

Spirit Demystified

Description

SPIRIT DEMYSTIFIED

A Concise Explanation of the Hebrew Word Translated as “Spirit”



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Today, the word “spirit” usually means something non-physical. The “spirit” of a person is thought to be the immaterial part of them – sometimes equated with the soul. The “spiritual realm” is considered to be a plane of existence beyond the bounds of space and time. When reading English translations of *the Bible*, we often come across the word “spirit” and assume it must mean what people today usually mean by “spirit.” But, as we’re about to see, the Hebrew word often translated as “spirit” simply doesn’t convey these metaphysical ideas. It doesn’t point to anything non-physical, immaterial, or incorporeal. The word is

???? (*ruach*), and it basically means “gust,” as will soon become apparent. Throughout the rest of this article, when you see “gust” in a translation of a Hebrew text, keep in mind that it’s being used as the English translation of ???? (*ruach*).

This is going to be a rather simple look at the use of the word ???? (*ruach*) in order to illustrate its meaning. But before we get into that, I should make a few preliminary remarks about language.

The meaning of any word is determined by how it’s used; this is just the way words work. A word is typically an arbitrary collection of sounds that acts as a symbol for an idea. When multiple people use the same collection of sounds as a symbol for the same idea, it opens the doors of communication. As an example, when you hear the sound “low,” you might associate it with an idea that is also recalled by other words like “of small elevation.” But when a speaker of ancient Hebrew heard the sound “low,” they associated it with an idea that we English speakers refer to using words like “to him” or “for him.” The point here is that a collection of sounds doesn’t have an inherent meaning. The same collection of sounds can mean different things in different languages. The collection of sounds is simply a symbol that could hypothetically be used to represent any idea. What makes a word a word is that people associate a particular collection of sounds or signs with an idea.

The next point is that people were using words long before anyone represented those words in a written form, and people were writing for a good while before anyone undertook to create a dictionary. The purpose of a dictionary is to chronicle the meaning of words. But, as we’ve just seen, the meaning of words isn’t inherent; it’s arbitrary and becomes established through use. This means that people who write dictionaries need to figure out how to define words based on how the words are used. *That* is what we’ll be doing here. We’ll be looking at how the word ???? (*ruach*) is used in ancient Hebrew writings, and by seeing how it’s used, we’ll be seeing what it meant to those who spoke Hebrew in ancient times. And, as I already mentioned, we’ll see that it meant something much like the English word “gust.”

This will by no means be exhaustive. I’ll just be giving enough examples to illustrate each usage. These days, it’s easy to find more occurrences online or by using bible software if you want to look into this further.

One other preliminary remark: The translation for most of the passages in this article is called *Not A Bible Translation* – which is my own translation. It doesn’t read like standardized English, and this is deliberate. The English of the translation has been molded to the Hebrew in order to more fully reveal the ways in which the ancient authors chose to express themselves. I recommend treating it like something written by people whose English has been strongly colored by their native language. In truth, the authors of these texts are foreigners to us, and we to them.

Wind

As with the English word “gust,” ???? (*ruach*) finds its most basic meaning in the context of wind. First, here’s a line from one of the most popular of the psalms:

Surely not the wrongdoers; but only as the chaff that a **gust** wafts away. – Psalm 1:4 (NABT)

A gust that wafts away chaff is a gust of... – it’s obvious, right? It’s a gust of *wind*.

And it was told to the house of David, saying, “Aram done rested over Ephraim,” and his heart moved, and the heart of his clan, like the moving of the trees of a forest from the face of a **gust**. – Isaiah 7:2 (NABT)

Once again, a gust that makes trees move is clearly a gust of wind.

Breath

All in whose nostrils the respiration of the **gust** of life, from all who on dry land, done died. – Genesis 7:22 (NABT)

This is part of the flood story and is talking about the death of all the land animals. And here, too, the meaning of “gust” is rather obvious. It is a gust of breath, as is evident from the fact that it’s in their nostrils and is part of respiration.

This next passage is about the uselessness of idols.

The sculptures of the nations, silver and gold,
the work of the hands of an earthling.
A mouth for them, but they can’t word.
Eyes for them, but they can’t see.
Ears for them, but they can’t give ear.
Indeed, an absence of the presence of a **gust** in their mouth.
– Psalm 135:15-17 (NABT)

Living land animals have gusts of breath in their mouths and in their nostrils, but idols don’t even have a single gust in their mouths. In other words, they have no breath.

In both of the senses we’ve looked at so far, ????? (*ruach*) refers to a relatively brief movement of air – whether of wind or of breath. This is also the basic meaning of the English word “gust” (which is one of the main reasons I use it to translate *ruach*). Also like the word “gust,” *ruach* doesn’t have to refer to air. It can be a gust of something else.

Attitudes and Demeanors

...a man over whom a **gust** of jealousy crosses so that he gets jealous over his woman, he must station the woman before the face of Yahweh so that the priest can work for her all of this direction. – Numbers 5:30 (NABT)

A “gust of jealousy” here is not a gust of air coming from something else called “jealousy,” nor is it a gust of air carrying jealousy; it is jealousy itself. The word “wave” is commonly associated with water, but we understand that when we say “a wave of people,” or “a wave of traffic,” or “a wave of emotion,” we aren’t talking about water anymore. Rather, the people or traffic or emotion behaves in a wave-like way, so we refer to them as waves. The same is true here of “gust.” The jealousy, in this case, is referred to as a “gust” since it comes over the man somewhat suddenly and perhaps overwhelmingly – like a gust of wind.

And I’ll pour over the house of David and over the resider of Jerusalem a **gust** of grace and graciousness... – Zechariah 12:10 (NABT)

Again, the gust *is* grace and graciousness coming on people in a way that is reminiscent of a gust of air. As we’ll see, this sort of metaphorical extension of the more basic meaning of the word continues into the other senses we’ll consider.

Transience and Emptiness

And he remembered that they flesh – a going **gust** that doesn’t return. – Psalm 78:39 (NABT)

It’s worth noticing how different this is from the meaning associated with “spirit” today. Spirit is typically contrasted with “flesh” in such a way that implies they are two totally different substances: one physical, one non-physical. Here, though, flesh *is* ????? (*ruach*). But it’s important to realize that the reason why flesh is called ????? (*ruach*) isn’t in order to communicate something about its substance. Rather, it is to communicate something about its transience. Humans are but a *gust* in that, when viewed from a larger scale of time, we are here and gone like a puff of air.

In principle, all it takes to be able to call something a *gust* is for some aspect of its behavior to parallel some aspect of the behavior of a gust of air. Of course, this doesn’t mean that all possible parallels were drawn in the minds of ancient Israelites, which is why we have to look at how they actually used the word.

And the prophets do their thing as a **gust**,
and the word absent in them.

– Jeremiah 5:13 (NABT)

The prophets against whom Jeremiah was speaking lacked the word of God and so their words and actions were flimsy and lacked an enduring quality. Thus, they would pass away just like a gust of wind.

Behold, all of them – absent;
their works – naught;
their cast-metal statues – **gust** and waste.
– Isaiah 41:29 (NABT)

Here, cast-metal statues are *gust* not only because they will vanish, but because they are so worthless and empty that it's as if they've vanished already.

So far, none of the senses of ????? (*ruach*) indicate anything non-physical. Rather, they either refer to a literal gust of air (as with wind and breath) or to something *as* a gust metaphorically by virtue of its similarity to literal gusts of air. We have one more category to consider:

Celestial Beings

The context of this first passage is that Ahab, a king of Israel in the 9th century BCE, has asked a prophet named Micaiah if he should go up to engage in battle at a place called Ramoth-Gilead. Here's what Micaiah said,

"I done saw Yahweh residing on his throne, and all the host of the skies were stationing about him at his right and at his left.
And Yahweh said, 'Who can dupe Ahab so he should go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?' And this one said like so but this one was saying like so.
Then this **gust** proceeded and he stationed himself before the face of Yahweh, and he said, 'I – I can dupe him!'
And Yahweh said to him, 'With what?'
And he said, 'I can proceed and do my thing as a **gust** of falsehood with the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'May you dupe him and also may you succeed. Proceed and work surely!'
And now, behold, Yahweh done put forth a **gust** of falsehood with the mouth of all these your prophets, and Yahweh, he done worded trouble about you!"
– 1 Kings 22:19-23 (NABT)

So, the main thing to take note of here is that this refers to one called a *gust* who is participating in a meeting in Yahweh's heavenly throne room, and this *gust* is described in such a way that makes clear that he is a being – indeed, a being who is no less corporeal than a human. Consider, Yahweh is sitting on a throne, and a host of beings (the whole host of the skies) is standing around him to his right and left. The scene is clear and is not all that different from various meetings of governing bodies on earth. Yahweh introduces a mission and asks who will fulfill it. Discussion ensues with various members of this governing council putting forward different proposals. The *gust* comes forward, standing before the face of Yahweh, and expresses his proposal. It is accepted, after which he leaves the courtroom and goes to accomplish his mission. This plainly depicts these beings as bodies who occupy space, are located in space in relation to each other, and who move from one place to another. Again, this is unlike, and inconsistent with, the common use of the word "spirit" as referring to something non-physical.

There are other passages that describe the happenings of Yahweh's throne room, so we have the opportunity to more fully grasp the nature of the sorts of beings Israelites understood to be present on such occasions. Remember, they referred to at least some of these beings as *gusts*, so understanding the general characteristics of these beings should tell us something about those called *gusts*. The book of Job describes Yahweh's council meetings as follows:

And the day did his thing when the sons of the deities got there to position themselves about Yahweh, and the adversary also got there in their midst.

And Yahweh said to the adversary, "From where do you get here?" And the adversary answered Yahweh and said, "From roaming through the land and walking around through her."

– Job 1:6-7 (NABT)

A few things to take from this are as follows: First, this meeting is evidently within the bounds of time since it takes place on a certain day. Second, the sons of the deities (which is another way of saying "deities," just as "sons of humans" is another way of saying "humans") position themselves in physical proximity around Yahweh. Third, the attendants of the meeting evidently come to it from various other locations.

Let's look at another throne-room text:

In the year of the death of the king Uzziah, I saw my Lord residing on a raised and lifted throne, and his skirts were filling the palace.

Burning ones were stationed up above him. Six wings for each one. With two he would cover his face and with two he would cover his feet, and with two he would fly.

This one would call to this one and say, "Restrictite! Restrictite! Yahweh of hosts! The fullness of all of the land – his substance!"

– Isaiah 6:1-3 (NABT)

So here we again have Yahweh on a throne, plainly described as corporeal. Those attending him are also clearly corporeal since it not only describes them as having location, but also as having body parts. If you're wondering about the word "restrictite," no worries – we'll get to that in a bit.

Now, on to another text that mentions Yahweh in his heavenly court. And this one mentions beings called *gusts* again. The context is one of Zechariah's symbolic visions. This one is focused on four chariots proceeding from between two mountains. What we'll quote is part of the conversation between Zechariah and the celestial being who serves as his guide in the vision. I should also mention that the word used to refer to Zechariah's celestial guide is usually rendered as "angel," but that isn't even a translation – it is a transliteration of the Greek translation of the Hebrew word. But the Hebrew word more literally translates as "employee," which is how it's translated here. This will be relevant for another passage further on, but keep in mind the focus here is on ????? (*ruach*) – *gust*.

And I responded and said to the employee wording with me, "What these, my lord?"

And the employee responded and he said to me, "These are four of the **gusts** of the skies – proceedesses from positioning themselves about the Lord of all of the land." – Zechariah 6:4-5 (NABT)

So, according to this text, among those stationed about the Lord of all the land are beings called *gusts* who proceed from before him to carry out his decisions, just as the *gust* in 1 Kings 22 proceeded from before him to carry out his decision. The difference between the two passages is that in 1 Kings 22, the *gust* is a male, while here in Zechariah 6, the four *gusts* are females (and hence called "proceedesses" – females who proceed).

Next, we have a text that describes Yahweh in his palace hearing a cry for help and then responding with the help of a *gust* :

In my distress, I called, "Yahweh!"

And to my deities I maydayed.

He heard, from his palace, my voice,
and my mayday got before his face into his ears.

...

And he spread the skies and descended
with a cumulonimbus under his feet.

And he rode on a cherub and flew,
and he swooped down on the wings of a **gust**.

– Psalm 18:6, 9-10 (NABT)

The word “gust” here is in poetic parallelism with “cherub” of the previous line. This, with the content of the lines, makes it clear that the two words refer to the same entity. So the cherub here is a *gust*. And to note what’s already been noted in relation to other passages, Yahweh here is presented as a body. He is in his palace in the skies and is expressly described as having a face, ears, and feet and as being capable of mounting and riding a cherub. Cherubs in the ancient world, by the way, weren’t baby angels; they were celestial beings whose bodies were a majestic combination of parts we’d recognize as human-like, ox-like, lion-like, and bird-like (see Ezekiel 1).

Our next passage is, in some ways, very similar to this one. It refers to Yahweh as...

The one who sets logs in the waters for his upper rooms, the one who places clouds as his chariots, the one who gets going on the wings of a **gust**,
the one who works his employees as **gusts** and his assistants as flaming fire.

– Psalm 104:3-4 (NABT)

Calling Yahweh “one who gets going on the wings of a gust” is obviously reminiscent of what we just read from Psalm 18 regarding the cherub who Yahweh rode and who is called a *gust*. So, once again, these beings called *gusts* are corporeal beings. The line “the one who works his employees as gusts” is quite interesting. His employees (often rendered “angels”) are *worked as gusts*; in other words, they are called gusts due to their function – due to the way they work – rather than due to their essential nature. Remember, the word ????? (*ruach*) – gust – finds its basic meaning with movements of air and then acquired secondary meanings through metaphorical extension (a well-known linguistic phenomenon). So, in what ways are these beings like gusts of air? Well, for one, they are from the sky and fly through the air. Also, just as gusts of air powerfully swoop down to move the things of earth, so too do these beings – they make Yahweh’s plans happen in the world. Furthermore, like gusts of air, they do their work mostly unseen. And, of course, they move forward with great haste to do it, like a gust of wind. And as the gusts of our mouths are involved in producing speech, so too these beings are, at times, involved in producing speech, as in the case of the gust and the false prophets in 1 Kings 22.

Observe that these passages describe these gust-beings as behaving in gust-like ways. In addition to the speech example I just mentioned, they are described as *proceeding*, being *of the skies*, *swooping down*, and Yahweh *gets going on the wings of the gust* – indicating haste. This makes it clear that these beings are called *gusts* for the very reason that they behave in these gust-like ways. And again, Psalm 104:4 plainly says that Yahweh “*works his employees as gusts*.” This should make plain that the application of the term ????? (*ruach*) to these beings in no way indicates that they are non-physical or part of a “spiritual realm.” As we’ve been seeing, these beings are expressly described as corporeal. They are called gusts simply because they work similarly to gusts of air in certain discernible ways. Remember, humans and even metal statues are likewise called gusts due to being similar to gusts of air in other ways (like being transient or without significance), but this in no way repudiates their stark materiality.

Before moving on, there’s one other aspect of Psalm 104:4 that deserves more comment. It has to do with Yahweh’s “employees.” As I’ve already mentioned, the word here translated “employees” is usually rendered “angels.” While popular orthodoxy today may regard angels as incorporeal “spirits,” ancient Israelite texts plainly and regularly describe celestial employees as corporeal beings. Their form is generally human-like (Genesis 18-19), they travel from point A to point B (Genesis 28:12; Judges 2:1), despite their hiddenness they are naturally visible (Numbers 22:25, 31; Judges 6:12; 13:3-20), they eat food (Psalm 78:23-25; Genesis 19:1-3), wear clothing (Revelation 15:6), have biological sex (1 Enoch 6-7; Jubilees 15:26-27; 2 Baruch 56:10-11, 14); they have faces (Judges 6:22; Acts 6:15), hands (Numbers 22:23, 31; Judges 6:21), legs (Revelation 10:1), feet (1 Enoch 10:4; Revelation 10:2), etc. So, while we already had more than sufficient reason for understanding these celestial beings called *gusts* to be corporeal, the fact that Yahweh “works his employees as gusts” and his employees were understood as material beings establishes this all the more firmly.

Okay, we're at the point where we'll be quoting from some more passages that use the word "restrictite" so it's about time I explain its meaning. It's being used here as a translation of the Hebrew word *qadosh* (qadosh), which is traditionally translated as "holy." A careful study of the use of this word in ancient Hebrew writings, along with the use of other words that share the same root (q-d-sh), reveals that it had to do with the notion of "restriction;" that is, being off-limits. Exploring this in detail is beyond the scope of this study, but as an example of the evidence for this meaning of the word, I'll briefly explain how it's used in Exodus 19. In this passage, Yahweh is talking to Moses on the mountain and tells him to go down and "qodesh" the people (this is the verb based on the root). It also says that the people are to "qodesh" the mountain, and the priests are to "qodesh" themselves. So, whatever it is that Moses did to the people, the people did to the mountain, and the priests did to themselves must be what it means to "qodesh." And it turns out that the action in all three instances is to "restrict." Moses restricted the people from going up the mountain, the mountain had barriers set around it to turn it into a restricted area, and the priests restrained themselves from going up the mountain.

This meaning of "restriction" is maintained in various ways in all the words based on this root and in all their occurrences in ancient Hebrew writings. For example, an object or place that is restricted is called a "restrictum" and one who has access to restricted areas and objects is a "restrictite." "Restrictite" can also mean "a person who engages in restriction," like the Nazarites in Numbers 6 or like Yahweh in Isaiah 5:16 where he is called "the restrictite God" who "has restricted himself in righteousness." The main thing to keep in mind for our present purposes is that the word "restrictum" translates a Hebrew term that refers to a restricted object or place while "restrictite" refers to a person who is associated with restriction by restricting themselves and/or by having access to restrictums. In light of this, it should come as no surprise that the term "restrictites" often refers to celestial beings who have access to God's council.

All that said, we'll now look at a couple of passages from the Dead Sea Scrolls that speak of such restrictites and that use other terms (like "employees" and "gusts") to refer to them. This first text is from a document known as *The War Scroll*.

And you, God, are fearsome in the substance of your kingdom! And the assembly of your restrictites is in our midst to help for ineffable times... the Lord is a restrictite and the king of the substance is by us with restrictites. Predominators and a host of employees are among our attendants. And the predominator of the war is in our assembly, and a host of his **gusts** is with our steps.

– 1QM Column 12, lines 7-9 (NABT)

So this passage speaks of celestial beings as "with us" using a variety of different expressions. The beings are referred to, collectively, as "the assembly of your restrictites," a "host of employees" and "a host of his gusts." And it's clear that these expressions all refer to basically the same beings since they are all said to be "with us" using another set of parallel expressions: "in our midst," "among our attendants," and "with our steps." So, quite clearly, this is yet another example of *ruach* (ruach) in the plural – *gusts* – being used to refer to celestial beings.

While the above passage focuses on gusts among humans, our next passage focuses on a human among gusts. In fact, it first uses the term "gust" for a human in a ruinous and thus transient state (much like Psalm 78:39), but then it ends up using it for celestial beings (who are gust-like in very different ways – as we've already seen). This text is from a collection of hymns called *The Thanksgiving Hymns*, also made known to us from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

I know that hope present for one whom you formed from dirt for a council of ineffable time. And a **gust** of ruination you've cleansed from much transgression to be positioned in station with the host of restrictites and to get in community with the assembly of the sons of skies. You made fall for man a lot of ineffable time with **gusts** of knowledge to praise your name in the community of jubilation...

– 1QHa Column 11, lines 21-24 (NABT)

This passage speaks of a hope that is present for a creature of clay (a human) to become part of God's heavenly council. By being cleansed from transgression, the human might be stationed with "the host of restrictites." This same idea is expressed in the words "get in community with the assembly of the sons of skies" – which makes explicit that these are celestial beings that are in view. And again, they are referred to as "gusts of knowledge."

A Very Special Gust

Now, let's go on to another passage that speaks of a celestial being as a gust; this time, it's "the gust of his (Yahweh's) restrictum." The passage is from Isaiah 63.

In all their contraction, he wasn't contracted.

With the employee of his face he delivered them.

In his love and in his compassion he, he done redeemed them.

And he lifted them and carried them all the days of ineffable time.

But they, they done disobeyed and done wrenched the **gust** of his restrictum.

And to them he was turned into an enemy. He, he done fought against them.

But let the extractor of his clan remember the days of ineffable time.

?Where the one ascending them from the sea with the shepherds of his procession? ?Where the one setting the **gust** of his restrictum in the midst of em, making the right hand of Moses (the arm of his glories) go, splitting waters from before their faces to work for himself a name of ineffable time, having them go through the deeps like the horse through the pasture (they would stumble not, like the mammal in the valley)?

May the **gust** of Yahweh descend! May she guide us! Thus you done led your clan to work for yourself a name of glories.

– Isaiah 63:9-14 (NABT)

This is one of the earliest passages to speak of a being by a term like "the holy spirit" (translated here as "the gust of his restrictum" for the reasons I mentioned earlier). Let's make a few observations regarding what this passage says. First, it speaks of Yahweh delivering his people, but it makes plain that this is done through a representative. This representative is first called "the employee of his face" and then "the gust of his restrictum." Both expressions convey the idea that this being is intimately close with God. Not just anyone can be face-to-face with God, and not just anyone can enter into God's restricted space (it is, after all, restricted). But this being is fit to have that close of a relationship with Yahweh. The fact that the gust of Yahweh's restrictum is also referred to as "the employee of his face" is sufficient evidence that this gust is a being like gusts we've seen from other passages, but there are additional aspects of this passage that likewise reveal this gust to be a being; namely, it says that the Israelites disobeyed and wrenched the gust (which indicates that the gust had given instructions that might be either obeyed or disobeyed). Moreover, this passage expresses the wish that the gust might descend and guide us. This clearly portrays this gust as a being, and a celestial one at that, since her descending entails her having been somewhere higher – in this case, God's heavenly dwelling since she comes from his restrictum before his face. You may have also noticed the feminine gender of this gust – something we'll explore more fully.

There aren't many places in the Hebrew Bible that use language like "holy spirit." In fact, there are just two places: Isaiah 63:10-11 and Psalm 51:13. Yet, we all know that the phrase "Holy Spirit" is used many times in the New Testament. The phrase also occurs in other Jewish writings from before the time of Jesus, especially in the writings of Essenes, but these post-date Isaiah and build upon it. Even though the ideas about the Holy Spirit in the New Testament may indeed be further developments of ideas found in Essene writings, they too ultimately build on Isaiah 63 and Psalm 51. After all, both Essene writings and early Christian writings draw heavily on the Psalms and Isaiah. One of the most well-known Holy Spirit passages in the New Testament builds on ideas from Isaiah 63.

Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus also had been baptized and was praying. The sky was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form like a dove on him; and a voice came out of the sky, saying "You are my beloved Son. In you I am well pleased."

– *The Gospel of Luke* 3:21-22 (WEB)

First, it's important to be aware of the fact that the phrase "like a dove" in Greek modifies the *descent* of the spirit, not the *form* of the spirit. In other words, it doesn't say the Spirit's form was dove-like, but only that the Spirit's descent was dove-like. Yet, it does plainly say that the Holy Spirit is a being with a body and a form. The features this passage shares with Isaiah 63 are as follows:

1. The Spirit/Gust is called “the holy spirit,” or “the gust of the restrictum.” Jesus and his earliest followers spoke Aramaic, and the Aramaic phrase for “the holy spirit” (which can be seen in ancient Aramaic versions of the gospels) is almost identical to the Hebrew phrase. It too is more accurately translated as “the gust of the restrictum.”
2. There is reference to the Spirit/Gust descending.
3. The Spirit/Gust is plainly described as a being.

While *The Gospel of Luke* doesn’t specify the gender of the Holy Spirit, its description raises a question that rightly leads to the question regarding the Holy Spirit’s gender. In the passage, who is it that says, “You are my beloved Son. In you I am well pleased”? It is commonly assumed that the speaker is God (the Father), but the speaker actually isn’t overtly identified. God isn’t actually mentioned as part of the scene. The only person it refers to as being in the sky (the place from which the voice came) is the Holy Spirit. Granted, *The Gospel of Luke* doesn’t answer our question regarding the identity of the speaker, but if the speaker is to be understood as the Holy Spirit, it makes the Holy Spirit a parent of Jesus.

As I mentioned earlier, Jesus and his earliest followers spoke Aramaic (and some may have known Hebrew as well). Even though *The Gospel of Luke* was written in Greek, when it was translated into Aramaic, one would expect that features of the Aramaic translation which aren’t present in the Greek text would reflect ideas known among Aramaic-speaking followers of Jesus. As it turns out, the Aramaic Gospels use feminine terms for the Holy Spirit, including in the passage presently under examination.

Furthermore, there is another text that was used among early Semitic followers of Jesus known as *The Gospel According to the Hebrews* (or, more simply, *The Hebrew Gospel*), and in that text, it is explicit that the Holy Spirit is the one who speaks and that she is, in fact, a she. While *The Hebrew Gospel* doesn’t survive, quotations of it do. The following is found in the writings of Jerome:

It is stated in the Gospel written in Hebrew, which the Nazarenes read: ... “It came to pass that when the Lord came up from the water, the entire fountain of the Holy Spirit descended and rested on him; and she said to him, ‘My Son, in all the prophets I have been expecting you to come, that I might rest on you. For you are my rest; you are my firstborn child, who rules forever.’” – *The Hebrew Gospel*, from Jerome’s Commentary on Isaiah 11:1-3

All three features that *The Gospel of Luke* shares with Isaiah 63 are also shared by this passage, but this additionally shares a fourth feature with Isaiah 63 – the female gender of the Holy Spirit. And, fascinatingly, the Holy Spirit is plainly depicted here as Jesus’ heavenly Mother. And this isn’t the only place in *The Hebrew Gospel* that depicts the Holy Spirit in this way. Origen quotes a portion of it as follows (the speaker is Jesus):

“My mother, the Holy Spirit, took me just now by one of my hairs and carried me off to the great mountain Tabor...” – *The Hebrew Gospel*, from Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2.12

Yet another text written by an early follower of Jesus expresses this understanding. It’s from a collection of Aramaic Poems which eventually came to be known as *The Odes of Solomon*; they do not, however, claim to be written by Solomon. Scholars now agree that they were written by a member of the early Jesus-movement at about the same time as the composition of the writings that would later comprise the New Testament. One of the poems evidently contemplates Jesus’ baptism and understands it in much the same way as does *The Hebrew Gospel*:

The dove fluttered onto the anointed one,
because his head belonged to her.
And she cooed (psalms) about him,
and her voice was heard.
– Ode 24:1-2 (Nuhra 2021)

While this passage doesn't use the term *ruach*, the historical context, together with other passages in *The Odes* (Ode 28:1-2; 36), makes the identification of the "dove" with the "spirit/gust" clear. All together, it is evident that the understanding of the Holy Spirit in the early Jesus-movement was largely influenced by Isaiah 63. Again, this is apparent by the term "holy spirit" (more properly "gust of the restrictum") itself. Furthermore, this gust is a being, she descends, and she is female. These features are all found in Isaiah 63 and are visible in the writings of Jesus' followers – especially in texts written in Semitic languages (the languages of Jesus himself and his earliest followers).

Another aspect of Isaiah 63's depiction of this gust that is even more apparent in the writings of the Jesus movement is the closeness of the Holy Spirit with God. Isaiah 63 depicts the Holy Spirit as coming from God's personal presence (from his restricted space, even from before his face). But the Jesus-movement made the relationship more explicit. Jesus was the key to this. They understood that he is the Son of God, and that he was even God's Son as a divine being in heaven before coming to earth (John 3:16; Heb. 1). God Himself, having a son, is therefore a Father. While there were a few Jewish texts before Jesus' time that referred to God as a father (e.g. Is. 64:8), it is really only in the teachings of Jesus that we find God's identity as a Father become so prominent. The simple truth that often goes unrecognized by modern Christians, but which was not lost on the early followers of Jesus is that the very idea of a father logically entails a mother. Quite simply, no man can become a father on his own – a woman must be involved. What it is to be a father is to be a male who has produced offspring in collaboration with a female – a mother. Jesus and his earliest followers knew that the heavenly home of God and His Son was not motherless.

Early Christ-followers understood themselves as being adopted by God (Gal. 4:4-7; Rom. 8:15-17). Jesus wanted them to be as siblings to himself (John 20:17; see also Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:11), to have God as their Father (Matt. 6:9), and to be born of the Spirit (John 3:1-8). Lest this latter point remain mystified in a lingering mist of theological clichéification, the simple truth, comprehensible to children, is that the one by whom you are born is your mother, and your mother is female, not male.

So, the understanding of the Holy Spirit in the early Jesus-movement was based in part on Isaiah 63, but also on new light shed on the subject through the teachings of Jesus. And Isaiah 63 wasn't the only pre-Jesus text that was relevant for them. Take, for example, the depiction of the Holy Spirit as dove-like in her movements, found in both *The Gospel of Luke* and *The Odes of Solomon*. This notion isn't found in Isaiah 63, but an embryonic form of it is found in a fascinating Dead Sea Scroll fragment dating to the 1st century BCE. It is known as *The Messianic Apocalypse*. Here is the relevant portion:

...the skies and the land will hearken to his anointed one.
...my lord will attend to those who are committed.
And rightdoers he will call by name,
and over afflictants his **gust** will flutter,
and those who are truthful will be renewed in his power.
– 4Q521 (NABT)

This text has a gust (feminine btw) "flutter" over those who are afflicted when the anointed one (the messiah) comes. The verb for "fluttering" here is a very rare verb but is the same as in Genesis 1:2 where the "gust of elohim" is fluttering over the face of the waters. There too, the gust is female. This gust of Genesis 1 was later understood by the author of *Sirach* (circa 200 BCE) as a divine being known as Wisdom.

Wisdom, her breather praises!
And in the midst of her clan, she glories.
In the assembly of the Most High she opens her mouth
And in front of his host she gives praise:

I, from the mouth of the Most High, I proceeded,
 and in a cumulonimbus I covered the land.
 I, in the heights, I dwelt,
 and my throne: in a pillar of cloud.
 the circle of the skies I compassed alone,
 and I went about through the low places of the deeps.
 Over the waves of the sea, over all the land,
 and over every clan and nation, I ruled.
 In all these, I sought a resting place.
 In whose inheritance will I lodge?
 Then, the former of all commanded me,
 and the one who works me caused my dwelling to rest.
 And he said, "In Jacob, dwell;
 and in Israel, get rest."
 From ineffable time, from the first, he separated me,
 and until ineffable time I'll not cease.
 In the restricted dwelling I ministered before his face,
 and so I stationed myself in Zion.
 – *Sirach* 24:1-10 (NABT)

Here, Wisdom is depicted as a member of God's heavenly council. Like the other members of the heavenly council as we've read in other passages, she is a corporeal being – she has a "breather" (a throat), a mouth, has distinct location, sits on a throne, moves from place to place, etc. She was at one point traveling over the waters (like in Genesis 1), and later, she took up residence in the "restricted dwelling" (the sanctuary) in Israel. This is remarkable since it equates her with the one who dwelt in the cloud and who later took up residence in the tabernacles, who in *Exodus* is called "Yahweh" (Ex. 13:21-22; 40:33-38) – not that she is the same Yahweh as "the Most High" – from whom she is clearly distinct here in *Sirach*. As early as *Exodus*, there was an understanding in ancient Israel that Yahweh could share his name with a being with whom he is especially closely associated (See Ex. 23:20-21). This is certainly understandable when it comes to members of his own family.

Another text that speaks of this being known as Wisdom in a similar fashion is *The Wisdom of Solomon*. Here's one interesting excerpt:

Wisdom delivered a holy people and a blameless seed from a nation of oppressors.
 ...
 She guided them along a marvelous way,
 and became to them a covering in the day-time,
 and a starry flame through the night.
 She brought them over the Red sea,
 and led them through much water;
 – *The Wisdom of Solomon* 10:15, 17-18 (WEB)

Quite clearly, this is identifying Wisdom as the being who led Israel in the cloud by day and fire by night in the Exodus, just like in *Sirach*. And in both these texts, like in Isaiah 63, she is indeed a she. In the previous chapter of *The Wisdom of Solomon*, we find this:

Give me wisdom, her who sits by you on your thrones...
 Wisdom is with you and knows your works,
 and was present when you were making the world,
 and understands what is pleasing in your eyes,
 and what is right according to your commandments.
 Send her from the holy heavens,
 and ask her to come from the throne of your glory,
 that being present with me she may work,
 and I may learn what pleases you well.

For she knows all things and understands,
and she will guide me prudently in my actions.
She will guard me in her glory.
– *The Wisdom of Solomon* 9:4, 9-11 (WEB)

Who is this woman who sits with God on his throne and who was with him when he made the world, and who understands all things? Well, according to this very text a few verses later, she is the Holy Spirit:

Who gained knowledge of your counsel,
unless you gave **wisdom**,
and sent your **holy spirit** from on high?
– *The Wisdom of Solomon* 9:17 (WEB)

This passage uses a poetic device known as “parallelism” in which the same idea is expressed in different ways in consecutive lines. In other words, to “give wisdom” is to “send your holy spirit.” So, in *The Wisdom of Solomon*, the Holy Spirit is depicted as a female being, also known as “Wisdom.” She is corporeal, she sits with God on his throne, she was with God when he made the world, she was “on the ground,” as it were, as God’s agent in delivering Israel from Egypt, she knows all things, and she is needed on earth as a guide. This particular *gust* is obviously very special. In light of all this, it isn’t surprising that Jesus would say,

Again, there’s much for me to say to y’all, but y’all aren’t able to handle it now. Yet, when the Gust of the Truth comes, she will guide you into all of the truth.
– The Gospel of John 16:12-13 (NABT – translated from the Old Syriac)

Nor is it surprising that the great commission would include this being along with the Father and the Son, all sharing the same name into which Jesus’ disciples are to be baptized.

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
– Matthew 28:19 (WEB)

And, after this gust did come, it is entirely understandable that the community among whom she resided would be understood as a temple:

Don’t y’all know that y’all are the temple of God and that the gust of God dwells among y’all?
– 1 Cor. 3:16 (NABT)

Notice, just as it was God’s gust (Wisdom, the Holy Spirit) who dwelt in the ancient tabernacle, it is God’s gust who dwelt among the early followers of Jesus, represented collectively as a temple. This is significant since deities live in temples. While the Holy Spirit is plainly a distinct being from God in all these texts, she is also clearly a deity – sitting on God’s own throne, being with him when he made all things, etc.

And once again, in light of all we’ve seen, it makes perfect sense that Paul would end a letter saying,

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, God’s love, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.
– 2 Corinthians 13:13 (WEB)

Many are prone to think of the Holy Spirit as an immaterial wisp (whether they regard the holy spirit as an impersonal influence or as an entity they might call a “person” but regard as bodiless), but it should now be clear that the early Jesus-movement, and a line of Jewish authors before them, regarded the Holy Spirit (the gust of the restrictum) as a fully corporeal being – just as bodily as any other being or object. Furthermore, within the early Jesus-movement, this Gust was regarded as a supreme being, co-ruling the world with Jesus and God Himself.

So, while today the word “spirit” is often used to refer to “something immaterial,” it should now be plain that the word often translated “spirit” from ancient Hebrew texts in no sense implies anything immaterial. It often refers to material gusts of air (whether wind or breath), and it can be used metaphorically for anything that behaves in a gust-like manner. Sometimes, the word was used to refer to that which is here and gone like a puff of air and sometimes to beings that come from above and move with speed and power. It became a term for angels and deities, even being used in passages where these beings are overtly described as bodily entities.

Out of all the uses of the term “spirit,” people may be most prone to interpret the expression “Holy Spirit” in immaterialistic ways, but here too, the term is in no sense immaterialistic. It refers to a very special gust (a speedy and powerful being) who is fit to dwell in God’s personal space. Understanding regarding this being increased over time, but when reviewing a range of texts from Isaiah 63 to texts written by members of the early Jesus-movement, a clear picture emerges. This gust, the Holy Spirit, was understood to be a corporeal being – a body with parts, biological sex (specifically female), location, knowledge, ability, etc. She was regarded as Jesus’ heavenly Mother and the adoptive mother of all who join themselves to God by taking Jesus as their master and her as their guide. While she is a being distinct from both God and Jesus, she is an integral part of their family and is their “on the ground” representative whose work it is to unite God’s people by demystifying their understanding and guiding them into all truth.