

The Role of the Spirit (*rûah*) in the Ministry of the Prophet Ezekiel

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Abstract

The role of the rûah Yhwh is emphasized in the Old Testament. The rûah is often regarded as Yhwh's agent in the accomplishment his purpose. Often in the Old Testament, the rûah is said to seize or enter into or fall upon a person. The rûah falling on a person refers to the general empowerment of that person to perform a given task. The rûah plays an active role in the prophet's ministry. When it is said that the Spirit of God seized or entered a prophet, it means that he is empowered for his prophetic ministry. The role of the Spirit is particularly pronounced in the ministry of the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel is often portrayed as a man seized by the in the Spirit of the Lord. The rûah seizing the prophet or entering him (Ezek 2:2) or falling upon him (Ezek 3:24), refers to the power of God at work in him, revealing to him what he is to say (Ezek 11:5) and enabled him to obediently fulfill his commission.

Key Words: *rûah*, Living Creatures, Breath, Revival, Restoration, Revelation, Inspiration.

Introduction

The role of the Spirit has been emphasized in the Scriptures. In Gen 1, God's Spirit is portrayed as the agency of God's creative activity. The *rûah* is also active in the anointing of kings and the Judges of Israel. The Judge did not lead in his own name or by his own genius; he was prepared for his office by a special gift and unction of God's Spirit, and by virtue of this gift he held his

command (Judg 6:34; 11:29; etc.). The role of *rûah* is much pronounced in the ministry of the prophets. The prophets are men who were directed by the Spirit of God. Of all the OT prophets, Ezekiel may well be described as “the prophet of the spirit;” the role of the Spirit of God is more pronounced in the ministry of Ezekiel than in any other prophet. Of a total of 389 occurrences of *rûah* in the Old Testament, 52 of these are found in Ezekiel. This demonstrates that the role of the spirit is outstanding in the book of Ezekiel. This article examines the role of the *rûah-yhwh* (Spirit of God) in the ministry of the prophet Ezekiel.

The Role of the Spirit in Ezekiel’s Inaugural Vision (Ezek 1:4-14)

The agency of the Spirit is already evident in Ezekiel’s inaugural vision (Ezek 1:4-28). This vision shows something of the awesome power of God breaking into Ezekiel’s life and consciousness and empowering him to perform a defined task. In this vision, Ezekiel perceives supernatural realities hidden from the eyes of other mortals. In 1:4-8a, Ezekiel describes what he saw in his ecstatic rapture. “As I looked.... (v.4a). The phrase, “I looked” (*wā’ēre*’ from the verb *rā’āh*, 1:4) points to two types of roles that prophets played: *rō’eh/hōzēh* - “visionary,” and *nābî*’ - “God’s spokesman” (Block, 1997).

Ezekiel describes what he saw: “a stormy wind” (*rûah se’ārāh*) coming from the north (*hassapôn*), accompanied by “a great cloud” (*ānān gādôl*) and “fire” (*’ēs*). The “stormy wind” in 1:4 is characteristic of theophanies, just as the cloud and fire accompanying it. The stormy wind (*rûah se’ārāh*) is the manifestation of Yhwh’s glory (*keḥôd-yhwh*) and the power of Yahweh’s presence. As the book of Ezekiel unfolds, the term *rûah* will be double-edged, connoting at one time “the wind of judgment” and at another time “the breath of life.”

In the midst of the fiery cloud, the prophet saw four bizarre looking figures, which he refers to as “living creatures” (*'arba' hayyôṭ*, Ezek 1:5). These living creatures have a human form (*dumûṭ 'ādām*, 1:5), each has four faces (1:6a) and four wings (1:6b). Their legs have no knee joints, which made them very stable, and the sole of their feet glistened like polished bronze (1:7). Attached to their bodies, beneath their wings, were the hands of a human (v.8). These bizarre “living creatures” are also called *kerûbîm* in Ezek 10:1, 15, 20. Isa 6:2 refers to them as *serāphîm*. According to L. C. Allen (1998) and D. I. Block (1997), the four figures reflect “the universal omnipotence and omniscience of God.” The vision, which Ezekiel saw in Babylon, demonstrates to him that has not abandoned Israel to its fate. It also shows Yahweh’s sovereignty is not restricted to Jerusalem, it is a universal sovereignty; Yahweh’s dominion extends even to Babylon, Israel’s land of captivity. Ezekiel’s inaugural vision (Ezek 1:4-28) serves as an authentication of his call as a spokesman for God (Cody, 1984).

The *rûah* as Vital Energy (Ezek 1:15-21)

As Ezekiel looks, he notices that each of the four living creatures “moved straight ahead”. In 1:12, 20-21, Ezekiel explains the choreographed synchronized movement of the living creatures and their wheels: “Wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went” (cf. 1:12). The locomotive power of the creatures is provided by the spirit. The spirit (*harûah*) is the moving force behind the living creatures; the vital energy or impulse by which God acted upon them. Just as the creatures moved at the impulse of the Spirit (1:12) so their corresponding wheels also moved at its impulse (De Vries, 2013). The wheels could move because the *rûah* of life (*rûah hahayyāh*) of the living

creatures was in the wheels (cf. Ezek 10:17). The LXX translates *rûah hahayyāh* as *pneūma zoēs* and the Vulgate has *spiritus vitae*. We may understand *rûah hahayyāh* not as the spirit of the animals but as the life-giving Spirit of Yahweh. The movement of the wheels (*ôpannîm*) is completely subject to God's "spirit," that is, his power and influence (Siegman, 1961).

In v.4, the word, *rûah*, has a meteorological meaning and denotes "wind" (i.e., a stormy wind came out of the north); but in v.20, *rûah* refers to the life-giving, energizing power of God. We may interpret *harûah* here as the "breath of life", the divinely-given animating, vivifying breath. Authors like Block (1997) refer to the *rûah* as the animating spirit which determines the direction and movement of the heavenly vehicle. Constable (2020) avers that the mobility of the wheels points to the mobility of God. The mobility of the wheels suggests God's omnipresence and omnipotence. It also indicates that God's sovereignty is not limited to Jerusalem; it is a universal sovereignty which extends even to Babylon, Israel's land of captivity. A vision of God's mobility was for Ezekiel and the exiles a message not to despair.

The *rûah* as the Source of Energizing Power (Ezek 2)

In his earlier vision, Ezekiel "saw" living creatures (*rûah hahayyāh*), whose movement was dictated by the mobility of God's spirit. In Chapter 2, the prophet is led into another visionary journey. In a visionary experience, Ezekiel was brought into the presence of God, and is made to see the glory of Yahweh. The prophet is overwhelmed by this theophanic experience. He was struck with awe at the face of God. His first reaction when confronted with Yahweh and his glory is to fall on his face. Ezekiel does not only have a visionary experience but also an auditory experience. For, while he still lies prostrate, he hears a

voice speaking, commanding him to rise on his feet: “He said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you” (Ezek 2:1). The source of the voice is not explicitly stated. It is to be supposed that the voice belongs to Yahweh. Although the one speaking commands Ezekiel to rise, Ezekiel cannot rise of his own volition. But the energizing spirit (*rûah*) enters the stunned prophet, revitalizes him and set him on his feet (Ezek 2:2) (Block, 1997; De Vries, 2013). Here the *rûah* is portrayed as an energizing power.

Ezekiel, having been revitalized by the Spirit of God, is enabled to hear a voice speaking to him (Ezek 2:3-4). The speech opens with Yahweh addressing the prophet as “son of man/mortal” (*ben-’āḏām*, 2:1). God addresses the prophet as *ben ’adam* (Son of Man, or mortal) (Hayyim. 2011). Yahweh will consistently use this phrase when addressing Ezekiel. In fact, Ezekiel’s name appears only twice in the entire book (Ezek 1:3; 24:24). The term *ben-’āḏām* connotes the prophet’s weakness as a mere man in comparison to God, but energized by the spirit, Ezekiel can stand in the presence of Yahweh. Ezekiel is not only energized by the spirit, he becomes, from that point on, a man empowered by Yahweh’s Spirit. Ezekiel embodies the power of the Spirit in his own person. In the prophetic ministry of Ezekiel, the *rûah* does not only have an authenticating role, it also has a transforming role (De Vries, 2013). With Ezekiel’s prophetic calling authenticated, he now receives his mission: “I am sending you. . . and you shall say to them” (Ezek 2:3). The phrase, “I am sending you” (*šôlēḥ ’ānî*, 2:3a), as Darr (2001) has noted, constitutes the prophet’s “basic authorization” (cf. Isa 6:8; Jer 1:7). The text minces no words about the people to whom Ezekiel is sent - they are “the people of Israel” (Ezek 2:3). The “people of Israel” are further referred to as

“a nation of rebels,” “impudent and stubborn” (v.3-4); a rebellious house (*bêt merî*).

The role of the *rûah* is not limited to chapters 1-2, the role of the Spirit of the Lord (*rûah-yhwh*) is repeatedly emphasized throughout the book: in Ezek 2:2 “The spirit entered me as he spoke to me”; in 3:24, “The spirit entered into me, and set me on my feet; and ... said to me”; in 11:5, “The spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and he said to me.” Sometimes the prophet is said to be seized by the “hand of the Lord” (*yad-yhwh*). The phrase, “the hand of the Lord” (*yad-yhwh*), occurs seven times in the book of Ezekiel (Ezek 1:3; 3:14, 22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1; 40:1). In the book of Ezekiel, the spirit of Yhwh (*rûah-yhwh*) and the hand of Yhwh (*yad-yhwh*) have the same connotation of power; both phrases refer to the same divine power at work in Ezekiel. The phrase, “hand of the Lord” in 1:3 is used metaphorically of power, the overwhelming force with which God operates. Such a connotation of power is the sense the phrase is used elsewhere in Deut 4:34; 5:15; 6:21; Ps 136:12. In the context of a prophetic call, the “hand of the Lord” (*yad-yhwh*) describes the power with which God grips and energizes a person so that he is empowered to carry out his prophetic task (cf. 1 Kgs 18:46). When it is said that the hand of God is on Ezekiel, it means that he has been empowered by God for his prophetic ministry.

The *rûah* as Agency of Conveyance

In many instances, Ezekiel is portrayed as a man seized by the hand of God and under the control of the Spirit of the Lord (Ezek 3:22; cf. 33:22). By the hand and spirit of Yhwh the prophet is transported in the spirit into the presence of Yhwh. Sometimes Ezekiel is described as being lifted up by a *rûah* and transported from place to place (Ezek 8:1 ff.; 37:1; 40:1 ff.) (Block, 1997;

Roberts, 1971). For instance, the spirit is said to lift Ezekiel in the divine visions (*mar'ôṭ'ēlōhîm*) to behold the glory of Yhwh (*keḇôḏ-yhwh*) (Ezek 3:12, 14; 8:3; 11:1, 24; 43:5) (De Vries, 2013). The prophet reports that “the spirit lifting him up, carrying him away to the Exiles in Babylon (3:14; 11:24), to the Temple in Jerusalem (8:3; 11:1), to the inner court within the ‘new’ Temple (Ezek 43:5), and to a valley filled with dry bones (Ezek 37:1). The *rûah* enables the prophet to be in a place where he can experience the prophetic event, or to witness the atrocity taking place among the Israelites. For instance, within the divine vision (Ezek 8:1-11:25), Ezekiel was lifted up and brought to the east gate of the Temple in Jerusalem. There, he saw (in a visionary experience) twenty-five men devising iniquity. In 11:4, Ezekiel is told to ‘prophesy against them’ (*hinnāḇē' 'ālêhem hinnāḇē'ben-'ādām*). Just as the voice commanded Ezekiel to prophesy, the “spirit of Yahweh” fell upon him, empowering him to perform the prophetic role.

The spirit of *Yhwh* “falling” (verb: *nāpal*) on a prophet is unique in the OT. The *rûah* falling or entering a person, whether for prophecy or for more general empowerment (cf. Judg 14:6, 19; 15:14; 1 Sam 11:6; 16:13), refers to the power of God at work in the person. The pressure of Yahweh upon the prophet Ezekiel is emphasized by the additional comment that the hand of the Lord was strong upon him (*weyaḏ-yhwh ('ādōnāy) 'ālay ḥzāqāh*, Ezek 3:14). The ‘hand of the Lord’ (*yaḏ-yhwh*) is a metaphor for God’s power. The “hand of the Lord” falling on a prophet or seizing a prophet or “being strong” on him denotes the empowerment of that prophet by God. Whatever one makes of Ezekiel’s statements: “the spirit lifted me up (3:2) or “the hand of the Lord God fell upon me” (*wattippōl 'ālay šām yaḏ-Yhwh*, 8:1), what is emphasized is

that the prophet Ezekiel is unmistakably under the power and influence of Yahweh's Spirit (Bowman, 2004).

Just as the *rûah* was involved in the movement of the chariot and throne (Ezek 1), so too, the *rûah* moves Ezekiel. When it is said that the *rûah* moves the prophet, what is implied is not so much about physical movement; it is about revelation and inspiration. To say that the prophet is divinely inspired means that he is prompted by the Spirit of Yahweh to speak in his name. Such an empowerment gives authority to the oracle the prophet has to proclaim.

The spirit of Yahweh falling on the prophet both inspires the prophet on what to say and empowers him to courageously carry out his task. The divine breath/Spirit effectively breathes (inspires) the word the prophet speaks. Mickelsen (1963) says of the prophets, that "when they spoke (and, by inference, when they wrote), with a God-directed sense of urgency, they were speaking and writing as divinely energized persons." The *rûah* here is portrayed as an agent or dynamic force which breathes life into a person and enables him to perform a task. The *rûah* enables Ezekiel to receive God's word, and enables him to obediently fulfil his commission.

The *rûah-yhwh* as Agent of Spiritual Renewal (Ezek 36)

Ezek 36 portrays *rûah-yhwh* as the agent of spiritual renewal. Earlier, Ezekiel had stressed that infidelity to God's law was the cause of the exile, and that by punishing his sinful people Yahweh satisfied his honour. In 36:21ff, Ezekiel announced that Yahweh would now act for his name's sake and re-vindicate his divine honour by restoring Israel. God will not only act to put an end to the exile and restore Israel to its land, God will also work on the human volition to make him obey the divine will.

Ezekiel foresees a time when God will implant a new center of volition in the hearts of the people. God will remove “the heart of stone (*lēbhā’eben*) from their flesh and give them “a heart of flesh” (*lēb bāsār*, Ezek 36:26f; 11:19f). God will purify them, give them a “new heart” (*lēb hādāš*) and put a new spirit (*rūaḥ ḥādāšāh*) within them and cause them to walk in “my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances” (Ezek 36:25-27).

The mention of a ‘new spirit’ (*rūaḥ ḥādāšāh*) in 36:26 suggests that there is an old one, just as the reference to a “new heart” (*lēb hādāš*) implies there is an old heart, which the prophet refers to as the heart of stone (*lēbhā’eben*). The “new spirit” which God will infuse in them is also referred to as God’s own spirit (*rūḥī*, Ezek 36:27a.). According to Block (1997), to put a new spirit (Yahweh’s Spirit) within his people is obviously associated with the renewal of the covenant, but here it seems to relate more immediately to the rebirth of the nation, her receiving a new life. What the prophet foresees here is a renewal of the people which is to be effected by God himself. Yahweh’s *rūaḥ*, which is here portrayed as God’s agent of renewal, will bring about the transformation of the heart and the spirit of his people, from stubbornness and recalcitrance to a willingness to obey the divine Will. In this way, Ezekiel introduces something new to the understanding of the activity of the spirit. In 36:27, the new *rūaḥ* which Yahweh will put within the people becomes the driving force that empowers the locus of the moral will, ‘the heart’ (*lēb*). The reformation of the inner will of the people is meant to produce: so that they may “follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.”

Clearly Ezek 36 portrays the divine *rūaḥ* as an agent of spiritual renewal. This renewal involves the transformation of the heart and volition of man. In the promise of a new heart and a new

spirit, Ezekiel echoes Jeremiah 31:31-34. Jeremiah had declared that God would make a New Covenant (*berît hādāšāh*, Jer 31:31) with the “house of Israel” (*bêṭ yiśrā’ēl*) and the “house of Judah” (*bêṭ yehûdāh*). In this New Covenant, God will write his law on their heart and make them obey it. Ezekiel appears to have been influenced by Jeremiah’s new covenant oracle. In the context of Jeremiah, only the writing by God’s own hand on their hearts (31:33) can overcome their stubbornness and prepare them for loyal obedience (Keown, Scalise, Smothers, 1998). God’s law written on the hearts of his people will effect in the minds and hearts of the people the will to obey (Miller, 2001). If we juxtapose Ezekiel’s announcement of the infused *rûah* (Ezek 36:26-27) with Jeremiah’s description of the new covenant (Jer 31:33), we notice some similarities between the two texts:

Jer 31:33	Ezek 36:27-28
I will have put my Torah within	And my spirit I will put within
	you, them,
And I will be their God,	And you shall be my people,
And they shall be my people.	And I will be your God.

The spiritual renewal which Jeremiah attributes to the infusion of the divine Torah, Ezekiel ascribes to the infusion of God’s spirit (*rûah Yhwh*). In both texts, the result is the renewal of the covenant relationship between the people and God (Block, 1989). For Ezekiel, obedience will derive from a new spirit and a new heart; for Jeremiah, it will stem from God’s writing the law on the heart. God will affect the human heart so that people can keep the covenant requirements (Miller, 2001). In 36:26, the provision of the new heart is explained as a removal of the heart of stone (*lêbhā’eben*) from their flesh and its replacement with a heart of flesh (*lêb bāšār*). Such a metaphor points to a radical spiritual

revitalization of the nation. Though the regenerative power of the *rûaḥis* emphasized in Ezek 36:26-27, the transformative and re-creative power of the spirit of God (*rûaḥ Yhwh*) is given prominence in Ezek 37:1-14. The announcement of Yahweh's infusion of his own *rûaḥ* is repeated in 37:14, suggesting that the teaching in 37:1-14 is an exposition of the notion introduced in 36:26-27 (Block, 1989). The *rûaḥ* is portrayed as an animating power which effects spiritual renewal.

The *rûaḥ Yhwh* as Agency of Animation (Ezek 37:1-14)

Ezek 37:1-14 portrays the *rûaḥ* as the animating, vitalizing force. As an “agency of animation,” the *rûaḥ* operates internally, like the breath of a living creature in Chapter 1:15-21. In Hebrew thought, it is the breath of life (*nišmat ḥayyîm*) from God that gives life to created beings. This notion is reflected in Gen 2:7. Here the J writer tells us that God, after shaping (verb *yāšar* - to form, shape) man (*'ādām*) “from the dust of the land (*'ādāmāh*),” blew the breath of life (*nišmat ḥayyîm*) into his nostrils, and man became a living being” (*nepheš ḥayyāh*, Gen 2:7). As in Gen 2:7, the *rûaḥ* is portrayed as the vitalizing agent in Ezek 37:1-14.

The vitalizing power of the divine spirit is reflected in several texts of the Old Testament. Isa 42:5 describes Yahweh as the one “who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it” who gives “breath” (*nešāmāh*) to people on it [the earth] and spirit (*rûaḥ*) to those who walk on it” (Block, 1989). In Ezekiel, this animating sense of *rûaḥ* is more outstanding than in Isaiah. The animating effect of the presence of the spirit is described in the opening vision (Ezek 1). However, no text in the entire OT portrays the vivifying power of the divine spirit as dramatically as 37:1-14. In 37:1, the hand of Yahweh (*yāḏ-yhwh*) is said to come upon the prophet Ezekiel and transport

him in the spirit into the middle of a valley that was full of very dry bones (Feinberg, 1969). The bones which the prophet sees are interpreted as representing “the whole house of Israel” (*kol-bêṭ yisrā’ēl*, Ezek 37:11) in apparently hopeless condition in exile (Feinberg, 1969; Brownlee, 1971; von Rad, 1965). Jerusalem had been destroyed (587 B.C.), and the Babylonian exile is akin to the death of the nation.

The central issue in Ezek 37:1-14 is introduced by the question that Yahweh poses to the prophet: “Mortal, can these bones live?” (37:3a). Ezekiel’s response, “O Lord God, you know” (37:3b) draws the reader’s attention to the prophetic word which Yahweh commands Ezekiel to utter to the bones. In reply to the prophet’s agnostic answer, Yahweh commands him to prophesy over the lifeless bones. i.e., to pronounce God’s powerful word over the bones that they may be restored to life (Ezek 37:4-6). The words declared by the prophet result in the energization and revivification of the bones; the bones came together, and flesh came upon them. Though the bones came together, with flesh covering them, what was lacking in them was the regenerative life force (the breath of life, *nišmat hayyîm*) that will bring life into them (Ezek 37:7f; West, 1971; Feinberg, 1969). Therefore God, again, commands the prophet to “prophesy” to the breath (*hinnābe’ ’el- hārûah*, 37:9), and summon it (the breath of life) to come from the “four winds” (*me’arba’ rûhôt*) to “breathe” life upon the bones that they may live (37:9; Eichrodt, 1970; West, 1971). The speech of the prophet makes what is said a reality.

Authors like Darr (2001), Allen (1998), Breck (2001), Zimmerli (1983) and Achard (1992) understand the *rûah* as a vitalizing force. As he prophesied, the spirit of life came upon the bones and they were revitalized (Ezek 37:7-10). According to Grey (2009), the prophetic word pronounced by Ezekiel at the Yahweh’s

command has a ‘creative’ and ‘exercitive’ force. There is a play on the term *rûah* in Ezek 37:9: “Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy “to the breath” (*’el-hārû^h*), prophesy, mortal, and say “to the breath” (*’el-hārû^h*): Thus says the Lord God: Come “from the four winds” (*mē’arba’ rûhôt*), O breath (*hārû^h*), and breathe (*ûpehî* – from the verb: *nāpah* – to breathe) upon these slain, “that they may live” (*weyihyû*: from *hāyāh* – to live, be).” The *rûah* is called forth from the “four winds” (*mē’arba’ rûhôt*, v.9) or the four “directions.” The *rûah* that the prophet summoned by his prophetic word is the “breath of life” (*nišmaṭ ḥayyîm*), the life-force that animates all living creatures (*nepeš ḥayyāh*). The text is ambiguous. The “four winds” is a Semitic expression for the four corners of the earth. Ezek 37:1-14 concerns the restoration of the nation from exile. The terms, “breath,” “wind” and “spirit,” are renderings of the same Hebrew word *rûah*. The verb “to breathe” (*ûpehî*) in v. 9 is from the root *nph* (*nāpah*). It is the same verb used in Gen 2:7 to describe how God, having formed man (*’ādām*) from the soil (*’ādāmāh*), breathed into its nostrils the breath of life (*nišmaṭ ḥayyîm*) (Darr, 2001). Here, as in Gen 2:7, *rûah* is the animating principle. With the breath of life infused into the lifeless and dry bones they are quickened and revived. As Allen (1998) has said, the spirit of God which brings about the re-energization of the bones is a powerful creative force akin to that in Gen 1.

The text points to how God will revive the nation of Israel quasi moribund in the land of exile. The prophet proclaims that Israel will be gathered from the four quarters of the globe to which they are scattered (cf. Isa 43:5-6; Jer 31:8) (Feinberg, 1969). The bones which the prophet saw in the vision are interpreted as representing “the whole house of Israel” (Ezek 37:11), in a hopeless condition of exile. The *rûah* is a “breath of life,” an agent of revivification of a nation quasi moribund in exile. The exile was

the ‘grave’ into which Israel had been laid. This fact is underlined in 37:12-13. Here, the bones are portrayed as buried in graves. God announces that he will open their graves, bring them forth from those graves (exile), and restore them to their homeland. The expression, “I will open your grave...,” signals God’s intervention to bring about a new life. If the nation is to rise again, as Schedl (1972) said, this can only be by the reviving power of God’s Spirit. The revivification of the bones symbolizes the revivification of the nation. Such a revivification is a form of national disinterment. Brownlee (1971) writes that the revivification of the nation quasi moribund is also akin to the work of a new creation.

Evidently Ezekiel portrays Yahweh’s *rûah* as the agent of the revivification of the Exiles who are quasi moribund in the land of exile, and whose “breath”, i.e., hope of survival, is gone. It is a revival which is effected by God’s life-giving spirit (Achar, 1992; Allen, 1990). The revival of the nation demonstrates Yahweh’s power and being. God demonstrates his life-giving power, not only by initiating life, but also by re-animating the dead and re-energizing them with “breath” (*rûah*) so that they will live (Darr, 2001; Allen, 1998). Feinberg (1969) held that the revival of the dry bones symbolizes revival of Israel to spiritual life. The restoration of the people of Israel will thus be a singular miracle effected by the Spirit of God (Schedl, 1972). It is a resurrection which consists concretely in the restoration of the “house of Israel.” To the revived “bones” God will give his spirit within them so that they may live (37:14). God’s bringing them into the land of Israel is further evidence that the passage is speaking figuratively of the national restoration of Israel, and not of a physical resurrection of dead persons (Feinberg, 1969).

Already in Ezek 2:3-4, the “people of Israel” are referred to as “a nation of rebels,” “imprudent and stubborn” (2:3-4); a rebellious

house (*bêt merî*), an insubordinate family, “refusing to listen” These expressions are used to describe Israel’s recalcitrance toward Yahweh (Block, 1997). Ezekiel must proclaim God’s word to them. Ezek 37:14 indicates that it is not just the dead who are raised, as if the *rûah* is ‘the breath of life’ alone, the rebellious house of Israel is also revived by Yahweh’s bestowal of ‘a new heart’ and ‘a new spirit’ (36:26-27). In 37:14, Yahweh’s *rûah* will bring life, in 36:27-28, the infusion of Yahweh’s *rûah* ensures obedience to Yahweh law.

The *rûah* as Agency of Prophetic Inspiration

When we talk of inspiration of the Bible we mean that God or the Spirit of God inspired or moved certain chosen instruments to act or perform an action; this is evident in the Scriptures. For instance, the phenomenon of prophecy was attributed to the spirit of God that filled the prophet (Num 11:25-26) and empowered him to speak in God’s name. Moses and the Prophets of Israel were themselves conscious of speaking to the people in the name of God (e.g. Exod 4:15-16; 19:7-8; Jer 1:9; 20:7-9; Ezek 38:1). The Prophets of Israel were primarily moved by the spirit of God to speak the word of God to their contemporaries (Igbo, 2020).

The involvement of the spirit of God in the inspiration of the OT prophets is well known. The notion is given a classic expression in 2 Pet 1:21: “No prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit (*pneumatos hagiou*) spoke from God.” The involvement of the *rûah* in Ezekiel’s prophetic inspiration is hinted at in several passages. Examples of this phenomenon are found in Ezek 2:2, “The spirit entered me as he spoke to me,” and 3:24, “The spirit entered me and...said to me.” The most explicit statement of his prophetic inspiration in

Ezekiel is found in 11:5a, “The spirit of Yahweh fell upon me, and he said to me.”

The role of the *rûah* as the agency of prophetic inspiration receives its most explicit statement in Ezek 13. This text represents a woe oracle against false prophets, who posed as proclaimers of the will of God. When the services of the prophets were required they would employ special techniques and instruments to work themselves into an ecstatic frenzy which they interpreted as seizure by the spirit of God. Once they were in this state, whatever utterances they might make was interpreted as an expression of the will of God. The great prophets of Israel deliberately rejected such artificial methods for determining the divine will. Their messages were based instead upon direct and personal encounters with Yahweh at his own initiative. Instead of emphasizing the role of the *rûah*, whose apparent influence could be manipulated or coerced (cf. 1 Kgs 22), they based their authority on “the word of Yahweh” (*debar-yhwh*), which came to them almost as an objective concrete entity directly from God himself (Block, 1989).

Conclusion

The *rûah-yhwh* is the power, the overwhelming force with which God operates. It is a dynamic force; it refers to the power with which God energizes a person so that he will be able to carry out his task. The spirit of Yhwh “falling” on or entering a person is unique in the OT. This is evident in the life of the OT prophets, and very pronounced in the life and ministry of the prophet Ezekiel. The *rûah* plays an active role in the prophet’s ministry. The *rûah*, coming upon a prophet denotes the empowerment by God and also authenticate his role as God’s messenger. The *rûah-yhwh* is a spirit of prophetic empowerment. The *rûah* is also a spirit of revelation and inspiration. It both reveals God’s mind to the prophet and inspires and empowers him to effectively and obediently fulfill his commission.

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