

IS THERE ANYTHING LIKE HOLY GHOST FIRE IN THE BIBLE?

Instead of carefully scrutinizing what they have been taught in the light of the Scriptures, many professed Christians today allow themselves to be carried away by every wind of doctrine as long as such appear to satisfy their immediate emotional and material concerns. One of such doctrines is the teaching that there is something like “holy ghost fire” which can be invoked to destroy one’s enemies or whatever obstacles that may lie in one’s way.

Some seekers-after-truth have been asking whether this teaching is supported by the Scriptures. One of those who have expressed such concern is Dr. Reuben Abati of *The Guardian*. In an article entitled “The prayer warriors” he complained that the manner “Holy Ghost fire” prayers were being said at a Pentecostal church he attended amounted to arguing with God. Asserting that in these churches “Prayer-time is war time”, he added: “Prayer warriors worship a God of spectacle, they reach out to a distant God who has to be shouted upon and nudged and commanded.” –*The Guardian* September 26, 2003, page 51.

In a spirited response to the article one Lola Falobi contended that the issue of “violent prayers” and “speaking in tongues” was not new, and “could be traced to as far back as when the disciples of Jesus assembled together in the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-3)” He continued: “Besides, Pentecostal members pray feverishly because we live in a world where Satan (and his agents) have not relented in their wickedly adventurous devices and antics...Even though the Bible states that we should ask, seek and knock (Matthew 7:7) I am sure you should not do that timidly, especially when Jesus told his disciples ‘the kingdom of God suffereth violence, and the violent taketh it by force’ (Matthew 11:12)” He went on to contend that if Dr. Abati had been “tormented by the devil or faced any form of spiritual attack” he will “spend all his spiritual energy to constantly rebuke Satan” and that he should not blame those who “are shouting themselves hoarse during their prayer time or who pray vigorously and fervently” as they have their reasons. – *The Guardian* November 6, 2003, page 16

There is no denying the fact that it is now common to hear at crusades and services, church leaders yelling “holy ghost!” and the congregation energetically responding, “fire” and the next line which usually follows, “Holy Ghost fire” to which they start screaming “burn them!” “consume them!” or “destroy them!” as the case may be. According to the report by Dr. Abati the congregants were hysterically praying: “Father, destroy them. Father, bind them. I bind them in the name of Jesus. Holy Ghost fire, burn them. I say Burn them!, burn them! Holy Ghost Fire destroy them...” (*The Guardian* September 26, 2003, page 51) Whether this type of prayer is in harmony with the Scriptures or not they do not care to know. This is of course contrary to the Bible standard which requires us to verify the truth of what we are told before we accept such as an article of faith. – 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1; Acts 17:10,11.

Wrong notions

We must point out that the incident in Acts 2: 1-41 in which the 12 apostles spoke in tongues in fulfillment of the Lord’s promise cannot be used to justify holy ghost fire prayers. In the first place what happened on that day was that the apostles spoke various languages other than their own Galilean tongue. The testimony by those who heard the apostles is clear on this, as it is written:

“And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.” – Acts 2:7-11.

From the text above one could see that the tongues spoken by the apostles were known languages which were understood by the people who had converged at Jerusalem for the Pentecost, a later name for the feast of weeks which comes up on the 50th day after the Passover. The apostles did not behave in a wild manner. They were preaching, not praying. What obtains these days however is that the congregation keep shouting sometimes for hours on end, uttering unintelligible sounds (which they call speaking in tongues) – all in the name of prayers. This is of course the direct opposite of what happened on the day of Pentecost. What these professed Christians fail to realize is that speaking in tongues was necessary when Christianity was at its infancy so that the gospel could reach those who were not Jews. After a while, the gift ceased. The time of speaking in tongues has passed as St. Paul himself declared. – 1 Corinthians 13:8.

When Jesus Christ spoke of the kingdom of heaven suffering “violence” and the “violent” taking it by force, he meant that the devil and his agents use violence to continually persecute the true servants of God and make false claims to the kingdom. (2 Corinthians 11:13-15) History is replete with records of atrocities committed by so-called Church leaders against those they called ‘heretics’. Such churches have proved themselves not to be the servants of God. – Revelation 2:9; 3:9.

Another place cited by those who believe and teach the doctrine of holy ghost fire is Matthew 3:11. In the text John the Baptist, speaking of Jesus Christ stated: “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” It should be noted that this text does not say one should pray for fire to destroy one’s enemies. The statement of John the Baptist meant that the mission of Christ was of a far higher order than his. After Christ had been baptized with water by John the Baptist, the holy spirit alighted on him in the form of a dove. (Matthew 3:16-17) Thereafter he promised the apostles the gift of the holy spirit (or the spirit of anointing) which fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the spirit descended on them in the form of cloven tongues of fire. (Luke 24:47-49; Acts 1:3-8; Acts 2:1-41) This was the baptism with the holy spirit spoken of by John the Baptist.

For the fact that the holy spirit helps, strengthens and teaches the servants of God to withstand the fiery trials that come their way at the instance of the devil, it is called the Comforter or the Teaching Spirit (John 14:26; John 15:26; 1 John 2:27) The holy spirit is meant to help, not to destroy people.- Romans 8:26.

The baptism of fire mentioned earlier is not about retribution but refers to the suffering which Christ and those of the heavenly class face in the course of their ministry on earth. In the Psalms, the prophet David wrote under the inspiration of God: “Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.” (Psalms 50:5) The servants of God are called into a “covenant of sacrifice” and so they are prepared to suffer anything including death in the course of their ministry. Because they of the heavenly class suffer tribulations all their days on earth Christ declared thus: “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. “- Revelation 2:10.

The incident in which the prophet Elijah commanded fire to come from heaven to destroy or consume two captains and their bands (2 Kings 1) is also misconstrued by some as basis for

holy ghost fire prayers. That was an isolated incident in the ministry of the prophet and should not be applied in this time of grace. – John 1:17; 2 Corinthians 3:17.

Holy Spirit not Holy Ghost

There is nothing like Holy Ghost. The word *ghost*, according to *The New Imperial Reference Dictionary* comes from the archaic English word *g'ast* which is derived from the German word *geist*, meaning “a spirit appearing after death”. The *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* says it means “the spirit of a dead person appearing to somebody who is still living” while the *Websters New World Dictionary* defines *ghost* as among other things “the supposed disembodied spirit of a dead person, conceived of as appearing to the living as a pale, shadowy apparition”

The word *ghost* was wrongly used by the translators of the King James Version of the Bible to stand for “spirit” which is the same thing as “breath of life” – the power of God which is responsible for the functioning of the organs. For instance John 19:30 is rendered in the King James version as follows: “When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.” But the New King James Version has translated it thus: “ So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit”. Other translations such as the *New American Standard Version*, the *New International Version*, the *Revised Standard Version*, *The Living Bible*, the *Jerusalem Bible* and so on have all changed the word *ghost* to spirit.

In the New Testament, (King James Version) there is frequent use of the term “Holy Ghost”. When later translators realized this error in the use of the word “ghost”, they expunged it from their translations. For instance Matthew 28:19 is rendered thus in the King James Version “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” But this has been amended in the *New King James Version* to read “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

The idea that a person continues to live after death, which is the meaning carried by the word *ghost* is of course superstitious, devilish and completely alien to the truth of the Scriptures. (Genesis 3:1-4) In Hebrews 9:27 St. Paul declared unequivocally: “ And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment”. Also, the prophet Solomon stated: “For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” – Eccl 9:5,6,10. See also Psalm 146:3,4.

It could be seen therefore that once a man dies, he becomes unconscious, lifeless, inactive. He does not become a “ghost” wandering about but remains in the grave until the day of resurrection. -John 5:28,29; Acts 24:14,15.

Jesus' Example

That God is opposed to the practice of praying for fire to burn people is eloquently attested to by the statement of Christ when he was to pass through some Samaritan villages and they would not let him pass as it is written: "And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem. And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village." – Luke 9:51-56

It could be seen that when prompted by his enraged disciples to pray for fire to destroy the Samaritans for their slight on him, Jesus Christ rebuked them. But the professed Christians of today would readily call for fire to burn their enemies. God will not answer such prayers. Jesus Christ during his sermon on the mount exhorted: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." – Matthew 5:43-48. See also Luke 6:27,28.

It should be noted that when Christ said "pray for your enemies" and those who "despitefully use you and persecute you", it is to the end that God will open their eyes to understand their folly so that they will turn to righteousness and not for them to be strengthened in wickedness. St. Paul also said: "Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not." (Romans 12:14) He added: "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." -Romans 12:17-21; Proverbs 25:21,22.

It should be recalled that one of the reasons God blessed Solomon richly was that he did not ask for the life of his enemies. (1 Kings 3:5-15) Even while suffering the pangs of death, Jesus Christ prayed God Almighty in this wise: "...Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34) St. Stephen followed the same example when as he lay dying "he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge". (Acts 7:60) The Bible warns against rejoicing when calamities befall one's enemies as it is written: "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him." (Proverbs 24:17,18) If it is ungodly to derive pleasure from the troubles of those who oppose righteousness, is it prayer for doom to befall such people that God will answer? Certainly not.

Therefore, praying for evil to befall one's neighbours is clearly unchristian as it does not take account of the grace of God by which He forbears and forgives people when they repent. (Psalm 130:3,4; 2 Peter 3:9) The Bible teaches tolerance and peaceful co-existence. (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-42; Romans 12:18) We should be tolerant of those who do not know God or who oppose God that He may grant them repentance knowing that it is the devil who has taken them captive at his will. (2 Timothy 2:26) It needs be pointed out that some of the Samaritans were later converted to the Christian faith. (Acts 1:8; 8:14) Also, if the early apostles had called for fire to destroy Saul who later became Paul while he was persecuting them, he would not have been alive to expand the frontiers of Christianity as he did in his days by the grace and power of God.

Manner of Prayer

The Bible says that by their fruits ye shall know them. (Matthew 7:16,20) It is noteworthy that in the course of their prayers, some Christians today behave like the worshippers of Baal in their encounter with Elijah as described in 1 Kings 18. They scream or shout repeatedly at the top of their voices; they engage in outlandish gestures like vigorously waving their hands, stamping their feet, rolling on the floor, pounding the wall with their hands; running helter-skelter, uttering incomprehensible sounds in the name of speaking in tongues and so on. These are not the manifestations of the spirit of God which is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." (James 3:17)

It should also be pointed out that the spirit of the prophets is always subject to the prophets. (1 Corinthians 14:32) The spirit of God does not operate in such a way that the person will lose control of himself and behave in a

The pattern of prayer in some churches these days is at variance with Christ's instruction in Matthew 6:5-8 to wit: "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him."

Vengeance

There is no doubt that God will take vengeance on the wicked. But he will do so at His own time and in the manner he chooses – after giving them sufficient warning. (Matthew 24:14) In the book of the prophet Ezekiel, it is stated that God Almighty commanded His servants on earth to go about setting a mark on the foreheads of all those who sigh and cry for the wickedness that are being done in the city. In other words, he should impart the truth to them. It is when that work is finished that God will command the angels to go "through the city, and smite: old and young, both maids, and little children, and women." – Ezekiel 9:4-6.

Definitely if the wicked man continues in his wickedness, he will not go unpunished. (Proverbs 11:19,21; Psalm 19:7; Revelation 21:8) It is God Almighty Who will carry out the punishment, through Jesus Christ, not the propagators of the holy ghost fire doctrine. That was why in St. Paul's letter to the Christians at Thessalonica he declared that that Jesus Christ will in "flaming fire" take vengeance "on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power..." (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9) The punishment will be total such that the wicked will not have chance of life again, hence it is symbolized as fire. Thus the fire is not literal but is a symbol of everlasting destruction. It should therefore be understood what St. Paul meant when he said in his letter to the Hebrews "For our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:29)

From what has been said in this sermon, it is evident that the practice of calling for holy ghost fire to punish one's perceived enemies is based on ignorance. There is nothing like holy ghost fire in

the Bible. The adherents of this dangerous doctrine should therefore retrace their steps in their own interest for their own salvation. St. Paul admonished: "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words...from such withdraw thyself." – 1 Timothy 6:3-5. See also Ephesians 4:14; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.