

How Does the New Testament Refer to the Holy Spirit?

An understanding of the various terms applied to the Holy Spirit is essential if we are to comprehend the Bible's teaching concerning the Holy Spirit. Here are some of the ways He is referred to in the New Testament.

Spirit

Luke wrote, "And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led about by the Spirit in the wilderness" (Luke 4:1). Evidently, the Spirit that led Him was the Holy Spirit.

Mark 3:29 says "Holy Spirit," while Matthew 12:31 says "Spirit" when referring to the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. (In the Old Testament "the Spirit" is used many times to refer to the Holy Spirit—for example, Numbers 11:17, 25–29; 27:18.)

Spirit of the Father

Matthew 10:20 uses "Spirit of your Father," while Mark 13:11 uses "Holy Spirit" when referring to the one who inspired the apostles. ("Spirit of the Father" does not appear in the Old Testament.)

Spirit of God

Matthew 3:16 refers to the "Spirit of God." Mark 1:10 and John 1:32 say "Spirit" and Luke 3:22 says "Holy Spirit" in telling about the Holy Spirit's descending on Jesus when He was baptized. "Spirit of God" is also used of the Holy Spirit in other New Testament passages (Romans 8:9, 14; 1 Corinthians 2:11, 14; 3:16; 6:11; 7:40; 12:3; 2 Corinthians 3:3; Ephesians 4:30). (In the Old Testament "Spirit of God" is used repeatedly: Genesis 1:2; Exodus 31:3; 35:31; Numbers 24:2; 1 Samuel 11:6.)

Helper or Comforter

John 14:26 uses the terms "Helper" and "Holy Spirit" interchangeably: "But the Helper [“Comforter,” KJV; “Counselor,” NIV], the Holy Spirit, . . ."

Spirit of Truth

In John 14:16, 17 "Helper" and "Spirit of truth" are used interchangeably. This is also true in John 15:26: "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 bear witness of Me."

Spirit of the Lord

In Luke 4:18 Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, . . ." Acts 5:9 also mentions "the Spirit of the Lord" (referred to as "the Holy Spirit" in 5:3). Read 2 Corinthians 3:17. (The Old Testament says "Spirit of the Lord" many times—for example, Judges 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6.)

Spirit of Jesus or Christ

Romans 8:9 speaks of "the Spirit of Christ." Galatians 4:6 has "the Spirit of His Son." Also read Philippians 1:19 and 1 Peter 1:11. By comparing 2 Peter 1:20, 21 to 1 Peter 1:11, we can conclude that the Spirit of Christ and the Holy Spirit are the same.

In discussing the Holy Spirit, it is important for us to realize that He is referred to by different terms. We do not need to prove that the Holy Spirit is under consideration each time these various terms appear in the Scriptures. We can be sure that He is meant unless something in the context demands another meaning.