THE NEW SHOFAR

Baptism is not just a one-time event. It is a lifelong journey of faith and discipleship.

January 11th

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire

Many commentators will *incorrectly* ascribe this passage to believers and nonbelievers alike. However, what John was in fact saying was that we as believers are baptized in both Spirit **and** fire. ***Fire*** – trials and temptations - will be a part of our life in this world.

Baptism is spoken of in the Bible in several places: **1 Peter 3:20-21:** *at one time having disobeyed, when the longsuffering of God was waiting in the days of Noah, of the ark being prepared, in which a few—that is, eight souls—were saved through water, which also prefigures the baptism now saving you, not a putting away of the filth of flesh, but the demand of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ***.**

In this case, the earth itself was baptized by water. The earth was full of good and evil. The good was preserved through the water while the evil was washed away. In this case, we see both the good and bad being spoken of in the context of baptism. Note how Paul uses baptismal language to express a similar point. **1 Corinthians 10:1-2:** *our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea. And all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea***.** Baptism into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

"Baptism" has long been a part of God's revealed truth

This text is in reference to Israel crossing the Red Sea. In the Red Sea, they went down into the water and came out. In doing so, Israel came out purified of what held them back in Egypt, and the water destroyed the Egyptian armies which followed them. In this case, the good and the evil passed through the water, but the good remains and the evil is destroyed, which the Church has understood as a "kind" of baptism.

We need to look at something else in Peter - **1 Peter 1:6-7**: *at present for a little while if it is being necessary, having been put to grief by various trials, so that the proven genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold, perishing though being refined by fire, may be discovered to result in praise and glory and honour in the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

1 Peter 4:12, ff*: Beloved, do not be surprised at the fire among you taking place for a trial to you, as if a strange thing were happening to you...If you are insulted in the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you... For it is the time for the judgment to have begun from the house of God; and if from us first, what will be the outcome of those disobeying the gospel of God?* A fiery trial because the Spirit of God rests upon you. Keep this in mind. Note that Peter is talking about judgement. Judgement day *begins* with believers, not the wicked. We cannot hide from it.

Every person will be judged by fire – are we ready?

Let us now look at **1 Corinthians 3:13:** *Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.* **Every man** will be judged by fire. One of the common misconceptions is when people assume baptism by fire and burning of chaff with unquenchable fire, along with the burning of the tree which does not bear fruit, as all being statements regarding the wicked, that only the wicked will pass through the fire. That the only fire is the fire of hell. But in the Bible, God himself is a consuming fire (**Hebrews 12:29**) and one day, all must stand before him in judgement. Everyone will be tried by fire, whether righteous or unrighteous. Will the fire refine us as gold and burn away the admixture and impurities, making us perfect in the presence of God? Or will the fire consume us into the second death – the death that is eternal suffering (**Revelation 20:14**)?

When John says: "*the axe is laid at the root of the tree. Cut down every tree that is not producing fruit and throw it into the fire*. His audience is exclusively those who wish to understand what they must do *after being baptized*. We are the seed, which the water of baptism grows into the tree. But whether we produce fruit or not is the question. The tree which does not bear fruit is not a nonbeliever. It is he who believes and is baptized and yet does not "*bear fruit in keeping with repentance."* The fiery trials will consume us. We are the seed which is choked out by the thorns (**Luke 8:7**). The baptism of Spirit and fire is the trial that comes *after receiving the Holy Spirit*. They are the temptations for us to take short cuts, to marginalise the place of Christ in all aspects of our daily living. Those trials are the temptations we overcome and so are made stronger. They include all those things that make us half-hearted, going through the motions but not standing out as Christ-lights in our world. This is the experience of Jesus, who, after the Spirit descended and remained on him (**John 1:32**) at his baptism, he was then "*immediately led into the wilderness to be tested*" (**Matthew 4:1**). Receiving the Spirit is not the end, it is the beginning. This "once saved always saved" is a fallacy that some Christians take as a mantra. The truth is we must keep producing works. We must endure through trials because these trials shape us into perfection. Even Jesus was made perfect and learned obedience by the things which he suffered (**Hebrews 5:8**). This is how we become perfect. We are gold, being refined by the fire. We are wheat that is covered in chaff. The chaff is burnt up, but the wheat remains.

It is not possible for any person to avoid a fire judgment

Fire is a symbol of judgement in the Bible. If judgement begins with the house of God, then how can we expect to avoid the fire? *Whether we like it or not, God will judge ALL of us without partiality* (**Romans 2:11, 2 Corinthians 5:10**). The question at the beginning of this new year is whether we understand that we are living under the judgment of God now, today, in the present age. Judgement day for the righteous is now. And that offers us our New Year challenge. Are we living as people who have passed through the waters of the Flood, of the Red Sea? Are we living as people set free from the burden of sin, set free so that we can light the Light of Christ in the world around us? The Holy Spirit is refining us by fire, judging us that we may adjust our lives (repent) and repeat, collaborate more fully with the ongoing saving works of God in creation. The Hebrew people came through the waters and found their way to the Promised Land. We are no different. All we need to be doing is “walk” God will do the rest, feeding, guiding, protecting, watering and making us his own special, Chosen

People fit for the kind of home God alone can provide. Today’s celebration invites us to make 2026 the year of producing fruit in new areas of our lives as disciples.