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**GOD'S PRESENCE WITH US  
AND IN US**

A Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit

**MIGUEL G. ECHEVARRÍA**



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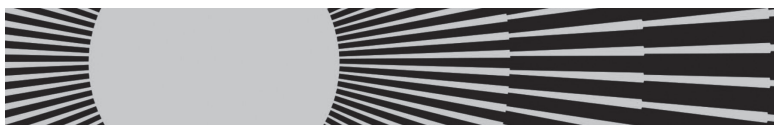
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## Chapter One

# THE SPIRIT IN CREATION

THE CREATION ACCOUNT IN Genesis 1–3 sets the expectations for the Spirit’s identity and role in Genesis and beyond. By recognizing *who he is* and *what he does* in these chapters, readers will be in a better position to understand why he has the power to restore, empower, and lead God’s people. Readers will also be in a better position to understand why he is actively involved in remaking the world into an Edenic paradise suitable for humanity and divinity. Altogether, those who take up this book will be better prepared to understand why the Old and New Testaments witness to the Spirit’s active role in renewing the earth into a cosmic temple where he will be *with us* and *in us* forever.

But before getting into what these chapters say about the Spirit, it is important to understand that the Old Testament was written by Israelites who understood God as one divine being. One of Israel’s most famous prayers, the Shema, confesses God’s oneness: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deut 6:4). While affirming his oneness, Old Testament authors also attest to God’s plurality. As early as Genesis 1, Israel’s Scripture suggests that a divine plurality (Gen 1:26, “Let us make . . .”) was involved in the process of creating and giving life. New Testament authors also wrestled with the oneness and plurality of God (e.g., Mt 28:19-20; Rom 8; Gal 4:1-7).



While biblical authors bear witness to the one-yet-plural nature of God, it would be anachronistic to argue that people such as Moses and Isaiah, as well as Paul and John, had a fully developed, classical Christian understanding of the triune God: that the one God eternally exists as the three divine persons, the Father, Son, and Spirit. That kind of mature understanding of God was not confirmed until the creeds of Nicaea (AD 325) and Chalcedon (AD 451).

This book, of course, will focus on the Third Person of the triune God, the Holy Spirit. While only using the full name of Holy Spirit on three occasions (Ps 51:11; Is 63:10-11), the Old Testament frequently testifies to the divinity, creative power, and personhood of the “Spirit,” “Holy Spirit,” or “Spirit of God.” So, while the authors of Scripture did not have a fully developed understanding the Trinity, their writings do attest to their experience with the Spirit of the triune God. Scripture attests to the Spirit’s powerful role in Scripture as early as the creation story in Genesis 1, as he works powerfully to make and later remake the world into the place where the divine presence of God will be *with us* and *in us* forever.

### THE SPIRIT’S ROLE “IN THE BEGINNING”

With all this in mind, it is significant that Genesis 1 begins with three of the most consequential words in Scripture: “In the beginning” (Gen 1:1). The beginning is the first stage in the creation of the world.<sup>1</sup> At this point, the earth has no real shape and order; it is comparable to a wilderness or desert, a place of vast emptiness (Gen 1:2).<sup>2</sup> The author adds to the ominous nature of the place by saying that “darkness” covered the deep, primordial wilderness. So whatever the initial stage of the creation resembled, one is on safe ground to argue that it was a deep, dark wilderness, a place with no shape or order. The author makes no effort to explain how this primordial stage of the world came into existence, except that it was part of the process of making the “heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1).

<sup>1</sup>Allan Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Baker, 2003), 106.

<sup>2</sup>For a study of the words *tohu* and *bohu*, which may carry the similar sense of “wilderness, wasteland, or desert,” see HALOT, III, 1689. See also the discussion in Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Eerdmans, 1990), 108-11.

The author then says, “The Spirit of God [*ruah ʾelohim*] was hovering over the waters” (Gen 1:2). The image of God’s Spirit hovering over the waters adds to the description of the nascent creation—it was a lifeless mass of dark, watery wilderness. That the Spirit *hovered* over the undeveloped earth means that it was under his divine care, ensuring its development into a place fit for God and his people, a place the author calls the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:8). Although some propose to translate *ruah* as a “powerful wind” or “tempest,” perhaps even a “mighty wind” or “terrible storm,” such renderings are far too impersonal to describe the creative activity of the one “hovering over the waters.” P. K. Jewett argues for the divine personhood of the “divine breath” or “Spirit” in the Old Testament, beginning in the Genesis creation account:

The Hebrews, it would seem, spoke of God in this way because they conceived of him in his essential being as the invisible Power (Energy) behind all that it, the creative Breath by which the living creature, indeed the whole universe, is animated. Yet in the context of the Old Testament as a whole it is evident that this animating Power, this creative Breath, is not understood as an impersonal force but rather as a living subject. The personal Energy which God is in himself, the breath by which he calls the worlds into being (Ps. 33:6), is, in the first instance, the Energy by which God wills who he is. He is who he is by his own act; that is, his being is *personal* being, being that can be understood only as self-determined “self” and “I.”<sup>3</sup>

The personal breath of God is the very divine Spirit who exercised care over the undeveloped creation, almost like an eagle “hovers over” the nest of its young (Deut 32:11). As such, the term *ruah* does not suggest the presence of an impersonal wind or storm. The term refers to the Spirit of God who ensured the development of the primordial wilderness into a world teeming with abundant life. Ambrose of Milan (333–397) provides a vivid description of the divine Spirit’s role in creation: “The Spirit fittingly moved over the earth, destined to bear fruit because by the aid of the Spirit it held the seeds of new birth which were to germinate according to the words of the prophet:

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<sup>3</sup>P. K. Jewett, “God Is Personal Being,” in *Church, Word, and Spirit: Historical and Theological Essays in Honor of Geoffrey W. Bromiley*, ed. J. E. Bradley and R. A. Muller (Eerdmans, 1987), 274, cited in Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Pentateuch,” in *A Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit*, ed. Trevor J. Burke and Keith Warrington (Cascade Books, 2014), 2.

‘Send for the Spirit and they shall be created and thou shalt renew the face of the earth.’<sup>4</sup>

Genesis 1:2 therefore provides the first instance of the Spirit of God transforming a desolate wilderness into an orderly creation. The Spirit will perform a similar work in Revelation, as authors such as Isaiah anticipate, when he takes a world that has returned to its darkened, primordial state and renews it into a place of abundant joy and life. For now, the author of Genesis has revealed that the divine Spirit was actively involved in turning the wilderness into an orderly creation with days and nights, land, plentiful vegetation, flowing waters, stars in the heavens, and animals (Gen 1:3-25). And what he has done in the beginning sets the expectation for what he will do again in the future, when he brings about a new creation.

But the Spirit is not the only divine person involved in the creation of the world. The author of Genesis highlights the divine cooperation among the persons of the Godhead when, after fashioning an orderly cosmos, he says, “And God [*’elohim*] said, ‘Let us make humankind [*’adam*] in our image, in our likeness” (Gen 1:26, my translation).<sup>5</sup> Although the plural construction (“Let us make”) has been the subject of much controversy, with some arguing that the author was speaking to a plurality of heavenly beings, it is more likely that the author refers to a plurality of divine persons involved in the creation of humanity.<sup>6</sup> For the sake of clarity, this does not mean that Israelites had a developed understanding of the Trinity. It does, however, suggest that Israelites understood that the one God existed and created in divine plurality. From Genesis 1, then, the divine Spirit cooperated with the other members of the Godhead to create the orderly world into which they would place humans. That the Spirit is explicitly mentioned in the creation account suggests his prominent role in shaping the primordial state into a place fit for God and humanity.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Ambrose of Milan, *Hexaemeron* 1.8, in *Genesis 1–11*, ed. Andrew Louth, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament 1 (InterVarsity Press, 2001), 5.

<sup>5</sup>I have translated the Hebrew term *’adam* according to its generic sense (Gen 1:26). In this context, the word can also be rendered “humanity,” “humans,” or “people.”

<sup>6</sup>See James McKeown, *Genesis*, Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, 2008), 26; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, NAC 1A (Broadman & Holman, 1996), 162.

<sup>7</sup>See similar discussion in Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, *Contours of Christian Theology* (InterVarsity Press, 1996), 21.

Centuries later, John would draw on the creation account in Genesis 1 to argue that the Son of God was the very Word through whom the Father spoke all things into existence (Jn 1:1-18). Taking John's reading of the creation account into consideration, one may envision that the Father, Son, and Spirit are the divine persons of the one *elohim* who were at work in the creation of the world. While affirming that the triune God was at work in creation, as supported by early interpreters such as Gregory of Nyssa and later Reformers such as John Calvin, it is again important to affirm that the author of Genesis likely wrestled with the plurality of God but did not have a fully developed understanding of the Trinity.<sup>8</sup> His words, however, do reflect the divine nature of the Spirit, who actively participated in the creation of the world.

## THE CREATION OF HUMANITY

Along with ensuring the creation of plants, land, animals, and the like, the Spirit also worked to create humans in the image of God (Gen 1:26). That people were made in God's image means that they were set apart from the rest of creation. The Spirit did not ensure that pigs, cows, or horses imaged God. Yet he did ensure that humans would be "the animate representation[s] of God on this planet," reflecting his character and likeness.<sup>9</sup> Humans are to image God by exercising dominion over the land, seas, animals, plants, and the rest of creation. The Spirit did not work to fashion men and women who would exercise a dictatorial or harsh dominion over the world. Rather, the Spirit fashioned people who would exercise harmonious and mutually beneficial rule over the world, seeking the flourishing of all things under their authority.<sup>10</sup> We can think of it as men and women embodying "God's sovereignty over the created order."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>See the observations of early interpreters in Louth, *Genesis 1–11*, 28. See the comments of Reformers in John L. Thompson, ed., *Genesis 1–11*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (InterVarsity Press, 2012), 41–42.

<sup>9</sup>Sandra L. Richter, *Stewards of Eden: What Scripture Says About the Environment and Why It Matters* (IVP Academic, 2020), 9–12.

<sup>10</sup>Norbert Lohfink, *Great Themes from the Old Testament*, trans. Ronald Walls (T&T Clark, 1982), 177, 179.

<sup>11</sup>Richter, *Stewards of Eden*, 9.

Following the creation of humanity, the cosmos is complete. The wilderness has been fashioned into a beautiful, orderly creation. So God ceases from all his labors (Gen 2:1-3). As already noted, the Spirit has been directly involved in the creation of the world. He hovered over a dark, watery wilderness, ensuring its development into a habitable environment, and worked together with *’elohim*, as one of three members of the divine plurality, to create a world over which men and women were to exercise benevolent authority.

### A CLOSER LOOK AT THE SPIRIT'S ROLE “IN THE BEGINNING”

The author of Genesis transitions from a general account of the creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 to a more specific one in Genesis 2:4-25. He marks the transition by inverting the phrase “the heavens and the earth” in the first half of Genesis 2:4 to “the earth and the heavens” in the second half of Genesis 2:4.<sup>12</sup> “These are the generations of *the heavens and the earth* when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made *the earth and the heavens*” (ESV).<sup>13</sup>

By changing “the heavens and the earth” to “the earth and the heavens,” the author prepares the reader for a detailed account about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Whereas the Hebrew Bible begins Genesis 2:4 with the words “These are the generations” (*’elleh toledot*), the Septuagint begins with the words “This is the book of the beginning” (*hautē hē biblos geneseōs*), suggesting that what follows is a more specific account of creation.

Stephen Dempster argues that the second account of creation describes “the prime habitat for the human couple . . . a garden planted by the Lord God.”<sup>14</sup> The later descriptions of the tabernacle and temple draw on the imagery of Genesis 2:4-25 to describe Eden as a sanctuary where God dwelled with his people. God commands Adam and Eve to “fill the earth and subdue

<sup>12</sup>Although much critical scholarship views these as competing creation accounts, I see these as complementary accounts moving from the general (Gen 1:1–2:3) to the more specific (Gen 2:4-25). This is true despite the origin of the accounts. What matters is how the author uses them to achieve his coherent literary purposes. See discussions in McKeown, *Genesis*, 29-32; Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 187-90.

<sup>13</sup>For a discussion of Gen 2:4 as a compositional link, see John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation* (IVP Academic, 2009), 312-14.

<sup>14</sup>Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (InterVarsity Press, 2003), 62.

it” (Gen 1:28) to expand the borders of Eden to the ends of the earth, making the entire world a cosmic temple filled with God’s presence.<sup>15</sup>

With regard to the creation of humanity, the author argues that God fashioned the man (*ha’adam*) from the earth (*ha’adamah*, Gen 2:7).<sup>16</sup> In other words, the man was fashioned from stuff that already existed. Yet he was still a lifeless corpse. This is where the author reinserts the Spirit into the narrative. The author says that God injected the “breath of life” (*nishmat hayyim*, my translation; LXX *pnoēn zōēs*) into the man, bringing him to life (Gen 2:7). This is no impersonal breath—it is the very divine breath of God. Ezekiel draws on the imagery of Genesis 2:7 to describe how the “breath” (*ruah*) of God will raise Israel to life in a new Eden (Ezek 37:1-14). Although Ezekiel uses *ruah*, whereas Genesis 2:7 uses *nishmat hayyim*, Ken Mathews argues that “the two [terms] are treated as virtually the same here and at times elsewhere.”<sup>17</sup> Both Ezekiel and Genesis are therefore referring to the same life-giving breath.

It is important to note that the Septuagint version of Genesis uses the Greek term *pnoē* to translate the *ruah* that gives life to Adam’s corpse. When referring to the divine “breath” or “Spirit,” however, Septuagint translators more commonly use the term *pneuma*, as in the earlier context of Genesis 1:2 (*pneuma theou*, “Spirit of God”). This point appears in later texts such as Isaiah 44:3 (*to pneuma mou*, “my Spirit”); Isaiah 61:1 (*pneuma kyriou*, “Spirit of the Lord”); and Isaiah 63:14 (*pneuma para kyriou*, “the Spirit from the Lord”). It is the case, however, that *pneuma* and *pnoē* may be used synonymously. Job 33:4, for instance, affirms that “the divine Spirit [*pneuma theion*]” is one and the same with the life-giving “breath of the almighty” (*pnoē pantokratoros*). Other examples are found in Job 27:3; 34:14. Such evidence makes it warranted to understand the Septuagint translator’s use of *pnoē* as a

<sup>15</sup>See James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Crossway, 2010), 73; G. K. Beale, *Union with the Resurrected Christ: Eschatological New Creation and New Testament Biblical Theology* (Baker Academic, 2023), 21-39.

<sup>16</sup>There is likely a play on words between *’adam* and *’adamah*, which makes a connection between the “man” and the “ground” from which he was taken.

<sup>17</sup>Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*:26, 196. He notes examples such as Gen 7:22; Is 57:16; Job 32:8; 33:4; 34:14. See also Daniel Block, “The Prophet of the Spirit: The Use of *rwḥ* in the Book of Ezekiel,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32 (1989): 34-41.

legitimate term for the divine “breath” or “Spirit,” just as legitimate as the use of *pneuma* in Genesis 1:2. So one should not imagine that God breathes an impersonal wind or breath into Adam. He breathes the same divine Spirit into Adam that later gives life to people such as Job. Walt Kaiser argues, “It is God the Holy Spirit . . . who breathes something altogether new into each being. Just as God sent his divine word, and the earth and heavenly bodies were brought into existence (Ps. 33.6, 9) . . . so also it was God the Holy Spirit who gave breath that animated Adam into a living being (Gen. 2.7).”<sup>18</sup> Ezekiel later envisions this divine Spirit breathing life into the dead bodies of humanity (Ezek 37:1-14).

The man whom the Spirit raised from dust was placed in the Garden of Eden, where “God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:8-9). There was also a river that watered the entire garden (Gen 2:8-10). The man was to steward Eden and was free to eat of any tree except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The penalty for eating of the forbidden fruit was certain death (Gen 2:17). Since he was alone in the garden, God fashioned a woman from the man’s side (Gen 2:21-24). The author does not have to restate how the woman came to life. One should assume that God breathed the same life-giving Spirit into the woman that he breathed into Adam (Gen 2:7).

As God fashioned humans from the ground, he also “formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky” (Gen 2:19). Genesis 6:17 affirms that the “breath” (*ruah*) of God brought all creatures to life. God breathed his divine Spirit on people and creatures, bringing all things to life. From this one should not assume that humans and animals are ontological equals, that they have equal value and authority before God. Only human beings are created in the image of God, with the command to exercise dominion over the earth (Gen 1:27-28; see also Job 26:4; 27:3; Is 42:5). Further, only humans have the “divine breath directly breathed into them by God.”<sup>19</sup> Since the Spirit also animated the woman, both Adam and Eve were commissioned to live as image bearers who were responsible for stewarding the

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<sup>18</sup>Kaiser, “Pentateuch,” 6.

<sup>19</sup>Kaiser, “Pentateuch,” 6.

garden and expanding its boundaries to the ends of the earth. Their collaboration was intended to lead to the paradise-like conditions of Eden encompassing the entire world, making it a cosmic temple filled with God's divine presence.

## EXILE FROM EDEN

The Edenic paradise the Spirit collaborated to create, into which he animated humans to dwell, would not last forever. The very next chapter in Genesis describes how the first humans obeyed the serpent's call to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3:1-13). Consequently, God cursed humanity, promising them a painful, cursed existence until they return to the ground from which they were formed (Gen 3:14-19). Even the earth will be cursed, producing conditions against which humanity must struggle to sustain life (Gen 3:17-19). God then sacrifices an animal to clothe their nakedness and sends them out of the garden (Gen 3:21-24).

Humans failed at their vocation to subdue the creation, listening to the voice of a serpent rather than the command of God. So all the descendants of Adam and Eve will live, suffer, and die outside the Garden of Eden. In considering texts such as Isaiah 24:10 and Jeremiah 4:23, readers should envision that God will “bring a complete reversal to the original state of the earth, because of human disobedience, by returning it to a state of emptiness and chaos.”<sup>20</sup> This state will be analogous to the “unorganized and lifeless state which was present prior to God's completion of his creation.”<sup>21</sup> A most unfortunate repercussion of Adam's and Eve's transgression, then, is that the nonhuman creation suffers the fate of humanity—it too will feel the sting of death (see Rom 8:12-15). As a result of sin, humanity's creation will be reversed, returning to the dust, and the world will return to meaningless chaos (see Eccles 12:1-7).

Despite the prospect of exile outside the garden, the author provides a glimmer of hope. He promises that the offspring of the woman will crush the serpent who slithered his way into the garden (Gen 3:15). In so doing, the

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<sup>20</sup>Kaiser, “Pentateuch,” 3.

<sup>21</sup>Kaiser (“Pentateuch,” 3) draws on the work of Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Magnes, 1969), 1:49.

power of death will be reversed, reopening the way back to Eden. Stephen Dempster argues,

This promise to the woman thus indicates that her progeny will eventually win a battle that will restore the world to the primeval conditions of Genesis 1–2, where humanity can rule together and expand God's dominion over the rest of creation under God's authority. The fact that the triumph will happen because of the seed of the woman means the return of human beings to their rightful rule over the world. . . . This is nothing less than the return of Adam, or what Adam and Eve were intended to be.<sup>22</sup>

Until then, humanity will suffer and die in exile outside Eden, waiting for the offspring of the woman to perform his death-defeating work.<sup>23</sup>

After the exile from Eden, readers should anticipate the re-creation of all that God once deemed “good” and that has been spoiled by the power of death. As the divine Spirit was at work to create the world in Genesis 1–2, the Spirit will work to re-create the place where he will give new life to humanity, delivering the world from the primordial state to which it has returned. Along the way, he will lead, empower, indwell, and seal humanity until the day of salvation, when all things will return to an Edenic state. He will even empower the offspring of the woman to crush the serpent, undoing the power of death over the world and ushering in the age of new life. At the heart of it all, the Spirit will do what he did in the creation account—be *with* his people as he remakes the world into a cosmic temple filled with his presence. As the story develops, it will become evident that the cosmic temple will be the place where the Spirit will be *in* humanity forever.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If “the Spirit of God . . . hovering over the waters” in Genesis 1:2 anticipates the original, orderly creation, what should we envision in other scriptural accounts where the Spirit comes on people or places (e.g., Is 42:1; 61:1-2; Mt 3:16 [cf. Gen 8:11]; Lk 4:18; Acts 2:1-4)?

<sup>22</sup>Stephen G. Dempster, *The Return of the Kingdom: A Biblical Theology of God's Reign*, Essential Studies in Biblical Theology (IVP Academic, 2024), 35.

<sup>23</sup>James Hamilton, “The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (2006): 30-54.

2. What kind of benevolent stewardship is involved in exercising dominion over the creation (Gen 1:28)? How can we exercise such stewardship?
3. As you examine your life, what are some of the characteristics of life in exile, that is, life outside Eden?

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