



# The Holy Spirit in the Bible



# The Holy Spirit in the Bible

**George M. Smiga**

with Little Rock Scripture Study staff



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Wrap-Up Lectures and Discussion Tips for Facilitators are available for each lesson at no charge. Find them online at



# Welcome

The Bible is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. It is the Spirit-inspired word of God for us. It reveals to us the God who created, redeemed, and guides us still. It speaks to us personally and as a church. It forms the basis of our public liturgical life and our private prayer lives. It urges us to live worthily and justly, to love tenderly and wholeheartedly, and to be a part of building God's kingdom here on earth.

Though it was written a long time ago, in the context of a very different culture, the Bible is no relic of the past. Catholic biblical scholarship is among the best in the world, and in our time and place, we have unprecedented access to it. By making use of solid scholarship, we can discover much about the ancient culture and religious practices that shaped those who wrote the various books of the Bible. With these insights, and by praying with the words of Scripture, we allow the words and images to shape us as disciples. By sharing our journey of faithful listening to God's word with others, we have the opportunity to be stretched in our understanding and to form communities of love and learning. Ultimately, studying and praying with God's word deepens our relationship with Christ.

## **The Holy Spirit in the Bible**

The resource you hold in your hands is divided into six lessons. Each lesson involves personal prayer and study using this book and the experience of group prayer, discussion, and wrap-up lecture.

If you are using this resource in the context of a small group, we suggest that you meet six times, discussing one lesson per meeting. Allow about 90 minutes for the small group gathering. Small groups function best with eight to twelve people to ensure good group dynamics and to allow all to participate as they wish.

Some groups choose to have an initial gathering before their regular sessions begin. This allows an opportunity to meet one another, pass out books, and, if desired, view the optional intro lecture for this study available on the "Resources" page of the Little Rock Scripture Study website ([www.littlerockscripture.org](http://www.littlerockscripture.org)).


Every Bible study group is a little bit different. Some of our groups like to break each lesson up into two weeks of study so they are reading less each week and have more



time to discuss the questions together at their weekly gatherings. If your group wishes to do this, simply agree how much of each lesson will be read each week, and only answer the questions that correspond to the material you read. Wrap-up lectures can then be viewed at the end of every other meeting rather than at the end of every meeting. Of course, this will mean that your study will last longer, and your group will meet more times.

## WHAT MATERIALS WILL YOU USE?

The materials in this book include:

- Scripture passages to be studied, using the New American Bible, Revised Edition as the translation.
- Commentary by George M. Smiga.
- Occasional inserts  highlighting elements of the Scripture passages being studied. Some of these appear also in the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible* while others are supplied by the author and staff writers.
- Questions for study, reflection, and discussion at the end of each lesson.
- Opening and closing prayers for each lesson, as well as other prayer forms available in the closing pages of the book.

In addition, there are wrap-up lectures available for each lesson. Your group may choose to purchase a DVD containing these lectures or make use of the video lectures available online at no charge. The link to these free lectures is:

[http://www.little-rock-catholic.org/lectures](#) Of course, if your group has access to qualified speakers, you may choose to have live presentations.

Each person will need a current translation of the Bible. We recommend the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible*, which makes use of the New American Bible, Revised Edition. Other translations, such as the New Jerusalem Bible or the New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition, would also work well.

## HOW WILL YOU USE THESE MATERIALS?

### **Prepare in advance**

Using Lesson One as an example:

- Begin with a simple prayer like the one found on page 11.



- Read the assigned material for Lesson One (pages 12–24) so that you are prepared for the weekly small group session.
- Answer the questions, Exploring Lesson One, found at the end of the assigned reading, pages 25–28.
- Use the Closing Prayer on page 28 when you complete your study. This prayer may be used again when you meet with the group.

### **Meet with your small group**

- After introductions and greetings, allow time for prayer (about 5 minutes) as you begin the group session. You may use the prayer on page 11 (also used by individuals in their preparation) or use a prayer of your choosing.
- Spend about 45–50 minutes discussing the responses to the questions that were prepared in advance. You may also develop your discussion further by responding to questions and interests that arise during the discussion and faith-sharing itself.
- Close the discussion and faith-sharing with prayer, about 5–10 minutes. You may use the Closing Prayer at the end of each lesson or one of your choosing at the end of the book. It is important to allow people to pray for personal and community needs and to give thanks for how God is moving in your lives.
- Listen to or view the wrap-up lecture associated with each lesson (about 15 minutes). You may watch the lecture online, use a DVD, or provide a live lecture by a qualified local speaker. View the lecture together at the end of the session or, if your group runs out of time, you may invite group members to watch the lecture on their own time after the discussion.

### **A note to individuals**

- If you are using this resource for individual study, simply move at your own pace. Take as much time as you need to read, study, and pray with the material.
- If you would like to share this experience with others, consider inviting a friend or family member to join you for your next study. Even a small group of two or three provides an opportunity for fruitful dialog and faith-sharing!



# The Holy Spirit in the Bible

## LESSON ONE

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### The Holy Spirit at the Beginning

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Begin your personal study and group discussion with a simple and sincere prayer such as:

#### *Prayer*

*Spirit of God, you breathe life into human beings and into your Word. Fill us with your presence as we spend time with your Word and one another. Re-create us and sustain us day by day.*

Read pages 12–24, Lesson One.

Respond to the questions on pages 25–28, Exploring Lesson One.

The Closing Prayer on page 28 is for your personal use and may be used at the end of group discussion.

## INTRODUCTION

Christians are united in the belief that the Holy Spirit is God, the Third Person of the Most Holy Trinity. A full understanding of the Spirit, however, was not present at the beginning of our faith tradition. References to the Spirit of God are found throughout the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Yet only in the later writings of the New Testament do hints emerge that the Spirit is not an attribute of God but Someone.

The early centuries of church life were characterized by extensive debates over the natures of Jesus and the Spirit. The Council of Nicaea in 325 CE officially declared that Jesus is “one in being” (*homoousios*) with God the Father and is therefore fully God. The council’s proclamation proved definitive and was in time universally accepted by Christians. Not until 381 CE did the Council of Constantinople assert that the same divine nature belonged to the Spirit, declaring the Holy Spirit to be “Lord and Giver of Life.”

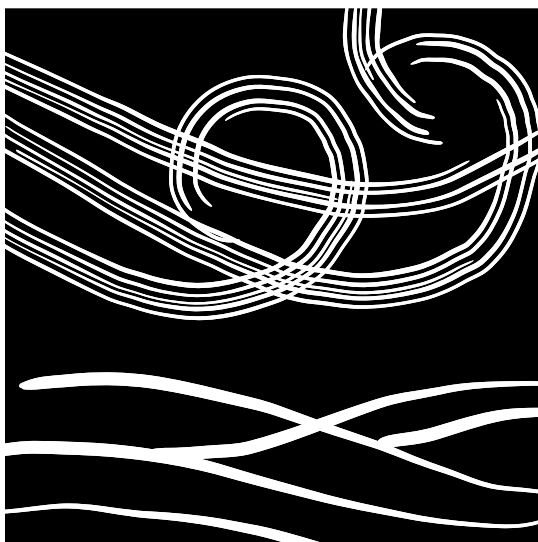
Therefore, as we begin this study of the Holy Spirit, we should not expect to discover scriptural passages that explicitly present the Spirit as the Third Person of the Trinity. What the Bible *does* offer is a variety of texts in which God’s Spirit is shown to act. With the hindsight of the church’s tradition, we are able to recognize these actions as the work of a Divine Person of the Godhead. To the biblical authors, however, the nature of the Spirit was less clear. For them, it was sufficient to focus on the Spirit as an aspect of God carrying out God’s will in the world.

This study will examine biblical passages that describe the action of God’s Spirit in the world and how such passages can speak to us

today. Each of the six lessons will discuss a particular dimension of the Spirit’s activity. Our approach will be chronological. Lesson One will present the Spirit acting in the process of creation, both cosmically and in the fashioning of the human person. We will then examine the Spirit’s presence in those chosen by God to serve Israel (Lesson Two) and in Israel as a people (Lesson Three). The last three lessons will explore New Testament references to the Spirit. Lessons Four and Five will consider the Spirit in the ministry of Jesus and the early church. Lesson Six will conclude our study with the role of the Spirit at the end of time.

Within the limitations of this study, we are unable to examine every reference to the Spirit in the Bible. We will, however, address the major narratives and themes in which the Spirit appears. As we do this, it will soon become apparent that identifying the biblical passages that refer to the Spirit is complicated by vocabulary. For example, the word “spirit” in the Bible may sometimes refer to God’s Spirit and other times may not. Choices must be made in interpreting the original text and the translations of it. We will discuss some of these instances as we go along.

In the following pages, you will encounter sections labeled “Contemporary Relevance.” In them you will find suggestions for how a particular biblical passage may connect to our lives today. Examining the history, vocabulary, and theology of the Bible is important, but I believe it is of equal value to recognize how God’s Spirit continues to guide us today. My suggestions in these sections should not be considered complete or definitive. I offer them only to encourage your own reflection on the role of the Spirit in your journey of faith.



## THE HOLY SPIRIT AT THE BEGINNING

### From Air to Divine Power

Names are important. They color the way the world is perceived. “Husband” and “Sweetheart” may refer to the same person, but each word carries its own nuance. Words are particularly crucial when they refer to God. As pure spirit, God cannot be seen or examined. In naming God, words must be drawn from human experience to capture even a hint of God’s being. Words are always limited, yet they are the only means available to express what is inexpressible. The scriptural word for God’s Spirit is a prime example of such a dynamic.

The Hebrew word for “spirit” describes a phenomenon of nature: a movement of air. The

Hebrew term is *ruach*. It can be translated “wind” or “breath.” Originally the term was used to describe a gentle breeze, a powerful storm, or the inhaling and exhaling of a living being. The Bible uses *ruach* to name such natural phenomena. But the way in which moving air can be sensed and yet remain unseen renders it a fitting metaphor for the action of the invisible God. The Scriptures often employ the word “spirit” in this “divine” sense. Sometimes, the use of *ruach* to describe God’s actions must be discerned based on the context of the word in the biblical text, but frequently the divine sense is made explicit by linking *ruach* to the modifier “of God.” Therefore, biblical translations will speak of “the wind of God,” “the breath of God,” and “the spirit of God.” The Hebrew word *ruach* is behind all of these expressions.

To differentiate between *ruach* as a natural phenomenon (wind or breath) and *ruach* as God’s Spirit, it would be helpful if the Bible always used the common designation of “Holy Spirit.” But the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) employs the modifier “holy” in only two places: Isaiah 63:10-11 and Psalm 51:13. In the New Testament, “Holy Spirit” is used more frequently, especially in the Gospels of Luke and John. Yet the expression “Holy Spirit” does not become commonplace until after the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE, centuries after the New Testament books were written. Therefore, as we read the biblical texts together, we will want to keep in mind that behind the words “wind,” “breath,” and “spirit” often stands the Holy Spirit of God.



### A note on the capitalization of “Spirit”

In any text describing God’s Spirit, it must be decided whether the word “spirit” should be capitalized. When speaking of the Spirit in its fullest sense (as the Third Person of the Trinity) capitalization is certainly appropriate. In many scriptural passages, however, the view of the Spirit is less developed. For this reason, the New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE), which is used throughout this study, does not capitalize “spirit” when it occurs in the Hebrew Bible (Old

Testament). (See page 62 for information about capitalization in the New Testament.)

For clarity and consistency, however, we will capitalize “Spirit” throughout the commentary of this study when the word is used as a designation for God or an aspect of God. When the word “spirit” is used in a generic sense to designate *wind*, *breath*, or *spirit* and is not directly associated with the divine, “spirit” will be lowercase.