

# THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION: AN ADVENTIST PERSPECTIVE

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## Abstract

This article explores the constant presence and significant role of the Holy Spirit in the book of Revelation from a Seventh-day Adventist theological perspective. Although the term "Holy Spirit" is never used in the book, various symbols, metaphors, and allusions highlight His fundamental involvement in the plan of redemption and the life of the Church. The study organizes these references into five categories: explicit mentions, indirect references, possible allusions, implicit inferences, and the angelic representation of Revelation 18:1-3 as a symbolic depiction of the Holy Spirit in the context of the eschatological event known as the "Latter Rain." This interpretation carries significant theological implications, inviting reflection on the broader symbolic presence of the Holy Spirit in Revelation, including other angelic figures that may hypothetically represent His activity. The study sheds light on the harmonious collaboration within the Trinity in the plan of salvation and reaffirms the essential role of the Holy Spirit in strengthening the Church's mission and its ultimate victory.

**Keywords:** Revelation, Holy Spirit, Latter Rain, Church.

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# O MINISTÉRIO DO ESPÍRITO SANTO NO LIVRO DO APOCALIPSE: UMA PERSPECTIVA ADVENTISTA

## Resumo

Este artigo explora a presença constante e o papel significativo do Espírito Santo no livro do Apocalipse a partir de uma perspectiva teológica adventista do sétimo dia. Embora o termo "Espírito Santo" nunca seja utilizado no livro, diversos símbolos, metáforas e alusões destacam Sua participação fundamental no plano da redenção e na vida da Igreja. O estudo organiza essas referências em cinco categorias: menções explícitas, referências indiretas, possíveis alusões, inferências implícitas e a representação angelical de Apocalipse 18:1-3 como uma representação simbólica do Espírito Santo no contexto do evento escatológico conhecido como "Chuva Serôdia". Essa interpretação traz implicações teológicas significativas, convidando à reflexão sobre a presença simbólica mais ampla do Espírito Santo no Apocalipse, incluindo outras figuras angelicais que hipoteticamente possam representar Sua atuação. O estudo ilumina a colaboração harmoniosa dentro da Trindade no plano da salvação e reafirma o papel essencial do Espírito Santo no fortalecimento da missão da Igreja e em sua vitória final.

**Palavras-chave:** Apocalipse; Espírito Santo; Chuva Serôdia; Igreja.

# EL MINISTERIO DEL ESPÍRITU SANTO EN EL LIBRO DE APOCALIPSIS: UNA PERSPECTIVA ADVENTISTA

## Resumen

Este artículo explora la presencia constante y el papel significativo del Espíritu Santo en el libro de Apocalipsis desde una perspectiva teológica adventista del séptimo día. Aunque el término "Espíritu Santo" nunca se menciona en el libro, diversos símbolos, metáforas y alusiones destacan Su participación fundamental en el plan de redención y en la vida de la Iglesia. El estudio organiza estas referencias en cinco categorías: menciones explícitas, referencias indirectas, posibles alusiones, inferencias implícitas y la representación angelical de Apocalipsis 18:1-3 como una representación simbólica del Espíritu Santo en el contexto del evento escatológico conocido como la "Lluvia Tardía". Esta interpretación conlleva importantes implicaciones teológicas, invitando a la reflexión sobre la presencia simbólica más amplia del Espíritu Santo en Apocalipsis, incluyendo otras figuras angelicales que hipotéticamente podrían representar Su actuación. El estudio ilumina la colaboración armoniosa dentro de la Trinidad en el plan de salvación y reafirma el papel esencial del Espíritu Santo en el fortalecimiento de la misión de la Iglesia y en su victoria final.

**Palabras clave:** Apocalipsis; Espíritu Santo; Lluvia Tardía; Iglesia.



## INTRODUCTION<sup>2</sup>

The various references to the Holy Spirit in the book of Revelation serve as a significant demonstration of His prominent role in the plan of redemption (Rodríguez, 2011; Lee, 2019; Reynolds, 2006, p. 70-71; Waddell, 2006, p. 178; Thomas, 2014, p. 550). Although the term "Holy Spirit" is never used in the book (Archer; Waddell, 2021, p. 553; Lee, 2019, p. 11), several words and metaphors are employed in reference to His Person and to His work in favor of God's people. His pervasive presence throughout the book highlights His vital importance to the life and the victory of the church.

Others have written about the numerous references to the Holy Spirit in the book of Revelation<sup>3</sup>; however, this paper approaches the topic from the perspective of Seventh-day Adventist theology, including the "Angel" in Revelation 18:1-3 as one of those references. Due to the symbolic nature of the apocalyptic genre, there is no consensus on the exact number of references or potential allusions to the Holy Spirit in the book. Numerous variables make it impossible to define a specific number with any degree of certainty.<sup>4</sup> In this paper, the presence of the Holy Spirit in Revelation is classified into five categories: 1) clear references to His person; 2) indirect references, which point to the results of His actions; 3) possible references or allusions; 4) some implicit inferences, and 5) the angelic representation in chapter 18, with some potential implications.

## CLEAR REFERENCES

Some clear references to the Person of the Holy Spirit in the book of Revelation are: the "seven spirits" (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6), the seven warnings from Jesus for His people to "hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22), and the two occasions when the Holy Spirit speaks (14:13; 22:17). These total thirteen occurrences.

As a demonstration of the all-encompassing presence of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Revelation, the first reference to His person appears as early as the fourth verse of the first

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<sup>2</sup> This article is based on a lecture delivered by the author at the annual meeting of the Adventist Society for Religious Studies (ASRS) on November 22, 2024, in San Diego, CA, USA under the title: "The Ministry of the Holy Spirit to the Christian Church as Depicted in the Book of Revelation: From the Incarnation of the Messiah to the Cessation of Grace."

<sup>3</sup> For example: Bauckham, 1980; Kuykendall, 2021; Mueller, 2017; Thomas, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, Edwin Reynolds (2006) calculates seventeen occurrences; Kuykendall (2021, p. 541) calculates thirty-one.



chapter. In Revelation 1:4-5, the greeting "grace and peace" is given by three Persons: the Father ("the One who is, who was, and who is to come"), the Holy Spirit ("the seven spirits who are before His throne") and the Son ("Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth").

The expression "seven spirits" draws on imagery from the seven lamps of the Hebrew sanctuary's lampstand (Exod 25:31-40), the seven lamps in Zechariah 4:2-7, and the seven characteristics of the Holy Spirit described in Isaiah 11:2. Despite the fact that the seven-lamp lampstand—a mere symbol—remained inert "before the table" in the Hebrew sanctuary (Exod 26:35; Num 8:4), the Holy Spirit, its living and dynamic antitype, is depicted as standing before the throne of God (Rev 1:4) and being sent to the Earth (5:6).

In Revelation 3:1 and 5:6 it is stated that Jesus "has" (Gk. *echo*, ἔχω) the "seven spirits of God." This demonstrates the intrinsic relationship between the members of the Trinity (Thomas, 2014, p. 540; Lee, 2019, p. 118). This is also evidenced in the symbolic representation in Revelation 5:6, where the "seven spirits" are presented as the "seven eyes" of the Lamb, symbolizing the omniscience of Jesus and of the Spirit (Kuykendall, 2021, p. 533; Lee, 2011, p. 108-109, 128).

The work of the Spirit among human beings working for their salvation is evident in the two statements made by the Holy Spirit Himself in the Book of Revelation. In the first statement (14:13), He pronounces a blessing on those who have died believing in the message of the three angels (Nichol, 1980, v. 7, p. 924). In the second statement, near the conclusion of the book (22:17), He extends an invitation, together with the "bride of the Lamb," for people to accept the salvation freely offered by Jesus.<sup>5</sup> Through these symbolic images, we see the relationship of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son, and His work in and by the Church.

## INDIRECT REFERENCES

Indirect references are those that do not mention the Person of the Holy Spirit but rather the effect or result of His interventions. Some of the indirect references to the Holy Spirit in the book of Revelation are related to the word "spirit." This word appears twenty-four times in the book, thirteen of them being the ones just discussed above. Four occurrences are

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<sup>5</sup> For Bauckham (1980, p. 78), "the Bride is the church seen from the perspective of the parousia" and "all the churches are summoned by the voice of prophecy to become the Bride."



not related to the Holy Spirit, being three references to fallen angels (16:13,14;18:2) and one meaning “breath” (13:15). However, seven of the remaining occurrences are indirect references to the Holy Spirit.

These are divided into four different expressions: “in the spirit” (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10); “spirits of the prophets” (22:6), “spirit of prophecy” (19:10), and “spirit of life” (11:11). Regarding the expression “in the spirit”, scholars debate whether it refers to the spirit of the prophet during an ecstatic vision or whether it refers to the Holy Spirit giving them this experience. Many of them believe it refers to the spirit of the prophet.<sup>6</sup> That being the case, it is still a reference to the action of the Holy Spirit upon the prophets so that they may receive the visions.

Similarly, the expression “spirit of life” seems to be a reference to the action of the Holy Spirit, based on Ezekiel 37:10 (Aune, 1998, v. 52b, p. 623-624; Stefanovic, 2009, p. 360). These occurrences with the word “spirit” in connection to the prophetic experience seems to be related to the gift of Prophecy, which has always been crucial for the Church (cf. 1 Cor 14:3-4).

Some scholars see also the word *pneumatikos*—an adverb found in Revelation 11:8—as a reference to the action of the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup> It is translated in some Bible versions as “symbolically”<sup>8</sup> or “figuratively,”<sup>9</sup> but since its root is *pneuma* (“spirit”), it can be properly translated as “spiritually”<sup>10</sup>—which would imply an interpretation given by the Holy Spirit through the spirit of prophecy.<sup>11</sup>

## POSSIBLE REFERENCES OR ALLUSIONS

There are many symbols used in the book of Revelation that, even not being explicit references to the Holy Spirit, carry in themselves a biblical background that alludes to His Person and/or His work. One of these symbols is the olive oil (Rev 6:6; cf. Exod 40:9; 1 Sam

<sup>6</sup> Bauckham (1980, p. 68) says that “John was *en pneumatikōi* in the sense that his normal sensory experience was replaced by visions and auditions given him by the Spirit”; on the other hand, Henry Barclay Swete (1911, p. 303) believes the expression “spirit of prophecy” refers to “the natural faculties of the prophets”; so David Aune (1998, v. 52c, p. 1182) and Melissa Archer & Robby Waddell (2021, p. 554).

<sup>7</sup> So Mueller (2017, p. 336-337); Bauckham (1980, p. 79).

<sup>8</sup> English Standard Version; Lexham English Bible; New English Translation.

<sup>9</sup> New International Version; New Living Translation.

<sup>10</sup> King James Version; American Standard Version; The Message; New American Standard Bible; Thomas (2014, p. 545); Mueller (2017, p. 336-337).

<sup>11</sup> Bauckham (1980, p. 79) says “it refers to Spirit-given perception,” since “the great city is called Sodom and Egypt through the Spirit of prophecy, which thus makes plain its real character as a city ripe for judgement.”



16:13; Jas 5:14; Stefanovic, 2009, p. 233; Mueller, 2017, p. 338; Thomas, 2014, p. 542-543). It is worth noting that the symbol of oil is present even when it is not mentioned. For example, the scene in which Christ walks among the seven lampstands reminds us of the priest watching the seven lampstands in the sanctuary, always ensuring that the oil level was replenished so that the fire could "burn continually" (Lev 24:2). This highlights the care of Jesus in providing the churches with the Holy Spirit.

Dealing with allusions is challenging because there might be an element of subjectivity in distinguishing between an intentional allusion and a mere coincidence. This is one of the variables mentioned above that make it difficult to determine with certainty how many references to the Holy Spirit appear in the book of Revelation. It is important to have this in mind when considering that some interpreters see references to the Holy Spirit in elements such as the 'eye salve' (Rev 3:18; Kuykendall, 2021, p. 539), the expression 'water of life' (Rev 21:6; 22:1; cf. Jn 7:38-39; Bruce, 1973, p. 343; Kuykendall, 2021, p. 538; Mueller, 2017, p. 340-341), the seal of God (Rev 7:2-3; 9:4; Mueller, 2017, p. 337-338), and even the imagery of clouds (Rev 10:1; 11:12; Wilson, 2019, p. 90-92) and smoke (Rev 15:8; Wilson, 2019, p. 90-92). Due to the subjectivity involved in these interpretations, one might count all of these elements as references—or none at all.

## IMPLICIT INFERENCES

The Holy Spirit is so ever-present in the book of Revelation that both His Person and actions can be perceived even in passages where there is no explicit reference or allusion to Him. His participation and importance in the plan of redemption lead the intelligent mind to perceive the connections between certain scenes and His work. For example, in the scene where the "woman," representing the people of God, is pregnant and suffering while waiting for the divine Son (Rev 12:2), Christians know that the Child is Jesus, and that the Holy Spirit was the Agent responsible for bringing Him to the world through the miracle of the Incarnation (Luke 1:32, 33, 35).

In the same way, in the scene where the temple in Heaven is "filled with smoke ... and no one was able to enter the temple" (Rev 15:8)—possibly representing the end of intercession (Stefanovic, 2009, p. 470-471). It means that the Holy Spirit, in this case, is no longer with the Bride inviting sinners to accept salvation (Rev 22:17). He is not mentioned, but we know that



since there is no more grace available, He is no longer convincing people “regarding sin, and righteousness, and judgment” (John 16:8; Rev 22:11).

Thus, as demonstrated so far, even though we are not able to quantify the number of occurrences, we can observe that the Holy Spirit is pervasively present in the book, and that His presence is prominent in the plan of redemption, alongside the Father and the Son, working for and through the Church, from the Incarnation to the conclusion of the Gospel proclamation.

### THE ANGELIC REPRESENTATION OF REVELATION 18

Beyond all the references to the Holy Spirit in the book of Revelation mentioned above, there is one more according to the Adventist understanding: the 'angel' who illuminates 'all the earth' with his glory (18:1-3). The word ἄγγελος (Gk. *angelos*), which is used widely throughout the book (sixty-seven times), does not mean only “angel,” but also “messenger.” Among the many angels/messengers that John saw in symbolic representations, some are depicted with tremendous power, authority, and glory, bearing a divine appearance (Rev 10:1-3; 14:15-16, 17-19; 18:1).

This has divided scholars basically into those who interpret all of them simply as very powerful created celestial beings, and those who see some of them as symbolic representations of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The latter interpretation does not diminish Jesus and the Holy Spirit to the level of created beings, just as representations of Jesus as? “lion,” “lamb,” “star,” “root,” and “key” (5:5-6; 6:16)—as well as those of the Holy Spirit as “horns,” “eyes,” and “fire” (4:5; 5:6)—do not undermine Their eternal divine nature.

Thus, in the so-called divine economy,<sup>12</sup> even Jesus and the Holy Spirit can be symbolically portrayed as *angeloi* (messengers) of God. In this case, as proposed by a minority view, the “archangel Michael” might be a representation of Jesus (Henry, 1950, p.1160; Lange, 1872, p. 39, 47, 238, 243; Reynolds, 2006, p. 58, 65; Stefanovic, 2009, p. 395), since He is the

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<sup>12</sup> Divine economy is the concept that the three Members of the Trinity assume different roles or functions in the “carrying out of the plan for humanity’s salvation and the eradication of sin from the universe. In this divine economy, the separation of functions makes for a more effective administration of the government of the universe, and each of the members of the Godhead makes His own unique contribution. The Father is the figurehead Administrator, the Sovereign, Almighty God, who remains on the throne directing the affairs of the universe while the other Two are engaged in other activities, especially activities connected with the salvation of humanity.” Edwin Reynolds (2006, p. 67, 71-72).





greatest of all God's messengers, being Himself the very "Word of God" (Rev 19:13; cf. John 1:1,14).

Similarly, the "mighty angel" of Revelation 10 is interpreted by some scholars as a symbolic representation of Jesus Christ.<sup>13</sup> In a different perspective, Waddell and Archer propose what they describe as 'a relatively novel idea in scholarship.' They suggest that this symbolic angel may represent a "theophany of the [Holy] Spirit."<sup>14</sup> For Ellen White, however, the identity of this "angel" (Rev 10) is unequivocal: "the mighty Angel who instructed John was no less a personage than Jesus Christ" (White, 1996, p. 243).

Furthermore, she implies in some of her writings that the "Angel with great authority" in Revelation 18:1-3, is a symbol of the Holy Spirit in the last-day event called "Latter Rain" (Joel 2:23-24; Jas 5:7; White, 1925, p. 253; 1900, v. 6, p. 401; 1911, p. 611-612; 1992, p. 193, 202). She says this event is "the great outpouring of the Spirit of God, which lightens the whole earth with His glory" (White, 1925, p. 253). On this occasion, the Holy Spirit will empower the remnant people—also symbolically represented by angels in Revelation 14:6-12—to keep preaching the Everlasting Gospel (Rev 18:3; cf. 14:8; White, 1900, v. 6, p. 401). This will cause the message preached by the remnant to "swell into a loud cry, and the whole earth will be lightened with the glory of the Lord" (White, 1900, v. 6, p. 401).

## POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS

Considering the idea that even Jesus and the Holy Spirit can be symbolically represented by angels/messengers in Revelation, some implications may follow. One issue that requires further study is the possibility that, just as in Revelation 18:1-3, other angelic figures in the book of Revelation may also represent the activity of the Holy Spirit. Regarding the "mighty angel" of 5:1, for example, Osborne states that "it is difficult to understand why a 'mighty angel' is needed here" (Osborne, 2009, p. 250). It is obviously not a reference to Jesus, as He appears in verse 5 as a Lamb, to take the scroll from the hands of the Father, who is on the throne. While we cannot definitively determine the identity of this symbolic angel,

<sup>13</sup> For example: Shea (1992, p. 289-290), who cites by his side J. A. Seiss, D. G. Barnhouse, J. A. Ford, and E. B. Elliot; against this opinion are, for example, Osborne (2009, p. 393) and Stefanovic (2009, p. 326), who believe the angel of chapter 10 is only an exalted angel.

<sup>14</sup> Archer and Waddell, p. 565; Robby Waddell explains this possible idea in his *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation* (2006, p. 158-160).





apparently nothing prevents the Holy Spirit from being a possible candidate, as we have seen so far.

Also in Revelation 14, after John portrays Jesus “seated on a cloud,” “like a Son of Man,” with a crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand (14:14), he describes “another angel” (v. 17) who appears shortly thereafter. Just as Jesus was depicted, this “other angel” also has a sharp sickle and reaps as well. In this scene, Jesus harvests the grain, while this “other angel” harvests the grapes (14:15-16, 18-20). Once again, we cannot determine the identity of this “other angel” nor that of the one who comes out of the sanctuary and commands both reapers to reap (14:15-18). This matter requires further study. However, these possibilities indicate that the Holy Spirit is far more involved in the plan of redemption than we can fully perceive.

Finally, in the last chapter of the book, it is stated that God sent “His angel” (22:6), and shortly thereafter, Jesus also says, “I have sent My angel” (22:16).<sup>15</sup> Due to the similarity between the text of 22:6 (about the messenger sent by God) and 1:1 (about the angel interpreter, who presents the visions to John), Aune suggests that both are the same angel, and that these two verses would indicate an inclusion (Aune, 1998, v. 52c, p. 1183.). For Ellen White, the angel of 1:1, whom John later attempted to worship twice, is Gabriel (19:10; 22:8-9; White, 2018, p. 99). However, she does not associate him with the “angel sent by God” (22:6) and the “angel sent by Jesus” (22:16). This specific angel, sent by both the Father and the Son, may belong to a different order, the order of the “Angel of the LORD” of the Hebrew Scriptures (Exod 3:2-6). Perhaps, this “angel” or “messenger” (*angelos*) sent by God and by Jesus in Revelation might also be references to the Holy Spirit.

Although the verb *apostellō* (“to send”) is used in relation to both the angel interpreter (1:1) and the “angel of God” (22:6), the object of the verb in 1:1 is different. In that occasion God is not sending the angel, but the message itself, through him. This usage of the verb can also be seen in other passages (Matt 27:19; John 11:3; Acts 11:30) where the message itself is the object of the verb, with the involvement of someone else. Besides, *apostellō* is also used in 5:6, in reference to the “seven spirits of God” sent throughout the Earth, or the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>15</sup> Curiously, the verb “to send” is different in these two passages: *apostellō* in 22:6 and *pempō* in 22:16. However, this distinction does not seem to be significant, as the two terms are used interchangeably in several passages. For example, both are used to affirm that God sent Jesus: *apostellō* in John 20:21 and *pempō* in John 5:23 (cf. 14:24; 16:5). Additionally, both verbs are also used in John to affirm that Jesus sent His disciples (respectively, Jn 4:38 [cf. 17:18] and 20:21).



Therefore, there might be a possibility that the *angelos* sent by God and by Jesus in Revelation 22:6 and 22:16 is the same One who “illuminates the earth with His glory” in 18:1-3. This sending of the Holy Spirit by both the Father and the Son would be in harmony with Jesus’ statement in John 15:26: “When the Helper comes, whom I will send [Gk. *pempō*] to you from the Father, namely, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, He will testify about Me.” Also, in John 14:26, the Father sends (*pempō*) the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus, while in John 15:26 Jesus sends (*pempō*) Him from the Father.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The book of Revelation contains numerous references, allusions, and figures that point both to the Person and to the activities of the Holy Spirit acting on behalf of the Church. He greets the readers with grace and peace together with the Father and the Son, He is depicted as the eyes of the Lamb before the throne of God, He is sent to Earth to inspire, instruct, empower, and invite to salvation alongside the Bride of the Lamb. He is sent by both the Father and the Son in a harmonious work shared by the members of the Trinity to save humanity.

The sceneries where Jesus and the Holy Spirit are depicted symbolically as *angeloi* (angels/messengers) sent by God do not diminish their divinity with the Father. They show us the interest of the whole Trinity in proclaiming salvation to the human being. Not only the faithful creatures of God can serve as His messengers; the Son and the Holy Spirit are so involved in the *Missio Dei* that they also act as His best and most powerful Messengers sent for the fallen humanity. In this imagery, only the Father is not depicted as a Messenger, because He is the One Who sends. Even so, He is totally involved: He “was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself”, and now He sends the Spirit in the name of Jesus (John 14:26; 1 Cor 5:19). That is why the Holy Spirit is so active and present in the book of Revelation.

We may never know exactly how many references to the Holy Spirit do exist in the book, but those that are evident, along with all the allusions, echoes and implicit inferences, demonstrate His prominent role in applying the merits achieved by Jesus and guiding the church in its mission. He has always been with the church in the proclamation of the eternal Gospel and will be until the day when the whole Earth will be illuminated by His glory.



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