

Symbols & Emblems of the Holy Spirit

Concord Community Church

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The Holy Spirit as a Fire



Throughout the Bible, God's power appears as or gets compared to fire. So, what does that tell us about the Holy Spirit appearing as fire?

Scripture speaks of God and uses all-natural imagery to describe his nature – mountains, thunder, lightning, and water. The most consistent, however, is flame and fire. Fire is full of mystery and wonder, causing both comfort and fear.

Where Does the Bible Compare God to Fire?

Scripture compares God to fire early in the narrative, in one of the Bible's central events that matters deeply to God's redemptive story: the [covenant](#) to Abram (Abraham). Abram questions God's promise—that he will have a son in his old

age and his descendants will have a promised land. God tells Abram to bring animals, cut them into two pieces, and leave them on the ground. Abram goes to sleep, and God passes between the sacrificial pieces, an ancient sign of covenant agreement ([Genesis 15:17](#)).

One of the ways God passes through is as a flaming torch. Additionally, only God passes through, not Abram. The tradition would have been for both parties to pass through the sacrifice as a commitment to the covenant. But God makes this covenant with himself to Abram. It's going to happen through Abram's power

Moses encounters God in a bush that burns without being consumed ([Exodus 3:2-3](#)). Moses feels awe and wonder, and God uses this conversation to commission him to go back to Egypt to set his people free.

The next time God comes to make a covenant is with the whole nation of Israel at Sinai ([Exodus 19:16-19](#)). God descends upon the top of the mountain in a dark cloud, with thunder and lightning. There is also smoke because God descended in a "form of fire." God spoke to the people from that fire "face to face," according to [Deuteronomy 5:4](#), just like he did with Moses at the burning bush.

Moving forward as a people, the Israelites were led by a cloud during the day. God led and protected them at night with a pillar of fire ([Exodus 13:21](#)). It must have been a continually miraculous sight to see a pillar of fire hovering in the air above the Tabernacle, then moving when God decided to move.

Speaking of the Tabernacle, its instructions included a burning incense in front of the Holy of Holies ([Exodus 30:9](#)) and a lampstand with burning oil to be lit day and night ([Exodus 27:20-21](#)).

Generations later, during the dedication of Solomon's Temple, the first sacrifice was accepted by fire from Heaven and thick smoke ([2 Chronicles 7:1-16](#)).

Along with God's presence, leading, and speaking, fire represented ways that God punished and judged people. A fire goes before God, consuming people in his path ([Psalm 50:3](#)). Fire's destructive force also played a big role in Elijah's ministry. First, in Elijah's confrontation with the priests of Baal ([1 Kings 18](#)) and later when King Ahaziah sent a captain and soldiers to arrest the prophet ([2 Kings 1:1-14](#)).

Fire as judgment also appeared in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's story when they were thrown into the fiery furnace. However, they were innocent. Tyranny sent them there, so the fire didn't hurt them ([Daniel 3:16-28](#)).

The New Testament refers to God as a consuming fire ([Hebrews 12:29](#)). At the final judgment, this world will be consumed with fire ([2 Peter 3:10](#)). People will be thrown into the Lake of Fire prepared for the devil and his angels ([Revelation 21:8](#)). Jesus also spoke of eternal punishment by fire ([Matthew 25:41](#)).

We must remember both the "goodness and severity of God," as Paul reminds us in [Romans 11:22](#). God is expressed as fire, as his being and nature, and part of that nature is a condemnation of sin and his enemies.

When Does the Holy Spirit Appear Like Fire?

The New Testament continues connecting Jesus and God with fire ([2 Thessalonians 1:7](#); [Revelation 1:14](#)), along with his judgment and eternal punishment from Hell.

Yet the New Testament takes the idea of God and fire a step further. [The Holy Spirit is identified with fire](#), and God's fire is seen not as judgment for believers but as refining and testing.

John the Baptist begins the idea when he says he baptizes with water (an Old Covenant-related idea of washing the outside clean), the Messiah will baptize with the Spirit and fire (or Spirit-fire, [Matthew 3:11](#)). Since Christ is (obviously) above John, Jesus' baptism is far greater. Fire would consume and clean more (and on a deeper level) than water.

This statement reaches fulfillment on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus had told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit. When the Jewish festival of Pentecost begins, they were baptized with that Holy Spirit, seen as a "tongue of fire" on each person ([Acts 2:3](#)). They went out from there and began speaking from the Spirit, supernaturally, in other languages about the wonderful works of God.

That fire sure did draw a crowd, and thousands were saved that day.

What does this event from [Acts 2](#) mean? Yes, a fulfillment of the baptism of Spirit-fire John the Baptist spoke of, but even more. Given the Old Testament's references to fire, we can see this event as God enacting the New Covenant and accepting the sacrifice of their lives unto his service. As he spoke from the burning bush and Mount Sinai, now he speaks through his disciples by his Spirit. In this one event, the disciples of Christ enter a New Covenant through Christ, the Temple of God, and God's voice of God on Earth.

It makes sense that the Holy Ghost is seen as fire. The Spirit is the third person in the Trinity, fully God like the Father and the Son. Just as the Father and the Son are seen as fire, the Spirit is fire.

Furthermore, God's judging fire doesn't condemn those filled with the Spirit. Fire exposes what something is made of. That fire now tests our faith, refining and strengthening our character and the grace we walk in. That refined faith is now

more precious than gold ([1 Peter 1:7](#)) because it is eternal and lasts. Gold will be consumed with everything else worldly. At the last judgment, our works will be tested and proven by God's fire to see whether they were based on Christ's work ([1 Corinthians 3:13](#)).

Perhaps I'll put it another way. All will stand before God and give an account ([2 Corinthians 5:10](#)). The fire of God will test what fire our works were made of and judge accordingly. Did we live according to the Spirit-fire of the Holy Spirit? This is why we must be born again and cling to God in relationship through Christ.

When Do We Receive the Holy Spirit?

Scholars and theologians debate the exact time a believer receives the Holy Spirit. The Bible is unclear about a specific moment. The disciples waited until Pentecost. Others received during preaching. Former disciples of John the Baptist had to be told about the Holy Spirit, and Paul laid hands on them to receive it.

Therefore, there isn't a formula we can follow. It completely depends on God to give the Spirit to whom he will. It is his gift, and he gives it when he deems it prudent. In other words, we can't jump through the right hoops to get the Holy Spirit. Paul and Barnabas dealt with this misconception when a man named Simon tried to get it by money ([Acts 8:1-25](#)).

We are told, however, that God is a good Father who desperately wants to give us the Holy Spirit ([Luke 11:13](#)). The Gospel centres around repentance, so our full receiving of the Holy Spirit, being born again from Heaven, is connected to the commitment of our entire lives away from our own strength unto following Jesus. We need his Spirit, his nature and power, to keep up with the [Son of God](#), and that's why we get him. It's

also a full gift. We have all three persons. He's holding nothing back. We have everything in him when we give all we are to him.

That's the pattern, but everyone has their individual stories. I've seen the Holy Spirit given in odd ways and unpredictable times.

Like God. Like fire.

What Does the Holy Spirit Empower Us to Do?

First, the Holy Spirit infuses us with God's divine nature, sharing his being and power through his indwelling presence, which is the only way we can serve that divine being.

Second, this infusion and regeneration brings us into God's family. We experience adoption and marriage (being lovingly chosen) and rebirth (emanating from him as children). We are eternally and completely united with God.

Third, the process empowers us to be God's witnesses unto the world ([Acts 1:8](#)). This was Jesus' stated purpose for giving the Holy Spirit. Now that we have his presence within us, we can be willing expressions of God's greatness.

Fourth, witnesses give an account before others. They speak. We can now speak the words of God as they did on the day of Pentecost. This includes the supernatural way we live, the Fruit of the Spirit, and the [Gifts of the Spirit](#).

Fifth, the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth ([John 16:13-15](#)). Like the pillar of fire, even in the night, we will see clearly and know the right way to go and what to do.

Sixth, the Holy Spirit cleanses us from within, purifying us in a way that a simple washing of the outside (the weakness of the Old Testament) can't do. This purifies our thoughts, feelings, and motives, all from God's presence and voice.

Seventh, being consumed by the Holy Spirit's fire and walking by the Spirit means we escape the fire of Judgment, the condemnation coming to the world. God's holy fire is greater and protects us while he leads and empowers us.

Thank God for his Holy Spirit fire! What a gift to us as believers. Let us let his Spirit do his work within us and through us to give hope to a dying world.

Peace.

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