

Fire Baptism

Do you think the reference seen in Scripture to “fire baptism” is to something good or something bad?

John the Immerser (or “Baptist”) is the one who references the baptism or immersion by fire in his statements about the coming of the Messiah. His words pertaining to this immersion appear in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke:

“As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matthew 3:11, NASU).

“John answered and said to them all, ‘As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire’” (Luke 3:16, NASU).

Many, particularly among Pentecostals and charismatics, will stop reading the text as quoted above, and automatically assume that “fire baptism” or “fire immersion” is something that is a *good thing*. A great number of songs, for example, have been composed from the point of view of “the Spirit surrounding us in your fire.” This, however, is not a theologically correct statement to make. In context with John’s entire statement, he is actually describing *two different baptisms* or immersions: some will receive the Holy Spirit, and others will receive fire. Continuing, John says the following:

“His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:12, NASU).

“His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Luke 3:17, NASU).

Those who are the chaff are taken out and burned. In this context, “fire baptism” is by no means something good or something to be pursued. An immersion by fire speaks of God’s judgment upon unrepentant sinners. For a further examination of this issue, consult G.W. Bromiley’s article in *ISBE*, “Baptism of Fire,” 1:426.