

Revelation
A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #87

6/18/2008

The Great White Throne Judgment: Part 1

The Finality of Human History

Revelation 20:11-15

In the last five verses of Revelation twenty is found an awesomely important passage, one of the most important in all of God's Word, which demands our most strictly focused attention. As we transition from the passage describing Satan's release from prison at the end of the **Millennial Kingdom**, and his leading of multitudes in rebellion against God with their complete defeat, four factors need to be noted.

First, God tells us about His defeat of Satan and his followers, but He does not tell us about some other things. Though we know the devil was cast into the **"lake of fire and brimstone,"** where the beast and false prophet have already been for 1,000 years, we are not told anything about what happens to the faithful saints. Based upon what we already know what God does with those who are His own, such as the church, to get them into His presence in heaven, we can likely conclude that God now raptures these faithful ones into His presence and gives them their resurrected bodies.

Second, when we finish these five verses we will forever have finished with all things dealing with time and this earthly creation. Such will be no more. This is the final chapter in the realm of time and materiality. Life, as is now known, is no more!

Third, as these five verses complete all that is to be said about this universe, they are also the prelude to God's revelation about His **"new heaven and new earth."** As we leave chapter twenty and move into chapter twenty-one we will find ourselves attempting to comprehend the marvelous and incomprehensible things God tells us about our eternity with Him after this life. Even as our minds have been challenged to comprehend the marvelous and strange things about the final days of this earth, we will discover that our minds are not well equipped to see the unseeable majesties of eternity. It will be an extremely pleasurable experience even while it may prompt more questions than we have ever had before. Prepare for an exciting venture.

Fourth, these five verses concern only those who have rejected Jesus Christ as Lord, Savior and King. While some of those who hold various eschatological viewpoints see these five verses as describing a **"general judgment,"** it is that only in the sense that all unsaved people, with the exception of two, are involved in appearing before this **"Great White Throne"** to receive the pronouncement of their final, eternal and unchangeable judgment. The **"beast and false prophet,"** the two unsaved who are not called before this **"Great White Throne"** to receive their sentence, have already been judged. They will have already been sentenced and committed unto their judgment in the **"lake of fire burning with brimstone."**

As we did with the previous passage, we shall list the various statements in these verses in order to more clearly deal with them.

Revelation 20:11-15

11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

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First, John tells us the focus of this passage which captured his attention: **“I saw a great white throne.”**

Second, John emphasizes **Who** was on the **“Great White Throne:”** **“... and him that sat on it.”**

Third, John describes an awesome happening, something that has never happened before: **“... from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.”**

Fourth, John sees what is surely the eeriest scene ever presented to man. He sees all of the spiritually dead, of all ages, brought back from their graves and reconstituted in their bodies: **“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God.”**

Fifth, John sees God open some books: **“...and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”**

Sixth, John provides some further explanation to the events described in verse twelve: **“And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.”**

Seventh, John describes another awesome scene, one that has never been seen or conceived before: **“And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.”**

Eight, and finally, John, with one last explanatory comment of the events of verse twelve, provides the concluding statement to all life in this created universe, and it is the most fearful final statement ever written or spoken concerning the eternal destiny of the unsaved: **“And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”**

One by one we shall examine each of these statements to acquire as much understanding as is possible. This passage is one of the most serious in God’s Word and must be given the most serious consideration by every person. As we continue we shall give close attention to each statement, but we remind ourselves that (1) John was observing a scene so unique and holy, so “other than this earthly dimension,” that it is likely that the words available to him were incapable of fully describing what his eyes beheld, and (2) our minds are likewise limited in ability to comprehend what we are told about this uniquely awesome scene.

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WHAT JOHN SAW: We begin by examining John's first statement: **"I saw a great white throne."** This "throne" was the first thing John saw when he was **"caught up into heaven"** (Rev. 4:2) That scene was so unlike anything John had ever seen before that he simply said, **"...behold, a throne was set in heaven."**

In the verses following John did told us about a few things associated with that **"throne"** he saw in chapter four. A **"rainbow was round about the throne"** (4:3), and **"out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne"** (4:5), and **"before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal and round about the throne were four beasts full of eyes before and behind"** (4:6). These descriptions seem designed to emphasize the holiness of God's throne as well as its authoritative nature. Each reference to God's throne, in addition to emphasizing God's holiness, also emphasizes His authority over all things. In chapter five it was His authority symbolized by the **"book"** that was in His hand, the title deed to the earth (5:1). In chapter six the reference to the One on the **"throne"** is in the context of His anger and wrath (6:16). In chapter seven He is seen on His **"throne"** worshipped as the One Who has provided salvation (7:10).

It was against the holiness and authority of God embedded in this throne that Lucifer rebelled and transformed himself into the devil, God's arch enemy. It was from the cross on Calvary, where God the Son gave His life as a substitutionary sacrifice to pay for man's rebellion, that this same holiness and authority expressed itself in offering pardon and forgiveness to all rebels. It is now this same holiness and authority which is seen being expressed in issuing a final, absolute and righteous judgment against all who have rejected the pardon and forgiveness previously offered. The excuses and reasons for such rejections will not matter. The only thing that will matter is that once the pardon and forgiveness has been rejected the rebel must then receive his just punishment from the holy God against Whom he has rebelled — and each such person shall receive precisely what he deserves and has demanded.

The two adjectives used in verse eleven, **"great"** and **"white,"** fittingly relate God's absolute, pure righteous holiness and His authority to His **"throne."**

WHO IS THIS ON THE THRONE? With his third statement, **"...and him that sat on it,"** John turns our attention to **the One Who sits upon the "throne"** Who exercises all of the authority embedded in it. While, in these few verses, the exercise of that divine, sovereign, almighty authority is what is presented rather than giving us a description of **the One Who** sits upon this supreme seat, the Scriptures elsewhere leave no doubt as to His identity.

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From the very first presentation of Himself in the Bible, *“In the beginning, God ...”* (Genesis 1:1), where God used the plural form of the Hebrew word, **elohim** (430), God has presented Himself as a triune God. However, in no instance has man ever been allowed or enabled to see either the triune God, God the Father or God the Holy Spirit. He told Moses: *“...Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen”* (Exodus 33:20-23). God’s Word tells us that *“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him”* (John 1:18).

Man does not have either the permission of God to actually look upon Him nor the ability to see through His holy righteousness and behold His person. That has always been the case and apparently remains unchanged since John provides no description of the image of **the One upon the throne**, either in Rev. 4:2 or here in Rev. 20:11. *God has presented Himself, manifested Himself, to man in the person of God the Son.* We are told that Jesus Christ is *“...the image of the invisible God”* (Colossians 1:15), and that: *“...in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily”* (Col. 2:9). The Greek word for **“Godhead”** is **theotes** (2320) and means the entire person of the Trinity, or Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Therefore, **the One John sees sitting on the “Great White Throne”** is the entirety of the Trinity, **but John sees Him as God the Son, for He is the One through Whom God manifests Himself to man.**

Furthermore, contrary to what some seem to think, instead of God the Father, it is God the Son Who serves as man’s judge. We are told in John 5:26-27: *“For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.”*

When God the Son incarnated Himself in a human body, He had to take upon Himself the full nature of man. In order to do this He had to leave His glory — the true outward expression of His inner reality — behind in heaven. Even while being fully God, He did not cling to His glory: *“being in the form, or true essence, of God, ... He made of Himself no reputation (left His glory behind in heaven) and took upon Himself the form (the very essence) of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross”* (Phi. 2:6-8).

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While Jesus was here in His human body on this earth, men could see God when they looked at Him, as much of the Triune God as could be displayed in a human body because He had left the fullness of His glory in heaven. Only a few times, such as at His transfiguration (Mat. 17:1-6) and when He spoke to the soldiers in the garden as they came to arrest Him (John 18:4-7), did He allow men to see any of His glory. Even then, seeing only a little sample, they were overcome. Here, in Rev. 20:11 John sees Him in the fullness of His glory and we shall later read of what John saw.

When He was hanging on the cross, paying for the sins of all men, He was fully God. When He spoke and said to His heavenly Father, God the Father, *“forgive them for they know not what they do”* (Luke 23:34), He was fully God and speaking with all of the authority of the Godhead. He was saying that, in their rebellion against Him, their minds had been blinded by Satan (2 Cor. 4:4) and even if they never fully comprehended the awfulness of their actions, they were as guilty as if they had fully understood, but now their sins were now completely paid for and they could be forgiven. From that time forward all men, each one a sinner, has had the invitation to come to Him and receive His forgiveness. However, now, before John’s eyes is the same Jesus he had known on this earth while He was in His human body, but now His glory is not restricted and He is no longer offering forgiveness.

John surely knows Who this is, but he makes no effort to describe the image he sees. Perhaps it is impossible for him to do so. He it is who wrote down the words recorded in his Gospel, such as 5:26-27. This is no surprise to him, but the scene is too awesome and overwhelming to describe. Perfect holiness is antithetical to sin and will not tolerate its presence, nor can it even exist wherever sin is present (2 Cor. 6:14-18). Perfect holiness not only is the exact opposite of sin, but holiness and sin are at war with each other. Ever since Adam and Eve’s rebellion in the Garden of Eden it has seemed as if sin has had its way in opposing the holiness of God, but no more.

When Jesus died upon the cross and rose from the grave He conquered Satan and death, but He had allowed Satan to continue to work his sinful ways on this earth. Even defeated, Satan had seemed to be mightier than God, but no more. The next statement, to be considered in the next lesson, tells us what happens when the holiness of the Lord Jesus Christ is no longer restrained, but fully expresses its indescribable power.