

INTERESTING FIRE PASSAGES RELEVANT TO JUDGMENT AND THE DEFINITIVE DIVINE THEOPHANY IN THE BIBLE

Prof. Chávez

In Isa 63:19-64:1; 66:15-16, God comes in fire to judge; fire is punishment in 66:24. This punishment, called in Hebrew *dēraôn* (“horrible shame”), is otherwise found only in Dan 12:2, in the one explicit resurrection passage in the Bible (for judgment).

Isa 66:24 is quoted by Jesus in Mark 9:48-49; Mark is commonly thought to have been written in Rome after Nero’s fire 64 (for which Christians were blamed and burned); salt is required for the offerings (LXX “sacrifices”) in Lev 2:13.

Fire is an image of refinement, as in the purification of metals. It is the trial (“temptation”) of the faithful. See Dan 11:35; 12:10 (and my Prophets Class Notes footnote 484 for Qumran). It figures in the important background text for Jesus’ Passion, Wis 2:18-20; 3:1-7 (cf. Matt 27:43). See also 1 Pet 1:7; 2 Pet 3:7-12 (re the Final Judgment by fire; cf. 1 Cor 3:10-15, used in the past as a purgatory text).

The flood had cleansed the world, but imperfectly, according to advanced sects in Second Temple period Judaism. Thus the final purification required for the coming of the messianic age would have to be by fire. See Mal 3:2-3; this chapter of Mal on “the great and terrible Day of Yahweh” has been called John the Baptist’s vocation narrative. See his mention of fire for judgment in Matt 3:10-12, and Luke 3:9, 16-17 (early, i.e., “Q,” passages). John, like the flood, will baptize with water, but Jesus will baptize with Holy Spirit and fire.

Jesus, to be himself tried by fire as mentioned in the Book of Wisdom, is eager for this judgment fire, Luke 12:49-50 (described also as his baptism). Jesus offered himself in sacrifice to God by the Holy Spirit (Heb 9:14), with which he was anointed, Isa 61:1; Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38. It is the Spirit, associated with fire, that comes down on Pentecost, Acts 2:3-4, as prophesied by Joel 3 (2:28-32 in the *NRSV*). It is this Holy Spirit which finally purifies (“circumcises,” according to Col 2:9-15) the heart of believers, Acts 15:8-9. This is the circumcision of the heart made new announced by Deut 30:6; cf. Jer 4:4, and the new, washed, heart of Ezek 36:25-27. Cf. Isa 4:4-5; 1 John 5:5-8.