

The Great White Throne (Revelation 20:7-15)

Undoubtedly the saddest passage in the book of Revelation is that which refers to the eternal condemnation of the lost. Revelation 20:7-15 describes the final rebellion and eternal destiny of Satan followed by the final judgment and condemnation of those who have refused to follow the Lamb. This passage portrays hell as a real place of eternal torment. Such a description is consistent with the teachings of Jesus and the rest of the New Testament. Hell is a place of darkness and despair (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30), fiery judgment and suffering (Matthew 13:42, 50; Luke 16:23-24), separation and sorrow (Matthew 24:51; Luke 13:28; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10), and external pain and internal torment (Mark 9:42-48). The fact that God warns about hell is a mark of His love and grace. However, all who reject His love and grace in the person of Jesus Christ must suffer eternal separation from God. To downplay the horrors of hell is to downplay the nature of sin, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, and the love and justice of God. Therefore, Revelation 20:7-15 should serve as a dire warning to all who question the necessity of faith in Jesus Christ. Because of the reality of hell we must rely on the Savior, the Lamb who is Lord. It poses two compelling questions. Have you surrendered your life to God? Is your name in the Book of Life?

The Final Rebellion—Satan will ultimately be forever confined to hell (20:7-10).

Satan's release, rebellion, and judgment point us to the first question. Have you surrendered your life to God? Those who follow Satan's example of personal, willful rebellion will suffer Satan's fate.

After the one thousand year reign of Jesus Christ, Satan will be released and gather an army to once again oppose God (20:7-8).

After His return to earth, Jesus will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords over His messianic kingdom for one thousand years. This millennial reign will be characterized by righteousness and prosperity. During that period those believers who survived the seven year Tribulation will populate the earth. At the end of the Millennium there will be many people who, while submitting to Christ's rule externally, will resist Jesus in their hearts. Even in the most perfect environment imaginable human sin will persist, proving that sin isn't a product of the environment but a reality of the heart.

At the conclusion of the Millennium, Satan will be released from his prison, the Abyss (Revelation 20:3). For reasons unrevealed to humankind, Satan must have one last opportunity to deceive the nations and mount an attack on Jesus Christ. Perhaps this final rebellion is necessary to prove both the hideous, unrelenting nature of sin and the powerful, just judgment of God. Upon his release from the Abyss, Satan will go out and once again deceive the nations throughout the four corners of the earth. John identifies these nations with the names Gog and Magog. Ezekiel 38:2 refers to Gog as the leader of the land of Magog and links these names to a great, future battle likely identified with the Battle of Armageddon at the time of Jesus' Second Coming. The fact that the names Gog and Magog again appear at the end of the Millennium is

probably a literary device by which John identifies the future nations as being like Gog and Magog all over again. The last rebellion will draw people from a wider range than the land of Magog—from the four corners of the earth. However, in character these nations will be like those who stood against Christ at His return to earth. These nations, consisting of unconverted descendants of the Tribulation survivors, will follow Satan’s lead and assemble for war. Their numbers will be great, “like the sand of the sea.” It’s difficult to understand how there can be such widespread rejection of Jesus Christ during a time of millennial bliss, but the fact is that the sinful human heart is stubbornly resistant to God. We dare not underestimate the power and perniciousness of sin.

Satan’s army will surround Jerusalem, but fire from heaven will quickly and finally destroy it (20:9).

This future army will rise up against the King of kings, gathering from around the globe. It will surround “the camp of the saints,” further described as “the beloved city,” a reference to the city of Jerusalem. The armies of the earth under the direction of Satan will converge on the capital of the Messiah’s kingdom. However, this attack will be quickly thwarted. Fire will come down out of heaven and devour this rebellious army. Just as Jesus Christ will destroy the rebellious armies of the earth at His Second Coming by the word of His mouth, so He will destroy the rebellious armies of the earth at the end of the Millennium by the power of His will. The Lamb’s victory will be swift and complete.

Satan will be thrown into the lake of fire where he will justly be tormented forever (20:10).

Having defeated the human armies under Satan’s spell, Jesus will then take care of Satan once and for all. The devil, the deceiver, will be thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur—hell. John notes that this is the same lake of fire into which the Beast (the Antichrist) and the False Prophet had been confined at the beginning of the Millennium (Revelation 19:20). The fact that these two nefarious individuals are still in torment in hell at the end of the Millennium is evidence that there is no annihilation of the dead, nor any second chance of salvation. Of course, Satan will not rule in hell. He, along with the Antichrist and the False Prophet, will be “tormented” there, day and night, forever and ever. Hell is real. It’s a place of eternal suffering. Its very existence warns us to surrender our lives to God.

**The Final Judgment—Unbelievers will ultimately
be forever confined to hell (20:11-15).**

The final judgment of Satan leads to the final judgment of unbelievers and raises a second compelling question. Is your name in the book of life?

John saw God seated on a great white throne, from which the earth and the sky fled (20:11).

In his vision of the future John next saw a Great White Throne. By its very description this seems to be a throne that’s distinct from the other thrones in the book of Revelation, even God’s glorious throne described in Revelation 4:2. The Great White Throne is specifically

identified with judgment. Its greatness may reflect the greatness of God's justice and the color white refers to the purity of His judgment. The One sitting on the throne may be God the Father (Daniel 7:9-10). However, God the Son shares the glorious throne with the Father (Revelation 3:21; 5:6) and therefore likely shares the Great White Throne with Him as well. In fact, Jesus claimed that the Father had entrusted all judgment to Him (John 5:22-23). It might be best to conclude that the Father and the Son share the Great White Throne with the Son, Jesus Christ, acting as final judge on behalf of the Father.

John states that the earth and the heavens will flee from the face of the One on the Great White Throne. There will be no place remaining for the earth and sky. This may be John's way of describing the impending dissolution of the present heaven and earth in preparation for the new heaven and the new earth (Revelation 21:1). Second Peter 3:7-13 describes a future dissolution of the earth, a transformation into a new heaven and a new earth, "the home of righteousness." Revelation 21-22 provides a detailed description of this new heaven and new earth along with the New Jerusalem.

John saw the dead standing in front of the throne where they will be judged based on their deeds recorded in the books that lay open before them (20:12-13).

With the Great White Throne clearly in view, John next saw "the dead, great and small." The dead from all classes of people will be resurrected to stand before the Great White Throne and receive their judgment. Those who are summoned to this judgment consist of all who had rejected God's grace throughout human history. (Church saints are judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ according to 1 Corinthians 5:10, presumably at the time of the Rapture. Old Testament and Tribulation saints are presumably judged at the time of Christ's Second Coming as participants in the first resurrection according to Revelation 20:4-5.) At the Great White Throne Judgment the books, the records of deeds performed on earth, will be opened. In addition, a special book, the Book of Life, will also be opened. The Book of Life is a record of everyone who ever lived, their names being included until the moment of death at which time their names are removed if they didn't put their faith in God's saving grace (compare Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 21:27). By God's grace it seems that the Lord first checks the Book of Life to make certain that those standing before the Great White Throne aren't in the wrong place. However, since their names don't appear in the Book of Life, those standing before the Great White Throne will be judged based on the other books, the books listing their works. Of course, their works cannot measure up to the holy standard of heaven. We are saved by grace through faith, not by our own merit.

John elaborates on the identity of those standing before the Great White Throne. He notes that the sea gave up its dead, that is, those lost or buried at sea will face this final judgment. In addition, death and Hades will give up their dead. This may be a way of describing the general condition of lost humanity. Hades is a general term for the grave or, literally, the "unseen" realm. Like the sea, the graves on land will surrender their dead for judgment. All will be judged based on their works. Since human works cannot earn salvation, this judgment of the works of the lost lends support to the idea that there will be degrees of punishment in hell. The Lamb who is Lord will judge each person according to his or her works on earth. No unkind act will be overlooked, no impure thought ignored. Christ's judgment will be thorough and just.

Death and Hades will be thrown into the lake of fire, constituting the second death (20:14).

Upon completion of judgment before the Great White Throne, the lost will be thrown into the lake of fire, the same destiny of Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet. John designates this destiny as the second death. The first death is our natural death, the passing from this life into the next. The second death, applied only to those who failed to believe in God's grace, is eternal death in hell. John, for a second time, underscores this reality by calling the second death the lake of fire. This second death cannot touch the people of faith (Revelation 20:16). However, no unbeliever can escape this second death.

Anyone whose name is not found in the book of life will be thrown into the lake of fire (20:15).

The ultimate decision about a person's eternal destiny is whether or not his or her name is found in the Book of Life. To have one's name included in the Book of Life is a matter of response to God's good news of salvation in this life. Those whose names are not written in the Book of Life must be thrown into the lake of fire, into eternal punishment in hell. However, if you're name is in the book of life, if you've responded to Jesus Christ's sacrifice for our sins by putting your faith in Him, you're name is in the Book of Life. Eternal life is ours through faith in Jesus Christ. Is your name in the Book of Life? Because of the reality of hell we must rely on the Savior, the Lamb who is Lord.