

“Lake of Fire”

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. III:1822. [1915]

(*limne tou puros*):

Found in Revelation 19:20, 20:10, 14, 15. Revelation 21:8 has “the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.” The brimstone in connection with “the lake of fire” occurs also in Revelation 19:20 and 20:10, the latter being a backward reference to the former passage. In Revelation 20:14 the words, “This is the second death, even the lake of fire” are either a gloss originally intended to elucidate 20:15 through a reference to 20:6, or, if part of the text, formed originally the close of 20:15, whence they became displaced on account of the identity of the words once immediately preceding them in 20:15 with the words now preceding them in 20:14. The “lake of fire” can be called “the second death” only with reference to the lost among men (20:15), not with reference to death and Hades (20:14). In all the above references “the lake of fire” appears as a place of punishment, of perpetual torment, not of annihilation (20:10). The beast (19:20); the pseudo-prophet (19:20; 20:10); the devil (20:10); the wicked of varying description (20:15; 21:8), are cast into it. When the same is affirmed of death and Hades (20:14), it is doubtful whether this is meant as a mere figure for the cessation of these two evils personified, or has a more realistic background in the existence of two demon-powers so named (compare Isaiah 25:8; 1 Corinthians 15:26, 54; 2 Esdras 7:31). The Scriptural source for the conception of “the lake of fire” lies in Genesis 19:24, where already the fire and the brimstone occur together, while the locality of the catastrophe described is the neighborhood of the Dead Sea. The association of the Dead Sea with this fearful judgment of God, together with the desolate appearance of the place, rendered it a striking figure for the scene of eschatological retribution. The two other Old Testament passages which have “fire and brimstone” (Psalm 11:6; Ezekiel 38:22) are dependent on the Genesis passage, with which they have the figure of “raining” in common. In Revelation 21:8, “their part” seems to allude to Psalm 11:6, “the portion of their cup.” In Enoch 67:4 the Dead Sea appears as the place of punishment for evil spirits. Of late it has been proposed to derive “the lake of fire” from “the stream of fire” which destroys the enemies of Ahura in the Zoroastrian eschatology; so Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (1906) 433, 434. But the figures of a stream and a lake are different; compare 2 Esdras 13:9-11, where a stream of fire proceeds from the mouth of the Messiah for the destruction of His enemies. Besides, the Persian fire is, in part, a fire of purification, and not of destruction only (Bousset, 442), and even in the apocalyptic Book of Enoch, the fires of purification and of punishment are not confounded (compare Enoch 67:4 with 90:20). The Old Testament fully explains the entire conception.