

There's Spirit and There's 'Spirit'

Ezekiel speaks a number of times a word from God (i.e. 'God's word' or 'the Word of God') to the Children of Israel that he will give them a new spirit.

Ezekiel 11:19 (NIV) – *I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.*

Ezekiel 18:31 (NIV) – *Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel?*

Ezekiel 36:26 (NIV) – *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*

What does it mean to receive a new spirit?

How can he exchange the spirit within us, which is our real person, for a new one? That's ridiculous! It's illogical. God must have meant something different when he wanted a new spirit and we need to come to grips with it.

Looking back from a Christian perspective, we have been taught that this is a prophecy about the release of Holy Spirit to every person following the work Jesus did to bring it about. It's known as a Messianic prophecy. But is it?

There are no NT references that state that Ezekiel 36:26 was speaking of the release of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost some 600 years later. Nor are there any references that regard what happened at Pentecost as a consequence of what was prophesied in Ezekiel. This is significant in regard to what we have been taught from the pulpit.

God was speaking through Ezekiel to the Israelites, trying to draw them back to himself. They needed a heart-change because they had become hard-hearted and rebellious towards him. We know that although this was God's desire, it didn't happen. Sure they changed in some ways because he allowed them to come back to their homeland from the exile in Babylon. However, the change didn't last. He had tried through Jeremiah¹ before this, but it failed, leading to their Babylonian exile. Even King David, some 400 years earlier, knew that God wanted this type of attitude.² In the end, Israel & Judah failed to comply for the third time and they were exiled divorce style³ into all the nations of the world (the *diaspora*) under the Romans in the 1st century AD.

So what really was God saying about giving them a new spirit?

Apart from our "spirit" and Holy "Spirit" the word "spirit" also means 'The fundamental, emotional, and activating principle of a person'⁴. For example we talk about a spirited person or a spirited horse which refers to their energy to do what they do. We use 'spirit' idioms that aren't referring to the spirit realm, such as: 'out of spirits'; 'broken spirit'; 'mean-spirited'; 'free spirit'; 'high spirited'; 'school spirit'; 'spirit of forgiveness'; 'generous spirit'; 'ANZAC spirit'. We can use the expressions "truculent in spirit"; "a spirited challenge" and "they set to it with spirit".

So "a new spirit in you" in Ezekiel could refer to a person's heart attitude, not the Holy Spirit.

The use of spirit can also relate to Kingdom matters when talking about a person's heart attitude and disposition. Take a look at this prophetic word as an example:

1 – Jeremiah 32:39

2 – Psalm 51:10

3 – "Israel was Divorced by Jesus" canberraforerunners.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Israel-was-Divorced-by-Jesus.pdf

4 – www.dictionary.com/browse/spirit

“I am refining you by testing your heart. Impurities in your character and nature will begin to rise to the top of your consciousness so that you can see clearly the things that need to be dealt with. This refining process will produce purity and sweetness of spirit. Set your heart to yield to this process, says the Lord.”⁵

The Bible also uses “spirit” in reference to a person’s character. Take 1 Peter 3:4 for example:

ISV⁶ *Instead, it should be the inner disposition of the heart, consisting in the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which God values greatly.*

KJV *But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.*

NET⁷ *but the inner person of the heart, the lasting beauty of a gentle and tranquil spirit, which is precious in God’s sight.*

Is “spirit” in 1 Peter talking about a person’s spirit or Holy Spirit? No.

Can you see that “spirit” in Ezekiel is not referring to Holy Spirit, but to the activating principle of a person?

The confusion comes when the same word ‘spirit’ is used to refer to different things in English Bibles. A person is left to interpret which spirit is being referred to. The same occurs in the Hebrew – as in the case with Ezekiel. The verse in question has *rûach* which translates to ‘spirit’, but this is the same word used in *Rûach HaKodesh* (the Spirit of God). No wonder Bible teachers think Ezekiel is a prophecy about the New Covenant’s release of the Spirit.

The same problem occurs in the Greek in 1 Peter. The Kingdom character of a woman is the exhibition of a quiet or tranquil “spirit” which translates from the Greek word *pneuma*. This is the same Greek word used for Holy Spirit, but, we know it’s not talking about the 3rd person of the Trinity. If we aren’t confused with 1 Peter, why are we confused with Ezekiel 36? Because we’ve been taught by Bible teachers that it’s messianic.

Interestingly our English word ‘spirit’ which we use to refer to something non-spiritual came from the Middle English word ‘spirit’ which came from the Latin word *spiritus* meaning ‘breath’. This is why the Roman Catholics use the Latin expression *spiritus sanctus* when referring to Holy Spirit. The word ‘spirit’ when referring to spiritual matters in English has the same origin. This is identical to the dual use of the Greek and the Hebrew word for ‘spirit’.

The rule that comes out of this is the reminder that we have to be careful transferring Old Covenant scripture into this New Covenant era because the two are mostly incompatible – the OC being based on Israel and the Law, the NC on grace and the Kingdom of God. We must also remember to consider the audience being addressed in the Bible. In this case the prophet was speaking to a rebellious nation who needed to refocus on who they were and to whom they belonged. They needed to be brought into alignment with heaven and God was going to help with that process.

If you not convinced of my proposition, here’s more instances of the different use of “spirit” for you to consider.

Job 20:3 (NKJV) – *I have heard the rebuke that reproaches me, and the spirit of my understanding causes me to answer.*

Psalms 51:10 (NKJV) – *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

5 – Small Straws In A Soft Wind by Marsha Burns (7/02/2020)

6 – International Standard Version

7 – New English Translation

Isaiah 57:15 (NKJV) – *For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.*

Proverbs 17:27 (NKJV) – *He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit.*

Proverbs 16:18 (NKJV) – *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*

Proverbs 16:19 (NKJV) – *Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.*

Proverbs 17:22 (NKJV) – *A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.*

Luke 1:80 (NKJV) – *So the child [John] grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.*

Luke 2:40 (NKJV) – *And the Child [Jesus] grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.*

Of course, we can get a different view from what various translators produce from these verses. For example:

Luke 1:80 (CSB⁸) – *The child grew up and became spiritually strong, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.*

Luke 1:80 (CEV⁹) – *As John grew up, God’s Spirit gave him great power. John lived in the desert until the time he was sent to the people of Israel.*

Luke 1:80 (EXB¹⁰) – *And so the child grew up and became strong in spirit [or in the Spirit]. John lived in the desert [wilderness] until the time when he came out to preach [appeared; was revealed] to Israel.*

Luke 1:80 (MSG¹¹) – *The child grew up, healthy and spirited. He lived out in the desert until the day he made his prophetic debut in Israel.*

Luke 1:80 (NIRV¹²) – *The child grew up, and his spirit became strong. He lived in the desert until he appeared openly to Israel.*

These translations make our task of understanding the Bible even more confusing. This is the common effect that translators have on Bible readers, by the way.¹³

So, be careful what you interpret from the Bible, because you could very well be mistaken. Always seek the mind of the King on everything you believe to be true. That’s the Kingdom way and the safest way to operate.

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10-2-2020

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8 – Christian Standard Bible

9 – Contemporary English Version

10 – Expanded Bible

11 – The Message

12 – New International Reader’s Version

13 – “How Bible Translators Shape Your Theology”

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