

THE "Lake of Fire" AND ITS PURPOSE

WHAT is the "lake of fire"? We find this expression used in the Bible only in the book of Revelation, and there its mention is confined to the small area of chapters 19 to 21. A possible allusion to it is also found at Matthew 25:41.

Who or what goes into the "lake of fire"? Among the things mentioned are the "wild beast" and the "false prophet." Death and Hades are put into this "lake." We also read that the Devil (and along with him his associate demons) is hurled into the "lake" after his final attack on God's sovereignty.—Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14.

A SYMBOL

In examining these texts we readily see that the "lake of fire" is not a literal pool of flame. The "wild beast" is symbolic, as earlier shown in Revelation chapter 13, the "image" of it being described in chapter 17, where we are told that the seven

heads of the "beast" represent seven 'mountainlike' kingdoms. These are understood by Bible commentators to be the seven world powers of Bible history. The five that had "fallen" were Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece. The one that "was" at the time the apostle John wrote was Rome. The seventh has proved, from historical events, to be the Anglo-American World Power.—Rev. 17: 9, 10; compare Daniel chapter 8.

Similarly the "false prophet" is not a person, but is a system or an organization.

A "prophet" claims to have inspired information for the direction of others. A "false prophet" would mislead others, to turn them away from God and toward false worship. What does this "false prophet" do to accomplish such purpose? He is shown in another guise in Revelation 13: 11-17 as a two-horned "wild beast." As such he is depicted as performing in front of the seven-headed "wild beast" the signs with which he misleads "those who received the mark of the wild beast and those who render worship to its image."—Rev. 19:20.

Since the "wild beast" and the "false prophet" are symbolic, the "lake of fire" is necessarily symbolic.

Further supporting this conclusion is the fact that the abstract thing, "death," is also hurled into the "lake of fire." Death cannot be literally burned.

Moreover, the demons are thrown into the "lake." These are angels, spirit persons. Being spirit, they cannot be hurt by literal fire, which is a physical product of chemical combustion. In fact, we read often of spirit persons manifesting themselves to humans in a flame.—Ex. 3:1-5; Acts 7:30; Judg. 13:20; Ps. 104:4; Dan. 7:9, 10.

Of what, then, is the "lake of fire" a symbol? The Bible says that it is, or that