

Holy Ghost or Christ?
1 Nephi 11:11
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1 Nephi 11:11

And I said unto him: To know the interpretation thereof--for I spake unto him as a man speaketh; for I beheld that he was in the form of a man; yet nevertheless, I knew that it was the Spirit of the Lord; and he spake unto me as a man speaketh with another.

The question:

Is the personage called the "Spirit of the Lord" in this scripture the Holy Ghost or is it the pre-existent Christ. The question arises because it does not explicitly state which is correct.

Pre-existent Christ:

Bruce R McConkie:

"We know, for instance, that the Spirit personage who appeared to the Brother of Jared was the Spirit Christ, for he so identified himself. (Ether 3.) But when we read the account of the appearance of "the Spirit of the Lord" to Nephi (1 Ne. 11), we are left to our own interpretive powers to determine whether the messenger is the Spirit Christ or the Holy Ghost. Presumptively it is the Spirit Christ ministering to Nephi much as he did to the Brother of Jared, for such is in keeping with the principle of advocacy, intercession, and mediation, the principle that all personal appearances of Deity to man since the fall of Adam, excepting appearances of the Father and the Son together, have been appearances of Christ." (Mormon Doctrine, Spirit of the Lord)

Elder McConkie later changed his position

Then came the miracle—the heavens were opened and John saw the Holy Ghost descending in peace and serenity, like a dove, to be and abide with the Lamb of God forever. *This is one of possibly two occasions in all history, of which we have record, in which the personage of the Holy Ghost was seen by mortal man. And yet there was more to come. A voice spoke, a voice from heaven, the voice of the Father of us all. It said in words of glorious majesty: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”* (See [Matt. 3:11-17](#).) (New Era, “A Man Called John”, may 1984, pg 6)

The Holy Ghost

James E Talmage:

"That the Spirit of the Lord is capable of manifesting Himself in the form and figure of man, is indicated by the wonderful interview between the Spirit and Nephi, in which He revealed Himself to the prophet, questioned him concerning his desires and belief, instructed him in the things of God, speaking face to face with the man. "I spake unto him," says Nephi,"as a man speaketh; for I beheld that he was in the form of a man; yet nevertheless, I knew that it was the Spirit of the Lord; and he spake unto me as a man speaketh with another."* However, the Holy Ghost does not possess a body of flesh and bones, as do both the Father and the Son, but is a personage of spirit." Articles of Faith. Chapter 8 (The Holy Ghost)

Orson Pratt

"Whether this Spirit that Nephi saw 'in the form or a man' was the person of the Holy Spirit, or the personal Spirit of Jesus, which, about six hundred years afterwards took upon himself flesh, is not definitely stated. The brother of Jared, some two thousand years before Christ, saw the personal Spirit of Christ, which was in the form of a man. Nephi might have seen the same; but we are rather inclined to believe from the context, that he saw the personage of the Holy Spirit; if so, this establishes, beyond doubt, the personality of the Holy Spirit." (The Holy Spirit; The Holy Ghost, Approved by John A Widtsoe, taken from Discourses on the Holy Ghost, Pg 80-81, also from Lesson XIII of 70's course in Theology, Vol 5)

Sydney Sperry:

(*Book of Mormon Compendium* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968], pg 116-119)

Notice carefully that Nephi wanted to know "by the power of the Holy Ghost." This statement is important in connection with his recital of a manifestation vouchsafed him involving the "Spirit of the Lord." While pondering in his heart, he says that he was "caught away in the Spirit of the Lord [cf. Ezekiel 37:1], yea, into an exceeding high mountain, which I never had before seen, and upon which I never had before set my foot." (11:1) The Spirit asked Nephi concerning his desires, and upon receiving an answer he proceeded to test his faith by asking if he believed that his father, Lehi, saw the tree (8:10-12) of which Lehi had spoken (11:2-4). Nephi replied that he believed all the words of his father. The Spirit commended Nephi for his belief in the Son of God and promised him that he would be shown all the things which he desired (11:6). In accordance with this promise, the Spirit began its fulfillment by showing Nephi the tree of which his father had tasted the fruit. The young prophet then desired to know the interpretation of what he had seen:

And he [the Spirit] said unto me: What desirest thou? And I said unto him: To know the interpretation thereof-for I spake unto him as a man speaketh; for I beheld that he was in the form of a man; yet nevertheless, I knew that it was the Spirit of the Lord; and he spake unto me as a man speaketh with another. (11:10-11; italics mine.)

The Spirit left Nephi's presence, and an angel came in his stead to continue the vision. But the identity of the Spirit of the Lord may be a question of great importance in the reader's mind. Who was this personage who talked face to face with Nephi "as a man speaketh with another"? There have been and are differences of opinion regarding this question. Some persons regard the Spirit of the Lord as the pre-existent Christ (cf. Ether 3:14-17); others look upon Nephi's visitor as the Holy Ghost in person. The writer identifies himself with the latter group. If Nephi talked with the Holy Ghost in person, we may regard 1 Nephi 11:1-12 as the classical passage in all scripture which identifies the Holy Ghost as a male personage with whom man may speak face to face. Can the differences of opinion regarding the identity of the Spirit of the Lord be resolved? Surely, it is important that this be done if it is at all possible. I have pronounced opinions on the matter but cannot hope to convince all Book of Mormon students that those opinions are correct.

First of all, let the reader remember that Nephi desired to "see, hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost. . . ." (10:17) In fact, he seems to have meditated upon the powers and functions of the Holy Ghost at considerable length before the desired manifestation was given him (10:17-22). Second, it should be observed that Nephi said he was caught away "in the Spirit of the Lord." (11:1; italics mine.) Apparently the same expression with the phrase "of the Lord" deleted is used in the chapter in relation to Mary, the mother of our Lord, and to the Twelve Apostles of the Savior:

And it came to pass that I [Nephi] beheld that she [Mary] was carried away in the Spirit ... (11:19; italics mine.)

And I also beheld twelve others following him. And it came to pass that they were carried away in the Spirit from before my face, and I saw them not. (11:29; italics mine.)

The references to the Spirit in both instances seem obviously to point to the Holy Ghost, not to the pre-existent Christ (cf 11:19 with Matthew 1:18). Third, it may be pointed out that the phrase "Spirit of the Lord" occurs forty times in the Book of Mormon, and in not a single passage where it occurs can there be pointed out a clear-cut example favoring the interpretation that it represents the pre-existent Christ instead of the Holy Ghost. On the other hand, there are many occurrences of the phrase that can refer only to the Holy Ghost. Let us look at a few. It is obvious on examination that in no instance where the phrase was written down after the appearance of the resurrected Christ on this continent does it refer to his pre-existent person. There are three illustrations of this kind: "the Spirit of the Lord did not abide in us" (Mormon 2:26); "the Spirit of the Lord hath already ceased to strive with their fathers" (Mormon 5:16); "I fear lest the Spirit of the Lord hath ceased striving with them" (Moroni 9:4). The references here must be to the Holy Ghost. Let us look at another use of the phrase as Nephi describes the course of his vision. In 13:12-15 he speaks of the coming of a Gentile (Columbus) to this land, together with other Gentiles who were to come at later times. Verse 15 reads, "And I beheld the Spirit of the Lord, that it was upon the Gentiles. . . ." It seems quite evident to me that the "Spirit of the Lord" as used in this verse is synonymous with the phrase "Spirit of God" as found in verses 12 and 13. Whatever else these phrases may mean, it is certain that the personage of the pre-existent Christ cannot be meant, because the vision of Nephi in this context envisioned the latter days which were to be long after Christ's resurrection. If it be contended that the phrases do not refer to the Holy Ghost (doubtful in view of 10:11) we shall have to say that they refer to the power that emanates from Deity as a whole. A few other illustrations where the phrase "Spirit of the Lord" clearly represents the functions of the Holy Ghost are given herewith: "the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy" (Mosiah 4:3); "the Spirit of the Lord did no more preserve them; yea, it had withdrawn from them because the Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in unholy temples." (Helaman 4:24; cf. Romans 8:9,11; 1 Corinthians 3:16.) Finally, it should be observed that when Nephi unquestionably refers to the pre-existent Christ, he never calls him the "Spirit of the Lord." For example, when the prophet had his first visitation from the Lord, he said, "I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me . . ." (2:16) He didn't say, "I did cry unto the Spirit of the Lord." At a later time, when referring to the prophet Isaiah, Nephi said, "He verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him." (2 Nephi 11:2; italics mine.) In other verses of the same chapter he refers to the coming Redeemer as the Christ.

We may conclude that inasmuch as there is no single instance in the Book of Mormon where the phrase "Spirit of the Lord" can be clearly and unequivocally equated with the pre-existent Christ, it is far more reasonable, in view of the evidence here presented, to believe that the phrase refers to the Holy Ghost. Such is the writer's personal opinion, at any rate.