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A0636 – September 3, 2006 – Rev 20:11-15 – The Great White Throne

Last week we saw that Satan, who must be released for a short time after the thousand years, will come forth from his subterranean cavern or abyss. His first activity will be deceiving the nations. The nations are the offspring of those believers who entered the Kingdom in natural bodies. Satan's intention is to deceive them into destroying the Jews. So, a thousand years of rehabilitation in prison have not worked for Satan. He's had time to think about what he's done and yet there's no change in his nature. We can't change our nature, only God can do that through faith in His Son. So, he will deceive the nations with a lie that causes them to doubt the King's goodness and truthfulness. And he gathers them for war from the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog. This is not Ezek 38-39 which happens in the first half of the Tribulation. Nor is this Armageddon which occurs during the second half of the Tribulation. This is a war after the thousand years. By this time Gog and Magog have come to refer to the enemies of God. And there is a global gathering against the King, His saints, and His beloved city, Jerusalem. This is a vast army, the greatest army numerically the world has ever seen. This is the final world war. They advance up on the broad plain of the earth as described in Zech 14:10 and surround the small camp of the saints in Jerusalem and then God sends down fire from heaven which devours them. After the war Satan will be cast into the lake of fire where the Antichrist and false prophet have already been for a thousand years. This is the final stage in his three-stage demise. Next, we have the great white throne judgment when all the rest of the unbelieving dead will be cast in the lake of fire and they will be under torment day and night forever and ever. This is the second death. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.

Since the main thrust of the passage is about Satan being cast into the lake of fire let's discuss a little bit about angels. Each angel is an individual creation and thus, as Aquinas said, an individual species (i.e. an individual kind). They were all created simultaneously and most likely sometime during creation week (cf Gen 2:1), possibly on day 1 or 4). They do not have bodies but rather are spirit beings (immaterial), not composed of flesh

and blood (Eph 6:12), although they have appeared in bodies at times or as men (i.e. they can materialize; Matt 28:3; Rev 15:6; 18:1). They have personality, capacity for great intelligence (they still learn, they are not omniscient), great strength (but not omnipotent, Rev 5:2), are morally responsible (Job 4:18; Ezek 28:12ff; Isa 14:12-14), and are all male, thus, they do not procreate among themselves. Angels in heaven do not marry (Matt 22:30; Mark 12:25). Their number remains the same and since they are spirit beings they do not experience physical death, but they are capable of spiritual death (i.e. separation from God; cf Rev 12:3). Like men, once in existence they continue to exist forever. Though all things are reconciled to God through the cross of Christ, things on earth and things in heaven (Col 1:20), there is no substitutionary application of the atonement for angels. This is because angels are not made in God's image. For angels to enjoy substitutionary atonement would require an individual Redeemer for each individual angel since each is its own individual kind. When Satan fell, 1/3 of the angels fell with him and at that point the angels were fixed in either a holy or fallen state. No more angels will fall in the future and none who are fallen will become holy. Thus, for the fallen angels our verse tells us, **they will be tormented (3PFPI) day and night forever and ever**. The word **tormented** is passive voice indicating that the torment will be imposed by someone else, presumably by God who prepared the lake of fire for the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41). The word **torment** is *basanizo* and means "to torture". The "torture" can be both mental and physical in nature. The duration of the torture is said to be **day and night forever and ever**. Notice it is **day and night**, that is, there is no rest and it is **forever and ever**, there is no end of torture. This is one of the most difficult teachings of Scripture; a horrible thought. As horrible as everlasting torment sounds we must remember that God has graciously given every person ever born into the world revelation for which they are responsible so if they reject it they are without excuse. Let's review the Doctrine of Revelation.

The Doctrine of Revelation can be divided into two aspects. The first aspect is general revelation and the second is special revelation. General revelation is revelation available to all men without exception. God has made this available to all men in two forms. First, creation and second, conscience. In creation God has made His divine nature and eternal power known. The Bible says that all men see God clearly through creation. Therefore they are without excuse. In conscience, God made men morally responsible for their actions so they are without excuse. General revelation in creation and conscience is enough to condemn but it is not enough to save. To be saved a person must receive the second aspect of revelation, special revelation. Special revelation is revelation of the person and work of Jesus the Messiah in the gospel. God has made this revelation available only to some men. Many men have lived their whole lives and never heard the

gospel message. When they die they will be without excuse and will ultimately go to the lake of fire. Many people think this is unfair but it is not. Let me explain. All men receive the revelation of God in creation and conscience. If a man responds negatively to general revelation then they would have responded negatively to special revelation. A rejection of the lesser revelation is a rejection of the greater revelation. However, if a man responds positively to the light of revelation in creation and conscience then God will send him more light. This may come as an answer to prayer when the believer asks God to send missionaries out into the world. Then someone is called to the mission field and they go to that person who responded positively to general revelation. Whatever the means God will make sure that person gets more light so they can hear the gospel, believe and be saved. This story could be recounted time and again as missionaries have been sent all over the world to evangelize pagan tribes.

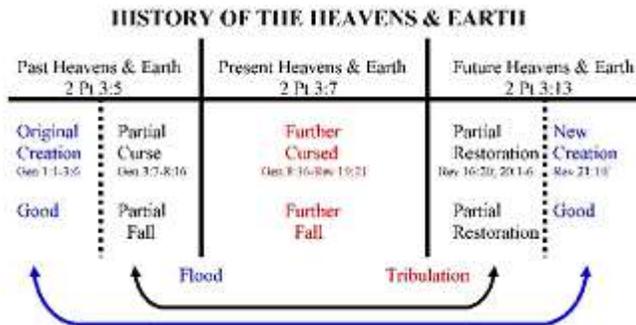
Revelation 20:11 And I saw (*kai eidon*) a great white throne and the One sitting (PMPart) upon it, who from the face fled (3SAAI) the earth and the heaven and a place was not found (3SAPI) it.

The words **And I saw** (*kai eidon*) introduce a new scene in John's vision. He sees a **great white throne and One sitting upon it**. Because of this description this future event is called "The Great White Throne Judgment". The word **throne** (*thronos*) comes from the Greek word *thranos*, meaning "bench". This is the "bench" in a courtroom. So John has entered the courtroom where the final judgments will be decided. The **throne** or bench is **great** (*meGas*) signifying the "greatness" of the One sitting upon it. The throne is **white** (*leukos*) signifying the "righteousness" of the One sitting upon it. Surely the verdicts which come forth from the Great and Righteous One will be great and righteous, in perfect harmony with the character of God.

Who precisely is the **One sitting upon it**? Some say the Father because He sat on the throne in Rev 4:2. Others say the son because of John 5:22 where the Father has given all judgment to the Son. In my opinion it is the Son sitting on the throne issuing for the judgments of the Father. This is in conformity with Acts 17:31 where Paul said the Father has fixed a day on which He will judge in righteousness through the Son. So, it seems that the Father is judging through the Glorified Son of Man who is sitting on the bench in this great courtroom scene. In John's writings it is often difficult to distinguish the Father from the Son because they are so closely connected in all their acts.

The first object of judgment is **the earth and the heaven**. They are described as **fleeing** from **His presence**. Debate has surrounded as to how this will take place. Some say God

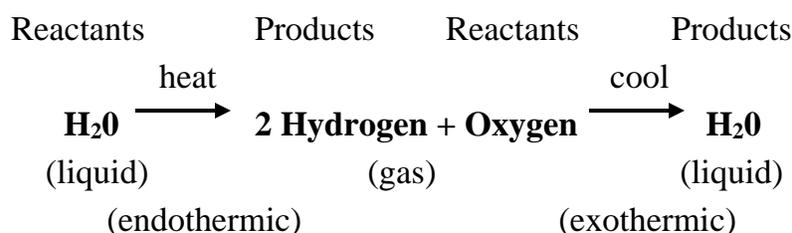
will dissolve the heaven and earth and create a new heavens and new earth *ex nihilo*. Others say God will disassemble the heaven and earth and re-create a new heavens and new earth from that previously existing material. Light is cast on what may happen from biblical and scientific data. Starting with the biblical evidence we have to understand the history of **the heavens and earth**. The phrase “earth and heaven” or “heavens and earth” is the ancient way of referring to the universe in its totality (e.g. Gen 1:1). Peter taught that there are three “heavens and earth” (2 Pt 3:1-13) or universes in God’s plan.



The past heavens & earthⁱ is distinguished from the present heavens & earth by the universal flood judgment. The present heavens & earth is distinguished from the future heavens and earth by the universal tribulation judgment. Since there are only three heavens & earths according to Peter and not four and the future heavens & earth begins with the millennium then this indicates that the latter theory is more probable. It seems that God will disassemble the present heavens and earth and re-assemble them into a new heavens and new earth from the previously existing material. Scientific discovery may serve to illustrate how this could take place. In the 1700’s, French chemist, Lavoisier discovered the Law of Conservation of Mass. This law states that in a chemical reaction, the mass of the products equals the mass of the reactants.

$$\text{Mass of Reactants} = \text{Mass of Products}$$

He demonstrated, for example, that if you boil a known mass of liquid water it will decompose into gaseous hydrogen and oxygen molecules (evaporation).



When boiled in a closed container these gas molecules are trapped. If the temperature is then decreased the hydrogen and oxygen molecules re-form as liquid water (condensation). His experiments demonstrated that through these chemical reaction the original mass of the water was preserved. This may illustrate how God could decompose the material of the heavens and earth and re-compose it into a new heavens and new earth, so that what we have in Revelation 21:1 is actually a re-creation, albeit, perfect. The mass before and after being the same but organized differently so that you have a new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells and the lake of fire where evil dwells; a perfect separation of good and evil.

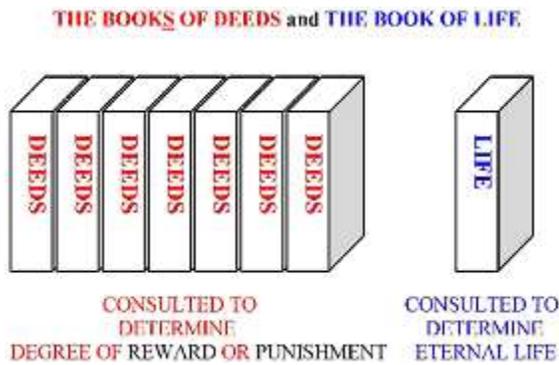
Thus, the text says John saw the earth and heaven flee much like Lavoisier saw the water disappear. This did not mean it was gone, simply invisible. In Rev 21:1 John sees a new heavens and new earth, just as Lavoisier saw the water after the counter-reaction.

SEE ABOVE DIAGRAM

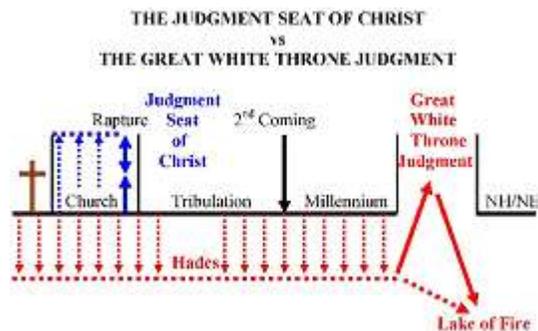
This logic is one of the most remarkable apologetics for the word of God and of Christ. Notice the coherence of God's thinking as reflected in his plan for the heavens & earth. Look at the remarkable continuity. You ought to be able to show this to an unbeliever and get some kind of response. How can forty authors living over the span of 1,600 years, from eight different countries and at least thirteen different occupations compose a book without any contradictions that paint this logical outline of the history of the heavens & earth? No two humans could do this living in the same generation and from the same country and from the same occupation. This coherence is evidence that the Bible is not simply a human book. Though it does have human authors, what is clear from something like this is that God superintended the human authors so they recorded the exact words God wanted to communicate without violating their own personality, style, intelligence or vocabulary. If you study and meditate upon this diagram I think you will come away with a deeper respect and awe for who God is and what He is doing. If you present this to an unbeliever they have to respond. How is this possible? If the Bible is not God's word then how does an unbeliever account for this kind of logical continuity? This is a great apologetic for the word of God

God has to separate good and evil forever at this juncture and so I suppose this is the beginning of that separation. Next, he will decide where the dead will spend eternity. Will they spend it in the new heavens and new earth or in the lake of fire?

Revelation 20:12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing (PerfAPart before the throne. And books were opened (3PAPI), and another (allo - of the same kind) book was opened (3SAPI), which is (3SPAI) of life, and the dead were judged (3PAPI) from what was written (PerfPassPart) in the books according to their deeds.



The dead refers to all unbelievers from the beginning of time. When a person lives their entire life without believing then their soul goes to Hades. The content, what a person must believe changes with progressive revelation but the basis of salvation is always the cross of Christ. If a person does not believe within their physical life then at physical death their soul goes to Hades. The soul then consciously awaits the Great White Throne Judgment



Just before this judgment they will be resurrected. After their judgment they will be cast into the lake of fireⁱⁱ with Hades. From this we gather that Hades and the lake of fire are two separate places even though they are both described in terms of “fire” (Luke 16:23-24; Rev 20:14-15). Peter made this clear when he said, “*then* the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment” (2 Pt 2:9). The KJV translation in verse 14 confuses Hades with hell by saying “death and hell were cast into the lake of fire”. The word translated “hell” in the KJV is actually *hades* in the Greek and not *gehennah* (hell) or *limne tou puros* (lake of fire). In summary, when an unbeliever dies they do not go to hell, rather their soul goes to

Hades where they remain until the completion of the millennium. Then they will be resurrected, judged and cast into the lake of fire or hell for all eternity.

So, here we are, after the millennium and obviously they have already been resurrected because John doesn't say he saw "souls" (Rev 20:4) but that he saw them **standing**. In a courtroom when the judgment is pronounced everyone standsⁱⁱⁱ before Jesus Christ who sits on the "bench" awaiting their judgment.

And books were opened, and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*, and the dead were judged (3PAPI) from what was written (PerfPassPart) in the books according to their deeds. Here we have a set of books and then a single book.

SEE ABOVE DIAGRAM ON THE BOOKS AND BOOK

First let's look at the single book, the book of life. Everyone's name was originally written in the book of life (Ps 69:28). A person can know his name is written in the book of life as long as he believes God's promise that he has eternal life (John 5:24; Phil 4:3). A person's name is erased from the book of life at the point of physical death if they have not believed (Rev 3:5). So, this book is a written record of every person who received eternal **life** through faith alone in Christ alone. On this day it will be consulted to discover whether the person has received eternal life or not.

Second, the set of books are the books of **deeds**. Every overt act and every covert thought are recorded in this set of books (Matt 12:36). On this day it will be consulted to determine the degree of punishment the person will undergo in the lake of fire. So, both the books of deeds and the book of life will be laid open before Jesus Christ who searches the hearts and minds. While unbelievers alone are in view at the great white throne the books of deeds will be consulted for both believers and unbelievers. Everyone will be judged **according to their deeds**. However, the judgment for believers will take place more than a thousand years before at the Judgment Seat of Christ while the judgment for unbelievers will take more than a thousand years later at the Great White Throne Judgment. Let me clarify. While the believer will never come into judgment regarding his final destiny (John 5:24) the believer's deeds will be judged to determine degree of reward. On the other side of the coin, the unbeliever's deeds will be judged to determine degree of punishment.

SEE ABOVE DIAGRAM COMPARING THE TWO JUDGMENTS

The sole issue that determines whether an individual is at the Judgment Seat of Christ or the Great White Throne Judgment is faith alone in Christ alone.

Understanding the relationship between faith and deeds is crucial to understanding this passage. Faith alone in Christ alone determines whether a person receives eternal life or not. As long as a person has not believed he stands under the Great White Throne Judgment.

John 3:18 "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

So, while faith alone in Christ alone is required to miss the Great White Throne deeds are consulted to determine the quality of life or death a person will experience. Now, let's apply this truth to our passage. First, according to verse 15 none of the dead at the Great White Throne Judgment have their names written in the book of life. This means they did not have faith alone in Christ alone and so did not receive eternal life. Inevitably they will be thrown into the lake of fire. However, the quality of death (i.e. the degree of punishment) they will experience in the lake of fire is determined by their deeds. Several NT passages indicate different degrees of everlasting punishment. For example,

Matthew 10:15 "Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for *the* land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.

Matthew 11:22"Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in *the* day of judgment than for you.

Matthew 11:24 "Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in *the* day of judgment, than for you."

The thing that determines degree of punishment is the amount of revelation received and rejected. For those who received a greater amount of revelation and rejected it there will be a greater degree of punishment (e.g. Jews (Rom 3:2), Jewish rabbi's (John 3:10), those who saw Jesus' miracles (above references), those who have the Scriptures (Rom 3:2)). For those who received a lesser amount of revelation and rejected it there will be a lesser degree of punishment (e.g. Gentiles, those who did not see Jesus' miracles, those who do not have the Scriptures, pagan tribes). Degrees of punishment in the lake of fire is in keeping with the justice of God.

ⁱ God originally created everything “perfect” and God will re-create everything “perfect”. When sin entered the heavens through Satan and the earth through Adam (Rom 5:12) the heavens and earth were partially cursed and God will partially restore the heavens and earth at the millennium. When God sent the Flood the heavens and earth were cursed to the furthest extent that they are considered a different heavens and earth altogether. God promised that he would never curse the earth again on account of man (Gen 8:21). If He cursed the earth further it is likely that all men would not be able to see God clearly through creation and this would mean men could not respond positively or negatively to the light of creation. This would mean men would have an excuse at the judgment for not believing. However, God, in His grace did not permit the earth to be cursed beyond its present condition. In its present condition the heavens and earth declare the glory of God and no man is without excuse (Rom 1:20).

ⁱⁱ The “lake of fire” was symbolized in the OT by the Valley of Hinnom or Gehenna at the southern end of the ancient city of David which served as the trash dump. It stood in contrast to what became the Temple Mount which has a higher elevation and symbolized heaven.

ⁱⁱⁱ This is similar to the picture in Dan 7:10 “A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And the books were opened.”

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