

KINGDOM BIBLE STUDIES

"Teaching the things concerning the kingdom of God..."

FROM THE CANDLESTICK TO THE THRONE

Part 168

THE THREE ANGELS' MESSAGES (continued)

“And the *third angel* followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb” (Rev. 14:9-10).

Have you ever had the nagging suspicion that God might actually enjoy seeing the people who dwell in religious Babylon receive the just rewards of their carnality and delusion? The motorist who has had another car whiz past him in a cloud of dust and leave him as though he were standing still can hardly stifle his satisfaction when, five miles down the highway, he encounters that same automobile sitting quietly on the shoulder of the road illuminated by the blue flashing lights of a State Trooper's car while its owner receives his richly deserved ticket. Most of us smile inwardly when the conceited roadhog finally meets someone who can whittle him down to size!

Does God feel the same way? No, He does not! God loves all His people no matter how deceived or wayward they may be. He loves them no matter what they do. And even though He cannot excuse their sin, He does not vindictively punish any of them, though He does have precise measures of judgment unto correction by which to deliver their souls. That's why He showed the apostle John a vision of three angels flying through the sky announcing His appeal and warning to all the Babylon dwellers. The first angel addresses his message to the leaders and ministers of Babylon, commanding them to fear God and give all the glory to Him: for the hour of His judgment is come; and worship no longer the externals of religion, but worship HIM who made all things. The second angel brings a wonderful revival of spirituality among some of God's people in Babylon, and the knowledge of the truth and spiritual experience thus obtained prepares the way for the next step, which is the discovery that the “churches” they have so cherished as the body of Christ are in reality a part of the great religious Babylon of Revelation and are in a “fallen” or apostate condition, “a hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.”

The third angel's message is directed toward those in Babylon who remain unaffected by God's dealings with the leaders and ministers, and unmoved by the moving of His Spirit among the people. It is a warning of the righteous judgments of the Lord to come upon the incorrigible in Babylon for their correction. Nearly all Bible teachers and believers through the ages have supposed that this message of the third angel somehow constitutes God's “final warning” to all the sinners of the world concerning their eternal doom in the fires of hell and damnation. But such is far from the truth! Each of the three angels' messages is sent to the sinners among God's people, not the sinners of the world! The entire book of

Revelation is directed to the *churches*, to show unto *His servants* the things that must come to pass through God's dealings with His people. This "wrath" of God, this "indignation" of the Lord, this "torment with fire and brimstone," this "smoke" that ascends bespeaks the judgments of God upon Babylon and the "fiery purgings" sent to cleanse and purify all His people who have been contaminated with the abominations of the religious systems of man! That is the mystery.

"If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same *shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation, and shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up...and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image...*" (Rev. 14:9-11).

May I remind the reader that this beast is the *second beast* John saw in chapter thirteen of the Revelation, the beast *out of the earth*, or out of the soulical religious realm of man, for that is the beast which commanded the people to make and pay homage to the image of the first beast. That identifies it as religious Babylon. The worshippers of this beast are those who receive its mark upon the forehead, or so indelibly impressed in their mind until they can only think and understand according to the teachings, doctrines, traditions and promotions of the beast; and receive its mark in the right hand, signifying their works and service on behalf of the beast. Those who are so captivated by this servitude that neither God's word nor the moving of His Spirit can dislodge them are ripe for the correcting disciplines of God. These judgments are characterized as *the wrath of God*. What terrifying words! We tremble before them. How can there be any hope, or any escape for an altogether rebellious people from so terrible a thing as the *wrath of God!*

Let us notice, in the first place, that this torment is primarily *internal*. Every one that at this point in time worships the beast, so the text reads, and receives a mark in his forehead or in his hand, he shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God which is prepared unmixed in the cup of His anger. It is my deep conviction that these words refer to the spiritual and internal suffering of those who remain in Babylon. The "wine of the wrath of God" is without doubt a figure. The meaning is that these worshippers of the beast shall receive a wine to drink, the spirit, or alcoholic contents, of which is the wrath or the passion of God. Thus it signifies a *dealing of God!* The wine is from the cup in the hand of the Lord! It is the Lord Himself who gives them to drink! Even as natural wine affects the spirit of man, so shall this wine of the wrath of God affect the worshippers of the beast. Even a child could understand that any "torment" that would come from "drinking" some substance would be a torment *within* oneself. Is that not true in the natural of people who drink too much alcohol, take drugs, or are poisoned by something ingested? By drinking this "wine" the worshipper of the beast shall receive the wrath of God *as a burning fire within his soul*, so that this wrath of God burns him from within, in his conscience, in his mind, in his soul, in his emotions; troubling him, leaving him no rest day nor night. It shall be *spiritual torment* day and night! Even as the greatest joy and the most profound peace springs from union with God in the spirit, so shall the most terrible anguish of spirit result from man's resistance to the wooings of God's love and the corrections from His hand.

Just as in verse eight where we read of "the *wrath* of her fornication," the Greek word for "wrath" here is *thumos* meaning, according to Strong's Concordance, "*breathing hard, passion.*" Anyone knows that wine inflames the *passions*. The word does not denote wrath in the conventional sense of rage, violence, vengeance, or judgment, but rather of fever heat or strong passion. It is associated with God's anger, and men of passion can certainly be angry, but anger is not the same as rage, for even in a punitive way passion may be expressed in terms of *love*, as when a parent is moved with passion and stirred to action to sternly discipline a misbehaving child. So it is clear that God's "wrath," as revealed in the

book of Revelation, has to do with passion, or feeling very strongly about something. Thus God's disobedient children, who ignore or resist the wooing of His Spirit, are made to drink of the "*wine of the passion of God.*" God's wrath or passion is not that which is vindictive and vengeful, but rather that which is impassioned, fervent, zealous, enlivened, glowing, vigorous, intense, burning, and dynamic.

God has a passion to make right what is wrong, to cleanse and restore His people and creation, like any Father who wants his son to grow straight and strong. He has a passion, therefore He will spare nothing, not even the rod, to accomplish His great purpose. The wrath of God is the wrath of a Father and in His wrath He remembers mercy! His purpose in wrath is always corrective and redemptive! Multitudes of religious people are full of anger, bitterness, self-righteousness, condemnation, censure, denunciation, vindictiveness, judgment, anathemas, and damnation — the wrath of man — but now *God's wrath* comes! It is the wrath of our Father and our Redeemer! What a revelation that is! Oh, the wonder of it! How sublime the very thought! How awesome the implication! How divine and glorious the outcome!

However, as the love of God does not cancel out His wrath, so His wrath does not cancel out His love! Every parent who has ever disciplined a child understands this! Wrath and love work together to correct what is wrong and make it right. Strictly speaking, the wrath of God and His love are not equally *eternal attributes* of God. God IS love, the scripture testifies, but nowhere does it infer that God IS wrath! You do not see in any listing of God's attributes that wrath is included. Neither is wrath listed as one of the *fruits of the Spirit*. When sin and error are finished in God's universe His wrath will end, but His love will abide eternally upon all His creatures and upon all the works of His hands. God *reacts* to sin by wrath — stern measures of discipline and correction. The wrath really is the love of God in reverse! According to the Word of God His wrath *is but for a moment* — but His love is *unending!* In wrath God remembers mercy — because GOD IS LOVE!

Men have been given a wrong view, a mistaken image of God! Religion preaches and serves a God who is a monster, who is exacting, mean, cruel, and vicious. They say that God is love, but in their hearts they believe that God is vindictive, implacable, harsh, and ultimately unmerciful, because they believe that God's judgment against sin and error is eternal torture in the fires of hell *without one degree of mercy*. They have a distorted, deranged notion of God's *justice*, too, for He will send to this eternal hell men who never had a chance, who never heard the name of Jesus, who were ignorant and undiscerning, who were careless and unconcerned, who were guilty at most of merely fleshly, temporal sins, although they did not hate God or deliberately walk in rebellion against Him — they merely had the misfortune of not *knowing Him*. But then, the way the churches tell it, the vilest man who ever lived, who hated and blasphemed and abused and murdered, if on his deathbed, at the last gasping breath of his life, he simply says, "Father, forgive me; Lord Jesus, save me," this one gets a one-way ticket to heaven! Now that, my beloved, is classical *fickleness* — not *justice!*

THE CUP OF HIS INDIGNATION

"The same shall drink of the wine of the passion of God, which is poured out without mixture into the *cup of His indignation...*" (Rev. 14:10).

The Psalmist Asaph wrote by inspiration, "*For in the hand of the Lord is a **cup**, and the wine is red...the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth (realm) shall...drink them*" (Ps. 75:8). John the Revelator has recorded more concerning this "cup" of God, "*And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and **great Babylon** came in remembrance before God, to give unto her **the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His passion***" (Rev. 16:19). "*And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For **her sins** have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered **her iniquities.***

*Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in **the cup** which she hath filled fill to her double” (Rev. 18:4-6).*

It is significant to note that in the whole book of Revelation the term “cup” in every instance refers either to the “cup” of Babylon’s abominations and filthiness of her fornication (Rev. 17:4), *or*, to the “cup” in the hand of the Lord from which HE gives Babylon to drink of the wine of His passion, even the “cup” of His indignation. Nowhere is this cup of His wrath and indignation given to the wicked sinners of the world to drink or to the nations of earth! Nearly all the Bible teachers get this one wrong! The cup of God’s wrath is poured out without mixture (nothing added, it’s all HIM) upon the RELIGIOUS KINGDOM OF MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT, the great whore that sits upon many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with her defiled wine (supposedly spiritual life). And while “Babylon” is first and foremost a spirit and condition within the human soul, it finds its greatest expression outwardly in the visible manifestation of the religious systems spawned out of the soulical, religious nature of man. All men’s actions and activities are but outward manifestations of an inward state of being, in soul or body.

Women in prophecy are churches. In Revelation 12:1 we find the true church of Christ described as a woman in heaven, clothed with the sun. In Revelation 14:4 we find that the 144,000 sons of God who follow the Lamb were “not defiled with women,” that is, man-made churches which are merely counterfeits of the one and only true church. And in Revelation 17 we have introduced “the great whore” which in verse five is said to be the “mother” of harlots. A mother must have offspring. This mother has “harlot” offspring. She is the “mother of harlots,” which is but another way of expressing the fact that she has many daughters who have followed her in the ways of harlotry. It is an undeniable fact that outwardly the Roman Catholic Church identifies herself as the perfect fulfillment of this prophecy by proclaiming herself to be “the mother of all churches.” The daughters are harlots because they partake of the same fleshly, carnal, worldly nature as their mother, the “great whore.” All, both mother and daughters, are harlots fundamentally because they are man-made institutions, whose husband is human instead of divine. The Christ of God is the one and only lawful husband (Head) of the one and only church, the *spiritual organism* known as His body. But apostasy persists in substituting in place of this spiritually created, God-designed *organism*, an organization patterned after worldly institutions, structured and controlled by the will and cunning of men, named with a name other than the name of the Lord, chartered by the State, riding upon the back of the scarlet colored beast of human government. All members of the organization are therefore prostituting unlawfully with their human head (head-quarters) which is usurping the place which belongs to Christ alone!

The Roman church is the mother of all, because all are modeled after her false system. And not only are these Protestant daughters modeled after their mother as to elementary form and nature, but all, from the Lutheran Church, the Reformed Churches, the Church of England, etc., right down to the youngest Charismatic organization, are propagating, in varying degrees, the false doctrines of their mother while, like their mother, they profess to dispense the Word of God, pure and unadulterated. They baptize like their mother, they take “Communion” as the members of the Roman church receive the “Eucharist,” they proclaim eternal damnation in hell for the lost, eternal life in a physical place called heaven with literal golden streets, trees, river of life, and mansions for the saved; they celebrate the pagan holidays of Easter and Christmas, and keep other religious holidays as does their mother. Time and space forbid a detailed discourse on all the harlot ways in which the harlot daughters follow their harlot mother. And we are not unmindful that a merciful and compassionate God has used all these things, even the mother, in the salvation of souls and in bringing blessings to humanity, for, after all, there *is* a “little light” and the “voice of harpers” in Babylon, and even the “voice of the bridegroom and the bride” have faintly been heard in Her! (Rev. 18:20-24).

But there is a higher walk, an undefiled way, the way of personal union with Christ in the power and glory of the living Spirit, apart from all the outward trappings and traditions of religion. All who find this blessed place have obeyed the command, “*Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues*” (Rev. 18:4). Those who have come *unto Him* without the camp no longer worship the “beast” of man’s carnality and ego, nor the “image” of the beast, the Babylon systems of this world; nor do they any longer feed upon the pronouncements of the “false prophet,” the erroneous and distorted message flowing from the religious systems, nor do they bear that “mark,” that way of thinking, upon their foreheads or in their hands (their service and actions). These have been “beheaded” for the witness of Jesus, severed from their own head, or the carnal mind, and severed from the earthly headships (head-quarters) of the religious systems of man, taking upon them the mind of Christ in and by the anointing within.

Our text says that all the beast worshippers will drink of the *wine* of the *passion* of God, and they will drink it out of the *cup* of His indignation or anger. This, as we know, is symbolic language, for no one will literally have to drink wine out of a cup in God’s hand! The language employed here is drawn from Jeremiah’s prophecies concerning the literal city of Babylon. “*For thus saith the Lord God of Israel unto me: Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it. And they shall drink, and be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them. Then took I the cup from the Lord’s hand, and made all the nations to drink, unto whom the Lord had sent me*” (Jer. 25:15-17).

Jeremiah did not literally take a cup out of God’s hand and make all the peoples of the nations drink of that wine. What a “communion service” that would have been! Perhaps he symbolically poured out a cup of wine upon the ground, but I rather think this was all accomplished in a spiritual way. But the result of this “wine” was to confuse the understanding of the nations that God was judging. “*They shall...go mad,*” the Lord said. Ah, Babylon in our day is already in a “confused” state. That is the *meaning* of Babylon — CONFUSION! Oh, what confusion in the religious systems of man! Thousands of conflicting creeds, names, organizational structures, and disciplines, each clamoring that they, and they alone, are the repository of all truth and the way to salvation and heaven. Now when God gives them of His wine He will ***confuse their confusion*** — what a thought that is! I’m sure you’ve heard the old cliché, “I’ve got my mind made up — don’t confuse me with the facts.” It is my conviction that the “wine of His passion” out of the “cup of His anger” will be the truth so sharp and piercing, in such power and demonstration of the Holy Ghost, that the citizens of Babylon will be shocked, astounded, shaken, broken, reeling to and fro, staggering like drunk men under the influence of the impact of God’s rebuke!

Let us not think of God’s “anger” as an emotional response, as if God has a hot, uncontrollable temper as men do, and rashly retaliates against those who dishonor Him. God says to men today as He did of old, “*You thought that I was altogether such an one as you are.*” But God is not like a man! “*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord*” (Isa. 55:8). God is all-wise and sovereign and does not suffer from temper tantrums or fits of frustration or rage. His “anger” is His sovereign will expressed through His passion to bring correction and make things right, even as His judgments are the essential corrections which bring men into alignment with His holiness. It is all executed by His hot, burning, passionate love nature, and all is positively designed for man’s good, and unto His own praise and glory. Aren’t you glad!

TORMENTED IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LAMB

“And they shall drink of the wine of the passion of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation; and he shall be *tortured with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb*” (Rev. 14:10).

We now recognize that in this chapter we have spiritual realities set forth in symbol, just as the writer sets forth spiritual realities throughout the entire book of his visions on Patmos. The rarest of gems are never found on the surface of the earth, and the greatest treasures of divine truth are never found openly on the surface of the scriptures. And so is it with our present subject! What a frightening thought on the surface: "...tormented with fire and brimstone...in the presence of the Lamb." But let us search *beneath the surface!* The Greek word used here for "tormented" is *basanizo* which is derived from the word *basanos*, and Strong's Concordance states that both words bear principally the same meaning. *Basanos* is the Greek word for what is commonly known in English as the "touchstone." It was a gritty black stone from Lydia whose proper usage in olden times was to test or try the genuineness of gold. The pure gold rubbed on the stone would leave a peculiar yellow mark, different to that of other metals or alloys. Today we test gold by acid or fire. Therefore the touchstone acquired a symbolic significance: a test or criterion for determining the quality or the genuineness of a thing; to test for purity or truth. The noted professor of Greek, Dr. Strong, admits it is only by analysis that the thought of torture has been derived from the original. How beautiful the truth, and how different from the distortions of Babylon, when we read the text in this light: "...and he shall be **tried and tested** with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy messengers, and in the presence of the Lamb."

We test wood, steel, and stone in order to find out what they are capable of supporting. We test our ability to read, to run, to think, to drive a car, but no one therefore calls them evil. We find out something about ourselves, even if that something is not always complimentary. Everything in life is tested in some manner! How important the truth, generally overlooked by Bible teachers, that this testing takes place, not in some far-away torture-chamber, but "in the presence of the holy messengers (ministers of God), and in the presence of the Lamb." God will certainly not torture sinners up in heaven before the throne of God! Yet, if we took it *literally*, and interpreted it with the *carnal mind*, that is what would be implied. This again points to the fact that it is not the sinners of the world that are being "tested" here, rather, it is the Lord's own people who are being tried and tested in the consuming Holy Ghost fire of God, and in the presence of Him who comes as a *refiner's fire*, and as a purifier of gold and silver! "In the presence of the Lamb" indicates that it is a spiritual work of testing within God's people who dwell in the *mixture* of Babylon, yet they are the Lord's. It is the Lord Himself and His saints that do the testing!

Jesus, then, is our "touchstone," and the Word of God, which He personifies. All the Lord's people must measure up to Him — HE is our *standard, gauge, yardstick, criterion*, "...till we all come to the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," and HE is our Judge and our judgment-seat before which we stand! Gold is what was tested on the touchstone, and gold signifies the divine nature. As we rub our "touchstone," what mark is being left thereon? Is the genuineness of our "gold," or *divine nature* being revealed in us? Do we leave the mark of sonship thereon? Or do we still, in some measure, reveal the character of the Babylon dwellers as an alloy, truth mixed with the traditions of men, spirituality mingled with carnality, and divine nature commingled with human identity?

Some argue that because we believe God's judgments are not unto condemnation, but are corrective and redemptive; and because we teach that the fire and brimstone are not the flames of an eternal hell of torture and damnation, but are Holy Ghost fire for man's purification, we teach a "hell redemption." We are accused of believing that the lake of fire can accomplish in a man what the mercy, gospel, and blood of Jesus could not accomplish. Many years ago Charles G. Finney opposed the ultimate salvation of all, and the work of purifying fire, by ridicule. Finney was an accomplished attorney and a master of the invective. He said that those who were saved after this "age of grace" ends would unceasingly sing, "Thanks be to the hell that saved us by our own suffering!" Just how much weight is there to that criticism? It is a marvelous truth that CHRIST ALONE can save, and ONLY THE BLOOD OF JESUS

can take away man's sin. There is no other way! How we rejoice that it is so! Yet, without an understanding of the relationship between the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus and the all-consuming, purifying fire of God, we can never comprehend the *whole truth!*

Throughout history God manifested Himself in various forms of fire on many different occasions. We find some of these manifestations in the making of His covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:17), the burning bush (Ex. 3:2-4), the pillar of fire (Ex. 13:21), on mount Sinai (Ex. 19:18), in the flame on the altar (Jud. 13:20), and God answering by fire (I Kings 18:24,38). Sacrifices and offerings were made by fire (Ex. 12:8-10), and fire often meant the acceptance by God of a sacrifice made (Jud. 6:21; I Kings 18:38; I Chron. 21:26).

The scriptures affirm that "our God is a consuming fire" (Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29). Fire in the scriptures is often used symbolically and typically to signify the glory, power, and holiness of God. Make a mental note here of the fact that on mount Sinai the glory of God appeared as "a devouring fire" (Ex. 24:16-17). As we search the scriptures, you're going to see that fire again and again. The prophet Habakkuk, for instance, says: "God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of His praise. And *His brightness was as the light*; He had horns coming out of His hand: and there was the hiding of His power" (Hab. 3:3-4). According to various Bible helps the word "horns" in this passage refers to bright beams. One translation calls them lightning-like shafts of splendor. The Bible tells us that in these fiery, lightning-like shafts lies the hiding place of God's power. That alone is enough to let us know that experiencing God's glory is more than having a warm "spiritual" feeling! It's an encounter with the very nature, power, and being of God because His nature, power, and being *is* His glory! He says, "Then I beheld, and lo a likeness as the appearance of fire: from the appearance of (God's) loins even downward, fire; and from His loins even upward, as the appearance of brightness, as the color of amber" (Eze. 8:2) Moses saw God's glory on another occasion, for we read that when the tabernacle was completed and set in order, Moses and Aaron moved back with all the hosts of Israel and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle, and the Shekinah presence of God was with them — the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. The pillar of fire *was* the Shekinah that filled the Most Holy Place! You will recall that when Solomon built the temple the glory was transferred from the tabernacle to the temple, and it was the smoke from His fiery presence that filled the whole house!

Again and again God is revealed expressing His glory, power, and holiness in the form of fire. For instance, in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah we are told that the wickedness of those cities had increased so that the cry of it had reached unto heaven, and God announced that He was coming down to destroy. When He did, it was in the form of fire. Again in the case of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10) we read that when these two men offered strange fire before the Lord, fire came out from the presence of the Lord and devoured them. On the other hand, we find instances such as Elijah on mount Carmel, where God expressed His delight in the form of fire. On mount Carmel God's glory, power, and holiness leaped forth in the manifestation of fire and consumed Elijah's offering in commendation and vindication of the righteous position of the prophet. John the Baptist announced that he baptized with water, but that the One coming after him would baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire. On the day of Pentecost God's glory, power, and holiness were manifested in tongues of fire resting upon every believer. Thus we see that the Holy Ghost is God's power in anointing, and the fire is God's power in purification, for the prophet Malachi had prophesied that the Lord would come as a "refiner's fire" and that "He shall sit as a *refiner* and *purifier* of silver; and He shall *purify* the sons of Levi, and *purge* them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness" (Mal. 3:2-3). Thus we see that the blood of Jesus *cleanses*, and the fire of God *purifies*. It is infinitely necessary that every member of God's elect understand the correlation between these two actions of God!

Perhaps one of the most outstanding illustrations of the principles we are trying to make clear is found in Isaiah 6:1-8. The prophet is standing in the temple area at the hour of the evening sacrifice, when in spirit he sees the Lord high and lifted up. He at once falls to his face and cries, "*Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips.*" Whereupon a seraphim takes a coal from off the altar, draws it across Isaiah's lips, and says, "*Thine iniquity is taken away, thy sin is purged.*" It is significant to note that this coal came from the brazen altar, the place of sacrifice and sin offering. In Leviticus 9:24 we read that the fire on this altar was kindled directly from God. In other words, God's glory, power, and holiness expressed itself in the kindling of the fire on the brazen altar where **sin** was to be dealt with. O that I possessed the tongue of an angel that I might articulate the wonder of this scene! I do know that the connection is drawn here between the sacrifice of the altar and the fire of the altar. Like a horse and carriage, the two go together. They are two aspects of a whole. In Leviticus 6:12-13 we read that this fire of the altar was never to go out. Therefore, the fire on the altar, in every sense of the word, was **God's** fire. It was for failure to recognize this that Nadab and Abihu got into trouble when they thought they could produce better fire. Man's fire cannot purify from sin, but God's fire can! It was the hour of the evening sacrifice, therefore these coals on the brazen altar at the moment were coals of God's Holy Ghost fire, but furthermore they were coals which had been **touched by the drippings of sacrificial blood!** Can you not see the mystery? **THE BLOOD WAS IN THE FIRE!** The result was that when God's fire touched the lips of Isaiah it resulted in purging and cleansing — the two-fold, intensified cleansing, purifying power of the blood and the fire!

Behold the sin of man! Behold the fire of God! For these two to come together without sacrificial blood to intervene leaves man lost and undone. For those two to come together with the presence of sacrificial blood means mighty deliverance and quickening. On mount Moriah Isaac made a statement and asked a question. His statement was: "*Behold the fire.*" His question was: "*Where is the lamb?*" Send the call to heaven above, "*Where is the lamb?*" Ask the angels, ask Gabriel, ask Abraham, ask the patriarchs, ask the prophets, "*Where is the lamb?*" and for four thousand years the heavens were silent. Then one day the last of the Old Testament prophets stood clothed in camel's hair, and, with unerring vision, pointed across the way to an approaching figure and declared, "***Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!***" At last Isaac's question is answered. It is the answer that set a world singing. It is the answer that turned night into morning. It is the answer that turned tears into diamonds of hope. It is the answer that opened the graves in resurrection. It is the answer that arrested the onward march of a ruined race into the gaping jaws of sin and death, and made it possible to ascend the stairway of the skies, back to the heart of God. And we read that as a High Priest Jesus took His own blood, the blood of the Lamb, into the Holiest of all in the heavens of God's Spirit, sprinkling His blood upon the heavenly mercy seat, and there now He appears in the presence of God for us. And it is there, Paul tells us, that He *dwells in the light (the fiery Shekinah) which no man can approach unto* (I Tim. 6:16). Oh, the mystery of it! Where is the blood of Jesus today? **THE BLOOD IS IN THE FIRE!**

In the Old Testament type we enter the most sacred spot on earth. The "Holiest" was a square apartment of ten cubits (15 feet) in breadth, length, and height — a figure of the spiritual dimension of the fullness of God. The Holy of holies must be entered with bowed head and unsaddled feet for Yahweh upon His throne is there. How awesome the presence-chamber of the Lord of Glory! Here no human voice is heard, only the voice of God. Here no seat for man is found, for in the western end and facing eastward stood the **THRONE OF YAHWEH**. Yahweh alone sits on that throne of glory, mercy, and righteousness, between the cherubim. Upon the throne, flaming out in awful brightness, rests the holy Shekinah. Here no created light, as the sun, nor artificial light as a candle, or the seven-fold lamp of the Holy Place, illumines the apartment, yet it is full of light, and the light is brighter far than the noon-day sun, for the fiery glory of God fills the "Holiest" with its own divine radiance, flooding the room with light

too dazzling for human eye to behold. Here all is divine and we breathe another atmosphere than that of this creation!

In that Most Holy Place the divine attributes were displayed in perfect reconciliation; mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace kissed each other. For into that secret place entered once a year Israel's priestly representative sprinkling the blood of atonement *upon the mercy seat*, yes, UPON THE THRONE OF YAHWEH, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. It was upon that mercy-seat that God was to be found, and His presence manifested in flaming fire. And according to Yahweh's promise, "*There will I meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from off the mercy-seat,*" the covenant-keeping God took His seat upon that throne of grace, accepted the blood of atonement, and propitiated the sins of all the people of Israel. Surely there is not a reader drawing breath who fails to perceive at least in part the wonder of what is transpiring here! Let us behold the scene! Our God is a fire. The fire of the brazen altar was kindled by the Lord Himself, the very fire which He is. This divine fire dwelt upon the mercy seat, between the cherubim. The priest enters, sprinkles the blood of atonement upon the mercy seat. The fiery presence of God receives that blood of atonement, and NOW THE BLOOD IS IN THE FIRE! Oh, the wonder of it! No, my beloved, we do not believe in a "hell redemption" or a "fire redemption" apart from the precious, redeeming blood of Jesus. Oh, no! You cannot meet the holy, consuming, purifying fire of God *apart from* the holy, cleansing blood of Jesus — for THE BLOOD IS IN THE FIRE! You get the fire, you get the blood. But never forget — you get the blood, you will also get the fire!

Fire is God and God is fire. If you're going to have a relationship with God, sooner or later you will have a relationship with fire! Tradition would say that the fire and brimstone in the book of Revelation bespeaks God punishing and torturing men with fire. That's not what this is talking about! Such talk only reveals men's ignorance of the things of God, the ways of God, and the word of God. The traditional idea is that God is torturing the wicked with fire and then sitting back and watching the whole thing, as Nero sat and watched the Christians burn at the stake. To the Romans it was just great sport! But that's crazy — would you really want to serve a God like that? Think about it!

Every man's state of being and every man's work will eventually be tested by fire. The fire will try every man to determine what is in him, and the fire will try every man's work of what sort it is. If you and I build into our spiritual life and activities wood, hay, and stubble, the fire will find it out, and the wall will come tumbling down. Every child of God is building his spiritual life upon the foundation that is Jesus Christ. There is no other foundation that can be laid, or is laid. Either we are building the quality of gold, silver, or precious stones or the weak and unprofitable things of wood, hay, and stubble that are soulish self-efforts and carnal. If the works that I do are gold, then surely it must mean that I am building out of the spirit! Am I led by the Spirit of God? Or am I fulfilling my own ambitions, satisfying my own ego? There is a vast difference!

The heart of man, even of the believing man, is often found to be desperately wicked in this regard. It is not difficult to find men who glibly make great claims of being led by the Spirit of God to go here or there, to do this or that, but many, alas, are involved in gaining a following and building their own kingdom, though they imagine they are building *for* God. Beware the man who tells you that *he alone* has the truth, that *he* is God's prophet, God's man of faith and power, that he is the one sent to seal the saints, that he alone bears the message of the hour, that you will not hear the deep secrets of the Lord from any other source, and his words alone hold the *key* to life and immortality, to sonship and the fullness of God. These people still move in the wicked spirit of the Babylon system, working overtime to build up their own Babylonish Kingdom. Such are false apostles, false prophets, deceitful workers, transforming

themselves into the messengers of Christ. These are self-deceived egoists, not discerning the Lord's body.

God has not made me a ruler or a judge of my neighbor's motives, but it does not require an exceptional gift of discernment to conclude that much of the work done in God's name is in reality the wood of a deceitful heart, the hay of spurious revelation, and the stubble of carnality. All work, whether carnal or spiritual, will be subjected to the testing fire of God! If it is gold, silver, or precious stones it will stand the test. If it is the wood, hay, or stubble of self-effort or self-promotion it will be burned up and destroyed. If any man's work can abide the fiery testing of God's fire and brimstone, then that man will receive a reward for the profitable work he has accomplished. But if any man's work abide not the fire, but rather is consumed by it, then that man will suffer humiliating loss. All that he has done through a lifetime of supposed service to God will all go up in smoke before his eyes, and he will suffer dreadful loss. "*He himself shall be saved,*" the scripture says, "*yet so as by fire*" (I Cor. 3:15). These words are worthy of deep meditation and prayer. Their deep and powerful meaning can never be comprehended apart from the quickening of the spirit of truth. I believe I have the spirit of the Lord when I say that the fire of God will not only consume the combustible works of such a person, but it will also *consume the man of sin in him, the carnal mind, the fleshly nature, the Adamic personality* (II Thes. 2:3-10). Unless the carnality *within* the man which inspired all the unprofitable works is also burned up and destroyed, how can we say that HE has been *saved by fire*? Just getting rid of the works is not enough!

More than three centuries ago when the Black Plague swept through London, England, more than 68,000 men, women, and children were sickened with the putrid fever, suffered nameless agonies, passed into delirium, sometimes with convulsions, and then died. Before the end of the terrible nightmare of anguish and death, what was thought to be an even greater tragedy occurred. The city caught fire, the whole heavens were ablaze as the Great Fire destroyed more than 13,200 homes and 89 church buildings. Most of the city, which was built largely of wood, lay in ashes. Wonder of wonders! As soon as the last dying embers cooled and the smoke cleared, the inhabitants of the city discovered that the Plague had been stayed! Not another person died of the epidemic. The Plague never returned. The fire had killed the bacteria-carrying fleas and rats that caused the Plague. It took a fire to do it! Fire is a great cleanser, purifier, and changer, the finest purifier.

It is interesting to note that the Greek word for fire is *pur*, a derivative of which is the Latin word *pyra* (pure) and the English word *pyre* — the place for the burning of a corpse. PYREX also comes from the same root, *pyr* or *pur*, meaning a fire, and *rex*, meaning a king — that which is king, thus ruling over the fire, hence a "heat-resistant" glassware. All our English words having to do with that which is pure are related to the Greek word *pur*, indicating clearly that that which is pure is so because it has been cleansed BY FIRE! Consider: PURE, PURity, PURify, PURification, PURitan.

OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE, the scriptures affirm. I understand not why fire has been represented to us as something so terrible, so frightening, so hideous that we should try to avoid it. If our approach back to God is through fire, as revealed by the flaming sword placed at Eden's gate, why do we always try to get out of the fire? Why do we evade the fire? Why expend so much energy and effort to try and pray ourselves out of the fire? Fire, in the scriptures, often symbolized two things — judgment and cleansing. But God is not schizophrenic in His nature — one side of His character disposed to forgive, save, heal, redeem, deliver, and restore, while another part of His nature is bent on vengeful destruction and the sadistic torture of His enemies. His action in fire, as His action in grace, is pure, harmonious, and balanced, directed toward the purging that will lead to restoration. His fire cleanses the believer that He may qualify for God's highest. His action of fire towards the unbeliever is to the same end, conditioning and preparing that one for good results, when, having been broken and purged from pride and rebellion,

he bows low before the Saviour, penitently receiving the gracious gift of life. This reveals clearly how it is that in God's great scheme of redemption and restoration THE BLOOD IS IN THE FIRE!

The crude idea that the loving and righteous Creator would decree endless torment in undying flame for His creatures who are the work of His hands, and who were created for His pleasure, does dishonor to the name and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is incredible that any man who has tasted of the goodness of the Lord could ever believe that the compassionate Saviour of mankind could ever have intended us to read such a meaning into His words. The eternal fire is the truth, the righteousness, the love of God; in a word, it is the nature of God. Any careful reader of the Old Testament will be aware that fire is often used therein as a symbol of the presence and action of God. "Our God is a consuming fire," says the scripture, and the apostle adds, "God is love." It is no straining of metaphor to say that the love of God and the wrath of God are the same thing described from opposite points of view. Every father who has had to put the rod of correction to his son understands this! How we shall experience God's love depends upon the way we come up against it. God does not change; it is man's moral state that changes. The wrath of God is a figure of speech to denote God's unchanging opposition to sin; it is His righteous love operating to destroy evil. Nothing can live in that devouring flame that is of the nature of a lie or wars against the spirit of holiness. Oh, if there is one thing for which we ought to rejoice and praise God without ceasing, it is that eternal fire which will burn up all the foulness and rottenness, all the wickedness and cruelty, all the shame and wrong from which our souls have suffered. It is not evil which will have the last word, but good; not sorrow, but joy; not hate, but love; not warfare, but peace; not Satan, but Christ! It is not *men* that God is consuming in His fire, it is what is *in man* that is consumed so that all men shall in that glad day be saved "*so as by fire,*" for THE BLOOD IS IN THE FIRE!

Fire appears terrible only to the man who is unprepared to pass through it. When of old God came down on Sinai, its upper peaks were veiled with impenetrable folds of smoke, like the smoke of a furnace. And in the heart of the smoke there was the appearance of devouring fire. There is dread here! Bounds had been set to keep the people back; but a special message must be sent to warn them against breaking through to gaze, lest the fire should break forth upon them. But there was no harm as long as they kept without the barriers; and when Moses entered into the very heart of it, it did not singe a hair of his head, and injured him no more than when it played around the fragile acacia bush, which burned with fire without being consumed — not a leaf shriveled, nor a twig scorched. Yes, our God is a consuming fire, but not everything will burn even in this fire; gold, silver, and precious stones abide the fire, and there is comfort and hope and blessing in the thought! When we yield to God's love, and open our hearts to Him, He enters into us, and becomes within us a consuming fire; not to ourselves, but to the evil within us. So that, in a very deep and blessed sense, we may be said to dwell with the devouring fire, and to walk amid the eternal burnings (Isa. 33:14).

WHAT A BURNING

What a burning, what a burning
As all goes up in smoke and flame.
Everything in Adam's nature
Bows the knee to Jesus' name.

Burn, O earth; consume within me
All that's there unlike to God;
That the new earth may be planted
As the kingdom of the Lord.

Let God's fire-like word consume
These religious heavens too,
Till no longer they receive
Refreshing drops of heaven's dew.

Lord, send forth Thy fiery judgments,
Great hail stones of talent weight;
Let them fall as truth descending
On man's wicked, sinful state.

That on whom so e're they fall,
Thy will the vile to powder grind.
Not one atom of the old
In our new earth will we find.

— Reba McMurry

To be continued...

J. PRESTON EBY

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