

Revelation 19:20-21

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The armies of the antichrist have gathered to defy Jesus and His heavenly forces. But immediately, the antichrist and his false prophet are grabbed and thrown alive into the lake of fire, perhaps a symbol of Jesus's fiery judgement. The armies of the antichrist are slain by a word from Jesus's mouth, presented symbolically as a sword, and the birds come to eat the dead.

In the previous two sections, Revelation 19:11-19, Jesus returned to earth along with a heavenly army, to meet the beast, who was *assembled* with the kings of the earth and their armies. The beast and his armies were *assembled* against Jesus and His army. Now Jesus executes judgement upon the nations of the earth, who have been deceived to follow the beast. John observes *And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence.*

The *beast* is the ultimate antichrist, who is at this point a dictator over all the nations of the earth (see commentary on Revelation 19:19 for more on the antichrist) . At this point however, *the beast was seized*, showing that his rule is coming to an end. He is “under arrest.”

The *false prophet* is the religious leader who leads the earth to worship the *beast*. In Revelation 16:13-14 the *false prophet* is presented as the spiritual member of an unholy trinity, which consists of Satan, *the beast* and the *false prophet*. The role of the *false prophet* is apparently to be a religious leader who is Satan's instrument of deception. In chapter 16, he deceived the armies into gathering against Jesus and His army.

The *false prophet* was introduced in chapter 13 as “another beast” (Revelation 13:11). The following verses in Revelation 13 add other things about the *false prophet*:

- “He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence” (Revelation 13:12).
 - The “first beast” is called “the beast” in chapter 19, while the chapter 19 calls the “another beast” of chapter 13 the *false prophet*.
- “And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed” (Revelation 13:12).
 - The “fatal wound” that “was healed” is apparently a demonically manufactured copy of the true resurrection, perpetrated to give credibility to the beast.
- “He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men” (Revelation 13:13).
 - The “great signs” performed by the *false prophet* are done in order to deceive the nations, and ultimately to gather them against Jesus and His army.
- The *false prophet* leads “those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast” (Revelation 13:14).
 - Further, the false prophet was given power to “give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed” (Revelation 13:15).

- It is the *false prophet* that caused everyone on earth “to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name” (Revelation 13:16).
 - It appears that there will be a complete melding of political and religious authority, with a state-imposed requirement to worship the beast.

John reminds us that it was by way of the *false prophet* who performed *signs in the beast’s presence*, and thereby *deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image*, as we also saw in Revelation 13. The *mark of the beast* is the mark required to buy or sell anything, as described in Revelation 13:16. In some way those who took the *mark of the beast* were *deceived* by the *false prophet*. Perhaps the *beast* had imposed the taking of the *mark of the beast*, and the false prophet *deceived* people into thinking it was a good and helpful thing to do, when in reality it doomed them to damnation (Revelation 14:9-11).

The *mark of the beast* is described in Revelation 13:18 as having the number 666, as a matter of “wisdom.” In Hebrew, letters have a numeric value. During the reign of Nero, Jews and Christians used the Hebrew system of numeric values (called *gematria*) to note that “Caesar Nero” carried the number value 666. Nero was certainly an antichrist, but not the ultimate antichrist who is the beast of Revelation. (An example of “*gematria*” can be seen in Matthew Chapter 1, where the number “fourteen” is prominent (Matthew 1:17). Fourteen is the numeric value in Hebrew for “David.” So the prominent use of “fourteen” emphasizes Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of David.) Perhaps this clue of the beast’s name as 666 will help those present at the time of the beast identify him and escape from his clutches (Revelation 12:14-17).

At this point, the *beast* as well as the *false prophet* are seized, like the criminals they are. And these two bad actors are *thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone*.

That the *beast* and *false prophet* are thrown directly into the *lake of fire* emphasizes their swift and immediate judgement. For these two, there is no standing before the judgement seat for them, as in the Great White Throne Judgement (Revelation 20:11-15). It appears that their sins are so overt that no judicial deliberation is needed. They are simply thrown directly *into the lake of fire* while they are still *alive*.

The phrase *lake of fire* is first introduced into scripture in this verse. It appears that the *lake of fire* is the permanent dwelling place for the damned. As we will see, both death and Hades will be thrown into the *lake of fire* (Revelation 20:14). “Hades” appears to have been the place where the dead have gone, up to the point of Revelation 20:14, at which time Hades is emptied into the *lake of fire*.

Satan, the third member of the unholy trinity will also be thrown into the *lake of fire* in Revelation 20:10, but not until he has spent a thousand years in the abyss, and then been released for a season to deceive the nations (Revelation 20:1; 7-10).

“Hades” is described by Jesus as a place of torment (Luke 16:23). In this parable, the rich man in Hades could see Lazarus in paradise, which was separated by an impassable gulf (Luke 24-26). It

appears that in the event of Revelation 20:14, Hades' existence will be terminated, and succumb to the *lake of fire*. This *lake of fire* will already contain the *beast* as well as *the false prophet*, who were thrown into the *lake of fire* alive prior to the events of chapter 20. "Hades" is also used in the New Testament to translate the Hebrew term "Sheol" which is used in the Old Testament for the place of the dead. This is seen in Acts 2:27, where Peter quotes Psalm 16:10, which says "You will not abandon my soul to Sheol." In the Greek rendering of Acts 2:27, Peter uses the word "Hades" in place of "Sheol."

Hades clearly seems to be a real place. The nature of the *lake of fire* does not seem to demand that it be a place. While we are not told details about the *lake of fire*, we are given a number of pieces of data that allow us to make an informed guess of its nature.

First, it is worth noting that God is described as a "consuming fire" in scripture (Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29). The throne of God is engulfed in fire, and a flame of fire destroys the beast of Daniel 7. In Daniel 7, Daniel describes a scene where:

"...thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took His seat.

So Daniel 7 pictures a vision similar to Revelation, with the throne room of God having a prominent place, (the throne of God being mentioned thirty nine times in Revelation). In the vision of Daniel, he sees God's throne engulfed in flame:

"His throne was ablaze with flames,
Its wheels were a burning fire.
A river of fire was flowing
And coming out from before Him."
(Daniel 7:9b-10)

Then Daniel sees the "beast" slain by flame that comes from the throne:

"I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire."
(Daniel 7:11)

It is not certain that the beast of Daniel 7 is the same as that of Revelation 19, but the topics are sufficiently similar that it is plausible, perhaps likely. Since the beast of Revelation 19 was thrown alive into the lake of fire, and the beast of Daniel 7 is slain in fire that comes from the throne, it could indicate that the *lake of fire* is the unveiled and unrestrained presence of God. For those who are unredeemed, or unrefined, the lake of fire is a "second death" (Revelation 20:14). For the redeemed, the presence of God will be life-giving (Revelation 21:22-25).

"Death" indicates a separation of some sort. In the context of the lake of fire being the "second death," the death that precedes the "second death" is likely physical death, when the human spirit separates from the human body. This death is spoken of this way:

“...it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment...”
(Hebrews 9:27)

The “second death” then would involve judgement, and indicate an additional sort of separation.

We might get a picture of what this looks like from the episode of the fiery furnace in Daniel chapter 3. In this story, Daniel’s three Hebrew friends refused to bow before the image of gold, and were sentenced to be burned in a fiery furnace. When they were thrown in, the fire did not hurt them, but slayed the soldiers stoking the fire. The king looked into the furnace and stated:

“... “Look! I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!”
(Daniel 3:25)

This pictures the three righteous Hebrews engulfed in flame, possibly in the presence of Jesus, but completely unharmed, while soldiers trying to stoke the furnace are being slayed by the heat. This might be a picture of the redeemed thriving in the presence of God while the damned are tormented by God’s glorious, fiery presence.

This could explain why we saw earlier in Revelation that the “second death” can “hurt” believers:

“He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.”
(Revelation 2:11b)

The picture here might be that believers who overcome (as Jesus overcame) will have been purified by overcoming the rejection and persecution of the world, and avoid the pain of being purified by the fire of the judgement seat of Christ. It will certainly be no fun for believers to see the deeds they did while living on earth burn up, and have nothing lasting, nothing for Jesus to reward us for (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). Paul describes this as follows:

“If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”
(1 Corinthians 3:15)

This passage from 1 Corinthians makes clear that having our works burned up at the judgement will be viewed as to “suffer loss.” It also makes clear that this judgement is for works, not for us. Even the believer who loses all will be “saved, yet so as through fire.” The fire being spoken of is the fire of God’s judgment, in His presence.

We can also look ahead to the new earth. In the new earth God is physically present, with His glory fully unveiled:

“I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its

lamp is the Lamb.”
(Revelation 21:22-23)

This passage does not insist that there is no sun in the new heaven. But it does assert that there will be “no need of the sun” because of the brightness of the glory of Jesus. This is the same glory that God told Moses He could not show him, lest Moses die:

“But [God] said, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!”
(Exodus 33:20)

It appears that believers in the new earth will enjoy and thrive being in the unveiled presence of God, that is as bright as the sun. Perhaps as fiery as the sun. This must be possible because believers have been given redeemed, resurrection bodies; what Paul called a “spiritual body” rather than a “natural body” (1 Corinthians 15:44). However, the unredeemed might perpetually experience a “second death” being in God’s presence. For the unredeemed, being in God’s presence continually separates them from their desire to live apart from and above God and His ways.

Just as our physical sun is a source of both life and death, depending upon its application, so God will be, in the new earth: a purifying fire and source of life for the redeemed, and a second death for those who refuse redemption.

This might explain how Satan appears to be visible to passers-by after he is judged, as described in this passage from Isaiah 14, which speaks of Satan who said in his heart “I will raise my throne above the stars of God” (Isaiah 14:13):

“Those who see you will gaze at you,
They will ponder over you, saying,
‘Is this the man who made the earth tremble,
Who shook kingdoms.’”
(Isaiah 14:16)

It could also explain who it is that is not allowed entrance into the New Jerusalem:

“...nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”
(Revelation 21:27)

If this mental model is accurate, then the lake of fire would be the fully unveiled presence of God engulfing the unredeemed, who are confined to certain locations, but who may be seen by the redeemed. It is clear from these passages that Satan’s power to harm will be completely removed.

This is a picture of ultimate irony. The redeemed will gain what they most desire, to be fully engaged in service with God and one another in the unveiled presence of God. Those who refuse redemption will get one thing they wanted: to live apart from fellowship with God.

However, as with all things promised by the world system, this will prove to be the opposite of the result they expected. Instead of being able to lord over and exploit, those who refuse redemption will have zero power to exploit others. They will reside fully in the unveiled presence of God, with a constant reminder of their loss.

The *lake of fire* is said to be that which *burns with brimstone*. *Brimstone* is the same word used in Luke 17:29 to describe the fire that consumed Sodom (an event described in Genesis 19:12-29). It is not clear what *brimstone* is, but this passage from Deuteronomy might offer a clue:

“All its land is brimstone and salt, a burning waste, unsown and unproductive, and no grass grows in it, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah...”
(Deuteronomy 29:23a).

Perhaps it is added to describe the *lake of fire* to indicate that this application of fire is destructive, yielding death, unlike other applications of fire that can be life-giving, such as fire to warm a house or cook a meal. The last line of Isaiah 30:33 describes the breath of God being like *brimstone*:

“The breath of the LORD, like a torrent of brimstone, sets it afire.”
(Isaiah 30:33)

Back to the scene of Revelation 19. After the beast and false prophet have been thrown alive into the lake of fire, then *the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse*. *The rest* refers to the armies of the nations that gathered with the beast and false prophet to oppose. Even though Jesus has an entire army behind Him, it appears that His word is all it takes to slay the rest of those who were “...assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army” (Revelation 19:19).

All the enemy soldiers are slain, all those who followed the beast and false prophet, *and all the birds were filled with their flesh*. This fulfills the prophetic invitation of the angel who called the birds to assemble for the “great supper of God” which is a great feast for the carnivorous birds of the earth (Revelation 19:17). There is no burial for these people who defied God. No honor. They suffer complete defeat, and total dishonor. They who persecuted the saints of God, and defied the Lamb of God, are now vanquished.

The events described in Revelation 19 could be an additional fulfillment of the prophecy in Micah 4. The Assyrians invaded Israel and exiled them around 722 BC, which would be a proximate fulfillment of Micah 4. But it is often that prophecies have multiple fulfillments:

“This One will be our peace.
When the Assyrian invades our land,
When he tramples on our citadels,
Then we will raise against him
Seven shepherds and eight leaders of men.
They will shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword,
The land of Nimrod at its entrances;

And He will deliver us from the Assyrian
When he attacks our land
And when he tramples our territory.”
(Micah 4:5-6)

If this passage has an additional fulfillment, the antichrist might be a descendant of the Assyrians, or the Assyrian kingdom might be a type of that of the antichrist.

In Isaiah chapter 30, the prophet speaks of Assyria being terrified when God strikes him with a rod. This could refer to the events God used to cause the Assyrian king to pull back his troops from invading Judah, as they had invaded Israel (also called Samaria). This story is told in 2 Kings 18 and 19. Isaiah 30 includes a passage that might tie to the events of Revelation 19:

“For at the voice of the Lord Assyria will be terrified,
When He strikes with the rod.
And every blow of the rod of punishment,
Which the Lord will lay on him,
Will be with *the music of* tambourines and lyres;
And in battles, brandishing weapons, He will fight them.
For Topheth has long been ready,
Indeed, it has been prepared for the king.
He has made it deep and large,
A pyre of fire with plenty of wood;
The breath of the Lord, like a torrent of brimstone, sets it afire.”
(Isaiah 30:31-33)

There is no recorded historical event in 2 Kings where the Assyrian king suffered judgment in “Topheth,” which is another name for the Hinnom Valley, also called Gehenna, which is often translated in the New Testament as “hell.” The Hinnom Valley borders Jerusalem, and was the place where dung was disposed and refuse was burned. It was also the place where children were sacrificed to the Canaanite god, Molech (2 Kings 23:10). It seems that in Isaiah 30, God paints a picture of the king of Assyria being burned on a funeral pyre in Gehenna. This must be a future event, since during the Assyrian invasion, King Shalmaneser V did not personally come to Judah with his army. Shalmaneser V was dethroned and most likely killed by his brother and successor, Sargon II, in Assyria. So Isaiah's prophecy could refer to the beast being thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20). If so, it is worth noting that the source of fire is the “breath of the Lord” (Isaiah 30:31). The fire from God’s breath is said to be “like a torrent of brimstone.”

Micah also prophesied that the Assyrian will invade the land (Micah 5:5), perhaps invoking a picture of this episode in Revelation, with the empire headed by the beast being foreshadowed by the king of Assyria, and the false prophet being foreshadowed by the boastful and pompous Rabshakeh, mouthpiece of the Assyrian King (2 Kings 19:4).

In the case of Assyria and Rabshakeh, God intervened as Assyria closed in on Jerusalem, and destroyed 185,000 troops, saving Judah from defeat (2 Kings 19:35). In the case of the beast and

false prophet, *fire came down from heaven and devoured them*. In each case, God intervened to save Israel.

Biblical Text

²⁰ And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. ²¹ And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.