

96. The Book of Revelation—20:11-15

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Revelation 20:11–15 (NKJV)

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

We are living at a time in human history where most people believe there won't ever be a day of reckoning coming, a day of judgment, when they will stand before God and give an account for their life—this passage, more than any other, gives us a look at that coming day.

We studied this a few weeks ago—it is what Jesus called, “**the resurrection of condemnation.**”

John 5:28-29 (NKJV)

²⁸ Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice ²⁹ and come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

Jesus is teaching here that there would be **2 great resurrections**—*'the resurrection of life'* (believers); and *'the resurrection of condemnation'* (unbelievers).

In Revelation 20:5 we learn that they are separated by at least 1000 years.

Paul the Apostle went on to explain that the *first* of these great resurrections is not a single event in time—but a category that contains multiple resurrections of believers (1 Corinthians 15:20-23; Revelation 20:4-6).

Now we see the *second* of these 2 great resurrections:

Revelation 20:11-12 (NKJV)

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

Once again, this is what Jesus called, “**the resurrection of condemnation**” (John 5:29b).

The word **'condemnation'** is a Greek word that means *'judgment'*—as in a *punitive* judgment rendered in a court of law.

Someday all unbelievers will be resurrected bodily from the dead and will stand before Almighty God at what the Bible calls—**"the Great White Throne judgment."**

This is *'Judgment Day'* for unbelievers—this is their *'day in court'*—or at least that's what they believe it will be. So many people have the concept that when they die and stand before God on the Day of Judgment that—they will plead their case and present to Him all the reasons why He should let them into heaven.

These people truly believe that all they need to do is tell God all the good works they did over the course of their lives—how wonderful they were as human beings on the earth—and they're convinced that He will see it their way and let them into heaven.

Why? Because they believe that they are basically good people—maybe not perfect, but certainly good enough to get into heaven.

Okay, let's break this passage down and see what God says about that.

1. The Supreme Court

Revelation 20:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne...

Here we are given a glimpse of the 'Supreme Court'—not of America or even of the world but of the whole universe!

As we have said, the Great White Throne is where all unbelievers, after having been resurrected bodily from the dead—will stand before God to be judged—those who died on the earth without receiving Jesus as their Savior.

Don't confuse this judgment with the Bema Seat Judgment of *believers*—where they stand before Jesus, and He rewards them for their service to Him on the earth.

This judgment seat isn't *punitive*—it is rewards based (think of the judge's seat at the Olympics where medals are handed out).

The Bema Seat Judgment and the Great White Throne Judgment are separated by at least 1007 years (directly after the Rapture when rewards to believers are given out (Rev. 22:12)—then there will be the 7-year Tribulation Period followed by the 1000-year Millennial Kingdom—and then the Great White Throne Judgment takes place).

- It is **'Great'** because there is no higher court—it is supreme.
- It is **'White'** because of the perfection, purity and righteousness of the decisions handed down.

2. The Supreme Judge

Revelation 20:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and **Him who sat on it...**

Who is this Judge?

He is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ—

John 5:22 (NKJV)

²² For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to **the Son**,

John 5:27 (NKJV)

²⁷ and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the **Son of Man**.

Revelation 20:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, **from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.**

Here John describes an awesome scene—heaven and earth **fled away**, and there was **no place left** for sinners to hide!

All people must someday stand before Jesus Christ, the Righteous Judge of the highest court in the universe! —

Hebrews 4:13 (NKJV)

¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.

Romans 14:11–12 (NKJV)

¹¹ For it is written: “*As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.*”

¹² So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

So far, we have seen that court has been convened and the Judge is seated on the *throne*—not the *bench* because this Judge is also—the King!

Next, we see—

3. The Supreme Summons

Revelation 20:12 (NKJV)

¹² **And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God...**

Notice that we see a *Judge* but no jury. We see *defendants* but no defense attorneys. That’s because this is not a trial—the case for man’s guilt was already decided in the Garden of Eden where God brought the gavel down on the human race!

At that time God pronounced mankind guilty by imposing a curse upon all the descendants of Adam (Genesis 3:14-19)—“*In Adam all die*” (1 Corinthians 15:22)

The universal guilt of mankind was something Jesus affirmed in John 3:18—

John 3:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

“*Case closed*”—mankind is guilty before God!

“So, what’s going on in Revelation 20:11-15?”

This is what our system of juris prudence calls the —‘sentencing phase.’

Revelation 20:12a (NKJV)

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing (bodily resurrection) before God...

The ‘small and great’ doesn’t refer to their physical *stature* (i.e., ‘*the short and the tall*’)—but to their supposed *importance* upon the earth in life.

So here we see a picture of Judgment Day where the “small” (the slave, the poor, the insignificant and the unimportant) standing next to the “great” (the kings and presidents; senators and CEO’s; the rich and the famous).

This group will include the atheists and so-called “*intellectuals*” (college professors) who mocked the existence of God—the late-night comedians—those who were too *cool* for God and made fun out of those who were “*stupid*” enough to believe in Him.

It also will include all the rebels who ever lived on the earth that refused to bow the knee to Jesus as their King—the ‘Henley’s’ who shook their fist in the face of a holy God and cried, “*I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul*” and all those whose “life song” was “*I did it my way*” in defiance of God.

We see here all the so-called *somebodies* and all the lowly *nobodies*—the irreligious and the very religious all standing before God on equal ground, and all bound together by their common, willful unbelief.

These are those who rejected the love of the truth (the Gospel), which would have saved them from this terrifying Day. Now they stand before the One who loved them and gave Himself for them—Whom they rejected as their loving Savior—and now they stand before Him and He becomes their Righteous Judge!

Remember—God is no respecter of persons—He isn’t ‘impressed’ by fame and wealth, by positions of power as with kings and presidents—all will be judged fairly, impartially and righteously!

Where do these “**dead**” come from? (we’re still dealing with “the summons”)—

Revelation 20:13a (NKJV)

¹³ The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them...

Death (the grave) will give up their *bodies* (physical resurrection), and **Hades** (the realm of the souls of the dead) will give up their souls—there will even be a resurrection of bodies from the sea—no sinner will escape this judgment.

J. Vernon McGee—

“**And the sea gave up the dead that were in it.**” *Multitudes who have gone to a watery grave in which the chemicals of their bodies have been dissolved in the waters of the sea will be raised. God will have no problem with this. After all, they are only atoms. He just has to put them together again. He did it once; He can do it again. The graves on earth will give up their bodies; and hades, the place where the spirits of the lost go, will disgorge for this judgment.*”

So we have, The Supreme Court, The Supreme Judge, The Supreme Summons and now onto our 4th point:

4. The Supreme Judgment

Revelation 20:12-13 (NKJV)

¹² And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. ¹³ ...And they were judged, each one according to his works.

Jesus Christ will judge these unsaved people on the basis of what is written in—“the books.”

What books?

We’re not told specifically—but it isn’t hard to figure it out from other passages in the New Testament:

a. The Word of God

John 12:48 (NKJV)

⁴⁸ He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him--the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.

Every sinner will be held accountable for the truth he or she has heard in this life.

Many of these will think that God has made a terrible mistake because they went to church and heard the Bible taught and the gospel preached.

But that was the problem, they *heard* the Word but never really applied it by faith to their hearts and therefore never lived any of it out in their earthly lives—they *‘professed to know God but in works they denied Him’* (1Tim. 1:16):

James 1:22 (NLT2)

²² But don’t just listen to God’s word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves.

Matthew 7:21-23 (NLT2)

²¹ “Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. ²² On judgment day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ ²³ But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God’s laws.’

b. The Ledger of God

What is this ledger? It’s what Paul called—“*...the record that contained the charges against us.*” Colossians 2:14 (NLT)

The Bible says that every sin that a person commits against God’s Law (of which the Ten Commandments are part of) is a debt that he or she owes Him—a debt that has to be paid.

Just like when a criminal finishes his time in prison we say, “*He has paid his debt to society.*” These sinners owe God a tremendous debt—a debt they accumulated over the course of their lives and God kept meticulous records of every word, thought and action that violated His Law.

Again, every sin is a crime against a Holy God and is written in His book (His ledger) and they must be paid for—*“For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.”* (Ecclesiastes 12:14-NKJV)

Jesus came to earth to pay our debt—

Isaiah 53:5-6 (NLT2)

⁵ But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. ⁶ All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all.

Colossians 2:13–14 (NLT)

¹³ You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. ¹⁴ He canceled the record of the charges against us [talking about our ledger] and took it away by nailing it to the cross.

Jesus as He hung on the cross said, *“It is finished (paid in full)”* (John 19:30)—*“I owed a debt I could not pay; He paid a debt He did not owe!”*

If a person refuses to receive what Jesus Christ did on Calvary’s cross (His death which paid for all of their sins)—then they will have to stand before God someday and be sentenced to pay for their own crimes against God—eternity in the lake of fire!

Hebrews 10:30–31 (NKJV)

³⁰ For we know Him who said, *“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,”* says the Lord. And again, *“The LORD will judge His people.”* ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

“That’s OK, I know I’m a good person and when I stand before God, I’ll plead my case and show Him all the ‘good things’ I’ve done—I believe He’ll be fair and let me into Heaven.”

J.Vernon McGee—

“Yes, my friend, you will be able to get a fair trial there. Your life is on tape, and Jesus Christ, the Judge happens to have the tape. I think He will have it on a television screen so that you can watch it, too (“This Was Your Life”). Do you think your life can stand the test? Are you willing to stand before God and have Him play the tape of your life? I do not know about you, but I could not make it. Thank God for His grace—“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:8)

This is why we don’t see any legal representation for these people—there is no defense attorney because the only One who could have defended them against the judgment of God—they rejected—

1 John 2:1-2 (NLT2)

¹ My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate [attorney for the defense] who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. ² He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.

➤ The question is, *“So, if these people have already been found guilty then what purpose does the Great White Throne Judgment serve?”*

As we've already said, the purpose of the Great White Throne Judgment will not be to determine a person's *guilt* or *innocence* before God.

No, the purpose of the Great White Throne Judgment will be to determine—the degree of punishment each guilty person will be sentenced to and have to endure in hell—

Matthew 11:20–24 (NKJV)

²⁰ Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: ²¹ “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴ But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.”

Luke 12:47–48 (NKJV)

⁴⁷ And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. ⁴⁸ But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

God doesn't send people to hell for the wicked things they have done any more than He brings people to heaven for the good things they have done. Whether a person winds up spending eternity in heaven or in hell depends on whether or not they received or rejected Jesus Christ as their Savior while on the earth.

So, the unbelievers who will be standing before the Great White Throne judgment are not going to hell for the wicked things they have done—but for rejecting Christ as their Savior.

But notice—they are judged '**according to their works**' (v.13b).

This is because their works (evil deeds) will be used by God to determine their *degree of punishment* in hell—just as a Christian's good works done for the Lord will determine their *degree of reward* in heaven.

Most sinners think they're "*good people*", not perfect mind you, but certainly good enough to get into heaven when they die.

They are harboring under a grave misconception—they're confident that their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds and so they believe on the Day of Judgment God will certainly let them into heaven.

So, God gives them what they want—they will stand before Him clothed in *the 'filthy rags of self-righteousness'* (Isa.64:6) and He will judge them according to their works (Revelation 20:13).

There is a third book mentioned in Revelation 20—

c. The Book of Life

Revelation 20:12 (NKJV)

¹² And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the **Book of Life**...

Revelation 20:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the **Book of Life** was cast into the lake of fire.

The Book of Life is the official registry of heaven—which corresponds to the registry of citizens kept by ancient cities. You see back then whenever a child was born their name was written in the official registry of that city which meant they were recognized as an official citizen of that town—that was important because it guaranteed them all the rights and privileges of citizenship.

Now that’s different from those who God, in His foreknowledge, knew from eternity past, all those who would receive Jesus as Lord and Savior during their life and as such—their names were written in His Book of Life from the foundation of the world! (Ephesians 1:4; Revelation 13:8)

Revelation 13:8 (NKJV)

⁸ **All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.**

There is a debate as to whether a true child of God can lose their salvation—and based in part on Revelation 3:5 some say ‘yes’.

Revelation 3:5 (NKJV)

⁵ He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

So, because of this verse, many Christians believe that a true believer in Jesus Christ can lose their salvation—i.e., “*have their name blotted out of the Book of Life.*”

- *Is that what is being taught here—can a true Christian lose their salvation and be sent to hell?*
- I don’t believe a true Christian can lose their salvation.
- *So then how do I explain what Jesus said in Revelation 3:5?*

It could be that there are 2 books—the “*Book of Life*” and the “*Lamb’s Book of Life*”—or that they are one in the same book—what do I mean?

One author had this to say about this verse—

“Is there a warning here that a true believer might lose his salvation? I don’t think so. It would appear that God’s “*Book of Life*” contains the names of all the living, the wicked as well as the righteous (Psalm 69:28).

Revelation 13:8 and 17:8 suggest that the names of the saved are written in the book from the foundation of the world—that is, before they had done anything good or bad. By God’s grace, they have been chosen in Christ before the beginning of time (Eph. 1:4; see also Matthew 25:34).

Jesus told His disciples to rejoice because their names were “written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). The Greek verb is in the perfect tense, which means it can be translated (as Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest does in his Expanded Translation of the NT), “*your names have been written in heaven and are on permanent record up there.*” It is not likely that Jesus would contradict Himself in this important matter!”

Warren Wiersbe—

“If the names of believers (the elect) are written from the foundation of the world, and if God knows all things, why would He enter the name of somebody who would one day fall and have to be removed from the book? We

are enrolled in heaven because we have been born again (Hebrews 12:23), and no matter how disobedient a child may be, he or she cannot be ‘unborn.’”

Again, the first author continues—

“As unbelievers die, their names are removed from the book; thus, at the final judgment, the book contains only the names of believers [those that were chosen from the foundation of the world] (Revelation 20:12–15). It then becomes “the Lamb’s Book of Life” (Revelation 13:8; 21:27), because only those saved by the Lord Jesus Christ have their names in it.

All the others have been blotted out, something God would never do for any true child of God (see Exodus 32:32; Romans 9:3). It is a book of *life*, and lost sinners are *dead* (Ephesians 2:1).”

So, after the Righteous Judge of the universe, Jesus Christ, assigns to each unbeliever who stands before Him at the Great White Throne Judgment their personal sentence for crimes committed against God Almighty, then and finally we see—

5. The Supreme Sentence

Revelation 20:14-15 (NKJV)

¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire [hell].

Scientist and devout Christian Henry Morris—

“All of these specifications seem to point to the likelihood (though we cannot be certain at this time) that “Hell” (Greek—gehenna) also called the “Lake of Fire” will be located on some far distant star. A star, after all, is precisely that—“a lake of fire”. There are indeed, stars and galaxies that, although “burning”, do not give off light in the visible part of the spectrum, so that they consist of both “fire” and “cloudy darkness.” One might even suggest a “black hole”, if and when such objects are actually proven to exist, would fit the description.”

When it comes to the judgment of God upon guilty sinners understand that—there will be no plea bargaining and no appeals will be allowed for this is the Supreme Court of the Universe and—all verdicts are final and forever!

2 Thessalonians 1:9 (NKJV)

These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

Matthew 22:13 (NKJV)

¹³ Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Jude 1:13 (NKJV)

¹³ raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

What will you choose today?

The Great White Stone or The Great White Throne?

Revelation 2:17 (NLT2)

¹⁷ “Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To

everyone who is victorious I will give some of the manna that has been hidden away in heaven. And I will give to each one a **white stone**, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one understands except the one who receives it.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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