

LITERAL OR SYMBOLIC FIRE?

"But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same Word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men." – 2 Peter 3:7.

WE HAVE been asked whether this prophecy may be expected to be fulfilled in some way with more or less literalness as, for instance, by electrical displays of lightning, by storms, or in connection with the zone of electrical energy which some scientists believe is approaching the earth, etc., and whether this thought, if accepted as true, would be in line with Exodus 9:23: "And the Lord sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran along upon the ground; and the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt."

We still think that the great fire that the Lord mentions through St. Peter, Zephaniah, the Prophet David and others is to be a symbolic fire. The Prophets declare that the fire of that great Day shall burn up the wicked – root and branch. And it would seem to signify that God's Justice, indignation, will burn against every one who is wicked, and that this fire will go on all through the Millennial Age – "that Day," the thousand-year Day. It will leave of the wicked neither root nor branch.

HUMAN MIND BROADENING TO RIGHTEOUS PRINCIPLES

The fire begins in the beginning of that Day, in the great time of trouble. The fire here would seem to be of this same kind. The judgments of the Lord will be abroad in the earth, and the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. The Lord spoke of a fire being already kindled in the Jewish nation. Trouble came upon them until their entire polity passed away – in the year A. D. 70. And so we see now that more or less there are fires burning

here and there, exposing, to some extent, the evil-doers. – Isa. 26:9; Luke 12:49.

This has been going on for some time, and is to a certain extent broadening the human mind to the principles of justice and injustice. This is taking hold on business methods in a way that was never before known. We hear a great deal about the political chicanery of the present, but the world has never had so righteous, so just and equitable business arrangements as at the present time. And this is not because the people are more *righteous* than their forefathers, but because they are coming to see better methods of business. But present conditions will eventuate in a great time of trouble, in which the Capital element and the Labor element will each seek to burn the other up – and it will, no doubt, be a great conflagration. The whole structure will be involved in anarchy, which, however, will be only temporary, because of the establishment of Messiah's Kingdom.

WATCH, RATHER THAN SPECULATE

As the Apostle Peter seems to imply that the "heavens" will be on fire and the "earth" also, the conflagration might possibly have its beginning in the Church. We see more or less of an excitement now amongst theologians and all classes. We see that people are more or less losing confidence in their leaders of the past, and it looks as though the "heavens" will pass away with a great deal of struggle and great commotion. Just now they are having a little diversion with special attacks on *us*. They do not yet have so much to do against each other, because they are all busily engaged in doing what they can against us.

All this will not interfere with the facts presented in **STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES** – re the change of Dispensations. We have the assurance from the Scriptures that Messiah's Kingdom will bring the world great blessings, and we wonder how these blessings will come. There will be a new arrangement of things in

the affairs of the earth, but just what will be the nature of the physical changes, or how these will be brought about, we do not know. We are not to suppose that there will be another canopy of water to make another Deluge, for the Lord has declared that there will never be another world-wide flood.

It would be very unwise for us to speculate on anything not revealed in the Bible. We prefer to keep our eyes open and not allow our minds to specially dwell on any one theory. Our confidence is not in any one method, but in the ONE who has all power. We feel sure that all He has promised will be fulfilled. It is not necessary to decide the point in our own mind even, let alone mentioning it to others.

SIGNS OF DISPENSATIONAL CHANGES

Then it is to be borne in mind that Joel's account of the Pentecostal blessing is divided into two parts – the blessing upon the servants and handmaidens, and that upon all flesh. According to this, the servants and handmaidens of the Lord have special blessing at the present time. With the conclusion of the blessing of the servants and handmaidens comes the fulfilment of the other prophecy – the pouring out of the Spirit upon all flesh. This evidently refers to the blessing of the whole world by the Church during the thousand years. And in this connection we see that the Lord will show signs and wonders, clouds, "blood [R5318 : page 286] and fire and pillars of smoke." We have no positive knowledge that this language is symbolic. It may refer to social upheaval and combustion, political troubles, financial troubles, and also some great physical manifestations of Divine Power in connection with the time of trouble.

But all this is only suppositionary. We are expecting a change; and if this change shall be accompanied by physical disturbances, *now* is the time for them to be coming. For the Lord says, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy Mountain" –

Kingdom. The supposition that there would be catastrophe *then* would be out of harmony with this prophecy. Rather, the appropriate time, if there are to be such calamities and changes, physical or electrical, would seem to be just now – just at the time when, as the Lord forewarned, there is to be "a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation" – at the time, apparently, when the "four winds," the fallen angels, will become loose.

All of these things together will constitute the "time of trouble such as never was." And from this time of trouble, "Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape." Watch that ye may "escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." – Luke 21:36.

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