

BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT VERSUS BAPTISM BY FIRE

John the Baptist, after emphasizing the need for repentance, proceeded to contrast himself with the One He pointed to, stressing His overwhelming GREATNESS!

Matthew 3:11 (NKJV)

11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

John indicates that his baptism signified repentance. We have already seen that it didn't produce it; it simply testified to it. The key issue is the genuineness of repentance. This was John's ministry. He baptized repenters in preparation to receive the GREAT ONE coming after him. In this way, he identified them as those who were repentant. Hence, he was called "John the Baptist" – "John the Baptizer."

In emphasizing the GREATNESS of this One coming after him, John said he was not even worthy to carry His sandals. John was considered by the general population to be a very holy man, so who could this person be? John's point certainly emphasized His surpassing GREATNESS!

To illustrate the contrast, John brings out that he baptized repenters with water, but this One coming after him would baptize "***with the Holy Spirit and fire.***" This coming One would be so great as to orchestrate the baptism of the Spirit and also the judgment of fire. Who could do this but God? Exactly! And that is the point made in Matthew 3:3, saying John prepares "the way of the LORD". This One is so mighty and great that in fact He would be able to facilitate what only GOD can do because in fact He would be God come in the flesh!

There is some debate over whether baptizing with the Spirit and fire are two things or one. Some take it that the fire further qualifies the Spirit's ministry in relationship to God's people in the sense that He would bring about a purifying reality. That is theologically true (cf. Isa. 1:25; 4:4; Zech. 13:9; Mal. 3:2-3).

However, both the immediate preceding context in verse 10 and the immediate following context in verse 12 both relate "fire" to the idea of judgment. So, I take it that baptism with fire here means the baptism of God's judgment. People will either experience one or the other. God's people who are repentant will experience Spirit baptism, while those refusing to repent will experience a baptism of fire in the sense of God's

eternal judgment. All of this will come from the hand of this GREAT ONE for whom John was preparing the way.

The subject of Spirit baptism anticipated the birth of Church on the Day of Pentecost. Note this connection. In the OT God promised that He would pour out His Spirit (cf. Joel 2:28-29). On the day of Pentecost the Spirit came as seen in Acts 2:1-4. Peter describes this as a partial fulfillment of what Joel prophesied in the OT as seen in Acts 2:16-18 (cf. Ezek. 36:25-27; 39:29). But then Peter went on to say:

Acts 2:33 (NKJV)

33 Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, **He poured out this** which you now see and hear.

This pouring out/baptizing of the Spirit was brought about by Jesus! (cf. Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:33) It started with the Jews, and then included the Gentiles, and became normative for every believer (cf. Rom. 8:9). Spirit baptism was initiated by Christ and going forth applies to every believer. As Paul says in 1 Cor. 12:13, “***by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.***” This is the glorious reality shared in by all God’s people in the Church Age.

“Throughout the Old Testament prophecies, the Holy Spirit is associated with the coming of the Messiah. It is one of the marks which identifies Him (Isaiah 32:15; Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26-27; 37:14; Joel 2:28-19).” – **Stanley Toussaint**

But a judgment day is also coming, which will also happen at the hand of Christ. It is Christ in Revelation 5 that is worthy to open the seals of judgment on the world. In John 5:22 Jesus said the Father, “***has committed all judgment to the Son.***” One day it is Christ Himself who will say to the lost, “***depart from Me, you cursed into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels***” (cf. Mt. 7:21-23; 25:41; Mal. 3:2-5).

Matthew 3:12 (NKJV)

12 His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Who has the winnowing fan, who will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn, who will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire? Well, it is none other than the one coming after John Who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Again, this is describing what only God can do emphasizing that Jesus is MESSIAH-GOD!

The Messiah would separate the wheat from the chaff. The winnowing fan was a fork/shovel like instrument used to toss wheat and chaff into the air. The wind blew away the chaff while the heavier grain fell into a pile to be collected into the barn.

This is descriptive of the Messiah ultimately separating true believers – true repenters from unbelievers – non-repenters. The wheat gathered into the barn represents repenting believers brought into the kingdom. The chaff that is burned up represents those unrepentant who will be turned into hell.

Note the emphasis that the chaff will be burned with unquenchable fire – meaning it never goes out. This is descriptive of eternal hell fire (cf. Isa. 34:10; 66:24; Jer. 7:20; Mt. 5:29).

John was a no-nonsense prophet/preacher. He told it like it is. If you want to see the kingdom you must repent. Only those who receive the Messiah with repentance will escape from the wrath to come. True repentance is seen in the fruits of change borne out in the life. The Messiah is so GREAT that He baptizes with the Spirit and with the fire of God's judgment. It is He who will ultimately separate the wheat (true believers) from the chaff (unbelievers). Indeed, He is Messiah-God. As prophesied by Isaiah, John the Baptist was His forerunner who in calling the people to repentance prepared the way for the LORD and that LORD is Jesus!

In 1951 Comedian Red Skelton took a party of friends with him in a plane to Europe where he was to perform in London. As they were flying over the Swiss Alps 3 of the plane's engines failed. The situation looked grave (no pun intended). People began to PRAY!!!

Skelton went into one of his best comic routines to try and distract them. The plane was losing power and coming closer and closer to the mountain. At the last moment the pilot spotted a clearing and was able to land the plane. Skelton broke the relieved silence by saying: "Ladies and Gentlemen, you may now return to the evil habits you gave up 20 minutes ago."

That my friends, does not represent true repentance. That is not indicative of a true saving faith. To truly receive Jesus as Lord and Savior involves genuine repentance that is a life changing reality. Receiving Christ in John's day involved repentance and it does in our day as well. The only way to genuinely receive Christ is by repentant-faith – that is a life changing kind of faith. Have you repented of your sin and believed on Christ as your Lord and Savior?

Paul summarized his gospel ministry to King Agrippa by saying that he told people far and wide “***that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.***” (Acts 26:20). Does this describe your life? If not repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thus flee from the wrath to come.