



Of Two Minds: Ecstasy and Inspired Interpretation in the New Testament World (Dead Sea Scrolls & Christian Origins Library, Vol. 1)

John R. Levison

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How does the spirit work through prophets? Early Jewish writers were themselves of two minds on this question. One answer—the "first mind"—was that the prophet is overcome by the spirit and becomes unconscious in the spirit's presence. The words are delivered not by the prophet, who is entirely unaware of them, but by the spirit. This concept, called "inspired ecstasy" was actually more at home at the oracle of Delphi in Greece than in Israel. Yet Jewish authors carefully and creatively imported the concept into the Bible.

The "second mind" is that of the inspired interpreter, a mind whose acuity is heightened by the presence of the spirit so that the prophet is able to interpret more clearly that which he or she sees. This concept can be clearly seen in the work of several biblical authors who recognized the divine spirit as the source of an inspired interpretation of Scripture.

From ancient Babylon to the present day, many have understood the work of the spirit in one of these two terms, either through the careful exegesis of the trained scholar or through the inspired speech of a spirit-possessed person. Yet, as Levison shows, not only are both of these concepts biblically based, they are but two expressions of a biblical concept of a spirit which is unbounded by nature or geography and which has no limits on the way it can work.

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