

The Fire Of God

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In Scripture, we find numerous attributes of God: the still small voice of God, the breath of God, the love of God, the touch of God, etc. Today, I want us to learn about the fire of God, which possesses the unique quality of bringing either blessing or destruction.

In Scripture, God describes Himself as "*an all-consuming fire*" (Dt. 4:24; 9:3). Since evil cannot stand before God, it is this fire of God that consumes evil and sin in the world. God is present in His holy fire, which can work in two ways in our lives. Depending on the condition of our heart, it can have a good effect or a bad effect. For those whose hearts are right, they will receive the power of God to sanctify and burn away the impurities and sin in their lives. For those whose hearts are not right and are in rebellion to the Lord, they will be consumed by the same fire, the same power of God.

The Fire Of Sanctification

In God's presence is holiness. In many examples in the Bible, we see that God showed Himself as a holy fire. This fire was an assurance of His presence. Yet, to be in His presence required a consecrated life.

In Exodus, this was first seen in the burning bush out of which God spoke to Moses. "*Moses saw that though the bush was on fire, it did not burn up. So Moses thought, 'I will go over and see this strange sight - why the bush does not burn up.' When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And Moses said, 'Here I am.' 'Do not come any closer,' God said. 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground'" (Ex. 3:2b-5).*

When Moses went up on Mt. Sinai, it was quite a spectacle that brought awe to all the people. "*Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire*" (Ex. 19:18a). The earth trembled and thunder and lightning appeared around the mountain, all attesting to the awesomeness of the presence of God. God told Moses that the people could not come upon the mountain, because they were not consecrated and would die.

As the children of Israel moved in the Sinai desert, they were guided by the presence of the Lord in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. "*By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people*" (Ex. 20:21-22). What a comfort to know that the Lord was visibly present in the desert wanderings. Day or night, the people needed to only look through the flap of their tents to see the presence of God and know that He was their protection.

God's presence requires consecration. Sin was not allowed in the camp. However, when it did come, God made a provision for sacrifices to be offered to the Lord - not only sacrifices for sin, but also for fellowship with the Lord.

Interestingly, one of the offerings which God instructed the people to make was burnt offerings. The aroma of these offerings was pleasing to the Lord. "*The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting. He said, 'Speak to the Israelites and say to them: When any of you brings an offering to the Lord, bring as your offering an animal from either the herd or the flock. It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord'" (Lev. 1:1-2,9b).*

At times, the fire of God itself came down from heaven to be present at a sacrifice, or even consumed the sacrifice with fire from heaven:

When **Abraham** cut a covenant with the Lord, the biblical account says, "*When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking fire pot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces [of the sacrificed animals]" (Gen. 15:17).* The fire showed the presence of God and seriousness of the covenant being made between Him and Abraham. The covenant made that day is still relevant as it had to do with the Land of Israel being an everlasting possession to Abraham and his descendants, forever!

When **David** bought the threshing floor of Arunah in Jerusalem (today's Temple Mount), he built an altar and prepared offerings to the Lord. Then, "*He called on the Lord, and the Lord answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering*" (I Chr. 21:26). God came down and consumed the offering Himself on the Holy Mountain of the city God calls His own.

When **Solomon** dedicated the Temple of God in Jerusalem, he prepared sacrifices for the Lord and prayed a great prayer of consecration for the people of Israel. To indicate His acceptance, we read, "*When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple*" (I Chr. 7:1). And, what did the people do? "*When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the Lord above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground and they worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, 'He is good; His love endures forever'" (I Chr. 7:3).*

When **Elijah** prepared an altar on Mt. Carmel in the presence of all the prophets of Baal, it was done as a demonstration to prove that the God of Israel was the one true God. The prophets of Baal also prepared an altar and an offering to Baal. They spent the day calling on him and even cutting themselves in homage to Baal in an effort to get results. Nothing happened. Then, Elijah walked over to the altar of the Lord, prepared it with the sacrifice and even poured water over it. He prayed a prayer of faith that God would reveal Himself to the people of Israel and the prophets of Baal. "*Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, 'The Lord, He is God! The Lord - He is God!'" (I Kgs. 18:38-39).*

In all of these examples, the response of the people of God to the fire of God was humility, repentance and consecration. Isaiah knew what it was like to be consecrated to the Lord by fire. In Isaiah 6, we read a compelling story that should encourage all of us to humble and consecrate ourselves before the Lord to receive His blessing. We remember that, in the spirit, Isaiah was brought to the throne room of the Lord. The description of the majesty of the Lord that Isaiah saw was overwhelming to him.

Isaiah, one of God's greatest prophets, only felt humility and the need for repentance. He said, "*'Woe to me!' I cried, 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord*

Almighty.' Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.' Then, I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" (Isa. 6:5-8).

What was Isaiah's reaction in the presence of the Lord? Humility and a sense that he needed to repent for himself and his people, Israel. You will notice that God quickly answered His prayer and used His holy fire to sanctify Isaiah.

Eventually, everyone on earth will face the fire of God - everyone including Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, humanists, atheists, etc. The prophet Malachi speaks of the Day of the Lord which will come like the refiner's fire to purify the earth in preparation for the coming of the Lord. Those who are not ready will be consumed. However, for those who are waiting for the Lord, as with the purification of silver and gold, the fire of God will burn away the dross, or impurities, that keep them from being truly holy (Mal. 3:2). The choice is ours. For the believer looking for God's sanctification, the fire of God comes to make us more pure and holy. We don't have to wait for the Day of the Lord, as we shall see.

The Fire Of Destruction

On the other hand, those who stand in sin in defiance of the Lord will find that when God's fire is present, then it will either change you or consume you.

The phrase, "turn or burn," is not just a phrase used by arch-conservative Christians to scare people out of hell and into heaven, but is a concept of God found throughout the Bible. Jeremiah made it very clear as God spoke through him: *"Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or My wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done - burn with no one to quench it"* (Jer. 4:4).

There is an amazing story in the book of Leviticus about the fire of God that shot out of the presence of the Lord from the Tent of Meeting. Some who saw it were blessed and worshipped, and others died.

In Leviticus 9:23-24, we see that after Moses and Aaron went in and came out of the Tent of Meeting, that the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people and fire came out from His presence to consume the burnt offering on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell face down before the Lord. However, as chapter 10 opens, we see the two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, taking their censers and offering unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to God's command. Then, the same fire of God that came out from the presence of the Lord and blessed so many, consumed Nadab and Abihu. Everyone was shocked, as you can imagine. These were Aaron's boys, the High Priest's sons!

What is the explanation? I think it can be found in the words of Moses to Aaron after this happened: *"Among those who approach me, I will show Myself holy; in the sight of all the people, I will be honored"* (Lev. 10:3).

There is much speculation about what the young men did to anger God. The most plausible explanation that fits the context is that the sons of Aaron were too familiar and too nonchalant in the presence of God. To the people, it was not necessarily a big sin, hence everyone was surprised. Yet, to dishonor God is a big sin to God. The sons of Aaron took for granted the power and presence of God, and an example was made of them before the people.

The same fire of God had a completely different affect on others. For those who saw the fire of God with awe and respect, there was power and blessing in the fire. However, for Nadab and Abihu, who may have had a "ho-hum, we've seen this before" attitude, it was their destruction. We see a similar, immediate judgment of God that fell upon Ananias and Sapphira in the book of Acts (5:1-16), when they lied before the Lord. While no fire was present, their cavalier attitude towards the things of God spelled their instantaneous destruction. These examples should give us pause to consider how we act before the presence of God. Do we fall asleep in church? Do we go to worship full of anticipation to receive from the Lord as we abide in His presence? What about our personal quiet time and prayer time with the Lord? Let us never take God's presence for granted.

God's fire consumes His enemies. In the book of Psalms, we see that fire comes from the mouth of God to consume His enemies. David wrote: *"I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from mine enemies. In my distress I called upon the Lord... The earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because He was angry. Smoke came out of His nostrils, and fire came out of His mouth to devour; coals were kindled by it"* (Ps. 18:3,6a,7-8).

While this is figurative, this literally happened, at times, when God became angry at His enemies.

When God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, two places that epitomized the essence of sin and degradation, *"the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah from the Lord out of the heavens. Thus He overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities - and also the vegetation in the land"* (Gen. 19:24-25). When the fire of God comes in judgment, it is truly an all-consuming fire.

When the Children of Israel complained bitterly about their conditions in the Sinai Desert in the hearing of the Lord, His anger was aroused. *"Then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to the Lord and the fire died down"* (Num. 11:1-2).

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram conspired to overthrow Moses, accusing him of being a self-proclaimed leader of the Israelites. God anointed Moses for this task. To prove it, Moses challenged the conspirators, along with their 250-man council, to come before the Lord to see what God thought of them. The 250 men took incense censers before God, as did Moses and Aaron, and Moses asked God to choose between them. Then, God told Moses to tell the people to *"move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram."* The earth opened and the household of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were swallowed by the earth. Then, *"fire came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men who were offering the incense"* (Num. 16). Needless to say, God's response was well understood in the Camp of the Israelites.

After Ahab died, King Ahaziah sent three companies, each comprised of a captain and 50 men, to capture Elijah. The first two companies were consumed by fire from God (II Kings 1:10,12), but Elijah went with the third company, because God instructed

him to do so (v. 15). Everyone, including the king, knew that God was with Elijah because of the fire of God that come down from heaven.

The Baptism Of Water. God's Spirit, And Fire

In Matthew 3:11, we read about God's baptism of fire. John the Baptist, speaking about Yeshua (Jesus) said of Him: *"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."*

Recently, in our church in Jerusalem, Asher Intrater delivered a sermon on this Baptism of Fire. He had some very profound insights into this passage in Matthew 3:11, that I really want to share with you, as it is so pertinent to this teaching.

He suggests that there are three phases of baptism described here: a Baptism with Water, a Baptism with the Holy Spirit, and a Baptism with Fire. This is not to suggest that there are three baptisms any more than we believe that the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are three Gods. God is One God manifested as three Persons in one. Likewise, there is one baptism, yet it seems to have three distinct elements:

1) The first phase of baptism is the Baptism with Water: As we repent of our sins and receive Yeshua as Savior, we are instructed to be baptized in water. Historically, this was done almost immediately after the act of salvation and confession. As with the Jewish custom of *mikve*, we are immersed and symbolically washed, forgiven of our sins, and cleansed of our guilt. Sigmund Freud said that all of man's psychological problems come from one source - guilt. But he did not know how to get rid of it; he could only identify the problem. Only by the blood of Yeshua, who gives us a new life and forgives all our sins, can we be truly free of guilt.

2) Phase two of our baptism process comes from Yeshua Himself, when He comes into our hearts and His Spirit dwells within us. In this Baptism of the Holy Spirit of the Living God, He comes and joins our spirit at the moment of our salvation. First, our spirit gets born again, and then His Spirit, from the outside, comes and lives on the inside of us. That is the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

I Cor. 3:16 says, *"Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells within you?"* In I Cor. 6:19, Paul says, *"What? Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, who is of God, and you are not your own? For you are bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."*

3) Finally, in Matthew 3:11, we find a third manifestation of our baptism process and that is a Baptism with Fire. This baptism is progressive throughout our walk with the Lord, as we shall see. Since fire is the subject of this teaching, we will spend more time on the Baptism of Fire.

What does it mean? In Acts 1:8, Yeshua says, *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be witnesses unto Me..."*

We need God's power to live the victorious life. We need God's power to walk away from the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life that seeks to entrap us daily. That is why He tells us that we will receive power when the Holy Spirit will come upon us so that we can walk in the footsteps of Yeshua and live like followers of Yeshua.

What was this power like when it came? Yeshua says that the Holy Spirit will come upon us.... The Holy Spirit, then power. What is the word for "spirit" in Hebrew? Ruach, which also means "wind."

Let's look at Act 2:2-3, *"And suddenly there came a sound from heaven like a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting, and there appeared unto them cloven tongues as of fire, and it sat upon each of them."*

First came the wind, and then the fire. In Acts 1:8, the pattern is that we will first receive the Holy Spirit, then the power. Wind and fire... Holy Spirit and power. 2 + 2 = 4.

This was not a little light upon their head like a lit candlewick. It was the flame of the power of God that burned down within them to empower them to do God's will. It rested for a moment and then went within to take up residence.

To receive God's power, we need to be humble. We need to fully submit to the Father to do His will, or we will fall flat in our own strength. We need to listen to the still small voice in our inner man. We need to listen to His gentle whisper, and to do this, we need to be yielded and able to surrender to the Holy Spirit of God, who is a gentleman.

Yet, in this same heart of humility, we also have to be bold in the Lord when He sends us into a spiritual battle. We need to speak in boldness to declare His Word, so that the fire will go out with it to accomplish His good and perfect will.

We need the grace to be humble and sensitive to the Holy Spirit, then bold enough to use His power as the Holy Spirit directs us. We let the Holy Spirit use us.

In Rev. 1:14, it says of Yeshua, *"His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire."* When you look in the eyes of a person, you can see what is inside him. The reason you can see fire within Yeshua is that you can see right into Him and see the brightness of God with all His passion, the flame, the zeal, the fire of the Kingdom of God.

It doesn't matter if the flame sat on the heads of the disciples in the Upper Room. What is important is did the flame go into their hearts? Could you grab James a year later, five years later, ten years later, and look in his eyes and see the fire of God, the passion and zeal and flame of Pentecost burning within?

We all need the fire of God to come within us to experience the fullness of the power of God. We don't need a little flame dancing on our heads, but the zeal of God to burn brightly within us.

The most important part of the fire of God is the passion. Yeshua was passionate about His Father's house and how people worshipped there. He also wants us to be passionate about Him and not bored and yawning at Him all the time. Hum... let's get off to church and take in another worship service ... Yawn, yawn...

We need to be like David, who danced before the Lord. Depending on our heart, the fire of God can be exciting or terrifying. All of our work, the Bible says, will be tested by fire. *"If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood,*

hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames"(I Cor. 3:12-15).

In the days of the bible, the refining fire of metalworkers removed the impurities from precious metals. Likewise, the Fire of God will purify our hearts and lives to serve Him. The sovereignty of God says that all the earth will feel the fire of God, and the free will of man can choose how he will respond to it. II Peter 3:6-7 speaks of Noah's flood and tribulation fire. For the earth, the first was as the Baptism of Water and the second is like the Baptism of Fire. The whole world is now transfixed on movies like "Armageddon" and "Deep Impact." Everyone knows that the world is going to face an all-consuming fire.

When it comes, we need to be ready to receive God's glory or be consumed by His power. In Luke 16, the rich man died and went to Hell and was burning in flames of fire forever and forever. He was conscious and knew the torment. In Hell, one will be fully awake and aware of the torment. There is never any sleep, and you can recall all the times you ignored God's call on your life. Those in Hell will see the saints at the banquet table and want just a drop of water, but not be able to have it.

We need to repent fast and get ready for the fire of God that is coming. The fire of God will also consume Satan, the evil one, and his demons. *"And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever"* (Rev. 20:10). Sadly, however, in Rev. 20:14, John also sees the end result for those who did not repent and ignored God's call on their life - they are in Hell, forever. This is not God's choice. Each man can choose eternal life or death. All of us need to be baptized by the refiner's fire of God. As mentioned before, depending on the condition of one's heart, the fire of God can be a curse or a blessing. It is all the same fire of God with different results. How can it be a blessing to us?

1) Salvation: First, if we do nothing, we will be punished by God and end up in the fire of Hell. People in this situation need to run to the Father and be forgiven and saved from an eternity away from God. Salvation is a free gift of God, available to all who call upon the Name of the Lord and accept the atoning sacrifice provided for on the Cross. *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord"* (Rom. 3:23).

2) Purity: Once saved, the second level of the fire of God is to purify us. We all have areas of carnality in our lives, and the fire of God can come and burn up the things that are not of Him: the worry, the lusts of the flesh, fear, and the junk that holds us back from Him. Like Isaiah, let God's fire burn it out of us. Most of us are struggling with sin visiting us, which we can't overcome. That is because we are trying to do it in our flesh and we can't. We need to let the fire of God come and burn it out of us. Wrestling with sin does not make it go away. Only God can remove it so we can serve Him.

3) Power: The third level of the fire of God is to receive the power of God to perform the works of the Kingdom of God, as He promised to us in His Word. What we often lack, however, is the power to accomplish the faith within. This is the power of God to perform the work of His Spirit. As we see in Scripture, God can use us to heal the sick, to cast out demons, make the blind to see, and to even raise the dead if God decides to do it for His ultimate glory, not ours.

But, we need power to do this. We can use this power and command the power of God, but not God Himself. People get this backwards. People try to command the Holy Spirit like the Holy Spirit is our personal valet. I have heard people saying, Holy Spirit do this, or Holy Spirit give me that. This is totally out of line, for this is God Almighty we are talking about.

We need to submit to the Holy Spirit and follow Him, to wait upon Him. It is as He leads and as He wills that the gifts are imparted. We need to let him lead us to do God's perfect will with power.

4) Passionate Love for the Lord: This fourth level is where we all want to go. Yes, we want to run from punishment and into the purity. Then, we want to experience God's power. But, more than this, we want the fire of God to ignite within us a burning passion for God. We need His passion so that we can't wait to wake up each day to see what great things we can do for the Lord. We need to desire to want God, love God, and do all we can for the Lord.

We see that when the fire of God entered into the disciples in the Upper Room, they received His power and His passion. In the book of Acts, we find Peter, who had denied the Lord three times, proclaiming the Kingdom of God with holy boldness, and people, on whom his shadow fell, were healed by the power of God (Acts 5:15).

In Amos 4: 11-12, God speaks to Israel, saddened that many had departed from Him. He says, *"You were snatched from the fire like a burning stick, yet you have not returned to me... Therefore, prepare to meet your God, O Israel."*

We, too, have been plucked out of the fiery judgment of God, yet many of us are lukewarm. Like Israel, are we prepared to meet God? If God came in the door just now, are we ready to look Him in the eyes, into the fire of God? Or, do we need to clean up our lives, our thought life, our secret sins and vices that control us? Are we ready to fellowship with the Lord?

I think that each of us needs to prepare to meet our God. This is not about power, but getting ready to meet the Lord through consecration unto holiness. For Christians, Yeshua is our Savior and Lord, and also our Baptizer. Are we ready to have an appointment with the Lord? Are you ready to meet Him RIGHT NOW? Amos says prepare to meet your God, and we need to be ready to meet Him every moment.

Let each of us pray that God would light His fire within us, and receive all the zeal and passion and power He will give us. Time is too short to be playing at our faith in the Lord. We need to make a serious commitment to be holy and submit to the Lord everyday and in every way. The Day of the Lord is coming soon. Remember the ten virgins - five who were unprepared and five who had fire in their lamps? Only those with the fire in their lamps could join the wedding feast. This story concludes with the injunction to *"Watch, therefore; for you do not know the day or the hour in which the Son of Man comes "* (Matt. 25:13).

May we be found ready.