

The Representations of the Holy Spirit

There are a variety of descriptions or depictions of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures, which give us a picture or illustration of His person and work. As a representation, figure or type we must be careful not to make too much of these illustrations doctrinally speaking. The reason for this is that types and figures are often susceptible to misuse due to personal bias or human opinion. So we must be careful as we examine these representations of the Holy Spirit in Scripture. So how is the Holy Spirit represented in Scripture? There are at least 8 representations of the Holy Spirit in Scripture.

First, the Holy Spirit is represented as Clothing.

This is noted in **Luke 24:49**, “*And behold, I am sending forth **the promise of My Father** upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are **clothed with power from on high.**”*

Following His resurrection Jesus commanded His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from the promise of His Father.

The promise of my Father is a reference to the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit when He was instructing the disciples in the upper room. He says in **John 14:26**, “*But the helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.*” He repeats this promise on the way to the Garden later that night. In **John 15:26**, He says, “*When the **Helper** comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is **the Spirit of truth** who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me.*”

Even the Apostle Paul would later refer to the Holy Spirit as *the Holy Spirit of promise* in His letter to the church at Ephesus. He says in **Ephesians 1:13**, “*...you were sealed in Him with **the Holy Spirit of promise.**”*

This command of the Lord in Luke 24:49 is referenced again in **Acts 1:4** in which Luke records, “*Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised...*” He also emphasizes it again in the command of **Acts 1:8**, “*but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you...*”

And the disciples reception of the Holy Spirit of promise is recorded for us in **Acts 2:1-4**, “*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all **filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.*”

It is interesting that in Luke 24:49 the term “*clothed*” [ENDUO] is the normal word for “dress,” or “to clothe someone.” This term in Luke 24:49 is in the passive and indicates that the individual does not clothe himself, but someone else (God) does it for him. The apostles were to wait in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from the Holy Spirit.

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“The use of the figure of clothing for this work indicates its outward character, its covering of human weakness, and its function as an official vestment identifying a person as a divine representative...Our clothing with power is that which God puts on us. It is to provide complete enablement for the appointed task. [John Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 19] So in this sense it would appear to be related to or represent the filling ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Directly it is speaking of the enablement or power from the Holy Spirit given to the Apostles to fulfill their role/ministry in the foundation of the church.

• ***Are you allowing yourself to be filled with or controlled by the Holy Spirit? Do you rely on the strength and power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill your role in ministry or do you try to serve in your own strength?***

Second, the Holy Spirit is represented as a Dove.

The use of the dove as a representation of the Holy Spirit occurs in the descriptions of the baptism of Christ. In fact all four Gospel accounts mention that the Holy Spirit descended upon Christ in the form of a dove or like a dove.

- **Matthew 3:16**, “*And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, {and} coming upon Him.*”
- **Mark 1:10**, “*And immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him.*”
- **Luke 3:22**, “*and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, “Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased.”*”
- **John 1:32**, “*And John bore witness saying, “I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him.”*”

In each of these four accounts, it is the Holy Spirit that is descending upon Christ at His baptism and He is descending from heaven. Matthew says that He was descending “as a dove.” Mark describes Him descending, “like a dove.” Luke carries it a step further and explains that He descended upon Christ, “in bodily form like a dove.” Lastly, John says that He descended “as a dove.”

We must be careful to note here that in each of these occurrences that the Holy Spirit's descension is not a dove actually descending, but the Spirit Himself. So why is he described as descending like a dove? The gospel writers had to give some sort of physical description to what was witnessed at Christ's baptism. There was evidently something in the quality and characteristics of a dove that represented the bodily form that the Holy Spirit assumed or it represented the way He descended.

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It is important to note that these verses emphasize that the presence of the Holy Spirit came directly from God out of heaven. This was significant in emphasizing the Father's blessing and anointing of His Son for His public ministry. It served as an important witness to the people and emphasizes the power of the Holy Spirit on Christ for His ministry upon the earth. Some commentators and theologians have mentioned that the characteristics of a dove include beauty, gentleness, peace, and purity and therefore represent the characteristics/attributes of the Holy Spirit as He descended upon the Son. But we probably should not make too much of that.

- ***Not only was the Holy Spirit present in the ministry of Christ, but He would later be sent down to be present with believers as an encourager, comforter and helper. In fact, as believers our very bodies become the temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:19). Do you recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life? Are your thoughts, speech and actions appropriate for one who is a temple of the Holy Spirit?***

Third, the Holy Spirit is represented as a Pledge.

In **2 Corinthians 1:22**, the apostle Paul says, “*who also sealed us and gave {us} the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.*” (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:5) The Greek word [ARRABON] “*pledge*” means, “a first installment or token payment, a deposit or a down payment.” It speaks of paying part of the purchase price in advance and so secures a legal claim to the article in question or makes a contract valid. It is a payment, which obligates the contracting party to make further payments. [cf. Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, Greek-English Lexicon, p. 109]

In **Ephesians 1:13-14**, the Apostle Paul reveals the nature of the Holy Spirit as a down payment of our ultimate and complete glorification in heaven. He says, “*In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation -having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of {God's own} possession, to the praise of His glory.*”

Very clearly in this passage the apostle Paul is looking forward to the final stage of the believer's redemption; our future inheritance; our ultimate glorification. Those who have truly trusted in Christ have been sealed with the Holy Spirit as a pledge. The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives serves as a pledge or symbol of our security in Christ and a promise of our future inheritance and glorification.

- ***Do you recognize that the Holy Spirit is your pledge; your deposit; your assurance of your future inheritance and glorification? Are you looking forward to your future inheritance and the fulfillment of God's promises? Are you living your life in light of your future reward that has already been guaranteed?***

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Fourth, the Holy Spirit is represented as Tongues of Fire.

This is noted in **Acts 2:3-4**, “*And there appeared to them **tongues as of fire** distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. **And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.”*

God's revelation of Himself by fire was not unusual and likely would have been understood by the Jews. Fire in reference to God had at least seven symbolic uses prior to the events recorded in Acts 2.

- In **Exodus 3:2** fire represented the Lord's presence, “*And **the angel of the LORD** appeared to him **in a blazing fire** from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.*” Very clearly the fire at the burning bush represented that the LORD (YHWH) was truly present in the bush before Moses.
- There are places where fire represents the Lord's approval. **Leviticus 9:24** “*Then fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar; and when all the people saw {it}, they shouted and fell on their faces.* The idea of approval is further confirmed by **1 Kings 18:38**, “*Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.*” (cf. 2 Chronicles 7:1) In each of these cases the offering that was made to the Lord was an acceptable offering. It met the Lord's approval.
- In **Exodus 13:21** fire represents the Lord's guidance, “*And the LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.*” ’
- In **Zechariah 2:5**, fire represents the Lord's protection, “*For I, declares the LORD, will be a wall of fire around her, and I will be the glory in her midst.*”
- In **Malachi 3:3**, fire represents the Lord's discipline and testing, “*And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness.*” (cf. 1 Peter 1:7)
- In **Jeremiah 5:14**, fire represents God's Word, “*Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, Because you have spoken this word, Behold, I am making My words in your mouth fire And this people wood, and it will consume them.*” (cf. Jeremiah 20:9)
- In **Leviticus 10:2**, fire represents God's judgment, “*And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.*”

This eighth use of fire in Acts 2:3-4 is clearly a reference to the Holy Spirit as the Apostles were filled with the Spirit and empowered by Him for the work of ministry. Judging by previous usage, the appearance of the Holy Spirit as tongues of fire carried with it the thought of the Lord's presence, approval, protection, and guidance for the ministry set before them.

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- ***Do you recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life? Are you relying on the strength of the Spirit and His ability to illumine the Word of God and guide you by it?***

Fifth, the Holy Spirit is represented in Anointing with Oil.

The representation of the Holy Spirit as oil or anointing with oil is considerably more vague than others. But often the various anointing of priests and kings with oil serves as a type of the Holy Spirit in regards to the Spirit's enabling ministry.

Zechariah 4:1-14 illustrates the significance of oil as a type; oil depicted the Holy Spirit's power in strengthening Joshua and Zerubbabel to lead the people of Israel in completing the construction of the temple around 515 BC. The constant flow of oil from the lampstand (vs. 2) to the two leaders (vv. 3, 14) is interpreted in verse 6, "*Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit.*" [Paul Enns, The Moody Handbook of Theology, p. 255]

In 1 Samuel 10:1 Samuel anointed Saul as king of Israel. This anointing represented the Holy Spirit's coming upon him to lead the people of Israel as their king. (cf. 1 Samuel 10:1-6). This is repeated in the life of David in **1 Samuel 16:13**, "*Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward.*"

In the New Testament we see the Holy Spirit anointing Christ to preach the Good News to the poor in **Luke 4:18**, "*THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR...*" While this is a quote of an Old Testament prophecy of Messiah and certainly speaks of Christ as the fulfillment of that prophecy. It also shows the Holy Spirit's involvement in anointing Christ and empowering Him for His role/ministry on the earth.

This is further illustrated by Peter's words in **Acts 10:38**, "*{You know of} Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and {how} He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him.*"

So the representation of the Holy Spirit as oil speaks of His involvement with various individuals for the purpose of empowering them to complete their role/ministry.

- ***What ministry has God entrusted you with? Are you relying on His power; His strength; His Spirit to accomplish God-given purposes; to fulfill your role in ministry?***

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Sixth, the Holy Spirit is represented as a Seal.

The Holy Spirit is identified as the seal of the believer in three different passages, all written by the Apostle Paul. The representation as a seal is very similar to the representation as a pledge, already mentioned.

- **2 Corinthians 1:21-22**, “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also **sealed us and gave {us} the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.**”
- **Ephesians 1:13**, “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation -having also believed, you were **sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.**”
- **Ephesians 4:30**, “And do not grieve **the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.**”

In Paul's day an official document would be sealed with wax. An impression would be made in the hot wax with the signet ring of the king or another high ranking official. The seal would signify that the document was official. The Spirit of God is our seal. Let's look at four things that the seal of the Spirit signifies.

1) **Security**: In ancient times the seal of a king, prince, or noble represented security and inviolability (cf. Daniel 6:6-7). When we became a Christian, God put His Holy Spirit in us. He stamped us with His signet ring, thus declaring us secure.

2) **Authenticity**: In ancient times the seal signified authenticity. The seal served as the Kings authentic signature (i.e. 1 Kings 21:6-16). When God gave us His Holy Spirit, He declared us to be authentic children of the King.

3) **Ownership**: In ancient times the seal also served as a completion of a transaction noting final ownership. When the Holy Spirit seals believers, He marks them as God's divine possession and declares the transaction of salvation as official and final.

4) **Authority**: In ancient times the seal emphasized the absolute authority of the decrees represented by the seal. Those who possessed the sealed decree had the Kings delegated authority (cf. Esther 8:8-12). When Christians are sealed with the Holy Spirit, we are delegated to proclaim, teach, and defend God's Word and His Gospel with His authority! When God gave you the Holy Spirit, He gave you the only guarantee you'll ever need.

The role of the Holy Spirit as our seal provides us with much security and assurance. God will certainly fulfill His promises to His children, whom He has sealed with the Holy Spirit.

- ***have this security and assurance of your salvation, knowing that God has given us the Holy Spirit as our seal? Are you looking forward to your future inheritance and the fulfillment of God's promises?***

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Seventh, the Holy Spirit is represented as Water.

Water is used in Scripture for various representations:

- In **Genesis 7:9** it is used to represent God's judgment as illustrated in the flood.
- In **Ephesians 5:26**, it signifies the Word of God. Paul says, “*that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by **the washing of water with the word.***”
- In **Psalms 69:2, 14-15**, it is used poetically of distress and tribulation, “*I have sunk in deep mire, and there is no foothold; I have come into **deep waters**, and **a flood overflows me**... Deliver me from the mire, and do not let me sink; May I be delivered from my foes, and from **the deep waters**. **May the flood of water not overflow me**, And may the deep not swallow me up, And may the pit not shut its mouth on me.*”
- But for our purposes here, it is also used to represent the Holy Spirit. We see this primarily in **John 7:37-39**:

*“Now on the last day, the great {day} of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being shall flow **rivers of living water**. **But this He spoke of the Spirit**, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet {given,} because Jesus was not yet glorified.”*

“During the final ritual at the Feast of Tabernacles the priest brought water from the pool of Siloam and poured it in the funnel beside the altar, amid the singing of worshipers. This event was a joyous one, in anticipation of Messiah's glorious reign (cf. Zechariah 14:16-21).” [Paul Enns, The Moody Handbook of Theology, p. 256]

It was likely during or just after this ceremony that Christ spoke the words of John 7:37-39. It is against this background of the water ceremony that we should understand the invitation of Christ. It is against this background of the water ceremony that we see Christ standing and saying, “**If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.**”

Christ, in John 7:37, was changing the focus of the feast from liquid water that would provide life for their crops to the “living water” that would provide life for their thirsty *souls*.

This certainly was made very clear to the Samaritan woman after Jesus had asked her for a drink in **John 4:9-14**:

“(9) The Samaritan woman therefore said to Him, ‘How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?’... (10) Jesus answered and said to her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, “Give Me a drink,” you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.’ (11) She said to Him, ‘Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? (12) You are not greater than our father

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*Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?' (13) Jesus answered and said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again; (14) but **whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.**'"*

What was this life giving water? What was this water that would spring up to eternal life? What was this water that would result in the flowing of rivers of living water?

Jesus makes it quite clear in **John 7:39**, “***But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet {given,} because Jesus was not yet glorified.***” So the water that Jesus had to give was the Holy Spirit. Several points are noteworthy:

- Water as an emblem for the Holy Spirit signifies eternal life (John 7:39 and John 4:14).
- Water also signifies a reception of the Holy Spirit (John 7:39; cf. Ezekiel 36:25-27; Isaiah 32:15; 44:3-4).
- Water as an emblem of the Holy Spirit also anticipates future millennial blessings (John 7:37-39 compared with Joel 2:28-32; Isaiah 12:3).
- ***The world is a spiritual desert, and everyday we are coming into contact with people who are dying of thirst. Are you, allowing the Holy Spirit to produce in you rivers of living water by the way you are living your life?***

Eighth, the Holy Spirit is represented as Wind.

Wind is a most natural representation of the Holy Spirit since the word “*spirit*” [PNEUMA] may be translated *wind* as well as *spirit*. English words like *pneumatic* or *pneumonia* derive their meaning from the word PNEUMA. [cf. Enns, p. 256]

Theologian, John Walvoord comments: “Wind is often mentioned in perfectly natural contexts from Genesis 8:1 to Revelation 7:1. But three passages stand out however as using wind as a symbol of the work of the Holy Spirit.” [The Holy Spirit, p. 24]

- In **John 3:8**, wind is used as an illustration of the work of the Spirit in the new birth, “*The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.*”

In this passage the immaterial character of the Spirit as invisible yet sovereignly accomplishing His divine work is presented. “Jesus' point was that just as the wind cannot be controlled or understood by human beings but its effect can be witnessed, so also it is with the Holy Spirit. He cannot be controlled or understood, but the proof of His work is apparent.” [The MacArthur Study Bible, note, p. 1581]

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- In **Acts 2:1-2**, wind is a symbol for the coming of the Spirit, “*And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.*”

While the wind is not explicitly connected with the Spirit, the outer phenomena were clearly intended to imply the work of the Spirit which was accomplished. Just as the wind “filled all the house where they were sitting, so they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4). This speaks of the mighty power of the Spirit and God's sovereignty in the coming of the Spirit. [Walvoord, p. 24]

- In **2 Peter 1:21** wind seems to be used as a symbol for the Spirit in connection with the Holy Spirit's involvement in the writing of Scripture, “*for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*”

While the word *wind* does not appear in the verse, the imagery is that of a ship being driven by the wind. The writers of Scripture were carried by or borne along by the Holy Spirit. The motive power and direction of the human writers of Scripture was the Spirit of God so that the prophecy was of God.

- *Very clearly the power and the work of the Spirit can be seen in the picture of the Holy Spirit as wind. From the initial coming of the Spirit to the regeneration of believers and the writing of Scripture, the Holy Spirit cannot be seen, but He is here and He is at work. Can you see the results of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in your life?*

CONCLUSION:

All of these representations of the Holy Spirit taken together reveal much of the ministry of the Spirit mentioned in Scripture. Works such as regeneration, inspiration, revelation, indwelling, filling, sealing etc...are clearly seen in these various pictures of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is revealed to be ever-present, abundant in power, sovereign in purpose and a guarantee of our future inheritance. Hopefully, we will have no problem yielding our hearts and lives in worship, love and obedience to such an infinite and glorious person as the Holy Spirit.