

רוח

Meaning:

- Wind
- Breath
- Spirit

Noun. Occurs about 380 times in the Old Testament.

The word רוח (ruach) is a richly layered term with several interconnected meanings depending on context. It is one of the most theologically significant words in Scripture.

The root idea is movement of air, which naturally extends into several related senses:

- Wind – a literal breeze or storm (e.g., “wind of the sea” in [Exodus 10:13](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigExodus 10:13

Hebrew וַיֹּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת מִטְהוֹ עַל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיְהִי הָרוּחַ בְּאֶרֶץ כְּדִים כָּל הַיּוֹם הַהוּא וְכָל הַלַּיְלָה הַבֹּקֶר הָיָה ה' So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning, the east wind had brought the locusts.

καὶ ἐπὶ ἡνιόκη τὸν ἄβδον εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν καὶ κύριος ἐπήγαγεν ἄνεμον νότον ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν...

- Breath – the animating force in living beings (e.g., “the breath of life” in [Genesis 6:17](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigGenesis 6:17

Hebrew וְאֲנִי הֹנֵנִי מִבֵּיא אֶת הַמַּבּוּל מִיָּם עַל הָאָרֶץ לְשַׁחֵת כָּל בֶּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ רֹחַ חַיִּים מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם כָּל אֲשֶׁר יָגוּעַ

ESV For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in

which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. NIV I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in i...).

- Spirit – an invisible, life-giving, and personal force—whether human, angelic, or divine

So רוח can refer to anything from a physical wind to the spiritual presence of God. The same Hebrew word thus bridges the natural and the supernatural—the air that moves the trees and the Spirit that moves hearts.

Human Beings and רוח

When applied to people, ruach refers to the inner life or disposition:

- [Genesis 41:8](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigGenesis 41:8

Hebrew וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וַתִּפְּעֶם רוּחוֹ וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיִּקְרָא אֶת כָּל חֲרָטְמֵי מִצְרַיִם וְאֶת כָּל חֲכָמֶיהָ וַיְסַפֵּר פְּרָעָה לָהֶם אֶת

ESV So in the morning his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called

for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

δὲ πρῶτὸ καὶ ἐταράχθη ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀποστείλας ἐκάλεισεν πάντας τοὺς Αἰγύπτου καὶ πᾶν... -

Pharaoh's spirit was troubled

- [Proverbs 16:32](#) plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_big Proverbs 16:32

Hebrew עַיִר מְלֵכָהּ מִלְכָּד עַיִר ESV Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city. NIV Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.

ἀνὴρ ἰσχυροῦ ὁ δὲ κρατῶν ὁργῆς καταλαμβανόμενος πόλιν - A person who controls his spirit is better than one who conquers a city

- [Ecclesiastes 12:7](#) plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_big Ecclesiastes 12:7

Hebrew וַיָּשֹׁב הָעָפָר עַל הָאָרֶץ כְּשֶׁהָיָה וְהָרוּחַ תָּשׁוּב אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר נָתַנָּה ESV and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. NIV and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. NLT

καὶ ἐπιστρέψῃ ὁ ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ὡς ἦν καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ἐπιστρέψῃ πρὸς τὸν θεόν ὃς ἔδωκεν αὐτό... - The spirit returns to God who gave it.

Here, spirit represents the non-material aspect of humans, their emotions, thoughts, and will.

God and רוח

The Spirit of the Lord (רוח יהוה) is profoundly important:

- [Genesis 1:2](#) plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_big Genesis 1:2

Hebrew וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תִּהְיוּ וְחָשֹׁךְ עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם ESV The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. NIV Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

ἡ δὲ γῆ ἦν ἀόρατος καὶ ἀσκοτός ἐπάνω τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐπεφύερε τοῦ ἐπάνω τοῦ ὕδατος... - "The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."

- The Spirit of the LORD empowers prophets, judges, and kings, e.g. [Judges 3:10](#) plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_big Judges 3:10

Hebrew וַתְּהִי עָלָיו רוּחַ יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁפֹּט אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּצֵא לְמַלְחָמָה וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה בְּיָדוֹ אֶת כּוּשָׁן רִישַׁתַּיִם מֶלֶךְ אֲרָם ESV The Spirit of the LORD was upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand. And his hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim.

καὶ ἐπ' αὐτὸν πνεῦμα κυρίου καὶ ἔκρινεν τὸν Ἰσραηλ καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἐπὶ τὸν πόλεμον καὶ παρέδωκεν...

- In [Ezekiel 36:27](#) plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_big Ezekiel 36:27

Hebrew וְאֶת רוּחִי אֶתֵּן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם וְעָשִׂיתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר בְּחֻקֵּי תִלְכוּ וּמִשְׁפָּטֵי תִשְׁמְרוּ וְעָשִׂיתֶם ESV And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. NIV And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

καὶ τὸ πνεῦμά μου δώσω ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ ποιήσω ἵνα ἀντὶ τῶν δικαίων μου πορεύσθε καὶ τὰ κρίματά μου φυλάξῃσθε καὶ ποιήσῃτε... God promises, "I will put My Spirit within you."

Here רוח expresses God's dynamic, personal presence and power - His life-giving energy that creates, inspires, and renews.

Greek Connections - the LXX and New Testament

In the Greek Septuagint, רוח is usually translated as πνεῦμα, carrying the same range of meanings: wind, breath, spirit. This continuity explains why in the New Testament, πνεῦμα is used for both the Holy Spirit and human spirit.

Theological Reflection

The word רוח testifies to the living God who breathes life into creation and into His people. Just as God's רוח gave life to Adam ([Genesis 2:7](#)),

ESV then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. NIV the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. καὶ ἔπλασεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς κ...), so His Spirit gives new life to believers ([Ezekiel 37](#) and [John 3:8](#)).

Greek τὸ πνεῦμα ὅπου θέλει πνεῖ, καὶ τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ ἀκούεις, ἀλλ' οὐκ οἶδας πόθεν ἔρχεται καὶ ποῦ ὑπάγει· οὕτως ἐστὶν πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος. ESV The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." NIV The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit...).

It reminds us that God's presence is both powerful and personal, unseen yet active. It moves like the wind, revives what is dead, and empowers those who trust in Him.

Comparison between spirit and soul - רוח and נפש

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