

Revelation 20:11-15 | The Great White Throne

Introduction

These verses are among the saddest in all of Scripture. They represent the final destiny of all those who refused God's offer of grace in Christ. This is the final judgment at the end of history.

Verse-By-Verse Notes

Verse 11

- The tone of John's words is ominous. Consider his careful choice of words:
 - o *Great*: (*megas*/ μέγας in Greek) – John uses this Greek word 80 times in Revelation – more than any other book in the New Testament. It connotes the “larger-than-life” nature of the throne of God as well as His total sovereignty.
 - o *White*: The word connotes the idea of the divine purity and transcendence of God.
 - o *Throne*: The word connotes the eschatological seat of judgment. It is a divine throne and points to the majesty of God.
- “Him who was seated on it” is no doubt the Lord Jesus Christ “who is the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15) and “in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). John 5:22 says, “The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son.” See also Matthew 25:31-46 – Jesus will sit on His throne in judgment of all creation.
- Note the severity of the Son of God on His throne – even creation itself will flee from His terrifying presence. This likely represents the passing away of former things in preparation for the renewed creation in chapter 21.

Verse 12

- This is the final judgment of the unbelieving dead. The righteous will not be a part of this judgment for they stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10). “It is neither the judgment of the nations (Matt 25:31–46) nor the great white throne (Rev 20:11–15). Rather than being viewed as a judicial bench, the judgment seat of Christ should be viewed as the ‘reward seat.’”¹
- “both small and great” – judgment is the great equalizer of mankind. Earthly status will afford no advantage or disadvantage to those who stand before the throne.
- “books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life” – the “books” likely represent the record of works done by those being judged. The book of life is the registry of the redeemed. Also possible/likely is that one of the “books” is the

¹ Jeremiah K. Garrett, “Judgment Seat of Christ,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Word of God, specifically the *Law*. The works of the unbelieving dead will be judged according to God's perfect Law. See also Daniel 7:10

Verse 13

- The sea, death, and hades represent the “universal scope of judgment. The sea is specifically mentioned to show that no one – not even those whose bodies had gone unburied because lost at sea – would escape resurrection and judgment.” (Robert Mounce)
- “Hades” is the temporary dwelling place of the unrighteous dead during the intermediate state while they await final judgment.

Verse 14

- Death and Hades are “thrown” into the lake of fire. There is never any indication in the New Testament that the fiery torture of final judgment is anything but *eternal* (as opposed to those aberrant views of temporary judgment, universalism, or annihilationism). The judgment of the wicked is eternal because it represents payment for their sin, and since their own works are infinitely insufficient to atone for their sin, their torment is also infinite.

Verse 15

- The final verdict: only those whose names are written in the book of life escape eternal judgment.

BIG IDEA: “This is what you face: resurrection, the opening of the books, and judgment according to what is written in them. How are you going to fare on that day? Is your name written in the Lamb’s book of life? Are you living according to what is written in the Bible? You will be judged according to what you do: will you be justified because you trusted in Christ and repented of your sin, or will you be condemned because you refused to follow Christ and instead followed your sin?”²– Jim Hamilton

² James M. Hamilton Jr., *Preaching the Word: Revelation—The Spirit Speaks to the Churches*, ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 378–379.