

**UNDERSTANDING END TIMES PROPHECY
FOCUS #9—THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT
REVELATION 20:11-15**

When we think of judgment in the end times, we often think of the event described in Revelation 20:11-15, which is The Great White Throne Judgment. This judgment is different from those previously mentioned. We have already talked about the judgment that involves the rewarding of church age saints often referred to as The Judgment Seat of Christ. We have also discussed the Sheep and Goat Judgment, which is a judgment of tribulation survivors for entrance into the Millennial Kingdom. Now, following the Millennial Reign of Christ is the Great White Throne Judgment, which is an eternal judgment examining the works of all individuals for their eternal destiny.

The Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15):

(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. (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. (13) 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. (14) Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. (15) And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

The scene now shifts to the event that immediately follows the Millennial Reign of Christ. John is now witnessing yet another vision. This time he has a vision of that final judgment of unbelievers called the Great White Throne Judgment.

The Place of Judgment: (Revelation 20:11)

John first sees a great white throne. It is called great not only because of its size as greater than the thrones mentioned in Revelation 20:4, but also because of its significance, majesty, and authority. The fact that it is white symbolizes its purity, holiness and justice. The verdict handed down from this throne will be absolutely equitable, righteous, and just.

Him who sat upon the throne is none other than Almighty God, who has previously been described for us in Revelation 4:2-3, *“Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. And He who was sitting [was] like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and [there was] a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.”*

The phrase, “from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was

found for them,” emphasizes the un-creation of the universe. The Lord will destroy our current heavens and earth and will recreate an eternal state, a new heaven and earth (cf. 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1, 5; Isaiah 65:17). The setting is in the midst of an indescribable void. It is between the destruction of our current universe and the creation of the new heaven and earth.

The People Judged: (Revelation 20:12-13)

Those who are now being judged are those who have died physically. Remember that all believers who have died physically have already been raised to life. So the dead at this point only includes unbelievers. They will be raised after the Millennial Reign of Christ. The phrase great and small simply emphasizes all unbelievers. All will face God’s judgment. They are now standing before the throne of God and the books will be opened. These books are a record of their works since they will be judged according to their deeds and that is what is written in the books. These deeds will reveal the truth about these individuals and give the explanation as to why their name is not found in the other book that is opened, the book of life.

In verse 13 John goes on to describe where these people came from. Some had come from the sea. This is a reference to the physical body of some. The sea is known as a difficult place to retrieve a body from. Death and Hades gave up their dead also. Death is a reference to all the places on land from which God will resurrect new bodies for the unrighteous dead. Hades is a reference to the giving up of the soul. Hades is a temporary place of torment for the unbeliever. After these unrighteous individuals are raised in their new bodies suited for hell, they will be judged according to their deeds.

The Punishment after Judgment: (Revelation 20:14-15)

The punishment for all who stand in this judgment is severe. None will escape from punishment. All who stand before the great white throne will reap the same consequences for their actions. First death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire. This is a reference to the grave and the temporary place of punishment. Both are permanently cast into the place of eternal torment. It is here where John identifies the lake of fire as the second death. Those who die in their sins during this present world will suffer a second death in eternity as they are sentenced to the lake of fire.

In fact as John concludes this section he says that those whose name was not found in the book of life were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the place of eternal suffering and damnation. It is a place where the worm shall not die and their fire shall not be quenched (cf. Mark 9:48). It is a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (cf. Matthew 13:42). It is a place where the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever (cf. Rev. 14:11). It is the future place of all who reject the risen Lord Jesus Christ. There is only one way to avoid the terror of hell. Those who confess their sins and ask God’s forgiveness on the basis of Christ’s death on the cross and thereby placing their faith in Him will be delivered from God’s eternal wrath.