

AN EXPANDED ROLE FOR THE SPIRIT IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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Abstract: *This study argues that the Spirit plays a more expansive role in John's Apocalypse than scholars have typically recognized. This role is examined in four steps, with each building on the previous one. First, a discussion of John's use of numerical symbolism in Revelation shows that the numbers two, four, seven, and their multiples often indicate references to the Spirit. Second, while most exegetes agree that πνεῦμα and its cognates refer to the Spirit anywhere from eleven to eighteen times in Revelation, a case is made that John uses the word group twenty times with the Spirit in view. Third, of the various possible metaphors used for the Spirit, five metaphors allude strongly to the Spirit's presence in eleven total references. Given John's use of the πνεῦμα word group and various metaphors, he refers to the Spirit a total of thirty-one times in Revelation. The study concludes by discussing how these references to the Spirit function theologically. Seven major themes are identified that unveil a stronger Trinitarian emphasis in Revelation than is normally recognized.*

Key words: *Spirit, Revelation, numerical symbolism, metaphors, Johannine theology, Trinity*

Many scholars do not find a developed role of the Holy Spirit in the NT. This especially holds true with regard to John's Apocalypse.¹ Although the Spirit is referenced and imaged less than God and Christ, this study intends to show that the Spirit (πνεῦμα) plays a much larger role for John's theology than previously thought.² Four areas are addressed, and each builds on the previous one. First,

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¹ David Aune, *Revelation*, 3 vols, WBC 52 (Dallas: Word, 1997–1998), 1:34; R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 1:11; J. M. Ford, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 38 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 19. The recent commentary by Sigve K. Tonstad, *Revelation*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), barely mentions the Spirit.

² Edwin Reynolds catalogs 124 names, titles, and designations for God, 80 for Jesus, but only 17 for the Holy Spirit, in "The Trinity in the Book of Revelation," *JATS* 17 (2006): 55–72. Richard J. Bauckham designates 18 in *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 150. Hee Youl Lee proposes 19 in *A Dynamic Reading of the Holy Spirit in Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 72. By adding the metaphors of the Spirit, this article makes a case for 31 references. The Spirit in Revelation has received attention from F. F. Bruce, who published the first in-depth contribution in "The Spirit in the Apocalypse," in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament: In Honour of C. F. D. Moule*, ed. Barnabas Lindars and Stephen Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 333–44. Bauckham has produced several cogent studies: *Climax of Prophecy*, 150–73; "The Role of the Spirit in the Apocalypse," *EvQ* 52 (1980): 66–83; and *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 109–25. Robby Waddell produced a full-length treatment from a Pentecostal perspective: *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation* (Blandford Forum, UK: Deo, 2006). Recent studies, usually accenting one area, include Melissa L. Archer, "I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day": *A Pentecostal Engagement with Worship in the Apocalypse* (Cleveland, TN: CPT, 2015); J. C. de Smidt, "The Holy Spirit in the

John's numerical symbolism primes readers to see how numbers are used to identify the Spirit. Second, all the references of *πνεῦμα* and its cognates to the Spirit in Revelation are briefly described. Third, several metaphors that allude to the Spirit are considered. Taken together, uses of the *πνεῦμα* word group and various metaphors make a total of thirty-one references to the Spirit. Finally, the way these references and metaphors function theologically in Revelation is discussed.

I. THE SPIRIT AND NUMERICAL SYMBOLISM IN REVELATION

John emphasized three numbers in particular that are relevant to a study of the Spirit. First, the number two (*δύο*) symbolizes completeness and is often connected to a valid testimony and effectual witness (Num 35:30; Deut 17:6; 19:15; Matt 18:16; Heb 10:28).³ Therefore, the “two witnesses” who are “the two olive trees” and “two lampstands” (11:3–6) are distinguished by their witness for Christ in spite of persecution and death.⁴ Another number to consider is four (*τέσσαρας*). This number symbolizes full and total coverage, most often in view of God's creation, the surface of the earth, and universality.⁵ Thus, John mentions “four angels” who restrain the “four winds” at the “four corners of the earth” (Rev 7:1; 20:8) to signify total coverage of the earth.⁶ The number four is also attached to the work of the Spirit and will be discussed below.

Seven is the final number stressed by John that will be connected below to the Spirit. It connotes completeness, fullness, totality, and perfection. Seven along with its multiples is found throughout the ancient Near East as a sacred number. It is a keystone symbol for John's Revelation. Seven (*ἑπτὰ*) is found fifty-five times in Revelation, accounting for 63 percent of all NT uses. Furthermore, thirty words

Book of Revelation—Nomenclature,” *Neot* 28 (1994): 229–44; Kobus de Smidt, “Hermeneutical Perspectives on the Spirit in the Book of Revelation,” *JPT* 7 (1999): 27–47; Richard L. Jeske, “Spirit and Community in the Johannine Apocalypse,” *NTS* 31 (1985): 452–66; John Christopher Thomas and Frank Macchia, *Revelation*, THNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 475–85; and Mark L. Wilson, “The Spirit in Revelation: Explorations in Imagery and Metaphor,” *CTR* 17 (2019): 83–96. Lee relates how Bruce undertook a straight historical-critical approach. Lee, *Dynamic Reading*, 1–30. Bauckham takes the same approach but adds literary analysis. Jeske brings in a limited sociological analysis. J. C. de Smidt and Kobus de Smidt append narrative and socio-rhetorical features. For himself, Lee adopts a “dynamic” approach which attempts to synthesize these methodologies. For the present study, I find value in Lee's categories, but rest upon historical-critical methodology, appended with literary analysis and a few appeals to narrative criticism.

³ Michael Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb: Interpreting Key Images in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 298–99; Leland Ryken et al., eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 901–3.

⁴ For a discussion of the two witnesses, including a list of interpreters who understand them as literal or as symbolic, see Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 170–72.

⁵ Bauckham states that four “is the number of the world.” Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 30–31. Beale adds that four is “especially connoting something of universal or worldwide scope.” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 59.

⁶ See Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 274–76; Ryken, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 307–8. M. Eugene Boring asserts the number four became so established as a sacred number that Irenaeus argued the church must accept exactly four Gospels, based on Rev 4:7–8. M. Eugene Boring, “Numbers, Numbering,” *NIDB* 4:298.

appear exactly seven times in Revelation, including crucial terms such as “Christ,” “earthquake,” “lampstand,” “patient endurance” (ὕπομονή), “prophecy,” “time,” “prepare,” and “rule.”

Other words appear fourteen times (7 x 2). Taking the two numbers together accentuates complete and full witness. Some of the words found fourteen times in Revelation include “Jesus” (seven of the fourteen occurrences are indeed connected with “witness/testimony”; see 1:2, 9; 12:17; 17:6; 19:10 [twice]; 20:4), “God’s people/saints” (οἱ ἄγιοι; accepting 22:21 as original), “servant,” and “Spirit.”⁷ The implication that Christ, the Spirit, and believers have a role in witnessing comes across strongly.

The number twenty-eight (7 x 4) is likewise significant. “The Lamb” (τὸ ἄρνιον) as a title of Christ is found twenty-eight times.⁸ Seven of the occurrences couple God with the Lamb (5:13; 6:16; 7:10; 14:4; 21:22; 22:1, 3). Richard Bauckham states, “Since it is through the Lamb’s conquest that God’s rule over his creation comes about, the 7 x 4 occurrences of ‘Lamb’ appropriately indicate the worldwide scope of his complete victory.”⁹ The phrase “every tribe and language and people and nation” is found seven times, thus “the sevenfold use of this fourfold phrase indicates that the reference is being made to all the nations of the world.”¹⁰ The mysterious reference to the “seven thunders” (10:3–4) suggests another synchronous series of judgments—like the seals, trumpets, and bowls—which are never launched. John Christopher Thomas asserts, “It is exceedingly difficult to imagine that mention of the seven thunders would not be taken by the hearers as the introduction of yet another series of sevens, along the lines of the seven seals and seven trumpets.”¹¹ A fourth set of seven plagues would equal twenty-eight plagues in all. The list of cargoes that Babylon imports (18:11–13) equals twenty-eight. Thus, they “are listed as representative of *all* the products of the *whole* world.”¹² It is also striking that the three words translated as “scroll” (βιβλαριδιον, βιβλίον, βίβλος) add up to twenty-eight as do the two words for “thousand” (χιλιάς, χίλιοι). This suggests that the scroll and the millennium are all-encompassing terms.

⁷ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 34–35. For a discussion that supports the inclusion of οἱ ἄγιοι in 22:21 as original, see Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 162.

⁸ Actually, ἄρνιον is found twenty-nine times, but the “like a lamb” (ὅμοια ἄρνιω) in 13:11 refers to the second beast.

⁹ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 34.

¹⁰ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 326. Bauckham adds that the four references to the sevenfold Spirit correspond to the seven occurrences of the fourfold phrase that designates all the peoples of the earth.

¹¹ John Christopher Thomas, *Apocalypse: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Cleveland, TN: CPT, 2012), 313. Several scholars appear to support this viewpoint, including Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 259–61; Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of St. John*, BNTC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 154; Frederick J. Murphy, *Fallen Is Babylon: The Revelation to John* (London: T&T Clark, 1998), 253; Ian Paul, *Revelation*, TNTC 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018), 189; James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 154; and Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 262–63. More supporters are listed in Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 150–52.

¹² Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 31.

These numerical patterns do not appear to be coincidental.¹³ The numbers receive their figurative significance from the OT. John is skillful and purposeful in utilizing the number seven and its multiples. He does it for theological reasons. All the sevens denote that God controls all the world and practices his sovereignty over it.¹⁴ This meticulous use of numerical symbolism also aids in identifying the Spirit's significant role in Revelation. There are four references to the "seven spirits," with one mentioning "seven blazing lamps" (5:6). There are fourteen (7 x 2) references to "the Spirit." Seven of those fourteen are the commands to the seven churches to "hear what the Spirit says." Four times the significant phrase "in the Spirit" is mentioned. The next section will flesh out these references to the Spirit.

II. REFERENCES TO THE SPIRIT IN REVELATION

The numerical symbolism mentioned above aids in identifying the Spirit in Revelation. Although the familiar title of "Holy" Spirit (as well as "Spirit of God" and "Spirit of Christ") is absent from Revelation, the Third Person of the Trinity nevertheless plays a major role. Peter J. Leithart's recent commentary is worth examining at this point since he argues for a much more extensive role of the Spirit in Revelation than is typical. At the outset, the "angel of Jesus" that delivers the apocalypse to John is actually the Spirit (1:1). Thus, the formula of disclosure is Father→Son→Spirit→John.¹⁵ Leithart refers to the "Angel-Spirit" throughout his two-volume commentary. The Angel-Spirit is also in view in 8:1–5 as "another angel" who casts judgment on the earth. The Spirit is the "mighty angel" who delivers the commission for John to prophesy (10:1) and who descends to judge Babylon (18:1). Leithart further speculates that all six references to "another angel" in Revelation 14 refer to the Angel-Spirit. Finally, the Spirit is also the angel who descends to bind Satan for a thousand years (20:1).¹⁶ Leithart's approach is interesting and connects with scholars who view "the seven spirits" as angels. As mentioned above, however, it appears better to keep πνεῦμα and ἄγγελοι separate. Laying aside Leithart's expansive role, the Spirit may nonetheless be recognized in the fol-

¹³ It is certainly possible that Revelation's numerical patterns are coincidental. John's usage of numerical symbolism including their multiples for theological reasons is championed by Bauckham, and followed by Beale and Osborne, among others. Not everyone, however, is convinced. Moyise, for example, accepts Revelation's numerical symbolism but not for theological intent: "I do not think Bauckham is correct in assigning the word frequencies to John's intention." Steve Moyise, "Word Frequencies in the Book of Revelation," *AUSS* 43 (2005): 291.

¹⁴ Beale, *Revelation*, 58–59; Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 283–85. John often attaches the number four to the number seven. For example, "earthquake," "sickle," and "abyss" are mentioned seven times. But in four of their seven instances, another word is attached—"great earthquake," "sharp sickle," and "shaft" (of the) "abyss."

¹⁵ Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation*, 2 vols., ITC (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 1:79–80.

¹⁶ Leithart, *Revelation*, 1:350–51; 1:398–405; 2:214–16; 2:92–109; 2:301–2. Leithart, however, is inconsistent. He does not refer to the "mighty angel" of 5:2 or 18:21 as the Angel-Spirit. Nor, in 7:2, is "another angel" considered the Spirit. Puzzlingly, the excellent candidates for references to the Spirit that are discussed below (11:8, 11; 14:14–16; 15:8) are not considered by Leithart.

lowing seven categories with a total of twenty references.¹⁷ The list begins with the references most agreed upon and concludes with the more contentious ones.

1. “*The Spirit and the churches*” (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Seven of the fourteen references to πνεῦμα are the commands to the seven churches to “hear what the Spirit says” (ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει). The exhortation is built on Jesus’s call, “Let the one who has an ear, listen” (Mark 4:9, 23; Matt 11:15; Luke 8:8; 14:35). The call is a window reaching back to Isaiah 6:9–10, which Jesus quotes (Mark 4:12; see Matt 13:13–15). The words serve as prophetic warnings for listeners to open their minds and hearts to kingdom truths. David Aune explains that the expression, placed at the end of each letter, serves as a proclamation formula. It is an appeal to hear, understand, and obey divine revelation.¹⁸ Thus, it is the Spirit of Christ who delivers the commands to each one of the seven churches. Indeed, that the command is not limited to the seven churches, but is given to all churches through the ages, is underscored by the symbolism of the number seven.

2. “*In the Spirit*” (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). The significant phrase “in the Spirit” (ἐν πνεύματι) is found four times. Many interpreters agree that the phrase is a major structural marker for Revelation. Several commentators divide John’s visions into four major segments based on this marker.¹⁹ Exegetes differ over whether John is in an ecstatic or non-ecstatic state during his visions. The ecstatic or trance-like state refers to an out-of-body experience in which John is whisked away.²⁰ A few English versions possibly support the ecstatic approach, with translations such as “Spirit-inspired trance” (CEB), “the Spirit took control of me” (CEV, GNT), and “came under the Spirit’s power” (GW). Other scholars do not view the phrase

¹⁷ Twice πνεῦμα refers to demonic spirits (16:14; 18:2). English translations render the word as “demons” at these locations. See Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 56–57.

¹⁸ Aune, *Revelation*, 1:150–51. See Osborne, who adds a footnote explaining that the present participle ἔχων plus the present tense λέγει “highlight the current activity of the Spirit in convicting the church of these truths.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 121–22.

¹⁹ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, 119; José Adriano Filho, “The Apocalypse of John as an Account of a Visionary Experience: Notes on the Book’s Structure,” *JNT* 25 (2002): 215; J. P. Heil, *The Book of Revelation: Worship for Life in the Spirit of Prophecy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 2; Ronald Herms, *An Apocalypse for the Church and for the World: The Narrative Function of Universal Language in the Book of Revelation*, BZNTW 143 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), 147–54; George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 14–17; Leithart, *Revelation*, 1:44–45; Frederick David Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-Critical Perspective*, BZNTW 54 (New York: de Gruyter, 1989), 338–43; J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation*, IVPNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 26–32; Rebecca Skaggs and Priscilla Benham, *Revelation*, PCS (Dorset, UK: Deo, 2009), 14; Christopher R. Smith, “The Structure of the Book of Revelation in Light of Apocalyptic Literary Conventions,” *NorT* 36 (1994): 373–93; Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 32–41; Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 2–5; Külli Tõniste, *The Ending of the Canon: A Canonical and Intertextual Reading of Revelation 21–22*, LNTS 526 (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 44; Waddell, *Spirit of Revelation*, 138–50.

²⁰ So Aune, *Revelation*, 1:82–83; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 152; Boxall, *Revelation*, 39; Charles, *Revelation*, 1:22; Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed., TNTC 20 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 51; Robert H. Mounce, *Revelation*, 2nd ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 55; Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, NAC 39 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2012), 67; Resseguie, *Revelation*, 106; Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 32; Ben Witherington III, *Revelation*, NCBC (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 80.

as a technical term for a trancelike experience. They believe that John was conscious and alert in receiving the messages, and he later wrote down his visions.²¹

Only a few voices suggest ἐν πνεύματι refers to John's own spirit, not the Holy Spirit.²² A few Bible translations support this view with "in the spirit" (NRSV) and "caught up in spirit" (NABR). Most interpreters, however, whether they favor ecstatic or non-ecstatic experience, recognize that the Spirit is being referenced at these four locations.

3. "The seven Spirits" (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). Revelation's interpreters differ on the identity of "the seven spirits" (τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα). Many scholars understand them as a group of seven angels connected to the trumpets or bowls or as the seven watchful archangels or even more broadly as a part of a heavenly entourage.²³ This "angel" view is viable but has drawbacks. First, "spirit" is not used of angels anywhere else in Revelation. Second, in Greek each group has its own article so "the seven spirits" seems to be explicitly distinguished from "the seven angels" (3:1). Third, although angels are coupled with God and Christ elsewhere, the invocational stress (especially in 1:4) makes "angels" a less likely alternative.²⁴ More interpreters, therefore, identify this as a figure of speech specifying the divine fullness, power, and ministry of the Holy Spirit.²⁵ A few English versions (NASB, NKJV) capitalize

²¹ So George R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 112; Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 42; J. C. de Smidt, "Holy Spirit," 239–41; Jeske, "Spirit and Community," 462–63; Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 84; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 92; Osborne, *Revelation*, 83; Smalley, *Revelation*, 51; John P. M. Sweet, *Revelation*, TPINTC (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1979), 15.

²² Murphy, *Fallen Is Babylon*, 87; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation*, 2 vols., WEC (Chicago: Moody, 1992, 1995), 1:91.

²³ So Aune, *Revelation*, 1:34–35; M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, IBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 75; Boxall, *Revelation*, 86; Bogdan G. Bucur, "Hierarchy, Prophecy, and the Angelomorphic Spirit: A Contribution to the Study of the Book of Revelation's *Wirkungsgeschichte*," *JBL* 127.1 (2008): 173–94; Charles, *Revelation*, 1:11; Ford, *Revelation*, 377; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, AYBC 38A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 216; Leithart, *Revelation*, 1:84–85; Mounce, *Revelation*, 46–48; Murphy, *Fallen Is Babylon*, 69; Roloff, *Revelation*, 24; Witherington, *Revelation*, 75. Some (Aune and Charles) consider the reference to be a later interpolation. Tonstad makes no comment on the seven spirits. Tonstad, *Revelation*, 45–46, 88–89, 105–6, 114–16.

²⁴ Keener, *Revelation*, 69; Osborne, *Revelation*, 74.

²⁵ So Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 164, 336; Beale, *Revelation*, 189; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 56; Blount, *Revelation*, 34; Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation*, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), 41–42; Bruce, "Spirit in the Apocalypse," 333–37; G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 2nd ed., HNTC (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 15; David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of Revelation* (Fort Worth: Dominion, 1987), 60; J. C. de Smidt, "Holy Spirit," 229–44; J. Scott Duvall, *Revelation*, TTCS (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 25; Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 80–81; Gordon D. Fee, *Revelation*, NCCS (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 6; Alan F. Johnson, "Revelation," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., vol. 13 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 599; Keener, *Revelation*, 70; Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 82; Ladd, *Revelation*, 24; Lee, *Dynamic Reading*, 83; Leithart, *Revelation*, 1:84–90; Joseph L. Mangina, *Revelation*, BTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 43; Michaels, *Revelation*, 54; Francis J. Moloney, *The Apocalypse of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020), 46; Morris, *Revelation*, 49; Osborne, *Revelation*, 61, 74; Patterson, *Revelation*, 59–60; Paul, *Revelation*, 62; Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, trans. Wendy Pradel (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 117; Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles, and the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 238–39; Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation*, SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 35; Resseguie, *Revelation*,

“seven Spirits” to confirm the Holy Spirit is intended, even though the plural form may be confusing for Bible readers. The NIV and CSB include a footnote that states that the phrase can be rendered “sevenfold Spirit.” The NLT inserts “sevenfold Spirit” into its text. The VOICE paraphrase gives “the seven Spirits, *the Perfect Spirit*.” The plural form probably alludes to the vision of the seven lamps of Zechariah 4:1–10. The lamps represented not might nor power but God’s Spirit at work in the world. Another allusion is the sevenfold description of the Spirit in Isaiah 11:2. The Spirit’s seven attributes described the ideal king from David’s line. Hence, the coming king will guide and empower through the Spirit of the Lord.²⁶

Significantly, this phrase occurs four times, suggesting full coverage of the earth. First, the Spirit empowers the churches to be effective witnesses in the world (1:4). Second, Christ holds the seven spirits in his hand; he is the Spirit of the risen Christ, distinct therefore from the seven angels (3:1). Third, John sees seven lamps blazing, recalling the lampstand with seven lamps (4:5; Exod 25:31–40) that stood in God’s presence. Finally, the seven spirits appear as a characteristic of the Lamb who has seven horns and seven eyes, “which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth” (5:6). Once again, the allusion to Zechariah underscores Jesus’s omnipotence and sovereignty and the Spirit’s omniscience.²⁷ The sevenfold (Holy) Spirit is God’s active presence and energizing witness sent out to all the earth.²⁸

4. “*The Spirit says*” (14:13; 22:17). Twice in Revelation the Spirit is quoted. Few scholars would dismiss such direct discourse.²⁹ The first one rests at the conclusion of the section where three angels announce end-time messages (14:6–13): “Then I heard a voice from heaven say, ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on,’” followed by “‘Yes,’ says the Spirit” (ναί, λέγει τὸ πνεῦμα), “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them” (14:13 NIV). The word ναί serves the same function as the double ἀμήν ἀμήν in the Gospel of John. It affirms the truth of the blessings that await those who die in the Lord.³⁰

The second quote comes at the conclusion of John’s work (22:17). The first phrase of the verse reads, “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’” The speaker’s identity is debated. A few commentators suggest Jesus is speaking.³¹ Other interpreters understand it as the voice of the Spirit speaking through John or Spirit-

66; Carol Rotz, *Revelation: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, NBBC (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2012), 48; Skaggs and Benham, *Revelation*, 18; Smalley, *Revelation*, 33–34; Sweet, *Revelation*, 65; J. C. Thomas, *Apocalypse*, 92; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation*, 1:67; Wilson, “Spirit in Revelation,” 86.

²⁶ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 162–66; Fanning, *Revelation*, 80–81. Leihart finds an allusion to Genesis 1:2, where the Spirit helps create the world in seven days. Leihart, *Revelation*, 1:87–88.

²⁷ Beale, *Revelation*, 355; Lee, *Dynamic Reading*, 102–4.

²⁸ Bauckham, “Spirit of Prophecy,” 113. See Waddell, *Spirit of Revelation*, 11–21.

²⁹ E.g., Ford accepts the references as later interpolations. Ford, *Revelation*, 238.

³⁰ As mentioned previously, Leihart suggests that the Spirit has been speaking throughout 14:6–13 in the guise of the three angels. Leihart, *Revelation*, 2:93–94, 103–5. In fact, there are six instances of “another angel” in Revelation. Three angels fly through the air (14:6, 8, 9); another calls on the son of man to throw his sickle to the grain (14:15); another harvests the grapes (14:17, 19); and another has power over fire (14:18→ 8:1–5). Since the harvesting angel appears twice (14:17, 19), Leihart concludes that these seven uses of ἀγγελος match the seven spirits of God (1:4).

³¹ Charles, *Revelation*, 2:179; Michaels, *Revelation*, 256.

inspired prophets.³² Most scholars, however, find that the speaker is simply the Holy Spirit, the very one who has inspired the whole book.³³ Thus, it is important for readers to heed these quotes from the Spirit, since they originate from heaven and are equated with God and the Lamb.

5. *“The Spirit of (the) prophecy” (19:10)*. The final three references are the most debated. At the end of the Fall of Babylon vision (17:1–19:10), John states that Jesus is “the Spirit of the prophecy” (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προφητείας). Many scholars understand πνεῦμα as the “essence” or “heart” of prophecy. Blount, for instance, states that John “is speaking here, then, not about the Spirit of God, but about the role of human witnesses.”³⁴ Most English versions also support the “essence” idea.

Nevertheless, a number of scholars affirm that John is referring to the Holy Spirit. Bauckham explains that parallels to this expression in other literature make it clear that the reference is to the divine Spirit.³⁵ Mark Wilson notes that “the article τὸ is anaphoric and refers to eight previous usages (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13)” and that the verse denotes “the Spirit who has inspired the prophecy—the Apocalypse.”³⁶ Thus, it is the Spirit who produces the prophecy or Spirit-inspired prophecy. Moreover, CEV, CJB, and NIV capitalize Spirit, and CSB adds the alternate reading in a footnote. Further support is available through numerical symbolism. If 19:10 refers to the Spirit, then it confirms exactly fourteen references to the Spirit (7 x 2).³⁷ The point is that the witness of Jesus is deeply connected to the Holy Spirit of the prophecy.³⁸

³² Aune, *Revelation*, 3:1227–28; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 167; Caird, *Revelation*, 287; Fanning, *Revelation*, 563; Wilfred J. Harrington, *Revelation*, SP 16 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 223; Morris, *Revelation*, 261; Smalley, *Revelation*, 578; Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 310.

³³ Beale, *Revelation*, 1148; Blount, *Revelation*, 412; Boxall, *Revelation*, 318; Brighton, *Revelation*, 655; Fanning, *Revelation*, 563; Fee, *Revelation*, 313; Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 592; Koester, *Revelation*, 856; Leithart, *Revelation*, 2:428; Mangina, *Revelation*, 251; Mounce, *Revelation*, 409; Paul, *Revelation*, 370; Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 400; Töniste, *Ending of the Canon*, 189. Osborne notes how awkward this seems for Jesus to quote the Spirit and the bride about his second coming. Thus, he finds no real distinction between these options. He is, after all, called “the Spirit inspiring prophecy” (19:10). Osborne, *Revelation*, 793. So too Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation*, 2:511.

³⁴ Blount, *Revelation*, 348. So too Beale, *Revelation*, 947; Boxall, *Revelation*, 270; Harrington, *Revelation*, 187; Ladd, *Revelation*, 251; Leithart, *Revelation*, 2:264; Michaels, *Revelation*, 214; Mounce, *Revelation*, 351; Murphy, *Babylon Is Fallen*, 385; Patterson, *Revelation*, 346; Tonstad, *Revelation*, 276; Witherington, *Revelation*, 234. See Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 255–56.

³⁵ Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*, 116. He footnotes numerous parallel expressions.

³⁶ Wilson, “Spirit in Revelation,” 89. So too Aune, *Revelation*, 3:1038; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 276; Boring, *Revelation*, 194; Brighton, *Revelation*, 502; Caird, *Revelation*, 233; Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 480; Duvall, *Revelation*, 252; Fanning, *Revelation*, 484; Fee, *Revelation*, 269; Johnson, *Revelation*, 756; Keener, *Revelation*, 452; Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 518; Koester, *Revelation*, 732; Leithart, *Revelation*, 2:264; David L. Mathewson, *Revelation*, AHGT (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 263; Morris, *Revelation*, 222; Osborne, *Revelation*, 678; Paul, *Revelation*, 311; Roloff, *Revelation*, 213; Smalley, *Revelation*, 487; Sweet, *Revelation*, 281; Swete, *Apocalypse*, 249; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation*, 2:377; Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 336–37; Töniste, *Ending of the Canon*, 63.

³⁷ Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*, 110.

³⁸ Since a majority of scholarship favors “Spirit” for 19:10, future editions of modern English versions should reconsider and capitalize the word or at least include an alternative reading in the footnote.

6. “*Spirit’-ually speaking*” (11:8). Does the Spirit’s presence extend to adverbs? After the two witnesses finish their testimony, the beast overpowers and kills them. Their bodies lie in the public square of the great city—which is “spiritually called” (καλεῖται πνευματικῶς) Sodom and Egypt—where also their Lord was crucified (11:7–8). A survey of English versions finds a range of “figuratively called” (NIV, CSB); “symbolically called” (ESV, NET); “symbolic name” (GNT, NABR, NJB); “prophetically called” (HCSB, NRSV, REB); “mystically called” (NASB); “spiritually called” (CEB, EHV, Message); “spiritual meaning,” (NCV); “spiritually speaking” (VOICE); and “spiritually like” (CEV). The RSV regrettably has “allegorically.”

Most scholars treat πνευματικῶς as an adverb that simply means “spiritually.” For instance, Robert L. Thomas says that the word “shows this to be the language of allegory or metaphor.”³⁹ Yet there is evidence to support πνευματικῶς as a reference to the Spirit. First, Greek dictionaries underscore the adverb’s close connection to the Holy Spirit. BDAG, for example, defines it as “spiritually, in a spiritual manner, in a manner caused by or filled with the divine Spirit.”⁴⁰ Several interpreters of Revelation note the linkage as well. Thomas and Macchia declare that “none of these [English Bible] translations are adequate, as they fail to bring out that this identification comes by means of the Spirit.”⁴¹ Keener explains the adverb in this way: “that is, by the Spirit, who inspires prophets to understand God’s revelations (as in 17:3–5).”⁴² Waddell concludes, “Like John, who was in the Spirit when he saw his visions, the church must also see Spiritually.”⁴³ Numerous other scholars agree with these assessments.⁴⁴ Therefore, the Spirit should be considered as the backdrop of “Spirit’-ually speaking” in 11:8.

7. “*Spirit of life*” (11:11). A final candidate for consideration is πνεῦμα ζωῆς. The beast kills the two witnesses. The inhabitants of the earth gloat over the bodies. But after three and a half days, πνεῦμα ζωῆς from God enters them and they stand on their feet (11:7–11). The majority of Revelation’s commentators support the idea of “breath of life.”⁴⁵ The phrase is translated as “breath of life” by almost all English versions.

Even so, a case should be heard for identifying the Spirit in this phrase. The KJV renders it “Spirit of life.” The only modern Bible to agree is Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase *The Message* with “The Living Spirit of God.” The NIV does in-

³⁹ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation*, 2:93.

⁴⁰ BDAG 837. Likewise, Silva, *NIDNTTE* 3818–20; and Balz and Schneider, *EDNT* 3:122. The adverb πνευματικῶς is found only twice in the NT (1 Cor 2:14; Rev 11:8). The connection to the Spirit is also noticeable in Paul’s use.

⁴¹ Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 205.

⁴² Keener, *Revelation*, 294.

⁴³ Waddell, *Spirit of Revelation*, 183.

⁴⁴ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, 209; Aune, *Revelation*, 2:620; Bauckham, *Climax of Revelation*, 168–69; Bruce, “Spirit in the Apocalypse,” 339; Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 281; Koester, *Revelation*, 500; Johnson, *Revelation*, 687; Osborne, *Revelation*, 247; Paul, *Revelation*, 202; Roloff, *Revelation*, 133.

⁴⁵ E.g., Beale, *Revelation*, 596–97; Blount, *Revelation*, 215; Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 337; Mounce, *Revelation*, 222; Paul, *Revelation*, 203–4; Smalley, *Revelation*, 284; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation*, 2:296.

clude an alternate reading “Or *Spirit*.”⁴⁶ The Spirit as the “breath of life” echoes Genesis 2:7, Job 33:4, and especially Ezekiel 37:1–14. In the famous vision of the valley of dry bones, the Spirit of God empowered Ezekiel. This life-giving Spirit also will empower revived Israel to a life of obedience. God proclaims, “I will put my Spirit in you” (37:14 NIV).⁴⁷ Several OT commentators express that it is the Holy Spirit who breathes life into the dry bones.⁴⁸ These OT echoes are brought forward into Revelation. According to Hee Youl Lee, John “adds two phrases, ‘of life,’ and ‘from God’ specifically to represent it as the Divine Spirit. The Spirit derives from God, and the function of the Spirit is to give life to the two witnesses.”⁴⁹ Keener agrees: “The ‘breath of life’ (Rev. 11:11), which can also be translated ‘Spirit of life’ (cf. Rom. 8:2), alludes to God’s care in Genesis 2:7.”⁵⁰ John Christopher Thomas relates that the “Spirit of Life” who “enters the two prophets is the same Spirit who has inspired their prophetic activity.”⁵¹ Grant Osborne notes a double meaning: “Here the two witnesses are raised from the dead and restored to life by the Spirit. It is likely that πνεῦμα ζωῆς has a double meaning here, pointing (1) to the ‘life-giving Spirit’ as the means of (2) the new life ‘breathed’ into them.”⁵² Gordon Fee extends the thought, stating that “John is making deliberate wordplay on the double reality that life is in the breath, while at the same time he surely intends that *real* life for the believer lies with the indwelling Spirit of God.”⁵³ Therefore, it appears that the KJV had this right after all. The πνεῦμα ζωῆς from God is the Holy Spirit who gives life and indwells the two witnesses—God’s church.

To summarize, Leihart’s “Angel-Spirit” connection, while intriguing, is laid aside. The Spirit and angels remain separated throughout Revelation. However, the above uses of πνεῦμα/πνεύματι/πνεύματα/πνευματικῶς ably account for twenty references to the Spirit in Revelation. The Spirit is the revelatory source behind the seven letters; the one who brings visions to John “in the Spirit”; the effective power and witness of the Lord throughout the earth (seven spirits); the confirmatory voice from heaven; the source and inspiration of prophetic activity; and the indwelling presence of God in the church.

⁴⁶ There are also lower-case alternate readings of “Or *the spirit*” in NRSV and CSB.

⁴⁷ Other versions capitalizing “Spirit” in Ezek 37:14 include CEV, CJB, CSB, EHV, ESV, GW, NASB, NCV, NKJV, NLT, and VOICE.

⁴⁸ E.g., Ralph A. Alexander, “Ezekiel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 848; Daniel I. Block, *Ezekiel 25–48* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 389–90; L. E. Cooper, *Ezekiel*, NAC 17 (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 324; Peter C. Craigie, *Ezekiel*, DSB (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 259–61; Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 427; Ralph W. Klein, *Ezekiel: The Prophet and His Message* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 149; John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel*, TOTC 22 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1969), 237.

⁴⁹ Lee, *Dynamic Reading*, 72.

⁵⁰ Keener, *Revelation*, 296. Keener further notes that “Spirit of life” may also relate to raising the dead in 1 En. 61:7; T. Abr. 18A.

⁵¹ J. C. Thomas, *Apocalypse*, 338–39.

⁵² Osborne, *Revelation*, 430.

⁵³ Fee, *Revelation*, 154. So too Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, 209–10; Mathewson, *Revelation*, 148; Mounce, *Revelation*, 222; Roloff, *Revelation*, 134; Waddell, *Spirit of Revelation*, 184; Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 207.

III. METAPHORS OF THE SPIRIT IN REVELATION

This section moves beyond actual references to *πνεῦμα* to five metaphors that allude to the presence and work of the Spirit in Revelation. The first three metaphors present strong possibilities. The last two are intriguing and worth exploring. In total, there are eleven references to these five metaphors.

1. *The Spirit as “seven blazing lamps” (4:5).* The clearest connection to the Spirit is the “seven blazing lamps” (ἑπτὰ λαμπάδες πυρός).⁵⁴ John confirms the seven blazing lamps “are the seven spirits.” Since most exegetes affirm the seven spirits as a reference to the Spirit, the seven blazing lamps follow suit. As mentioned, the lamps allude to the lampstand with its seven branches (Exod 25:31–40) that stood before God’s presence in the holy of holies. It also echoes Zechariah’s prophecy of seven lamps, which is interpreted to describe the Holy Spirit (Zech 4:2–3). The added information that they are “blazing” probably stems from Ezekiel 1:13. The cosmic “flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder” echo the sovereign pronouncements of the Lord from Mount Sinai (Exod 19:16; 20:18). The primary point is that both the cosmic storm (4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18; the latter three appearing at the end of the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments) and the blazing lamps are symbols of divine power and majesty and of judgment. Osborne states that the symbols “prepare the reader for the outpouring of the wrath of the awesome God soon to come in the book.... In 4:11 God is both the sustainer and finisher of creation. Here the Spirit joins him in his activity.”⁵⁵

2. *The Spirit as “water of life” (7:17; 21:6; 22:1, 17).* Water is a common symbol for the Holy Spirit in Scripture.⁵⁶ Water is a consistent symbol in Johannine literature as well.⁵⁷ The Gospel of John (21 times), 1 John (4 times), and Revelation (18 times) represent 57 percent of all NT uses of ὕδωρ. Revelation contains a greater concentration of water imagery than found anywhere else in biblical literature.⁵⁸ As with many of John’s symbols, water is used in contrasting ways in Revelation—it can be good or bad. Water depicts persecution (8:10–11; 12:15), judgment (11:6; 16:4–5, 12), people (17:1, 15), the sovereign power and greatness of Christ at his second coming (1:15; 14:2; 19:6), and the bliss of eternal life (7:17; 21:6; 22:1, 17). It is this last depiction of “water of life” that deserves a closer look for the Spirit’s

⁵⁴ The phrasing of modern versions includes “seven lamps were burning” (NCV), “seven lamps were blazing” (NIV), “seven lamps of fire” (NJKV), “seven flaming torches” (CEB, GW, NABR, NET, NRSV), “seven torches of fire” (ESV), “seven torches with burning flames” (NLT), “seven lighted torches” (GNT), and “seven fiery torches” (CSB).

⁵⁵ Osborne, *Revelation*, 231. See also Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 162–63; Beale, *Revelation*, 326–27; Smalley, *Revelation*, 119.

⁵⁶ See Gerald A. Klingbeil, “Water,” *NIDB* 5:818–21; Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 69–70, 78–79; Ryken, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 810–11, 929–32.

⁵⁷ See Seung-In Song, *Water as an Image of the Spirit in the Johannine Literature*, StBibLit 171 (New York: Peter Lang, 2019). Song surveys water imagery that relates to the Spirit in the OT (28–30) and Second Temple literature (35–36) as well as Johannine literature.

⁵⁸ Thomas E. Schmidt, “‘And the Sea Was No More’: Water as People, Not Place,” in *To Tell the Mystery: Essays on New Testament Eschatology in Honor of Robert H. Gundry*, ed. T. E. Schmidt and Moisés Silva, LNTS 100 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 233–49.

involvement. Christ will lead his people to “springs of living water” (7:17), and they will drink without cost from “the spring of the water of life” (21:6). An angel shows John “the river of the water of life” in the heavenly city (22:1), and the believer is invited to drink “the water of life” freely for eternity (22:17).

Several scholars note an allusion to the Feast of Tabernacles in 7:9–17.⁵⁹ Jesus’s actions during Tabernacles (John 7:2) offer a clear connection between water and the Spirit. Jesus proclaimed, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink” for Scripture confirms that “he will have streams of living water flow from deep within him,” and Jesus said this “about the Spirit” (John 7:37–39 CSB). Osborne notes how the water theme of the Fourth Gospel matches 7:17 “as a symbol of eternal life and the divine revelation that comes through the Spirit.”⁶⁰ The new heaven and new earth of 21:1–8 includes 21:6’s “springs of living water” and recalls 7:17.⁶¹ The “the river of the water of life as clear as crystal” (22:1) is also clear in its allusion to the Spirit’s presence. Beale observes, “If the waters symbolize the Spirit, as in the similar portrayal in John 7:37–39, then Rev. 22:1 is an early picture of the later Christian confession that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.”⁶² Other exegetes detect the allusion to the Holy Spirit here as well.⁶³

The final mention of water of life is in the epilogue: “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come!’ Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life” (22:17 NIV). As mentioned earlier, there is some debate on whether 22:17 refers to the Spirit. But many interpreters do see the Spirit here, providing a strong link to the “water of life.” Beasley-Murray writes, “Revelation 22:17 constitutes a bridge between John 7:37f. and Revelation 22:1; the theology is virtually identical.”⁶⁴ Duvall affirms, “Now, God’s people are ushered into the very presence of God’s Spirit (7:16; 21:6; 22:17). They cannot possibly live any closer to the Triune God than they will in the transformed paradise.”⁶⁵ Swete summarizes all four passages in which the Holy Spirit is symbolized as the “water of life” (7:17; 21:6; 22:1, 17):

⁵⁹ Specifically, the “palm branches” in John 7:9 are cited often. See Aune, *Revelation*, 2:468–70; Beale, *Revelation*, 428; Blount, *Revelation*, 151; Boxall, *Revelation*, 125; Brighton, *Revelation*, 194–95; Harrington, *Revelation*, 100; Patterson, *Revelation*, 200; Paul, *Revelation*, 161; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 290; Rotz, *Revelation*, 125–26; Smalley, *Revelation*, 192; Sweet, *Revelation*, 152. More detailed studies are in J. A. Draper, “The Heavenly Feast of Tabernacles: Revelation 7.1–17,” *JSNT* 19 (1983): 133–47; Edwin Reynolds, “The Feast of Tabernacles and the Book of Revelation,” *AUSS* 38 (2000): 245–68; and Håkan Ulfgard, *Feast and Future: Revelation 7:9–17 and the Feast of Tabernacles*, ConBNT 22 (Lund: Almqvist & Wiksel, 1989).

⁶⁰ Osborne, *Revelation*, 332.

⁶¹ Keener, *Revelation*, 488.

⁶² Beale, *Revelation*, 1104.

⁶³ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 330–31; Duvall, *Revelation*, 299; Leithart, *Revelation*, 2:401; Mangina, *Revelation*, 246; Paul, *Revelation*, 358; Smalley, *Revelation*, 562; Swete, *Apocalypse*, 298. Leithart and Mangina trace the connection to the Holy Spirit to ancient tradition, including Andreas of Caesarea’s seventh-century commentary on the Apocalypse. Song offers compelling evidence of connections between water-Spirit in 22:1 and the OT and Johannine literature. Song, *Water as an Image of the Spirit*, 87–94.

⁶⁴ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 331.

⁶⁵ Duvall, *Revelation*, 299.

These passages are remarkable for the width of their outlook: they carry us from the beginnings of the spiritual life to its maturity, from the first gift of the water of life to the state in which access is given to the fountain-head. There is no stage in the progressive development of the new life at which the human spirit is not dependent on the Divine; the water of life which satisfies the first thirst, is not less necessary to the ultimate perfection of the Saints.⁶⁶

Seung-In Song is similarly convincing about these four passages. John purposefully connects the water image with the Spirit's function of quenching spiritual thirst with the similar expressions of "living water" and "water of life." Song concludes, "These two phrases are used by the Johannine author(s) as technical terms for referring to the Spirit throughout the Johannine literature."⁶⁷

3. *The Spirit as "anointing ointment" (3:18)*. Revelation 3:18 ends with "eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see" (NASB). The believers at Laodicea failed to recognize their spiritual blindness and need for Christ to correct it. Eye salve was produced throughout the Roman Empire and would have been a useful metaphor for spiritual sight and blindness.⁶⁸ The eye salve or "ointment" (κολλούριον; CEB, CSB, GW, GNT, NLT) hints at the work of the Holy Spirit. This is suggested by the accompanying verb "anoint" (ἐγγρῖω), which is a hapax. Because of the context, ἐγγρῖω has been translated as "put on" (CEB, GNT, GW, NET, NIV), "spread" (CSB), or "smear" (NABR). But several versions have the more accurate "anoint" (EHV, ESV, NASB, NKJV). This rendering matches well with its cognate, χρίω, found five times with a regular translation of "anoint." This anointing from God comes to Jesus for his work (Luke 4:18; Acts 4:27) and includes being imbued with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38). This anointing also comes upon believers (2 Cor 1:21; Heb 1:9). An unmistakable similarity connects Revelation 3:18 and John 9:6, where Jesus anoints (ἐπέχρισεν) the eyes of a man born blind. The story concludes with the man's spiritual insight contrasted to the spiritual blindness of the religious leaders (John 9:35–41). The apostle John also mentions the anointing (τὸ χρίσμα) that believers receive from the Holy One for spiritual insight (1 John 2:20, 27).⁶⁹

John continues the allusion to the anointing of the Spirit at Laodicea. Swete notes the Spirit's convicting ministry: "The eye-salve which stings while it heals is the ἐλεγμός [conviction, reproof] of the Holy Spirit (Jo. xvi. 8ff.), which destroys self-deception and restores spiritual vision."⁷⁰ Robert L. Thomas does not preclude Swete's appraisal, but he adds that "the anointing or teaching ministry of the Spirit that provides illumination following conversion" is a "more prominent" symbol.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Swete, *Apocalypse*, clxv.

⁶⁷ Song, *Water as an Image of the Spirit*, 146–47.

⁶⁸ Fanning, *Revelation*, 188–89; Koester, *Revelation*, 339.

⁶⁹ J. C. Thomas, *Apocalypse*, 194; Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 130–31.

⁷⁰ Swete, *Apocalypse*, 62–63. Swete may have been influenced by Fausset: "The Holy Spirit's unction, like ancient eye salves, first smarts with conviction of sin, then heals: He opens our eyes first to our wretchedness, then to the Savior's preciousness." Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Hartford, CT: Scranton, 1871), 562.

⁷¹ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation*, 1:316. He cites three other commentators for support on the connection between the Spirit and eye salve: Henry Alford, William Kelly, and William Newell.

More broadly, Beasley-Murray summarizes that “the symbolism points rather to the riches bestowed by God to men of faith, above all the new life by the Spirit.”⁷² True, interpreters must be cautious and not go beyond the text.⁷³ Nevertheless, when all the Johannine writings are taken into account, a solid allusion to the Spirit can be seen in the anointing ointment of Laodicea.

4. *The Spirit as “cloud” (14:14–16)*. Mark Wilson recently made a case for detecting the Spirit in the cloud of the grain harvest (14:14–16).⁷⁴ The “one like a son of man,” seated on a “white cloud,” harvests the earth. This cloud is mentioned four times in three verses, which suggests numerical symbolism. The majority of Revelation’s interpreters recognize “one like a son of man” as a messianic title symbolizing the risen Christ who oversees his church (1:9–20; 2:1) and comes in judgment and victory at the second coming (14:14–16).⁷⁵ The “white cloud” signifies victory, a throne upon which he sits in end-time judgment.⁷⁶

Wilson, however, delves deeper to discover biblical connections between the cloud and the Spirit. The cloud is a theophanic experience. The pillar of cloud enveloped the tabernacle (Exod 33:9–10; 40:34–35) and led Israel during their wilderness wanderings (Num 9:18–22). The cloud filled the sanctuary at the dedication of Solomon’s temple. The glory of the Lord’s *shekinah* presence was so heavy the priests were unable to perform their duties (1 Kgs 8:10–11). When Isaiah envisions the future messianic kingdom, Mount Zion and those assembled there are covered by “a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy” (Isa 4:5 ESV). The clearest connection is found in Numbers 11:25: “Then the Lord descended in the cloud and spoke to him. He took some of the Spirit who was on Moses and placed the Spirit on the seventy elders. As the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they never did it again” (CSB). The cloud imagery continues in the NT. A divine voice comes out of the cloud that overshadowed the mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:7).⁷⁷ Wilson keenly notes how closely Revelation’s cloud (14:14–16) is linked to what the Spirit says (14:13). John’s imagery “is purposefully suggestive to show the Spirit’s role in the ingathering of the righteous by the son of man,” and he concludes that the cloud of Revelation 14 “has a metaphorical dimension symbolizing the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁸

5. *The Spirit as “smoke” (15:8)*. Smoke is a common portent of cosmic end-time judgment in Revelation (9:2–3, 17–18; 14:11; 18:9, 18; 19:3). John also uses it as a symbol of sacrifice and worship rising up to God (8:3–5; 15:8).⁷⁹ Wilson, however,

⁷² Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 106. Similarly, Ryken states, “The symbolic use of anointing in the NT clearly points to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit as Acts 10:38 makes explicit.” Ryken, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 605.

⁷³ Osborne considers such attempts as allegorizing and that they “go beyond the text.” *Revelation*, 210. So too Beale, *Revelation*, 306; Smalley, *Revelation*, 100.

⁷⁴ Wilson, “Spirit in Revelation,” 89–92.

⁷⁵ Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 50–51.

⁷⁶ Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 84–85.

⁷⁷ Wilson, “Spirit in Revelation,” 91–92.

⁷⁸ Wilson, “Spirit in Revelation,” 92.

⁷⁹ Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 100–101.

suggests a connection to the Spirit at 15:8: “And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power.” The seven bowls originate from the heavenly tent of witness (15:5–7), and no one can enter until the bowls are poured out (15:8). Once again, the scene alludes to the earthly sanctuary during the wilderness wanderings (Exod 29:4; Num 4:25; Deut 31:15). Smoke filling the sanctuary is rare (Isa 6:4; Rev 8:4; 15:8). But Wilson connects the sanctuary to the “cloud” and “glory” (Exod 40:34–35). He states, “Here ‘cloud’ replaces ‘smoke’ as the tangible evidence of the glory of the Lord.”⁸⁰ This glory then is visible as a cloud and as smoke (Exod 24:17; 2 Macc. 2:4–8; Ezek 10:4; 43:5). Thus, Wilson is able to connect glory with smoke, and Revelation 15:8 includes both words.

This rich OT background continued as Second Temple Judaism and early rabbinic texts used the phrase “the glory of God” as a circumlocution for the divine presence. Citing Jürgen Moltmann, Wilson concludes that early Christians began to connect *shekinah* with the Holy Spirit. The *shekinah* glory of God is the presence of God the Holy Spirit.⁸¹

The first three metaphors (“seven blazing lamps,” “water of life,” “anointing ointment”) strongly allude to the Spirit. Wilson’s “cloud” and “smoke” metaphors are intriguing and deserve consideration. Johannine interpreters should be open to seeing more metaphors as possible allusions to the Spirit. Taken together, uses of metaphors and the *πνεῦμα* word group make a total of thirty-one references to the Spirit in Revelation.

IV. THE SPIRIT’S THEOLOGICAL ROLE IN REVELATION

These identifiable numerical patterns, references, and metaphors reflect a deliberately crafted theological message. Several major themes in Revelation revolve around the Spirit, and many of them overlap. This final section draws from the previous sections to stress John’s theology of the Spirit in Revelation.

1. *The Spirit’s intimate connection to God and Jesus.* The Spirit’s close connection to God and Jesus accents John’s Trinitarian interests. Commencing with the salutation, the Father, Son, and Spirit are closely related (1:4–6).⁸² Alongside the Father and the Son, the sevenfold Spirit is the giver of grace and peace. This grace and peace refer to the salvation that was accomplished via the cross.⁸³ All four references to the seven spirits are presented on the same level of divine authority as God and Christ. He is the Spirit “of God” who is before the throne (4:5). He is connected to the Lamb (3:1; 5:6). Moreover, the Spirit speaks the words of Jesus, and these

⁸⁰ Wilson, “Spirit in Revelation,” 93–94.

⁸¹ Wilson, “Spirit in Revelation,” 94–95. See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 47–51.

⁸² Leithart notes that the order of Father, Spirit, Son in the introduction (1:4–6) differs from the traditional Father, Son, and Spirit found in later creeds. He concludes that throughout the NT, “the Father acts on and gives life to the Son through the Spirit. Father, Spirit, Son.” Leithart, *Revelation*, 1:85.

⁸³ Kobus de Smidt, “Spirit in Revelation,” 35. For a discussion of the unity of the Spirit with the Father and the Son, see Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 243–48.

words are discerned “in the Spirit” to the churches.⁸⁴ The presence of the Trinity in eternity is especially evident in the water of life metaphors (7:17; 21:6; 22:1, 17). The conclusion of most of John’s visions depict eternal bliss for believers. All four water references are found at the conclusion of individual visions or the epilogue (7:1–17; 20:1–21:8; 21:9–22:5; 22:10–21).⁸⁵ All of these connections reveal John’s intentions to underscore the Trinity.

2. *The life-giving Spirit.* Paul Rainbow reminds us that “God’s Spirit is the life force that vivifies all living things.”⁸⁶ The Spirit stirred the primordial sea (Gen 1:2) and gives breath to living creatures (Ps 104:30). The Spirit is an agent of rebirth from above (John 3:8; 6:63).⁸⁷ The Apocalypse continues this theme when the Spirit gives his “breath of life” (11:11) to the two witnesses. If the two witnesses represent the church, as most interpreters understand, then it is the Spirit who gives life, indwells believers, and empowers the church.

3. *The Spirit and discipleship.* The theme of discipleship is woven throughout Revelation. It is the Spirit who exhorts believers toward deeper discipleship. The seven exhortations to “hear (ἀκουσάτω implies “obey”) what the Spirit says to the churches” fit here. Believers are to undergo self-evaluation in order to repent (2:5, 16, 21–22, 29; 3:3, 6, 19, 22; 9:20–21; 16:9).⁸⁸ Discipleship includes being anointed by the Spirit to teach others and being reproved by the Spirit as necessary (3:18). These Spirit-led appeals also include the call to endure suffering (1:9; 2:2, 17; 3:21; 7:4; 12:11; 13:10; 14:10, 12), along with the expectation to be faithful even to the point of death (2:10; 11:3; 12:11; 14:13; 20:4).⁸⁹ When believers die, they hear the Lord’s “well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt 25:21 NIV). Likewise, it is the Spirit who confirms “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them” (Rev 14:13 NIV).

4. *The Spirit and witnessing.* It is the Spirit who fills believers for effective worldwide witness. The theme of witness runs through Revelation. As noted above, the two witnesses symbolize the complete and full witness of the church. The Spirit’s call to the seven churches expects a gospel witness, and those who are victorious will receive rewards. The four references to the “seven spirits” (from Zechariah 4) closely identify the Spirit with Christ as the seven eyes sent from God throughout the earth. The numerical symbolism of seven (completeness, totality) and four (full coverage with the earth in mind) highlight the theme of the full presence and effective work of the Spirit. Bauckham adds that the close association of the seven spirits with the Lamb at all four locations “indicates that the Lamb’s victory is implemented throughout the world by the fulness of divine power.”⁹⁰ Furthermore, when the Spirit inspires prophecy (19:10), its content is the witness of Jesus. Evan-

⁸⁴ Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 476; Kobus de Smidt, “Spirit in Revelation,” 42. See Waddell, *Spirit of Revelation*, 170–88.

⁸⁵ See Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 14–16.

⁸⁶ Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 263.

⁸⁷ Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 263–65.

⁸⁸ Kobus de Smidt, “Spirit in Revelation,” 37.

⁸⁹ See Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*, 121–25.

⁹⁰ Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*, 109.

gelism is likewise evident in 22:17 as the Spirit and the Bride call out, “Come!” The call is for the second coming, and yet the call to come to Christ is implied.⁹¹

5. *The Spirit and prophesying.* John’s work is a word of prophecy (1:3) from the Holy Spirit (19:10). The noun *προφητεία* is found seven times, signifying Revelation as the perfect and consummate fulfillment of all prophecy. The apostle Paul relates that there are prophets in the body of Christ and a gift of prophecy (1 Cor 12–14). Most interpreters accept narrow roles for both the ministry of prophets and the gift. Yet John appears to expand the role of prophets to emphasize the “prophethood of all believers.”⁹² Many Bible students make a distinction of prophets as a specially called group within the Christian community.⁹³ Several interpreters, however, view the term simply as a general description for all believers. Thus, like the “priesthood of believers” so too the “prophethood of believers.”⁹⁴ The Spirit inspires all believers to prophesy for Christ.

6. *The Spirit and worship.* The presence of the Spirit has implications for worship throughout Revelation.⁹⁵ The Spirit leads believers to worship God and the Lamb. John was “worshiping in the Spirit” (NLT) on the Lord’s day (1:10), signifying the Spirit as the pathway to worship. John was “in the Spirit” four times at four locations. The worship of God and the Lamb is scattered throughout Revelation (1:17; 4:8, 11, 15; 15:6, 9–13; 7:10; 11:5, 15–17; 15:3; 16:5; 19:1, 5–6).⁹⁶ John is told to worship God because the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy (19:10).⁹⁷

Melissa Archer produced a full-length study that stressed the liturgical elements of Revelation, and she draws several conclusions. First, Revelation is a narrative about worship as seen in its language, forms, and imagery. Second, true worship takes place “in the Spirit.” Third, worship makes room for the prophetic voice of the Spirit. Fourth, the Apocalypse demonstrates that worship is the central purpose of all creation. Fifth, Revelation insists that God alone is worshiped, and sixth, this differentiates between legitimate and illegitimate worship (Balaam, Jezebel). Seventh, Revelation reveals numerous worship activities (hymns, use of musical instruments, prostration, prayers, exclamations, silence, repentance, and Eucharist allusions). Finally, Revelation conceives of witness as worship. Through witness, God’s people give worship to God and the Lamb.⁹⁸

⁹¹ Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 270.

⁹² Boring, *Revelation*, 142.

⁹³ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 160–62; Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 345; Koester, *Revelation*, 840; Mounce, *Revelation*, 295; Osborne, *Revelation*, 446; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation*, 2:253, 342, 501.

⁹⁴ So Beale, *Revelation*, 617, 1128; Blount, *Revelation*, 403; Boring, *Revelation*, 142; Caird, *Revelation*, 129; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 636–37; Smalley, *Revelation*, 292, 568; J. C. Thomas, *Apocalypse*, 349, 671. See also Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 255–57; Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 267–68.

⁹⁵ Archer surveys modern scholarship on worship in Revelation. Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, 4–37. She then offers her own narrative of worship through the Apocalypse (119–294) and concludes with applications for the Pentecostal community that are certainly not limited to it (295–335).

⁹⁶ Kobus de Smidt, “Spirit in Revelation,” 37.

⁹⁷ Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 478. Filho stresses “in the Spirit” not only as a structural guide, but as a grounding in the worshipping community. Filho, “Apocalypse of John,” 213–34. Archer devotes the entirety of her study *I Was in the Spirit* to the Spirit and worship in Revelation.

⁹⁸ Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, 298–332.

7. *The Spirit and end-time judgment.* The Spirit delivers eschatological judgment alongside the Father and the Son. Bauckham notes the Spirit in eschatological perspective. The purpose is not simply predicting the events of the end. Rather, it is to enable Christians to bear witness to Jesus now and see their present from the perspective of the future.⁹⁹ For believers, it is the Spirit who fills the saints with the expectation of Jesus's return (22:17). Revelation 5:6 identifies the seven Spirits with both the seven horns and the seven eyes of the Lamb. Thus, through the Spirit, the Lamb not only sees what happens throughout the world, but also has the ability to act powerfully whenever he chooses. The horns and the eyes represent victory. Revelation 11:11 fits here as well. The "breath of life" from God enters the two witnesses and they are resurrected. Rainbow observes, "Since the Holy Spirit is the ground of both natural and eternal life, his is also the energy that will bring about the final resurrection."¹⁰⁰ When Christ comes to harvest believers, the Spirit comes with him (14:14–16). Finally, as reflected in water of life imagery, believers will enjoy eternal bliss with the Father, Son, and Spirit (7:17; 21:6; 22:1).

For unbelievers, however, the second coming signifies end-time judgment. When Jesus returns in righteous, culminative judgment, God and the Spirit come with him. The seven blazing lamps (4:5) join God and the Lamb in delivering final judgment. Both lightning and the blazing lamps are symbols of deity and of judgment. They prepare readers for the coming wrath that a righteous God will soon deliver. The Third Person of the Trinity, therefore, joins the Father in this activity. Moreover, when the bowls on their march to culminative judgment are launched, an allusion to the Spirit's presence is detected in the smoke and the glory of God (15:8). The Spirit, therefore, has a role in final judgment. The Spirit actualizes God's presence in the present and in eternity, extending even to the lake of fire.¹⁰¹

CONCLUSION

The Holy Spirit, therefore, only appears to be less prominent in Revelation when compared to the Father and the Son. On the contrary, his role is thoroughly active. By utilizing numerical symbolism, *πνεῦμα* references, and key metaphors, John permeates the Apocalypse with the Third Person of the Trinity. John's theology of the Spirit is much more expansive in Revelation than previously considered. His emphasis on the Trinity exceeds any other NT document. The Spirit plays major roles as the one sent by the Father and Son to be their eyes in the world; to represent the present and effective work of God; to inspire John's visions; to indwell, discipline, and disciple believers to witness for Christ; and to lead in worship. Ultimately, the Spirit joins the Father and Son in delivering end-time judgment on unbelievers and experiencing the fellowship of eternal bliss with believers.

⁹⁹ See Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 166–73.

¹⁰⁰ Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 271.

¹⁰¹ Rustin Umstatt, *The Spirit and the Lake of Fire* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 143–49.