

**Revelation**  
**A Wednesday Night Bible Study**

Lesson #89

7/02/2008

The Great White Throne Judgment: Part 3

**“The dead, small and great, stand before God”**

**Revelation 20:11-15**

Today’s lesson brings us to the fourth statement found in this passage:  
**“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God.”**

This means that one of the eeriest and most awesome scenes possible for human eyes to see was before John. This horrible scene is further described by the sixth statement which is found in verse thirteen: **“And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them ...”**

Who were these **“dead”** that John saw standing before God? The word **“dead”** has been variously interpreted as: 1) The spiritual dead; and 2) The physical dead. In essence, both interpretations are correct. Therefore, the answer to the question is that each and every one of **“the dead”** whom John sees **“standing before God”** is an unsaved person.

**“The dead”** could not include any believers because all believers have been resurrected in **“the first resurrection”** (20:6) and none are left on this earth. This includes those saved during the **Millennial Kingdom** as well as those either raptured (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) and the believers who were martyred during the **Tribulation Period**.

The additional information in verse thirteen about **“the sea”** and **“death and hell”** delivering up **“the dead”** indicates that **“the dead”** of all ages are included in those John describes. **“The sea”** points to the disposal of a person’s body, where the forces of decomposition would naturally totally disseminate the elements, leaving behind no traces and unrecoverable by man. Such would have been the fate of the multitudes of people drowned in Noah’s flood, and the countless others so buried since that time. A similar dissemination happens with the ashes of those consumed by **“the fire from God”** which devoured the rebels in Rev. 20:9, as well as the ashes of millions of cremated people prior to that time. Even the bodies of those buried in the ground over the centuries will have so disintegrated that nothing seems to be left.

However, God, who created that body and has even given **“a number to each hair on every person’s head”** (Mat. 10:30), is able to call the atoms back to reconstitute that person’s body so that he can be given **“a body resurrected unto damnation,”** or judgment (John 5:29).

In addition to the bodies given up by **“the sea”** will be those released by **“death and hell.”** The word for **“hell”** used here is **hades** (86), which according to Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, **“is just the abode of the wicked”** (Luke 16:23). **“Death,”** **thanatos** (2288), is a synonym for **hades** with both words signifying the place where the souls of the wicked are held until summoned to appear before the **Great White Throne of Christ**.

**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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Perhaps pointing to this time, in Revelation 1:18 we read where Jesus said: **“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”** Apparently Rev. 20:11-15 describes the time when Jesus will use those **“keys,”** the sole authority, to bring forth the wicked dead so that they might respond to His summons to receive their sentence of judgment. He speaks. They hear and respond for God the Father has honored God the Son by committing all judgment unto Him as we are told in John 5:27-29.

*“And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”*

It is to be exactly as God’s Word describes it in Philippians 2:9-11, for when the wicked are summoned by the authoritative command of our Lord, the first thing they will do will be precisely what they had once been invited to do so that they might be saved, but, now, will do them no good at all. What once could have provided forgiveness from sin and guilt will, at this time, simply be their public acknowledgment that Jesus Christ is indeed Lord of all:

*“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

As John saw them standing before God he also saw God open some books: **“... and the books were opened.”** John saw the wicked in their resurrected bodies, not resurrected unto life, but unto judgment and condemnation, to receive their sentence which each of them deserves. Their bodies are uniquely designed to experience to the fullest extent possible the eternal pain and punishment which their wickedness has earned.

The purpose of **“the books being opened”** is so that what has been done in secret can be displayed openly for all to see. Jesus has repeatedly warned all men that:

*“For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad”*  
(Luke 8:17. *“...There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore*

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*whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops”* (Luke 12:2-3).

In some way that is likely beyond our ability to comprehend, God has created us so that a record of each of our thoughts and actions is imprinted upon our brains, waiting for God to bring them forth. To Jeremiah God said:

*“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings”* (Jeremiah 17:9-10).

Let us be crystal clear, the dividing line between those who are resurrected to spend eternity with Jesus in heaven, and those who are resurrected to be condemned to eternal suffering and torment in the “lake that burns with fire and brimstone,” is sharply defined:

*“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil”* (John 3:18-19) with the word “*believed*” being further defined in the verses elsewhere, specifically in the verses previous such as John 3:3-7.

However, for those who reject Jesus Christ as Lord and King, there will surely be different degrees of punishment for they will be tormented according to their works (Jer. 17:10). It may well be that “**the books**” which John sees opened are kept in the very brains and minds of the guilty themselves, for modern scientists have demonstrated the ability to cause a person to reexperience thoughts and actions which took place long ago. Nevertheless, however God chooses to accomplish His purposes, He will reveal each and every wicked thought and deed which has been committed by the wicked. Nothing, not even one thought or deed, is lost. Each and every one of these will be brought forth for God will judge each and every person righteously and justly, “*to give to each one according to the fruit of his doings.*”

John also tells us “**another book was opened, which is the book of life.**” This book is quite different from the ones discussed above, and, though there are varying interpretations regarding some details of this book, it is generally agreed that it contains the names of those who belong to the Lord. To better comprehend all that we can about this “**book of life,**” we will examine the specific references about “**the book of life**” which God gives to us: Besides the two references in this passage there are four other references in the book of Revelation and three other possible references elsewhere in Scripture that we will consider.

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**First**, we look at Revelation 17:8:

*“The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.”*

We are told that some follow and serve the anti-christ whose *“...whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.”* This seems to indicate that *“before the foundation of the world”* God knew and wrote down in *“the book of life”* the names of those who would choose to belong to Him. This is likely the correct view since God knows all things, even those things which have not happened (Isaiah 42:9). Furthermore, God *“chose us in Him (Christ) before the foundations of the world”* (Eph 1:4) and *“foreordained before the foundations of the world that Christ would shed His precious blood for us”* (1 Peter 1:19-20).

**Second**, we look at Revelation 3:5:

*“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”*

There are two implied points to consider in this verse. 1) For one to have his name in *“the book of life,”* he must be an *“overcomer,”* i.e., continue in his faith without falling away. 2) The second point that some see in this verse is that one’s name is written into *“the book of life”* when he is born physically. This view is supported by God’s statement in Exodus 32:33: *“And the Lord said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.”* The implication is that God could not *“blot out”* someone’s name unless his name was already written in *“the book of life.”*

**Third**, having introduced the idea of someone’s name being “blotted out” of “the book of life” with the references in Rev. 3:5 and Exodus 32:33, we now turn to Revelation 22:19 where we are confronted with a very strong statement from God:

*“And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”*

Some issues are raised here. **First, is it possible for a person to lose his salvation? God says NO!** (John 10:28-29; Romans 8:28-39).

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**Second, it is more likely that a person who claims to belong to Jesus, and thus has his name written down in “the book of life,” does not belong to Jesus at all and never has.** If a person cannot trust God to say what He means truthfully and completely, then it is not likely that he can or will trust Jesus Christ to be his Lord and Savior (Deu. 4:2; 12:32; Pro. 30:6; Jer. 26:2). The verse in Proverbs indicates that such a person is a liar.

**Fourth,** we look at Revelation 21:27:

**“And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”**

Again, we find two points:

1) **“The book of life”** has something to do with the Lamb, **“the lamb of God,”** Who is Jesus Christ. This implies that, in order to get one’s name written down in His **“book of life,”** one must allow his sins to be cleansed by the precious blood shed by the sacrificial lamb of God. It is as if a person’s name is written down in **“the book”** with His blood, the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2) Only people whose names are written down in **“the lamb’s book of life”** will be allowed into heaven. The characteristics which are listed to begin the statement identify three specifics which will not characterize those whose names are **“written in the Lamb’s book of life,”** which are:

1) Anything that defileth (anything of sin, specifically what is contrary to the holiness of God);

2) Neither whatsoever worketh an abomination (anything in relationship to the worship of other gods); or

3) Anyone who is a liar. The third characteristic seems to be very important to God since He chose to list it twice in this same chapter in describing people who will not be allowed into Heaven. Perhaps this is because there are lots of people who lie about having a relationship with Jesus when they still belong to and serve the devil. God knows who they are and will not be fooled. They will not have their names written down in **“the Lamb’s book of life,”** will not get into heaven and are specifically addressed in the last verse of chapter twenty:

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

Finally, in **“the book of life”** the names of people are written at the time of their birth. They are **“blotted out”** when they reach the age of maturity and sin. Then, his name must be written in **“the Lamb’s book of life”** as explained above or else his name will not be found in **“the book of life.”**