

Matthew 3:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Analysis

The winnowing fork imagery depicts Christ's separating work at judgment. Wheat represents the elect who will be gathered into God's barn (heaven), while chaff represents the reprobate who will be burned with 'unquenchable fire'—emphasizing the eternal, irreversible nature of hell. This agricultural metaphor was readily understood and highlights both election (the gathered wheat) and reprobation (the burned chaff).

Historical Context

Winnowing was the final stage of grain processing where grain was thrown into the air, allowing wind to separate heavier wheat from lighter chaff. This agricultural image would resonate with John's largely agrarian audience.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does the imagery of wheat and chaff illustrate the doctrine of election and the final separation of believers and unbelievers?
2. What does 'unquenchable fire' teach about the eternal conscious punishment of the wicked?

Interlinear Text

| | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|--------------|-------------------|---------------|------------|------------------|
| οὗ | τὸ | πτύον | ἐν | τῇ | χειρὶ | αὐτοῦ | καὶ |
| Whose | G3588 | fan | is in | G3588 | hand | his | and |
| G3739 | | G4425 | G1722 | | G5495 | G846 | G2532 |
| | | | | | | | |
| διακαθαριεῖ | τὴν | ἄλωνα | αὐτοῦ | καὶ | συνάξει | τὸν | |
| he will thoroughly purge | G3588 | floor | his | and | gather | G3588 | |
| G1245 | | G257 | G846 | G2532 | G4863 | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| σῖτον | αὐτοῦ | εἰς | τὴν | ἀποθήκην | τὸ | δὲ | ἄχυρον |
| wheat | his | into | G3588 | the garner | G3588 | but | the chaff |
| G4621 | G846 | G1519 | | G596 | | G1161 | G892 |
| | | | | | | | |
| κατακαύσει | πυρὶ | ἄσβέστῳ | | | | | |
| he will burn up | fire | with unquenchable | | | | | |
| G2618 | G4442 | G762 | | | | | |

Additional Cross-References

Malachi 4:1 (Parallel theme): For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

Matthew 13:30 (Parallel theme): Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

Luke 3:17 (Parallel theme): Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.

Isaiah 41:16 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the LORD, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel.

Jeremiah 51:2 (Parallel theme): And will send unto Babylon fanners, that shall fan her, and shall empty her land: for in the day of trouble they shall be against her round about.

Psalms 1:4 (Parallel theme): The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

Matthew 13:41 (Parallel theme): The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

Jeremiah 7:20 (Parallel theme): Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched.

John 15:2 (Parallel theme): Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

Jeremiah 15:7 (Parallel theme): And I will fan them with a fan in the gates of the land; I will bereave them of children, I will destroy my people, since they return not from their ways.