

Beauties of the Truth

A Forum for the Publication of Scriptural Viewpoints
Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages
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Turn to Ashes

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures the concept of sacrificing animals is an integral part of worshipping God. The straightforward procedure is to build an altar, put wood on it, light the fire, slay an animal, and then place it on the altar to be consumed. The worshipper thus demonstrates his desire to gain God's approval by offering an animal sacrifice that cost him something. That sacrifice is consumed and lifted up to God, leaving only ashes behind. The scriptures call this a **burnt offering**.

The story of Noah provides a clue to the meaning of a "burnt offering." Genesis 8:20, 21, "And Noah builded an altar unto Jehovah, and took of every clean beast, and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And Jehovah smelled the sweet savor."

Jehovah was delighted with this burnt offering! It was a "sweet savor" to Him. His delight meant He accepted it! This is the basic meaning of a burnt offering, the acceptance of God! God accepts it wholly! "The burning of the offering on the altar shows how God accepts the sacrifice, as "a sweet smelling savor" (*Tabernacle Shadows*, page 45). "Its being burnt on the altar shows how God accepts this 'as a sweet smelling savor' or perfume" (R73).

A special class of burnt offering is recorded when God Himself consumed the sacrifice by sending down fire. This indicates something special, perhaps something new, the start of some event or process, or a significant requirement of God's intervention.

Following are some examples where God miraculously consumed a sacrifice (not in chronological order!):

EXAMPLE 1: ELIJAH AT MOUNT CARMEL

1 Kings 18:38, "Then the **fire of Jehovah** fell, and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench."

This was an undeniable manifestation of Jehovah's acceptance of Elijah's sacrifice! This event not only demonstrated God's acceptance of the worship and offering of Elijah, but it revealed that Jehovah was truly the all-powerful God!

In the competition between the Baal worshippers and

Elijah, there were some differences in their methods. The Baal worshippers:

(1) Took a long time! They started in the morning and went until noon! (verse 26). They continued until the time of the evening offering, about 3 pm.

(2) The Baal ritual included "leaping about," dancing, as was the custom in pagan worship, dynamic demonstrations of their allegiance to Baal.

(3) By noon, with no response from Baal, they took out their knives and began cutting themselves, drawing blood that "gushed" in their effort to elicit Baal's presence. By any standard this was very dramatic!

But Baal did not respond. By contrast the approach Elijah took was no less dramatic, but short and simple.

(1) He invited the people to draw close. This demonstrated that there was nothing hidden going on.

(2) The account says that he repaired the altar (Verse 30). While this could have been repairs from long ago, it is likely that the altar he had put together earlier in the day had been, in some way, damaged by the Baal worshippers and required attention.

(3) As he rebuilt the stone altar, he had a trench dug around it, large enough to contain "two measures of seed."

(4) Then, after laying the sacrificial bullock on the altar, he instructed that four jars of water be poured on the altar and on the wood and into the trench. He repeated this three times!

(5) Finally, at the time of the evening sacrifice — about 3 pm, Elijah came near the altar and reverently uttered a simple prayer of two sentences.

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Immediately, the fire from Jehovah came down and consumed not only the bullock on the altar, but the altar, the stones and the water in the trench in a stupendous firestorm. The identification of the true God and his full acceptance of the offering was irrefutable.

There are a few more gems in this narrative.

(1) The Time of Elijah's Offering was about 3:00 pm, the time of the evening sacrifice under the law (1 Kings 18:29). It is no coincidence that this is about the same time of Jesus' death on the cross! (Luke 23:44)

(2) The trench that was made for the water could contain about two measures of seed (1 Kings 18:32). Water is a symbol of truth. The two measures of seed may depict the seed of Abraham as the stars and sand — the two salvations which come from Jesus' death on the cross!

EXAMPLE 2: AT THE CONSECRATION OF THE AARONIC PRIESTHOOD

Leviticus 9:24, "There came forth **fire from before Jehovah**, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: and when all the people saw it, they shouted, and fell on their faces." Leviticus 9 describes sacrifices made that day, a bullock, a goat, an ox, and a ram. But why does Jehovah consume only the burnt offering?

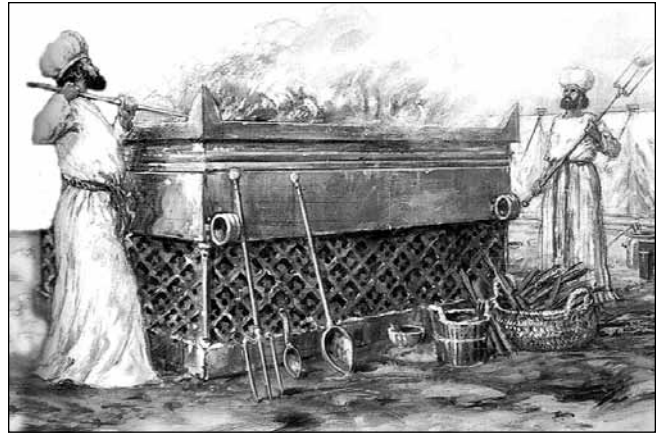
This ritual is the consecration of the office of the **priesthood**, not just the dedication of individual priests. It is the start of a new arrangement! In the finale of the service, God's miraculous acceptance of that priesthood is revealed. God's supernatural manifestation demonstrates that from henceforth the offerings of the Aaronic Priesthood are accepted by Jehovah.

Furthermore, all the people saw it! It was intended as an unambiguous public demonstration, similar to Elijah's experience. What will be the unambiguous demonstration of Jehovah's acceptance of the priesthood of Christ and the church?

The Day of Atonement provides a clue. The typical sacrifices of this day laid the foundation for the acceptance of the offerings of the people of Israel for the coming year. Likewise, the antitypical sacrifices of the Gospel age lay the foundation for the acceptance of the subsequent offerings of mankind in the Mediatorial phase of the Kingdom. But there were additional offering that followed immediately after the Atonement Day sacrifices. They were offered on the very same day!

Numbers 29:7-11, "And ye shall have on the tenth day of this seventh month an holy convocation; and ye shall afflict your souls: ye shall not do any work therein: But ye shall offer a burnt offering unto the LORD for a sweet savour; one young bullock, one ram, and seven lambs of the first year; they shall be unto you without blemish:"

In general, a bullock represents a perfect human being. After the sacrifices of the Gospel age are complete, in this case shown by the completion of the Atonement Day ritual, we look for some manifestation of perfect individuals!



Altar of burnt offering in the court

The bullock here cannot represent Jesus or the justified church. The Atonement Day sacrifices happened earlier in the day. Antotypically, the church is also beyond the veil with Jesus — they are no longer men. This burnt offering *followed after* the Atonement Day ritual.

After Christ and the church complete their antitypical Atonement Day sacrifice, it is time for the mediatorial phase of the Kingdom to begin. The New Covenant will be inaugurated and begins its blessings. But the opening stage is the time of Jacob's trouble. Deliverers will be needed resulting in the Ancient Worthies being raised.

Isaiah 1:26, "And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called The city of righteousness, a faithful town." The Ancient Worthies will be resurrected as perfect human beings, and as such they are represented by the bullock, that immediately following the Atonement ritual.

Israel's deliverance will be an astonishing miracle witnessed by the world. This is similar to the event concluding the consecration of the Aaronic priesthood (Leviticus 9:24). All the people will see that God has accepted the Priesthood of the Glorified Christ!

EXAMPLE 3 — KING DAVID, 1 CHRONICLES 21:26

"And David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and he called on the Lord: and he answered him **from heaven by fire** upon the altar of burnt offering."

In 1 Chronicles 13 David tried to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. Uzzah was killed for touching the ark (1 Chronicles 13). David tried a second time and finally brought the Ark to Jerusalem with much rejoicing (1 Chronicles 15, 16).

A short time later David, influenced by Satan, decided to number the people. This was likely a sin of pride or even fear.¹ God judged and brought pestilence on the people, resulting in the death of 70,000. The angel had been slaying the people and worked his way to the threshing floor of Ornan. David was told to build an altar there. The narrative is quite interesting:

1 Chronicles 21:20-22, “And Ornan turned back, and saw the angel; and his four sons that were with him hid themselves. Now Ornan was threshing wheat. And as David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David, and went out of the threshing-floor, and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground. Then David said to Ornan, ‘Give me the place of this threshing-floor, that I may build thereon an altar unto Jehovah.’”

1 Chronicles 21:23-25, “And Ornan said unto David, ‘Take it to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: lo, I give thee the oxen for burnt-offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meal-offering; I give it all.’ And king David said to Ornan, ‘Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for Jehovah, nor offer a burnt-offering without cost.’ So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight.”

1 Chronicles 21:26, 27, “And David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, and he called on the Lord: and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt-offering. And Jehovah commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof.”

This is certainly a dramatic and emotional narrative. It ends with Jehovah manifesting his acceptance of David’s offering. There are two reasons for this acceptance:

- David’s heartfelt repentance.
- This place was a location of acceptable sacrifices!

This second reason has profound significance! Of all the places on earth, this location was special.

(1) This is the area where Abraham offered Isaac! (Genesis 22)

(2) This is the area where Solomon’s Temple would be built. (1 Chronicles 23)

(3) This is the area where Jesus was to be crucified!

Consequently, it is clear why Jehovah chose to accept and consume this burnt offering with his own fire!² This was to be holy ground where vital elements of God’s plan were carried out.

EXAMPLE 4 — KING SOLOMON, 2 CHRONICLES 7:1

“Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the **fire came down from heaven**, and consumed the burnt-offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of Jehovah filled the house.”

As soon as Solomon’s prayer was finished, Jehovah consumed the sacrifices and “fire came down.” This

is a simple and yet profound indicator that Jehovah considered the Temple an acceptable place of worship! It was constructed in the same area where Jehovah had accepted David’s offering with divine fire.

The significance of Solomon’s Temple is described by Bro. Russell. “The Church will be the great Temple through which all the world of mankind may have access to God and return to harmony with Him. Thus, eventually, this glorified Church, or Temple, will be the House of Prayer for all people, all nations—not that they will pray to a house, but that they will approach God through the glorified Church, in which His Presence will be manifested and His mercy will be available to all. From this viewpoint, the Temple with its Shekinah glory represented the Church in the glory of the future, in association with Christ; and God will dwell in and operate through that glorious Church for the blessing of the world” (R5713).

The number of animals sacrificed during the dedication ceremony was around 142,000 (2 Chronicles 7:5). This was far too many to put on the altar. So, some were offered in the middle of the court (1 Kings 8:64) because the brazen altar was insufficient to accommodate all of the offerings.

EXAMPLE 5 — GIDEON, JUDGES 6:18-21

Verse 21, “Then the angel of Jehovah put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there went up **fire out of the rock**, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and the angel of Jehovah departed out of his sight.”

The situation Israel was experiencing at the time is helpful when endeavoring to understand the circumstances under which Gideon was called.

(1) Israel was under the severe domination of the Midianites.

(2) The Midianites had taken everything and were a great trial to the Israelites (Judges 6).

(3) The people cried out to Jehovah for deliverance. (Judges 6:6). So, Jehovah chose Gideon as their Deliverer.

(4) The angel consumed Gideon’s offering with miraculous fire! This indicated God’s acceptance and authorized Gideon to be Israel’s deliverer.

There was a reason for this miraculous display. Gideon understood the difficulty of this commission. There was no practical way to deliver Israel. They were forbidden to possess weapons and all blacksmith shops had been shut down. The people were generally in unbelief, not yet converted back to the Lord.



Solomon offering to God

Gideon needed a special demonstration of his acceptance in order to be convinced. Gideon brought an offering to God to indicate his own acceptance of God's commission. God showed his acceptance of Gideon by the miraculous fire which consumed his offering.

Gideon has great reason to question the validity of Jehovah's commission. Jehovah was asking him to do what seemed impossible in the current circumstances. The people were still in unbelief and had been rejected by God for years. So, Jehovah demonstrated the acceptance of what could have been considered impossible. The fire from God was an undeniable witness that what seemed impossible would be accomplished with God's help. This is a wonderful example of the grace of God making up for what His people may lack!

EXAMPLE 6 — ABEL (GENESIS 4:3-5)

The next example requires a bit of conjecture. But assuming our surmise is correct, the same elements of God's acceptance seen in the previous examples are again manifested.

"It came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto Jehovah. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And Jehovah had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell."³

The manner Jehovah used to show his acceptance of Abel's sacrifice is not declared. However, probably God demonstrated His acceptance in some visible way. How else could Abel have known? The suggestion of divine fire is not unreasonable. The previous examples reveal that Jehovah has demonstrated His acceptance of offerings by a supernatural fire. Such an explanation here then is consistent. Thus Abel is included in our list of examples.

All six examples revealed God's acceptance in special circumstances. They also indicated a pattern for accepting future sacrifices.

EXAMPLE 7: YOU AND I

We have seen how Jehovah God manifested his acceptance of sacrifices by sending supernatural fire to consume them. He did so in extraordinary times and in each case, there was a special lesson to be learned.

We are now in the process of offering our consecrated lives to God through Christ. We began at our initial consecration and continue the offering each day of our lives. How can we know that Jehovah has accepted our offering? Remember the principle being demonstrated in the above examples, Jehovah accepts offerings by consuming them with divine fire. It is the same for us!

Psalms 20:3, "Remember all thy offerings, And accept thy burnt-sacrifice; Selah." This Psalm is, of course, our prayer. We want to have our offering accepted. But this text has another rendering which is very enlightening!



Abel's offering was accepted by God.

Psalms 20:3, "He doth remember all thy presents, And thy burnt-offering doth reduce to ashes. Selah" (Young's Literal Translation). Albert Barnes' commentary here is very interesting:

"And accept — Margin, **turn to ashes**, or make fat. The Hebrew word *dashen* (H1878) — דַשֵׁן — means properly to make fat, or marrowy, Proverbs 15:30; to pronounce or regard as fat; to be fat or satiated, or abundantly satisfied, Proverbs 13:4. It conveys also the notion of reducing to ashes; perhaps from the fact that the victim which had been fattened for sacrifice was reduced to ashes; or, as Gesenius supposes (Lexicon, see דַשֵׁן *deshen*), because "ashes were used by the ancients for fattening, that is, manuring the soil." The prayer here seems to be that God would "pronounce the burnt-offering fat;" that is, that he would regard it favorably, or would accept it."

Thus Jehovah will manifest his acceptance of an offering by 'turning it to ashes.' This means that God shows his acceptance of our offering **by using us!** He turns our sacrifices into ashes, lifting up the sacrifice!! Being turned into ashes requires constant contact with the fire! We cannot back off because the fire is hot! Of Jesus it was said: "The zeal of thine house has consumed me."

A question now posed to each of the Lord's people: "Is Jehovah using you?" If you are laying down your life daily in the service of Jehovah, the truth, and the brethren, and are being a blessing in so doing, then God is certainly using you. He is turning your offering to ashes and thus showing His acceptance of your sacrifice.

The seventh fire from heaven then is the acceptance of your consecration. As Jehovah uses you in his service, He demonstrates that you are accepted by consuming your offering. You must always have a burning desire to give to Jehovah what you have promised Him. "Daily seek to renew your consecration and daily seek to fulfill it" (Brother John Edgar).

May each of us labor without ceasing in the service of Jehovah through Jesus Christ; making an offering of our small service in the hope that Jehovah will accept it and turn it to ashes. And out of those ashes may we hope for

the beautiful crown of glory, the final acceptance of our offering and the proclamation from God — “Well done, my good and faithful servant!”

Isaiah 60:1-3, “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion — to bestow on them, the oil of joy instead of mourning *a crown of beauty instead of ashes*, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.”

— Br. David Stein

(1) Another possibility was that he wanted to know his military strength. This is evidenced by the fact that when Joab returned with the numbers, he only mentions how many men could use the sword (1 Chronicles 21:5). So the reason may have also been fear. If David

wanted to know how many men could use a sword he seemed to be interested in the strength of his army. This may have been caused by a fear of his enemies, and thus a lack of trust in God.

(2) Application Note: David would not accept Ornan’s offer to give him his threshing floor without cost. David said he would not offer to God what did not cost him anything. The lesson is that we are not to offer to the Lord that which costs us nothing!

(3) Abel we are told brought “firstlings” of his flock, and the text has the word *bekorah* which means female firstborn, of either sheep or goats. Dr. Young’s translation says that Abel brought “the female firstling of his flock.” “Even from their fat ones.” In other words God should have the first and the best of his flock, he chose the fattest and the best of the firstborns as his contribution. But Cain did not bring the best of his produce. This is shown by the Hebrew words used in Genesis 4:3. The “firstfruits,” in the sense of the earliest to ripen in Hebrew, is *bikkar* (Numbers 13:20). The firstfruits in the sense of the best produce is *reshith* (Leviticus 2:12, 23:10). The term for fruit in general is *peri*, and this is the very term used in Genesis 4:3 for Cain’s sacrifice. So it appears that Cain did not bring firstfruits of his labors as did Abel. He brought of the fruit of his labors but it was not of the best or the choicest or earliest, and that is why his offering was rejected. That was why “Abel offered unto God a far more excellent sacrifice than Cain” in Hebrews 11:4. The Almighty can only accept of our best, and sadly, Cain failed to give of his best.

Rubbed Upon the Touchstone

The use of the word torment in the Bible has misled many to believe in the false teaching of eternal torment. In the King James version, the Greek word *basanos* (G931, βασανος) is commonly translated torment or tormented. However, the concept of hell as a place of sorrow and pain is inconsistent with the true Biblical teaching that hell means the grave, a condition of death where there is no consciousness (e.g. Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10). A proper understanding of *basanos* is helpful in bringing harmony to God’s word.

Vine’s Dictionary says that *basanos* is “primarily a touchstone, employed in the testing of metals.”

Webster’s dictionary defines a touchstone as follows. “Touchstone n (1) Lydian stone; *basanite* — so called because used to test the purity of gold and silver by the streak which is left upon the stone when it is rubbed by the metal. See *Basanite*. (2) Any test or criterion by which the qualities of a thing are tried.”¹

Examining the way *basanos* is used in a few different contexts reveals that it can be associated with the thought of punishment resulting from failing a particular test. But *basanos* itself does not include the thought of physical torment in a burning hell.

TOSSED WITH WIND AND WAVES

The word occurs 21 times in the New Testament, in various forms of the root word. One text is Matthew 14:24. “But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, **tossed** with waves: for the wind was contrary.”

The context describes Jesus sending his disciples out into the Sea of Galilee while he went to pray in the nearby mountains. Later that evening a storm arose and the disciples’ ship was “tossed with waves.” This word “tossed” is the verb form of *basanos*, *basanizo* (G928). In other words, the ship was being tested by the storm. Could it endure the powerful wind and waves?

The parallel account in Mark 6:48 reads a little differently. Rather than the ship being tested, it describes how the disciples were tested. “And he saw them **toiling** in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them.” The word “toiling” is the word *basanizo*. The strength of the disciples was being put to the test by the violent storm.

VEXED HIS SOUL

Another instance of *basanizo* is found in 2 Peter 2:8. “For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, **vexed** his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds.”

Speaking of Lot, the account points out that living in Sodom was *basanos* to him. Righteous Lot was being worn down by the constant need to resist the evil influences around him. It **vexed** him, it put him to the test of remaining righteous despite living in such a sinful environment. It is an important lesson of the need to be set apart from worldly influences as much as possible.

TORMENT ME NOT

After calming the storm-tossed waters of the Sea of



The spirits cast out of the man, entered into the swine.

Galilee, Jesus landed on the east side, at a place called the country of the Gadarenes. There he was met by a man possessed of “devils.” The passage says, “When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, ‘What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, **torment** me not.’ And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep” (Luke 8:28, 31).

In verse 28, *basanizo* is translated “torment.” Whenever Jesus cast out a demon from someone, he was removing the demon’s control and influence over that individual. In the case of the man fallen before Jesus, many demons afflicted him. By asking Jesus not to torment them, the demons were not expressing fear of physical pain, but feared a removal of their influence. As Jesus was about to cast them out, he had determined them unworthy of such control. Their mark on the touchstone failed the test.

In verse 31, the demon asked Jesus not to “command that they go out into the deep.” In the scriptures, the deep usually refers to the ocean. However, in this verse it is a different Greek word, *abussos*, or abyss (αβυσσος — Strong’s G12). Revelation 20:3 uses the same Greek word to describe Satan being cast into a bottomless pit (*abussos*). This describes how Satan’s ability to interact and influence the nations will be eliminated during the Kingdom. In Jesus’ case, the demons were asking not to be cast into the same pit, or condition of limited influence and power.

Vine’s dictionary adds that *basanos* can also mean “to distress.” Brother Russell uses the example of how a landlord might distress a tenant for not paying their rent. He does not torture the person, but by demanding payment he can create mental anguish at the thought of being evicted. So Jesus was tormenting the demons by ordering them out of this man. (Question Book, page 222.)

A TORMENTED SERVANT

Another occurrence of *basanizo* is found in Matthew 8:6. “And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a Centurion, beseeching him and

saying, ‘Lord, my servant lieth at home, sick of the palsy, grievously **tormented**.’ And Jesus said, ‘I will come and heal him.’”

The word *tormented* is again *basanizo*. This is the first instance we have considered where it may appear to have a sense of personal pain associated with it. Vine’s dictionary says that the word palsy (*paralutikos*) means paralytic. Although there are situations where a paralytic can feel pain, the use of this word may suggest that being paralyzed was distressing to the servant and created great mental anguish. This text then cannot be used to prove conclusively that *basanos* indicates physical pain.

BASANOS USED SYMBOLICALLY

When *basanos* is associated with hell (*hades*), it is done strictly in a symbolic sense. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is an example of this (Luke 16:19-31). In the parable the rich man died and was buried. Lazarus, who had begged at the rich man’s table, also died and was carried to Abraham’s bosom. “And in hell he (the rich man) lifted up his eyes being in **torments** and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham have mercy on me and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am **tormented** in this flame’” (verses 23, 24).

The key to unlocking this parable is found in verse 29. After the rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brethren, Abraham answered: “they have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them.” This is a clear reference to the nation of Israel, who literally had Moses and the prophets. Their teachings were meant to guide and change the hearts of the people, to prepare them to receive their Messiah when he came. But, in so many instances, their hearts were proud of their exalted position. As a result, God removed His favor and gave it to those Gentiles who were contrite of heart. (See Romans 11:9.)

Lazarus pictures the Gentiles who were grafted into the Abrahamic promise as part of the heavenly seed. This is illustrated by Lazarus being taken into Abraham’s bosom. In the parable, the rich man died and was buried, and being in hell (*hades*), he lifted up his eyes being in torment. This verse actually helps to define the meaning of *hades*. By being buried in the ground, he was in *hades*. This means that *hades* is equivalent to being buried. So, the word *hades* simply refers to the grave.

But the point is often made that he was conscious in the grave. How does this harmonize with other clear statements of scriptures, which describe the opposite condition? (See Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10, Psalm 115:17, Psalms 146:4, Daniel 12:2.) The only way to harmonize these plain statements with the rich man speaking in *hades* is that Jesus must have been giving a fictional story to convey a lesson — a parable.

In the broader context of Luke 16, Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees, and we are told that “without a parable

spake he not unto them” (Matthew 13:34). By this parable Jesus was revealing that Israel would die as a nation, and yet many individual Jews would experience the *diaspora* punishment during the Gospel Age. True to this prophecy, 37 years after Jesus’ death, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. As a functioning nation, Israel went into oblivion, while individual Jews were scattered throughout all the nations of the world. It was these Jews who were suffering the consequences of Israel’s failure when rubbed against the touchstone of Jesus’ teachings.

In verse 24 the rich man said, “I am tormented in this flame.” Here Jesus used the word flame in a unique way. This is the only occurrence in the New Testament where it is used by itself. In all other places, it is in connection with fire, a flame of fire. In using the word by itself, Jesus was referring to the light of the flame. The light of truth was an exposing light that revealed to the world Israel’s unbelief. It was not the light that tormented them. But the light brought the wrath of the world upon Israel. Their pain and anguish came as a result of the Lord, rubbing them against the touchstone and proving them unworthy for his favor. The mark Israel left on the touchstone was insincerity, unfaithfulness, and pride.

The word torment appears four times in Luke 16, verses 23, 24, 25, and 28. In the first and last occurrences (verses 23, 28), the word torment is *basanos*. But in the middle two occurrences, (verses 24, 25) the word *odunao* (G3600) is used. It means to grieve, to suffer pain, to be in anguish, to be greatly distressed. This is helpful in understanding how Jesus was using *basanos*. If Jesus had intended *basanos* to refer to literal pain and distress, he would not use a second word, *odunao*, to describe the condition of individual Jews during their diaspora. The result of their rejection was *odunao*, persecution at the hands of the Gentile world.

Jesus used *basanos* to indicate a test of genuineness. The rich man, being in the grave of national extinction, felt the consequences of Israel’s rejection, and cried out for relief. But because of dispensational changes, the guarantees of the Abrahamic promise could not, for a time, be applied for their blessings and deliverance.

Abraham answered, saying that he could not send relief because there was now “a great gulf fixed” between him and the rich man. The word “gulf” (G5490, *chasma*), means, “a chasm or an impassable interval.” An interval relates to time. The set time fixed by God was the 1845 years of disfavor, prophesied to come upon Israel for all her sins — a “chasm” between Israel and God’s favor.

GIVEN TO THE TORMENTORS

In Matthew 18:21-35, Jesus gave a parable often referred to as the Parable of Unforgiving Servant. He used a form of the word *basanos* (*basanistes*) to describe a jailer. It is translated “tormentors” in the King James version. Examining this parable on a basic level, it is difficult to conceive that, when giving a lesson about

mercy and forgiveness, Jesus would condemn someone to literal torture. The lesson he was making is that when an individual fully appreciates the mercy and kindness of God, it will be reflected in their treatment of others.

When the master of the parable learned of the servant’s conduct, he “was wroth, and delivered him to the **tormentors**, till he should pay all that was due unto him” (verse 34). Albert Barnes says, “The word ‘tormentors’ here probably means keepers of the prisons. Torments were inflicted on criminals, not on debtors.” Wilson’s Diaglott translates the word, “jailors.” One of tests God uses to determine the condition of one’s heart is the ability to forgive and extend mercy. This is a fundamental principle on which life will be granted or withheld. Although God is very patient in dealing with His children, if this lesson is not eventually learned, Bro. Russell suggests that in a “hopeless case,” the result would mean second death. This parable then is consistent with the concept of *basanos*, a testing of one’s heart condition.

BASANOS IN REVELATION

The word *basanos*, or *basanizo*, appears eleven times in the book of Revelation.

Chapter 18 describes the judgment of Babylon. Because of her wickedness, she has been given plagues and *basanos* in order to destroy her. “Her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double. How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment (*basanismos*) and sorrow give her: for she saith ... I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow” (Revelation 18:5-7).

Babylon was an ancient empire that had crumbled long before the apostle John wrote these words. Babylon is here used figuratively to describe a system that falsely claims to be Christ’s kingdom. The Apostle Paul said it had its beginning even in his day. It grew powerful enough to systematically endeavor to eliminate the saints of God.

Revelation 6:10 describes the saints crying out of their bitter persecution. “How long, O Lord, holy and



Gate of old Babylon

true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" The passage in Revelation 18 is the fulfillment of God's promise to avenge Babylon's treatment of the saints. "Reward her even as she rewarded you. And double unto her double according to her works." As Babylon brought famine, death, and pain to the true church, she would receive a punishment equal to what she inflicted. In describing Babylon's double punishment, Bro. Russell suggests she would receive "a penalty equivalent to the combined judgments upon all who have despised, rejected, and persecuted God's people throughout the age" (R1702).

The comparison in verses six and seven is a comparison of degrees. How much she has rewarded you, the saints, so much reward her. How much Babylon has glorified herself, so much give her torment (*basanismos*) and sorrow. As a corrupt system, it is prophesied that she will suffer the anguish of her plagues and the undermining of her power. The wealth and position she once possessed is being eroded, and her sins are being exposed. The system is tormented by exposing the dark secrets of the many immoral priests who live within her walls. This is an example of being rubbed on the touchstone of truth and being proven unworthy.



"the third angel followed."

Revelation 14:9, 10, 11. "And the third angel followed them saying with a loud voice, if any man worship the beast and his image and receive his mark in his forehead or in his hand, 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 (*basanizo*) with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the lamb. And the smoke of their torment (*basanismos*) ascended up for ever and ever. And they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and receiveth the mark of his name."

These verses show the consequences for those who take part in, or support, the system of error. At our Lord's return the supporters are tormented with fire and brimstone. They must endure great distress as they watch the systems crumbling around them. The leaders of Christianity will be tormented by losing the power and influence that the system had given them.

Being tormented in the presence of the holy angels and the lamb is significant. This cannot describe a place of literal hell-fire and torment. Why would holy angels and the lamb be in such a place? But, as a symbol of the testing and proving of the time of trouble, a powerful image is conveyed. Christ and the holy angels are now working to expose and destroy the systems of this fallen world.

The passage describes the smoke of their torment ascending forever and ever. It is the smoke that ascends forever, not the torment. This describes the powerful memories that mankind will have for eternity as they

recall the depths of wickedness that man once reached.

Brimstone is here added to the fire. Brimstone is sulfur, a highly flammable element. In the valley of Hinnom, just outside of Jerusalem, sulfur was added to fire to help keep it continually burning. The purpose of this fire was not to punish or to torture, but to completely consume the garbage or any dead animal carcass thrown there. The fire and brimstone of Revelation is a picture of the consuming nature of the time of trouble. Nothing ignoble will endure the Lord's judgments.

This is the same thought conveyed in Revelation 20:10. "The devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

In verse 14, John defines this "lake of fire" by adding "which is the "second death." The Lake of Fire is a symbol of eternal extinction. Casting the devil, the beast, and the false prophet into the Lake of Fire shows that they will never exist again. This passage adds that they will be tormented day and night forever. Their testing on the touchstone of truth demonstrated failure. The underlying failure was pride, a quality inherent in many of those that fail the test when rubbed on God's touchstone. If persisted in, the final result will be second death.

God has given us a touchstone as well. The touchstone is Christ. By understanding his life, we have a standard by which to compare our own lives. In the decisions we make and the course in life we take, he provides the guiding principles. When his guidance results in spiritual growth, then the tests we face will reveal a genuineness of character. The touchstone will have done its work.

Although the Apostle Paul does not use the word *basanos*, he does convey the concept in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

"But thanks be to God, which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).²

— Br. Tom Ruggirello

(1) Online definition, webster-dictionary.org/definition/touchstone

(2) Postnote: *basanizo* — occurs 12 times in the New Testament; *basanismos* occurs 6 times (including twice in Revelation 9:5); *basanistes* occurs once; *basanos* occurs 3 times.