

THE SPIRIT

What the Bible Teaches About Your Spirit

Breath:

ruah. Wind, breath, mind, spirit. This noun occurs 387 times in the OT, usually feminine.

The basic idea of ruah (Gr. pneuma) is “air in motion,” Job 41:16 - air which cannot come between a crocodile’s scales

Isa 25:4; Hab 1:11 - to the blast of a storm

Jer 49:36; Ezek 37:98 - The “four winds,” רִּיחַ, describe the four quarters or four directions of the world

In living beings the ruah is their breath:

Gen 7:15; Psa 104:25, 29 - animals

Isa 42:5; Ezek 37:5 - men

Gen 7:22-23 - or both

Jer 2:24 - whether inhaled

Isa 11:4; cf. Job 9:18 - on the lips

Jer 10:14; Jer 51:17 - contrast dead idols

Job 27:3 - God creates it: “The ruah “spirit” of God (from God) is in my nostrils”.

The connotations of breath include:

Power:

1Kings 10:5 - where the Queen of Sheba had “no more ruah, i.e. she was “breathless,” overwhelmed

Courage:

Josh 2:11; Josh 5:1 - where the “spirit” of Israel’s enemies failed them

Value:

Lam 4:20 - where the Davidic king was “the breath of our nostrils,” or prized hope—a phrase borrowed from the common Egyptian *æwn fnd.sn* “the breath of their nose”.

Yet false prophets become ruah “wind” because they lack the word:

Jer 5:13 - the connotation being emptiness the futility of “mere breath” (see also Job 7:7; Isa 41:29)

As a rush of air, a snort through one’s nose, ruah depicts emotions of aggressiveness or anger:

Isa 25:4; Jud 8:3; Prov 29:11

Ultimately breath signifies activity and life:

Job 17:1 - One’s “spirit” is consumed when he is sick or faint

Jud 15:19; 1Sam 30:12; cf Gen 45:27 - but it comes back as a “second wind” and he “revives”

Job 12:10; Isa 42:5 - In God’s hand is the breath, ruah, of all mankind

Genesis 6:3 - best rendered, with the RSV, as “my spirit (the breath of life, from God) shall not abide [following LXX] in man forever, for he is flesh (mortal), but his days (until the deluge) shall be a hundred and twenty years” (cf. Job 34:14-15).

The unique feature of human life is not, however, the physical but the spiritual i.e. - the mental and personal: Gen 2:7; cf Gen 1:24 - The “breath” of man was bestowed by a special creative act of God

Gen 1:26 - But it is his inner being that reflects the image of God, formed by the counsel of the Trinity and makes him sovereign over all other living things (see also Gen 2:20)

“Our personal identity is preserved in the resurrection, though not the same particles of matter or material substance as went into the grave. The wondrous works of God are a mystery to man. The spirit, the character of man, is returned to God, there to be preserved. In the resurrection every man will have his own character. God in His own time will call forth the dead, giving again the breath of life, and bidding the dry bones live. The same form will come forth, but it will be free from disease and every defect. It lives again bearing the same individuality of features, so that friend will recognize friend. There is no law of God in nature which shows that God gives back the same identical particles of matter which composed the body before death. God shall give the righteous dead a body that will please Him.” {6BC 1093.2}

Psa 32:2 - and “in his spirit There is no guile”

Mind, Attitude, or Character:

Ezek 11:5; Ezek 20:32 – speaks of things that come into your mind, i.e. ruah:

Dan 5:20 - Daniel’s (Aramaic refers likewise to Nebuchadnezzar’s mind [ASV, spirit] being hardened)

Num 14:24 - Caleb’s spirit was different from that of his faithless colleagues (cf. Sennacherib’s spirit, i.e. resolve in 2Kings 19:7 ASV).

1Kings 21:5 - A person’s ruah may be sad

Psa 77:3 - overwhelmed

Isa 57:15 – contrite

Prov 17:27 - It can be “cool” (restrained)

Num 5:14 - jealous

Ecc 7:8 - patient or proud

Deut 34:9 - People can be marked by a spirit of wisdom

Hos 4:12 - or whoredom

Prov 16:32; cf. Dan 5:20 - a wise man “rules his spirit”,

Isa 26:9 - With my spirit within me I will seek you ear-

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” —John 10:10, NIV

*All Scripture References are from the updated New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

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Even the physically oriented verb רָחַם “to smell” assumes figurative connotations:

Gen 27:27 –

Jud 16:9 - A thread is consumed when it “touches” (ASV, smelleth) the fire.

It may also (like its noun counterpart - ruah) assume connotations of mental awareness:

1Sam 26:19 - God will “accept” (ASV marg., smell) a sacrifice.

The goal, indeed, of OT sacrifice, to be a רִיחַן han-nómuah “sweet savor, “ a soothing aroma to God (Gen 8:21 NASB), points by symbol and type to the idea of the propitiating atonement through Christ.

State of Dead:

While, the OT generally treats man as a whole (nepesh “soul, “ often rendered simply as “self”), it also recognizes his essential dualism.

Gen 2:7 - Flesh and spirit combine to form the “self, “ so that while man may be said to have a ruah he is a nepesh. Dan 7:15, Aramaic; cf. Zech 12:1 - The ruah is contained with its bodily nidneh “sheath”

Gen 3:19; Eccl 12:7 - At death the body returns to dust, but the spirit returns to God who gave it.

“Our personal identity is preserved in the resurrection, though not the same particles of matter or material substance as went into the grave. The wondrous works of God are a mystery to man. The spirit, the character of man, is returned to God, there to be preserved. In the resurrection every man will have his own character. God in His own time will call forth the dead, giving again the breath of life, and bidding the dry bones live. The same form will come forth, but it will be free from disease and every defect. It lives again bearing the same individuality of features, so that friend will recognize friend. There is no law of God in nature which shows that God gives back the same identical particles of matter which composed the body before death. God shall give the righteous dead a body that will please Him.” {6BC 1093.2}

Job 7:11; Isa 26:9; cf. Exo 6:9 with Num 21:4 - ruah and nepesh tend to overlap.

(This may explain such verses as - Gen 35:18; Psa 86:13; cf. 1Kings 17:22)

Ruah and Nepesh are described as:

1. The principle of man’s rational and mortal life.
2. Possesses reason, will, and conscience.
3. Imparts the divine image to man.
4. The distinctive personality of the individual
5. The seat of his emotions and desires.
6. Life-power.
7. With a subjective and conditioned life.

8. The NT equivalents are pneuma (ruah) and psyche (nepesh).

On a higher plane, ruah may then designate a supernatural, angelic being:

1Sam 16:23, NASB - “a spirit from God”

Job 4:16; cf. Zech 1:9, 19 - The function may be revelatory

Psa 104:4 - God might have his angels serve as “winds”

Heb 1:7 - or spirits

1Kings 19:11 - fire

Satan:

1Kings 22:21 - “the great, accusing spirit”

1Sam 16:14; 1Sam 18:10; 1Sam 19:9 - Other evil spirits could fall upon men, as decreed by God

God: The pre-eminent example of spiritual personality
Isa 31:3 –

Ruah can exhibit a range of meaning:

Isa 40:7; Isa 59:19; cf. Num 11:31 - The “breath” of God may be a strong wind Isa 40:13 - His “spirit” may indicate no more than active power or mood (“Who hath directed the spirit [intention] of the Lord?” OR “who has known the mind [intention] of the Lord, “ SO LXX and 1Cor 2:16).

Holy Spirit: At most points, however, context approves and the analogy of the NT strongly suggests that the ruah YHWH is the Holy Spirit:

Gen 1:2 - From the outset God’s ruah moves upon the primeval waters

Num 11:17, 25 - his guiding presence, separate from that of both Yahweh and Moses, which the Lord “placed” upon the elders in the wilderness

Psa 51:11 - David first designated him “Holy Spirit”

Isa 63:10-11 - Isaiah, whether thinking of him as his own inspirer or as a fellow speaker, assumes his distinct personality when he says, quoting the Messiah, “The Lord hath sent me and his Spirit”.

Job 26:13 - The work of God’s Spirit may be cosmic, whether in creation

Job 33:4; Psa 104:30 - in continuing providence

Ezek 11:19; Ezek 36:26-27 - redemptive, in regeneration

Neh 9:20; Psa 143:10; Hag 2:5 - indwelling, to uphold and guide the believer

Num 11:25; Jud 6:34; 1Sam 16:13 - or infilling, for leadership

Num 11:17; Mic 3:8; Zech 7:12 - service

Isa 11:2; Isa 42:1; Isa 61:1 - or future empowering of the Messiah

Joel 2:28 [H 3:1]; Isa 32:15 - and his people.

LIGHT BEARERS