

THE FIRE OF GOD

3. Fire Consumes Sin & the Wicked



Introduction

We have all seen images on the television of fires raging in different countries, destroying property and everything in its path. The Bible describes God as 'a consuming fire'. That is not a picture that most of us feel comfortable with, but this is an aspect of God's holiness we need to understand.

1. Fire Consumes Sin

The Tabernacle in the wilderness had just been completed and the priests were to begin their ministry. After they were consecrated to the Lord, they brought the offerings on behalf of the people. We see this in Leviticus 9:22-24.

- ◆ Where did the fire that consumed the burnt offering come from?
(It is very clear that this was a supernatural incident. The fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering.)
- ◆ What was the people's response and why do you think they responded this way?
(They shouted for joy because the Lord had accepted their offerings and forgiven their sin. Then they fell face down because of the awesome holy presence of God, who was manifested among them.)

The people of Israel sacrificed sin offerings. This was the means God had given them to receive atonement and forgiveness for their sin before the coming of Jesus. The burnt offering was also for atonement, as well as a sacrifice to show complete surrender to God. Paul had this in mind when he wrote Romans 12:1-2.

- ◆ Compare the sacrifices in the Old Testament with what God is requiring of us now. What are the differences and what are the similarities?
*(Differences - In the Old Testament they offered animals, but we are to offer ourselves.
Similarities - In the Old Testament they were to offer animals that were spotless. We can only come into the presence of the Lord when we are washed clean by the blood of Jesus. He alone is spotless.
- The way to worship God in the Old Testament was to bring sacrifices. When we offer ourselves to God it is an act of worship.*
- ◆ In Leviticus 9, when the sacrifices were given, fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them. What does God do in our lives when we offer ourselves to as living sacrifices?
(Obviously God's fire does not literally consume us, as it did the sacrifices in the Old Testament! However the Holy Spirit comes and works in our lives when we offer ourselves to God, and we are consecrated to his service.)

2. Fire Consumes the Wicked

As we have learnt, the Bible says that 'God is a consuming fire'. We have seen how this fire literally came out from his presence and consumed the sacrifices. We are to offer ourselves as 'living sacrifices', and the 'fire of God', the Holy Spirit, will work in our lives making us holy. This is wonderful news to those of us who have put our trust in Jesus, but a terrible thing for those who refuse to obey him.

- ◆ What happened to Aaron's sons in Leviticus 10:1-3, and why?
(Fire came out from the presence of the Lord, but this time it consumed the priests because there was sin in their lives – they had disobeyed the Lord.)

Aaron and his sons were in the Holy Place where the altar of incense was, facing the Ark of the Covenant. Turn back to Exodus 30:7-9 and read the instructions that God gave concerning what the priests were to do on the altar of incense. The sons of Aaron had not followed God's instruction and they were in his holy presence. God is holy and sin cannot stand in his presence, so they died.

- ◆ Share what you have learnt from the verses we have been looking at.

Conclusion

Our God is a God of love, but it is a holy love. When we come to him, through the blood of Jesus, confess our sin and offer ourselves as a living sacrifice, his fire comes to purify us. However this same fire comes to judge and consume those who are disobedient to him. This is not God's will. His desire is that all men will be saved. We need to understand that! However since God is holy and just, sin has to be dealt with. The accounts in the Old Testament are lessons we can learn from, so that we will love God and reverence him. Let's offer ourselves afresh to him as a living sacrifice.