



“I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets” (Hosea 12:10).

Symbols of the Holy Spirit

Central Truth: Various figures of speech in the Bible help to reveal the nature and work of the Holy Spirit.

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Topic: Holy Spirit: Symbols of.

A study of Bible teaching concerning the Holy Spirit of God is one of the most inspiring and rewarding subjects one can pursue. And yet, there is no area of revealed truth where there is more confusion.

One reason for the confusion concerning the person and work of the Holy Spirit is that there is no one section of Holy Scripture which presents the doctrine in full. One passage must be compared to other passages to understand Him. There are seven passages quoted in the lesson text of this study on the “Symbols of the Holy Spirit.”

God wants us to understand what He has revealed about the Holy Spirit. There are 713 references to the Spirit in the Bible, almost equally divided between the Old Testament (378) and the New Testament (335). Surely God desired us to be informed about the Spirit since He made so many references to Him.

The next three months will be given to a study of the Holy Spirit of God. We will seek out Bible teaching about His personality, His saving work, His indwelling, His leading, His filling, His sanctifying work, and kindred subjects. The aim of the quarter is to enable you to “walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16, 25) that you may serve and please God.

This week's study deals with “Symbols of the Holy Spirit.” It seeks to understand the Spirit by comparisons with things in nature which God said represent the Spirit.

I. WIND

“I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets” (Hosea 12:10).

“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting” (Acts 2:2).

Jesus said, *“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). The Hebrew language has one word for “wind, breath, spirit.” Jesus used the term for “wind” (Greek, *pneuma*) which is the word for “Spirit” in John 3:8. On the great Christian Pentecost, *“Suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. . . . And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 2:2, 4). Wind is a common emblem of the Holy Spirit of God, according to Bible usage.

In what way is the wind like the Holy Spirit? (1) Both are invisible, yet real. They are known, not by sight, but by the effects of their presence and power. (2) Both are beyond human control. One can as well control the movements of the Spirit of God as he can control the direction and speed of the wind. (3) Both are powerful in their movements. The winds determine weather patterns, including temperature and moisture. The Spirit controls men and things in nature. (4) Both are cleansing in their effects. The winds drive away the pollution of our cities; the Spirit removes the pollution of our hearts. (5) Both are varied in their directions. The wind changes course according to the will of God. The Spirit cannot be restricted to one way of dealing with men. The wind is, therefore, a fitting symbol of the Holy Spirit.

II. FIRE

“And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them” (Acts 2:3).

The ancient prophet named Isaiah spoke of *“the spirit of judgment”* and *“the spirit of burning”* (Isaiah 4:4). On the great day when the Holy Spirit came to begin His universal indwelling presence in those who believe, the Bible recounts, *“There appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 2:3, 4).

In what way is fire a proper emblem of the Holy Spirit? Fire is

everywhere used in the Bible as a symbol of God. It represents His presence — as when He appeared “*in a flame of fire*” (Exodus 3:2). It represents His approval — as when fire fell from heaven at the prayer of His people (Leviticus 9:24; II Chronicles 7:1; I Kings 18:38). It represents His protection — as when He promised to be “*a wall of fire*” about His people (Zechariah 2:5) and protected them by the pillar of fire at the Red Sea (Exodus 13:21). It represents His discipline by which He purifies His people (Malachi 3:3). Yes, “*Our God is a consuming fire*” (Hebrews 12:29).

The Holy Spirit is properly represented by fire in that each purifies, softens, warms, cheers, tests, illuminates, moves, and ascends toward God in heaven.

III. DOVE

“And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:16, 17).

At the baptism of Jesus in water by the hands of John the Baptist, God showed His approval: “*And, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*” (Matthew 3:16, 17).

The dove is a symbol of the gentle, loving, and kind character of the Holy Spirit of God. It was as the dove that “*the Spirit of God moved* (literally, 'fluttered, brooded as sitting on the nest') *upon the face of the waters*” (Genesis 1:2).

In what specific ways is the Spirit like a dove? (1) Each is clean in its nature (Song of Solomon 6:9). That is why He is called the “Holy” Spirit. (2) Each is gentle in its manner (Matthew 10:16). There is no harshness where the Spirit moves. (3) Each is swift in its movements (Psalm 55:6). (4) Each is beautiful in its appearance (Psalm 68:13). Of course, the Spirit is not seen, but the character He produces in believers is beautiful beyond expression.

IV. OIL

“And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, And said unto me, What seest

thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof. . . . Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 4:1-3, 6).

The prophet Zechariah had a vision of a golden lampstand with seven branches and lamps, with a bowl for oil on top. The lampstand was connected with two olive trees by two tubes through which oil flowed to keep the lamps burning (Zechariah 4). The meaning of the oil is clearly stated by the prophet, *“Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts”* (Zechariah 4:6). Oil is an emblem of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament as well as in the New.

The two trees represent God the Father and the Son from whom the Holy Spirit flows to believers (John 14:16; Acts 2:32, 33). The oil represents the Holy Spirit through whose fullness every need of the Christian is met (Philippians 4:19).

What a beautiful truth! God is constantly providing for us as the oil was constantly flowing from the olive trees to feed the lamps in Zechariah's vision. The life of God himself, in the person of His indwelling Spirit, is being lived in our mortal bodies day after day. It is not necessary to go and seek Him. He is here! He is in us and we are in Him. We are saved and sanctified, and, due to His indwelling presence and provision, we are satisfied. Praise the Lord!

The flow never ceases. The supply is never exhausted. The light burns in our hearts because the Spirit flows through us.

V. CLOTHING

“But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him” (Judges 6:34).

The book of Judges is a wonderful record of the Spirit of God working through ordinary men to make them extra-ordinary in their accomplishment. A key clause in the book is *“the Spirit of the LORD came upon him (Othniel)”* (3:10), Jephthah (11:29), and others. But Judges 6:34 uses a different word concerning Gideon. The King James Version reads, *“But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon.”* The Hebrew literally states that the Spirit of the Lord *“clothed himself”* with Gideon. The basic idea of such a covering of himself with Gideon is that the Spirit of God controlled Gideon.

Notice that the text does not indicate that the Spirit was clothing which Gideon wore. Gideon was the clothing the Spirit wore. Is there any difference in those two statements? Yes, indeed! If Gideon was clothed by the Spirit, the man was in control of the Spirit. But since the Spirit was clothed with Gideon, the Spirit was in control of the man. Man can never control the Spirit; the Spirit can control the person.

The control of the Spirit over Gideon, taking an untrained farmer and making him into a military and political victor, shows how the Spirit can control you and make you a blessing. To “*be filled with the Spirit*” (Ephesians 5:18) means to “be the Spirit's garment which He wears.” Be controlled by the Spirit.

VI. SEAL

“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:13, 14).

The sealing of the Holy Spirit is a blessed truth to the child of God. Ephesians 1:13 reads in part, “*Ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.*” The process is as follows: (1) You heard the word of truth. (2) You believed. (3) At that very instant you were “*sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.*”

What does seal mean? It means “brand, mark of identification.” It is like a rancher branding his cattle, except that God's seal is in the spirit, not the flesh (II Corinthians 1:21, 22). The Holy Spirit living in the human spirit is the “mark” by which one is identified as a child of God (Romans 8:9).

Who is sealed? Every child of God is sealed in that each believer has received the indwelling Spirit (II Corinthians 1:1, 2, 21, 22; Ephesians 1:1, 13, 14; 4:30).

When is one sealed? Each person is sealed as belonging to God at the instance of personal faith in Jesus (Ephesians 1:13).

What does the seal imply? (1) It indicates a finished transaction, as when a notary seals and signs a legal document today (Jeremiah 32:6-10). God's seal shows salvation is done. (2) It signifies security. Only a power greater than the one who made the seal can break it (Daniel 6:16, 17; Matthew 27:62-66). There is no power greater than God. (3) It testifies to ownership (Haggai 2:23). We are the Lord's! (4) It aids in recognition (II Timothy 2:19), as ranchers separate their livestock according to brand. The

indwelling Spirit identifies one as belonging to God in Jesus Christ.

VII. EARNEST

“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:13, 14).

The Holy Spirit is *“the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory”* (Ephesians 1:14).

Originally, “earnest” meant money deposited by purchaser and forfeited if the purchase was not completed. In the New Testament it means God's guarantee which is assured to those who believe in Jesus Christ. It is God's pledge that He will complete His perfect plan of redemption: our inheritance, our salvation, our glory, our eternal fellowship with God, our likeness to Him, our freedom from the presence of sin and all its evils, are all guaranteed by the “earnest of the Spirit.”

What is the “earnest”? It is not a promise from God. It is the personal presence of the Spirit of God in the spirit of the believer. He commits himself! He will absolutely complete the work of redemption which He has begun in us. Our glory in eternity is as sure as our forgiveness in time (Romans 8:29, 30) because He has given His Spirit to guarantee it. What a cause for rejoicing!

How weak human language is at this point! We can say, “The Spirit of God is like the wind, fire, a dove, oil, clothing, a seal, and an earnest.” But we know that He is far more than all of them together. How appropriate that we bow before Him and offer ourselves as willing tabernacles in which He can dwell and as willing agents through whom He can work. “Have thine own way, Lord.”

Questions

1. What is a “symbol” as used in this study?
2. Why is there so much confusion concerning the Holy Spirit?
3. How is the Spirit like the wind?
4. How is the Spirit like fire?
5. How is the Spirit like a dove?
6. How is the Spirit like oil?
7. How does the Spirit make us His clothing?

8. How is the Spirit a seal?
9. How is the Spirit our earnest?
10. What is your relationship with the Holy Spirit?