

Do You Want the BAPTISM by FIRE?

by Herbert W. Armstrong

OFTEN we hear one say, "I want that baptism with the Holy Spirit and FIRE."

Or: "I have the baptism with the SPIRIT,—now I want that FIRE!"

Do such persons know what they are asking?

The common belief that we should desire that baptism with FIRE springs from texts showing God will purify and cleanse those who are His, by purging away the dross. And the Scriptures speaking of this purifying process usually speak of it as "purge away," or "take away the dross," rather than burning it away with fire.

But in Ezekiel 22, God does speak of burning away this dross with fire. Before we examine the words of John the Baptist about being baptized with the Holy Spirit and with FIRE, let's see if we want even to have this dross purified by FIRE. Here it is! LISTEN!

"Son of man, the House of Israel is to me become dross: all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver. Therefore thus saith the Eternal God; because ye are all become dross, behold, therefore I will gather you into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you *in mine* ANGER and in my FURY, and I will leave you there, and melt you. Yea, I will gather you and blow upon you the FIRE of *my* WRATH." (Ezek. 22:18-21.)

Now do YOU want to become DROSS? Do you want this kind of FIRE? Do you want to become so wicked—so rebellious, stiff-necked, hard-hearted, as God says Israel was, that you PROVOKE GOD'S ANGER to the extent that He has to chastise you in the FIRE of His WRATH? Those here purified in this fire were those so wicked, so rebellious, in such a wrong spirit that God is punishing them in ANGER, and in FURY. He is not here speaking of CHRISTIANS at all, but with unregenerate, stiff-necked, rebellious sinning ISRAEL.

To Whom Was John Speaking?

Now examine the text which speaks of this baptism with FIRE. The words were spoken by John the Baptist: "I indeed baptize you with water into repentance: but He that cometh after me . . . shall baptize you with the Holy

Spirit, and with FIRE." (Matt. 3:11.)

To whom was John speaking? Notice verse 5 . . . "Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan." Now are we to suppose that all Jerusalem and all Judaea, and all this region was RIGHTEOUS, or at least REPENTANT, and seeking salvation? Not at all! The whole population came in great crowds—largely out of curiosity. Did John baptize them all? Not at all! Many were, confessing their sins. But others were not. Notice:

"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, 'O generation of VIPERS, who hath warned you to flee from the *wrath* to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.'" (Verses 7-8.) John is speaking to these hypocrites whom he calls VIPERS, whom he refused to baptize, who are awaiting the WRATH TO COME, as well as to those who repented and whom he baptized. So notice, SOME of those in his audience to whom John spoke were to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, later. Others are awaiting the WRATH TO COME, which shall burn them with unquenchable FIRE! There are two classes of people here, awaiting two opposite fates—one to receive the Holy SPIRIT, the others HELL FIRE!

Notice the 10th verse: "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth *not* forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the FIRE." He is speaking of the fate of the wicked, which shall be cast into the lake of FIRE, which is the second death (Rev. 20:14), and standing before him were those to receive that fate!

Next, John said to them, "He"—Jesus Christ—"shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with FIRE whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather His wheat into the garner, and He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable FIRE." (Verses 11-12.)

Now notice many things here. He will gather HIS wheat. The wheat is cast, or rather gathered, into the garner. But the FIRE is the fate of the chaff—unquenchable FIRE! Compare that with Matt. 13:30. "Let both (wheat and tares—wheat representing saints, the tares

lost sinners) grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to *burn them*: but gather the wheat into my barn." What do the symbols represent? Jesus explained: "The field is the world; the good seed (wheat) are the children of the kingdom; but the tares (chaff) are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of the world. The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom (purge his floor) all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of FIRE." (Matt. 13:38-42.)

What Is His Floor?

Now the KEY to the whole question lies in the definition of "His Floor." Those who believe Christians should seek this baptism with FIRE believe the "floor" means the individual Christian—that Christ will fan up the flames with the fan in His hand, burning out the dross from the life of the Christian, purging this life of sin, thus burning up the chaff, leaving only the GOOD part of the man—the wheat.

But that is merely an interpretation read into it. That is not at all the evident meaning as INTERPRETED BY SCRIPTURE.

Notice, Christ's fan is to be in His hand. He will purge His floor. Purge it of what? Of the chaff. Then the wheat will be gathered into His garner. What is "His floor"? Evidently the same as "His field" of Matt. 13:24. "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in HIS FIELD." But while He slept, the enemy, the devil, came and sowed tares—sinners. Now He let BOTH—saints and sinners—the wheat and the tares (or the wheat and the chaff) grow together in HIS FIELD—(His FLOOR)—until the harvest. Then He sends the angels to baptize (immerse) the tares, or the chaff—the lost sinners—with FIRE, which burns them up, but the wheat—the saved—are gathered into His garner—His kingdom.

Verse 38 says the field is the world.

The expressions used are almost identical to John's statement about baptizing with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Before John were gathered the children of the wicked one, and also some of those to be heirs of salvation. Christ will PURGE His floor—His field—the Earth. The wheat will be gathered into His kingdom and the chaff, or tares—the lost sinners—are to be PURGED from the world, burned with unquenchable fire.

Now examine that word "purge." What is it Christ will PURGE? Notice Ezek. 20:38. When He comes again, "I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me; . . . and they shall not enter into the land of Israel." What about that word "fan"? The marginal reference takes us to Jer. 51:1-2: "Thus saith the Eternal, I will raise up against Babylon (sinners) . . . a DESTROYING WIND, and will send unto Babylon FANNERS that shall fan her, and shall empty her

land." And she (Babylon) shall be utterly BURNED with FIRE: "for strong is the Lord God that judgeth her." (Rev. 18:8.) The fan is an instrument for destroying sinners with FIRE—hell fire—not purifying saints.

Now what is the "CHAFF"? Speaking of SINNERS (not sins to be cleansed out of saints), God says, through Hosea 13:3: "Therefore they shall be as the . . . CHAFF that is driven with the whirlwind (fanned) *out of the FLOOR.*" How closely this language matches that of Christ, with His fan, whipping up a wind that purges the chaff off His floor, to be burned! Now notice further, Dan. 2:35: "Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold (Babylon—sinners) broken to pieces together, and became like the CHAFF of the summer threshing FLOORS; and the *wind* (fanned by His fan) carried them away." Yes, to be burned. These scriptures show the chaff refers to lost sinners, not faults of saints. With His fan

he purges His floor, carrying away the chaff, or the tares, to be burned with FIRE. Now what is UNQUENCHABLE fire? Is it used in connection with purifying saints, or punishing the lost?

Notice Isa. 66:24: "And they (saints) shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of *the men that have transgressed against me*: for their worm shall not die, neither shall THEIR FIRE BE QUENCHED." Notice Malachi 4:1: "For, behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble (chaff; tares): and the day that cometh shall BURN THEM UP, saith the Lord of hosts."

Surely that settles it. John was speaking to both sinners and those to be saved. When he said Christ shall baptize YOU—the YOU included BOTH. The saved He would baptize with His SPIRIT—the others with the FIRE!