

BETWEEN THE LINES™

DEEPER LOOK STUDY GUIDE

HOLY FIRE. . . God's Sacred Flame

First an overview...

Just for starters, let's run a listing of some of the many, many Bible stories that have flame as a meaningful element. This can serve as a starting point that will be more extensive than we could ever do in only six broadcasts on the air...

STORIES OF FLAME	Genesis 3	A flaming sword holds rebellious children away.
	Genesis 19	The tool of God on evil cities.
	Exodus 3	The bush is not consumed by this sacred flame.
	Exodus 12	The Lamb/lamb is prepared in the flame.
	Exodus 13	The Shekinah is a flame that protects and guides.
	Exodus 19	Like the bush, the mountain is not threatened by Him.
	Leviticus 10	There is "His" fire and then there's a counterfeit.
	Leviticus 16	A smoldering censer is precious to God.
	Leviticus 20	Illicit fires of passion call for fires to resolve them.
	Numbers 11	Flame of the Lord is used to purge the rebellious camp.
	Numbers 26	Once again it is the appropriate element of judgment.
	Numbers 28	One of the best (of many) citations where it consumes sacrifice.
	Joshua 6	Jericho is the first city purged of the lingering vestiges of paganism.
	Joshua 7	Achan's cherished goods are annihilated by the flames.
	Joshua 11	Weaponry of the enemy comes to ashes. How cool!
	Judges 20	The end of a two-chapter story of national retribution.
	I Kings 19	Curiously, the God of the fire wasn't in the fire!
Nehemiah 2	Sadly, three times the destroyed Jerusalem is described as ashes.	
Daniel 3	Flames were impotent against the servants of God.	
Mark 14	In the flickering light Peter approaches an eternally pivotal moment.	
John 18	Judas also approaches his moment in the flickering of the torch.	
John 21	I wonder how Jesus started this little campfire?	
II Thessalonians 1	His flames WILL purge evil. It is promised.	
Hebrews 12	That last fact is so certain that God Himself is equated to fire!	
II Peter 3	A very colorful description of the final conflagration.	
Revelation 3	Well controlled fire can accomplish much in purification of precious things.	

Fire As A Positive Element...

We easily focus on the destructive nature of fire. That's certainly not to be ignored, but it denies the other side of what fire can (and will) accomplish in a positive manner for God's people. Perhaps we could take a moment to reconsider a few more passages in a new light and see if they might not be something that we praise Him for instead of fearing....

Judges 13:	We find a remarkable fire-enactment as God announces a special initiative to a poor couple who live under the heel of the oppressor. Oh that we might see such a portrayal in our day!
Isaiah 10:	Messiah is equated to the astounding fire of God... in every good way!
I Kings 18:	Perhaps His fire will soon, once again, reveal fully who is God for all to see. Oh pray for it!
Malachi 4:	When it all said and done, evil will be simply ash. That's all.
Ezekiel 28:	Evil is so self-destructive that it is destined for flame, even from the inside out.
Acts 28:	I really like the prophetic nature of this narrative. The child of God casts the serpent into the flame and the ancient prediction of Genesis 3 is fulfilled. How cool!

In Conclusion...

James said every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of lights? (1:17) Is it completely illogical to read that passage backward and consider that if it comes from the Father of lights it MUST be good?

If that's fair, then we shouldn't be terribly surprised that the fire from God is not an evil thing. It must be a true gift if, "The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works." Psalm 145:17

Insights From Judaism...

Once upon a time I wanted to translate the commentary of *Leviticus Rabbah*, the chapter 10 episode of the Holy Fire judgment against Nadab and Abihu. Instead I ended up moving to another topic from *Bereshit Rabbah* on the death of Jacob from Genesis 49. Still, I'm intrigued by this and promised on our broadcasts that I'd give you a bit of a sampling from Judaism on the concepts of "Holy Fire" and "the Sacred Flame." Let's finish this study guide by sharing these...

- ☆ "Do you know the story of the ironmonger (blacksmith) who wanted to become independent? He bought an anvil, a hammer and bellows and went to work. Nothing happened- the forge remained inert. Then an old ironmonger, whose advice he sought, told him: 'You have everything you need except the spark.' That is what Hasidim is: the spark."
- Elie Wiesel
- ☆ "While praying one day, Reuven experienced an intuitive flash: that the child Zahava was carrying would be a boy, and that his name was Esh Kodesh, meaning 'Holy Fire; or 'Fire of the Holy One.' According to the Sages, parents experience a kind of prophecy when they name their children. Questioned after his son's death [killed by a terrorist] Reuven insists that he did not choose the unusual name based on any connotations of sacrifice nor even as a reference to the Chassidic Rabbi of the same name who perished in the Holocaust. 'Esh Kodesh was simply his name. That's who he was.' Zahava adds, 'I always felt that his name referred to the special spark of holiness that every Jew has inside.'
- Sara Yoheved Rigler
- ☆ "For almost one hundred years he lit up our world. His [Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan] was a soul from on high whose only desire in life was to fulfill the wish of his Creator through lifting the worth of individual lives as well as the life of the Jewish people as a whole... And within his heart there burned a holy fire; the hope for the full salvation. The redemption of Israel was his constant concern."
- R. Avroham Yitzchak Kook
- ☆ "There is an ancient mystical legend that the Bible was written with black fire on white fire. Now, we can only read the black fire (the letters), but someday we might be able to see white fire."
- Malka Drucker
- ☆ "During the Mussaf service of Yom Kippur, there is a section which describes the death of Ten Martyrs at the hands of the Romans. One of the ten was Rabbi Chananya ben Tradion. The Midrash teaches that he was executed on the pretext of teaching Torah publicly, a capital offense according to Roman law. He was wrapped in the Torah scroll that he always kept with him, and the Romans set him and the scroll afire... Rabbi Chananya said, 'The parchment is consumed, but the letters fly up into the air.'
The Torah is fire, and fire cannot consume fire."
- R. Yaakov Asher Sinclair
- ☆ "The fire conceived and gave birth to light"
-Exodus Rabbah 15:22
- ☆ "Fire is *esh*, a word interwoven with *ish* (man) and *ishah* (woman). Fire is the first light of creation, and it is the eternal light burning in the holy sanctum. Fire is the pillar that led the Israelites through the wilderness, and it is the burning revelation atop Mt. Sinai. Fire is the angel that wrestled Jacob, blessing and struggling with him. Fire is the flame of love as the Song of Songs says: 'Many waters cannot quench love.' Fire is the Divine: the devouring fire that burns, and also the warm light that blesses and heals. Fire is the altar, the place of sacrifice and communication... Fire represents the sacred hearth, the Temple, the Tabernacle, the holy place."
- Jill Hammer
- ☆ "God is not hiding in a temple. The Torah came to tell inattentive man: 'You are not alone, you live constantly in a holy neighborhood; remember; "Love thy neighbor - God - as thyself."' We are not asked to abandon life and to say farewell to this world, but to keep the spark within aflame, and to suffer His light to reflect in our face."
- R. Abraham Joshua Heschel
- ☆ "Israel is like a wick, the Torah is its oil, and the Shekinah [God's presence] is its light."
- Tollime Zohar
- ☆ "And after this I beheld that there was gathered from the four winds of heaven an innumerable multitude of men to make war against that Man who came up out of the sea... And I saw that he cut out for himself a great mountain and flew up upon it... And when he saw the assault of the multitude as they came, he neither lifted his hand, nor held spear nor any warlike weapon; but I saw only how he sent out of his mouth as it were a fiery stream, and out of his lips a flaming breath, and out of his tongue he shot forth a storm of sparks... And these fell upon the assault of the multitude... and burned them up."
- 4 Ezra 13