

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

“The Great White Throne”

Revelation 20:11-15

Introduction

1. Chiliasm (millennium of 1000 years) is effected by the return of the Lord Jesus (19:11-16), the earth being cleansed (19:17-21), and Satan bound (20:1-3).
2. Concurrent with the Millennium is the first resurrection which includes the Church (1 Thess. 4:13-18), Old Testament saints (Dan. 12:1-3), and Tribulation saints (Rev. 20:4). All entering the Kingdom (Millennium) are believers; non-believers go into the Tribulation (1 Cor. 15:51-57).
3. Following the Millennium, there will be an outbreak of violence through the deceptive activity of Satan (20:8). God will intervene to suppress this opposition to His rule (20:9) and He will cast the Devil and his colleagues (two beasts of Rev. 13) into the lake of fire for eternal punishment (20:10).
4. At that critical time, the scene is set for the final judgment of non-believers. This day of doom is clearly explicated with these details.

1. The NAME of it v. 11

This is not some mystical matter, but what John saw (). There are other thrones (cf. 4:2; 20:4), but this one exhibits God’s unlimited majesty in the disposition of the ultimate destiny of God’s non-believing creatures. It must be differentiated from the judgment seat of Christ for the Church (Ro. 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). Clearly the unveiled blaze of divine holiness and pure justice are noted by the unsullied white and greatness of this throne. Here there is no pity, no mercy, no repenting.

2. The JUDGE of it v. 11

The identity of “Him” who sits (present tense) on the throne is not given. However, Scripture does teach the Son is designated as the Judge (John 5:19-22; Acts 17:31; 2 Tim. 4:1; James 5:9). The fact of the triune God is obviously latent to the text. The Talmud suggests the Messiahs: Messiah Ben (son), Joseph (as lamb), and Messiah Ben (son) David (as Lion). Jesus rejected as Saviour must be faced as Jesus as Judge. All creatures must bow to Him (Phil. 2:9-11).

3. The TIME of it v. 11

The Bible notes emphatically that the Great White Throne is associated with a most dramatic event i.e. the dissolution of earth and heaven. Plainly it is recorded that both earth and heaven fled (aorist tense) from the face of the Judge. Further, no place was found (aorist passive) for the earth and heaven. It becomes evident that this Great White Throne does not come at the time of the Lord’ return to the earth at the close of the Tribulation before the millennium. Here is something which is a precursor to eternity about which Scripture speaks (Isa. 34:4; 51:6; Heb. 12:26-28; 2 Pet. 3:10). John here explains the old earth and heaven have in fact passed away. Peter provides the means by which this will be accomplished. So this scene is post millennial and the “Day of God.”

4. The PURPOSE of it vv. 12-15

a. Concerning Dead vv. 12, 13

1) Who? Apparently every social class is noted -- small and great (cf. 11:18; 13:16; 19:5, 18). Moreover, not only those on the land, but those who perished at sea. The noun

for “dead” (used four times in context) means these had been physically dead. Further, these are under the “power” (authority,) of the second death, a fearful destiny (cf. v. 14; 21:9).

2) What? These are spiritually dead (John 3:18) and they are resurrected to judgment (John 5:29; Acts 24:15) so they now “stand” (perfect tense). They are part of those who are the “rest” (v. 5), hence there is no general resurrection as there is no general judgment. This resurrection is separated from the first one by 1000 years.

b. Concerning Deeds vv. 12, 13, 15

Note: There is not one minuscule of work a sinner can do to be saved. That is unequivocally the testimony of Scripture (Ro. 3:10, 19, 20, 24; 4:4; Eph. 2:8, 9; Titus 3:5, 7). However, evidence of true faith on Christ’s complete work must of necessity issue in work, otherwise the faith is dead (Eph. 2:10; James 2:14-26).

In view of the above, it is understandable that the “dead” are accountable for their “deeds.” The sin nature in all of us (Ps. 51:5) is not the ground of judgment. The existence of the evil nature in us came from Adam, but we are responsible for its activity. We are born with the root of sin, but we are not expected to allow for its fruit because provision has been made in the sacrifice of Christ. “The Books” () may suggest “Books of Deeds” while the “Another Book” (singular) is “The Book of Life.” That is a register of every one born. Those who ultimately reject Christ are blotted out of the Book of Life (Rev. 3:5; 22:19; cf. Ex. 32:31-33). Here the dead (spiritually) are judged as those who gave no fruit of faith. Their works (twice here) negated any profession of faith. How horrible!

c. Concerning Destiny vv. 13-15

a) Of Death/Hades

Twice this text speaks of death and hell (hades). Death is personified, as is hades. Both are involved in two actions: 1) They deliver (give up) the dead in them. Their work is no longer to keep the dead. 2) They are cast (aorist passive) into the lake of fire. This is a direct literal fulfillment of prophecy (Hosea 13:4). This is called the second death (v. 14).

b) Of Unwritten Names

The verb written is perfect tense. It must connote genuineness and reality. The two verbs “found” and “cast” are both aorist passive. Make no mistake, the “not being found” and the fact of “being cast” has nothing to do with “works,” good or evil, but because the name is not written in the Book of Life. What a warning!

Conclusion Think of it. Names might have been written in the Book of Life, but mercy was despised, grace was rejected so now judgment and its execution must run its course and what a course! The bodies of the wicked will last forever. They will never die, but eternally exist in the second death. It is not extinction nor annihilation, but it is a torment forever. There is no evidence that a name can be written on that final day. May God solemnize our hearts as we ponder these overwhelming realities. Too soon they will be the portion of many. Help Lord! Amen.