

WHAT IS THE “BAPTISM OF FIRE?”

John the Baptist (baptizer) made reference to the “baptism of fire” in Matthew 3:11 when he saw the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism: *“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire”* (see also Luke 3:16).

Some today preach and pray for people to receive the “baptism of fire.” They believe it to be something desired. However, the context of the passage clearly shows the baptism of fire is not that which anyone should desire, but seek to avoid at all cost!

In the context, John is discussing two kinds of fruit — good and bad. *“...Therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire”* (Matt. 3:10). Likewise in verse 12 he discusses these fruits as “wheat” and “chaff.” *“Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his **wheat** into the garner; but he will **burn up the chaff** with unquenchable **fire**.”*

The two figures used in verses 10 and 12 clearly represent the two kinds of people in John’s audience. He separates: 1) the good from the bad, 2) the wheat from the chaff, 3) the righteous from the wicked. However, not everyone in his audience would receive the “baptism of fire,” but some would — those who are not children of God. Nor would everyone in his audience receive the “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” but some would — the twelve apostles.

The baptism of fire will be received

by the wicked — those who “know not God” and those who “obey not the Gospel” of our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

The baptism of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled when He came upon the twelve apostles on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) and the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:44; 11:15). There is no record of it being received by anyone else.

Some, however, believe the apostles received the baptism of fire when *“...there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them”* (Acts 2:3). But, there is no “baptism of fire” in this verse because these “tongues” were not “fire” but **“like as fire.”** And, they were not immersed in fire, it merely “sat upon each of them.”

The “baptism of fire” is clearly reserved for the wicked. God’s divine wrath will come upon them with unquenchable fire in the final judgment. The parable of the tares vividly describes the Lord separating the good from the bad. He will take the wicked *“And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth”* (Matt. 13:42). Such punishment is described as a “baptism of fire.” No one would desire such a dreadful event!

You can avoid the “baptism of fire” by whole-heartedly obeying the Gospel: **Hear** the Word (John 6:44-45), **Believe** the Word and Jesus Christ (John 8:24), **Repent** of sins (Acts 2:38), **Confess** Jesus as God’s Son (Acts 8:37), be **Baptized** for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16).

—Garland M. Robinson