

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)

#05-1120

Brimstone — Agent of Love

January 20, 2011

It can be stated without much, if any, contradiction that when most people hear the word *brimstone*, they conjure up images of people being tormented (actually, more like tortured) in a fiery place called *hell*. If you have followed my writings, you know that I abhor such a thought, for it maligns the loving and merciful character of God, and, besides, it is not based on scripture but on pagan religion.

In the physical sense, the English word *brimstone* simply refers to sulfur (sulphur). The word is traced to the Old English word *brynstan*, which is made up of *brin*, meaning "to burn," and *stan*, meaning "stone." Taken from the ground, sulfur, which has the atomic number 16, appears as a bright yellow crystalline solid that burns easily; hence, it is called a **burning stone**.

Sulfur is one of the oldest known substances used as a fungicide (kills fungus) and pesticide (kills pests). It is a component in fertilizer, black gun powder, and matches, and is used in the process of manufacturing cellophane, rayon, rubber, bleaching paper, and a host of other products.

Also, it is an essential element of life, being found in two amino acids, cysteine and methionine, and it is used to save lives and fight infections by being formulated into a form of drug called **sulfa drugs**.

As such, in a physical or natural sense, sulfur is not a bad thing, for it has many good uses, especially when it comes to life and its preservation. On the other hand, it can also be used to kill.

However, when it comes to its spiritual meaning or application, the traditions of men have built up quite a bias against the word *brimstone*. Bible dictionaries generally identify *brimstone* as sulfur (sulphur), an inflammable mineral substance found in quantities on the shores of the Dead Sea, which is a most appropriate understanding of the word. However, most go on to define it as denoting destruction or punishment and expressing **the idea of excruciating torment**. This is based on the literal destruction of the ancient cities on the plain, Sodom and Gomorrah, and on a literal and torturous lake of fire.

The question is this: Is there a spiritual meaning to *brimstone* that goes beyond physical destruction of the flesh? Of course, I reject the excruciating torment part.

The first mention of *brimstone* is found in the account of the Lord judging Sodom and Gomorrah by totally destroying the cities of the plain by fire and brimstone. There was no torture in this judgment; it was simply a total destruction of the city and its inhabitants. All who died on the plain will be raised up in the second resurrection to face the Great White Throne Judgment.

(24) Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone [gophriyth] and fire from the LORD out of heaven, (25) and He overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. (Genesis 19:24-25 NASB)

The Hebrew word for *brimstone* is *gophriyth*, which is related to cypress resin and, by analogy, inflammable (burning) sulphur, and is derived from the Hebrew word *gopher*, which is identified with a type of wood, in particular, cypress wood. If you recall, Noah was commanded to make the ark out of gopher wood (Genesis 6:14).

In the New Testament, the first mention of *brimstone* comes from Jesus as He referred to the ancient judgment in Lot's day, and the last mention in scripture is associated with the Great White Throne Judgment and the lake of fire.

But on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone [theion] from heaven and destroyed them all. (Luke 17:29 NASB)

"But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone [theion], which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8 NASB)

The Greek word for *brimstone* is *theion*, which conveys the sense of flashing, as in inflammable sulphur, and is derived from *theios*, which means "**divine, godhead.**"

Now, putting all these notes together, spiritually speaking, I propose that brimstone denotes something good, not bad, for it speaks of God's means of cleansing the flesh of man. In the physical sense, it was used to literally destroy sinful flesh (i.e., death of the body, not torture), but, in the spiritual sense, it signifies (figuratively speaking) the cleansing of man from his sinful nature and works of the flesh. Its ultimate purpose is salvation, not destruction or annihilation. Let us consider a few points.

First, generally, the first mention of a Hebrew word in the Old Testament sets the meaning for the Greek word in the New Testament when the same Hebrew verse is repeated or referenced in the New Testament. As such, in its primal meaning, brimstone refers to gopher wood, which was used to save Noah and his family who were brought safely through the water; in type, baptized into Christ through His resurrection (1 Peter 3:20-21). Salvation!

Second, in the Greek, *brimstone* is also connected to that which is *divine*. Many probably think of it as connected to Satan and hell, but this is not so, for there is a divine meaning attached to brimstone.

Third, brimstone is like **a sulfa drug** used to fight off infection and disease in the mortal body. In the spiritual sense, it signifies the agent by which God cleanses or, if you will, purges unbelievers from the works or deeds of the flesh (Revelation 20:13). All the wicked or unjust will be judged before the Great White Throne and will have a part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. As I have written elsewhere, the **lake of fire signifies the righteous and holy law of God** that will purge (cleanse) the wicked of their works of the flesh, teach them righteousness, make restitution for their evil deeds against others, and, ultimately, reconcile and restore them to God. The second death is the death of their works of sinful flesh, not annihilation of their existence or torture of their body. We could say that brimstone is the treatment of disease (sinful deeds) and the preserver of life.

Fourth, the atomic number for sulfur is **16**, which is the number of **love**. **God is love**, and in His love He mercifully judges, even the unjust, for the purpose of leading all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth through the man Christ Jesus (Anointed, Messiah) who gave Himself a ransom for all, not just some or a few but ALL (1 Timothy 2:4-6). Thus, at the heart of brimstone is *God is love!*

Fifth, the gematria for the Hebrew word for *brimstone* is 693, which is a factor of 9 times 77. The number **9** signifies **judgment**, and the number **7** signifies **divine perfection** or **perfection of what is in view**. The number **77** could signify either a **double witness** or a factor of 7 times 10 with the number **10** signifying **ordinal completion** or **perfection of divine order**, as well as **the fullness of law and responsibility**. As a whole, these numbers all point to God's perfect judgment. Thus, brimstone signifies God bringing about His divine, perfect order that will ultimately include the unjust. At the consummation of the ages, the unrighteous will join the ranks of the righteous company of God.

Sixth, the gematria for *brimstone* in Greek is **144**, which signifies **the first resurrection saints**. 144 is also the multiplication of 12 by 12, and the number **12** signifies **divine government** or the **perfection of divine government**; and is the primary number of **New Jerusalem** (Revelation 21-22). I recognize that brimstone is not associated with the first resurrection; but, what about brimstone being associated with God establishing His divine government on a new earth that has been cleansed from all deeds of sinful flesh (2 Peter 3:10)? However, to bring all mankind into His Kingdom and immortality, He must purge the unjust, those outside New Jerusalem, as well. Thus, fire and brimstone are God's way of establishing His divine government in the hearts of **all** mankind, none excluded.

In conclusion, **brimstone** could be called **the sulfa drug of God** that will cleanse and purge all mankind of sinful deeds, so that by the consummation of the ages, all will be restored to God, so that the Father will be **All in All New** (1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Revelation 21:5), proving **love never fails!** **Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!** (Romans 11:33 NASB)