

BAPTIZED WITH FIRE

Malachi 4:1. "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace...and the day that is coming will set them ablaze...."

In preparing the way of the Lord, John the Baptist gave special emphasis to the work of the Holy Spirit prophesied by Malachi and Isaiah—a work of fire that threshes and cuts away at the root of that which restricts and voids all that God would do in us.

And then came the day of fire! Like a rushing mighty wind, it shook the little remnant of believers and the place where they waited on the day of Pentecost; the Church was born. On the day of Pentecost, The tongues of fire and the Spirit of burning sat upon the disciples, and they were changed through their awareness of the Spirit of God. All the little grievances, all the doubts, all tendencies to waver in their dedication were burned away. The place where they were was shaken that day. The baptism of fire was the beginning of the shaking of the whole world.

We need to also experience this baptism of fire. The Spirit came upon them so mightily that it burned out their individuality. The promise of that baptism of fire is for us also, (Acts 2:39). What happened on that first day of Pentecost was an initial fulfillment of the experience of fire. The Lord is restoring the baptism of fire to the church.

Just being baptized with the Holy Spirit is not enough; we also need to be baptized with fire. John the Baptist prepared the way for the baptism in fire. If we really want to know God we need the fire of His holiness. The fire will refine our walk with God, so the Holy Spirit can use us to shake the world.

We need a Pentecost of fire. There is a distinction between receiving the Holy Spirit and receiving the baptism of fire. Many have thought that it was just one experience; however, it involved two different experiences in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, but He also talked about the baptism of fire that He was to undergo (Luke 12:50). John spoke about the Holy Spirit coming, but he also spoke of a baptism of fire (Matthew 3:11–12).

When the Holy Spirit and fire was poured out on the day of Pentecost we can see the results, we can see the power, the anointing, the miracles and the oneness in which the disciples moved. Fifty days before, those believers were hiding behind closed doors for fear of the Jews. The Shepherd had been smitten, and all the sheep were scattered. Peter had denied the Lord, and Thomas had doubted. The early believers were willing to sell everything they had and lay the money at the apostles' feet (Acts 2:42–47).

The fire is what prepares us for discipleship.

Many believers receive the Holy Spirit years before they come into a real walk in the Spirit. But when they do enter into such a walk, the baptism by fire becomes more and more an experience in their lives. There is no way we will be able to meet the trials ahead of us unless we go through a baptism of fire first. This is the experience which will prepare our hearts for the days ahead. When we come into a walk with God we experience the fire. When we come into a walk with God we experience things other Christians never experience.

We do not really have an effective ministry like Jesus did, unless we go through the fire. The fire only hurts until the old life is dead. A walk with God is characterized by a baptism of fire, so that only dedicated seekers of God experience it. The baptism of fire brings us into a real

walk with God. When people see the cost of discipleship they do not enter the fire, they think it is unreasonable, the carnal mind rejects it.

People want the gifts of the Spirit, but they do not want the fire of the Spirit. The minute the fire of testing begins to burn, many turn aside to a lesser level of God in their lives.

In a walk with God, we cannot talk about being an ex-anything; by the time we go through the fire, we no longer have a past. We are dead to self. The baptism of fire takes away the professionalism that characterizes much of Christianity. Some people rejoice that they have a certain seniority, or position. When we go through the fire, we are persecuted by the church at large, we become a threat to religious movements and traditional Christianity, because of the revelation and power that we walk in.

If we welcome and submit to the baptism of fire, we are being prepared to enter into the Kingdom.

There is still ambition in the traditional church system, but anyone who comes into a real walk with God does not seek a place. Such a person is not concerned if they are up at the top or way down at the bottom. If we are to be a real ministry, we will walk through the fire. The Lord burns out ambition until His people are willing to do what He asks of them.

When Jesus spoke of the baptism with which He was to be baptized , He had already received the Holy Spirit, and had been baptized in water. He was referring to a baptism of fire. The disciples received both baptisms simultaneously on the day of Pentecost

Paul said, ...I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is

he that calleth you, who also will do it. I Thessalonians 5:23–24. Anyone who has not entered into the sanctification and the preparation of the Lord in every realm of his being—spirit, soul, and body—will be in trouble in the days ahead.

The baptism of fire is necessary to prepare us to go through the days to come. The only people who will be immune to the fires of judgment will be those who have passed through the baptism of fire.

When the Lord brings promises and prophecies about the things that will take place, He immediately puts us into an experience. A true Pentecost experience is the launching pad to move us into a ministry. We may begin to minister with gifts, but we have a real ministry only after we have been through the fire. Gifts are given to people even though they are filled with self-ambition. A real ministry comes forth when the fire has been applied to a person's ambition, when the fire has burned up the chaff of their life. When the baptism of fire has taken place, our focus is no longer on having certain gifts; our life becomes the evidence that we are a ministry of God. There is a difference between something that we do as we work ourselves into a place of importance, and what we do after God has put the fire to us and consumed the chaff. When He has consumed the chaff, then we begin to minister to the Lord.

A Pentecostal experience of receiving the Holy Spirit without the baptism of fire is something we can talk people into.

The fire is the prelude to the glory returning. The glory will even become visible upon the faces of God's people. The deeper the fire is applied to us, the sooner we will see it manifesting itself in the physical realm. The Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, and that dwells in us, will also quicken our mortal bodies (Romans 8:11). Sooner or later the Holy Spirit affects the body, reaching down into the physical realm after

first starting with the spiritual realm. The Holy Spirit begins to refine our souls with fire, and then we feel the effects in our physical bodies. That is why some of us begin our walk with God under such great stress and agony of spirit. As soon as we begin walking, whatever God does in our spirits also comes through to the physical realm.

It is scriptural and very necessary that the Lord break through to the physical realm where all our senses have been dead to God for so long. In New Testament times, the believers saw angels and talked with them because their senses were tuned to the spirit world. This ability has been lost, and it must be restored to us. “Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions. Your sons and daughters will prophesy” (Acts 2:17). Through prophetic utterance and prophetic perception, God is bringing all our senses into focus so that we can begin to hear His voice. No longer is it only a still, small voice down deep in the heart. God has many different ways of speaking and confirming truth to the believers.

We need to be prepared to enter into every phase of the restoration. We experience the fire in our soul until the chaff is burned away. Soon we will find that even our soul and body is alert to God and senses the presence of the Lord and the spirit world.

We cannot complain about God’s dealings. A walk with God is our only hope. Our life has no value without it. We need to be patient with our brothers and sisters problems and faults. They have not yet experienced the fire. We need to have faith for them. They will go through the fire until their area of failure is burned out and the chaff is gone.

When people start walking with God, almost immediately every relationship is thrown into uncertainty. The fire has come. Before they walked with God, their relationships may have been unbalanced, but

they had worked out some kind of compromise. When God starts to set things in order; He puts the fire to their lives and they have to start all over.

The Lord reverses everything in our life. He brings the mountains low and fills the valleys. Before the fire, our “ups” sometimes did not last very long, and our “downs” lasted a long time. We may still have mountain-top experiences, but they are much more level after we go through the fire. We are being prepared to go through the tribulation, through troubles, and through judgments.

Paul said, *According to the grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder I laid a foundation...but let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon. For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* I Corinthians 3:10–11. If a man builds upon a foundation of gold, silver, and precious stones, the building will stand. But if he builds upon wood, hay, and stubble, it will not stand because the day will declare it. It will be tried by fire.

People will wonder as they see church after church in the denominations fall. Wood, hay, and stubble burn very rapidly. The gold, silver, and precious stones are what God desires. He is constructing a fireproof structure. When God brings forth a church by the Holy Spirit today, the pastor often is not sure if God is working with him or against him. Just when he has that church moving along fine, it seems as if the Lord decides to check it out to see if it is really what He wants. He walks through, like a building inspector, and throws in a lot of matches. If it burns up, that is too bad; it was not what He wanted. As the building inspector, He has certain specifications for the building: if it will burn, then it is not good enough.

A day of judgment is coming which will determine if a work is of wood, hay, or stubble. The Lord is putting the fire to us now to prepare

us. Before we come into a walk with God we are only half saved. When the Lord puts the fire to us, we receive the rest of it in a hurry. We become saved and delivered completely. This happens because the Lord drives us into the appropriation of a complete and full experience.

Fire is the source of revelation. It illuminates; it sheds light. Things will lie covered over in our life until the Lord puts the fire to us; then immediately our area of weakness or need comes to the surface, and we know that it has to be dealt with. We cannot get away with it any longer. We have to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying and submit to Him. We have to stand transparent before the Lord, and let Him deal with us. We cannot be touchy or easily embarrassed. Everything that is hidden will be unveiled shortly. God is starting with His people so that they will have immunity in a day of judgment.

The world is about to go through the greatest baptism of fire and judgment and exposure of sin that it has ever seen. If we are to be exposed to the judgments, then we will have to become immune to them if we expect to survive. We can be either a partaker of the judgments of the world, or we can judge ourselves now and ask the Lord to put the fire to us.

The living Word slays the antichrist of self who is sitting on the throne of our temple. We have to be delivered from the mark of the beast within us. Then by the Holy Spirit we can say, "Jesus is Lord." No man can call Jesus Lord, but by the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:3). We have to go through the fire until all the other lords that have had dominion over us have been burned up.

The Lordship of Jesus is involved with the baptism of fire. He becomes Lord only if He burns up all the other lords. Everything else that has dominion over our life must be destroyed and brought down.

Hobbies and interests that once intrigued us must be cast aside. We have to become addicted to doing His will. The cry and prayer and proclamation of our heart must be, not my will but Thine be done. We have to shout it! We do not merely accept His will. We Demand it! The fire must burn out the reluctance in our heart. We have to go deeper into a walk with God. Submit to the fire He puts to our life. Our prayer must be, “Lord, fill me with your Spirit and help me to really glorify you.

The one key that will open the door to the greater works, to the exploits, and to the worldwide ministry is the baptism of fire

We are contending for the restoration of buried truths. Today the Lord is doing a quick work in the earth.

We have been falling short of the power and purity that existed in the early Church. Where are the exploits? If we were filled with the Spirit people would ask us “What must we do to be saved?”

God is now restoring the duality of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The knowledge of this will open the door to a flow of revelation to us. When the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled, indicating that the believers were keeping the feast. At the Feast of Passover, according to the instructions of Moses, the Israelites killed one lamb; but at the Feast of Pentecost, they killed seven lambs. When you see the Lamb of God (the Lion of the tribe of Judah) represented in the New Testament in the book of Revelation, you do not see just a lamb; you see a lamb with seven heads, representing the perfect fullness of Christ in His Church.

At the Feast of Passover a sheaf of grain was waved; but at the Feast of Pentecost the wheat was ground into fine flour and baked in an oven into two loaves which were waved before the Lord (two being the number of Christ and His Church). On the day of Pentecost, described in

the book of Acts, the symbolism of that feast was being manifested. Those believers were the firstfruits of all the earth to come forth (after Christ). This is why we say that the Church was born on the day of Pentecost. It was born in the sense that one hundred and twenty people became the wave offering before the Lord, the first bread which God was going to break and multiply to feed the world.

In the period between Passover and Pentecost, Jesus met with the disciples. We read in Acts 1:4–5: *And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*

The expression "baptized with the Holy Spirit" does not occur again in the book of Acts; only in these words of the Lord is the word *baptize* used in reference to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We read other expressions such as, "They were filled with the Holy Spirit," "The Spirit fell upon them," "Hands were laid upon them and they received the Holy Spirit."

The New Testament opens with the message of John the Baptist: *"And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. As for me, I baptize you in water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not even fit to remove His sandals; He Himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."*

Notice that he was talking about two fires. If you do not bear fruit, you will be cut down and cast into the fire. But if you submit to the Lord, He will baptize you with fire. You either will bear fruit or you will experience the fire of judgment.

“And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” Matthew 3:10–12. The chaff is the substance that clings to the wheat.

When we lay hands on people and prophesy over we want to see them thrust into the threshing and the burning process. No one can be talked into a walk of discipleship. It must be a revelation to them. A work of the cross must be wrought in our life, and the fire must deal with our heart.

Gideon’s victory is a good analogy of this. Each of Gideon’s three hundred had a fire hidden in a vessel—a lamp that was covered—and when the hour came for victory over the Midianites, the trumpets blew, the vessels were broken, and the fires blazed forth. The trumpet is a symbol of prophecy, and the fire in the broken vessel symbolizes the hidden fire of God’s dealing in our life. Their shout, “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon,” symbolizes the living Word that is coming today.

Three hundred men turned aside the armies of an entire nation. But before all that happened, there had to be a sifting. There were thirty-two thousand men in the field. And the test came, “Are you fearful of losing your life? Are you afraid to go all the way and walk with God, then go home.” Twenty-two thousand failed that test and went home. But still there were too many. Gideon took the remaining ten thousand down to the water for another test. Only the watchmen can God use.

The baptism of fire is the process that identifies God’s remnant. First it brings forth the sifting. What is added to the remnant from that time on is pure. In the book of Acts, we read these phrases: “With great power they gave witness to the resurrection,” “Many signs and wonders,” “The word increased,” and “They spoke the Word of God.” Christ was seen by more than five hundred at one time after the

resurrection. God sifted that five hundred down to a remnant of one hundred and twenty who were gathered in the upper room. When God had a remnant, a remnant of fire, then He began to move in a special way.

After John prophesied the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire, Jesus came to Him to be baptized. It was the baptism of the Holy Spirit that He was to receive. The Holy Spirit came upon Him like a dove. And the voice of the Father confirmed His sonship. The Father was well pleased.

After Jesus received the Holy Spirit, He was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness, where He was tempted. He came back, in the power of the Spirit victorious over Satan, and began His ministry. Jesus said, *“I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo”* (literally, “to be baptized with”), *“and how distressed I am until it is accomplished*

It is possible to receive the Holy Spirit without experiencing a baptism of fire.

James and John wanted to sit on the right and left hand of Jesus. *But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”* Mark 10:35–38. This was the same baptism of which Luke wrote, where Jesus said, “I am facing this baptism, and how concerned I am to see it accomplished.” This is the attitude God wants us to have. He wants us not only to receive the Holy Spirit, but enter into the God who is a consuming fire and get the chaff removed. We cannot walk in the full level of anointing and power and ministry until this has taken place.

And they said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized"

After the baptism of fire, you never again find ambition among the apostles. When the cloven tongues of fire sat upon them, ambition and greed disappeared. Even the sense of ownership disappeared. No one said, "This is mine"; that attitude had been burned out of them.

Ambition and greed do not characterize those who truly walk with God. The dealings of God upon a true son will burn away all ambition.

Without the fire we will not have the power and the glory that God wants us to enter into. It is the way into the Kingdom. It is the way to be seated on His right hand or on His left.

When we go through the fire we enter into the sufferings of the Lord. If you suffer with Him, you shall also reign with Him (Romans 8:17). People with whom we used to have fellowship with may thrust us out. It may be unpleasant, but is not suffering.

The sufferings of Christ are the fires that we go through. If we want to reign with Him, we must allow the fire to burn out the self. If we want to inherit the earth, we must be filled with the meekness of Christ. That comes by identifying with Christ Jesus the Lord in His baptism of fire. It is one thing to glorify God for the cross on which Jesus died for us: it is another matter to glorify Him for the cross of Christ whereby we die.

We have to be identified with the fire of God's holiness. As the fire burns within us, changes take place in a very special way. God is doing the deep work of fire in our life because He is looking for worshipers. He is Lord, and we are to have a pure worship before Him. But the

worship God seeks reaches an impasse when we are not a purified channel of worship before Him.

We have to be dedicated to the fire's application. We have to be put us on the threshing floor where we are completely exposed.

Usually the channels of threshing and of fire come internally, from within the Body of Christ. In that way God causes the Body to relate to itself. We are taught to have love and faith for our brother and sister. God will not allow us to walk any other way. Therefore He deals with us until the chaff is burned in the fire.

We need to be concerned with our relationship to the Body of Christ. We must accept our brother and sister even though there are things in their life that are not yet right.

If we are truly filled with the Spirit we will be thrust into the threshing of our life. The chastening of the Lord will be upon us and the dealings of fire will come. When He has tried us, we shall come forth as pure gold.

In the Old Testament, when people were seeking the Lord, they made a sacrifice, and as the sign of their acceptance by the Lord, fire would fall upon the sacrifice. How much more will He bring the fire upon us so that you will be acceptable!

We have to bind the sacrifice to the horns of the altar." The animal sacrifices were tied to the altar so they would not get up and walk off. We are to be a living sacrifice to the Lord.

Malachi prophesied that the Lord would come as a refiner's fire to purify us, so that we may present offerings in righteousness

Judgment and the fires of the Lord will be in the whole earth, but right now the fire is in us. He is purifying us. Our sacrifices and offerings—our praises, our worship, our service—will be just as pure before the Lord as those in New Testament times.

The New Testament believers were basically no more qualified than we are. The reason God could use them was because they went through the fire. God baptized them with the Holy Spirit and fire. He is thoroughly threshing His floor and gathering the wheat into the garner; the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.

God must burn our past out of us until we stand only as a worshiper of the Lord. The fire removes professionalism. It takes away the ambition of seeking a place as James and John did. Our hope is based on the fact that the Lord is threshing us and burning the chaff.

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you. This verse preceding the passage, if any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God. When we go through the fire and speak the living word it will change the age, we will bring down principalities and powers.

God is destroying the obnoxious part of the human nature, especially individuality. He is making us one Body, and that is why individual ambition disappears. The collective visions and the Word that we are receiving become the burning realization of our lives.

When we submit to the fire in our own heart, we will be exactly what God wants us to be. Nothing of the old nature will cling to us. We need to ask the Lord to thresh us and take away the chaff.

God is going to start completing the work of fire within us in order that the judgments of the earth can begin. The judgments are not going to come apart from us. God is in readiness to avenge all disobedience when our obedience is complete (II Corinthians 10:6). First you have to be threshed, and the chaff has to be burned out of us. We will have to experience it. When it becomes a part of our being, then we can release Judgments in the earth.

We release judgments in the earth, because we are praying for God's kingdom to come and every other kingdom brought down.

The reason there are delays in what God has promised to do for us, is because we have not gone through the fire.

The early Church moved effectively because of the baptism of fire that was worked in it along with the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Cloven tongues of fire sat upon them. It was a fulfillment (as Jesus had indicated) of John the Baptist's prophecy that the One coming after him, whose shoes he was not worthy to untie, would baptize the people with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He whose fan was in His hand was going to thresh the floor and gather the wheat into the garner, but the chaff He would burn with unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:11–12).

The chaff is something that grows on the wheat. we are the wheat, and so the Lord flails us. A flail is a manual threshing instrument. The wheat was flailed upon the stone to separate it from the chaff. The chaff was a part of its growth, just as our fleshly old nature is a part of us and is natural to us, we were born with it. It is a problem that only God can solve.

God says, "I will bring the chastening to you as My children, and when I am through dealing with you in My unique way, you will be

separated from the chaff in your nature that must go.” This is what John the Baptist was illustrating when he prophesied about the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the fire. The disciples experienced this baptism of fire on the day of Pentecost and then they became very effective.

The disciples were able to go forth to heal the sick and do various other things through an implicit, implied commission that was given to them by the Lord; and then it seemed to stop. But after the day of Pentecost, after the fire had been applied to their lives and their own carnality had been dealt with, they were able to move consistently. There were no longer the times of doubting and of clouded perception. The fire seemed to burn away those things that had restricted the disciples’ comprehension and dedication.

You never read, in the book of Acts, about the disciples getting into the same kind of dispute that caused the Lord to rebuke them when they were wondering who was to be the greatest. That was before the fire came. I suppose you could point to one controversy. Paul said that he withstood Peter to his face because he was to be blamed (Galatians 2:11–21). But that was not too serious; it was a matter of principle with Paul and a matter of expediency with Peter. There had to be some way for them to get together in that situation; so Paul confronted Peter about his attitude toward the Jews and the Gentiles in the Church. I know of no other conflict between the early apostles.

The apostles seemed to commend one another and build one another up. They walked without ambition. They walked without the independent secular spirit that sometimes afflicts the ministers of the Lord. It was the baptism of fire that came to open the door to that kind of walk.

Although we believe for certain things that God has prophesied over us, those prophecies involve not only us, but often they involve other

individuals as well. What is to prevent them from coming to pass? The factor that God has to work in us is one thing, but God may have to work a factor in another person as well.

God's promise to Abraham had two things in mind: first, the seed of Abraham would be blessed with that entire land; second, the Amorite nation would have complete opportunity to run their course, to follow what was in their own natures and in their own hearts. In God's foreknowledge, He knew that the Amorites would come to the full place of wickedness. Then God would be justified in bringing the wars of annihilation, and He could tell Joshua, "Go in and utterly destroy all of them" (Deuteronomy 7:2).

The Canaanite woman was a "dog." She had no right to be alive. If God's Word had been completely obeyed under Joshua, that woman never would have existed. Her wicked forebears would have been slaughtered in the wars under Joshua. Even though we are completely disinherited, if we have faith, God will still bless us and say, "Go in peace: your faith has brought the answer.

In the days of the Amorites, God said, "I am going to destroy them, but their wickedness will have to run its course. It is going to take about four generations before they have reached the place where any tendency they have to seek me is subordinated to their tendency toward evil and wickedness." When God said, "Destroy them all," He was bringing judgment upon them, and at the same time He was bringing the blessing of inheritance upon His people.

This is exactly what God is doing now. Two things are happening, and we can appropriate them just as completely and quickly as the Lord sets them before us. These are the days when the iniquity in the world is coming to the full, like the iniquity of the Amorites. This is the day when denominationalism has run its course. Babylon must come down. If you

are concerned about all the good people in Babylon, do what the Word of God says. Stand as a believer and pray, “Come out of her, God’s people; be not a partaker of her sins” (Revelation 18:4). Do not condemn the people in Babylon; just be one of the channels of the Spirit that calls them out.

Only one thing holds up the denominational system. God has some people He wants to get out of there first; then it will collapse. According to Revelation 18:19, Babylon will come down in one hour. We know that is a symbolic term, for the book of Revelation contains a great deal of symbolism; it means that she will come down in a very short period of time. Verse 20 says that the apostles and prophets will rejoice because God has judged their judgments upon her. Babylon is both religious and commercial, but all of it is going to come down—all of it!

God has promised His remnant, “Fear not, little flock; it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom” (Luke 12:32). But He desires to let the iniquity in the earth to run its course before we move into our inheritance.

Those who are purified as gold through the fire will have a part to play when Jesus returns to establish the kingdom of God upon the earth

As the God of justice, He is not justified in destroying the “Amorites” before they have had an opportunity to make a full decision to reject God and turn to evil.

The time finally came when the struggle between the two natures within Judas had to be decided. And Judas made his decision. He talked with the Pharisees, he made his bargain, but it still was not complete until that night when he got up and walked out the door. It was not a

demon or an oppression that was harassing him; Satan had entered into his heart.

A smoking wick He will not quench (Isaiah 42:3). As long as there is a little flame, He will hold on to a person. If they have had a revelation, and it is still burning in their heart, He will give them every opportunity and every chance. Neither prophecies nor judgments are fulfilled quickly. We must come to the place where we are either completely given over to believe God or we are completely given over to turn away from Him.

The iniquity, such as that of the Amorite, has to come to the full, but notice the other factor that is involved. *For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ* (what great power we have), *and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.* Notice: when your obedience is complete. II Corinthians 10:4–6.

If a situation were completely right or completely wrong, God could deal with it. we cannot expect God to vindicate us or to bring us blessing in any contest or any matter of decision until our obedience is complete: until the fire of God has gone through us and cleansed us of every unforgiving spirit, every rebellion, every withdrawal, everything in our heart and everything of the old flesh that is wrong. God is ready to judge, but He does not judge until all things are in place.

The Lord is waiting for a people to come forth in the earth who are right. Then He can deal with the wrong. What is holding up the judgment in the earth? There are no righteous people. There is no right side; there are only wrong sides. Why doesn't God judge the wicked?

Because all would be judged; none would be left. Why doesn't God bring back the days of Ananias and Sapphira? Because He would not have any churches left.

Now, in this day, God is gathering a people and putting the baptism of fire to them. He does this so that we will seek first the Kingdom and His righteousness. When we are right because our obedience is complete, then the Lord will be ready to judge all disobedience. But He is not going to do it as long as we have a degree of wrong in our own spirit.

Why does God hold on to the carnal believer? The wick is still flickering; the lamp has not gone out. Why doesn't He discard them when they have done so much that is wrong? There is still some right in them, too. He is saying to the church as He said to the Laodiceans, "I wish you were hot or cold." Get off the fence! Get on one side or the other!

God deals with us so that He will have a righteous remnant in the earth that He can bless.

Men often do things that make them candidates to be removed completely from God's Kingdom and sent into the abyss. But they love God, and God keeps dealing until either the old nature or the new nature in Christ takes over and prevails. The flesh wars against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh; these two are contrary, one to the other, so that they cannot do the thing they would.

We must also remember that we have to let our obedience come to full completion. Knowing the truth that God has spoken, we will struggle to rise up into the completion of our obedience to God. God has both judgment and mercy that He is going to visit upon this generation. Judgment will be on those, like the Amorites, whose

iniquity comes to the full; and blessing will be on those whose obedience comes to completion.

We must totally believe God to move in this generation, for the judgments of the Lord to be in the earth, and for the completion of the Lord's will to be accomplished in His remnant. But while we are praying and contending for this, the practical course is to open our hearts to complete, absolute obedience to the Lord. Heart searching is not a luxury—without it, any one of us might be holding back the whole procession.

The Lord is looking for the person whose heart is right before Him, whose spirit is perfect. We must acknowledge our mistakes and ask for forgiveness. We must repent until He renews a right spirit within us.

Now is the time to walk with an upright heart before the Lord. Let it be said of us, as it was of Daniel, that an excellent spirit is in us (Daniel 5:12). God will bless us to be submissive with a right spirit. We will be victorious if we have a right spirit toward God. This is where our obedience comes to completion. It is not that our experience and our record are always perfect, but that we reach the place where our heart is perfect toward the Lord.

Prepare to walk with Him. Keep an excellent spirit before Him. The course of the whole age can be changed by a few people whose spirits are right toward the Lord.

The way we become righteous is not to put forth great effort and come under a lot of discipline. The Word says, *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness*. It does take effort to hunger and thirst. Righteousness is not produced by what we do; it is produced by our hunger and thirst after it. Only when we want it deeply enough

does the Holy Spirit come to fill us and move in our life in a distinctive way.

A deeper walk with God deals with mountains and valleys—those things that make walking with Him difficult. We must pass over mountains and walk through valleys as we enter in to what God sets before us. The prophecy in Isaiah 40:3–5 will help us understand this more clearly. *A voice is calling, “Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; and let the rough ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley; then the glory of the Lord will be revealed”* (the margin reads, “in order that the glory of the Lord will be revealed”), *“and all flesh will see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”*

Let us also look to a related passage in Matthew 3:1–12. *Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (the margin reads, “has come near”). *For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet, saying, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight!’ ”* This passage in Isaiah is quoted with regard to John the Baptist in each of the four gospels: Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3, and John 1. In each instance the voice of one crying in the wilderness refers to John the Baptist.

Now John himself had a garment of camel’s hair, and a leather belt about his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with your repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

"And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees" (hold that in your mind); "every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. As for me, I baptize you in water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not even fit to remove His sandals; He Himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean His threshing floor...."

This might be difficult for us to comprehend until we understand the old methods of harvesting used in Bible times. First, a hand threshing instrument called a flail was used to thresh the grain. Usually it consisted of a wooden staff with a broad piece of board or a short, thick stick attached to one end by a hinge. The one who did the threshing would swing the board and beat the grain which was lying on the threshing floor, a smooth stone surface.

After flailing the wheat repeatedly in this manner, the thresher tossed it into the wind with a large, wooden winnowing fork. The wheat, being heavier, fell back to the floor, while the chaff blew away. Later it was burned. Psalm 1:4: *...the chaff which the wind driveth away.* The Holy Spirit comes as a fire; He comes also as a wind.

The chaff is the protective covering of nature that is upon the wheat as it grows. Because this part is inedible, it must be separated from the grain. In Luke 6:1–2 the disciples picked a handful of wheat while passing through a field and began rubbing it in their hands to loosen the chaff so that they could eat the wheat. The Pharisees accused them of threshing on the Sabbath day.

The chaff must be separated from the wheat. Afterwards it can be gathered together and burned with fire. It cannot be burned while it is still on the wheat. The entire kernel of wheat represents the Christian; the chaff is the human nature with which we are born. It grows with us from the time we are an infant.

The time must come when God brings some experience to our life that is like a threshing, which takes away that which is natural to us. By the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire, the Lord wants to separate us from the chaff in our life and burn it by the fires of the Holy Spirit. The initial experience in the Holy Spirit does not make us holy. It is the baptism of fire that removes from us the predisposition to a nature that God condemns. It looses us from it and brings us into another dealing of the Lord completely.

Today most people will accept the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but they reject the fire. It is not the reproach now that it was some years ago when people who attended a certain church were called Holy Rollers.

Today people do not stumble over receiving the Holy Spirit, but they do protest and reject the fire that was prophesied would come with that baptism, the fire which deals with the chaff in their lives. They reject the fire that is related to the threshing of the Lord which will separate them from their human nature and bring an end to ambition, and their own personal desires and burdens.

The mountains shall be brought down and the valleys will be filled and a way will be made for the Lord. The fire comes to take the ups and downs out of our lives. Until the Lord threshes the chaff out of our lives, we will continually waver in our walk.

As victims of the old nature and victims of our emotions, we become discouraged and disheartened, hemmed in by the chaff that completely surrounds the nature that God wants to bring forth in us.

The true characteristic of walking with God is the unique way that God works a chastening in our life by disciplining us and working the fire within us. The threshing separates us from it; but the Holy Spirit destroys it with an unquenchable fire.

No one who follows their own understanding will ever come into a walk with God. Too much of it is involved with being threshed. Solomon's Temple was built on the threshing floor of Ornan (II Chronicles 3:1). And on the threshing floor, God is again building up the living stones that will be His temple. The temple of Solomon is a type of irreversible dedication. The stones were finished before they were set in the temple.

Many say yes to the Holy Spirit, feeling that He will help them as they do their own thing. But the baptism of fire will help them to do His thing. The dealings of God's is a key to the Kingdom.

Matthew 3:2 says, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."* When the Word begins to come about the Holy Spirit and the baptism of fire, about the threshing floor and the burning of the chaff, then the Kingdom of heaven is near. The greatest assurance we can have that we are walking in the truth which God has revealed is the fact that we are experiencing the repentance that is necessary for the gospel of the Kingdom to prevail.

We need to Make a fresh dedication, not only to the outcome, but also to the process by which God brings it to pass. Be dedicated to the Kingdom, but be dedicated also to the means by which God brings it about. We have to go through the wilderness of testing, before we walk

in the power of the kingdom. When we Let God put the fire to our chaff, then because of our submission to the means by which God brings about the end, we can move ahead immediately.

God's righteousness is attractive. It is not repulsive like that which we normally find in holiness teaching and the pharisaic attitudes. When we suffer with Him; when we suffer the threshing and the fires upon the chaff then we will reign with Him. The wheat does not lose a thing when it loses its chaff. It brings forth a hundredfold.

We need to observe the manner whereby God moves. On the day of Pentecost, tongues of fire settled upon one hundred and twenty believers. This was the fire that had been prophesied by John the Baptist when he said, "You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Luke 3:16). The fire was more than just a little symbolic flash that settled upon their heads; it was a beautiful work of the grace of God that made the fullness of the Holy Spirit operative.

It is the Holy Spirit, and not just our own spirit, that is warring against our flesh. It is the Holy Spirit operating through our quickened spirit, when we were in the world our spirit was not warring against our flesh. Our spirit was already condemned and consenting to the flesh. We were dead in trespasses and sins, so nothing was operative there.

God moves through the Holy Spirit to bring an end to that conflict. However, when the Holy Spirit comes into an individual, it does not necessarily mean that this conflict is over. Many people who have received the Holy Spirit and spoken in tongues are not free from the flesh; they still find the warfare going on in their lives.

I Corinthians illustrates the fact that a person can receive the Holy Spirit and move in the gifts and still find the coexistence of a strong,

vigorous flesh life that continually nullifies everything he does. Paul wrote that the Corinthians were behind in no gift, with all utterance and all knowledge, waiting for the coming of the Lord. And yet in chapter after chapter throughout this Epistle, you find the evidence of a very fleshly life existing in the Corinthian church. That is why John the Baptist preached about God doing something to the old nature while He was filling people with His Spirit. While baptizing them in the Holy Spirit, God also intended to baptize them with fire.

This is what is described in the second chapter of Acts. When we read John's prophecy in the third chapter of Luke, we understand better why tongues of fire were in evidence when the believers received the Holy Spirit. The spiritual fire is an integral part of a walk in the Spirit today.

The fire destroys that which is feeding the old disposition and the carnal nature in our life. We deal with the basic source of our trouble by putting an axe to the root.

The baptism of fire will deal with the mountains, the valleys, and the crooked roads that plague the life of the believer and make them so ineffective that it requires many years to travel a short distance spiritually. Have you known those deep valleys that make it difficult to reach the beautiful view of the mountains? Let the Holy Spirit eliminate the ups and downs in your life.

The illustrations of laying an axe to the root of a tree, of threshing the wheat from the chaff and then burning the chaff, are very important. They refer to the Holy Spirit and fire that is to complete the work within our heart. God is a consuming fire. We need to throw ourselves into the fire. There is no other path into the Kingdom.

We have to go through the flaming sword that guards the way into Eden

We will be ready to enter the wedding if we purify ourselves and go through the work of the cross; dying out to everything that God wants us to die out to.

Hebrews 12 speaks about the Lord's coming and the end-time events. Verse 14 says that without holiness no man is going to see the Lord. This refers to seeing Him when He breaks through. What we must do to prepare the way of the Lord and make His paths straight, see that the axe is laid to the root of whatever is feeding our life the wrong thing. We need to get the chaff separated from the wheat.

There are many things that are natural to us. They have been with us from the time we were born. When a little baby does not get what he wants, he begins to cry, yelling and stiffening himself. His mother looks at him and says, "Just like his father." She can see the stubborn nature that has been born in him. When a young boy is about ten or twelve years old and is getting out of line, Dad looks at him, somewhat amused, and says, "Hmm. Chip off the old block. I have to do something about this." Taking the boy out to the woodshed, he tries to beat out of him what he has bred into him, hoping to stop the course of the old nature. There is a better way. The baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire can be like an axe being laid to the root of negative things that are growing in our life.

Too many people have become Christians only to find that many things are still smoldering beneath the surface, and they need help. What can we do to change? Be baptized by fire. Welcome it. God gives us an option. We can run away from it if we want to. That is why many people who start to walk with God leave the minute they see the fire, the chastening, and the discipline that will be in their lives.

Do we want to be a vessel of honor in the house of God? Do we want to be a prophet and prophesy the Word of the Lord? What a glorious prospect is before us. The Lord says, "Fine, son. I will make a prophet. I will make you my bond-servant." He takes us to the threshold of the door and rams a hole through our ear.

God is trying to do something in our life to bring us into our spiritual inheritance. A man can come to Gilgal and listen to a pep talk by the generals about how good it will be to take the land of Canaan; but they will never take it that way. Instead, he hears someone say, "All you women go back to the tents and all you men come on over here," as he starts sharpening the knife.

"What are you going to do?"

"It is all right, son. I am going to seal you to the covenant of God's people. You are to go in and inherit Canaan. But first you must be circumcised."

"Will it hurt?"

"Of course it will hurt."

The chaff and the circumcision speak of that which must be cut away because it surrounds and houses the new nature and all of its creativity that is needed to bring forth the will of God in the earth. We may protest, "You're going to make me so that I won't even look human anymore."

"That is right. You are going to be made so that you will appear divine, and when people look at you, they will not see the chaff; they will see your circumcised heart; they will see Jesus."

“Well, if that’s the case, bring on the knife, bring on the axe, and bring on the winnowing fork and the flail. If I have to, I have to.”

No, that is not the right attitude. Welcome it! To lose the old nature is not to create a vacuum. It is to embrace the body and the blood of the Lord and to receive His life as the complete source of our life. The work of the cross is necessary if we want to move into the new life.

There are six aspects which need to be considered concerning our initiative in the fire. In the first step, you submit to the fire. Paul wrote in Romans 12:1: *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God...* You come, saying, “Here I am, Lord; apply the fire.” We will not die; but neither will we remain only half alive like we may be now. When we submit ourselves to the fire, the dross will be burned out, and this conflict of nature will be resolved by the Lord’s life coming forth and prevailing in us.

Our submission to the basic teaching of the Lordship of Jesus Christ initiates this experience of fire. This first step is taken at our initiative. When we become submissive to the will of the Lord, a fire starts in our life. A fire starts to burn wherever a living Word is preached. The living Word shakes a church. The moment God brings a revelation to our heart of His divine order and we begin to submit our life to it, we start going into the fire.

The fire changes people. For this reason we must refuse to see anyone as he was a month ago, six months ago, or six years ago. We cannot see one another after the flesh any longer because God is doing such an amazing thing within us. Sometimes the illusion stays awhile.

Before the Word has been working in our life very long, people look at you and say, “Oh, I know that old rat. I’ve known him a long time.” They judge by the appearance, not perceiving the change that God is working inside of us. There is hardly any of the old you left at all!

The second step of initiative is an aggressive appropriation of the fire. There must be a compulsion in our spirit—call it a yearning, a hunger. *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.* Matthew 5:6.

There must be an aggressive appropriation of the fire. We can back away from it, constantly refuse it, and work around it; we can choose a situation in which we run away from this kind of dealing. And to a great degree, God lets us position ourselves at various levels of His dealing. Those who are on the outskirts of the Lord’s camp are not bothered much by problems or requirements that come up within the Body.

But those of the inner camp attend the tabernacle where the glory is, and that is also where the fire is. In the days of future testing, it will be as it was with Israel: the wrath of God will fall on those on the outskirts of the camp, because they have not submitted to the righteousness of God. This aggressive appropriation of fire seems to be a very necessary move on our part.

The third point concerning our initiative with the fire is the need for a faith to become. We have to believe that we are going to become. All prayers should have that quality of appropriation which believes to become something, which believes for the will of the Lord to be done.

We cannot listen to the promises of the Lord that are being preached to us and then pray, “Lord, if it be Thy will...” He is trying to tell us that it is His will! Are we saying to the Lord, “If it be Thy will, let the fire come”? We know very well that it is the will of God.

Do we want God to refine us? He will. Do not just submit to it; aggressively appropriate it. Believe to become what He wants you to be.

Do we really believe to become a manifested son of God? Do we really believe that we are going to walk in perfection in this generation? Do we believe that we are going to be a refined vessel for the Lord to use? This is where either faith or unbelief enters in. We may say that we believe in a walk with God, but do we believe in the destination of that walk for our own life? Do we accept it? We must have faith to become the will of God.

The fourth step in our initiative is expressed in Hosea 10:12b: *Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord until He comes to rain righteousness on you.* If we want God to do something for us, there is an initial preparation necessary on our part, or else all that God says and all that He would do will have no effect on us. We must get the ground ready: break up the clods, plow it, and harrow it; otherwise when the Lord plants the seed of His Word in our heart and waters it, it will not produce any fruit.

This hundredfold ministry with nothing choking it out, a hundredfold yield returned to the Word of God can come only when the clods have been broken up and the soil has been prepared and made ready for the seed to be planted and watered by the Lord, and for the sun to shine upon it.

If the fallow ground is not prepared properly, that seed springing up will soon die. If we want to conquer Canaan, we first come to Gilgal for the circumcision of heart. We are not prepared to go in and really conquer until the Lord has dealt with our heart and brought this deep

and necessary preparation. Break up that fallow ground. Get ready for the Lord to move!

This is what made the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire described in Acts 2 such a fantastic experience. Notice in the first chapter of Acts that the believers were continually in prayer. Although they tarried in Jerusalem to receive the Holy Spirit, today we can receive the Holy Spirit by faith; no tarrying is required. But the extent to which the Holy Spirit is to operate powerfully in our life may depend greatly on how we have broken up the fallow ground before the Spirit took over.

In the past, many people who tarried and emptied their hearts, wanting to be completely open before the Lord, had a wonderful experience. On one hand, too much introspection—without the appropriation of faith that believed to be filled—resulted in many people waiting longer than they should have. On the other hand, those who came unprepared spoke a few words in tongues, but there was no great experience of the Holy Spirit in their lives because there had not been the necessary preparation. We have to prepare for that which the Lord would bring forth.

The fifth step involves our association with God and with others which will refine us. Practicing the presence of the Lord is probably one of the greatest benefits, because He is a consuming fire. The more we enter in to be close to the Lord, to associate with Him, the more the fire happens. People who walk together in the Spirit are soon all going through the same thing. Paul wrote to one church, “Oh, I rejoice that you have the same conflict which you have seen in me” (Philippians 1:30). In other words, “Welcome aboard! We are all in the battle together. The same conflict that you saw working in me is working in you.” When we are around one another, we partake of the same warfare and the same dealings of the Lord.

The sixth key is worship. Perhaps we have never considered worship in this light, but when we come to worship the Lord, it is as though we throw a match on a pile of wood. We start the fire. In His dealings, God will show us what He wants; then we will have to drag it in, tie it to the horns of the altar, and say, "Now I've initiated it."

In our worship we open our hearts and drag everything in our innermost being right into the presence of the Lord so that He can touch it with His fire. The fire is not ours; the fire is the Lord's. It is His fire that burns, but we initiate the positioning of ourselves so that it can happen. We do not make the fire happen in the sense that we start it and finish it, but we initiate it; we bring everything under the focus of God's dealings, so that God will lay the fire to it.

How many times have we read in the Old Testament about the fire coming down and burning up the sacrifice? They made the altar and brought the sacrifices. After they had made the full preparation for the Lord to be glorified, they said, "Now Lord, where is the fire? Lord, you send the fire." And if they had pleased the Lord in their sacrifice, the fire would come.

The Lord never receives any sincere offering from us that He does not break or burn. He either breaks it, or He burns it. The alabaster box was broken. When five loaves and two fishes were laid in His hands, He blessed them and then He started breaking them. The little boy's mouth was probably watering as he saw his barley cakes and fishes being distributed to the people. He may have sat there hungry while his gift was being broken, blessed, and distributed. It will be that way with us as we come and give the Lord whatever He requires of us. The most beautiful little lamb, the one without any blemish, was burned with fire! That is the way the Lord wants it.

What will happen when we have nothing left but ashes? That is answered in Isaiah 61:3: He will give us beauty for ashes. He takes away the self-reliance, that assertiveness, that pride, all of the grooming of the old flesh. Then we stand before the Lord crying, “O Lord, what a mess I am—a person of unclean lips.” He will solve that by putting a little fire on our tongue to remove the uncleanness, and then we will be able to prophesy until nations fall and the Kingdom arises.

That is the way it will be: we submit in order for the Lord to deal with our heart. The Lord did not choose us because we were so beautiful, so diplomatic, or had such an outgoing personality and great qualities of leadership. He did not choose us for our money either. Why did He choose us? What we have to give Him may not be much, but put it on the altar and let the Lord burn it up. When He is through, we will see that we have been tried as gold in the fire. And we will say like Job, “When He has tried me, I shall come forth as pure gold.”