Wind And God's Spirit

The Spirit
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Used as an image in the Scriptures, wind often has a negative meaning. Yet, at other times, the symbol of wind has a decidedly positive meaning. The image of wind covers a lot of territory. *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* comments that wind in Scripture can picture lack of substance and mean adversity or changeableness. The writer continues; "Only when the pictures of wind connects to the person of God do we find more positive meanings.

So it is at least apparently, a study of wind is a study in contrasts, we can say a study in opposites. All of this makes wind one of the most complex images in the Scriptures and, by that token, an image can be surprising.

One person actually wrote to the church awhile back, and he stated that the air around us is the Holy Spirit. Well obviously, he had confused the symbol with the thing for which the symbol stood. Today I want to talk about the symbol of wind. My approach would be to review five physical characteristics of wind and see what each one can teach us about the Spirit.

First, wind can be titanically powerful. The major upper atmospheric winds are actually set up by the rotation of the earth. An EF5 tornado registers speeds in excess of 200 mph. I will avoid the more sensational examples of wind power, focusing instead on examples more interesting to me at least than tangled buildings and demolished homes.

As one example, we know that wind is capable of cleaning the atmosphere of colloidal substances such as clouds. In no time at all, practically, winds can clear the air of smoke, dust, and haze. Of course we know what wind is powerful enough to disperse today it can gather tomorrow.

Second example, consider that wind broadcasts seeds through a process called anemochory. This is a very important function of wind, one that we do not often speak about. Through a similar process, called anemophily, wind can disperse pollen. It happens all the time, as in the case of oak, and grasses.

Third example, wind can damage soil over time, that is erosion. Indeed it can move sand from one continent to another. Saharan sand in North Africa, actually is found in the Caribbean. Any number of scriptures speak of the power of wind. I will only mention...
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two.

**Job 1:18-19** [a servant informs Job] While he as still speaking, another also came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their older brother’s house, and suddenly a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young men, and they are dead; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

**Ezekiel 13:11** [God is speaking about the fate of a wall made with untempered mortar] "Say to those who plaster it with untempered mortar, that it will fall. There will be flooding rain, and you, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall tear it down."

A second and more interesting aspect of wind is its independence. Wind almost appears to be impulsive or whimsical, if we were to think about it terms of human behaviors. Its apparent autonomy, this freedom that it displays to do whatever it pleases, make it a splendid emblem of God's sovereignty and at the same time of mankind's weakness.

Wind by virtue of its strength, but also its unpredictable changeableness, frustrates mankind. It leaves him pondering or wondering what is next, and in fact when it comes to powerful winds, all we can do is hide, seeking shelter for protection.

The wind presents difficulties to man. Ever try to catch the wind? I remember as a boy, the frustration I encountered as I attempted to catch and stomp on small dust devils that we often experienced in Southern California. They were no more than a foot high, and so enticing to a kid, spurting as they did, darting, spiriting about erratically, quickly, existing only a few seconds. Unless I accidentally collided with one, I was generally unable to catch it. Mankind has difficulty catching the wind; perhaps the best examples of his successful attempts to do so are sailing ships, where the sails catch it propelling the vessel.

Although canyons and valleys do channel it, mankind himself is not able to control or channel the wind effectively, at least on any large scale. Mankind is generally ineffective in damming up the wind, or storing it, except on modest scales.

For example, we can use a windmill to run a generator which charges a battery, then when the wind stops we can turn the battery on to power this and that. That is the type of storing the wind on a fairly small scale. Of course man is not able to stop the wind.
from blowing.

The wind's independence, though its perceived characteristic of wandering around at its own will is certainly more apparent than real. The word wandering comes from the same root as the word wind.

**Amos 4:13** For behold, He who forms mountains, and creates the wind, who declare to man what his thought is, and makes the morning darkness, who treads the high places of the earth— the Lord of hosts is His name.

This points out that God creates the wind. He controls it. I will mention three examples. There are many more.

**Jonah 1:4** [Holman] Then the Lord hurled a violent wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose on the sea that the ship threatened to break apart.

**Isaiah 30:30** [God's Word translation] The Lord will make His majestic voice heard. [Hold onto that word, voice, we will come back to the same Hebrew word shortly.] He will come down with all His might, with furious anger, with fire storms, windstorms, rainstorms, and hailstones.

**Matthew 8:26-27** [Common English Bible] [This of course is the well known example where Christ calmed the storm.] He [that is Christ] said to them, Why are you afraid, you people of weak faith? Then He got up and gave orders to the winds and the lake, and there was a great calm. The people were amazed and said, What kind of person is this? Even the winds and the lake obey Him.

In summary, the wind appears to us to be independent and intractable, but is in fact controlled by the sovereign God. But, why does the wind appear so independent, so intractable, to us? To answer that question, we need to turn to the third point about the wind's physical characteristic.

Wind is invisible. We cannot see it. One of the two Hebrew nouns generally translated wind is ruach, which is the word for spirit as well. E.W. Bullinger points out that *ruach*, in
whatever sense it is used, always represents that which is invisible except by its manifestations. The invisible wind may raise dust, as with those pesky dust devils which so bedeviled and outfoxed me as a boy, but the dust is not the wind, just its manifestation.

It is in the New Testament where the classic connection between wind and invisibility appears. You know it well, please turn to John 3. Here the Greek word is pneuma, wind is often translated as spirit, although it means wind, and in that sense it is just like the Hebrew word ruach, which is also translated sometimes as wind and sometimes as spirit.

**John 3:8** [Holman] The wind blows where it pleases, [independence] and you hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. [invisibility] So it is with everyone born of the spirit.

What is by far the most positive treatment of wind in the Scriptures, Christ connects God’s Spirit with the wind, stressing its invisibility as well as its independence.

Please turn to I Kings 19. I will be going into the fourth point about wind’s physical features. This fourth point permits us to make the connection between wind and words, or wind and voice. It is here that a study of wind really starts to become interesting.

Remember I said that a study of wind is a study of contrasts or opposites. So, at this point, I need to call out the fact that wind does not need to be powerful. It does not have to be overwhelming or fearsome or destructive. It can be a very light and gentle breeze. It can be bracing, invigorating, even refreshing.

In I Kings 19 we find the use of both concepts of wind. Powerful gale and gentle breeze. It is quite an interesting scripture.

**I Kings 19:11-12** [Contemporary English Version] [God is speaking to Elijah] Go out, and stand on the mountain. I want you to see Me when I pass by. [This is going to be one of those circumstances where someone sees God. The pertinent questions become, How does Elijah come to see Him? Where does the prophet find God?] All at once, a strong wind shook the mountain and shattered the rocks. But the Lord was not in the wind. Next, there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. Then there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. Finally, there was a gentle breeze.
The Biblical paraphrase called *The Voice* uses the term, “a calm breeze.” At least two versions use the term “a gentle blowing.” However, other versions focus on the quietness associated with this breeze. For example, Wycliffe renders it, “a hissing of the wind.” The editors of one version gloss the term “gentle breeze” with the term “hardly a sound.” The King James Versions famously use the term, “a still small voice.” Many versions call it “a low whisper” or “a soft whisper.” Clearly, this gentle breeze is connected with a quiet voice.

Let us delve a bit further into the nature of this quiet wind, this gentle breeze. The Hebrew noun translated variously as breeze or wind or voice is *kole*. The root means, to call aloud. *Kole* has a number of meanings: noise, sound, thunder, proclamation. Importantly, however, *kole* is most often translated as voice, as in Isaiah 30:30, it talks about the voice of the Eternal.

Its first use appears in Genesis 3:8, where Adam and Eve “heard the voice of God, [as He was] walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze.” In I Kings 19:12, that same word *kole*, with its descriptors, becomes poetically, “a still small voice.” That is where Elijah found God.

He manifested Himself, He expressed Himself, in the gentle voice. The voice of a gentle breeze. If you read the entire account of I Kings 19:9-18, you will note that as God passed by, Elijah never did see Him, not in the sense that Jacob must have seen Him, or in the sense Abraham saw God, or Moses saw God. Elijah perceived God through the sense of sound, not sight, through what he heard, through God's voice, and through God's words.

One is reminded of Paul's comments, recorded in II Corinthians 5.

**II Corinthians 5:7** For we walk by faith, not by sight.

The apostle fills in some details about the species of this kind of faith in Romans 10.

**Romans 10:17** So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

What we need to do is more precisely state the connections between wind, this gentle breeze, and the voice, and words. As an approach, we need to ask, “What makes voice work?”
Consider that breath, on a small scale, is wind. This is more than poetry; even to this day we perceive of breath as wind. For example, when we observe his labored breathing, we say that a runner has lost his wind. When we fall on your back, the fall can, as we say, knock the wind out of you. When a person finds it hard to breathe due to over exertion, we say, he has become winded, or someone who speaks overlong, he is long-winded.

**Job 16:3** (Expanded Bible) (Job responds to Eliphaz) ñWill your long-winded speeches never end?ò

Many translations use ñwindy wordsò or ñwords of wind.ò So on a micro level, breath is wind. What is more, this wind or breath is a perquisite to voice. It is necessary for speech. Exhaled breaths are minuscule, barely audible, gusts of wind or air. We could say just breathy puffs. But, breaths can become more than puffs of air. In normal human beings, the spirit in man works with breath, the spirit shapes that breath, brings it under control, the spirit in man harnesses that breath, and the spirit in man disciplines that breath.

What is the result of a spirit's influence on breath? It is speech, it is words. We speak words, and we speak them with our voice.

My point is, the wind, when worked on by the spirit in man, shaped and conditioned and controlled by the spirit in man, can become more than just meaningless grunts, more than whining, whistling wind. Wind then becomes what the Greeks recognized as *logos*, words, but more importantly, *logos* is not just the word that appears in a book but it is something that has meaning. They may be hateful words, or they may be comforting words, or anything in between.

The nature of the words depends on the nature, or we could say, on the disposition or orientation, of the spirit in man which forms the breath into words. You see, the nature of the words coincides with the spirit in man which gives breath its voice.

Voice is the controlled, sensate operation of breath, wind, by a spirit. This is what a young child is doing when he learns to speak. Through a process which I believe we do not understand at all, the baby is learning to bring puffs of wind, his breath, under the control of his spirit. His spirit in man is developing the ability to translate thoughts into words, in order to facilitate communication with other spirits in man, that is, other people, like mommy and daddy. The spirit in man gains voice as it learns to discipline
breath effectively.

We think in words. Think about that for a moment. When you think, you are thinking in words. Now, I suspect that thoughts originate deep down in the subconscious and we can say that that is a conscience in man. I do not know whether it is or not. But at that particular subconscious level, they are basically worthless until they become manifested as words. You may not write or speak those words but you are thinking your thoughts through words.

This is all a bit analogous. James comments that “faith devoid of works is dead.” Your faith is demonstrated by your works. Likewise, thought without words is dead. Thoughts go nowhere, they accomplish nothing, until attached to words by the spirit in man. Once thoughts are wrapped in the superstructure or the framework of words, you can manipulate those thoughts, refine them, and just as importantly, you can then communicate those thoughts.

We have been talking about this breath disciplined by a spirit phenomenon in terms of children and in terms of the spirit in man. We will look at it in terms of God's Spirit. Please turn to Acts 2, where we see a clear example of God's Spirit imparting the ability to speak. Here, God's Spirit, not so much the spirit in man, is the actor hard at work in people giving them voice. On that day of Pentecost, they are able to speak in foreign languages, "as the Spirit gave them utterance." 

**Acts 2:4** And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

I found no less than five versions which render the last part of this verse 4, using language similar to, "As the Spirit enabled them to speak." The Greek verb translated give or enable, means "to be the author or source of a thing." Spirit enables speech. Spirit is the source of speech, the author of speech. That is true whether the spirit involved is God's Spirit, as in this case, or the spirit in man, or as we will see in a minute, a demon, a spirit which has gained control of a person and can speak through that person.

As an example of this phenomena in terms of demons, you may want to jot down Job 26:4. We are not going to spend much time on it. Here, Job sarcastically begins his response to Bildad.

**Job 26:4** (Lexham English Bible) With whose help have you uttered words,
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and whose breath has come forth from you?

The King James Version translates breath as ruach. "Whose spirit has come from you." Bildad did not speak of himself. If you study his comments carefully, you will see that he had help, not necessarily a benign spirit. Evil spirits also can gain a voice should they gain control of our breath. There are a number of examples of this in the Scriptures.

We will circle back around to this point in a minute. For now, I want to turn to the fifth and last point about the physical characteristics of wind. Wind is a major factor in determining weather. In fact the word weather and wind share a common Indo-European root, from the same word, we. Wandering comes from the same root.

Now of course, other factors, ocean currents, mountain ranges and such, play important roles in determining climate conditions and weather conditions. We cannot claim that wind is everything in the environment. That would not be true. Wind does play a major part in creating a physical environment. We may not always feel that wind, as it may be upper atmospheric, but it is there, behind the scenes, affecting the weather in a really big way.

Does wind, I mean here, wind as a spirit, play a role in determining our psychological environment, or, one's emotional atmosphere? The question almost answers itself when we restate it as, "Does spirit play a role in the environment of our mind, in our thinking?"

We will pursue this inquiry by going back to the idea that breath is wind, metaphorically, wind. I am talking about wind in the form of words, words that have been created by the spirit in man. Words create the zeitgeist, the milieu, the spirit of the times, the social environment. This is what John was talking about, words were magical, when controlled by a demon, they are magical in the sense it is sleight of hands, deceptive, spiritual in essence.

Breath disciplined by a spirit, words, play a big part in creating a social atmosphere. Surely the words that we breathe out do have vast environmental impact, I am talking about an attitudinal environment. Words have huge influence over the attitudes of their hearers. At the micro level, the words we issue can discourage or encourage a person, can raise or sap his spirits, as we say idiomatically. Just a few words can turn a wholesome environment into a miasma one, or vice versa.

Words go a long way to create attitudes, to foster an environment that is filled with hope or despair, with anger or forgiveness, again, coinciding with the spirit which gave them
voice, the spirit which formed those words, the intent of that spirit.

Now, transport this power of breath disciplined by a spirit, that is the kenning I am using to describe words or voice, breath disciplined by a spirit. Transport that power of words to a larger scale and you have dynamite. At the macro level, words can determine the tenor, and by that I mean, the character, of a whole nation.

Witness the eloquent speeches of Winston Churchill or, perhaps to a lesser degree, of King George VI. They inspired the British folk during the days of darkness. Those of you old enough to remember those days may also recall the Fireside Chats of Franklin Roosevelt. Although his statements offered nothing profound, in fact far from that, the President's voice, even heard over those crackling, unsophisticated radios of the day, was reassuring in troubled times. That voice, those words, created and supported a nationwide zeitgeist of sacrifice and of hope, a spirit of the times long gone. Today, there are other words, different words.

So, to reiterate, the wind is not the weather. There are other factors. Wind does play a major role in setting up the weather. So too, God's Spirit plays a major role in building the spiritual environment, the atmosphere in which God's children work. God sets up that environment through His Word, His voice.

Yes there are other factors. There is faith in the unseen—a very important factor. There is God's law which is spiritual, the law of love. There are other players, the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ, are in us, a part of us, just like our breath is in us, occupying that same spiritual environment. I think we can argue that God's children share that same spiritual space with us.

We will view this from a slightly different perspective. What symbolically happened in Genesis 2:7?

**Genesis 2:7** (Everett Fox) God formed the human, of dust from the soil, He blew into his nostrils the breath of life and the human became a living being.

This is where biology 101 should begin, though it usually does not. But let us get past the physical, the air mixing with the blood, the oxygenation process that takes place in the lungs, which describes a *nephesh*. Man became a living soul, that is true, but it is all at a physical level.

Symbolically, what happened was this: What was internal to God, His wind, His breath,
became internal to man. Remember, breath is the wind inside you. The symbolism is that God's wind, His Spirit, could become internal to man, could become a part of man. Man could receive God's Spirit, His breath. With Adam and Eve, that happened only on a symbolic level. I am not saying God gave His Holy Spirit to Adam. He did not, but His breathing life into Adam was symbolic of His later giving His Holy Spirit to us, His disciples.

Breathing is associated with the coming of the Holy Spirit. This is one of the connections between breath, wind, and Spirit that I will not be able to stress today. But, you can check that out in John 20:22. There Christ breathed on His disciples after His resurrection, saying, receive the Holy Spirit. Please turn to Colossians 2. This is a clear example of spirit as creating an environment or space.

Colossians 2:5 (Common English Bible) [Paul says that], though he is absent physically, I'm with you in spirit.

Paul is clearly speaking of a non physical environment; he is referring to a spiritual space, if you will, where he fellowships with God, with Christ, and with others of God's children in the Spirit. God's Spirit, His wind, His words, play a major role in forming that environment.

Galatians 5:16 (New King James) if say then walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Fenton translates it as, Walk spiritually. When we walk, we walk in somewhere, we walk in a garden or in a field. We walk in an environment, in a space. In a physical world, we call it the around and the about, that is where we walk. It is perfectly OK to say we are walking in the spirit, or walking spiritually, in that we are walking in a spiritual environment. Certainly, it is an unseen environment, it is invisible. As we said, wind is invisible, and God's Spirit, like the wind, is invisible.

One paraphrase, The Voice, renders the last clause of John 3:8, which we looked at earlier, in a fascinating way. Life in the Spirit is as if it were the wind of God. Importantly, this environment is an internal one. But an environment it is, occupied by Jesus Christ and by the Father, who function as the Holy Spirit in us.

Romans 8:9 (New International Version) [using the noun realm] You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if
indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. [You see, the Spirit is inside you.]

The dictionaries define the noun realm as ña sphere.ò It is a setting, an environment, with God in us, closer than our breath, more steady than our breathing. This spiritual realm is our home, and it is God's home.

What is important to note is that realm did not come to mean sphere until the fourteenth century. Before that time realm meant something else. Linguists trace the word back to the Indo-European root reg. That is the root that gives us words like regimen, rule, reign, regal, royal. Most directly, the noun realm probably came into English through the Old French word, where it meant, kingdom.

What we have really been talking about is an environment that we know of as God's Kingdom, a spiritual realm. By the power of God's Word, His wind, His voice, we have been transferred from this land of darkness ñinto the Kingdom of the Son He loves.ò a quote from Colossians 1:13 (Holman translation).

As Christ pointed out in Luke 17:

Luke 17:21 ñNor will they say, See here! or See there! For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.ò

This realm has no physical coordinates, but like the wind we call our breath, Christ says ñIt is within you.ò