

## GOD'S FIRE REMOVES THE CURSE

- A. Introduction: The Bible informs us that the years preceding Jesus' second coming be increasingly difficult for a variety of reasons (II Tim 3:1; Matt 24:21-22; etc.). We are talking about what will happen and why (according to the Bible) so that we are better prepared to deal with the troubling times ahead of us.
1. For the past two weeks we've been discussing a final shaking that will occur when Jesus returns (Joel 3:15-16; Haggai 2:6-7; Matt 24:29; Heb 12:26-29). The term final shaking refers primarily to changes in the earth itself in connection with the second coming of Jesus.
    - a. Remember, Almighty God created men and women to become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ, and He made this world to be a home for Himself and His family. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18
    - b. Both the family and the family home have been damaged by sin, beginning with the first man Adam's sin. Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; Rom 5:19; etc.
      1. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin at the Cross so that all who believe on Him can be transformed from sinners into sons and daughters of God. John 1:12-13
      2. He will come again to restore the earth and return it to a fit forever home for Himself and His family. Acts 3:21; Matt 19:27-29; Isa 65:17
  2. Second coming is a broad term that covers a lot of events which unfold over a period of time. People focus on individual events and miss what Jesus' return is all about—completing God's plan.
    - a. We are focusing on the end result: the completion of God's for a family of sons and daughters with whom He can live forever on this earth. From then on, life in the family home will finally be what it was always meant to be—fully glorifying to God and fully satisfying to His family. Rev 21:1-7
    - b. Understanding the end result, and living with the awareness that there is a good end ahead for those who know the Lord, will give us peace of mind and hope as we face increasingly troubling times.
  3. We are examining a statement that Paul the apostle made to a group of Christians who were experiencing challenging times that were going to get worse. He wrote to encourage them to stay faithful to Christ, despite their hardships, because what is ahead far outweighs every present difficulty.
    - a. In his closing exhortation Paul reminded his readers that we belong to an unshakeable kingdom, the kingdom of God. This kingdom is coming to earth when Jesus returns and the arrival of His kingdom will transform and restore the world. This awareness will sustain you now.
    - b. Paul wrote that when God spoke from Mt. Sinai His voice shook the earth, and that He has promised to once more shake both earth and the heavens. Then, only eternal things will be left. Heb 12:26-27
      1. This temporary, corruptible world will one day be replaced by what is everlasting—earth restored to what God always intended it to be before it was damaged by sin.
      2. Heb 12:29—In this context Paul, referred to God as a consuming fire. What did this mean to the people who first read Paul's epistle? That is our topic tonight.
- B. Remember who Paul was writing to—Hebrew (or Jewish) believers in Jesus whose world view was shaped by the Old Testament. The Old Testament refers to God as fire in a number of places.
1. The Bible uses numerous word pictures to describe the Infinite, Almighty God who is in many ways beyond description to our finite minds. One of those word pictures is fire.
    - a. God is referred to as fire, not because He is fire, but to help us understand some things about His person and work. In the Old Testament fire was a symbol of the Lord's presence and power.
    - b. The Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire in a burning bush and then on Mount Sinai. God led Israel on their journey from Egypt to Canaan as a pillar of fire. When they entered Canaan the Lord went before Israel as a consuming fire to destroy their enemies. Ex 3:2; Ex 13:21-22; Ex 14:19-20; Ex 14:24; Ex 19:18; Deut 9:3
      1. Although fire can be destructive because it burns, fire in and of itself isn't bad. It's a blessing.

- Fire gives warmth and light and cooks food. It is both awesome and beautiful to look at.
2. Note that it isn't the fire that determines if something burns. It is the makeup of the object itself. Is it combustible (capable of being burned) or non-combustible (cannot be burned)?
  - c. Israel saw God as a fire that both did and did not burn or consume. When the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush, the bush was not burned (Ex 3:2-3). The same was true at Mount Sinai when Moses went up into the devouring fire of God (the word literally means to eat), yet he was not consumed (Ex 24:17-18).
2. There are also examples in the Old Testament where the expression of God's wrath against sin is referred to as a consuming fire. Nadab and Abihu (sons of Aaron, the first high priest) offered strange fire before the Lord and the fire of the Lord consumed them.
    - a. God gave Israel specific instructions on how to carry out sacrifices to the Lord that would cover sin. When sacrifices began in the completed Tabernacle, God sent His own fire as an emblem of His presence and the means for consuming sacrifices on the altar. Lev 9:23-24
      1. Lev 6:12-13—From that time on, this fire was kept burning continually as a symbol of God's presence and a means of consuming the sacrifices. Strange fire was fire that was used for sacred purposes, but did not come from God.
      2. Nadab and Abihu had been commissioned as priests of God and thoroughly instructed in how to approach the Lord and offer effective sacrifices. They immediately violated this sacred commission by offering strange fire. Lev 10:1-3
      3. This is a serious issue because one of the purposes of these specific sacrifices was to build into human consciousness the fact that there is only one way to God. Otherwise destruction comes.
    - b. The very fire that became the instrument of their destruction would have sanctified and consumed their gift had it been properly applied. Note that in Lev 9:24 the fire of God blazed forth and consumed the burnt offerings (sacrifice) on the altar. Nadab and Abihu had seen that happen.
      1. The significance of the sacrifices is a big topic for another day, but note one point that relates to how the first Christians would have viewed the fire of God. They saw it as a cleansing agent.
        - A. Isa 6:5-7—The prophet Isaiah was sanctified by a burning coal from the altar of God.
        - B. Mal 3:2-3—The coming of the Lord was compared to a refiner's fire that will purge Israel. Metals were refined by separating dross from ore. Metal was heated to liquefy it and solvents were added which mixed with the dross making it easier to extract the pure ore.
      2. The fire of God that consumed the offering was not a picture of destruction and wrath. The Hebrew word translated burnt means to cause to smoke. A sacrifice consumed by fire from God ascended up to Him as a sweet savor, acceptable to Him. Lev 1:9; Lev 4:31
  3. In Deut 4:24 God is called a consuming fire. Note the context. Israel was at the border of Canaan, about to cross over and settle. The Lord warned them (through Moses) that if they worshipped the gods of the people living around them, they would be swept from the land by invaders (v23-28).
    - a. Remember that God connected such events to Himself in the Old Testament to help men see that destruction comes when you are out of right relationship to Me through idol worship.
    - b. Deut 4:33-39—Moses reminded them how and why the Lord showed Himself to them in such a powerful way through the plagues (power demonstrations) in Egypt and as fire—so that they would know that there is no other god. His motive was love. His purposes are always redemptive.
      1. Before we move on we need to address the statement that God is a jealous God. The word jealous in connection with God is always used to describe His attitude toward the worship of false gods. Ex 20:5; Ex 34:14; Deut 6:15
      2. This is not jealousy as humans express it (fear or suspicion of a rival or envy of someone more successful). The word jealous comes from a verb that means to be zealous. God was jealous or zealous for Israel's good. Idol worship brings destruction to all who engage in it.

4. First century Christians (the kind of people that Paul wrote to) knew from the Old Testament that there are two groups of people in the world—those who are God’s and those who are not.
    - a. They further understood that those who are not God’s will ultimately be removed from contact with God, His family, and the family home. Ps 37:37-39; Ps 104:35; etc.
      1. Jude (Jesus’ half-brother) cited a prophecy about the Lord’s coming given to Enoch (who lived in the last years of Adam’s life) that the Lord will come with those who are His and carry out justice on those who are not His. (Justice means removal of the wicked). Jude 14-15
      2. Jesus also affirmed this: So it will be at the end of the world. I, the Son of Man, will send my angels, and they will remove from my Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil, and they will throw them into a furnace and burn them (Matt 13:40-42, NLT).
      3. At that time, (Jesus) will come with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don’t know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ. They will be punished with everlasting destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power when he comes to receive glory and praise from his holy people (II Thess 1:7-10, NLT).
    - b. Separation of those who are God’s and those who aren’t applies not only to those alive on earth when Jesus returns. It includes all who throughout history have rejected God’s offer of salvation through Jesus. No one ceases to exist at death, and all will be affected by His second coming.
      1. When we separate from our bodies at death, our bodies return to dust, but we (the immaterial part of our makeup) pass into another dimension—either Heaven or Hell, depending on how we responded to God’s offer of salvation from sin through Jesus that was given to our generation.
      2. Heaven and Hell are temporary. In connection with Jesus’ return, all those in Heaven will be reunited with their bodies raised from the grave, so they can live on earth after it is restored. Those in Hell will be forever confined to a place called the Lake of Fire and the Second Death. This is all part of restoring the world to what God always intended it to be. Rev 20:11-15
  5. This is the context in which the Hebrew Christians that Paul wrote to would have heard the statement that God is a consuming fire. God’s fire will not destroy this world—it will transform the earth.
- C. The first Christians understood that earth will not be destroyed. It will be restored by the fire of God.
1. II Pet 3:10-12—Peter the apostle gave a fairly detailed description of earth’s coming transformation. The original language (Greek) makes it clear that Peter was not describing earth’s destruction.
    - a. **Pass away** is made up of two Greek words that mean to come or go by and carry the idea of passing from one condition or state to another. The words never means cease to exist. **Elements** is a Greek word that means the most basic components of the physical world (atoms, molecules).
    - b. **Shall melt** (v10), and **dissolve** (v11-12) are the same Greek word and means to loose (John 11:44—loose him and let him go). **Shall melt** (v12) is the Greek word *teko*. We get our English word *thaw* from it. Winter releases its grip when the spring thaw sets in.
      1. The first man, Adam, was not only the head of the human race he was earth’s first steward. As such, his sin had a direct affect on the material creation. Through Adam’s act of disobedience the earth was infused with a curse of corruption and death. Gen 3:17-19
        - A. Rom 5:12—When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire human race. His sin spread death throughout all the world, so that everything began to grow old and die (TLB).
        - B. Rom 8:20-22—For the creation was subjected to frustration (corruption and death), not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it (Adam), in hope that creation itself will (one day) be liberated from its bondage to decay... We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time (NIV).
      2. In connection with the return of Jesus, corruption and death will one day release their grip on

this world and the earth will be loosed from bondage to both.

2. II Pet 3:10—In the earliest Greek manuscript copies of the New Testament, **burned up** is from a Greek word that means found or shown. The idea is not the destruction of earth, but exposure of corruption for the purpose of renewal: And the earth and everything in it will be laid bare (NIV).
    - a. II Pet 3:5-7—The context of Peter’s description of earth’s future makes it clear that he is describing earth’s transformation—not its annihilation. He had just referenced Noah’s flood, stating that the world perished. Earth was not destroyed by flood, it was changed. A surface cleansing occurred.
      1. Noah’s flood did not address the root problem in the heavens (atmosphere, sky, outer space) and the earth—the curse of corruption and death that permeated it when Adam sinned. This problem will be addressed when Jesus returns.
      2. II Pet 3:13—Note that Peter refers to the changed earth as the new heavens and new earth. New (*kainos*) means new in quality or form as opposed to new in time.
    - b. The purification of the heavens and the earth will be accomplished by the Word of God. Fire is used figuratively in scripture to describe God’s Word. Jer 5:14; Jer 23:29; Deut 33:2
      1. The Lord will purge the material elements that make up the physical world with the fire of His Word. Just like He spoke in the beginning and created the heavens and the earth, He will speak again and atoms will be loosed from their present state of corruption.
      2. They’ll be put back together in a new heavens and new earth—the entire universe released from captivity to decay and death. The family home will be restored. Remember, Peter is the one who made reference to the restoration of all things when Jesus returns. Acts 3:21
    - c. Ps 24:1—The earth belongs to the Lord. He is not going to surrender one atom of His material creation to sin, Satan, corruption or death.
      1. God’s plan to restore the family and the family home (His plan of redemption) extends as far as the curse of sin and death is found. Rev 22:3
      2. Col 1:18-20—He (Jesus) was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he’s there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the Cross (The Message Bible).
- D. Conclusion: First century men and women understood that the final shaking that’s coming is good. It will result in the removal of all that is not God’s and the cleansing and restoration of the heavens and the earth.
1. They understood that all who belong to God will return to this world once it is restored to live here forever. Consider two statements from the oldest book in the Bible, the Book of Job.
    - a. Job 19:25-26—Job knew that his body would one day go into the ground. But he also knew that because of the coming Redeemer, he will one day live on this earth again—in his body raised from the grave. Job is in Heaven right now waiting for that day, the second coming of Jesus, because Job knows that he will come home to earth with Jesus.
    - b. Job 38:4-7—God spoke to Job out of a whirlwind and asked Job where he was when he created the world. The Lord revealed that the sons of God (an Old Testament term for angels) witnessed the creation and shouted for joy at the sight.
    - c. When the world is recreated all of God’s redeemed sons and daughters (including you and me) will witness this glorious event, and we too will shout for joy at the sight!!
  2. Despite how dark things may look on earth right now, it’s all temporary. And God will get us through until He gets us out. Our future is bright!! Lots more next week!!