

The Holy Spirit Symbolized in Scripture



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 3:11; 10:16; John 1:9, 32; 7:37-39; 2 Cor. 1:20-22; 1 Pet. 1:22.*

Memory Text: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (*John 3:8*).

In addition to numerous references to the Spirit by name, both in the Old and in the New Testament, the Spirit is frequently alluded to through the use of a variety of symbols. It only is through an acquaintance with the symbols, emblems, or illustrations used for the Spirit that His work and ministry in the believer's life can be adequately understood.

“In us as a Light to illuminate; in us as a Friend to counsel; in us as Water to refresh; in us as a Comforter to cheer; in us as a Teacher to teach; in us as a Guide to direct; in us as Oil to make us shine; in us as a Fire to purge; in us as a Dove to sympathize; in us as the Seal to secure; in us as the Witness to confirm; in us as the Strength to keep; in us as the Power to pray; in us as the Source of fruitbearing; in us as Sap to make us grow; in us as the Remembrancer to remind us that all the precious promises of God are yea and amen in Christ; and in us as the Earnest of the coming glory.”—F. E. Marsh, *Emblems of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1957, 1971), p. 246. This week we'll take a look at what some of these symbols mean.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 8.*

Dove

“John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him” (John 1:32).

“The Lord had promised to give John a sign whereby he might know who was the Messiah, and now as Jesus went up out of the water, the promised sign was given; for he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit of God, like a dove of burnished gold, hovered over the head of Christ.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1078.

When you think of a dove, what qualities do you think of? Why would this type of bird—as opposed to a crow, a vulture, or a hawk—be used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit? *See Matt. 10:16.*

The word in Matthew 10:16 often translated as “harmless” can more accurately be translated as “unmixed,” “pure,” “without a mixture of evil.” This is certainly an apt description of Jesus, but it is also an indication of what the Spirit can do in the lives of believers.

Read Ephesians 5:9, 10; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; and 1 Peter 1:22. What is the Lord telling us with these texts?

The Bible is abundantly clear about the kind of lives those who follow the Lord should live. Yet, it’s also clear, too, that we can be what God wants us to be only through a power from above working in our hearts. In and of ourselves, we are simply too far gone to reform ourselves in the sight of God. Only the purifying, regenerating, and sanctifying power of the Spirit can enable us to reflect the purity and character of Jesus. This is the goal of all who profess to follow Christ.

What areas in your own life need the greatest reformation? What are practical ways in which you can cooperate with the Holy Spirit so He can work the changes in you that are needed?

Key Text: *Ephesians 5:9, 10*

Teachers Aims:

1. To show that all goodness and righteousness come from the Holy Spirit.
2. To examine the various evidences of the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives.

Lesson Outline:

I. Light Versus Darkness

- A. Biblically, goodness is represented by light (*2 Cor. 6:14, Eph. 5:9*).
- B. Biblically, evil is represented by darkness (*John 3:19*).
- C. All signs of goodness are evidence of the Holy Spirit (*Zech. 4:1-6; Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 385).

II. The Purpose of the Holy Spirit Revealed Through Symbols

- A. Water (*John 7:37-39*).
 1. Water is essential for life.
 2. Flowing water is not stagnant.
- B. Oil (*Matt. 25:1-4*).
 1. Oil provides energy.
 2. Oil, when lit, dispels the darkness.
- C. Seal/Guarantee (*2 Cor. 1:22*).
 1. God has invested in us.
 2. This investment guarantees that He will finish what He has started, if we allow.

III. Nature of the Holy Spirit

- A. Dove (*Matt. 3:16*).

Purity.
- B. Light and Fire (*Exod. 13:21; Isa. 6:6, 7*).
 1. Presence of God.
 2. Cleansing power of God.
- C. Wind (*John 3:8*).
 1. Invisible.
 2. Omnipresent.

Summary: All of these symbols are meant to reveal different aspects of the essence of the Holy Spirit. Simple words alone are unable to express the deeper meanings of the Holy Spirit's character and purpose. The vastness of God in any form is too great for words alone to contain; through the use of symbols, He tries to help us understand.

COMMENTARY

Introduction

So rich and varied is His work, that the Holy Spirit is symbolized in Scripture in a variety of ways, several of which are considered in this week's lesson. No *one* symbol or wide array of symbols can fully portray the nature and work of the Holy Spirit. Each symbol highlights some aspect of His infinitely glorious character and work.

I. Dove

Most Scripture references to the dove are redolent with positive and peaceful associations. (*See, for example, Gen. 8:8-12, Ps. 55:6, 68:13, Song of Sol. 2:14, 5:2, 6:9.*) Christ's anointing by the Holy Spirit lighting upon Him at His baptism as a dove (*Matt. 3:16*),

Water

“On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, ‘If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, “Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.” ’ Now this he said about the Spirit” (*John 7:37-39, RSV*).

Jesus here likens the Spirit to water. Water is essential to life. There can be no life without water. So, there can be no spiritual life without the presence of the Spirit. Also, water is not something we can make ourselves. We are totally dependent upon God for it. It’s the same with the Spirit.

Notice, too, the idea of water flowing out of the hearts of those who believe in Jesus. Here the Lord reveals a crucial truth about those who believe in Him: That which they received through the Spirit will in turn flow out from them to others.

Read Isaiah 44:3, 4. How does this text reflect the same idea Jesus expressed above?

The second part of verse 3 explains what the first part actually means. Verse 4 indicates that as there will be growth as a result of pouring out water upon parched land, so there will be spiritual growth as a result of the outpouring of God’s Spirit. And growth alone is positive evidence of life. As parched land is clothed with verdant growth because of water, so the Spirit can transform a barren soul into a person of Christian beauty. “The Spirit of God through faith produces a new life in the soul.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 176.

Read Matthew 18:21-35. What principle is seen here that powerfully expresses the idea of today’s lesson?

What are some things the Holy Spirit has done for you that you also should be doing for others?

aply betokens the beauty of Jesus' work as the Prince of Peace (*Isa. 9:6, 7*). The Holy Spirit empowered Christ to meet every situation with calm self-possession that blended with far-seeing perception and efficiency for service.

Just as a dove ascends heavenward in its flight, so does the Holy Spirit lift receptive hearts into realms of heavenly thought and sensibility to view life through God's eyes. The Spirit wishes to anoint us for service, just as He did Jesus. (*See 1 John 2:27; compare John 14:26.*) "The impartation of the Spirit is the impartation of the life of Christ. It imbues the receiver with the attributes of Christ."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 805.

II. Water

Water turns parched deserts into fertile fields. In like manner, as the Spirit irrigates our arid hearts, we bear the fruit of the Spirit bountifully in all the seasons of life. Water benefits every living thing through which it flows, whether a riverbed or a human heart. "He who waters will also be watered himself" (*Prov. 11:25; compare John 7:37-39*).

"As is the palm tree in the desert—a guide and consolation to the fainting traveler—so the Christian is to be in the world. He is to guide weary souls, full of unrest, and ready to perish in the desert of sin, to the living water. He is to point his fellow men to Him who gives to all the invitation, 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.'

"The sky may be as brass, the burning sand may beat about the palm tree's roots and pile itself about its trunk; yet the tree lives on, fresh and vigorous. Remove the sand, and you discover the secret of its life; its roots strike down deep into waters hidden in the earth.

"Thus it is with the Christian. His life is hid with Christ in God. Jesus is to him a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life. His faith, like the rootlets of the palm tree, penetrates beneath the things that are seen, drawing life from the Fountain of life. And amid all the corruption of the world he is true and loyal to God. The sweet influence of Christ's righteousness surrounds him."—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 240.

III. Oil

Oil is presented as a symbol of the Spirit, not primarily to emphasize its properties as a nutrient or lubricant, but as a fuel for lamps, which variously symbolize the church (*Rev. 1:20*), the believer (*John 5:35*), and Scripture (*Ps. 119:105*). Oil (the symbol of the Holy Spirit that makes God's Word effectual) must enter our hearts and freely circulate through us, if we are to receive its benefit. (*See Zech. 4:12-14.*) "The whole heavenly treasure awaits our demand and reception; and as we receive the blessing, we in our turn are to impart it. Thus it is that the holy lamps are fed, and the

Oil

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps” (*Matt. 25:1-4*).

Oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. As lamps in the time of Christ did not give light without oil, so a Christian cannot bring light to the world, as he is commissioned to do (*Matt. 5:14-16*), without the Spirit in his or her life. The wise virgins in the parable “had received the grace of God, the regenerating, enlightening power of the Holy Spirit, which renders His word a lamp to the feet and a light to the path. In the fear of God they had studied the Scriptures to learn the truth, and had earnestly sought for purity of heart and life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 394.

In what terms is the light-giving power of the Holy Spirit described in Zechariah? *Zech. 4:1-6*. In particular, what do you think the angel meant by his words in verse 6?

The lamps or the lampstands (the candlesticks) represent the church, or Christ’s followers. (*See Rev. 1:20.*) From the holy ones that stand in God’s presence, His Spirit is imparted to the human instrumentalities who are consecrated to His service. It is only through the anointing and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit upon the heart that we may develop the right attitude toward divine light and truth. It is only through the Spirit, as opposed to human power and might, that we can be channels of mercy and grace toward a sinful, dying world.

In Zechariah’s vision the two olive trees that stand before God are represented as emptying the golden oil out of themselves through golden tubes into the bowl of the sanctuary. From this the lamps of the sanctuary are fed, that they may give a continuous bright and shining light. So, from the anointed ones that stand in God’s presence, the fullness of divine light and love and power is imparted to His people, that they may impart to others light and joy and refreshing. They are to become channels through which divine instrumentalities communicate to the world the tide of God’s love.

In the past 24 hours, were you a dim bulb, a fickle lantern, or a bright beacon of hope and grace?

church becomes a light-bearer in the world.”—Ellen G. White, *Ye Shall Receive Power*, p. 17.

IV. Seal and Guarantee

With all the authority of Heaven behind them, a seal and guarantee are potent forces. Therefore, the promise of the Spirit (*see 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5*) is not blithely or casually extended. We must meet the conditions of the promise. Ephesians 1:13, 14 states the primary positive condition on which we are “sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.” What is that condition? Ephesians 4:30-32 states three positive conditions (all interrelated) for receiving the seal of God, and six ways by which the sealing Spirit is grieved into withdrawing His presence. What attitude is at the root of these hindrances?

V. Light and Fire

Without apology the Bible declares, “Our God *is* a consuming fire” (*Heb. 12:29; compare Deut. 4:24*). While fire consumes infe-

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *John 3:6-8, 7:38, Ephesians 4:30, 1 Corinthians 12:4-7*

- 1** The Bible often uses symbols that are familiar to us in our daily lives. What are some of these symbols? Do you find them illuminating, or do they raise more questions?
- 2** Why does the Bible use a variety of symbols to help us understand the Holy Spirit? Why is any one symbol inadequate to reveal all we need to know about this Member of the Godhead?
- 3** Given that the Holy Spirit is a personal Being, why do so many of the symbols for Him remind us of natural phenomena or substances (for example: wind, water, and oil)? What is the Bible trying to teach us through these symbols?
- 4** What common thread runs through all of these symbols? Could it be that the multitude of symbols suggest that the Holy Spirit is the most difficult aspect of the Godhead to understand in human or natural terms? Explain your answer.
- 5** The images used for the Holy Spirit often suggest power and, occasionally, force. In spite of that, we can—and sometimes do—resist the Holy Spirit. How is it possible for us to resist such an irresistible presence?

Seal and Guarantee

“He has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (2 Cor. 1:22, RSV).

Read a few verses (starting at verse 20) that precede 2 Corinthians 1:22. What is Paul basically saying to us?

Paul here uses the figure, or symbol, of money, kind of like a down payment, to illustrate the gift of the Holy Spirit to believers. This is a first installment, an assurance of their full inheritance when Christ returns.

Where do you see the work of the triune God in the preceding texts? Why should that also give us assurance regarding salvation?

Notice too, in the above texts, in whom we have all these promises. Of course, it's in Jesus, for “all the promises of God find their Yes in him” (vs. 20, RSV). The assurance Paul talks about here, which is sealed with the Holy Spirit, comes because of what Jesus has done for us at the Cross. It's only because of the Cross that we have been given the Holy Spirit, the seal of our redemption.

The gift of the Spirit to the believer is the pledged guarantee to the believer on the part of God that He will ultimately bring him the full gift of salvation by taking him out of this world of sin and give him an inheritance in His eternal kingdom. Even in human affairs the earnest money, or down payment, is the purchaser's pledge that he will go through with a particular transaction. The Spirit is God's down payment on His promised salvation, which was paid in full at the Cross.

The texts, though, do not teach “once saved always saved.” We can resist the Spirit (*Acts 7:51*); we can fall away. God's sovereignty does not infringe upon human free will. As long as we choose to follow Him, living by faith—claiming His power to overcome when tempted, claiming His forgiveness when we fall—we can be sure He will do all He has promised for us. What more assurance do we need?

Paul wrote that “all the promises of God find their Yes in him” (2 Cor. 1:20). What promises that we have in Jesus mean the most to you and give you the most comfort and assurance? Share them with the class on Sabbath.

rior metal, it also purifies and toughens with fire metals of durable value. John the Baptist had this process in mind when he spoke of Christ's baptizing His people with the Holy Spirit and with fire. John himself was a burning and shining light for the Lord (*John 5:35*). Representing his Savior with unblemished integrity, he craved no honor but to exalt his Redeemer, and point others to salvation.

Fire is also a source of illumination. God wants us to have our lamps always burning so that we may be incandescent guides to people who walk in darkness. While Christ is the supreme Light of the world (*John 8:12, 1 John 1:5*), He also enables His people to be lights to the world through our connection with Him (*Matt. 5:14-16*). The Holy Spirit, illuminates our minds through God's

Witnessing

When we *really* accept the Holy Spirit into our hearts, He fills us up so completely with the love of God that we have absolutely no alternative but to share the overflowing abundance with those around us. We can't bottle up His blessings any more than steam can be bottled up—it has to escape—because it can't be contained any longer!

When the Holy Spirit has taken up permanent residence in our hearts and minds, we demonstrate daily to others His influence in our lives. Some of the ways in which others see His presence may be through our efforts to bring about peaceful solutions to problems. Whether it is a problem within the church family, issues in the neighborhood where we live, or perhaps at the school where our children attend, our efforts to find peaceful solutions send positive messages to those who witness these attempts.

Perhaps we observe someone at work who desperately needs a friend but is too reserved (or prickly!) to allow anyone near. We can ease our coworker's pain a bit by being an invisible friend for a while. We can leave messages of encouragement on this person's desk for him or her to find after lunch. We can place a small plant on this person's desk to brighten the day. And best of all, we can pray continually for the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit to minister to this person's life.

Witnessing through our own personal relationships also may positively touch the lives of those around us. When others see that we treat our spouses, children, parents, friends, coworkers, and others with respect and care, at all times, we clearly send the message that the Holy Spirit abides in our lives.

Like steam that can't be contained, the Holy Spirit will permeate hearts and minds so that the actions that follow are visible outpourings of the abundance of God's grace and love.

Light and Fire

“That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (*John 1:9*).

“Wherever there is an impulse of love and sympathy, wherever the heart reaches out to bless and uplift others, there is revealed the working of God’s Holy Spirit. In the depths of heathenism, men who have had no knowledge of the written law of God, who have never even heard the name of Christ, have been kind to His servants, protecting them at the risk of their own lives. Their acts show the working of a divine power. The Holy Spirit has implanted the grace of Christ in the heart of the savage, quickening his sympathies contrary to his nature, contrary to his education. The ‘Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world’ (*John 1:9*), is shining in his soul; and this light, if heeded, will guide his feet to the kingdom of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 385.

Dwell on Ellen White’s understanding of *John 1:9*. What important issues does it answer? What questions does it leave unanswered?

With what did John the Baptist say Jesus would baptize His followers? What do you think he meant by what he said? *Matt. 3:11*.

Fire had a significant meaning to people familiar with Old Testament traditions, for it denoted the presence of God (*Exod. 3:2*). It also represented the protection and leading providence of God (*Exod. 13:21*), the approval of God (*Lev. 9:24*), and the cleansing and sanctifying power of God (*Isa. 6:6, 7*).

In what ways have you experienced a baptism of fire? What happened? What lessons did you learn?

Word, and is the means by which this connection is established and maintained.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: One of the most powerful signs in sign language expresses the feeling “I love you.” What forms of nonverbal communication do you use in your family? How do they transmit powerful positive and negative messages? Why was it necessary for God to use so many symbols to communicate the ministry of the Holy Spirit?

Thought Questions:

❶ Ask several members of the class to describe fire and what it does. Then read Matthew 3:11 together. Why do we need to be baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire? Now read Acts 2:1-39. How is the story of Pentecost related to John’s prediction? In what ways were the disciples’ lives changed by the Holy Spirit’s presence in their lives? How does the Holy Spirit’s work in your life compare or contrast with the disciples’ experience?

❷ Who you know and follow does make a difference in where you go and in your final destination. Read John 1:9 and then Matthew 10:16. How does knowing “the True Light” help us to “be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” (*NIV*)? Share a time when your connection to Christ and the Holy Spirit’s presence in your life made a difference in a difficult situation. In what ways did that situation provide a positive witness to another person?

Application Question:

Paul describes a profound transaction in 2 Corinthians 1:20-22. What does it mean for God’s promises to be “Yes” in our lives? In your journal, or on a sheet of paper, mark two columns. In one column write what God has done for us based on this passage; for example, He has “anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts” (*vss. 21, 22, NIV*). In the other column write how these changes are evidenced in your life. Then spend some time praying, praising God for these gifts. If you have difficulty filling out the second column, spend time in prayer and in God’s Word asking Him to lead you into an experience that will guarantee “what is to come.”

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, “Two Worshipers,” pp. 158, 159 and “To Meet the Bridegroom,” pp. 405–408; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 190, 453, 454; *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 36, 37; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 425, 426; *Steps to Christ*, “The Test of Discipleship,” pp. 57, 58.

Another example used to describe the work of the Holy Spirit was presented by Jesus Himself, when He compared the work of the Spirit to the wind (*John 3:8*). The wind is not visible; we do not know from where it comes or where it goes. But although invisible, its effects are plainly seen. Jesus likened the Spirit to the wind. He cannot be seen, yet, the effects He brings about in changed human lives are plainly evident. But the Spirit Himself is a mystery. Of the three Persons in the Godhead, He is the most unfamiliar to humanity. Jesus came to reveal, or make known, the Father (*see John 1:18*), and humanity saw Jesus in human form. But no one has ever seen the Spirit, nor has anyone revealed Him to us.

“Christ uses the wind as a symbol of the Spirit of God. As the wind bloweth whither it listeth, and we cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth, so it is with the Spirit of God. We do not know through whom it will be manifested.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 15.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** As a class, compare your answers to the final question in Wednesday’s study. What promises, if any, came up again and again?
- 2** The week’s study emphasized the changes the Holy Spirit brings about in our individual lives and how these changes should be manifested. How, though, should the church, as a whole, be impacted by the Holy Spirit? What changes could He bring to the whole church? How would these changes be made manifest in, for example, how the church related to the local community?
- 3** What things could you do as a class to help your whole church be more receptive to the workings and power of the Holy Spirit?