

Symbols Of The Holy Spirit

Part 1

Introduction

When you think of the Holy Spirit, how do you picture Him? One of the difficulties of studying the Holy Spirit is the problem of building a concrete, physical picture of Him. Of course, we're trying to do the impossible. In a very real sense, the spiritual cannot be pictured. However, the Spirit, His purposes, and work can be compared to other things more understandable to us, and this is what God has done through the writers of Scripture. Through the analogies, with descriptions of physical things, and ordinary events in people's lives, He has helped us understand spiritual truths. In studying these analogies, is important to remember that they are limited to illustrating only a small picture of the Holy Spirit. As such, they can only be carried so far; otherwise the comparison breaks down and causes more confusion than illumination.

Our Study

A Dove

If you ask most Christians what is the one symbol they first think of in connection with the Holy Spirit, they will say, "a dove." The New Testament specifically mentions this symbol as representing the Holy Spirit only four times, all referring to the same analogy.

The Scripture: Mark 1:9-11

"At that time Jesus came from Nazareth to Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, He saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased.'"

1. What is the occasion of this appearance of the Holy Spirit? _____

This same occasion is described in the other three gospels:

The Scripture: Matthew 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased."

The Scripture: Luke 3:21-22

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as He was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are My Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased."

The Scripture: John 1:32

Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on Him."

The Scripture: Matthew 10:16

"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."

2. What characteristic of a dove is mentioned in this verse? _____

Although specific reverences to the dove as a symbol of the Holy Spirit are sparse, there are other scriptures that shed some light on the nature of the dove as seen by God.

The Scripture: Genesis: 1:2 (Amplified Bible)

"The earth was without form and an empty void, and darkness was upon the face of the very great deep. The Spirit of God was moving, (hovering, brooding) over the face of the waters."

Personal Question:

Concentrate on the words *hovering* and *brooding*. What pictures would be applicable to the Holy Spirit and His work? _____

Hovering can be defined as "abiding or lingering--the hand fluttering in the air or upon the wing". In the word *brooding*, we have the idea of the mother hen sitting on her eggs for the purpose of warming, hatching, or protecting them. The word also means "to remain steadfastly settled over something, to sit over, cover and cherish, to nourish, to foster."

Here at the very beginning of our world, we have this beautiful picture of the gentle, bird-like nature of the Holy Spirit, as He waits expectantly, for the "birth" of the earth and then ready to cherish, nourish, and foster the development of its dwellers.

Genesis 8:6-12 describes the ending of the Flood, how Noah first sent out a raven, then a dove, to test the condition of the land. The dove came back first with an olive branch, and then did not return, signifying it had found a place to land.

Other Characteristics

The Scripture: Song of Songs: 5:2

"I slept but my heart was awake. Listen! My love is knocking." "Open to me, ...my flawless one."

3. What characteristic is given here? _____

Other scriptures reveal His beauty, His swiftness, His fixed purpose.

Fire

The presence of God is also frequently associated in Scripture with fire.

4. What is the presence of the Lord associated with in each of the following Scriptures? _____

The Scripture: Genesis 3:2

"You must not eat from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die."

The Scripture: Exodus 3:24

"He placed ...cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life...."

The Scripture: Leviticus 6:13

"The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out."

The Scripture: Deuteronomy 5:23

"When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, all the leading men of your tribes and your elders came to me."

The Scripture: Matthew 3:11

"After me (John the Baptist) will come One who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

5. When John the Baptist, Jesus' herald, announced His coming, with what did he say Jesus would baptize His followers? _____

The Scripture: Acts 2:3

"They (Jesus's followers) saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them."

6. What visible sign of the Holy Spirit did those gathered in the upper room see? _____

Personal Question:

What do you consider the primary purpose of fire of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life? Tell of a time when He has acted as fire in your life. _____

The Scripture: Hebrews 12:29

"For our God is a consuming fire."

7. How is the Holy Spirit described in this verse? _____

The Scripture: Malachi 3:2-3

"Who can endure the day of his (the Lord's) coming? Who can stand when he appears? For He will be like a refiner's fire or a launder's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver."

8. What are the purposes of God's fire in this verse? _____

Isaiah 10:17 and Zechariah 13:9 also describe the refining qualities of fire.

The Scripture: Isaiah 10:17

The Light of Israel will become a fire, their Holy One a flame; in a single day it will burn and consume his thorns and his briers.

The Scripture: Zechariah 13:9

This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on My name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.' "

The Scripture: Exodus 13:21-22

"By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night."

9. What does the fire of the Holy Spirit do in these verses? _____

Personal Question:

Fire also illumines. Give examples of times when the Holy Spirit has enlightened something for you? _____

Oil

Oil was used for a variety of purposes in the daily life of the people of earlier times, purposes we might not necessarily associate with its use today. For instance, oil was used to anoint both kings and priests; with the latter, at least, it was used very generously as described in Psalm 133:2. It was also burned in lamps, was important as a food, and was used as a medication.

The Scripture: Exodus 29:7

"Take the anointing oil and anoint him (Aaron) by pouring it on his head."

10. What was oil used for in this verse? _____

The Scripture: Hebrews 1:9

"You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy."

11. With what emotion is oil associated? _____

The Scripture: James 5:14-15

"Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven."

12. How is oil used as described in these verses? _____

Personal Question:

What are some other uses of oil not referred to by these verses? Share some ways the Holy Spirit has functioned as oil in your life. _____

The Cloud

The cloud which went before the Israelites in the wilderness is another picture or type of the Holy Spirit.

The Scripture: Exodus 13: 21-22

"By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night."

13. What did the pillars of cloud and fire do? _____

14. Why? _____

The cloud speaks to us not only of the Holy Spirit's guidance and leading, but of His faithfulness as well. As in the case of the manna (a type of Christ) no matter how much the Israelites sinned, no matter how much they grumbled and complained, the cloud was never removed from them. It was always there to lead them and to protect them from the harsh elements of wilderness life.

Personal Question:

Tell of an occasion when the Holy Spirit has remained faithfully with you when you didn't particularly deserve it. What does this tell you about the Holy Spirit? _____

In the next part of this study we will continue to look at other symbols the Bible uses to describe the Holy Spirit.

The Answers

1. Jesus' baptism
2. His shrewdness and His innocence
3. His love
4. The tree in the middle of the Garden [the Tree of Life], the cherubim and a flaming sword, the fire on the altar, the voice out of the darkness, and a mountain ablaze with fire
5. With the Holy Spirit and fire
6. Tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them
7. "For our 'God is a consuming fire.'"
8. To refine and cleanse
9. It leads the Children of Israel at night so they can travel by day and night.
10. For anointing Aaron as priest
11. With joy
12. As an instrument of healing
13. Went before them to guide them
14. So they could travel day and night

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