**VOLUME 1; CHAPTER 5 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**DWELLERS IN FIRE by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling hath seized the godless ones: who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?*

*Isaiah 33:14*

THIS CHAPTER IS A GRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF DIVINE DELIVERANCE wrought, and the text reveals the effect produced upon some in the delivered city as they gazed with wonder and astonishment at the judgment of that God who was their King. The hosts of Assyria had melted away, and yet of these hosts they had been afraid. It must have seemed to those within the city as though they would be utterly overcome by the great armies that lay encamped about the walls. It was of this occasion that Byron sang:

The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,

And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;

And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea;

When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

And yet, though Judah had struck no blow, but through her King and her prophet had waited upon God only, the vast hosts had been driven back, many of them escaping to Nineveh, many of them being left dead upon the field. As the men of Zion looked out at this wonderful work of God, and became conscious of how God wrought without human instrumentality when it so pleased Him, the sinners in Zion were afraid, and the godless inside the delivered city trembled and cried out in their anguish, "Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?" They had seen the fire at its work. They had seen the age-abiding burnings take hold of the enemies of God, until they became weak and were driven and consumed. Isaiah had perpetually taught the truth of the presence of God as righteousness and as fire amongst men. That truth was demonstrated in the destruction of the hosts of Sennacherib. When in answer to prayer God delivered them they were impressed, not so much with the deliverance as with the method. As it proceeded in fiery judgment upon the foes outside, and the consciousness of God as fire came home to those within, they cried out in trembling and anguish: "Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?" Are we safe? May not that fire burn us ere the night fall upon us? May not that age-abiding burning scorch us at it has scorched the men outside? The question is a revelation of the dawning upon the consciousness of these men of the truth which Isaiah had attempted to teach them, that of the presence of God as devouring fire and as age-abiding burnings. This consciousness raised in their case, as it must ever raise in the case of men who arrive at it, an inquiry of the utmost importance. How can man live in lire without being burned or scorched?

Turning from the local colouring, coming at once from Jerusalem to London, from the bygone age to the age that now is, I propose to ask you first to consider with me in the light of the inquiry of the men of old the fact of the presence of God in human life as fire; and, secondly, I shall invite you to make the inquiry they made, "Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire?" and then to listen to the answer of the prophet which immediately follows.

First, let me speak to you of this vision of God as fire. I have already said that this was the burden of Isaiah's message. Certainly the great burden of his message was the immanence of God, the nearness of God. Isaiah, perhaps the mightiest of all the Hebrew prophets, the man of largest outlook and keenest insight, came to an age characterized by its practical godlessness. We know the history of Israel and Judah, and how terrible had been the forgetfulness of God. To these people Isaiah came, saying in effect, You forget God, but you do not escape God; though you put Him out of your thinking, and make no calculation upon His presence and will, He wraps you round about in every hour of your life. This man of far-seeing vision, as he looked on to consummation and deliverance and salvation, expressed the whole of it by one word - Emmanuel, God with us. He taught constantly the presence of God in human affairs, and that in the processes of the method of God there would be a mysterious moment in human history when God would be present in the form of a child. Whether he saw clearly all the issue of his teaching I am not prepared to say, but this was the underlying truth, the nearness of God and the impossibility of human escape from that nearness. Isaiah taught, moreover, the righteous character of God, and insisted that the uplifted throne was based upon righteousness and holiness and equity. He declared with scorching and biting scorn that their religious observances were of no value in the sight of heaven if in their own life they were not true and upright and righteous. He insisted first upon the immanence of God, and, secondly, upon His righteousness and His righteous requirements. Then he perpetually used fire as a symbol of the Divine presence and method. Go back to the opening of the prophecy, to chapter 6, in which he describes the wonderful way in which he was called to the work, when he saw the Lord high and lifted up, and His train filling the temple, and when there came out of his own anguish the cry that told of his sin and of the people's sin, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." How was he prepared for his work? "Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand ... from off the altar; and he touched my mouth with it, and said, Lo, this bath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin forgiven." God came to him as fire for purification, according to the figurative language of that chapter. Then coming to the end of the prophecy, in chapter 66, speaking of the coming of God in punishment, he says: "For behold, Jehovah will come with fire, and His chariots shall be like the whirlwind; to render His anger with fierceness, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire will Jehovah execute judgment, and by His sword, upon all flesh." It is not Isaiah only who uses this figure of fire. All Scripture brings us back again and again to this symbolism. From beginning to end you will find that the presence of God is suggested under the figure of fire. When from the Garden of Eden man was excluded from intimate communion with God it was a flaming sword which was the symbol of that exclusion and of God's holiness. When Cod would reveal Himself to a man for the making of a nation it was in a bush which burned with fire and was not consumed. Then in the New Testament all truth about God is expressed in one remarkable sentence in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "Our God is a consuming fire." Or, if I think of Christ, the last prophecy foretelling His coming declared that "He is like a refiner's fire." Christ Himself used the same figure: "I have come to cast fire upon the earth." In the final book of the Bible, John, describing the glorious vision of this self-same Christ, said: "His eyes were as a flame of fire." Or, if I come to the Holy Spirit of God, omitting all the incidental words concerning Him in the old economy, and taking up the simple story of His coming to initiate the era in the midst of which we live today, what was the symbol of His coming? Tongues of fire that sat upon the heads of the assembled company. I have but gathered these things together to show that this figure runs through the Word of God, teaching us certain truths concerning God Himself.

What, then, are we intended to learn by its use? What is fire? Fire is the evolution of light and heat by combustion. Those of you who perfectly understand what that means are welcome to the definition. I think I see enough of what it means to understand the use of this marvellous figure in the Word of God. In. the New Testament, which is the final revelation, we have three definitions of God, which it is well to put together. "God is love." "God is light." "God is a consuming fire." The greatest of the three is not the first, nor the second, but the last, because it includes the other two. God is love and light, and therefore He is fire. The evolution of light and heat is fire. The combination in one mysterious personality of light and love is fire. Love is heat, passion. Light is illumination, principle. Combine the two and you have fire. "Our God is a consuming fire." Omit if you will the distinguishing word "consuming." It is used there because it is needed in the connection, but the great word stands, "God is fire." Whether He be consuming or not depends entirely upon the condition of that which comes into contact with Him. Whether He be a devouring fire or an age-abiding burning depends entirely upon the condition of the person who comes into contact with Him. To put the whole thing superlatively, whether when a man is wrapped about with God he be in hell or heaven depends upon what the man is in himself. No man escapes God in hell. I need not say that no man escapes God in heaven. It is the One Presence which makes heaven and hell the presence of the God of fire, who is to certain people a devouring fire and to others an age-abiding burning. It is this combination in a personality of passion and principle acting upon each other, holding each other in true proportion, which blazes out into fire. If there were nothing but principle it would petrify itself into stone. Where there is principle - light, and passion - love, principle is suffused with passion and passion is held in check by principle, and there is fire. Not fire that needs feeding with any earthly fuel or else it die, but the eternal fire, the age-abiding fire, which fire is God Himself.

Take this symbolism of fire a little further. What shall we say of the presence of fire? It is everywhere. Scientists make use of the word "eremacausis," and believing with John Ruskin that it is well to translate such words into simpler words, I find that eremacausis means a slowly burning fire. There is in nature everywhere a slowly burning fire. There is fire in everything, there is no escape from it. We do not always see its flame, but it is always burning, and it is most beneficent. Without it nature could not renew itself, nature would be halted in its procession from season to season, and in its unfolding of new glory and beauty. Sometimes we speak of this in other words as the process of oxidation going forward everywhere. I pick up a piece of metal from the highway. It is rust covered. What is rust? Fire. I stand in autumn looking at the hillside clothed with trees, and I admire the beauty of the tints. But what is this? Fire. This is not poetry. This is not imagination. This is cold, scientific fact. The fires in nature flame out in autumn time. What are they doing? Devouring effete things - age-abiding fires thoroughly purging nature's floor, and making way for springtime and new harvests. These fires are destroying this building while we are in the midst of it, tearing it down, burning up the effete thing, making way for something yet to be. It is not idly that this great figure of fire is utilized all through Scripture as a symbol of God. God is in this and every age, in this and every place. He fills heaven with His presence. He wraps earth about by that self-same presence. He is every-where throughout the limitless and marvellous universe of which we know so little. There is no escape from Him. He is present as fire, as devouring, age-abiding fire. At this very moment all the men of this age and all the movements of this age, and all the thinking of this age are wrapped about with this fire, penetrated with this fire. I am not yet dealing with the effect it will produce upon us, but rather facing the fact of the presence of God everywhere, and the impossibility of escape from that presence.

I would like for one moment to change my tone and say that in this text there is the greatest comfort the soul of man can find. I never look at some vested interest rearing its lordly head and blighting with its breath the life of men without saying, Oh, thou foul monster, thou too art wrapped in the fires of God, and as the Assyrian host melted so shalt thou melt presently! It would be interesting to make application of that to all the nation and the outside world, but I am more anxious to make application to this audience. I am in the fire now. I am wrapped about with Deity, unable to lift my material hand save in Divine strength, unable to think a problem out save with heaven's own wisdom. I may prostitute the wisdom and the strength, but it is in God I live and move and have my being, and God is a fire.

One word more as to this symbolism of fire. If this is fire, and the presence of fire, what is its effect? It is penetrative, it is resistless. It is devouring or transmuting into permanence, according to the material that is put in it. There are things that fire makes not to be, so far as there can be an end of anything. There are things that fire makes stronger and mightier. There are certain things which, if flung into a furnace, lose their identity. There are other things which, when put into the furnace, lose dross, alloy, admixture, and flash with new brilliance and lustre. The effect of fire is according to the material. To certain things fire is devouring, and the Hebrew word "devouring" is, literally, eating. We talk of rust eating, and it is a perfectly correct figure; it is the figure of this word. Who among us can dwell with fire which eats like rust? Who among us can bear the age-abiding burnings?

From these questions, then, as to the symbolism of fire we make these deductions: God, because He is love and light, is fire. He is everywhere, therefore all things and all men are already in the burning and ever-present fire. In its effect fire is devouring, or transmuting into permanence, and I would not pass from that statement without one word of personal application. God is destroying you or making you. God as a veritable fire is devouring you already, or is devouring that in you which would destroy you, in order that you yourself may not be destroyed. Everything depends upon what we are in ourselves. I am not dealing with how a change in personality may be effected which changes the relationship to fire. That is the Gospel, blessed be God! I am dealing with simple and abiding law. Those souls that have wandered into everlasting darkness, who have of their own deliberate choice turned their back upon the call of infinite mercy and of infinite law, are not without God, they are with Him, and the fire of their age-abiding devouring is the fire of the Divine presence. Draw me what graphic picture you will of the condition of the lost, it may be lurid, it may be medieval, according to the fastidiousness of this age, out of date, but no picture of the Middle Ages is half so dreadful as the fact of the soul abiding in God yet out of harmony with Him - destroyed by the fire that ought to have made it, because of deliberate and final choice on the part of that soul. Hell is begun here as heaven is begun here. I am not foolish enough to tell you that hell ends here anymore than I am foolish enough to tell you that heaven ends here. Some men tell me that heaven is beyond but that hell is all here. Hell begins here; some of you are in it. Heaven begins here; some of us are in it. When we have done with this material frame we shall be where we choose here and now. Whether in hell or heaven, we shall have our being in God, and in God as fire. Whether to feel forevermore the eating and devouring of that fire upon the thing that is unworthy, or to feel forevermore the burning of that fire to high and noble purpose and permanence, depends entirely upon what we are ourselves. How often this text has been preached from as though it refers to hell. So it does, but it also refers to heaven. The deepest thing in it is not a description of hell, but a tremendous announcement that God is fire. It is the cry of a heart conscious of sin, Who can dwell in this? Who can dwell in such burnings as this?

Now we turn to that inquiry. Take the simple word used in both cases. Who can dwell in the fire. Who can dwell in the burnings? You will find that the word "dwell" is used four times in this chapter. Twice in the chapter of my text, in verse 16: "He shall dwell on high," and in verse 24, "The people that dwell therein." The Hebrew word is not the same. There are here three Hebrew words with different shades of meaning. In verse 24 is a word which suggests sitting down in perfect rest in a certain place. In verse 16 the word signifies being at home. In my text it signifies to sojourn as a guest. The word used in the text itself has three distinct significations: to sojourn as a guest, to fly away, and sometimes conflict. I am by no means perfectly sure what these men meant when they used it. I am not sure that the use of this many-sided word is not indicative of the trembling fear in which they asked the question, as though they had said: See that fire outside, how it has destroyed the Assyrians. Who of us dare visit it, dare flee it, dare fight it? There is evidence of a lurking sub-consciousness that that fire is where they are also, and a desire to be out of it. Who are the men who ask the question? Sinners, ungodly ones, and they say, Who can be the guest of fire and not be burned or scorched by the flame? What flame is it, O men of Jerusalem? Of what are you speaking? And I think I hear their answer. There has been a scorching fire; behold the Assyrians dead about our city. We are delivered, but, oh, what a blast has burned Assyria! Who of us can live in it? Whether they were consciously in it is not definitely told by the word they used, but they were conscious of its nearness. They felt the hot blast of the fire sweeping toward them and said, Who among us can dwell there? If there had been nothing but the question we should have gone away feeling that the symbolism of the test was that of judgment only. How wonderful is the answer of the prophet: "He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly." That is, he whose attitude toward God is what it ought to be. It is as though the prophet had said: I have told you that God is righteous, God is upright, God is fire. But you need not be afraid of the fire if you have God's character: "He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly." How shall I know whether that is my condition or not? And the prophet turns from the relationship to God to the relationship to man. "He that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from taking a bribe, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from looking upon evil: he shall dwell on high." Isaiah uses a stronger word than they used. He says, If you are right with God you can be at home in fire. Then follows the most marvellous description of the absolute safety of the soul that is right with God. He gives the position, "he shall dwell on high"; and the defence, "his place of defence shall be munitions of rocks"; his sustenance, "his bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure"; his hope, "thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty."

May I venture to translate this message of Isaiah into other words? Oh, soul of mine, art thou afraid in the presence of the truth that God is fire? If thou art afraid it is because of what thou art in thyself. God's fires never harm God's children. The man who partakes of God's character can live in God's fire. You may well fear fire if you are a sinner. You may well fear the burnings if your hands are full of bribes and there is blood in your garments. You may well fear the fire if you are unholy, unrighteous, but not if you are right with God. To use the magnificent and daring word of Peter, the man who himself partakes of "the Divine nature" can live in the fire of the Divine nature. Hell and heaven are one in atmosphere, and the atmosphere is a burning, blistering pain, or a shining, beauteous glory, according to what I am in myself. Nothing can live in fire but that which is of the nature of fire. Nothing can live in fire but that which will take hold of the fire and be unweakened thereby. Who is it that can dwell in everlasting burnings and be unafraid? He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly. He can dwell in the fire.

This is the great rock upon which faith fastens in the midst of toil. I may be speaking to some tonight who are greatly overburdened in their toil for God. Perhaps there are some worshiping with us who have come from the country, and down there in your village or town it seems as though God was being beaten, it looks as though the Assyrian must triumph over Judah. It is not so. God is in this age burning, burning, burning, and only that can remain which partakes of the fire nature, which answers the call of righteousness and becomes righteous. The mightiest foe cannot abide, God will burn it to destruction. Assyria is very proud. She spoils, though none has spoiled her. She deals treacherously, though none has dealt treacherously with her. For a time evil has a glamour and apparent glory about it. Take heart, and be at rest, oh, warrior of the King! The one thing that evil cannot do is lock its door against God. He wraps it about in the flame of His own being, and there is no evil house in London, no evil man or movement that is not already in this all-embracing fire. I thank God that my heart knows it.

Then there is the other side of this great truth, which should give my heart pause tonight. Can I dwell with the lire? Can I dwell with the age-abiding burnings? Let me drop the figurative language of the prophet and ask, Am I right with God? That is the final question. If I am right with God then I can dwell with the fire. If not, I must still dwell in the fire, but the fire will blast me. Hell is an absolute necessity of morality. Deny me the fire of hell which burns the man who deliberately turns his back upon right, and by that denial you deny me the love of God, the love and light, from the commingling of which fire issues. Find me the man, the woman, the child, who is love-governed, and who walks in light, that is a son, a daughter of fire. Such can live in fire. Find me the man, the woman, hate-governed, and who loves darkness, such is stubble for burning. The very fire which purifies to perfection the son of fire consumes with age-abiding force the soul that is against God.

Oh, soul of mine, canst thou dwell in fire? I dare hardly ask you, so does the question press on me. Ask it of your own heart tonight. Having said with these men, Who can dwell in the fire? say, I am in the fire What will it do with me? Will this fire, from which I cannot escape, this fire so slowly burning that in my unutterable folly I think of it as some autumnal tint, when it is blasting devastation - will it finally devour or purify me?

Eternal Light! Eternal Light!

How pure the soul must be,

When, placed within Thy searching sight,

It shrinks not, but, with calm delight,

Can live, and look on Thee!

The spirits that surround Thy throne

May bear the burning bliss;

But that is surely theirs alone,

Since they have never, never known

A fallen world like this.

There is a way for man to rise

To that sublime abode; -

An offering and a sacrifice,

A Holy Spirit's energies,

An Advocate with God.