

The East Tennessee Fires

On Nov. 23 the “Chimney tops 2 fire” in the Great Smokey Mountains National Park near Gatlinburg, TN was first reported. On Nov. 28 “the wildfire exploded...as massive walls of flames spread down the mountains into Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge with shocking speed...” Reportedly, over 1,700 structures were either damaged or destroyed. These fires claimed 14 lives and “left nearly 150 injured.” Two teenagers have been “charged with aggravated arson in connection” with these fires.

In October of this year my wife and I vacationed in Gatlinburg. We ate at two restaurants in Gatlinburg. Both were destroyed in the fires. The lodge where we stayed was also destroyed.

But why mention these things in a publication such as this? Primarily, because of the great object lessons to be gleaned. You see, the Great Smokey Mountains, especially in the Fall of the year when the leaves are changing, are a beautiful sight to behold! The mountains, the flowing streams, the majestic trees, the hiking trails, the water falls, etc., provide great attraction to nature lovers, and this results in many thousands of people vacationing in that part of the world. But the greatest appeal no doubt is experienced by those born and reared in that area, many of whom perhaps have viewed their part of the world as the closest thing to paradise on earth.

With thousands of acres of trees either scorched or burned, with hundreds of homes burned to the ground, with many businesses destroyed, with loved ones killed, with dozens of others injured, etc., “paradise” is no longer paradise. No doubt many have lost both their jobs and their homes — and all of that in a matter of days. Their “world,” as they viewed it, has been “turned upside down.”

Certainly we should sympathize with, and pray for, those so adversely affected by this tragedy. But at the same time we should pause and take note of the fact that there are no really permanent structures on earth, and that those many this-world blessings we so often take for granted can be destroyed in an instant! This is why sober-minded people endeavor to get their priorities in order. They know that life on earth is not permanent; they know that mere “things,” at best, can only provide temporary enjoyment. They know “*it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,*” Heb. 9:27. Hence, they take seriously the words of the Savior Who said, “*seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you,*” Matt. 6:33. They know that “death and decay and passing away are written on the wings of time and timely things.” They know that “*we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out,*” I Tim. 6:7. They know that the time of our stay on earth, at best, is short, and that it is filled with upheaval and uncertainty. Consequently, they use time in order to prepare for **eternity**, for they realize that judgment day, with its eternal consequences is surely coming! Cf. Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:10-15.

Getting back to the east Tennessee fires; they scorched thousands of acres. But the **land** is still there. If time continues, the trees will grow back. However, another fire

is approaching, and it won't be confined to east Tennessee! Please read and seriously ponder these words from the pen of the inspired apostle named Peter: "*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both **the earth** and the works that are in it will be burned up,*" 2 Peter 3:10. With the day of the Lord coming "*as a thief in the night,*" you can be sure it will be sudden and unexpected. Even "*the elements will melt with fervent heat!*" And even "*the earth*" itself will "*be burned up.*" Many people made brave, nerve-wracking, dangerous (but successful) attempts to escape the east Tennessee fires. But there is no escaping a fire which will consume "*both the earth and the works that are in it!*"

A lieutenant with the Fire Department, referring to the east Tennessee fires, said "everywhere you looked, there were fires everywhere. It was like driving into hell." I wasn't there, and I cannot relate to the fears which had to consume his entire being, but I beg to differ. First of all, no one can drive "into hell," and once there, there is no escaping that fiery place of unending agony. Jesus spoke to His disciples, saying, "*do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body **in hell**,*" Matt. 10:28. Elsewhere Jesus described hell as "*the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels,*" Matt. 25:41, and also as "*the fire that **never** shall be quenched,*" Mark 9:43. The punishment of the lost in hell will be of the same duration as the blessings of the saved in heaven; it will be "*everlasting*" or "*eternal,*" Matt. 25:46.

Sometimes it seems that we get too attached to "our possessions," "our surroundings," and to the things of this world. But they can all be taken from us in an instant. And even if we could cling to them forever, mere "things" do not provide lasting happiness. If you doubt this, then please explain the miseries that plague many of this world's millionaires, and even billionaires; also explain why some of them commit suicide. They have everything that money can buy, but **money** can't buy happiness, contentment, real friends, escape from ill health and death, and it certainly can't buy peace of mind and salvation in heaven!

Let us remember to pray for those who have lost family, friends, and property because of the east Tennessee fires. But let us also take this as an object lesson, as to what is really important and thus place the eternal well being of our **souls** on a much higher plane than the temporal ease and pleasure of our bodies which temporarily sojourn upon this planet which is destined to be burned up!

It may well be that this article will be read by accountable people who have never obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ, or by some who once obeyed the gospel but have since become unfaithful. Friend, you have no guarantee of tomorrow, Prov. 27:1); "*now is the day of salvation,*" 2 Cor. 6:2. As long as the devil, our "*adversary*" (I Peter 5:8), exists, you can be sure there will be no "*convenient time,*" Acts 24:25, to obey God. So you must resolve to "*submit to God*" and "*resist the devil,*" James 4:7, by obeying the will of God. Do it today! Tomorrow may never come. And even if it does come, it might be too late for **you!**

**** —B. Witherington

Baptizo, Rhantizo, and Ballo

Many man-made churches are very accommodating. Though they demand something called "baptism" before one can be a member of their flock, they will "baptize by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion."

The above words, *baptizo*, *rhantizo*, and *ballo*, are three Greek words spelled in English, but in the Bible they are translated "*baptize,*" "*sprinkle,*" and "*pour,*" respectively. In reality,

“*baptizo*” is not really translated; it is Anglicized and, if translated, it would be “dip,” “immerse,” or “submerge.” *Rhantizo* and *ballo* (translated “*sprinkle*,” and “*pour*”) are never used in connection with *baptizo*, or “*baptize*” (immerse). These words denote three separate acts and, literally speaking, all three cannot be performed on man! For example, one can “sprinkle” or “pour” **water**, but one cannot “baptize” (immerse) water. Likewise, one can immerse (“*baptize*”) a person, but literally speaking one cannot sprinkle or pour a person. **Water** is that which is sprinkled or poured, but a **person** is that which is baptized, or immersed. My conclusion: One can walk by flying as easily as one can be baptized (immersed) by sprinkling or pouring! Friend, if they sprinkled or poured water on you, you were **not** baptized — regardless of what they called it!

—Bobby Witherington
