

THE SECRET OF HIS PURPOSE THE PLAN FOR THE FULLNESS OF THE TIMES
TO HEAD UP ALL THINGS IN THE KING,
EVERYTHING IN THE HEAVENS AND ON THE EARTH,
IN JESUS....

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#61

Second Death—Lake of Fire

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For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. (1 Corinthians 15:25-26 NASB)

Then death and the unseen [hades] were cast [thrown] into the lake of fire. This is the second death—the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:14 CLV [YLT; NASB])

It is a safe conclusion that a vast majority of Christians have been taught that John's vision of the lake of fire represents what is commonly called *hell*, an eternal place of torment, even torture, with no possible way of escape, for the multitudes of so-called *lost*. Actually, John makes no such assertions. What he does tell us is that those who are cast into the lake are outside New Jerusalem, as they experience something called the *second death*.

Although the second death and the lake of fire are synonymous in John's vision, it seems that most teaching on the subject focuses on the fire and less on the death, especially the word *second*. (Exception: those who see death as total annihilation.) Most also present fire as if it is a bad thing, when the fact of the matter is that *God is a consuming fire*, and this attribute is a good thing—*God is love*, and His fire is driven by His love for humanity, not unto destruction but unto His glory. God's fire is about *divine purification*. Let us not overlook the fact that the one who was given a vision of the lake of fire is the same apostle of love who tells us that God is love.

Many have written about John's vision in Revelation 20, especially in light of Daniel's very similar vision of a stream of fire coming forth from the throne of God, received about 700 years prior. Most, if not all, of these writings are along the line of one of several schools of eschatological thought (i.e., end-time teaching) that are used to interpret *Revelation*. This article is not about eschatology per se, so no one view is presented. Rather, this article offers a different approach to explain John's vision of the second death—the lake of fire. Part of this approach relies heavily on Paul's epistles, for he best explains John's vision of the second death.

What is Death?

To begin, death, in a very general sense, is the cessation of anything, most notably of life but also of things seen (objects, works) and unseen (hopes, dreams, visions, etc.). So, the second death is the cessation of something, but what does this mean?

It is obvious that the distinguishing feature of this death is that it is a second death and by inference is the last death. There is no direct use of the term *first* death in scripture, and the term *second* death is used only four times, all in the book of Revelation. By inference, if there is a second, there must be a first. On one level, it seems obvious enough that the first death must refer to the death and hades of Revelation 20:14 that is associated with the first Adam. But, if

this is the only explanation, why not simply use the same language of 1 Corinthians 15:26 and declare that death and hades are abolished? Why refer to this as the second, unless it has some specific meaning or purpose? As will be shown, it has a grand purpose in fulfilling God's ultimate purpose of all.

As a reminder, God's principle that runs throughout scripture is: *He takes away the first to establish the second* (Hebrews 10:9), meaning the second has far more significance than the first. Now, let us see how this plays out with the first and second deaths.

The first death refers to the first Adam's death. ***In Adam all die***. The second death refers to the last Adam's (second man's) death. ***One (Christ) died for all, consequently all died***. Notice that both men brought a form of death to ALL. However, the difference between the two deaths is that the first death produces nothing beyond death; it is life unto death. Even the concept of so-called *life after death* is still only death. Immortal, incorruptible life—that is, life in a spirit-animated body comes only through resurrection and a complete transformation. But, in a reverse of Adam's death, the second death, which is the last Adam's (Jesus') death, produces life; it is death unto life. ***In Christ all will be made alive***.

Simply, Adam's entire race experiences two deaths, one in the first Adam and one in the last Adam (*Yeshua*). However, only through Jesus's death is there life. The lake of fire and brimstone signifies the spiritual fire of God that purifies by consuming (bringing into death) the old man (carnal flesh) and his works and bringing forth the new man (spirit energized) in God's Son.

My conclusion is this—the second death and the lake of fire are unequivocally and absolutely essential for every single person born of Adam's race, without exception. Paul pretty much tells us that God has placed all humanity in the same prison, so to speak. We all start from the same position before God. Perhaps, we could call it a death prison, for this is how we appear to God apart from His Son.

For God locks up all together in stubbornness, that He should be merciful to all. O, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How inscrutable are His judgments, and untraceable His ways!" For, who knew the mind of the Lord? or, who became His adviser? or, who gives to Him first, and it will be repaid Him? seeing that out of Him and through Him and for Him is all: to Him be the glory for the eons! Amen! (Romans 11:32-36 CLV)

Regardless of what label (i.e., saved or lost) one puts on people, all will experientially identify with the second death—passing through the consuming fire of God, whether it is described as a fiery stream coming from the throne of God, as in Daniel 7; or a fiery lake in the midst of the throne of God, as in Revelation 20; or simply called the *consuming fire of God*, as in Hebrews 12:29. The difference between each and every one is in timing, severity, and how long the fiery-divine purification will last. The question is who will be hurt by the second death and who will not. Even though all must go through it, some will be hurt or injured by it, others will not (i.e., conquerors). The injury is never described as a fatal wound nor as an endless injury, as if it can never be healed; it is eonian (as in, for a season or an age). The good news is that by the consummation of the ages, all will be healed and there will be no unbelievers. Why? The glory

and absolute victory of Christ's death and resurrection demands that the time will come when there will no longer be any outside the will of God, for all will bow and all will confess, even those who have been angry at the Lord.

"Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. "I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance. "They will say of Me, 'Only in the LORD are righteousness and strength.' Men will come to Him, and all who were angry at Him will be put to shame. (Isaiah 45:22-24 NASB)

For this reason, also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11 NASB)

The word *bow* means that one willingly and reverently prostrates himself before the Lord. It does not mean one will be forced to his knees by the angels, as some teach. Besides, no one can say, "*Jesus is Lord,*" except by the holy spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3).

All are judged, whether through what is called *the bema*, the judgment seat of God and of Christ, or the judgment emanating from the great white throne, which, as I see it, are similar ways of describing the same throne, although the timing may vary. Judgment brings out the truth. Jesus is the truth (John 14:6), and the truth will make you free (John 8:32). *So, if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed* (John 8:36). The goal of judgment is to take away the first order of sin and death in order to establish the second order, so that God the Father may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28). *Behold, I am making all things new* (Revelation 21:5). This is the ultimate purpose of God. All will be free indeed, free from sin and death, and all will come into the glorious liberty of the life of the Son, for it is the Father's good pleasure to bring many sons unto glory and to fill His whole creation with the glory of the Lord. This is truly good news!

Two Men—Two Deaths

According to Paul's gospel, there are only two men in view, and all matters related to death are explained through these two men, both of whom experienced deaths with profound impacts on all mankind, none excluded. They are the first Adam, the first man from the earth, and the last Adam, the second man from heaven who is the Son of God, the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus, the King, and the Messiah of Israel. (Throughout the following, I interchange the word *Christ*, which is not Jesus' surname but a title, with the equally acceptable *Messiah*, *Anointed One*, or *King*.)

That's what it means when the Bible says, "The first man, Adam, became a living natural being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. (1 Corinthians 15:45 Kingdom NT)

The first man is from the ground, and is made of earth; the second man is from heaven. (1 Corinthians 15:47 Kingdom NT)

Humanity is divided according to these two men—those who are in the first Adam (living natural being; occupying a nature-animated body) and those who are in the last Adam (life-giving spirit; becoming a spirit-animated body); or stated another way, those who are in the first man and those who are in the second man; or using Paul's terminology, those who are *in Adam* and those who are *in Christ*. Interestingly, Christ is referred to as the last Adam but not as the second Adam. Why? Perhaps there are no more Adams after Jesus, who is the consummation of all that humanity is meant to be. The good news is that all humanity is destined to be alive in the Messiah.

All die in Adam, you see, and all will be made alive in the Messiah. (1 Corinthians 15:22 Kingdom NT)

In his Romans epistle, Paul contrasts the work of these two men that is summed up in two words—death and life. Notice his use of the words *one* and *many* as he unfolds the justification of life to all men (mankind, men and women).

For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. So then as through one transgression there resulted ***condemnation to all men***, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted ***justification of life to all men***. For as through the one man's disobedience ***the many*** were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One ***the many*** will be made righteous. (Romans 5:19 NASB [bold italic added])

The many are included in or identified with one of two men. Actually, all men (humanity), as the many, start in the first one (first Adam), who is a type of Him who was to come (Romans 5:14), and all mankind, as the many, end in the second one (last Adam, Jesus Christ). Paul presents a rather simple equation: Adam + the many = ALL; Christ + the many = ALL.

Another way to look at this is that the two Adams stand apart from the rest of mankind that are called *the many*. By the way, Paul's use of the expression *the many* came from Isaiah 53:11: *The righteous one, My servant, will justify the many, He will bear their iniquities*. Some argue that the use of the word *many* rules out the word *all*, but Paul disproves this by clearly linking *the many* to *all men*. The use of the word *many* is used to express that there will be a vast number of men and women that will be brought into life. It could be likened to the great multitude which no one could count (Revelation 7:9). Consequently, Isaiah and Paul saw the many, not the few. Besides, *the many* were made sinners, and *all* have sinned (Romans 3:23).

We need to be very clear that both the condemnation and the justification Paul speak of came through death—Adam's death when he transgressed God's one command and Christ's death when He was crucified on a cross for the sin of the world. (This is critical to understanding the second death.) The one transgression led to death coming upon the entire human race from which no man is excluded, for all die. The one act of righteousness that came through death led to life for the entire human race from which no man is excluded, for all men will be drawn or dragged into life by a life-giving spirit.

"And when I have been lifted up from the earth, I will draw [literally, drag] all people to Myself." (John 12:32 Kingdom NT)

Based on Paul's comparison of the two men, the first death speaks of the first Adam's death and the second death speaks of the last Adam's (Messiah's) death. As all the affairs (history) of mankind are summed up in two men so are the two deaths, and, by the consummation of the eons (ages), everyone born of Adam's race will have been brought through both deaths into life, each in their own order (1 Corinthians 15:23). Technically, death in all its forms has already been dealt a death blow, so to speak, but it is being worked out in our present age and will continue to be worked out throughout the ages to come. Ultimately, the condemnation to *all* men will fully yield to the glory of the justification of life to *all* men. The last enemy that will be abolished is death (1 Corinthians 15:26), for no longer will there be death (Revelation 21:4).

Now, let us consider the two deaths.

The First Death

The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:16-17 NASB)

Without doubt, there are many interpretations of what happened in the garden, specifically what changes came upon Adam and Eve and what they passed onto their progeny. In some respects, the theological debates over Genesis are moot, for all one needs to do is look at the history of mankind to get a pretty good picture of man's condition that had its genesis in our ancient parents. Sin and death pretty much sum up the history of humanity, even in the midst of all that we would call *good*.

Although we are focusing on sin and death, do not for a moment think that all is lost in our day as if there is no good. History is filled with good. Down through history, if there had been no good, then evil would have prevailed and eventually would have destroyed everything, for that is what it does best. It is good that has kept evil in check. God knows what He is doing!

As an aside, when Elohim finished restoring the earth, He said it was very good. In other words, the material creation was very good; it was not evil. We need to be careful we do not take on a platonic view that says the material world is evil and we must become some disembodied spirit-being that ceases to have any connection to the material creation. God's intent has been and continues to be to bring both heaven and earth into union.

Now, there were two trees in the garden, one that gave life and one that gave death. In the case of Adam and his race, the key to our understanding is discovered in these two trees, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which could be called the *tree of death*.

Some commentators, undoubtedly, would take exception to the term *tree of death*—as their thinking goes, man was meant to partake of both trees, but in the proper order; the tree of life was to be partaken of first. Is there enough to go on in scripture to support this? Not sure! At any

rate, I use the term *tree of death* in relation to Adam *after* he transgressed, not before. Did the fruit of that tree not produce death? Given the obvious answer, I use the term to describe what scripture tells us happened, not so much what it meant prior to Adam's one transgression.

The antidote for the tree of knowledge is the tree of life, for without the tree of life even the knowledge of good is death. Adam partook of the "death" tree and God barred his way to the "life" tree; consequently, death in all its forms of cessation came upon Adam's being (consequently, his entire race). We could say that sin infected man much like a disease and the result or conclusion of this infection is death. (As we will see, there is another antidote for this infection, and it is called *fire* and *brimstone*.) Paul gives us the best explanation of what occurred. Although he does not call it such, consider what Paul has to say about the first death. For the inquiring mind, two renderings of Romans 5:12 are presented to provide further depth to the matter.

Therefore, even as through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin death, and thus death passed into all mankind, on which all sinned.... (Romans 5:12 CLV)

Because of this (Therefore; That is why), just as through one man (through the act or agency of one person) The Sin (or: the failure; the miss of the target; the deviation from the goal) entered into the ordered System (the world of religion, culture, economy and government; or both religious and secular society; or the cosmos) and through The Sin (failure; the mistake; the miss of target; the deviation) The death also, in this way The Death thus also passed through in all directions (or: came through the midst causing division and duality; went throughout) into all mankind (or: into the midst of humanity; or to all the people), upon which [situation and condition], all sinned (or: everyone fails and misses the target, falls short of the goal, makes mistakes and deviates from the goal). (Romans 5:12 Jonathan Mitchell's NT)

For as in Adam all die.... (1 Corinthians 15:22 NASB)

By the way; 1 Corinthians 15 is one of the great chapters of all scripture as Paul defends the bodily resurrection of Christ, and, consequently, the bodily resurrection (i.e., *redemption of our body*; Romans 8:23) of all humanity, each in their own order. Simply, Paul defends the glory of putting off mortality (corruption, death) and putting on immortality (incorruption, life beyond death).

It is commonly taught that Adam passed sin onto his progeny, but this is not entirely accurate. What he introduced into mankind is sin, but what he passed onto mankind is death. Sin came first, for the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). The *Concordant Literal New Testament* (CLV) cited above attempts to make this distinction with the awkward-sounding phrase *death passed through into all mankind, on which all sinned*. On Adam's side, it is sin then death, but on our side, it is death (mortality) then sin.

This explains why a fetus can die in the womb or a newborn can die immediately in the birth canal or upon birth, having committed no sin. Unfortunately, it does not take very long for the sin nature to surface, for as Paul tells us, *sin reigns in death* (Romans 5:21), meaning that because we are mortal, we sin. In a sense, we have no choice; it is programmed into our DNA because we

live in mortal bodies and this is where sin resides, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23).

Adam introduced sin into his race (not into God's entire creation; at least as far as we are told), and death followed. Adam's race has inherited death and in death all sin. It is a proven fact that *in Adam all die*, and all humans born on planet earth are born in Adam with the exception of Jesus the Christ, the last Adam who is of an entirely different realm or order, yet fully human.

In other words, all born of Adam's race, without exception, are born mortal; that is, all are born into the process of dying that culminates in the body going into the grave and returning to the dust (soil) of the earth, the soul or experiences of the body going to the unseen or sheol-hades where the dead do not know anything (Ecclesiastes 9:5), and the spirit (breath) of man returning to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

Now, some argue that the death Adam experienced was not of the body but entirely of the spirit, meaning it was a *spiritual* death. They see death as mutually exclusive, meaning it only included the spirit and excluded the body. I see it as mutually inclusive, both of spirit and body.

Part of their premise is based on the two phrases *in the day* and *you will surely die*. As their argument goes, Adam was formed from the soil of the earth as a mortal and was destined to die, regardless of his one transgression. They insist the expression refers only to the actual day that Adam partook of the tree, and it is all about spiritual death with nothing to do with physical death or any other type of death, for that matter—they exclude other forms of death.

Two literal translations of the same verse help to explain the death that came upon Adam and his race.

... and of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou dost not eat of it, for in the day of thine eating of it—dying thou dost die.' (Genesis 2:17 YLT)

Yet from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you are not to be eating from it, for in the day you eat from it, to die shall you be dying. (Genesis 2:17 CLV)

Another way to state this warning is *you are dying to die*, meaning that dying is the process and to die is the consummation of the process, if you will, the final act of the process is the grave. To be sure, the spirit of Adam was affected in that day, but it did not die in that day, as in cease to exist (annihilation). If it had died, Adam would have died physically as well. When the Lord God formed Adam out of the soil of the earth (i.e., formed a body), He breathed into his nostrils the breath or spirit of life and he became a living soul (Genesis 2:9). The spirit is what gives life, take away the spirit and life ceases. As James 2:26 says, *the body without the spirit is dead*. To nail down the point, so to speak, the breath of life is not restricted to man.

All flesh that moved on the earth perished, birds and cattle and beasts and every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth, and all mankind; of all that was on the dry land, all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, died. (Genesis 7:21-22 NASB)

However, this does raise the question of whether death is restricted entirely to the body. Again, turning to Paul, who reminds us that man is comprised of spirit, soul, and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23), the answer is no; death is mutually inclusive and involves all three components of man—spirit, soul, and body. The body degrades and eventually goes into the grave with no inherent ability to get out; the soul is self-centered, fixated on "I and me" and continually misses the mark (sins) by pleasing the flesh (the carnal, temporal body) as it tries to gain the world (Mark 8:36); and the spirit of man is isolated from God's spirit so he knows nothing of a God-centered spiritual life, for the spirit of God is not within him. In this sense, we could say that the spirit is dead to God but not to man. History proves it and scripture, especially Paul's epistles, explain it.

For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. (Romans 8:6-10 NASB)

Paul makes the point for us that death is multifaceted, having affected more than the body, as evidenced by the mind set on the flesh (temporal, mortal body) is death. In other words, when man caters to, even worships, his carnal or bodily desires, it produces death. A mind set on the flesh is obsessed with all that gives pleasure through the senses of the body.

As an aside, some see the senses of the body as inherently evil. I don't see it this way, for God created man this way and it is very good. The problem is that sin distorts these senses or, we could say, makes them out of balance as they become part and parcel of the self-centered life that caters to the body (carnal flesh and mind). It is the "I" life, the life of self.

The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), and Adam brought all mankind into sin and death; consequently, everything associated with the first Adam is death. Mankind did not enter the realm of life as typified by the tree of life; mankind entered into the realm of death and everything associated with this realm is death. The good news is that the remedy for this death is for one to come into the death of Christ that rises out of the grave into the realm of life and to receive the indwelling of the spirit of God and of the King, that is, the King in you (Colossians 1:27). Without the spirit of God, the spirit of man has no meaningful relationship with God, for he does not know how to please God. In fact, in this condition, man has a groan within that cries out to God for deliverance from the toil of life on earth. The cry is: Why?

Why Have You Forsaken Me?

My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning. O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer; and by night, but I have no rest. (Psalm 22:1-2 NASB)

Truly, when David first penned these words, his soul was in deep anguish as he felt abandoned by his God. He cried out, but there was no answer to satisfy his groaning; there was no rest from

his forsakenness. He was all alone in his darkness. Let us be clear that this was David's cry; it belonged to him well before the King of kings arrived on the scene. But then, Jesus as the last Adam, the second man, the Messiah and the King, went to the cross for all humanity. As He looked out on His creation and the men and women before Him, Jesus quoted David's psalm and cried out, taking these words as His own cry of anguish.

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" (Matthew 27:46 NASB)

We might think that the Son of God cried out these infamous words for Himself, but we must remember that He is also the Son of Man. This cry echoed back into time to the garden when the first Adam knew a dramatic change had taken place. Adam and his race were banished from partaking of the tree of life, and they were cast out onto a cursed ground that they had to work with the sweat of their faces if they were to eat. Their world became one of thorns and thistles with death all around. Everything returned to the soil or ground of the earth!

And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3:17-19 ESV)

Surely, at times, this curse was too much to bear, and the first Adam must have cried out as the last Adam cried out. Why? Why have you made it so hard for us to live? And, considering the history of man, this cry has gone forth countless times from the anguished souls of men and women who have found life so hard, so full of toil and sweat, so full of death and wickedness. It has been the 6000-yearlong cry of mankind as if forsaken by their God. (Of course, in Jesus, this is rectified.) Apart from God, there is no rest from their toil, no rest from the effects of sin and death.

However, the good news is that Jesus took on sinful flesh as the last Adam, cried out on the cross for all humanity that has been under the curse brought on by the first Adam. There is now a sabbath rest for the people of God, a seventh day when all the toil ceases (Hebrews 4). This day is in Christ.

We need to be reminded that although the problem of sin and death has been settled in Jesus, neither sin nor death has been abolished as of today. We know it will be one day, for the last enemy death is destined to be abolished because Jesus has overcome death.

There is another truth to be added to this to provide some glorious balance. Although there is a day yet future, we are in what could be called a *now day in Jesus*. All that our Lord is in His mighty victory is ours today; not just some far-off day. Take the matter of the sabbath rest, the Messiah is God's sabbath rest! Meaning—all who are in the King today are already in the rest of God. It is a now rest!

Old Man, Sinful Flesh

Nevertheless, overall, mankind continues to suffer as the first Adam. The epistles use various terms and means to describe this realm of death that permeates all of the first Adam. Two terms are *the old man* (Romans 6:6; Ephesians 4:22; Colossian 3:9) and *the flesh*. Paul saw sin dwelling in him and nothing good dwelling in his flesh (Romans 7:17-18).

For clarification, in our present context, the flesh refers to that which is corruptible and prone to go its own way, not God's way. It is the carnal nature of fallen man (e.g., faulty thinking). The physical body itself can be referred to as the flesh as well, but this is different from the carnal nature. Again, as a reminder, on the sixth day, after God had restored the earth to glory, Elohim pronounced that all was very good. In that day, Adam's body was part of the very good. So, we shouldn't consider that which Elohim made to be in His image as something not good. The body is good; it is death and sin that defiles and corrupts it, and that is our present focus. This is an important distinction, for, as far back as Plato, some have looked upon all matter, including the body, as evil and something that has to be shed.

Jesus came in the likeness of flesh, and, as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh (Romans 8:3). As cited already, the mind set on the flesh is death; the flesh is hostile toward God; and the flesh cannot please God. Much more clarity is given by Paul in his epistle to the Galatians as he lists the symptoms of the flesh. We could say that he is describing a disease. The flesh sets its desires against the spirit; consequently, there is a present danger for all.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:16-21 NASB)

Another symptom of the flesh is described through the word *lust*, which means "longing." We could say that the carnal flesh longs for something other than God and His life in His Son; it longs for that which can only bring forth death.

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (James 1:14-15 ESV)

You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. (James 4:2 ESV)

For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (2 Peter 1:4 NASB)

Then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties.... (2 Peter 2:9-10 NASB)

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (1 John 2:16 NASB)

The flesh is also described or inferred through the word *carnal*, meaning worldly, not spiritual.

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:1 KJV)

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? (1 Corinthians 3:1-4 KJV)
If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? (1 Corinthians 9:11 KJV)

There are various teachings about all these verses, especially regarding Paul's understanding of the law and the flesh; however, these should serve to highlight the nature of the old man and the symptoms of death that permeate this man. It should not be lost on us that there is a tension between these two natures—between the realm of death for the old man and the realm of life for the new man who has an earnest of the spirit of God dwelling within. For this reason, Paul exhorts us to put off or lay aside the old man or old self and put on the new man or new self (Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-10). Paul gives us another exhortation that deals with the carnal mind.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2 ESV)

For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace: (Romans 8:6 Webster)

The mind of the old man is conformed and shaped by the world system (man's system) that is passing away (going into death). The carnal mind must be changed or transformed into the mind of Christ, coming into the realm of God, where there is life and the knowing and doing of God's will.

Another way of describing what happened in the garden is that Adam's actions resulted in God's earth falling from His spiritual realm, in which heaven and earth were created in union with one another—into the carnal realm, in which heaven and earth became separated and, we could say, dysfunctionally carnal.

The Second Death

Now, let us move onto the second death, for here we discover the death of all that is associated with the first death, none excluded. We could say it is the death of death. Stated another way—death is the tool or means by which death itself is defeated. All that is of sin and related to sin is dealt with in the second death, which is as inclusive as the first death is inclusive. However, as we go forward, let us be clear on one vital point—the second death is not like the first death. The first death is like leaven and the only way to stop it is through the fire of the second death, the lake of fire. This places the second death on an entirely different plane.

The last Adam or the second man also experienced death but with an entirely different result. The first Adam's death produced death that permeated all realms of man's constitution, but the last Adam's death rectifies all that the first Adam brought upon his race and produces life in all of man's constitution, as well as in God's entire creation. The death of the last Adam leads to life for all in all that constitutes a human—spirit, soul, and body.

Paul does not use the term *second death*, but he explains it for us.

For the love of Christ is constraining us, judging this, that, if One died for the sake of all, consequently all died. And He died for the sake of all that those who are living should by no means still be living to themselves, but to the One dying and being roused for their sakes." So that we, from now on, are acquainted with no one according to flesh. Yet even if we have known Christ according to flesh, nevertheless now we know Him so no longer." So that, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: the primitive passed by. Lo! there has come new!" Yet all is of God, Who conciliates us to Himself through Christ, and is giving us the dispensation of the conciliation, how that God was in Christ, conciliating the world to Himself, not reckoning their offenses to them, and placing in us the word of the conciliation." (2 Corinthians 5:14-19 CLV)

This particular translation uses an *if...then* clause: If Christ died for all, consequently, all died. It is a clausal relationship: If we agree that Christ died for all, which, according to scripture, He did, then all died. Death to all is a consequence of the death of the one. To repeat, He died for all, therefore all died. Don't read over this statement too quickly, for this is paramount in our understanding of the good news. Therefore, or consequently, or as a result of Christ's death, ALL DIED as well! The fact of the matter is that when Christ died, He took all men and women with Him into the grave, none excluded. Let's make it more personal—you and I died nearly 2,000 years ago! All humanity was rendered dead!

Obviously, all mankind did not literally die physically in that day. But in the eyes of God, the entirety of the human race that was dead in transgressions has been brought into Christ's death to die to the transgressions (i.e., sin). This means that Christ brought the *first* Adam's death into His death. This is the death of death, the second death.

All are brought into the *last* Adam's death so that all may rise up out of the grave into life as a new creation; this is the life of the new man or the second man. All are destined for resurrection and transformation, not all at the same time but all eventually.

As an aside, commentators generally see Paul's reference to the flesh in the above verses as relating to God no longer recognizing anyone according to their birthright, bloodline, or heritage, specifically that of the Jew. This is an undeniable fact and one that Paul clearly makes throughout his writings, including in these particular verses. However, this does not exclude the much larger picture of the good news that death has been swallowed up in life and that there is a new creation in God's pattern Son. All things have become new in the Messiah, and this newness comes through His death to all that is of the first Adam and through His resurrection to life for all. The good news is that God is not charging the world's transgressions against it; He conciliated Himself or made peace with the world, and this is all because of the one who died, died for all; consequently, all died with Him. How can God hold transgressions against a dead man? What would this gain? He is dead. *The wages of sin is death*, and the penalty has been paid in full by the ultimate and absolute death of the Son of God and the plunging of all humanity into this death. This is the second death.

Consider this, if all of the human race was brought into the Son's death by God Himself, meaning man had no choice in the matter, then how does man come out of this death on his own? Simply, on our own, we have nothing within us to give us life again. While we were still in our sinful carnal nature (old man), the Son of God's love came and took this old ungodly life to the grave. *For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly* (Romans 5:6). It seems that people, generally, read this verse and see it applying only to those who somehow figure out how to save themselves. Paul made no such assertion. All of Adam's race was in a state of ungodliness and helplessness when the lamb of God, at the foreordained and appointed time (Acts 2:23), died for the sin of the whole world as the Savior of the world.

All were bound in sin and death. *Unbind him, and let him go* (John 11:44)—this is what the second death is about.

The only way into life is through the one who brought all of us into His death in the first place. We cannot do it no matter how much so-called *free will* we think we have. Only God can do it. *But God!* (John 1:12-13; Romans 9:16). If we are dead by God's own doing, then only God can give us life. The good news is that God has done it, is doing it, and will continue to do it until the consummation of the ages, *for God wills all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth* (1 Timothy 2:4).

Some might argue that this is not so based on Paul's own words in 2 Corinthians 5:15: *He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf*. Isn't Paul restricting the *all that died* to those who exercise their free will to believe? Doesn't *the all* refer to only believers? No! Emphatically, no! One has to read this into Paul's gospel. *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men* (Titus 2:11). Paul fixes our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, *especially* of believers (1 Timothy 4:10). The word *especially* does not mean "exclusively." It is simply Paul's way of singling out the believers of this age, but it does not follow that he is excluding all mankind from ever coming into life. Keep in mind that, like all writers, Paul had a specific audience in mind that he sought to encourage and exhort. The fact is that Paul indicates each will come in according to his own rank or order: *In Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order* (1

Corinthians 15:22-23). So that we are not tempted to think 1 Corinthians 5:14 stands alone in Paul's gospel, consider what he has to say in his Roman's epistle.

Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:8-11 NASB)

The second death has won the victory for all mankind, for the Anointed One overcame or conquered death. This is what is meant by *never to die again* and *death no longer is master over Him*. He also died to sin once for all, and He now lives for God. Death and sin have been conquered by Messiah Jesus through His death, as proven and declared by His resurrection (Romans 1:3-4). It is a fact that not only was death dealt with in the Messiah's death but so was sin. He died to sin once for all. His death was a death sentence on sin as well as on death. He now has the keys of death and of hades (Revelation 1:18).

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:54-55 ESV)

JESUS HAS FIXED IT ALL! This is the good news of the King. We are to stand in this truth and withstand in it. We are to walk in this truth and to glory in it. God is love has undone all that was wrought by the first Adam. He has fixed the entirety of mankind and creation in His beloved Son.

God is love. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. (1 John 4:8, 10; 2:2)

The fix is in for those of the whole world, not just us. It is presently being worked out. On our part, we are to reckon ourselves crucified with Yeshua, meaning we are dead men and women as far as our old man (old self, old "I") is concerned. This was Paul's testimony.

I am crucified with Christ, and no longer live, I, but Christ lives in me; but in that I now live in flesh, I live by faith, the faith of the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me. (Galatians 2:20 DNT)

This translation properly notes that Paul's faith was the faith *of* the Son, meaning Paul had no faith of his own. He was given the faith of Jesus which then became his faith. His personal testimony supports this: *But the grace of our Lord surpassingly over-abounded with faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus* (1 Timothy 1:14 DNT).

There is a present-day identification with Christ's death, the second death. The "I" used by Paul refers to the self-centered "I" of the old man, the carnal nature. Stated another way; my old "I" that thrived in the first death no longer lives, I live by the new "I," the new life that came out of the second death and thrives in the life of Christ, the second man.

Paul not only saw himself crucified but also all who believe as well. This also connects back to Romans 6:8, if we have died with Christ. In Colossians, Paul makes it more emphatic—you *have died*. As such, we are to consider the members of our body that sin as dead to the outworking of this sin. Again, lay aside the old self with its practices (Colossian 3:9).

So, if you were raised to life with the king, search for the things that are above, where the king is seated at God's right hand! Think about the things that are above, not the things that belong on the earth. ***Don't you see: you died, and your life has been hidden with the king, in God!*** When the king is revealed (and he is your life, remember), then you too will be revealed with him in glory. (Colossians 3:3-5 Kingdom NT (bold italic added))

As an aside, it seems that some commentators separate this objective truth of being crucified with Christ from the working out of this truth (i.e., putting off the old man, dying to self, taking up our cross, etc.) as if there is an additional death in play. I see no need to divide it this way based on the simple concept of two men, two deaths. The objective truth and the experiential working out of this truth are mutually inclusive. That we must work out this truth does not weaken the power of it; it glorifies it, for we come to see that it must be all of the King or nothing. We come to see our total and absolute need for Yeshua who is our salvation. His grace is sufficient in the working out of this truth. Again, Paul who had a weakness in his flesh gives us the example to follow.

And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. (2 Corinthians 12:9 NASB)

As to the matter of the all-sufficiency of grace, Paul links the grace of God to working out this objective truth.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:11-14 NASB)

Grace brings salvation to all men; men do not go looking for it, God brings it. This one fact alone takes all the pressure off any of us trying to save ourselves even after we know we are saved. Too many Christians live in fear that they might lose their salvation or make God so mad that He will toast them along with all the other billions of lost souls who are in hell or going to hell. What a lie! Relax, God's grace has saved you, is saving you, and will save you. And, guess what? He is going to do it for all as well, none excluded! No man will boast in himself; all will boast in the Lord.

The good news is that grace is not a one-time phenomenon. In verse 11, the word *instructing* is better translated *chastening*, meaning the grace of God chastens us to live sensibly. Grace has a continuing purpose in our lives that pertains to us walking in a manner pleasing to God. If grace

given to save us is a free gift, do you not think grace given to chasten us unto a godly life is not a free gift as well?

Chastening is required because there is often a tension within us that ebbs and flows as a battle is fought between our flesh and the spirit. Given this tension, our experience sometimes lags behind the objective truth. However, we are to press on toward the goal (Philippians 3:14) and, as we do, hold it by faith as we work out our salvation as God works in us to will and to work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13). The good news is that in time the spirit rules and by grace the flesh is subdued. In the King, there is only victory, there is no such thing as defeat. Then, one day, we will be resurrected and transfigured into the likeness of Christ with immortal glorified, spiritual, celestial bodies that embody and can transcend both the physical (seen) and spiritual (unseen) realms. Just as we have borne the image of the earthly, we will *also* bear the image of the heavenly (celestial) (1 Corinthians 15:49). This does not mean we forever depart from the earthly as Plato taught. Instead, we will image both the earthly and the heavenly. In resurrection, heaven comes to earth in a new body that is animated by spirit not by the natural given to all flesh and blood creatures. It is God's intent for heaven and earth to be married. The second death is the precursor or the means to resurrection life.

Conformed to His Death

Now, this leads to being conformed to His death. Paul came to see the way to deal with the old man within us is to experientially identify with Christ's death, not simply in word but in a life that dies to self; again, it is the crucified life. We might be tempted to think we have to work up a head of steam, so to speak, in order to do this, but not so. It can only come by experientially knowing Him and the power of His resurrection, knowing the power of His life.

This means knowing him, knowing the power of his resurrection, and knowing the partnership of his sufferings. It means sharing the form and pattern of his death, so that somehow, I may arrive at the final resurrection [out-resurrection] from the dead (Philippians 3:10-11 Kingdom NT [Wuest])

Paul sought to be included in the out-resurrection from among the dead. But his way was by being conformed to the death of his master, even by partnering with His sufferings. Paul sought to be conformed to the second death, the very death of Christ. Mind you, Paul was not stating he could die for the sin of the world, which is impossible for anyone of Adam's race to do. He sought to die to all of himself, that is, to his own carnal will, which is essential for all to do. His heart was like his Lord's heart: *Not My will, but Yours be done* (Luke 22:42). This was a complete dying to self, all in accord with the words of Jesus.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:24-26 NASB)

And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?" (Luke 9:23-25 NASB)

On this side of the cross, taking up our cross is a death to the old man. Taking up our cross is declaring that I have been crucified with Christ. My old way was death. My new way is life. Let's add another word from Paul.

But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. (Galatians 6:14-15 NASB)

What matters is new creation (from the Kingdom NT). Oh, if we could only get this deep within our being and live there in the reality of new creation! We are a new creation, and our old creation must die by going through the second death of the Messiah Jesus, which includes a death to the world system, the spirit of the world (1 Corinthians 2:12).

Paul (along with the other apostles) is an example of one dying to self and, as such, being experientially conformed to His death, which, as I have been making the case for, is the second death. Paul declared that he died daily (1 Corinthians 15:31) for the good news to go forth, and his testimony bore this out. For example, read 2 Corinthians 6:3-10 and 11:23-29. If this isn't enough, then read of his trials in Acts.

All of us who are going on in the Lord in this age are called to walk in this same path. We are to die to a self-centered life set on pleasing the flesh. We are to lay down our lives for one another as Jesus laid down His life for all. Love demands it! We are to put off the old that loves self and put on the new that loves all mankind and especially the Lord. As we do, we become more and more like Jesus, was and is, and are truly conquerors or overcomers who are walking in a manner worthy of the God who invites us into His own kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12).

Is it an easy walk? Is death easy? No! It is a walk of suffering (Romans 8:17-18), fiery trials (James 1:2; 1 Peter 4:12), tribulations (Acts 14:22), persecutions (Matthew 5:10; 13:21; Acts 8:11; Romans 8:35; 1 Timothy 3:12), discipline (Hebrews 12:1-11), striving and contending (Luke 13:24; 1 Timothy 4:10; Jude 1:3), and learning obedience as Jesus learned obedience (Hebrews 5:8). The good news is that those of us in this age who are granted the grace and faith of Jesus to believe have the opportunity to experience the second death by the same grace and faith while we continue to occupy *the body of this death* (Romans 7:24). If we do, we will not be hurt by the second death. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 7:24)!

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death. (Revelation 2:10-11 ESV)

Notice that it does not state the conquerors will not experience or pass through the second death; it states they *will not be hurt by it*. Why? Because they will have been conformed to the image of Yeshua and like the three Hebrews walking through the furnace of fire with Yahweh by their side, they will not be hurt by the fire of the second death.

Men will experience the second death either now in this age while occupying mortal bodies or later when all the dead are resurrected unto judgment. This is not a physical death; it is the death of sin, or we could say, the death of the old sin nature, the carnal nature (flesh) of the first Adam, the death of being a slave to sin. Jesus tells us that this death is related to the soul-life.

For whosoever may be wanting to save his soul (life) shall be destroying it. Yet whoever should be destroying his soul (life) on My account shall be finding it. (Matthew 16:25 CLV)

Christ is in us and we are in Christ *now*, not later—as such, even as we occupy mortal bodies, we have a new creation life in us (the inner man) that allows us to be conformed to His image on a daily basis as, by grace through the faith of the Son, we die to self and live according to His life and His love as we await the resurrection and transfiguration, and our full inheritance in the kingdom of God. The earnest of the spirit of the Lord within us ensures us of this (Ephesians 1:13-14). As the Lord's people, we are to have hearts like Paul's heart that willingly and voluntarily take up our cross knowing that His grace is sufficient, so that we too can share in the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death so that we might be conformed to His image sooner than later. Without suffering there is no glory (Romans 8:17).

Summary of the Two Deaths

Understanding the two deaths and their ramifications is so important that we need to summarize what has been stated so far before moving onto the fire of God.

It seems that, in the sight of God, there are only two deaths. The first man or the first Adam brought death into all mankind; thus, this death is rightfully called *the first death*. The second man or the last Adam took all mankind into death with Him; thus, this death is rightfully called *the second death*. Christ died for ALL, consequently ALL died!

The first man's death is different from the second man's death. The first Adam's death has no way out; it is simply death and, of course, sin reigns in this death. All of us are born mortal and we experience death—mortality. However, the last Adam's death is entirely different. The second death is a death to death and sin, resulting in life for all. The second death kills mortality and ushers in immortality. It kills the old man and births the new man, the new creation in Christ where God is all in all. It kills sin and ushers in righteousness. It takes the unclean and produces the clean. The second man's death takes away sin altogether, meaning it takes away the sin nature entirely, not simply sins. *Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* (John 1:29), who bore the sins of many (Hebrews 9:28). Therefore, the second man's death is not like the first man's death; it is the second death. It is the death of death! This death is essential—out from it, God raises up the human race into life, the life of His Son.

We are called to have a life that radiates a likeness of the second death, conquering through knowing Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. We are to be immersed (baptized) into His death, experientially identifying with His death. It is a call to die to a self-centered nature and to live by a Christ-centered nature, living and walking by the spirit of God (Galatians 5:25). It is a life that declares: *Not my will, but Yours be done!*

The out-resurrection awaits all who press on toward the goal for the prize—they will attain to it in the day of the King. They will not be hurt by the second death associated with the final judgment of all, for they will have already been identified with and experientially brought through the second death while they have occupied mortal bodies. They are ones who live by the power of His resurrection until the second death has no power over them.

In order that I might come to know Him in an experiential way, and to come to know experientially the power of His resurrection and a joint-participation in His sufferings, being brought to the place where my life radiates a likeness to His death; if by any means I might arrive at the goal, namely, the out-resurrection from among those who are dead. (Philippians 3:10-11 Wuest, *An Expanded Translation*)

Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 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 3:12-14 NASB)

This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in this first resurrection: over them the second death hath no dominion; but they shall be, [nay] are, priests of God and of his Messiah; and they will reign with him the thousand years. (Revelation 20:5-6 Murdock)

Perhaps Jesus' word on the death of a grain of wheat best describes the second death.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him. "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose, I came to this hour." (John 12:24-27 NASB)

The grain dies, but, in a sense, it does not, for out of the grain, the seed form, comes a new life, a resurrection life, a much greater form that bears much fruit. This is what we are all called into, a life that falls into the ground and dies to its grain nature in order to produce new growth and thus new life. Jesus is the consummate example of one who fell into the ground to die. He came to do His Father's will, and His will was to fall into the ground and die. We are called into nothing less. We die to live. *For you have died and your life is hidden with the King in God. When the King, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory* (Colossians 3:3-4).

Now, this leads to another truth that is linked to the second death. We know that, in Revelation 20, the second death is also called *the lake of fire*. Consequently, death and fire are joined as one, which further explains the nature of the second death. It is a death by fire. As we will see, all must go through this fire to reach God's glorious new beginning. We must live in and by our Lord and Savior today so that we will be raised up in glory in His day. It is more about being than doing!

Good and Essential Nature of Fire

What is fire? Fire is combustion or burning; a substance combines chemically with oxygen from the air and typically gives out bright light, heat, and smoke. The word *burn* means to consume, but this does not mean total annihilation in the absolute sense, for the basic elements are not destroyed in fire; the fuel of the fire simply changes. Another definition states that fire is the rapid combination with fuel in the presence of heat, typically characterized by flame, a body of incandescent (luminous with intense heat) gas that contains and sustains the reaction and emits light and heat. Oxygen + fuel = heat = fire. Others define fire as that which works at the atomic level to divide the elements.

Einstein's *Law of Conservation of Energy* states that energy is neither created nor destroyed; it can only change form. This is basically what happens with fire. When any matter burns, it undergoes change and energy is transferred, meaning fire is not a totally destructive force as if when the flame has ceased nothing remains. Fuel that is fired simply changes form or chemical structure. We might not see the change or recognize it, but it is there.

In the natural realm, consider what would happen if man did not have literal fire. Man could not live throughout the earth without fire. Need we be reminded that the inner core of our planet contains fire that erupts to the surface through volcanoes? Fire is essential for cooking, heating, manufacturing, purifying, cleansing, and, in our modern world, generating energy that runs practically everything we depend upon in our daily lives. Most cars run on fire; most power plants run on fire; petroleum products are produced by fire; steel is formed by fire; precious metals (gold, silver) are refined by fire; solar power comes from the sun, a huge ball of fire, to name a few examples. Even our human bodies are, to some degree, forms of fire, for we generate heat within our cells to maintain an average temperature of 98.6 degrees F. Without the ability to make heat through fire, mankind would be restricted to the year-round warmer areas of the globe. Needless to say, fire is essential for us to live on planet earth.

Fire is also a purifying and cleansing agent, for, in a good sense, it removes impurities and unwanted materials. Although disputed by some, others credit the *Great Fire of London in 1666* for slowing the bubonic plague that is estimated to have killed 100,000 people in England. The fire is suspected of killing off rodents and fleas that carried the pestilence. Another example involves forestry. Have you ever observed a forest that has been destroyed by fire? In time, out of the ashes comes forth new growth as the forest comes alive again. Even well-established forests need to be control-burned periodically so that new and better growth will come forth. These controlled burns are necessary to remove underbrush and dead trees and brush that hinder growth and serve as tinder if lightning strikes and sets the forest ablaze.

So, fire is a good and essential thing, especially for its ability to cleanse and purify. Keep these points in mind as we expand our understanding of the second death as a lake of fire, for this aspect of literal fire speaks to the spiritual aspect or signification of God's fire. Also, keep in mind that God is the creator of fire, and it is part of the very good.

In ancient times, it is clear that God used literal fire to judge nations and cities. The classic example is Sodom and Gomorrah. The more recent example is the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Because of examples like this, many have been led to believe that God is going to judge the wicked with literal fire as well. However, Paul tells us that the spiritual (spirit-animated body) is not first, but the natural (nature-animated body); then the spirit one (1 Corinthians 15:46) and that we must be taught by the spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* (things) with spiritual *words* (alternate rendering: to spiritual people) (1 Corinthians 2:13). In other words, it is true that God works in the natural realm; but, as ones who have an earnest of His spirit within us, we need to learn to discern and understand that which is spiritual. The Lord wants us to see beyond the natural and temporal into His realm and to see what He is doing in spirit in the earth today and will do in the ages to come. This is what it means for heaven to come to earth.

Sodom is a great example of how we are to transcend God's physical or temporal judgments to see His spiritual judgments. Have you considered what scripture has to say about the judgment of Sodom? We know that their inhabitants and land were totally destroyed by fire in the days of Abraham, never to rise up again so that their exact locations are unknown even to this day. Consider what the Lord Jesus has to say about Sodom and Gomorrah.

"Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city." (Matthew 10:15 NASB)

"And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. "Nevertheless, I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you." (Matthew 11:23-24 NASB)

Like Sodom years before, Capernaum was judged by fire during the Jewish Wars of 66-70 AD. However, Jesus spoke of a future judgment. Consequently, it is obvious that fire did not totally and eternally annihilate the historical people of either city. Clearly, the people of these two immoral cities appear before the throne of God. For what purpose? Are they going to be raised up from the dead to undergo another fiery destruction or annihilation like the one they had previously experienced, perhaps 5,000 years hence when the Lord prematurely cut their lives short? What purpose would this serve from God's perspective other than to exact some form of vengeance? It would appear to be double jeopardy or paying twice for the same crime. Where is this in God's law given through Moses to the ancient sons of Israel? Even man's law does not condone double jeopardy.

Some theologians teach that Sodom and Gomorrah are presently in a toaster oven of physical torture and that they will be raised up from this hell-hole only to be cast into another hell-hole called the *lake of fire* that is hotter and viler than their previous imprisonment. Some in America liken it to first being held in a city jail and then later cast into a federal prison. Where does this

come from if not from the fertile, carnal mind of man, regardless of what title the man holds? It surely is not in scripture, but it can be traced through pagan religions.

God is not into double jeopardy, for there is no justice in this; it is strictly punitive in the extreme. When we follow the course of justice in the light of the natural first and then the spiritual, we see that the physical or natural fire and brimstone that rained on these immoral cities signify the spiritual truth that God judges the works or deeds of the carnal flesh of man (emanating from carnal thinking), not for his annihilation or eternal torture (punitive vengeance) but for correction and restoration back to God Himself. *For from Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things.*

It is similar to Paul's teaching that we must put off the old man, which was crucified with Jesus (Romans 6:6), and put on the new man, which after God is created in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24). 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). In our carnal flesh, none of us are any different from the people of Sodom and Gomorrah; we all come from the same corrupt stock. Is it so difficult to accept that God intends to take off the old man of Adam's entire race and put on the new man of the last Adam for the same entire race of people, creating an entirely new people, a new creation? First the natural then the spiritual, first a nature-animated body then a spirit-animated body! Deep down in your being, doesn't this ring true for a God who is love?

God is spirit, and His fire must be understood in spirit. Another way to state this is that God's fire must be discerned in spirit, or yet another way to state it is that His fire is spiritual fire not natural fire. In scripture, fire in the nature realm comes first; then comes fire in the spirit realm. If fire is a purifying and cleansing agent in the nature realm, then why isn't it a purifying and cleansing agent in the spirit realm? In fact, knowing that God is love dictates that it is more so in the spirit realm. God is spirit, and God is fire; therefore, ***God is spirit-fire***. Admittedly, this is playing with words a bit. To use the exact scriptural phrase, *God is a consuming fire*, meaning God is likened to fire. As we will see, His word is also likened to fire.

God, a Consuming Fire

According to John, God is spirit, love, and light. Light is one of the components of fire; the other component is heat. There are several Hebrew and Greek words translated into the words, *wrath* and *vengeance*, some of which denote heated (i.e., fiery) passion, even to blow smoke (i.e., from fire). In addition, wrath is death (not torture), and, as such, God's passion is to bring man's old nature fully into death through the second death of the second man. So, within these words, we get an intimation of the fire of God, that is, His heat and light.

The exact expression *consuming fire* appears eight times in scripture, and in all cases, it is used in reference to the Lord and His people. Interestingly, the number 8 signifies *new birth, new creation, or new beginnings*. Does this not intimate the purpose of God's fire is to bring about something new? God's fire kills off the carnal flesh in order to fully release the life of His Son. Again, it is likened to a purifying and cleaning agent that burns up or removes the flesh, the dross, the chaff, the tares, the disobedience, the rebellion, the lawlessness, the enemies, etc.

Although I use the word *likened*, as in God is likened to fire, I believe we could say that God is fire. If asked, I think God would say: I AM FIRE! What about the burning bush?

Let us consider these references, discerning them spiritual to spiritual.

Fire, Glory, Kingdom

God's fire, kingdom, and glory are inter-related and reveal the plan and purpose of God.

And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. (Exodus 24:17 NASB)

This is the first mention of a consuming fire, and it is likened to the glory of the Lord. When Yahweh appeared on Mt. Sinai and spoke in the midst of a fire, the sons of Israel feared for their lives, and rightly so. This was Moses' sixth trip to the top of the mountain, and he remained there for forty days and forty nights. A cloud had covered the mountain for six days and Moses was called to enter the midst of the cloud on the seventh day. This is a type of King Jesus (Yeshua) coming in the glory of His kingdom on the seventh day. Moses, whom Yahweh spoke to face to face (Exodus 33:11), not only likened the Lord's glory to fire, but he also likened God Himself to fire, a consuming fire. Again, God is fire!

"For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God." (Deuteronomy 4:24 NASB)

What will be the result of God's consuming fire? In Moses' day, the Lord granted a pardon to the sons of Israel; however, this intimated God's greater plan to fill the whole earth with His glory—a theme later reiterated by Habakkuk. Consequently, all mankind will be pardoned.

"Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now." So the LORD said, "I have pardoned them according to your word; but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD. (Numbers 14:19-21 NASB)

"Is it not indeed from the LORD of hosts that peoples toil for fire, and nations grow weary for nothing? "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. (Habakkuk 2:13-14 NASB)

Along this same line, Ezekiel saw the divine glory of God as he was given a vision of the Lord as the Son of Man on His throne. Take note of fire and glory in his account of the vision.

And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were *the appearance of fire*, and there was brightness around him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the

likeness of *the glory of the LORD*. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking. (Ezekiel 1:26-28 ESV)

John's Patmos vision, much like Ezekiel's vision, also includes fiery imagery of the Lord Jesus as the Son of Man.

His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. (Revelation 1:14-15 NASB)

His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. (Revelation 19:12 NASB)

By drawing upon Moses, the Hebrews epistle brings the kingdom and, by inference, the glory and the consuming fire of God together.

Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:28-29 ESV)

What cannot be shaken are those things that have come through the consuming fire of God. Things that can be shaken are things that are consumed in the spirit-fire of God; the things that cannot be shaken, that is, consumed by fire, remain, for they are of the character of the kingdom of God, more specifically, the character of God's Son and King. The most graphic example of this and probably the view the writer of Hebrews had in mind is the shaking of Mosaic Judaism that occurred in 70 AD with the total destruction by fire of Jerusalem and the temple. All that Jerusalem stood for in that day was shaken to its very foundation. Again, for this reason, Paul exhorts us to walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls us into His own kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12).

However, if we take all this imagery as literal fire, we miss the very heart of God to purify and cleanse this earth so that not only His glory will fill it, but also His righteousness will dwell in it. Jesus' death and resurrection have secured this for, not only the earth and all creation, but for all humanity. God's fire will go forth until He has consumed all that is not fit for His kingdom.

God's Fiery Word

In two other *consuming fire* verses, His word is likened to fire that proceeds out of the Lord's mouth or off His tongue.

Look, Yahweh comes from far away, His anger burning and heavy with smoke. His lips are full of fury, and His tongue is like a consuming fire. (Isaiah 30:27 HCSB)

And the LORD will cause His voice of authority to be heard, and the descending of His arm to be seen in fierce anger, and in the flame of a consuming fire in cloudburst, downpour and hailstones. (Isaiah 30:30 NASB)

As a consuming fire, the Lord's word, which includes His law and commands, is confirmed elsewhere. We could call it His fiery word or fiery law. Let us not forget that the Lord Jesus is the word. Could we not say that He is the fire as well? The fiery word!

"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) [This verse is included in order to directly link the law to fire.]

Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, "Because you have spoken this word, Behold, I am making My words in your mouth fire and this people wood, and it will consume them. (Jeremiah 5:14 NASB)

So, I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them by the Words of My mouth; and your judgments have been as the light that goes forth. (Hosea 6:5 LITV)

And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so, if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. (Revelation 11:5 NASB)

As for the two witnesses, the fire coming forth from them is the same that came forth from Jeremiah. They are not literal flame throwers. It would be comical if it weren't so sad, but some preachers actually believe this speaks of literal flames coming out of their mouths. (I would not believe this could be possible, except I heard it directly from a heaven-hell preacher.) However, like Jeremiah the prophet, these two witnesses (prophets) speak forth the words of the Lord or the fiery word of God in order to consume, that is, convict the carnal flesh of men.

To reinforce this point, the word or law of God is not only likened to fire but also to a sharp two-edged sword. Of course, Jesus is the word and He is the law—the consummation of all!

From His mouth comes a **sharp sword**, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a **rod of iron**; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. (Revelation 19:15 NASB [bold added])

Take note that there are two symbols in this verse—a sharp sword and the rod of iron. It would appear that they express the same thought. A rod is an inflexible tool that does not bend easily; we could say it is rigid like iron. In this case, **the rod of iron is the spirit of truth**, which is likened to the sharp sword, which is the word of God.

The writer of the Hebrews epistle clearly tells us that this sword is the word of God.

For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the ideas and thoughts of the heart. No creature is hidden from Him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account. (Hebrews 4:12-13 HCSB)

The purpose of the sword is to divide that which is of God (spirit) from that which is of man (soul; carnal mind). Stated another way—it is designed to divide righteousness from wickedness or unrighteousness. The sword sets things right! Undoubtedly, the writer of Hebrews had David's prophetic word in mind when he penned this.

Yahweh is in His holy temple; Yahweh—His throne is in the heavens. His eyes are perceiving; His eyelids are testing the sons of humanity. Yahweh is testing the righteous one, Yet His soul hates the wicked one and the one loving wrong. Let Him rain coals of fire and sulfur on the wicked, and let a simoom wind be the assigned portion of their cup. For Yahweh is righteous; He loves righteous deeds. The upright, they shall perceive His face. Concerning the Octave (Psalms 11:4-7 CLV)

Based on history, David knew of God's fiery judgments, not only of nations or cities such as Sodom and Gomorrah, but also of his own people in their wilderness journey. Whether David knew it or not, his words prophetically pointed to the character of all the judgments to follow, starting with Israel (Samaria) and Judah (Jerusalem) and ending with the lake of fire. As referenced already, this same picture of the Lord's eyes judging is also discovered in two other verses in the *Revelation* that draw our attention to the flame of fire.

His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. (Revelation 1:14 NASB)

His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. (Revelation 19:12 NASB)

All of this imagery speaks of the Lord as both king and judge. His eyes see according to His word (law), and His mouth speaks His word (law), and, by the way, He is the word, and He judges according to His divine purity, for *Your word is very pure* (Psalm 119:140). And, let us not forget that **Jesus is the truth**. He is the rod of iron, for He cannot be bent away from the truth of God. When He rules, nothing associated with the fallen nature of humanity can rule or will rule. Only that which is of His life is allowed to rule in His kingdom.

Oh, dear saints, do you see the glory in the fiery word of God to reach all? *By Myself I have sworn; Truth has gone from My mouth, a word that will not be revoked: Every knee will bow to Me, every tongue will swear allegiance* (Isaiah 45:23 HCSB). God does not fail! And, His fiery word will not fail to divinely purify all things in heaven and on earth—that is, in all creation.

Fiery Consumption of Enemies

The Lord's fiery word goes forth to consume enemies, within and without, for the sole purpose of deliverance into the glory of the Son. We could say that His fiery word divides and conquers. For example, as the sons of Israel were being readied to cross over the Jordan, the Lord promised to go before them as a consuming fire to destroy all their enemies.

"Know therefore today that it is the LORD your God who is crossing over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and He will subdue them before you, so that you may drive them out and destroy them quickly, just as the LORD has spoken to you."
(Deuteronomy 9:3 NASB)

Turning to Isaiah, we discover that the Lord's own people had become His enemy, and He came to them as a consuming fire.

Suddenly from Yahweh of hosts, you are visited with thunder, and with a quaking and a great sound, a sweeping whirlwind and tempest, and a blaze of fire devouring [consuming].
(Isaiah 29:6 CLV)

Sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling has seized the godless. "Who among us can live with the consuming fire? Who among us can live with continual burning?" (Isaiah 33:14 NASB)

Do you realize that we have enemies within us as well, and that these enemies have to be consumed for us to enter into glory in heavenly bodies (not about going to heaven)—spirit-activated bodies—typified by crossing over the Jordan into the land of promise? Who among us believes that in our carnal flesh we could or would ever survive the presence of the consuming fire? If the flesh of God's chosen people, ancient Israel, could not survive the consuming and jealous fire of God, what makes us think that our sinful flesh or our old man within us in our day could survive His spirit-fire? Thank God; it won't survive. Who in their right mind would want it to survive anyway?

Another way to look at this is through the illustration of leaven, which can be portrayed as producing corruption, such as corrupt teaching, or it can be portrayed as producing a good thing, such as tasty bread, meaning it can be useful. As for corruption, however, fire is needed to stop leaven from increasing. In the same fashion, leaven or corruption within the first Adam or old man requires the fire of God to stop its growth. Leaven is stopped by fire.

Herein is the good news: There is a continual burning within those of us who believe; it is God's means of burning up all that is not of the life and character of His Son so that we will be trained up and disciplined as true sons of God. It is like our own internal river or lake of fire. What is the outcome of this continual burning? Tasty bread for the Father! Consider these verses.

He who walks righteously and speaks with sincerity, he who rejects unjust gain and shakes his hands so that they hold no bribe; he who stops his ears from hearing about bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil; he will dwell on the heights, his refuge will be

the impregnable rock; his bread will be given him, his water will be sure. Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; they will behold a far-distant land. (Isaiah 33:15-17 NASB)

O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart. He does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend; n whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD; he swears to his own hurt and does not change; he does not put out his money at interest, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken. (Psalm 15:1-5 NASB)

Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and has not sworn deceitfully. He shall receive a blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. (Psalm 24:3-5 NASB)

How is this possible? With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God (Mark 10:27). How? For everyone will be salted with fire (Mark 9:49). Why? Because God is a consuming fire!

Saved, Yet Thus, as Through Fire

We might think that John was the only one to see the lake of fire, but it appears that Paul saw it as well, maybe in vision; can't say for sure. What does seem to be apparent is that Paul, who knew that God is fire, explained the purpose of fire. He too went through the fire of God as he died daily for the body of Christ and for the sake of the good news for all mankind. As a former, zealous Pharisee, even a persecutor of the ecclesia, Paul knew that the works of the law could not save anyone. However, he also knew that the works of the flesh emanating from both believer and unbeliever alike could not and would not survive the consuming fire of God.

For other foundation can no one lay beside that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Now if anyone is building on this foundation gold and silver, precious stones, wood, grass, straw, each one's work will become apparent, for the day will make it evident, for it is being revealed by fire. And the fire, it will be testing each one's work—what kind it is." If anyone's work will be remaining which he builds on it, he will get wages." If anyone's work shall be burned up, he will forfeit it, yet he shall be saved, yet thus, as through fire." (1 Corinthians 3:11-15 CLV)

Keep in mind that salvation is based on grace through faith, not on any man's works. But scripture is also clear that the fire of God judges works, meaning this comes not in relation to salvation per se, but in relation to reward in the kingdom of God. John's revelation indicates that all of one's works could be and will be burned up, leaving nothing to commend the person before the throne.

Early in my Christian education, I was taught that these verses apply only to believers. To be sure, they do apply to believers but, perhaps, not to them exclusively. Note Paul's use of the expression *anyone* and how this is related to being saved, yet so as through fire, implying that *anyone* will

be saved, but their works may not survive God's consuming fire. Have you ever noticed that the great white throne judgment is based on works, not faith? There are two types of works: ones that come out a self-centered carnal life and ones that come out of a spirit-centered life producing the works of God, that which pleases Him.

Let's just say that, at the fiery throne judgment, when all who were unbelievers while in their mortal bodies look upon the Lord Jesus, the Savior and King of all, they will be so caught by His glory that they willingly bow the knee and confess Jesus truly is Lord. Technically, they are saved, but they have no spirit-centered works to commend themselves—all they have is self-driven works of the flesh. So why the fire for them? What needs to be fired, so to speak, is their carnal nature that drove their works, just as the carnal nature of believers is fired while in mortal bodies. Simply burning the works would fail to deal with the person and what drove their works.

Where does this fire come from if not from the throne of God that both Daniel and John saw, and Paul possibly saw when he was snatched away to the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2)? The fire is for the purpose of testing the quality of one's work. Isaiah referred to it as the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning (Isaiah 4:4). What kind of judgment by burning is needed to do this, spiritually speaking? To burn something requires fire. There is only one fire in scripture that is capable of doing this; it is God's consuming fire that will judge the quality of each man's work. But notice that the work must be based on the foundation of God's Son and not on the foundation of man. All that is built on man will be consumed by God's fire, for God is a consuming fire.

The lake of fire may be a season of anguish or even torment for those cast into it. Have you taken note that it is a lake, and lakes have boundaries, meaning they have limits? Further, natural lakes eventually fill in and vegetation begins to grow. Is this not a picture of the seed falling into the ground to bear fruit? The lake eventually fills in with the rich root of Christ until there is no more flame—only richness that brings forth fruit. And, so will the lake of fire bear fruit when all is said and done!

So, the lake is a good thing, for it will lead to their ultimate restoration through the love of God that wins their hearts to truly and willingly love God, doing His will in all things as they continually confess Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. In that glorious day, God the Father will be *All* in all, and all creation will be in love. This is the absolute success, victory, and glory of the cross.

Who among us claiming the name of Jesus has never experienced torment of our soul as we die daily to our own self-centered ways? Assuming we are dying daily. There is a point, even many points, in our journey of becoming like God's Son that we seem to have our own Gethsemane experiences. No one is exempt from this! If it is essential for our growth, how much more essential is it for all those cast into God's fiery lake? However, the big difference for them is that they start out not personally knowing the Lord. Our torment comes about in various ways and stages in knowing Him as we die to the old man (self) and grow in the Lord. The difference is that they will start out with torment as they stand in the presence of a righteousness they never knew.

Regardless of the symbolic nature of any man's works, all of it must go through the refining, testing, and proving fire of God. For many, this occurs in this life. Some works will survive and

some (probably, many) will not. Even such things as gold and silver must be refined in fire to remove the dross and impurities.

The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold, and each is tested by the praise accorded him. (Proverbs 27:21 NASB)

"And I will bring the third part through the fire, refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'" (Zechariah 13:9 NASB)

For You have tried us, O God; You have refined us as silver is refined. (Psalm 66:10 NASB)

"Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. (Isaiah 48:10 NASB)

... so that the proving of your faith, much more precious than perishing gold, but having been proved through fire, may be found to praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.... (1 Peter 1:7 LITV)

I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich.... (Revelation 3:18 NASB)

Of course, wood, hay, and straw may have a more difficult time passing through God's fire, but perhaps, even these symbolic materials may produce some commendation or reward; nevertheless, they all must be tested, proved, or refined through and by fire. Based on this, could we not conclude that since all mankind's works must be judged by fire that all of us must pass through the lake of fire? Again, everyone will be salted with fire. Is there more than one type of judgmental fire if it is from God? Is there more than one God? No! But Isaiah gives some good news for those who believe and conquer in this day.

"When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you." (Isaiah 43:2 NASB)

The conquerors walk through the lake of fire but the second death does not hurt them, for it has no power over them. Why? Because they have laid down their lives and the fire of God has done its work in them to the point that when they face the judgments of God there is nothing left to consume. They simply walk through them untouched. Stop and meditate on this!

Before moving on, one commentator has suggested that the second death works right through to the final demise of our mortal bodies—the final outworking of the first death. Another way to state this is that right up to our last breath, the spirit of the Lord is transacting in our being to clear away what might be left of the carnal nature—unbinding us from the old as we surrender *fully* to the will of God. Some who have studied death claim that prior to death, people come to a place of *now*—that is, there is no past or future, they are simply in the present. Though our bodies might be in outward anguish or suffering (or even peace), perhaps there is a glorious

transaction going on within between us and our creator. I wonder if the spirit of God brings us to this point, as if all is settled prior to the final manifestation of the first death. Just a thought!

There are so many ways to discuss this topic that the greatest concern is leaving something out that would help make this message much clearer. It might seem like there is a contradiction over what is judged. Is it simply works or is it character emanating from the carnal flesh that is in battle with the spirit of God? It has to be both, for God is producing a people to rule with His Son who are fully tested, refined, and purified through and through with nothing exempted from passing through His consuming fire; even our faith must be proved by fire.

The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying, "Rule in the midst of Your enemies." (Psalm 110:2 NASB)

The King in you is ruling, especially in the midst of His enemies within us. He is ruling in the midst of you, knowing full-well your condition with the sole purpose of conforming and transforming you to His image so that you will bear fruit by doing the good works of the Father. This is the glory of the good news. Relax and let Him rule, expecting Him to kill off your enemies within.

Now, let us switch gears a bit and consider *torment* and *brimstone*. A proper understanding of these terms helps to understand the true nature of the lake of fire.

Torment is Testing

The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels [messengers], and in the presence of the Lamb.... (Revelation 14:10 KJV [YLT])

He, also, is drinking of the wine of the fury of God, blended undiluted in the cup of His indignation, and he shall be tormented in fire and sulphur in the sight of the holy messengers and in the sight of the Lambkin. (Revelation 14:10 CLV)

The presence of the righteous Lambkin of God and His holy messengers brings torment to the idolaters. The Lambkin does not even have to touch them to bring torment; all He needs to do is appear before them. Can you imagine the response from the unrighteous as they appear in the presence of the righteous one, typified as a gentle lamb (meaning of lambkin)? He doesn't appear to them as a roaring lion that devours. No! He is the gentle, loving Lambkin of God that takes away the sin of the world, for God so loves the world. Can you imagine the response of those looking into the eyes of the lambkin that are filled with the love of God? There will be no hate in His eyes, only compassion and mercy, for they do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34).

To be sure, the words *torment* and *brimstone* do not conjure up good images in most people's minds, especially the Christian mind that has been taught to think in terms of an eternal hell. It is time to throw off this shackle and have our eyes opened to the greater truth of God's love for all. Both *torment* and *brimstone* have meanings that actually are quite encouraging.

The word *torment* is translated from the Greek word *basinizo* [Strong's G928]. The word *basinizo* comes from the root word *basanos* [G931], which, according to *Strong's Concordance*, refers to a touchstone.

Depending on the source, there are various and conflicting meanings assigned to this word. Based on a variety of sources, it can mean to...

1. Test (metals) by the touchstone, which is a black siliceous stone used to test the purity of gold or silver by the color of the streak produced on it by rubbing it with either metal.
2. Question by applying torture.
3. Torture.
4. Vex with grievous pains (of body or mind), to torment.
5. Be harassed, distressed, of those who are at sea are struggling with a head wind.

Of the five definitions, the first one is the most intriguing and, perhaps, the most accurate one in understanding the true nature of torment, for this one dates back to the Babylonians. In that day, a touchstone was a black siliceous stone that was used to test the purity of gold or silver. When the touchstone was rubbed across gold or silver, the streak caused by the touchstone turned a certain color and the color determined the quality of the metal. The touchstone was also called the *proving stone*. In other words, this stone was used to prove the quality of the gold and silver. This was the meaning of the word *basinizo* up to the third century AD, which means that, when it was penned by John in the first century, it simply referred to a touchstone or testing and not to torment, and definitely not to torture. Jonathan Mitchell's *New Testament* attempts to capture this original meaning.

"he or she will also drink out of the wine of God's rushing emotion (strong passion; anger) – of the one having been mixed undiluted within the cup of His inherent fervor (natural bent; impulse; indignation; wrath). And he will be examined (scrutinized with the touchstone to test his "mettle") with Fire and Deity (or: in union with Fire, even Divine qualities) in the presence of (before; the in the sight of) the set-apart agents, and in the presence of (before) the little Lamb." (Revelation 14:10 JMNT)

It is a testing or examination or proving the worth of the ones appearing before the lambkin. This same Greek word is found in the story of the disciples battling the waves while in a boat.

But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered [*basinizo*] by the waves; for the wind was contrary. (Matthew 14:24 NASB)

Jonathan Mitchell translates this as continuously being tried—as with a touchstone to test its metal (and thus, its mettle). Clearly, the disciples were being tested by the waves, but they were not tortured, and they survived the rough weather.

Notice in Revelation 14:10 that the testing or examination is by fire and brimstone or, as Mitchell puts it, deity. Thus, we are given the same picture of God's spirit-fire signifying purification through testing. What about the brimstone?

Brimstone—Agent of Love

... he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone (Revelation 14:10 NASB)

... their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8 NASB)

When it comes to its spiritual meaning or application, the traditions of men have built up quite a bias against the word *brimstone*. It can be stated without much doubt that when many people hear the word *brimstone*, they conjure up images of people being tormented (actually, more like tortured) in *hell*. As stressed many times in my writings, the modern-day concept of hell maligns the loving and merciful and just character of God.

This same concept is also seen in Bible dictionaries. They start off by identifying *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. But then, 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: Is there a spiritual meaning to *brimstone* that goes beyond physical destruction of the flesh? Yes!

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 appears as a bright yellow crystalline solid that burns easily; hence, it is called a *burning stone*. Notice that we are presented not only with a touchstone but now a burning stone.

At the heart of sulfur is love. How do we know? Because the atomic number of 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 Jesus who gave Himself a ransom for all, not just some or a few but ALL (1 Timothy 2:4-6). Could we not agree that at the heart of brimstone is *God is love*!

As one of the oldest known substances to man, sulfur is an essential element of life, being found in two amino acids, cysteine and methionine. Industrially, sulfur is a component in fertilizer, black gun powder, and matches; is used in the process of manufacturing cellophane, rayon, rubber, bleaching paper, and a host of other products; and is useful as a fungicide (kills fungus) and a pesticide (kills pests). Medicinally, it has been used to save lives and fight infections and disease in mortal bodies by being formulated into a form of drugs called *sulfa drugs*. I find this use particularly germane to the spiritual significance of brimstone-sulfur. It could be said that brimstone is *God's sulfa drug*, for it signifies the agent by which God cleanses or, if you will, purges man from the dead works or deeds of the flesh (Revelation 20:13). It is the antidote to the infection of sin! It comes from God's medicine chest that brings about divine purification.

All the dead will be judged before God's throne and will have a part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. Will this bring torment to (testing of) one's soul,

as in weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28)? Undoubtedly, it will. After all, even some treatments of illnesses and diseases cause pain in the physical flesh until healing takes root. 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 and, in this case, it kills the carnal flesh, the infection of sin.

Some might say to themselves: "Well this doesn't sound too bad; I'll live as I want today and get my antidote then." Such an attitude is one that forfeits the opportunity to live an abundant life today, a life of love, grace, peace, righteousness, joy, etc. in the life of God's beloved Son. Which is better—going through the suffering of the second death of God's Son today and progressively knowing abundant life in Him now through these sufferings, living for the ages to come—or, at the end of the age(s), being cast into God's fiery lake of judgment for an extended season (possibly ages) in which the carnal nature, which lived apart from a loving and merciful God and His Son, is consumed by God's fire, and suffers (has a part in, is hurt by) the second death that Christ bore for all humanity?

Which will you choose, life today or death in that day? Yes; everything ultimately leads to life by the consummation of the ages. But why miss out on life in this age and enjoy all the ages to come, as Jesus the King heads up all things for the glory of God? Choose life today that you may live for the ages!

Now, turning to both Hebrew and Greek scripture, we learn more of the value of brimstone.

In the old testament, the Hebrew word *gophriyth* (translated as *brimstone*), which in Hebrew 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. Its spiritual significance is discovered in the account of Noah as he was commanded by God to make an ark out of gopher wood (Genesis 6:14), which resulted in the deliverance from the flood for Noah and his family as they were brought safely through the water—in type, baptized into Christ through His resurrection (1 Peter 3:20-21). Salvation! Brimstone saves!

Further, the gematria of *gophriyth* 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. Through His Son, God will bring all to perfection! At the consummation of the ages, the unrighteous will join the ranks of the righteous company of God.

Turning to the new testament, 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." This has led some commentators to refer to the fire and brimstone of Revelation as fire and deity (the divine, or of God). Of course, this is contrary to the many who probably think of it as connected to the devil and hell. However, the much better possibility is the fact that the words *divine* and *godhead* are attached to the meaning of *brimstone*. Brimstone is the character of the

fire, but it is not ordinary fire and brimstone—it is *God is consuming fire and deity*. There is nothing in this that relates to the natural; it is spiritual throughout.

The gematria for *theion* is 144, which is the multiplication of 12 by 12—the number 12 signifies divine government; and it is the primary number of New Jerusalem (Revelation 21-22). Brimstone leads to the perfect government of God.

Symbolically, brimstone is the sulfa drug of God, the healing agent of God, that will cleanse and purify all humanity—especially those that lived without Christ while in mortal bodies—from its sinful nature and works of the flesh, so that by the consummation of the ages, all will be restored to God, so that the Son and the Father will be All in all new and in love (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)

For all who are in the Messiah, I leave you with a word from Paul that makes all this practical to us this day. I offer the more expansive translation of Jonathan Mitchell.

Consequently, brothers, I am repeatedly calling you folks alongside to exhort, implore and encourage you, through God's compassions to stand your bodies alongside (to place your bodies beside) [the] Well-pleasing, Set-apart (Holy), Living Sacrifice by God (in God; for God; to God) [this being] your sacred service which pertains to thought, reason and communication (your rational service; your logical obedience in worship). And stop constantly conforming yourself (or, as pass.: And quit being repeatedly fashioned or patterned together) by this age [or, w/other MSS: ... and not to be continuously configured to this age; ... and to not constantly remodel yourself for this age], but on the contrary, be continuously transformed (transfigured; changed in shape, form and semblance) by the renewing (in the renewal; for the making-back-up-new again) of your mind into the [situation and condition for] you to be habitually examining in order to be testing and, after scrutiny, approving what [is] God's will (design; purpose; resolve; intent): the good and well-pleasing, even perfect (finished and complete)! [or: ... the thing that is good, satisfying and able to succeed; ... the good thing, also an acceptably well-pleasing woman, even a full-grown, mature man!] (Romans 12:1-2 JM-NT)

Simply, we are to present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God. We are called to be living sacrifices in this day. In ancient days, the sacrifices were salted with sulfur for purification. Carrying this imagery forward to us, when we present our bodies to God, we are asking Him to purify us with His sulfur, which is His spirit-fire that purifies us without destroying us. Through this process which Paul also calls a testing to discern the will of God, we are no longer conformed to the thinking of the world, but rather, our thinking is transformed to the mind of Christ through the rule of the King, who is truth.

May we be like Paul and proclaim: ***But we have the mind of Christ!*** (1 Corinthians 2:16). Let us have the same mind and the same judgment and not be persuaded by the spirit of the world that has sadly infiltrated into much of the teaching of Christendom, especially in regard to judgment

and the very essence of God who is love. God's purifying love knows how to change the mind of all humanity until He is all in all, all new and all in love.

Conclusion

It seems apparent, at least to me, and I hope to you, that the second death, the lake of fire, and deity, are God's way of bringing all the dead of mankind into the life of His glorious ALL in ALL as He continually (not a one-off event) makes all things new. Death in all its forms is an enemy, and God's Son came to defeat all the works of every enemy of God and of man. By the way, He did it! Praise God!