

Jewish nation. "My word," said Jehovah, "is as fire, and as a hammer that breaketh the rock in peices;" and "my word in thy mouth shall be as fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them."

Fire, indeed, is in no place the symbol of spiritual blessings; The fire of persecution may be a blessing—afflictions may be a blessing—calamities may be blessings in disguise; but that *fire upon a person* can be a natural blessing, must first be proved before it can be the type or emblem of a spiritual blessing! Will any lover of mysticism undertake to show how fire upon a man's flesh can be refreshing as the water; as preparatory to his proof that to be immersed in flame is an appropriate symbol of the refreshing and consoling influences of the Spirit!

But still more preposterous is this visionary interpretation, when we consider that our Lord, to whom the Baptist refers in this passage, often promised a fiery immersion to his enemies, and never to his friends. In the parable of the Tares, he promised a baptism in fire to his enemies. Matt. xiii. 40—42, "As, therefore, the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of the world: the Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity: and they shall cast them into a furnace (a baptistry) of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Again, says he three times, Mark ix. "Better for you to enter into life maimed," &c. "than to go into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched." And in Matt. xxv. "Depart, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels," &c. There is, then, no countenance for such a shocking confusion of figures in any portion of scripture, Old Testament or New. Let us, then, look into the whole context of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, in reference to this point.

Matthew makes the Baptist ask "the vipers" of that day, "many of the Scribes and Pharisees who came to his baptism," to tell "who had prompted them to flee from the wrath to come"—"the impending vengeance," spoken of by Malachi. "For," says that Prophet, speaking of the last days of Jerusalem, and his people, "Behold the day comes, saith the Lord, that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, and all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, and it shall leave them neither root nor branch." "Behold I will send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of that great and terrible day of the Lord"—the day of this immersion in flame. Here, then, was Elijah in the person of John, saying to those "vipers" who would not reform, "Who has prompted you to flee from the wrath coming on this nation?" "I, indeed," says he, "baptize you, (i. e. men,) into reformation," in order to your escaping this vengeance: for 'now the axe is ready to cut down all you rotten trees, that you may be cast into the fire.' "He that cometh after me is mightier than I; he shall immerse you (i. e. men,) in the Holy Spirit and in fire." He can separate the pretender from the reformer—"his fan or winnowing shovel is in his hand." "He will indeed cleanse his floor." He will blow out of you the chaff, and he will gather out of you the wheat into