

Who is the Holy Spirit?

Lesson 2: The Spirit in Greek

Vocabulary:

temple	womb	meaningful	invisible
awareness	to compel	properly	precise
complex	to convince (adj. convinced)	to bury (adj. buried, n. burial)	to condemn (n. condemnation)
court	selfish	to commit	to struck
to follow (n. follower)	to excite (adj. exciting)	to resurrect (n. resurrection)	to long (to do something)

Discussion:

In the previous lesson, we learned how the Hebrew word “ruach” means *Spirit, wind, and breath* and how “ruach” gave hope to the Jewish people in captivity. He raised dry bones from the dead and gave them tissue and skin and breathed life into them. This metaphor reflected the spiritual condition of the Jewish people at the time of Ezekiel. They were spiritually dead and hopeless. They had lost their **temple**, their homeland, and their relationship with God. Yet through Ezekiel’s vision, God give his children hope that he would not only free them from captivity but also put life and passion back into their hearts so that they would desire to live for him and serve him again.

From the last study, how did you grow in your relationship with God, your understanding of the Holy Spirit, or your **awareness** of the spiritual condition of people around you? What decisions or changes did you make?

Spirit in the New Testament Greek

This lesson will explore the word “Spirit” as it is found in New Testament Greek, so that you can continue growing in your understanding of the Spirit and experience him more in your life!

In the New Testament, we see four definitions for the term “spirit” in Greek, yet they are surprisingly similar to what we saw in Hebrew, yet the metaphors are more **complex**. How did this happen? The Babylonian captivity not only led to the spiritual transformation of the Jewish people, but it also had a major impact on the language of the Israel as a nation. Living among the Babylonians, the Jewish leaders and highly skilled men were educated by the Babylonian **court**. As a result, the Hebrews adopted the Greek version of Aramaic, which exposed them to more abstract vocabulary.¹ By 40 C.E., under the influence of the Roman Empire, Jewish writers of the New Testament, spoke Greek and were able to communicate increasingly complex and philosophical concepts with a stronger vocabulary to express those ideas. Even so, we continue to see the use of physical metaphors to express spiritual ideas during the days of Jesus, while Paul expresses many of ideas using more abstract language.

The Spirit and spirit

In Greek, the word “spirit” is *pneuma* (NYOO-mah) [Gk. πνεῦμα]. In John 3, Jesus reveals three of the four definitions as he speaks to Nicodemus [nih-kuh-DEE-mus], a Jewish leader or Pharisee [FAYR-ih-see] about the entering the kingdom of God. Yet, before we fully understand these definitions, we must explore what Jesus tells Nicodemus he must do to be a part of God’s kingdom.

¹ Myhill, John. *Language in Jewish Society: Towards a New Understanding*. Multilingual Matters, LTD, Tonawanda, 2004. (24,60)

Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night to talk to him about who Jesus is. Nicodemus believes that Jesus must be from God because he performs such great miracles. While Nicodemus appears to be a **follower** of Jesus, he comes to Jesus at night, likely because he doesn't want the other Pharisees to hear what is saying. For this reason, Jesus explains to Nicodemus that believing that he, Jesus, is from God is not enough for a man to enter God's kingdom: "I tell you the truth," Jesus says, "no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born again (3:3), a physical metaphor for a spiritual concept.

Think back to Ezekiel's vision. What do you think Jesus means when he says that we must be "born *again*," and why is this important?

How is what Jesus is telling Nicodemus similar to what God had promised the Jewish people in captivity?

Nicodemus doesn't really understand Jesus's meaning and tries to interpret his metaphor in a physical way: "How can someone be born when they are old? Surely, they cannot enter a second time into their mother's **womb** to be born!" (3:4). Paul in his letter to the Corinthians [kor-IN-thee-inz] explains some of spiritual meaning of Jesus's statement:

¹⁴ For Christ's love **compels** us because we are **convinced** that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." (II Corinthians 5)

In your own words, explain how Paul's message helps us to understand what it means to be "born again."

What motivation does Paul give us for living this way?

In this passage, Paul helps us to understand that in order to be "born again," we must first die to our old life. This is not a physical death, but a spiritual death. We used to live for ourselves – our dreams, our careers, our future, our family, our **selfish** desires, doing what we want when we want. But as followers of Christ, we begin to ask ourselves, "Would Jesus live this way? Is this what Jesus taught? How can find new dreams to bring him glory and build his kingdom, instead of bringing glory to myself?"

But why would a person want to do this? Isn't it more **exciting** to live for ourselves? A person who realizes that they are spiritually dead from sin, dry bones with no real life, no meaningful purpose, struggling with their relationships, hopeless and spiritually separated from their loving Father in heaven, they are hungry for more – something true, something **meaningful**. They may not know it, but they are hungering for God! When they realize who they are without God and realize that as their loving Father, he is offering them forgiveness through the sacrifice of his perfect only Son, that they can have peace with God, and that they're being given a second chance for a true and meaningful life, this person will run from their old life of sin and self and live the rest of their life praising God for his grace and goodness!

In Romans 6, Paul goes on to explain this new life: “¹We are those who have died to sin... ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

Do you remember the dry bones in Ezekiel that had not been properly buried? What did those bones represent physically and spiritually?

What role does baptism play according to verse 4? How is this burial different from the burial we saw in Ezekiel 37?

In our last lesson, we learned that during the time of Ezekiel, a field of bodies that had not been buried represented a people who had been destroyed, never to be remembered. Even a dead body lying in the streets was considered a curse. Death without proper burial represented a spiritual state of being lost, unsaved, and rejected by God. Yet, because of Jesus’s sacrifice, everyone who turns from their old life to follow Christ is given a proper burial, one that assures them of eternal life!

Thanks to Paul’s writings, we can now understand more about Jesus’s response to Nicodemus and what it means to be “born again.” As Jesus continues to explain to Nicodemus how we enter the kingdom of God, we see his three uses of the word “pneuma,” or “spirit” and their definitions:

⁵Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the *Spirit* [Πνεύματος]². ⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit [Πνεύματος] gives birth to *spirit* [πνεῦμά]³.

As we can see from Jesus’s reply, the first two definitions of the Greek word “pneuma” are simply Spirit, as in God’s Spirit, and *spirit*, as in the human spirit. While the definitions are the same, the translation depends on the context of the sentence, just as we saw in the use of “ruach.”

According to John 3:5-6, what is the role of the Spirit for Jesus’s followers?

How are the roles of the Spirit similar to what we saw in Ezekiel 37?

Just as we saw in the vision of Ezekiel, we see in this passage that the Spirit is responsible for raising us from spiritual death and giving us new life – both inside and out! As he changes our hearts, our entire lives change for his purposes and his vision for his kingdom, so that we are all joined together as one body: his church and army for God’s glory. This is something we cannot do by ourselves, or our flesh, for “flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. In other words, we don’t make ourselves new; the *Holy Spirit* makes us new when we die to our old way of life, put away our sin, decide that we no longer want to live for ourselves, and commit our lives to him through baptism. While there are many passages that point to the Spirit already at work in us *before* we are baptized, this new life is promised to us as a gift when we are baptized, and we can be assured of this promise, as Paul says, “⁵If

²“4151. pneuma,” *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*, electronic database (BibleSoft, 2011), <https://biblehub.com/greek/4151.htm>.

³Ibid.

we have been united with him like this in his death, we will *certainly* also be united with him in his **resurrection**...⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin" (Romans 6).

The Spirit as *wind*

In the same conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus explains God's Spirit in this way, and reveals the third definition of *pneuma*:

⁸The *wind* [*pneuma*, πνεῦμα] blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So, it is with everyone born of the Spirit. (3:8)

We see that "pneuma" and "ruach" share the same definition of *wind*. How does Jesus describe wind? How do you describe wind?

How does this wind explain what happens to us when we receive God's Spirit?

Jesus explains that wind is something we can hear but is **invisible**. We can see the effects of wind in the trees, the leaves, and the grass. We can even feel wind on our skin, but we cannot see the wind itself. Without **precise**, modern tools, we cannot tell where the wind comes from or where it is going. In this way, Jesus helps us to see that God's Spirit moves where he wants to move. He enters whom he wants to enter, and we don't know where or when that will happen. He fills the person whom he wants to fill with his Spirit and transforms whom he wants to transform. He even moves our hearts, directs our actions, and moves us into the ways he wants us to go when we truly leave our old lives and desire his direction. In the same way that the Spirit brought Ezekiel out into the middle of a valley of dry bones to reveal a spiritual message to God's children, the Holy Spirit also reveals spiritual truths to Christ's followers. For Jesus, "full of joy through the Holy Spirit said, 'I praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do'" (Luke 10:21). The Holy Spirit wants to reveal spiritual truths and wisdom to us even today!

The Spirit as *breath*

In the New Testament, we see one passage where "pneuma" is used as *breath*. It is also found in a vision that John has about the end of times in the book of Revelation. In the vision, we see two prophets who, like Ezekiel, had seen the spiritual condition of the people around them, telling them about the **condemnation** that they would face if they do not turn from their sin and follow Jesus (11:15-18). The people kill them for their message, leaving them dead on the streets, unburied and cursed, just like the dry bones in the vision of Ezekiel. It is in the hope of resurrection and new life that we see the word *pneuma* used as breath:

But after the three and a half days, the *breath* [πνεῦμα] of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror **struck** those who saw them. (11:11)

We see that after three days, God in through the power of his breath, his Spirit, raises these men to life – just as he raised Jesus from the dead after three days, just as he raised the valley of dry bones, just as raises to new life anyone who dies to themselves and lives for Christ, and just as he will raise all those who are in Christ into eternal life. This is the power of the Holy Spirit!

Conclusion

Simply through the word “spirit” found in the Old and New Testaments, we begin to understand the love our Father in heaven has for us. He longs to save us from condemnation, to give us new life and strength and breath. He longs to transform us into the likeness of his Son through love that we all might live in unity under his name. He longs for us to help others find this new life and experience his love, salvation, and transformation, that the world might experience peace with God and brought into eternal life.

We can each examine our own spirit and ask ourselves the most important questions for our lives. Take a minute to quietly answer the ones that you believe God wants you to answer and share your answers with your group or with a friend. Take some time to pray one for another.

Have you ever been born again and baptized the way this study describes?

If yes, describe how your life has changed? What sins do you need to continue putting to death?

If no, what would being born again look like for you? How does the Spirit give you hope? Do you want to be born again? If yes, what is your next step?

Do you feel that you let the Spirit lead and direct you in your life?

If yes, what does that look like? How can you grow in this practice?

If no, do you want the Spirit to lead you and direct your life? If yes, what could you start doing to experience his guidance?

This Week:

Write in your journal:

1. Spend time in prayer this week asking the Spirit to help you the needs you shared above. Make a plan to put sins to death in your life and invite friends to help you.
2. Ask the Spirit to reveal sins in your life that are keeping him from leading you. Ask the Spirit to remove any sins or situations that he knows are moving you in the wrong direction. Ask the Spirit for direction for all areas of your life and trust that he will help you. Pray for your heart to be open to his direction.
3. Ask the Spirit for wisdom and guidance over situations in your life. Then open the Word of God and allow him to show you the wisdom he has for you.