice to it. But 2.0 isn’t a totally different thing than 1.0, but it is a much better, enhanced version that works better. [laughs]

Jon: Yeah. Yeah, you know—

Tim: [laughs] And maybe that doesn't—maybe that's unhelpful.

Jon: But I get what you're getting at. The *ruakh* Elohim is responsible for life. You do not exist without the *ruakh*.

Tim: Right.

Jon: [Tim agreeing throughout] And so you have God's *ruakh*. But then you can have God's *ruakh*, and you can *have* God's *ruakh*.

Tim: That's right. That's right.

Jon: And it's the same *ruakh*, but it's more than just: "*Cool. I'm alive. I'm being sustained.*"

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: You're actually living in grain with the wisdom of God. You can become—

Tim: In this case, with the word of God.

Jon: And the word of God.

Tim: Doing what God says.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And so that my words and plans and behavior then match God's words and plans. Hmm.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. So this is why you can go to elsewhere in Ezekiel, and he critiques other prophets that are on the scene with him that even went into exile, prophets who were surrounding the king, saying, like, "You're fine. You're going to be fine here in Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar is going to chill out and go away." And he says of those prophets, in Ezekiel 13: "Those are prophets who follow their own *ruakh*, and they haven't seen anything."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So he's contrasting their experience with his experience of seeing God and then—

Jon: And being filled with God's *ruakh*.

Tim: And being filled with God's *ruakh*. And he's like, "These guys, they haven't seen God, and they follow their own *ruakh*." Which gets back to this because—

Jon: Yeah. It's so weird.

Tim: We could get Ezekiel to agree, like: "*But wait, Ezekiel, the ruakh they have is God's ruakh.*" And he'd be like, "*Yes, but what I'm experiencing is something different—it's 2.0.*" I don't know. He wouldn't say that, but.

Jon: Yeah. What would he say?

Tim: That he's got the new *ruakh*.

Jon: The new *ruakh*.

Tim: The new *ruakh* is what he encounters.

Jon: What's the word in Hebrew for new?

Tim: Oh, *khadash*, new.

Jon: It means "new."

Tim: New. Yeah. [laughs]

Jon: I mean, there's new in like, "*Hey, this didn't exist before. It's new.*"

Tim: Exactly. Yeah.

Jon: [Tim agreeing throughout] And there's new in, like, it's newly arrived, or it's, like—it's present now in a new way.

Tim: You could say: So it's new in degree or is it new in kind?

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Is it new in kind, like it's a *whole* different *ruakh*—

Jon: New category of *ruakh*.

Tim: —or is it new in degree in that the interweaving of divine and human *ruakh* is intensified to a new level? Is it new in level or new in kind? And my hunch is that what we're talking about is new in level.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's a human who's more in tune and more full of God's *ruakh*.

Jon: Yeah. So I can't exist without God's *ruakh*, but I can exist in a way which—hmm—

Tim: I'm not using well. I'm abusing the *ruakh* he gave me—

Jon: I'm abusing it—

Tim: —to do something that isn't part of God's desire.

Jon: [Tim agreeing throughout] Yeah. And I go my own way with it. And then Ezekiel would be like, "*Well, that's your own ruakh.*"

Tim: Exactly. Yes.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So this is the portrait of prophecy and filling with the Spirit that you find throughout the biblical prophets. The prophets who actually, like, wrote the books that we have.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So that's why I'm calling this the biblical default portrait of prophecy. You can find multiple portraits of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, but which version is the one the biblical authors want us to see as, like, the real deal? And we're seeing it in Ezekiel's version here.

Jon: Hmm. Where it still has kind of a wildness to it.

Tim: It totally—that's right. Unpredictable. But—

[Music fades in]

Tim: —it's not a complete loss of self-control. It's a heightening—

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] —of Ezekiel's mind so that he has clarity. He can see things that no one else can see. And what he sees is the presence of God.

Jon: [Tim agreeing throughout] And then he has the language to describe in a way that can make sense to someone else what he's seeing.

Tim: Exactly right. That's right.

[Musical break (38:12-38:29)]

[More of the Gold Standard in Micah (38:29-48:17)]

Tim: So just real quick—just one kind of final portrait here.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: We find a very similar description of God's presence and Spirit and prophecy in a prophet who preceded Ezekiel by, like, 150 years, a guy named Micah, Micah of Moresheth. And he grew up in the hills way outside of Jerusalem—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: —but he's really bothered by the injustice he sees happening, of people's ancestral, tribal lands getting bought up.

Jon: What time in Israel's history?

Tim: He's living in the eighth century, so same time period as Isaiah.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] There's—the kingdoms of Israel have split into two, north and south. He lives in the south. And the empire of Assyria is the big threat on the horizon. Babylon hasn't risen yet. And what he's especially angry about is the prophets in Jerusalem and up in the north who are telling the kings who are worshiping all these other gods and seizing land illegally from Israelite farmers—and they have these prophets around them who he says that “are fed by the kings.” And so they constantly are saying, “*Shalom, shalom*”—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: —“everything's going to be great, O king.”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] “*Shalom* to you, O king.” And he's like, “No, man. No.” He says, “There's a night coming that there'll be no more seers, and there's a darkness coming for no more prophets.” He says, “The sun will set on the prophets, and the day will grow dark over them. The seers will be disgraced, and those practicing sorcery”—divination—these are, like, channeling—

Jon: Oh.

Tim: —the power of other spiritual beings—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] And he says, “All of them will put their hand over their mouths because there’ll be no reply from the true God anymore.” As a contrast to them, he said, “But me, as for me, I am filled. . .” Then he says four things that he’s filled with: “with power, with the *ruakh* of Yahweh, and with justice and with strength to declare to Jacob his rebellion and to Israel his sin.” What he’s talking about is just his own description in short form of the experience he had, for why he wrote this elegant collection of poetry that’s full of social critique of the powers. So once again, he’s full of the *ruakh*. But then of strength? Two words for strength—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Energy?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Energy.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: He’s a passionate dude.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: He grew up in the rural country, and he becomes this passionate, loud voice out of this little farming community—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —to start holding the leaders of Jerusalem accountable. [laughs] That’s pretty intense.

Jon: Yeah. Now, he doesn’t say I’m filled with a sound mind and with, you know, clarity of mind, right?

Tim: Oh, sure.

Jon: Like you could take power—

Tim: No, that’s right.

Jon: —and you could take strength, and you can still be a wild man.

Tim: That’s right. Yeah. But also, he is filled with justice—

Jon: Justice.

Tim: —a very clear sense of right and wrong.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And he's declaring Israel's rebellion and sin to their leaders.

Jon: He's critiquing.

Tim: [Jon backchannelling throughout] And—oh, so interesting: 150 years later in Ezekiel and Jeremiah's day, they quote from Micah— [enthusiastically] 150 years later—and say, "Remember what Micah said? It's happening, folks." So he made a big impact.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So he wasn't like Elisha when he visited Jehu—you know, when he left, everybody was like, "Huh, what's that mad man?" Like, "Don't listen to anything he says." Micah had the opposite effect. People were like, "Whoa, that guy." They remembered what he said and how he said it. What I'm trying to draw out here is he was clearly somebody who people took seriously. And he had a message that was coherent and powerful, persuasive, and addressed to economic, political realities. You know?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That's not a kook. [laughs]

Jon: No. And—

Tim: It's not a sign of somebody insane, you know?

Jon: Right.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And then you read his words—

Tim: Read his poetry, and it's—

Jon: His poetry.

Tim: —beautiful poetry.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] Yeah. So I think what the biblical authors want us to see is there's prophecy, and there's prophecy. And there's different ways that people experience God's Spirit. Always power, always intense. But what seems to be put forward to us is: The most positive portraits of prophecy are people who push the boundaries, are unpredictable and intense, that reflects their, like—putting their finger in the light socket, as it were, of divine power. But at the same time, what they have to say

is coherent. It makes sense. And people can understand it. And that's why Micah 3, verse 8, "I'm filled with power and the *ruakh* and justice and even more strength" —

[Jon laughs]

Tim: —that I feel like this captures this balance. And—ah, so Hebrew Bible scholar that I've learned a lot from on this is the scholar Jack Levison. He talks about the balance between ecstasy and understanding. So ecstasy is a word—it's a Greek word that we'll come across it again later in our conversation on New Testament prophecy. *Ekstasis* means to stand outside of. It means to be outside of your mind. Out of your mind.

Jon: Oh. Okay.

Tim: That's what happens to Saul. That's how people think of Elisha. That's not what we see with Ezekiel and Micah, though. What we see is somebody who's very thoughtful. It's like the spirit—very powerful, but they haven't lost their mind.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's supercharged their mind. And that's the picture of the Hebrew prophets that the biblical authors want to put forward to us. It's sort of like the gold standard.

Jon: Hmm. Okay. Then real quick, why did the biblical authors—why did the prophets compose the story of Saul losing his mind the way they did, saying he was filled with the *ruakh* of Elohim and just kind of leaving a little bit cryptic of like—

Tim: Yeah, yeah.

Jon: "*What's going on?*" Because you could read that story and be like, "Oh, *okay, so that's what it means to be filled with the ruakh of Elohim.*"

Tim: That's right. Yeah. Ah, that's so great. It's like—I didn't pay you to say that. But that's what we're going to talk about next.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Because the connection of the Spirit and God raising up a royal, prophetic, priestly leader for his people, that is, the Messiah—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] —is a huge, huge theme also within the Hebrew Bible. And the contrast between Saul and David and their different experiences of the *ruakh* is a really key part of the Messianic hope connected to the Spirit. Messiah and Spirit in the Hebrew Bible. And Saul and David's stories are at the heartbeat of showing us two different kinds of rulers inspired by the *ruakh*—

[BibleProject theme]

Tim: —with two different outcomes.

Jon: Hmm. Okay.

Tim: So that's what we're going to talk about next.

[Musical break (45:40-45:44)]

Jon: Thanks for listening to BibleProject podcast. Next week, we're going to talk about the Spirit of the Messiah, that is, a Spirit-empowered prophet-priest-king. The first example of this type of character in the Bible is Moses.

Tim: [Audio clip from Spirit of God (Reboot) E5: The Spirit of the Messiah in Moses] He does signs and wonders. He confronts unjust leaders. He brokers a covenant relationship between God and a whole people group. And then he uniquely ascends to the very presence of God and then speaks God's purpose and word and brings it back down to the people. He's the package deal, man.

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[Phone beep]

Ryan: Hi, my name is Ryan.

Emily: Emily.

Aaron: Aaron.

Callie: Callie.

Ryan: And we are from the colony, Texas. We first heard about BibleProject a couple of years ago when our pastor used one of the videos in his sermon. And ever since, we have been using BibleProject videos and podcasts in our family bible studies, and I even use some of the videos in my classroom. I teach high school science at a private Christian school, and I use the videos for a lot of the lessons about environmental issues. We believe the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus. BibleProject is a nonprofit funded by people like me. Find free videos, articles, podcasts, classes, and more on the BibleProject app and at BibleProject.com.

[Phone beep]

Macenzie: I'm Macenzie. I'm on the finance team, and I get to do a lot of reporting to make sure the budgets are in line. I get to come into the office about three times a year for team building or strategy moments. My favorite office dog is Darla. She is the sweetest personality. And sometimes I'll sit at my coworker's desk, and there's these chicken, like, jerky kind of dog sticks, and so I bribe the dogs' love with that. It's great. There is a whole team that work to bring the podcast to life every week. For a full list of everyone involved in this episode, check out the show notes wherever you stream the podcast and on our app. Blessings.

[BibleProject theme fades out]

[BibleProject sonic logo]