



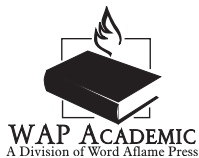
THE
**HOLY
SPIRIT**

A COMMENTARY

DANIEL L. SEGRAVES

The Holy Spirit

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Preface

The development of a truly biblical understanding of the Holy Spirit requires more than a mere listing of all the verses that mention the Spirit.¹ It requires more than a systematic categorization of these verses into topical headings. We must allow our understanding to arise from the text itself as we weave together the various contexts of the biblical witness to the Holy Spirit. This contextual interweaving occurs not only within individual books of Scripture, but also among them. It also includes the way in which each of the two testaments provides distinct elements that informs our understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (i.e., pneumatology).

When it comes to the development of biblical pneumatology, it is helpful to avoid the limitations of systematic theology. This is not to say there is no value to systematic theology; it is, however, but one approach. Scripture was not written as a systematic theology.² The text presents itself to us as a book, in such a way that a natural reading of it results in a biblical theology.

As it relates to pneumatology, for example, the terminology referring to God as Spirit appears extremely early and very late in the text. The second verse of Scripture informs us that “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). The third from the last verse reads,

“And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’” (Revelation 22:17). Regardless of the implications of the immediate contexts in which these verses are found, and regardless of how many other verses may be found describing the Spirit as “hovering” or as participating in an invitation, the location of these two verses indicates the prominence of the terminology of the Spirit in Scripture.³ We could say all of Scripture is bracketed by the Holy Spirit.

Oneness, or Apostolic Pentecostals emphasize as normative the experience of baptism with the Holy Spirit with the initial sign of speaking with tongues. As a result, virtually all Oneness Pentecostals speak with tongues. This does not mean their biblical understanding of the Holy Spirit has caught up with their experience of the Spirit. While speaking in tongues is important, a single-minded focus on it sometimes comes at the expense of minimizing other experiences with the Holy Spirit such as the full range of spiritual gifts, empowerment, and fruit.

We must not be satisfied with approaches to the text that do anything less than reading it as it was meant to be read, in a holistic literary fashion, allowing the text to speak for itself.

1 | *The Holy Spirit*

The Hebrew word translated “spirit” is *ruach*. It appears nearly four hundred times in the Old Testament with the usual range of meaning also including wind or breath. In about eighty cases, *ruach* refers to the Holy Spirit. Other references to the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament use phrases like *the Spirit of the LORD*, *the Spirit of God*, *my Spirit*, *your Spirit*, *His Spirit*, and *the Spirit*. In some cases, the word *spirit* may not be used, but the context makes it clear the Spirit is in view.

In the New Testament, the Greek word *pneuma* is translated “spirit.” It is a virtual synonym for *ruach* and includes the ideas of wind or breath. In nearly 250 cases, a form of *pneuma* refers to the Holy Spirit, but other phrases include *the Spirit of the Lord*, *the Spirit of God*, *my Spirit*, *His Spirit*, and *the Spirit*. One phrase refers even to *the Spirit of His Son* (Galatians 4:6) and others to *the Spirit of Christ* (Romans 8:9; I Peter 1:11) and *Spirit of Jesus Christ* (Philippians 1:19).

Altogether, then, there are more than 330 references to the Holy Spirit in Scripture. Since there are 1,189 chapters in the Bible, this means the Spirit is mentioned on average about once every 3.6 chapters. In the Old Testament, the Spirit is referred to about once every 11.6 chapters. In the

New Testament, with 260 chapters, the Spirit is referred to almost once per chapter.

The first reference to the Spirit of God appears in the second verse of the Bible: “The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). The word translated “God” is the Hebrew noun *Elohim*, which appears thirty-three times in Genesis 1. Although *Elohim* is plural in form, the referent is singular. This is because in the Hebrew language, the verb governs the number of the noun. When there is a singular verb with a plural noun, the noun does not refer to more than one of something; the plural form is used for other reasons.¹ *Elohim* must be accompanied by plural modifiers and plural verb forms to function as a plural noun. If accompanied by singular modifiers and singular verb forms, it functions as a singular noun.²

In the phrase *Spirit of God*, the word *Spirit* is in the construct state, which means it is grammatically bound to the word *God*.³ It is the Spirit possessed by God.⁴ There is no suggestion here that the Spirit is a person distinct from God. Instead, the context created by the relationship between the first two verses of Genesis is that the phrase *Spirit of God* in this case refers to God in activity. In Genesis 1:1, the word translated “created” (*bara'*) is in the perfect form, indicating action that is completed. In English, the perfect is usually translated as the “simple past or present perfect.”⁵ The point is that Genesis 1:1 describes a completed action.

In Genesis 1:2, the word translated “was hovering” (*rachaph*) is a participle, suggesting “continuous occurrence of an activity or a mode of being.”⁶ As the Pentateuch draws to a close, a form of the word translated “was hovering” appears again for the first time since Genesis 1:2. Here, in the Song of Moses, the LORD⁷ is described as an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young (Deuteronomy 32:11). It is significant that this image of God appears both at the beginning and ending of the Torah.⁸ As with the entirety of Scripture,

we could say that the Torah is bracketed by the Holy Spirit. This is especially true since the fourth verse from the end of the Pentateuch tells us that Joshua “was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him” (Deuteronomy 34:9).

It should also be noted that just as the Spirit of God was involved in His creative work, so the Spirit was involved in the work of the building of the Tabernacle. Indeed, the thing that enabled Bezalel to accomplish his work was that he was filled with the Spirit of God (Exodus 31:3; 35:30–31).⁹

SUMMARY

A wide variety of descriptors are used to refer to the Spirit in Scripture. The most common Hebrew (*ruach*) and Greek (*pneuma*) words have essentially identical meanings. The presence of the Spirit at the beginning and ending of Scripture calls attention to its high profile within the biblical text.