

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?

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?

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?

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.

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?

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:

- ❶ As a class, compare your answers to the final question in Wednesday’s study. What promises, if any, came up again and again?
- ❷ 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?
- ❸ 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?

A New Hope

Anastasia Kmetova

I am an artist living in Bulgaria. My entire life had been filled with art, but as I approached retirement, I knew that I would no longer be able to enjoy the ceramics that had given me so much joy. I found my hope for the future fading before me.

Then I found the true path to God, and my heart again was filled with hope and love. But how, I wondered, could I share my faith with colleagues—artists, actors, writers, intellectuals. They were so much smarter than I was. If I tried to preach to them, I knew they would not listen. I prayed that God would give me a way to share my faith with these influential people.

And God gave me poetry.

Since my childhood I have written poems, but never a religious poem. After I prayed for a way to share my faith, the words of religious poems began to pour out onto paper. I had a small book of poems published. Then when my friends asked me about God, I gave them a copy of the poems. I've written poems about Christ's first advent, His second coming, the Flood—almost any religious topic.

People were curious why I was suddenly writing religious poems. I told them I was excited over finding the true path to God, and I wanted to share my joy with others.

Then I became ill and was hospitalized for 20 days. While there I shared my faith with those who came to my room. Hospitals in Bulgaria are gloomy and sad, but I dressed up my room a little and put my Bible on the table and a nice blanket and pillowcase on the bed. The doctors and nurses noticed and commented on the bright room. I told them that God created a beautiful world, and we owe it to Him to recreate some beauty even in the hospital.



I shared my faith with my roommates and with the doctors and nurses. I gave each of them a copy of my poems, and several asked to learn more about my religion. I plan to contact these women again soon and follow up on our conversations in the hospital.

When I asked God for a way to share, He gave me just what I needed.

Anastasia Kmetova (left) is a retired artist who shares her faith in Plovdiv, Bulgaria.