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## Lesson 35

### Revelation 20:11-15 (NASB)

<sup>11</sup> Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.

<sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

<sup>13</sup> And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds.

<sup>14</sup> Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

<sup>15</sup> And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

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## O. The judgment of the great white throne ([20:11-15](#))

### 1. THE RESURRECTION AND JUDGMENT OF THE WICKED DEAD ([20:11-13](#))

[20:11](#). The final five verses of [chapter 20](#) introduce the judgment at the end of human history and the beginning of the eternal state. John wrote, **I saw a great white throne**. The events here described clearly follow the thousand years of [verses 1-6](#). The great white throne apparently differs from the throne mentioned more than 30 times in Revelation beginning with [4:2](#). It apparently is located neither in heaven nor earth but in space, as suggested by the statement, **Earth and sky fled from His presence, and there was no place for them**. It is not indicated who sits on this throne, but probably it is Christ Himself as in [3:21](#) (cf. [Matt. 19:28](#); [25:31](#); [John 5:22](#); [2 Cor. 5:10](#)—though the throne in these references is not necessarily the same throne as in [Rev. 20:11](#)). While Christ is now seated on the throne in heaven and will be seated on the Davidic throne on earth in the Millennium ([Matt. 25:31](#)), this white throne judgment is a special situation.

The question has been raised as to whether the earth and the starry heavens as they are today will be destroyed at this point in the future or will be simply restored to a new state of purity. Many references in the Bible suggest that the earth and the heavens, as now known, will be destroyed (cf. [Matt. 24:35](#); [Mark 13:31](#); [Luke 16:17](#); [21:33](#); [2 Peter 3:10-13](#)). This is confirmed by the opening statement of [Revelation 21](#), "the first heaven and the first earth had passed away."

The present universe was created like a gigantic clock which is running down, and if left to itself, would ultimately come to a state of complete inactivity. Inasmuch as God created the universe and set it in motion for the purpose of enacting the drama of sin and redemption, it would seem proper to begin anew with a new heaven and a new earth suitable for His eternal purpose and built on a different principle. The new heaven and new earth described in [chapter 21](#) has no similarity to the present earth and heaven.

**20:12.** The purpose of establishing the great white throne is to judge the dead. John wrote that **the dead, great and small, stood before the throne.** From other Scriptures it seems that all the righteous dead have been raised, including Old Testament saints, the dead of the Great Tribulation, and the church saints, the body of Christ (see [comments](#) on [v. 5](#)). Thus it may be assumed that [verses 11-15](#) refer to the judgment of the wicked dead, who according to [verse 5](#) would not be resurrected until after the thousand years and will have no part in what is called "the first resurrection."

At that judgment John saw **books... opened**, including a book called **the book of life.** The text does not state clearly what these books are, but the first opened books may refer to human works and "the book of life" is the record of those who are saved (cf. [3:5](#); [13:8](#); [17:8](#); [20:15](#); [21:27](#)). The fact that these dead have not been raised before is evidence in itself that they do not have eternal life and that their judgment is a judgment of their works.

All final judgments deal with works, whether the works of Christians rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ or the works of the unsaved which are in view here. The question of who is saved is determined not in heaven but in life on earth. What is revealed here is the *confirmation* of one's destiny by means of God's written records.

Some view the book of life as the record of all the living and that when the unsaved die their names are deleted from it. A better view is that the book is the record of those who are saved whose names were "written in the book of life from the creation of the world" ([17:8](#)). Regardless of which view is taken, at this time only the saved are in the book of life.

**20:13.** In order for the wicked **dead** to be **judged... the sea... death, and hades** will give up their dead. Those who are unsaved at the time of death go immediately to a state of conscious punishment described in the Old Testament as sheol and in the New Testament as hades. Neither sheol nor hades ever refer to the *eternal* state and should not be considered equivalent to the English word "hell," which properly is the place of eternal punishment. The lake of fire ([vv. 14-15](#)) referred to as "the fiery lake of burning sulfur" ([19:20](#)) is the same as gehenna (cf. [Matt. 5:22, 29-30](#); [10:28](#); [18:9](#); [23:15, 33](#); [Mark 9:43, 45, 47](#); [Luke 12:5](#); [James 3:6](#)) and is translated "hell" in the NIV and KJV with the word "fire" added in several passages. Actually gehenna was originally a name for the place of burning refuse, located in the Valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem. The term, however, goes far beyond this geographic background and refers to eternal punishment.

The statement "death and hades gave up the dead" means that the physical bodies of the unsaved will be joined with their spirits which have been in hades. The mention of "the sea" giving up its dead makes it clear that regardless of how far a body has disintegrated, it will nevertheless be resurrected for this judgment.

## **2. THE LAKE OF FIRE ([20:14-15](#))**

**20:14-15.** Following the great white throne judgment **death and hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death**, the final destination of the wicked. The doctrine of eternal punishment has always been a problem to Christians who enjoy the grace of

God and salvation in Christ. The Bible is clear, however, that the punishment of the wicked is eternal. This is confirmed in [verse 10](#), where the beast and the false prophet are still in the lake of fire after the thousand years of Christ's millennial reign. Though the wicked dead will receive resurrection bodies, they will be quite unlike the resurrection bodies of the saints. The former people will continue to be sinful but will be indestructible and will exist forever in the lake of fire.

Though many have attempted to find some scriptural way to avoid the doctrine of eternal punishment, as far as biblical revelation is concerned there are only two destinies for human souls; one is to be with the Lord and the other is to be forever separated from God in the lake of fire. This solemn fact is motivation for carrying the gospel to the ends of the earth whatever the cost, and doing everything possible to inform and challenge people to receive Christ before it is too late.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

### Open it

1. What is one time you remember getting in trouble as a child?

**I was always the one to touch and pull things, dropped the bucket on the tractor playing and spilled fuel oil out on the ground. My Dad was not happy with me.**

### Explore it

2. How will creation react to the "great white throne" judgment? ([20:11](#))

**from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them**

3. What will be the effect of God's presence on "earth and sky" at the great white throne judgment? ([20:11](#))

**Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them**

4. Who will be involved in the final judgment? ([20:12](#))

**And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds**

5. How does God keep track of what people do in this life? ([20:12](#))

**The book of life**

6. On what basis will people be judged at the end of time? ([20:12-13](#))

**According to their deeds**

7. From what diverse places will the dead assemble for this judgment? ([20:13](#))

**From the sea, and Hades**

8. How did John describe the lake of fire? ([20:14](#))

**This is the second death, the lake of fire.**

9. What will happen to those whose names are not found in the Book of Life? ([20:15](#))

**<sup>15</sup> And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.**

### **Get it**

10. How does a person get his or her name recorded in the Book of Life?

**We must be saved and have Jesus as our savior.**

11. How is it significant that earth and sky fled from the presence of the one seated on the throne of judgment?

**They were created by God and could not stand in his presence**

12. What does it mean that "the lake of fire is the second death"?

**Sinners and Satan and his followers will be there forever, separated from God and his presence**

13. Who are the people whose names are not recorded in the Book of Life?

**All who have not trusted in Jesus**

14. How should the certainty of future judgment affect the way we live?

**Knowing where we end up should make us more confident in what we do and how we do it, in the What would Jesus do style**

### **Apply it**

15. What can you do to remind yourself of the reality of a future judgment?

**I must remember the "I am a child of God"**

16. How can you help a friend or family member avoid a future in the lake of fire?

**Start a conversation with them about God, slowly and carefully leading them**