

The Holy Spirit: Working Behind the Scenes



SABBATH—JANUARY 7

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Ezekiel 37:5, 9; Genesis 1:2; Job 26:13; Exodus 31:1–5; John 16:13, 14; Galatians 5:16–23.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘He will bring me glory by receiving something from me and showing it to you’ ” (John 16:14, NlrV).

THE HOLY SPIRIT does not receive the same attention (special treatment) in the Bible that the Father and the Son receive. But the Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit was present at important moments in sacred (holy) history. For example, God created this world. And the Holy Spirit was at work during Creation. But He worked behind the scenes. This means He was more in the background. He also was involved in the work of inspiring (communicating God's message to) God's prophets (special messengers). In this way, the Holy Spirit had an important part in the writing of God's Word (the Bible). And He played an important role in the miracle of Jesus Christ becoming a baby in Mary's womb.¹

But the Holy Spirit is not at the center of the Bible. We know little about Him. He remains in the background. His work and purpose are to help the work of Someone else in the Godhead.² That Someone is Jesus, the Son of God. But it is also the Holy Spirit's job to give glory to God the Father.

The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit chooses to be a behind-the-scenes Helper. He supports, helps, and provides what is needed. He works this way in all that He does now and has done. He does not try to get honor or fame.

DEFINITIONS

1. womb—a uterus. A uterus or womb is the organ in women in which babies develop before birth.
2. Godhead—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit make up the Godhead. They are Three Persons who are One God.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS MYSTERIOUS³ (John 3:3–8)

Just like the wind, the Holy Spirit cannot be seen. But we can see the wind at work.

DEFINITIONS

3. mysterious—difficult to understand.

4. compares—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

5. revelation—a sign or message from God.

Read John 3:3–8 and Ezekiel 37:5, 9. Why is the wind a suitable picture for the way the Holy Spirit works?

Jesus compares⁴ the Holy Spirit to the wind to show how the Spirit works. Jesus uses the wind as a symbol to show how hard it is to understand the Holy Spirit. For example, the way the wind moves is mysterious. It is difficult to know exactly where the wind comes from and where the wind is going.

We cannot control where the wind comes from. But we can learn how the wind moves by experiencing it. In the same way, no one can control the Holy Spirit. But we can know where He is working and that He is working. This is because just like the wind, the Holy Spirit cannot be seen. But His power can be sensed in a strong way. In other words, we can feel the wind. And we often can see its effect, even if we cannot see the wind itself. But wind can be a light breeze to a deadly blast. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit's power is like a strong wind. Why is His power described in this way? It is because He has the power to bring the dead to life. It takes the greatest strength and highest power to do this work. Bringing the dead to life is something that only God can do.

How the dead are brought back to life is a mystery. God and His work through the Holy Spirit are greater than what we fully can understand.

This fact does not mean that we cannot know what work the Holy Spirit gets done. But we have to have humble (not proud) hearts when considering the mysteries of God. And a humble heart appreciates the greatness of God. A humble heart recognizes our limits as fallen humans. It accepts our need for revelation⁵ from God.

Ellen G. White writes, "The mysteries of the Bible are not an argument against the Bible. Instead, the mysteries of the Bible are some of the strongest proof that the Bible comes from God. Suppose the Bible contained only those things about God that we could understand. And suppose God's greatness and majesty could be grasped (understood) by human minds. Then the Bible would not show, as it does now, that it came from God."—Adapted from *Education*, page 170.

What are some unseen forces in nature that can impact (affect) our lives? What should these forces in nature teach us about other unseen powers in our world and how real they are?

THE HOLY SPIRIT AT CREATION (Genesis 1:2)

The first great work of God on this planet was its creation. The Bible clearly mentions God (Genesis 1:1) and Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:16, 17) as the Creator of heaven and earth. They created all that was made (John 1:1–3). But the Bible also mentions the Holy Spirit in the work of Creation.

Read Genesis 1:2; Job 26:13; Job 33:4; Psalm 33:6; and Psalm 104:29, 30. In these verses, what is the job of the Holy Spirit at Creation? How is the Spirit of God related to the creation of life?

The Bible clearly mentions God the Father and His Holy Son, Jesus Christ, as taking part in the creation of the world (read Isaiah 64:8 and Colossians 1:16, 17). But the Holy Spirit is there also. The Creation story in Genesis 1:2 mentions the presence of God’s Spirit at Creation. Job 26:13; Job 33:4; Psalm 104:29, 30; and Psalm 33:6 teach the idea that the Holy Spirit was involved in the creation of the earth. So, He is involved in the creation of the world in a way that is not so obvious (easily seen).

We could say, then, that the Holy Spirit does not appear as the central actor in the Creation story. Instead, He is “hovering [staying very close; floating] over the waters” (Genesis 1:2, NIV). And through His hovering, He is there at the beginning of life on this earth. The Hebrew word for “moving over” the surface of the earth, or “hovering,” is *merahepeth*. This word is used in Genesis 1:2. It is the same word that is used in Deuteronomy 32:11. Deuteronomy 32:11 compares God to an eagle hovering over its nest of young. So, we know the Holy Spirit is involved closely in the creation of life on this earth. He takes care of the newly created living beings (humans) as an eagle would take care of its young. And Psalm 104:30 suggests that creation was possible only through the work of the Holy Spirit.

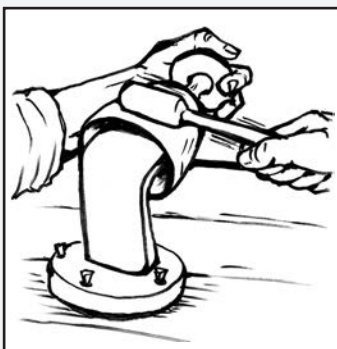
The Holy Spirit was not only there at the creation of this world, but He also has an important part in the process of our re-creation (being made new). His part is giving us a new heart and a new mind. How are both of these jobs of creation and re-creation related? How does the Sabbath help us to understand and appreciate more fully this work of creation and re-creation?



The Bible compares God to an eagle hovering over its nest of young.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE SANCTUARY⁶ (Exodus 25:8)

“ ‘Have them make a sacred [holy; set apart] tent for me. I will live among them’ ” (Exodus 25:8, NIV).



The Holy Spirit helped certain people to build the sanctuary.

God’s act of Creation is of first importance in the Bible. And next to Creation in importance comes God’s plan of salvation. In a fallen world, what good would Creation be without the plan of redemption?⁷ So, as sinners, we need a Creator and a Redeemer.⁸ How thankful we should be that we have that Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Without Him, we would be without hope in a world that offers us none.

In the Old Testament, the sanctuary and its service showed how God forgives sin. It showed this truth through symbols. Much of the service pointed to Jesus and His death for the forgiveness of sin. But the Holy Spirit also was shown as having a part in the work of the sanctuary service. The Holy Spirit helped certain people to build the sanctuary. They built it using the pattern God had shown to Moses.

Read Exodus 31:1–5. How was the Holy Spirit involved in building the sanctuary? How did the Holy Spirit help those who built it?

The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit was there when the sanctuary was built. The sanctuary was the main place where a holy God met sinners. It was the place where peace and harmony between God and humans were restored (made new after being broken). God told Moses to build the earthly sanctuary according to (just like) the sanctuary in heaven (Exodus 25:9, 40).

God used the sanctuary to show us His plan of salvation. God was going to live among His people in a special way. And He was going to do it in the sanctuary, which He told them to build. It was the work of the Holy Spirit to help humans to use their skills to make the sanctuary beautiful. Without the Holy Spirit’s help, Israel would not have been able to accomplish this great work.

The Holy Spirit is powerful. He did not need human help to build the sanctuary. Instead, He helped people to do it with skill and beauty. How and where can you encourage and help other people to use their talents to serve God and give Him glory?

DEFINITIONS

6. sanctuary—a place of worship.

7. redemption—the act of saving people from sin and evil.

8. Redeemer—One who sets sinners free from sin and evil.

THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES GLORY TO JESUS CHRIST (John 16:13, 14)

The Holy Spirit was at work during Old Testament times. But it does not seem that His work is as widely spread (covers many places) or as far reaching in Old Testament times as it is in the New Testament. This is because when Jesus came as the promised Messiah (the Chosen One; Savior), the work of the Holy Spirit increased.

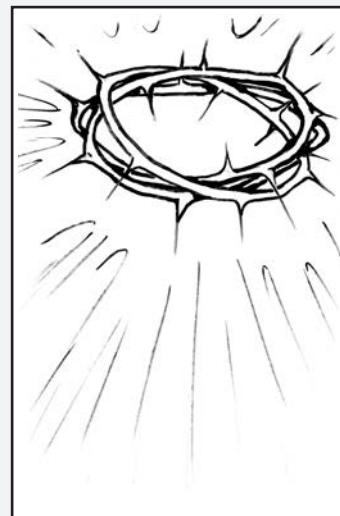
The Holy Spirit gives His gifts to all believers. The New Testament tells us that the Holy Spirit works in many different ways in our spiritual lives and in the life of the church. But His most important work is to give glory to Jesus Christ.

Read John 16:13, 14 and John 15:26. In these verses, what kind of work does Jesus say that the Holy Spirit does? How is all other work of the Holy Spirit related to this chief work?

Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit does not speak about Himself. Instead, the Holy Spirit speaks of Jesus. The Holy Spirit's work involves giving glory to Jesus as our Savior. The Holy Spirit keeps Himself in the background. He puts the attention or focus on Jesus. It has been said that "the Spirit's message to us is never 'Look at Me [the Holy Spirit]. Come to Me. Get to know Me.' But His message always is 'Look at *Him* [Jesus]. See *His* glory. Listen to *Him*. Hear *His* word. Go to *Him* and live; get to know *Him*. Taste *His* gift of joy and peace.' We can say that the Spirit is the heavenly matchmaker.⁹ It is His job to bring us and Christ together. And it is His job to help us stay together."—Adapted from J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit: Finding Fullness in Our Walk With God*, revised (changed) and enlarged edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), pages 57, 58.

This part of the Holy Spirit's work in pointing to Jesus is so important. The Holy Spirit is necessary for our spiritual lives. But He should never take the place in our lives that belongs only to Jesus Christ. Wherever Jesus is honored, the Holy Spirit is at work.

Why is it so important for us to lift up the risen Lord in all that we do? After all, think about what Jesus has done for us. We owe everything to Him. How can we show our thanks to Him? (For example, read 2 Thessalonians 1:11, 12.)



Perhaps the Holy Spirit's most important work is to give glory to Jesus.

DEFINITIONS

9. matchmaker—a person who tries to bring two people together so that they will marry each other.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND CHRIST (Luke 24:44–49)

The Holy Spirit helped Jesus do many things during His time on earth. He made it possible for Jesus to be born as a baby (Luke 1:34, 35). He poured out His power on Jesus to do His holy work (Luke 3:21, 22). This power helped Jesus to complete His work as the Messiah.

But in all this work, the Holy Spirit stayed in the background. Instead, He chose to help bring Jesus Christ to the center of our attention.

Read Luke 24:44–49; Galatians 5:16–23; and Ephesians 4:23, 24. In these verses, what do we learn about the work of the Holy Spirit? How does the Holy Spirit give glory to Jesus?

The Holy Spirit gives glory to Jesus in the following ways:

1. The Holy Spirit teaches about Jesus in the Bible. We can trust what the Holy Spirit says. He tells us everything we need to know about Christ and salvation. Nothing is missing from what He tells us. He does not mislead us. All we need to know is there in the Bible. We must read the Word of God in faith. We must obey its teachings.
2. The Holy Spirit draws men and women into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit gently works on people's hearts and minds. He gives them understanding. Then they are able to understand spiritual things. He causes them to be willing to place their trust in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit helps them to accept Jesus as their Leader and Savior.
3. The Holy Spirit helps us to have Christ's character (goodness; holiness). He helps us to be like Christ in our lives (Galatians 5:22, 23). And through the blood of Jesus, we are given victory over sin (compare Revelation 12:11). The Holy Spirit gives us strength to be faithful to God's commandments.
4. The Holy Spirit helps us to live lives of service to others just as Jesus did. The Holy Spirit helps us to be loving and unselfish. He calls men and women to do special work for God. He helps us to reach out to others in a way that draws them to Christ.

The Spirit helps us to have the character of Christ. How does this part of the Spirit's work in our lives bring glory to the Father?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: There is no question that the work of the Holy Spirit is very important to our walk with the Lord. Again, we might not be able to see the Holy Spirit work. But we can see the effect (result) of His work in our lives and in the lives of others. Suppose your life has changed through faith in Jesus. Then it has changed only through the work of the Holy Spirit in it. “We cannot see the wind. But we can see and feel its effects. In the same way, the work of the Spirit upon the soul will be seen in every act of the one who has felt its saving power. The Spirit of God must take full control of our hearts. Then the Spirit can fully change our lives. Sinful thoughts are put away. We stop doing evil. Love, a gentle heart, and peace take the place of anger, jealousy, and quarrels. Joy takes the place of sadness. The whole face shows the light of heaven.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 173.

These promises are wonderful! Many people’s lives have shown just how real they are. But the work of the Holy Spirit is not something that happens all at once. We do not in an instant become the kind of people we should be. A life of faith and obedience to the Lord is a life of struggle. It is a life of surrender. It involves repentance (turning from sin) when we fail. The Holy Spirit is our Divine Agent. He works in our lives to make us into new people in Christ. But this process is the work of a lifetime. Our faults and weaknesses should lead us to surrender ourselves to the Lord even more. But we must not let the devil use our faults to discourage us in our Christian lives. The devil always is eager to destroy our hopes. He will try to make us feel terrible about the sins we did in the past. But when he does, we always must remember the death of Jesus on behalf of (for) sinners. We are sinners in need of grace (mercy and forgiveness). Jesus died for us to give us that grace.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 What can the Holy Spirit’s example teach you about working for God from behind the scenes? That is, what can it teach you about doing the work of the Lord in a way that many people do not know about, understand, or even appreciate?
- 2 How does the Holy Spirit lift up Jesus? How does the Spirit bring Jesus to the center of our attention? How can you lift up Jesus without putting yourself at the center of attention? Why is that sometimes so hard to do? How can we fight the natural desire to put ourselves first before Jesus and ahead of others?