

The Baptism of Fire

To understand the baptism of fire it is necessary to understand the context in which it was given by John the Baptist. Many pray for the baptism of fire as a purification technique. Peter tells us that we endure fiery trials but this was in terms of suffering and endurance. Many are going through fiery trials right now because the Bride of Christ is being readied. The trial of your faith is more precious than gold and should endure the trial of fire. I don't want you to suffer so I must tell you that it is not something we should pray for. If anything we should pray for His latter rain spirit to fall on us and that God will make us holy, so as to sooth the fire, not pray for fiery trials just because of your lack of faith. The Lord or your circumstances may test you to see if you are following Him or a false spirit and the enemy will stand in your way, be aware of this and endure the trial. Do not be swayed from the doctrine of holiness, do not succumb to the lusts of the flesh and do not allow mammon take your true reward.

Many practice as if asceticism was a good thing, that self denial and fiery trials are beneficial for their spirituality and one must undergo these hardships to be strong. It is a legalistic notion and God doesn't work that way unless He feels that it is necessary to break down a stubborn spirit to effect repentance. Faith dispels those false notions and there are better ways to gain spiritual strength than do something that can lead to discouragement and heartbreak. What He would rather have us do is us practice mercy, not sacrifice.

What John spoke about is the refiner's fire that the world is undergoing and is associated with the end-time judgment of the house of God and the separation of the wicked from among the Bride of Christ. You cannot escape it but you can get through without even a scent of smoke. It has to do with being holy and John the Baptist speaks of both baptisms.

Malachi times the refiner's fire with the messenger who has been identified as Elijah. "Behold, I will send my messenger and he shall prepare the way before Me and the Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come into his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom you delight in, behold he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap." "For Behold the day comes that shall burn as an oven and all the proud, yes and all that do wickedly shall be stubble and the day that comes shall burn them up saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings and you shall go forth and grow up as calves of the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts."

Elijah will come during these days and even now includes many who in the Elijah spirit and setting the stage for the Day of the Lord and the baptism of fire. When the Elijah spirit preaches, holiness and righteousness will cleanse the church with a purifying fire. Many will be called into the kingdom but only a few will be chosen because of the fire. Daniel writes that "many shall be purified and made white and tried, but the wicked shall do wickedly and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand." Who can endure the day of Elijah's coming? This is the baptism of fire that the church must undergo when he preaches. It will not be what they want to hear and the sifting will follow of their own accord. Whoever does not hear this prophet will be cut off but many will just walk away of their own accord, not willing to endure the fire and get rid of their spiritual pride.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were the fundamentalist legalists of Jesus' day and had come to John's baptism and received a severe rebuke from him. "O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance. And think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father: For I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the ax is laid unto the root of the trees, therefore every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance but he that comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor and gather his wheat into the garner but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." The chaff is the grain husks of the wheat left over after being separated from the seed in threshing. Throwing the wheat up into the air on a windy day and letting the wind catch the lighter chaff to blow it away would

separate it. The chaff was worthless and highly flammable, burning was the easiest way to get rid of it. The message is in the separation.

The grace flowing from the death and resurrection of Jesus and the realization of the atonement of man baptized the church in the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost almost two thousand years ago. This was the First Advent and was ushered in with the baptism of the spirit. The Second Advent will culminate in a baptism of fire and the purification of souls in preparation of entering the kingdom age. Isaiah writes, "For, behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with His chariots like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire." Jesus will send the fire and suggests the spark that precedes it, "I am come to send fire on the earth, and what will I, if it be already kindled?" Paul writes that there is salvation on the other side. "Every man's work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire, and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he has built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire."

The prophet Isaiah informs us that this fire is spiritual and ignored by those who it is consuming. "Who among you will give ear to this? Who will listen and hear for the time to come? Who gave Jacob for a spoil and Israel to the robbers? Did not the Lord, He against whom we have sinned? For they would not walk in His ways, neither were they obedient unto His law. Therefore He has poured upon him the fury of His anger and the strength of battle and it has set him on fire about. Yet He knew not and it burned him, yet He laid it not to heart. But now thus saith the Lord that created you, O Jacob, and He that formed you, O Israel. Fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name, you are mine. When you pass through the water, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you; when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon you."

Ezekiel says it very well. "As they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you in My anger and in my fury, and I will leave you there, and melt you. Yes, I will gather you and blow upon you the fire of my wrath and you shall be melted in the midst thereof." "The people of the land have used oppression and exercised robbery and have vexed the poor and needy. They have oppressed the stranger wrongfully. And I sought for a man among them that should make up the hedge and stand in the gap before me for the land that I should not destroy it but I found none. Therefore have I poured my indignation upon them, I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath, their own way have I recompensed upon their heads saith the Lord God."

The baptism of fire is God's way of purifying the church. This is unquenchable fire we are discussing here and Babylon will be in the heat of it but like a lobster in a slow boiling pot the unrepentant will not know until it is too late. The chaff are the wicked people that will go through the fire and get burnt up and that includes those in the church that have not accepted the Holy Ghost. David describes the ungodly in his first psalm as "chaff, which the wind drives away." But do you see that believers also will be going through this baptism of fire? John is speaking of two different baptisms here. By being on the right side of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, then staying holy and going through the fire unscathed is God's intent as well as mine to prepare you as the Bride of Christ and get you into the kingdom without looking like a crispy critter.

The purification of the Baptism of Fire is associated with the refiner's fire of the Old Testament. Zechariah speaks of the refiner's fire in the last days, "And it shall come to pass that in all the land, saith the Lord, two parts therein shall be cut off and die, but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined and will try them as gold is tried. They shall call on my name and I will hear them. I will say, it is my people and they shall say the Lord is my God."

Jesus is coming for a holy church, one without spot or wrinkle. The baptism of fire comes to bring about repentance in the church and the fall of Babylon. When His Bride appears before Him she will be virgin, pure and chaste, blameless through the precious blood that was shed. He wants us to be ready, not just curious about what is coming but directly involved with a faith and resolve to be holy and blameless before Him. It's time. Do not be as the foolish virgins but be ready and fill your lamp with oil, that oil is the Holy Ghost. Light the lamp and be ready to meet Him.

Contributed by Betty Hightower