



The Revelation of Jesus Christ

“Flesh. It’s What’s for Dinner”

19:17-21

Introduction

Repetition is often instructive when studying a passage of Scripture.

The word “flesh” is repeated six times in these next verses. It has a very literal meaning. It refers to the skin and muscles of the Lord’s enemies at His Second Coming. Their flesh will be eaten by scavenger birds. It will be a feast for them as they pick away at the carcasses of the fallen.

We also talk about nonbelievers figuratively as bringing forth the works of the flesh. We mean that they produce awful things from their unredeemed human nature. In one famous passage the works of the flesh are described like this:

Galatians 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,
Galatians 5:20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,

Galatians 5:21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Jesus returns to establish the kingdom of God. These “will not inherit” it. They are of the flesh having never received the Lord as their Savior.

Revelation 19:17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God,

An angel blocks out the sun on account of his own brilliance. He calls out to birds that have gathered in the Valley of Megiddo. All of the world's remaining scavenger birds come and fill the sky. They literally feast on the flesh of the fallen but we are to see the failure of the flesh from a spiritual standpoint.

The scene is presented with what one commentator called ‘repellant realism.’ It is purposely revolting and nauseating in order to emphasize how revolting and nauseating is fallen man in his natural state.

The chapter opened with an invitation to the marriage supper. This is not it. This is a second supper. **Nonbelievers are the menu, not the guests.**

William Newell points to four different suppers described in the Bible:

1. The supper of salvation, alluded to in Jesus' parable (Luke 14:16-24).
2. The Lord's supper, a commemoration of Jesus' sacrifice.
3. The marriage supper of the Lamb.
4. The supper of the great God.

If you reject the first supper, the second supper will mean nothing to you. Then you will not be present at the third supper, but will be present at the fourth supper.

Everybody gets to attend at least one of these suppers, but some will eat and others are eaten at the suppers.

Revelation 19:18 "that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great."

God is no respecter of persons. In the end only one thing will matter: Do you know Jesus as your Savior? If not it makes no difference if you are great or small, free or slave, in the eyes of other nonbelievers.

Revelation 19:19 And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.

In any good movie there is a showdown between the main characters - the hero and the villain. Somehow they find each other on the field of battle and they go at each other. In the movies, for dramatic effect, usually the villain almost defeats the hero but, in the end with some amazing maneuver, the hero wins out.

The Second Coming of Jesus is not like that. The villains are the "beast," who we call the antichrist, and those with him. They are easily overcome. We call it the Battle of Armageddon but that more properly refers to the earthly armies in their campaigns against one another. Jesus' return is one-sided with no real fighting.

Revelation 19:20 Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.

These two men were the world's hope. The world can only offer you false hope. True hope is in Jesus, in His coming.

The beast and his false prophet will be the first two inhabitants of the Lake of Fire. They are judged and thrown there prior to the final Great White Throne judgment.

We'll see that the devil will be thrown into the Abyss for one thousand years before he is confined for eternity to the Lake of Fire.

The Lake of Fire is the final eternal destination for all those who ultimately reject Jesus Christ. We normally refer to it as Hell but that is a little ambiguous and it is inaccurate. Let's look at a few terms to describe the destinations of the dead.

Sheol is a Hebrew word that describes the non-permanent place or temporary address of the disembodied souls of dead. It is the same as the Greek word "Hades." Prior to Jesus Christ's resurrection, both the souls of the evil and the righteous went there after death. It is translated "grave" 31 times, "hell" 31 times, and "pit" 3 times in King James Version (KJV) of the Bible.

Sheol (or Hades) has two separate halves. One side was and is reserved for the torment of nonbelievers while the other side, called "Abraham's Bosom" in Luke 16:22, was for the comfort of the righteous. There is an impassable gulf, between the two halves.

When Christ died He descended into Sheol, into Hades. When He was resurrected He led the righteous out of Sheol to Heaven. Since then the souls and spirits of all of the saved people go directly to Heaven when their bodies die. The lost still go to Sheol and join the lost of the Old Testament in torment on one side of the canyon when they die.

The other side of Sheol formerly known as Abraham's Bosom has been vacant since Jesus Christ led the saints within it to Heaven after His resurrection.

We use the English word "Hell" refers to a place of eternal punishment for the wicked. Its meaning does not distinguish between the two separate places for the wicked to be punished, one temporary for the soul, and the other, the Lake of Fire, permanent for the soul and body. Nor does its meaning include the place of comfort for saints prior to Christ's resurrection. In normal English conversation, "Hell" is used only in the negative sense, with no saved people ever going there.

"Sheol" and "Hades" are sometimes mistranslated as "Hell." In many other places "Sheol" and "Hades" are translated as "grave," but the grave is only the place for the body after death, not the place for the soul and spirit. Confusion often occurs when the verse refers to a righteous man going to "Sheol," such as men like Jacob, Joseph, (Genesis 37:35) and Job (Job 14:13). Of course, these men did not go to a place of torment, but to the comfort side of Sheol (Hades), called Abraham's Bosom.

Then there is Gehenna. It is translated "Hell" all 12 times in KJV. It is used to refer to the permanent place for destruction of the "... *soul and body ...*" (Matthew 10:28). It is a place of "... *fire that never shall be quenched*" (Mark 9:45). In most of the references, it is clear from the context that those who enter Gehenna, do so in their bodies. For this to happen, it must occur after the resurrection of the damned at the Great White Throne of judgment. Therefore Gehenna is the Lake of Fire described in Revelation 19 and 20. It is presently uninhabited, but the Beast and the False Prophet will be cast into it at the end of the tribulation (Revelation 19:20). One thousand years later Satan will be cast into it (Revelation 20:10) and will be followed shortly by the lost people of all previous time periods (Revelation 20:15). They will all enter Gehenna together, in there resurrected bodies, where they will remain in torment for all eternity.

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The future final destination of the wicked is symbolized by the Valley of Hinnom to which Gehenna refers. It is a place south of Jerusalem where the bodies of dead animals and rubbish were taken to be burned. The Valley of Hinnom was also the site of much human sacrifice to the pagan god Molech (2 Kings 23:10, 2 Chronicles 28:3, 33:6, Jeremiah 32:35). The fire burned constantly in the valley since additional fuel was frequently being cast into it.

None of these places are to be confused with the Abyss (Greek *abussos*). It is translated "bottomless pit" 5 times, "deep" twice, and "bottomless" twice by KJV. It is where Satan will be locked up for the 1000 years of Christ's reign on earth. It may be the same as the impassable gulf described in Luke 16:26 between Hades and Abraham's bosom.

A while back we talked about a demon-prison called Tartarus. It may be located somewhere in the Abyss as well.

To summarize: Sheol and Hades are the temporary place of torment for the souls and spirits of the nonbelievers who die. Prior to Christ's resurrection saints were kept and comforted in the now vacant half of Hades known as Abraham's Bosom. Gehenna is the Lake of Fire for the permanent place of torment of the souls of the wicked dead in their resurrected bodies. Hell is a rather general and inadequate term that is often used to refer to either Gehenna or the torment side of Hades.

An old doctrine about eternal punishment is becoming new and popular with some Christians. Annihilationism is the teaching that sinners are destroyed rather than being tormented forever in the Lake of Fire. It is directly related to the doctrine of conditional immortality - the idea that a human soul is not immortal unless it is given eternal life. Annihilationism asserts that God will eventually destroy or annihilate the wicked leaving only the righteous to live on forever. Some annihilationists believe the wicked will be punished for their sins in the Lake of Fire before being annihilated.

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Jehovah's Witnesses are annihilationists but so are Seventh Day Adventists. It might surprise you to learn that C. S. Lewis rejected traditional pictures of the tortures of hell. Recently a handful of evangelical theologians, including the prominent evangelical author John Stott, have offered at least tentative support for the doctrine.

Stott supports annihilation, yet cautions, "I do not dogmatise about the position to which I have come. I hold it tentatively... I believe that the ultimate annihilation of the wicked should at least be accepted as a legitimate, biblically founded alternative to their eternal conscious torment."¹

F.F. Bruce wrote, "annihilation is certainly an acceptable interpretation of the relevant New Testament passages ... For myself, I remain agnostic [with regard to a belief in torment]. Eternal conscious torment is incompatible with the revealed character of God."²

I wish I could embrace annihilationism. It would make the death of nonbelievers so much easier. The arguments for annihilationism do not seem conclusive. The main argument isn't a verse or verses so much as it is a feeling that an eternal place of punishment is incompatible with God's love. Another is that we who are saved could not enjoy the bliss of Heaven knowing others are suffering in the Lake of Fire.

It seems biblically clear, no matter these considerations, that there is such a place and folks will be there for eternity:

Revelation 14:11 And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."

¹ *Essentials: A liberal-evangelical dialogue* by David L. Edwards with a response from John Stott. 1988, p. 320

² Letter from F. F. Bruce to John Stott in 1989, as quoted in *John Stott: A Global Ministry*, p. 354

In response defenders of annihilationism say this is just one verse. How many Bible verses do you need to believe something?

Revelation 19:21 And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

The “rest” are those on this battlefield. *No enemy on this battlefield will survive!*

Jesus said in Matthew 25:41 that the Lake of Fire was prepared for the devil and his angels. God never sends any man to the Lake of Fire; they go there of their own free will, having rejected Christ. Jesus speaks at His Second Coming and all things obey.

- Once Jesus spoke to a fig tree and it withered.
- Once Jesus spoke to a storm and it calmed.
- Once He spoke to a legion of demons and they fled a man’s soul.

Today He speaks His Word to us. It is the power of God to salvation. It is afterward our sanctification as we are changed by it from glory-to-glory into the image of Jesus.

We need only add obedience to experience its blessing.