

## The Spirit Abides

### Chapter 1: The Spirit and the Waters (Genesis–Exodus)

“The earth was unformed and unfilled; darkness covered the deep, but the Spirit of God hovering covered the waters.” (Gen. 1:2)<sup>1</sup>

“Yahweh said, ‘My Spirit won’t keep abiding in people<sup>2</sup> forever, because they are mortal.’” (Gen. 6:3a)

“By the breath [*ruah*] of your nostrils, the waters were piled up.  
They stacked up like a mound,  
The deep, in the heart of the sea, was solidified.” (Exod. 15:8)

These texts, spanning creation, the flood, and deliverance at the Sea, collectively suggest the abiding presence of the Spirit even amid chaos. The Spirit (*ruah*) and the waters are considered foundational in their role for cosmic creation, inundation (uncreation), and new creation in Genesis and Exodus.<sup>3</sup> At first glance, Genesis 6:3 seems to contradict this book’s central theme: the Spirit abides. Yet this apparent tension actually illuminates *how* the Spirit abides. First, a rehearing of the creation in Genesis 1, where the divine Spirit hovers like a bird over the chaotic watery creation needing forming and filling to be a place for life.<sup>4</sup>

The previous chapter explored the rich semantic range of *ruah*—wind, breath, spirit—and how this multivalency enables the Hebrew text to speak simultaneously of natural phenomena and divine activity: wind, breath, spirit, and Spirit. In the narratives examined in this chapter, this linguistic fluidity becomes theologically essential. When *ruah* moves over waters, we encounter not merely meteorological events but cosmic encounters between divine presence and primordial chaos. The waters themselves carry symbolic weight throughout these texts: *mayim* (waters), *tehom* (the deep), *tehomot* (depths), and *yam* (sea) represent more than geographical features—they embody the forces of chaos, death, and uncreation that only divine *ruah* can order, judge, and ultimately overcome.

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<sup>1</sup> All translations are my own unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew reads “*adam*” as singular noun meant to be collective and the personal pronouns in this sentence are the masculine singular “he” perhaps making this even more personal and corporate where all are judged together.

<sup>3</sup> Others have noted the ways in which the chaotic waters and the *ruah* intersect playfully in Genesis 1, 6, and Exodus 14–15. See, for example, Richard E. Averbeck, “Breath, Wind, Spirit and the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament,” pp. 25–37, in David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner, eds., *Presence, Power, and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 31–33.

<sup>4</sup> There are numerous scholars who have read the watery chaos as such, but one who makes a strong case for precisely hearing the Spirit here as divine and intentionally framed at the beginning to set the stage for what follows is William P. Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology in the Hebrew and Greek Texts of Genesis 1:1–2:3* (SBL Dissertation Series 132; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993), 75–77.

This chapter traces three pivotal moments where *ruah* encounters chaotic waters: the hovering over primordial chaos in Genesis 1, the withdrawal and return through the flood narrative in Genesis 6-9, and the dramatic rescue and judgment at the Reed Sea in Exodus 14-15. Each episode reveals the Spirit's sovereignty over chaos while developing the theological theme that undergirds this entire study—that the Spirit abides, though not always in ways human expectation might predict. The Spirit's relationship to water imagery provides a lens through which to understand how divine presence operates through both creative ordering and necessary judgment, always with the ultimate goal of establishing spaces where life can flourish.

## Genesis 1: The Spirit Hovers Over Primordial Waters

The opening of Genesis is crafted to indicate something created that is not yet life-giving and sustaining. The chaos of the watery “deep” (Heb. *tehom*) is also “the unformed and the unfilled” (Heb. *tohu wabohu*). The Hebrew term *tehom* appears here without the definite article, suggesting not merely ‘a deep’ but perhaps the primordial Deep itself—the embodiment of chaos that stands opposed to ordered creation. Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) literature depicts such primordial waters as divine opponents requiring conquest (Tiamat in *Enuma Elish*, Yamm in Canaanite texts), but Genesis presents a strikingly different picture. The lack of the definite article before *tehom* in Genesis 1:2 is grammatically significant—elsewhere in the Old Testament, “the deep” typically appears as *hat-tehom* with the definite article when referring to specific bodies of water. The absence of “the” before *tehom* here in Genesis 1:2 suggests something more fundamental: not merely a deep but the archetypal Deep, the primordial state that precedes all ordered creation. Here, *tehom* is not a deity requiring defeat but chaos requiring ordering—and the Spirit of God hovers over it with nurturing intent.

This ordering process in Genesis 1 follows a pattern remarkably similar to ancient temple construction and dedication.<sup>5</sup> The seven-day structure of creation mirrors the seven-day dedication ceremonies found in temple literature throughout the ANE. Just as temples required careful preparation of sacred space before divine presence could dwell there, creation unfolds through systematic preparation—separating, gathering, and ordering—until the cosmic temple is ready for God's sabbath rest. The Spirit's hovering presence over the primordial waters thus initiates not merely cosmic ordering but temple preparation on the grandest scale.

The relationship between *tehom* and *tohu wabohu* creates a hendiadys of sorts (meaning two terms that communicate a single idea): the deep-chaos is simultaneously the formless-empty. This pairing suggests that what needs divine attention is not evil requiring destruction but potential requiring actualization. The waters are not inherently opposed to God's purposes but await divine ordering to become the foundation for life. This theological nuance becomes crucial for understanding how the same waters that later destroy in the flood can also preserve life in the ark, and how the Reed Sea can simultaneously provide a highway for Israel and a grave for Egypt.

The creation of the heavens and the earth begins with a scene that is there, yet not fully a something. It is not yet capable of generating or sustaining life. In modern contexts, readers might assume life emerges from the waters themselves. While life will emerge from the “deep”

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<sup>5</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (New Studies in Biblical Theology 15; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 29-122; John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011); and *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

and from the “waters,” it will not be because of the waters. It will be because of the hovering Spirit of God.

The Hebrew word *merahepet* used here and translated as “hovering” is used elsewhere of an eagle hovering over her young in the nest (Deut. 32:11). This is the image of the Spirit over the watery deep that remains yet unformed and unfilled. While the Spirit is never explicitly given agency in this creation account of Genesis one, the setup to this breath of God, this divine wind blowing over the waters, carries the implications of nurture, care, protection, and ultimately life. This imagery also foreshadows the Spirit’s continued, protective action over Israel, as is heard in the crossing of the Sea in Exodus.

The life of God stirs over the chaos as God speaks and creation forms (days 1-3) and fills (days 4-6). Notably, the very first creative act following the Spirit’s hovering is the separation of waters—light piercing darkness, then waters above from waters below (1:6-7). The hovering Spirit does not remain passive over the chaotic *tehom* (“deep”) but is present with the divine word to breath order upon the watery chaos. What was once undifferentiated deep becomes structured: seas gathered into their place, dry land appearing, boundaries established. The Spirit’s nurturing presence engenders the fundamental act of creation—the ordering of what was formless into a cosmos capable of sustaining life.

The Spirit’s hovering enables what follows: the systematic structuring of chaotic waters throughout creation’s first three days. This three-day structuring of space (days 1-3) followed by three days of filling (days 4-6) reflects the fundamental temple pattern of preparation and consecration. Ancient temples required both architectural completion and ritual filling with sacred objects, personnel, and divine presence. Genesis 1 follows this same sequence: space is first prepared through separation and boundary-setting, then filled with lights, creatures, and finally humans who bear God’s image—the ultimate temple furnishing. The Spirit’s role in enabling this cosmic temple construction establishes the pattern for all subsequent sacred space, from ark above the floods to the tabernacle in the wilderness.

Day one pierces the darkness over the deep with light. Day two separates the waters above from waters below, creating the *raqia* (firmament/expanse) that holds back the upper waters while organizing the lower ones. Day three gathers the lower waters into their designated places, allowing dry land to appear and creating the fundamental boundaries between sea and land that make terrestrial life possible.

This progression reveals the Spirit’s role as enabler of divine ordering. Each act of separation and gathering represents the imposition of boundaries on what was previously undifferentiated chaos. The waters are not eliminated but organized—transformed from threat to foundation, from chaos to cosmos. The Spirit’s hovering presence ensures that this ordering serves life’s flourishing rather than mere cosmic control.

Perhaps you are wondering why the Spirit would only be mentioned at the beginning of Genesis 1 and not throughout or even at the end? If the Spirit abides, why is the Spirit only here at the opening of Genesis one?

A couple of reasons may suggest themselves from the flow of the text. First, the highlighting of the Spirit is offered at the beginning to point to an emphasis that appears to be held in mind as the days reveal themselves with new surprises at the divine command. Emphases do not always need to be repeated. Instead, the intended trajectory appears set. Readers are meant to assume the Spirit abides over the days of creation, somehow there in the midst, over, above, moving about. Without a reference to the Spirit departing once God begins speaking, would be to assume something the text does not say. The text does not say explicitly that the Spirit abides, but

why would it be assumed the Spirit does not abide if the text also does not claim that to be the case? The forefronting of the Spirit sets the stage for the waters to divide, to be put into their place/s, to give way to land, to be filled with life. The hovering Spirit remains to nurture all of this.

This divine activity of placing waters “in their place” echoes the temple imagery of establishing proper boundaries and sacred order. In temple theology, everything must be in its designated location—holy of holies, holy place, outer court—with clear boundaries maintaining the sacred geography. Similarly, the Spirit’s work ensures that cosmic waters are assigned their proper domains: seas gathered into their places (Gen. 1:9), waters above held in the firmament (1:7), each element positioned to serve life rather than threaten it. The Spirit thus functions as the divine architect, ensuring that the cosmic temple’s sacred geography serves its intended purpose.

Second, the Spirit in verse two is the Spirit “of God”.<sup>6</sup> (or the divine wind). The reference is not missed when, only a few words later, the text says, “and God said...”. Those hearing this would not now assume that the Spirit of God has departed. The assumption (without having to say it each time) is that this same Spirit of God is present and involved in the creation that follows. Life proceeds from the hovering Spirit. Waters are separated and assigned to their place by the Spirit. Newly created life swarms within the waters to fill them even as creation itself seems filled with the life of this hovering Spirit. This breath of life fills those created to “fill the earth” and those tasked to also care for the creation. It would seem the text indicates the Spirit abides through it all: from the deep waters of chaos to the waters, heavens, and land bearing life. The waters of chaos, where nothing was formed or filling creation, is now that from which the Spirit hovering bears witness to life. This hovering presence establishes the pattern of the Spirit’s abiding with creation.

The culmination of this cosmic temple construction comes with humans created as God’s image-bearers—living representations of divine presence placed within the temple of creation.<sup>7</sup> Just as ancient temples housed divine images representing the deity’s presence, humans function as Gods living images within the cosmic sanctuary. The Spirit who hovered over the initial chaos thus enables the creation of both temple and temple servants, establishing the fundamental pattern that will later manifest in tabernacle and temple construction, where the same Spirit empowers human craftsmen to build earthly sanctuaries.

## **Genesis 6-9: The Spirit Withdraws and Returns**

However, this is not all that Genesis (or the rest of Scripture) has to say about the Spirit and the waters. The Spirit’s abiding proves conditional, tied to creation’s capacity for life rather than violence. Here we also see a second aspect of the Spirit: the conditionality of moving between life-giving and life-withdrawing, already hinted at in Genesis 1. In Genesis 6, Yahweh is grieved that he had created humans who never cease conceiving of evil and inflict violence everywhere undoing the life (and lives) of that first creation account. Death fills creation. Yet the Spirit abides!

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<sup>6</sup> The NRSVUE reads “a wind from God” with a footnote saying, “Or *while the spirit of God* or *while a mighty wind*” while the NEB reads “mighty wind”.

<sup>7</sup> J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005).

The same Spirit who hovered to nurture creation is now in tension with humanity's corruption. The breath that once gave life now threatens to be withdrawn. The flood narrative makes clear what this undoing means. Genesis 7:22 states that 'everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life (*ruah neshamat hayyim*) died'. Here, *ruah* (spirit/wind) and *neshama* (breath) are doubled to intensify the image. This recalls Genesis 2:7, where Yahweh God breathed *neshama* into the piled-up dust, making him alive—though Genesis 2:7 contains no explicit reference to *ruah*, the flood narrative's doubling of both terms suggests their fundamental connection in biblical anthropology. The flood undoes creation by withdrawing this very gift. The Hebrew phrase is striking—it is not merely biological life that perishes, but specifically all with the *ruah* of life, the very breath-spirit that animates creation. When the Spirit no longer abides with humans, the *ruah* that gives life is withdrawn, and the chaotic waters reclaim what the Spirit had once ordered for life.

This withdrawal specifically affects what Genesis 7:21-22 describes as "all flesh (*basar*) that moved on the earth ... everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life (*ruah nešamat ḥayyim*)."

The text emphasizes that the flood destroys not merely physical bodies but *basar* that contained divine *ruah*—embodied beings in whom the Spirit had been dwelling. The doubling of *ruah* and *nešama* intensifies the tragedy: what perishes is *basar* that had been animated by divine breath-spirit.

According to Genesis 6:3 that abiding would not be forever. The theological tension in Genesis 6:3 requires careful examination. When Yahweh declares that the Spirit 'will not abide (*yadon*) in humans forever,' the Hebrew verb suggests not simple departure but a refusal to remain engaged in the ongoing struggle with human rebellion. The root meaning involves contending or striving—the Spirit will not continue striving with humanity indefinitely. This nuances our understanding significantly: the Spirit's 'withdrawal' is not abandonment of creation but a shift from patient forbearance to active judgment.

Yet even this shift maintains the Spirit's fundamental commitment to life. The same divine decision that brings the flood also provides the ark. The same Spirit that withdraws from the rebellious earth hovers over the preserved remnant floating above the chaos. This suggests that the Spirit's 'not abiding' with humanity in general does not negate the Spirit's abiding with those whom God chooses to preserve for life's continuation.

The Hebrew verb *yadon* (occurring only here in the Hebrew Bible) can mean either 'abide' or 'contend/strive.' Both meanings illuminate the text: whether the Spirit ceases abiding with humanity or stops contending against human corruption, the implication remains that divine patience has limits. The Spirit's relationship with creation involves both sustaining presence and active resistance to chaos—whether moral or cosmic. This tension highlights how abnormal the Spirit's withdrawal would be considered.

The theological significance of Genesis 6:3 deepens when we examine what the Spirit will not continue abiding *in*. The Hebrew text specifies that the Spirit will not abide "in humans" (*ba-adam*), but the broader context reveals this relates specifically to the Spirit's presence in human *basar* (flesh). This term appears throughout the flood narrative and deserves careful attention for understanding how the Spirit relates to human existence.

The word *basar* in Hebrew encompasses more than physical flesh—it refers to the whole embodied human person in their mortality and vulnerability. When Genesis 6:3 declares humans are *basar* ("because they are flesh"), it emphasizes not sinfulness per se but the finite, mortal nature that makes humans dependent on divine *ruah* for life. This creates a crucial theological distinction: the Spirit's withdrawal is not from flesh as inherently evil but from flesh that has

become corrupted through violence, making it incompatible with the life-giving presence of the Spirit.

Genesis 7:15 provides a striking counterpoint that illuminates this relationship: “They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life (*ruah hayyim*).” Here we see that *basar* (flesh) can indeed contain *ruah hayyim* (breath/spirit of life)—the very thing that the flood removes from the violent earth. This suggests that the problem is not *basar* itself but *basar* that has become incompatible with the indwelling *ruah*.

The pairing of these verses reveals a sophisticated understanding of divine indwelling. The Spirit can abide *in* flesh when that flesh serves life’s flourishing, but withdraws from flesh that has become an instrument of violence and death. The preserved animals in the ark represent *basar* that retains its capacity to house the *ruah hayyim*, while the destroyed creation represents *basar* from which the Spirit has departed.

This *basar-ruah* relationship provides crucial background for understanding the Spirit’s later work through human agents. When the Spirit fills craftsmen like Bezalel and Oholiab, we see the same idea: the Spirit can dwell within human *basar* when that embodied existence remains aligned with divine purposes. The craftsmen’s *basar*—their hands, minds, and creative capacities—becomes the vessel through which the Spirit works to create sacred space.

This statement must be understood within Scripture’s broader testimony about the Spirit’s activity. It cannot mean that the Spirit was just done with all of creation and humans altogether and forever, since the Spirit fills the pages of Scripture that follow through the canon all the way through to the end. It may be that the flood account gives us some help with answering this.

While the Spirit is said not to continue to abide with (or in?) humans forever, the story moves forward with the undoing of creation by the waters of the deep and the water sluices of the heavens opening to release their waters upon the earth. The chaotic deep engulfs earth, humanity, and all living things. Is this what happens when the Spirit no longer abides with humans—a sort of return to the chaotic watery deep of the beginning?

Except not all is lost. Noah, his family, and all of the creatures who are gathered with him in the ark survive by the will of God, but they must wait to see what might follow after the waters have destroyed everything on earth. While they were spared the immediate undoing of creation when the Spirit no longer abides, how do they survive the waters, even while floating above?

Are readers to imagine the Spirit has abandoned the preserved ark, or does the Spirit abide even within divine judgment? The ark represents a fascinating theological concept—a Spirit-sustained space above the chaotic waters. While the text does not explicitly describe the Spirit’s presence in the ark, the preservation of all life-breath (*ruah nishmat hayyim*) within its boundaries suggests continued divine sustenance. The ark becomes, in effect, a floating temple—a sacred space where the Spirit abides even while withdrawing from the earth below.

Significantly, those preserved in the ark are described as *basar* that retains ‘*ruah hayyim*’ (7:15). This indicates that the ark preserves not just biological life but the fundamental relationship between human *basar* and divine *ruah*—embodied existence that remains compatible with Spirit indwelling. The ark thus preserves the possibility of renewed *basar-ruah* relationship, maintaining the pattern established in Genesis 2:7 where divine *nešama* animates formed *adamah* (earth/flesh).

This theological dynamic anticipates themes that will become central to Israel’s later understanding of divine presence. The Spirit abides in designated spaces (tabernacle and later temple) while remaining sovereign over the broader creation. The ark prefigures this pattern:

divine presence concentrated in a specific location while maintaining authority over the surrounding chaos. The biblical text provides specific materials and dimensions for the ark (Gen. 6:14-16), creating a structured, measured space amid the measureless flood—much like how the tabernacle and temple will later provide measured sacred space amid the wilderness and world. Note that none of the details the text specifies are sufficient to actually build what is commanded. This suggests that those tasked to build will do so according to a pattern not fully described. As my next chapter indicates, this will require the Spirit's abiding guidance in construction down to every detail, even while remaining open to individual discernment of these incomplete scriptural instructions.

The ark's three levels (6:16) anticipate the tabernacle's tripartite structure (court, holy place, holy of holies), while its gopher wood construction parallels the careful material specifications that will characterize later sanctuary building. In both cases, the Spirit enables the creation of ordered sacred space where life can be preserved while chaos rages outside—whether floodwaters or wilderness dangers.

This selective pattern—the Spirit abiding with some while withdrawing from others—might seem to contradict claims about universal divine presence. However, these narratives suggest that the Spirit's abiding operates more like sanctuary theology: divine presence concentrated in spaces aligned with life's flourishing while remaining sovereignly engaged with the broader creation. At some point, Spirit withdraws from places and people that generate death while creating alternative spaces where life can be preserved and renewed.

The flood narrative suggests a profound truth: we live only as long as that Spirit remains. That same Spirit that would not abide with the violent earth and leads to the undoing of life, is paradoxically the same Spirit above the waters, guaranteeing and continuing the life of those within the ark.<sup>8</sup> That Spirit will also blow over the earth to push back the waters.

Genesis 8 opens with God remembering Noah and all those with him, and God “caused wind [*ruah*] to pass over (*va-ya'aver*) the earth, and the waters receded.” The language deliberately evokes the imagery of Genesis 1:2, where the Spirit of God hovered (*merahepet*) over the waters. Now divine *ruah* again moves over the chaotic waters, not to begin creation but to restore it—the same Spirit that once joined in the creation of life from the formless deep now pushes back the death-dealing flood to reveal dry ground once more. It was divine *ruah* that would not abide with humans forever, but also divine *ruah* that sends the waters of chaos back so that life might again flourish on the earth.

Perhaps we are meant to hear that the same *ruah* that departs is the same *ruah* that returns. The same *ruah* that allowed the watery deep to reclaim all of life also pushed back those waters so the spared could again fill the earth. The playfulness of the term in the Hebrew leaves open such possibilities.

Readers of Genesis should also note that the very waters that buried creation in Genesis 6-9 remove those in whom the text says the *ruah* of life was in (6:17; 7:22) even as paired representatives of all the creatures with this *ruah* of life in them entered the ark to be saved from the watery undoing of all life (7:15). This would not be the last rescue by the *ruah* through the waters. This pattern of *ruah*-mediated rescue through chaotic waters reveals the Spirit as wielding the very forces of chaos as instruments of both judgment and salvation.

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<sup>8</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 29.

## Exodus 14-15: The Spirit Commands the Sea

The echoes reverberate generations later when the descendants of Noah—through Abraham and down into Egypt—found themselves facing their own watery abyss under Moses' leadership. From hovering over creation to guiding Israel through the Sea, the Spirit's abiding presence governs life and chaos alike. Following the afflictions of Yahweh upon Egypt (and her gods), Yahweh leads the people toward the land promised long ago. The direction is not along the roads to Canaan, but up to and *through* the Reed Sea (*Yam Suph* in Hebrew—though many English translations render this as “Red Sea,” the Hebrew suggests a marshy body of water with reeds, but the identification remains unknown).

The location of Israel's water-crossing holds both geographical and theological significance. Whether *Yam Suph* refers to the Red Sea, a marshy lake region, or another body of water, the Hebrew term literally means ‘Sea of Reeds’—suggesting a liminal space where water and land interpenetrate. Reeds grow in shallow waters, boundary zones between the fully aquatic and the terrestrial. This geographical detail reinforces the theological symbolism: Israel stands at the boundary between slavery and freedom, between death and life, between chaos and promise.

The east wind (*ruah qadim*) that drives back the waters carries its own significance. East winds in biblical literature often herald divine intervention—sometimes bringing judgment (locusts in Exodus 10:13), sometimes deliverance. Here, the same directional wind that brought plague upon Egypt now brings salvation to Israel. The Spirit's sovereignty over chaotic waters encompasses both judgment and rescue, often simultaneously.

In the narrative telling of the crossing of the Sea (Exodus 14), Yahweh drives the Sea back with a strong east *ruah* to make a dry highway through the watery abyss. In the song of Moses that follows in Exodus 15, two lines mention *ruah* and the waters: “by the breath [*ruah*] of your nostrils, the waters were piled up” (verse 8) and following the enemies' boasts to overtake and destroy Israel, “but you blew with your breath [*ruah*], and the Sea covered them” (verse 10).

The Song of the Sea in Exodus 15 deliberately evokes the language of primordial creation and chaos. When verse 5 declares that “the depths (*tehomot*) covered them [the Egyptians],” it uses the plural form of *tehom*—the same chaotic deep over which God's Spirit hovered at creation's beginning (Gen. 1:2). The linguistic connection is unmistakable: the waters that once threatened to overwhelm all creation now serve as instruments of divine judgment, swallowing those who would destroy God's people. The *ruah* that once ordered the primordial *tehom* now commands the *tehomot* of the sea.

The Song of the Sea presents one of Scripture's most concentrated theological statements about the Spirit's relationship to chaotic waters. Verses 8 and 10 describe the same divine *ruah* performing opposite actions within a few lines: “By the *ruah* of your nostrils the waters piled up ... you blew with your *ruah* and the sea covered them.” This is not a contradiction but a revelation—the same Spirit-breath that creates safe passage for life releases destructive chaos upon those who oppose life.

The anthropomorphic language (describing God in human terms) intensifies the theology: God's nostrils (*appekha*) suggest both the breath of life given to Adam (Gen. 2:7) and the fierce breathing of divine anger. The same divine breath that animated the first human now both preserves and destroys life according to God's purposes. This dual function reveals the Spirit not as a capricious force but as a consistent advocate for life against the powers of death and oppression.



This represents the theological climax of the *ruah*-water theme throughout these texts. Within two verses of the same song, the identical divine breath performs contradictory actions—preservation and destruction, salvation and judgment. The proximity of these opposing functions in 15:8 and 15:10 eliminates any possibility of viewing them as separate aspects of divine activity. Instead, they reveal the Spirit’s complete sovereignty: the same breath that orders chaos for life can release chaos against those who threaten life.

One may still hear the playfulness of wind and Spirit in the *ruah* of this account. The strong east wind sent by Yahweh accomplishes the task of making the dry path through the Sea. No strictly meteorological “wind” carries out such actions, but the divinely sent *ruah* does. That *ruah* blows straight toward Israel on the western shore of the Sea. The waters are pushed away and piled up. The dry ground appears. Life passes along where the abyss had once ruled. It is also as if once again a representation of all with the *ruah* of life in them (in Israel) are preserved from watery graves. The Spirit abided with and on behalf of Israel.

Yet this is not the whole story. The Egyptians pursued Israel along that dried Sea-way. Yahweh had blown with the *ruah* of his nostrils to pile up the waters for Israel to live and escape (15:8), but then also blows with his *ruah* to swallow the Egyptians up in the midst of the Sea (15:10). The song of Moses thus resonates with Genesis. Just as God’s Spirit hovered over the chaotic waters of creation and later sent the flood and wind of re-creation, here again divine breath parts the sea and secures life. The *ruah* of Yahweh may both rescue and judge by the waters of undoing. Life belongs to the *ruah* of Yahweh. It is removed when the *ruah* blows and the waters return. It is preserved so long as the *ruah* abides it to be so.

### **Conclusion: The Spirit’s Sovereignty Over Chaos**

These narratives reveal the Spirit’s consistent sovereignty over the waters of chaos. Where the deep once threatened to engulf all creation, the hovering Spirit enables life to flourish. Where the flood returns creation to a sort of formless void, the same Spirit preserves life above the waters and then drives them back. Where the sea blocks the path to promise, divine *ruah* transforms the barrier into a highway. Across creation, flood, and exodus, the Spirit emerges as the decisive agent over the waters. In these accounts, water symbolizes chaos and death, but they are never sovereign—the Spirit is. Where the Spirit withdraws, chaos reclaims. Where the Spirit blows, new creation dawns.

The apparent contradiction between the Spirit’s withdrawal and abiding resolves when we recognize that divine persistence operates through rather than despite selective engagement. The same Spirit who “will not abide forever” with violent humanity nevertheless abides with creation itself, working through flood and exodus to preserve and restore life. Divine abiding transcends human mortality and failure precisely because it serves purposes that outlast any particular generation.

This understanding of the Spirit’s selective yet persistent abiding sets the stage for understanding how the same Spirit will later empower human artisans to construct earthly dwelling places for divine presence. From cosmic temple to ark to tabernacle, the pattern remains consistent: the Spirit abides wherever sacred space can be prepared for life’s flourishing, enabling both the ordering of chaos and the crafting of sanctuaries where divine presence can dwell among the people.

What emerges from these water narratives is a nuanced understanding of divine abiding that transcends simple presence or absence. The Spirit’s abiding operates on multiple levels

simultaneously: (1) cosmic sovereignty (maintaining ultimate authority over chaotic waters), (2) selective concentration (dwelling intensively with those aligned with life), (3) temporal persistence (remaining engaged across generations despite human failure), and (4) active responsiveness (dynamically engaging rather than passively residing).

The Spirit abides not as static presence but as committed relationship—withdrawing from violence while preserving remnants, departing from rebellion while enabling restoration, judging chaos while creating space for new life. This pattern suggests that divine abiding depends not on human deserving but on divine purpose: the Spirit remains wherever life can be nurtured, and chaos transformed into cosmos. Both flood and exodus indicate selective preservation and the dual action of salvation-and-judgment, revealing a God whose abiding transcends human expectations precisely because it serves life's ultimate flourishing.

These passages point toward the Spirit's persistent presence across the Old Testament (or at least from the beginning). These passages reveal an introductory continuity of the Spirit abiding over the surface of the texts. Having heard how the Spirit and the waters offer stories and songs of the Spirit abiding, the next chapter will explore how this same Spirit who orders cosmic chaos also enables human craftsmen and artisans to construct earthly sanctuaries—demonstrating that the Spirit's abiding extends from cosmic temple construction to human sanctuary building.