

Book Review

An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God

Wilf Hildebrandt

(Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995). 256 pages. \$14.95 paper.

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For years, the only book on the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament written by a Pentecostal was Stanley Horton's *What the Bible Says About the Holy Spirit* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1976). Since 1995, an excellent study by Wilf Hildebrandt, based on his 1989 thesis at Regent College, has made a great contribution to Old Testament pneumatology. While insightful, Horton's work is a terse, running canonical commentary that interacts minimally with the views of other scholars. Hildebrandt has taken a more topical approach that interacts extensively with other literature in the field. Both books are important resources for the Pentecostal student of the Old Testament.

Hildebrandt begins with a helpful survey of the field in the Preface. He makes an important point about previous popular literature that ultimately diminishes the authority of the Scriptures by shallow, fallacious handling of many passages, evidenced particularly by spiritualizing and allegorizing (xvi). Hildebrandt does a good job of interpreting biblical texts in their context and clarifying their intended meaning.

The first chapter, on "The Semantic Range of *Ruach*," is the best way to begin this study. Hildebrandt asks the right questions and searches the best sources, especially in the ancient Near

Eastern background of the Old Testament. I agree with his statement that *ruach* was "the best [term] for Israel to communicate God's invisible presence" at work in the world to accomplish His purposes (8, see also 89).

The other chapters continue a logical progression on the major pneumatological topics or themes of the Old Testament: "The Spirit of God in Creation," "The Spirit and God's People," "The Spirit of God in Israel's Leadership," "The Spirit of God in Prophecy," and "Pneumatological Reflections." They provide an outline for teaching or preaching on this subject. Hildebrandt's subtopics would make a good sermon series, for instance, on the work of the Spirit in "the establishment, preservation, judgment, and restoration of the people of God" (67).

Hildebrandt brings out many insightful and practical truths, such as "the successful rule and blessing of God is experienced only where charismatic leaders are endowed with the Spirit for their royal functions" (61). With a careful, thorough investigation of various biblical texts, his study of water as a symbol of the Spirit of God is a helpful clarification of a common symbol (62-66). Hildebrandt provides useable, practical, truths in his exposition of the verses that talk about

“Comfort in God’s Presence” (82). In one example of a helpful comment on a difficult Bible passage, he explains the sons of God in Genesis 6:3 are “tyrannical and polygamous rulers” (83). He handles very well the important subject of the Spirit as a person in the Old Testament revelation (88-91).

I especially like Hildebrandt’s observations on Numbers 11. I have developed my own article (see *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 10. no. 1 [October 2001], 3-10), building on Hildebrandt’s description of the narrative about the seventy elders’ reception of the Spirit and prophesying as both paradigmatic and programmatic for God’s people, making them Pentecostal. An important concept for Pentecostals, which he sees here and elsewhere, is the democratization of the gift of the Spirit (96, 99, 109), by which he means God wants this for all His people. Furthermore, Hildebrandt’s understanding of the phenomenon of prophesying in Numbers 11 supports the doctrine of initial evidence (111). Finally, he brings out truths on leadership that are applicable in the church today.

I must take exception with Hildebrandt at one point, but it changes only a metaphor of the Spirit’s working in a person’s life. Hildebrandt says Gideon was “clothed” with the Spirit, according to Judges 6:34 (115). However, a close study of the verb usage in this form shows that it always means, “put on as clothes” before an object (a piece of clothing). Thus, the verse says, “the Spirit of God put Gideon on as clothes,” which means Gideon was filled with the Spirit (see also Horton, 38-39). There is no reason to change this powerful image.

A few other excellent points include his explanation of God’s anointing of someone as “authorizing” and “commissioning” them for their leadership function (123-125). Chapter 5 contains many helpful points on prophecy, a topic of great current interest. Hildebrandt explains the transfer of the Spirit from Elijah to Elisha as God’s authorizing the latter as the successor to Elijah’s ministry (176-177).

The book concludes with a good summary, including a discussion of miracles: “The OT is uncompromising on the fact that spoken formulas, repetition, and manipulation are not factors in bringing about the design, word, and will of God. It is only God’s word brought about by the Spirit that is effectual and able to supercede natural laws” (207). Finally, the indices in the back of the book greatly enhance its usefulness as a reference tool. Hildebrandt has done thorough, careful, scholarship on a needed subject, from a Pentecostal perspective. I highly recommend it for all who are interested in teaching and preaching on the Spirit from the Old Testament.