

Creation Care Bible Study 12: Air

I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind. (Eccl 1:14)

This week we study biblical images of air, wind, breath and the related notion of spirit.¹

We now understand that oxygen in the air is essential to life. Apart from about 70 references to “birds of the air”, the word “air” only appears about 12 times in the NIV. Let’s look at a couple.

Read Eph 2:1-2, Eph 6:12.

Q1 What do you understand by “the ruler of the power of the air” and “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”?

Read 1 Thess 4:16-17 about the coming of Jesus.

Q2. Who is now in charge of the “air” now? What does it mean to meet Jesus in the air – halfway between heaven and earth?

Much more common, much more significant, and perhaps more interesting are other images associated with air – wind, breath, storm, whirlwind, speech. These feature heavily in complex biblical imagery which we’ll explore.

Q3. FIRST: Do you have a story you’d like to share about air or wind or storms, including any feelings or memories that these resonate with?

The Hebrew word *ruwach* has many meanings – spirit, wind, breath. In terms of “spirit” it mean the human life force sustained by God, the seat of reason, the seat of emotion, senses. In English, translators need to choose one, and this often obscures the poetic ambiguities present in the original. The NT typically uses different words, so the translations are clearer: *anemos* (wind) *pneuma* (spirit, sometimes breath or wind) *emphysaō* (breathe).

As an example read 2 Thess 2:8. Some translations will have “breath of his mouth”, others have “spirit of his mouth”. John 3:8 Here *pneuma* in some translations is *the wind blows where it will*, others *the Spirit blows where it will*. In the OT. Gen 1:2 - some translations have *a wind from God* (NRSV) and others have *the Spirit of God* (NIV)

Q4. Is it better to decide which is the “right” translation, or to acknowledge multiple possible meanings, or even multiple intended meanings?

The idea of the spirit of God, the breath of God or the wind from God evokes a rich relationship between God, humanity and creation.

¹ A lot of this material comes from the book “Dictionary of Biblical Imagery”, editors Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman

Different Meanings of Breath.

Q5: What part does the breath of God play in creation? see Gen 2:7, Job 27:2-4, Ps 104:29, Ps 33:6

Q6: What role does the breath/wind of God have in saving Israel? – see Ex 14:21, Ex 15:8-10?

Q7 Read Ezek 37:4-9. How is breath, spirit and wind all related here.

Q8: Read John 20:22-23. In what way is this breath of God life giving?

Wind also has many metaphorical meanings

Images of Wind.

Q9: What image does wind represent in the following?: Eccl 1:14, Eccl 5:15-16, Prov 11:29, Job 6:25-26

Q10: What image is represented by wind in Job 27:19-21, Matt 7:24-27, Eph 4:13-15?

Q11: Here are a range of positive images – how these use the image of wind? 2 Sam 22:10-11, Ps 18:10; Ps 104:3-4, Ps 135:7, Jer 10:13?

In early summer in Israel, the scorching east wind, Sirocco, thwarted human endeavors destroyed crops and dried up water sources

Q12: What role does wind play in these verses: Jer 4:11-13, Jer 18:17, Ps 11:6.

Q13: What does wind represent in Acts 2:1-3 ?

Q14: Do you see God at work in the world through natural phenomena like wind, rain, storms? If so, what is God saying to you as you ponder these things.?

The four winds (N, S, E, W) represent the comprehensiveness of God's control and dominion: Jer 49:35-36, Zech 2:6-7, so we can finish with the following prayer:

Prayer of The Four Winds (adapted from several sources)

Lord of the East, Lord of the morning, of brightness and new beginnings, help to arise each day in the newness of our baptism.

Lord of the west, Lord of sunsets and evenings, give us rest and refreshment, and the assurance of your continued protection and peace.

Lord of the South, of cold winter storms and cool summer breezes, help us to understand and appreciate the blessings of every season.

Lord of the North, of warm winds, of rain, of fertility and abundance, help us to be thankful for your fruitful earth and to care for it as wise stewards. Amen