

The Great White Throne Judgment

20: 11-12

DIG: Who is the **Judge** who will sit on the great white throne? By what standard will those who stand before it be judged? Why is the earth destroyed? Is there such a thing as degrees of punishment for unbelievers? What special group will be judged at that time? What- is the difference between the book of life, the Lamb's book of life, and the other books that were opened?

REFLECT: How has **the father of lies** tempted you recently? Did you recognize the attack? What will you do differently next time? Why is the great white throne judgment something believers can look forward to? How does it make you feel to know that you will share in the judging the world (3:21, 20:4)?

This section describes the final sentencing of the lost and is the most serious, sobering and tragic passage in the entire Bible. It will be the last courtroom scene that will ever take place. After this there will never be a trial again, and **the Lord** will never need to act as **Judge**. The accused will not be allowed to quibble over their guilt or innocence. There will be a **Prosecutor**, but no defender; an **Accuser**, but no advocate. There will be an indictment, but no defense mounted by the accused; the convicting evidence will be presented with no cross-examination. There will be an utterly unsympathetic **Judge** and no jury. There will be no appeal of the sentence once it is pronounced. The guilty will be punished eternally with no possibility of parole in a prison from which there is no escape. Banished for eternity, they will be without **God**, without love, and without **hope**.

The famous words, "Abandon **hope**, all you who enter here," appeared above the gates of **hell** in Dante's fanciful epic poem *Inferno*. According to Dante, those who pass beneath that sign will have no **hope** of ever getting out. Though the details of his fictional picture of heaven, **hell** and purgatory range from the fantastic to the blasphemous, he was right about this: at the end of the day, the wicked of this world will get a one-way ticket to **hell**. All hope vanishes and there will be no escape **the lake of fire** forever and ever. And forever is a long time. This will be true for those at **the great white throne judgment**. They rejected **the blessed hope** (Titus 2:13); therefore, they will be without **hope**.

But ever since the fall of mankind in the garden of Eden, **Satan, the father of lies** (John 8:44), has attempted to deceive people about the reality of this inevitable **judgment**. **He** has done **his** best to convince the lost that there will be no final hearing. **The great dragon** has deceived sinners into believing that they can live as they please without fear of ultimate

accountability or future punishment. Long ago **the tempter** said to Eve: **You will not surely die (Genesis 3:4)**, thus revealing **his** lie that sin would go unpunished. The primary means the devil uses in his deception are atheism, especially the godless theory of evolution, and false religion. Atheism's denial of **God's** existence implies there is no moral **Judge** to whom we are held accountable after we die. This can give the false impression that we are free to sin up a storm and then simply pass out of existence with no consequences. The gods of false religions are not holy. They are appeased by ritual and ceremony; therefore, they inspire no fear of accountability in their worshipers.⁴⁵⁷

For unbelievers, this may be one of the most frightening prospects regarding the future. Those who are separated from **God** by their decision to reject **Yeshua** will nonetheless be **judged**. For those in **Messiah**, however, **there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1)**. In fact, for believers, **the great white throne** judgment will be something to look forward to, for it will vindicate their lives. Evil will be punished and faithfulness will be rewarded.⁴⁵⁸

But in stark contrast to these holy ones, unbelievers will stand spiritually naked before the **Judge** of the earth with only their putrid works as their defense. Mankind has always wanted to be judged according to their works - this will be their opportunity. Separated from **Messiah** at death, they will have no way of being united with **Him** again at **the great white throne**. They had made their choice long ago. **The Lord's** only recourse will be to send them away from **His** presence, saying: **Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his fallen angels (Matthew 25:41)**.

Jesus Christ will sit on **a great white throne (20:11a)**. Although **He** shares the throne with **God the Father (3:21)**, it is through **Yeshua** alone that **ADONAI** renders the final judgment.⁴⁵⁹ Nearly fifty times in the book of **Revelation** there is the mention of the **throne**. It is **great** not only because of its great size, but also because of its importance, magnificence and authority. It is **white** because of its points to purity, holiness, righteousness and justice. Every verdict handed down from this **great white throne** by the **Lord** will be completely righteous and just (**Psalm 9:7-8**) because that is **His** nature. **He** cannot act otherwise. Even more inspiring than the **throne** itself, was **Him who sat on it (20:11b)**. All judgment has been given to **Jesus Christ**. **The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son (John 5:22)**. Then several verses later **John** added: **For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself. And He has given Him authority to judge because He is the Son of Man (John 5:26-27)**. Other biblical writers identify **Christ** as the **Judge** also (**Acts 10:42, 17:31; Romans 2:16; Second Timothy 4:1**). Therefore, it is the second person of the Trinity, **Yeshua Messiah**, who will sit in final judgment of unbelievers.

It may come as a surprise to hear that believers will share in the judging. In **Matthew 19:28** and **Luke 22:28-30** Jesus suggests that the Jewish disciples will judge the twelve tribes of Israel. In addition, we are told that believers will sit on thrones and **judge the earth** (**First Corinthians 6:2-3** and **Revelation 3:21, 20:4**). While we are not told the exact details, **Messiah** will apparently permit believers to share in this work.⁴⁶⁰

After describing the vision of **Jesus on His throne**, **John** realized that **the earth and sky fled from His presence**. This will be nothing less than the *uncreation* of the universe. **The earth** will have been reconfigured by the devastating **judgments** of the Great Tribulation and then restored during the messianic Kingdom. Yet, it will still be stained with sin and subject to the effects of the Fall (see my commentary on **Genesis Ba - The Woman Saw the Fruit of the Tree and Ate It**). It shared the results of man's sin (**Rom 8:19-22**), and thus it will be subject to **God's judgment**.⁴⁶¹ Nothing tainted by sin will be allowed to exist in the Eternal State. **Peter** wrote: **Live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed it's coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness** (2 Pet 3:11-13).

The present earth and sky will not merely be shifted or reshaped, because **John** saw that **there was no place for them** (20:11c). They will be totally *uncreated*. Just as they came from nothing by the **Word of God** (**Genesis 1:3-26**), they will be sucked into black nothingness by the same **Word of God**. **The day of the Lord will come** suddenly and unexpectedly, just like a thief. **The heavens will disappear by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare**, totally consumed (**Second Peter 3:10**). It didn't take eons of evolution to create the universe, and it won't take eons to *uncreate* it. The *uncreation* of the universe will be like its creation, by the spoken **Word of God**.⁴⁶² That will leave everything ready for the **judgment** itself.

The prisoners before the bar of justice will all be physically dead, since no one could survive the destruction of the present universe. The last living unbelievers will die when **God** crushes Satan's rebellion at the end of the thousand-year millennium (**20:8-9**). The last living Gentile believers who came to **Christ** during the Millennium will be translated and transformed into their resurrection bodies, like Enoch (**Genesis 5:24**), Elijah (**Second Kings 2:11**), and the raptured Church (**First Thessalonians 4:13-18**).⁴⁶³

The resurrected dead, however, are pictured **standing before the throne** of divine **judgment**. These are not merely **the dead** from Satan's last rebellion at the end of the Millennium, but will include all the unbelievers who ever lived (see **Fn - The Second Resurrection**). To emphasize the broad scope of the **judgment**, **John** notes that the grand mass of unbelievers before **Messiah** will include both the **small** and the **great**. There will be

a terrible fellowship . . . **the dead, small and great**, will stand before **the Lord**. Little men and paltry women whose lives were filled with pettiness, selfishness, and nasty little sins will be there. The **small**, whose lives amounted to nothing will be there, whose very sins were drab and plain, mean, spiteful, irritable, groveling, vulgar, common and cheap. The **great** will also be there, men who sinned with a high hand, with dash, courage and flair. Men like Alexander the **Great**, Osama bin Laden, Adolph Hitler, Chairman Mao and Joseph Stalin will be present, men who went in for wickedness on a grand scale with the world as their stage and who died unrepentant. They will all be arraigned and on their way to be damned; a horrible fellowship gathered together for the first and last time.⁴⁶⁴ What a scene!

Before they are sent to **the lake of fire**; however, they will experience **God's** love. As they stand before **the great white throne** and **He** who sits on it, they will be in the presence of **God's** love. **Jesus is God** and **God is love**. If they had never experienced **His** love on earth, they will experience it in heaven. The last pleasant feeling they will have before spending eternity in the burning, choking, putrid second death, will be **His** love. The contrast will be devastating. I cannot fathom the hopelessness and the sorrow. No wonder the Bible tells us that there will be **weeping and gnashing of teeth** (**Matthew 8:12, 13:42, 13:50, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30; Luke 13:28**).

A book was opened, which is the book of life (20:12b). This book contains the names of every person who was ever born: **Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be** (Psalm 139:16). Believer's names are retained in the book of life: **He who overcomes will be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life** (Revelation 3:5). However, the lost will have their names **blotted out of the book of life**. King David said: **May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous** (Psalm 69:28). Many years before, Moses had pleaded with **ADONAI** to **blot him out** of **His book** rather than withhold forgiveness from the Israelites who had sinned (**Exodus 32:30-32**).⁴⁶⁵ Because the names of the lost will be **blotted out**, they will be worthy of this judgment.

Books were opened (20:12a) . . . and the dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in those books (20:12c). They will contain the thoughts, words, and deeds of each unbelieving soul. The evidence written on the life of every soul will be the basis of the degrees of punishment in hell.⁴⁶⁶ The purpose of **the great white throne judgment** will not be to determine if a person is saved or lost, because that will be settled forever (one way or the other) at death. The purpose at **the great white throne** will be to determine the degree of punishment. There is a principle in the Bible that teaches degrees of punishment in hell are based upon degrees of sinfulness in this world. **Jesus** talked about things being more tolerable for some than for others in the day of judgment (**Matthew 11:20-24; Luke 12:47; John 19:11**). On the basis of what is written in these **books** that

the degrees of punishment will be determined. So even those who are not of the family of **God** will be treated fairly.

When the Bible says the **books** are **opened** and the **dead** are **judged**, Seventh Day Adventists believe that **the dead** are *closely investigated*. From this belief they have invented a doctrine called *Investigative Judgment*. This blasphemous doctrine states that **Jesus** can forgive sin, but **Satan** cannot **blot out** sin. They teach that only Satan can **blot out** sin and therefore the ultimate power of salvation lies with Satan and not **Christ!**

One special group that will be judged at that time will be the demons who tried to ruin **God's** plan of salvation by creating a race of demon possessed humans that could not be saved before the Flood (see my commentary on **Genesis Ca - The Sons of God Married the Daughters of Men**). Those demons were so dangerous that **ADONAI** had to create a special prison for them called *Tartarus* (**First Peter 3:19-20; Jude 6**), beneath **Sh'ol**. The word translated **hell** in **Second Peter 2:4** is the *Greek* word *Tartarus*. **For if God did not spare the fallen angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, or Tartarus, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment.** They were so dangerous that they were not released with Satan and the other demons at the end of the Millennium (**20:7-10**). Their **judgment** will come when **the books** are finally **opened** (**20:12**) after the last rebellion is crushed.

Finally, **another book** mentioned in the Bible is **the Lamb's book of life**. This **book** only contains the names of those who are born again. Interestingly, their names were written into this **book** before **the earth** was ever created (**13:8; 17:8b**). Because of the nine things that **the LORD** does for us at the moment of faith (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Bw - What God Does For Us at the Moment of Faith/Trust/Belief**), it is impossible for believers to be blotted out of **the Lamb's book of life**. **God's** children do not appear at **the great white throne judgment**, and nothing further is said concerning them until after the New Jerusalem descends from heaven to the new earth.⁴⁶⁷