

Excerpt from James Montgomery Boice's Commentary on Genesis

The presence of God in this ceremony was signified for Abram by two symbols that were intended to tell Abram something of God's nature. First, Abram saw a "smoking firepot," or furnace, pass between the animal pieces. In our day we have almost lost the significance of this object, but it was well known in ancient times. It was a small furnace used to purify metals. As the ore was heated within the furnace, the dross separated from the metal and rose to the top. It was the refiner's work to skim off the dross until the metal appeared. He looked into the smoking furnace until he could see his face in the surface of the molten metal. Peter had such a furnace in mind when he wrote of our faith being "of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire" (1 Peter 1:7). Malachi wrote that God "will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. The LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness" (Mal. 3:3). Malachi means that God refines his people until he can see himself in them.

God wishes to do the same with you. At times the trail may be painful and you may resent the fire. But it will be good for you. God will purify you until you reflect his image.

The second symbol seen by Abram was a torch. The passage says that, "a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces" (Gen. 15:17). This too is a symbol of God's presence. First John 1:5 says, "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." God often presented himself to his people as light...it was thus that God appeared to Abram. God alone moved between the pieces and guaranteed the promise."