

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.***

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

#04-1039

Lake of Fire

April 10, 2010

The last two issues were devoted to *gehenna* to prove that it does not refer to the pagan concept of a living *hell*, a place of literal fire in which people who are alive in death (i.e., afterlife) are tortured and tormented forever and ever and ever. In Scripture, we discover that the phrases *the second death* (Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8) and *the lake of fire* (Revelation 19:20; 20:10, 14, 15) occur exclusively in *The Revelation*. It is safe to state that many Christians interpret *the lake of fire* as one and the same as *the pagan hell*. I use the word *pagan* in order to stress that the *hell* many Christians believe in comes from pagan thought and not God's word. But, if *the lake of fire* is not a living hell based on paganism, what is it?

As he was on the isle of Patmos, John was given *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, and, in that revelation, he saw the Lord sitting upon a great white throne set to judge all the great and the small that had been made alive (raised from the state of death) through the **second resurrection** or a **resurrection of life** (the righteous) and a **resurrection of judgment** (the wicked) (Acts 24:14-15; John 5:28-29). Please see issues #02-0838, June 6, 2008, *You Surely Will Not Die!*; #02-0839, June 13, 2008, *All Who Are in the Tombs Will Hear*; and #02-0840, June 20, 2008, *Sons of the Resurrection*. John beheld the judgment of the deeds or works of the righteous and the unrighteous, and the unrighteous being thrown into the lake of fire, for their names were not found written in the book of life.

First, it is essential that we understand what fire symbolizes or signifies according to Scripture. It is true that the destructive force of physical fire has been employed as divine judgment, as when Sodom and Gomorrah were judged for their gross immorality and going after strange flesh (Genesis 19:24; Jude 1:7), which is the first mention of fire in Scripture. Following the law of first mention, we need to be reminded that **the spiritual is not first, but the natural is first; then the spiritual** (1 Corinthians 15:46 NASB), and that we need to be **taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words** (1 Corinthians 2:13 NASB). When we follow this course, it is easy to understand that the physical or natural brimstone and fire that rained on these immoral cities signify the spiritual truth that God intends to judge the works or deeds of the carnal flesh of man, not for his annihilation but for his correction and restoration back to God. It is similar to Paul's teaching that we must put off the old man (fallen Adamic-life), which was crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6), and put on the new man (risen Christ-life), **which after God is created in true righteousness and holiness** (Ephesians 4:24 KJV). Nothing good dwells in the flesh of the old man, for the law of sin dwells there, making it hostile to God (Romans 7:5, 25; 8:7).

Second, the remedy to the law of sin is the law of God, which is signified by fire. The fire of God is the law of God.

Consider these verses: **"Is not My word like fire?" declares the LORD, "and like a hammer which shatters a rock?"** (Jeremiah 23:29 NASB). **The voice of the LORD hews out flames of fire** (Psalm 29:7 NASB). **"Out of the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; and on earth He let you see His great fire, and you heard His words [commands, law] from the midst of the fire"** (Deuteronomy 4:36 NASB). **From his right hand went a fiery law for them** (Deuteronomy 33:2 KJV). God's word is His law, and it is a fiery law.

The fact of the matter is that law comes forth from a throne, and God's throne is described as a blazing flame of fire. Both Daniel and John were given visions of the judgment of God going forth from His throne. Compare Daniel 7:9-10 and Revelation 20:11-15, and you will discover that Daniel saw the throne of God ablaze with fire, along with a river of fire flowing from the throne, and John saw the river as a lake of fire before the throne. Putting the two visions together reveals that the source of the fire is the throne. In fact, the throne is ablaze with fire, which speaks of the law emanating from God Himself.

(9) “I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow and the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames. Its wheels were a burning fire. (10) A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him; thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; the court sat, and the books were opened.” (Daniel 7:9-10 NASB)

(11) Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. (12) And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. (13) And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. (14) Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. (15) And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15 NASB)

Daniel was shown the throne with thousands attending to the Ancient of Days and myriads upon myriads standing before the One on the throne. Clearly, this is a judicial scene, for the court sat. In other words, it is a scene of the divine court room in which judgments are made. The King is seated, and from His throne come forth judgments. In our day, a judge sits upon a bench and makes judgments of lawlessness by applying what is written in the books of law that he is sworn to uphold. In Daniel’s vision, books were opened, which refer to the law by which the court judges the myriads standing before the Ancient of Days. No injustice or partiality will come forth from this court; all will be judged according to the righteousness and impartial justice of God, as expressed in His law.

John’s vision reveals who are summoned to appear before the court of God. They are the great and the small that were not included in the first resurrection. They are standing before the throne to be judged according to their works. It is their works or deeds that are subjected to the fiery law of God as signified by the lake of fire. The works, not the people, will be consumed by God’s fire. Law judges works.

But take note of the difference between the two visions: Daniel saw a river flowing from the throne and John saw a lake before the throne. Taken together, we are given a more complete vision of God’s judgment. The fiery law of God flows from His throne as a river that grows into a lake. A lake can be defined as “a place where a river widens out greatly,” and this is what John observed. The law of God will go forth like a river of fire that widens out so greatly that it becomes like a lake of fire that engulfs the myriads upon myriads standing before the throne. A river could flow on endlessly, but God’s river becomes a lake, meaning that it has limits. It will not flow endlessly, for it has a limitation on its time and use. Simply, when it has accomplished its purpose, it will be no more.

We know that there is a limit to the time and use of the lake of fire, for it is called the second death, and all death must be abolished in order for God’s Son to deliver up the kingdom, so that God the Father may be all in all new (1 Corinthians 15:24-28) at the consummation of the eons. The second death means that all the works of sinful flesh are judged and brought into death. The second death is *a type* of death that contrasts it from the first type of death. The first death pertains to the physical body, and the second death pertains to works and deeds performed while in the body of sinful flesh. Simply, *the lake of fire* will purge and cleanse all the works or deeds of fallen man; no dross will remain. This is the purpose of the lake of fire; it is not for the purpose of torture or annihilation; rather, it is for correction and restoration, for the law is holy, spiritual, and good (Romans 7:12, 14, 16; 1 Timothy 1:8), and God, who is Holy and Spirit and Love, **will have all men to be saved and come into the knowledge of the truth** (1 Timothy 2:4 KJV). The truth is that His plan is **to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him [His Son], whether things on earth or things in heaven** (Colossians 1:20). The truth is that God loves the world! The truth is that God, in His love, will save all mankind, without exception, and make all things new, so that He may be all in all new. The lake of fire is essential in bringing about God’s purpose of the eons. Eventually, all the unrighteous and wicked will be saved through the fiery law of God. Will one suffer loss? Yes! Will it be a temporary torment of one’s soul? Probably! Will one be tortured for eternity? No!

If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Corinthians 3:15 NASB); the lake of the fiery law of God.