

God's Refining Fire Leads to Spiritual Purity

On the first Sunday in July 1995, something unthinkable happened in Israel. A raging fire consumed an estimated two million trees. Hand planted trees!

About 2,500 acres of land were left charred and barren. Several communities were evacuated while hundreds of firefighters bravely battled the flames in high summer temperatures, and planes and military helicopters sprayed chemicals from the air.

The ashes were landing on my balcony that day, though our home was at least 25 kilometers away from the forest. Roads into Jerusalem were closed and our speaker for that evening service at King of Kings Community Jerusalem was not able to arrive. We all prayed.

Only weeks earlier I had traveled past that forest, headed west in the afternoon, and marveled at the beauty of the trees through the sunlight. This was a heartbreaking day for a land that treasures its trees.

I now know that many of the pines that burned that day had been among the earliest planted. They had been fast to grow but had a short life span, and had probably lived it out by then.

Researchers are now saying that fires are not necessarily bad, but can be a natural part of a forest ecosystem. Parasites and pests die, piles of turpentine-producing needles and cones burn off, giving the soil a chance to regain its pH balance.

Today, 17 years later, the Jerusalem Forest is again beautiful. But now there are trees and plants that could not grow there before. This forest will be a stronger one, for it

is planted in soil cleansed and renewed by the fire. Even the rainfall in the area has greatly increased over the years because of surrounding growth.

Have you been hit with a devastating tragedy? Does it seem like a loss that can never be redeemed? The story is not over when the ashes still smell and the soot is still flying through the air.

God's fire is painful but not cruel. Only for the rebellious does His fire consume and destroy, but if you are His, you will come through better, stronger and more luxuriant.

Some theologians deny that God would treat His own with fire. They insist that only those who rebel and reject God are subject to His fire.

Read Zachariah 13:9. Here we see God refining His remnant people for His glory. Hear what He says! "They will call upon my name and I will answer them. I will say 'They are my people' and they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'"

I would prefer a baptism in fire from Yeshua now, than have to undergo a worse burning later. I pray for him to burn away the chaff and every harmful element from my heart; to bring me out of the fire with a tender and pure heart, ready for a new season of growth and wholeness.

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