

***Question: What do people mean when they talk about the Holy Ghost?***

While the expression Holy Ghost comes from the 1611 King James Version of the Bible, more recent versions translate this same expression as Holy Spirit. In the early 1600's, the word "ghost" meant "spirit" or that which is not the material part of a person as distinct from the physical body; and "ghostly" meant what "spiritual" means to us today. Also, the literature of that time period commonly referred to a priest as a ghostly father, ghostly advisor or ghostly instructor. In Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," Romeo called Friar Laurence "a ghostly confessor." This use of the words "ghost" and "ghostly" is now obsolete and mostly forgotten except for those who continue to use the older King James Version of the Bible. The New King James Version has updated Holy Ghost to Holy Spirit.

This term "Holy Spirit" or a variation of it is found three times in the Old Testament and ninety-one times in the New Testament in the New International Version. Sometimes the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit, the Spirit of God or the Spirit of the Lord. For centuries, theologians have debated the nature of the Holy Spirit and the relationship of the Spirit with the Father and the Son in what has been called "the Trinity." This debate continues. While we may find this discussion both interesting and helpful, failure to answer this question does not prevent us from understanding the important role the Holy Spirit plays in the life of a Christian.

In the Old Testament, we find that the Holy Spirit was only given to a few select persons so that they might fulfill specific tasks. For example, God placed his Spirit upon a man named Bezalel to endow him with artistic ability for work on the Tabernacle in the wilderness, the tent-like predecessor of the Temple in Jerusalem (Exodus 31:2-5). Moses and others with him had the Spirit placed upon them so they could lead God's people (Numbers 11:17), and the Spirit of God spoke through King David and the prophets (2 Samuel 23:1; Micah 3:8; 2 Peter 1:21). One of the primary functions of the Holy Spirit was to reveal God's word and guide the chosen writers of scripture. The apostle Peter wrote: "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21; cf. 2

Timothy 3:16).

In the New Testament, we learn that the Spirit was poured out on “all people” just as the prophet Joel foretold (Joel 2:28; cf. Acts 2:16-21). Thus, the Holy Spirit was given to be with and in all those who came to believe in Jesus and were baptized into Him, whether Jews or non-Jews (Acts 2:38). The apostle Peter spoke of “the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him” (Acts 5:32); and Paul spoke of the bodies of Christians as the temple of God’s Spirit who lives in us (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19).

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christians is a source of encouragement and power by serving as a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance in Christ (Ephesians 1:13-14) and by providing spiritual gifts for ministering (1 Corinthians 12:4-6; cf. Romans 12:6-8). The Spirit also intercedes for us in our most difficult moments of prayer (Romans 8:26-27) and helps us understand the words God has freely given to us (2 Corinthians 2:10-13). Those who belong to Jesus Christ have the power to overcome sin in their lives because they are led by the Spirit and live by the Spirit (Romans 8:13-14; Galatians 5:16). Their lives give evidence that they belong to Christ by bearing the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:16, 22-23).

To those of you who do not personally know and understand these blessings that come through faith in Jesus Christ and the life empowered by God’s Spirit, “The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life” (Revelation 22:17).

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