The Final Judgment of the Damned
Revelation 20:11–15

We have come to the end of the one-thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. It ended with a final rebellion of Satan who was let out of the bottomless pit to once again deceive the nations. Fire came down from heaven and immediately devoured the armies of Satan who were going to make war with Christ and His saints. Satan was then cast into hell where the Antichrist and the False Prophet have suffered since the Millennium began. Next comes the resurrection of the unsaved; it consists of all unbelievers from the beginning of the human race to the end of this world as we know it; their bodies and spirits are united and they will face God’s final judgment of the damned; it is called the judgment of the great white throne.

The Scene of the Judgment (20:11)

*The presentation of the Judge*… “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it...” (20:11a). This throne is different from the throne of God mentioned in Revelation 4:2; it is the throne for final judgment; it is white to symbolize the holiness and purity of the One who sits on that throne.

The One who sits on this throne and makes the final judgment is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus said, “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son... and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man” (John 5:22, 27). In Peter’s sermon to the family of Cornelius, he said, “And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42). In Paul’s message to the philosophers on Mars Hill, he said, “He [God] has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). He is talking about no one other than Jesus Christ, whom God raised from the dead.
When Christ brings judgment, He does so in righteousness. Our God is a just God; His judgments are just. Moses said to the children of Israel, “For I proclaim the name of the LORD: Ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He” (Deuteronomy 32: 3–4); Job wrote: “As for the Almighty, we cannot find Him; He is excellent in power, in judgment and abundant justice; He does not oppress. Therefore men fear Him; He shows no partiality to any who are wise of heart” (Job 37:23–24).

Recognizing that Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh, when He sits on that great white throne to bring judgment, He does so with truth, with righteousness, and with justice and He shows no partiality.

_The passing away of earth and heaven... “…from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them” (20:11b). This judgment of the great white throne takes place after heaven and earth have passed away. Peter tells us that in the day of the Lord, “the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?” (2 Peter 3:10–12).

Just as God created the universe, He will dissolve it; the entire universe will go out of existence; eternity will begin and there is no time in eternity; that’s why the universe must be dissolved; time and creation began together; scientifically, you cannot separate time from creation; creation consists of matter, or as Peter said, “elements”; matter is particles in motion; an object may appear solid, but it really isn’t, for every object or thing consists of particles of matter in controlled motion; motion requires time because if something moves from one place to another, that requires time, even if that time is faster than the blink of an eye.

When time ends, creation as we know it ends; so the judgment of the great white throne takes place when time and creation ends and eternity begins; the location of that throne is unknown, but for certain, it will not be part of the physical universe as we know it.

What happens to the saints on the Millennial earth if the heavens and the earth are dissolved? There is one of two possibilities: We are all transported to heaven
where God has dwelt, or we are caught up to the New Jerusalem which will come down from heaven and rest on a new heaven and a new earth—a totally different creation than the universe in which we presently live.

The Summoning of the Ungodly to Judgment (20:12a, 13a)

_The people who are judged_... “And I saw the dead small and great, standing before God...” (20:12a). This is the second resurrection; it is the summoning of all the unsaved from all human history and they are called before the Judge; they come from the OT age, the NT age, the Tribulation, and even those who refused Christ during His Millennial reign and died.

_The places from where they came_... “The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in it” (20:13a). Some had their ashes tossed into the sea; some died in the hot desert and their bones were left to bleach in the boiling sun, some came out of graves; wherever their bodies or ashes were placed, God is putting that body back together and unite it with their spirit which has been held captive in Hades; when a person dies there is a separation of the spirit from the body (James 2:26); the body ultimately returns to dust, but the spirit lives on; at death, the spirit of the unbeliever lives on in a place of Torments called Hades (Luke 16:23); it is an intermediate abode of the dead where the living spirit resides until the resurrection when the body and the spirit are reunited to stand in judgment; after that they will be tossed into hell.

What is the difference between Hades and Hell in terms of punishment? In Hades, the spirit suffers; in hell, the whole person—body and spirit—suffers; Hades is temporary, Hell is eternal. Jesus said, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

The Standard for Judging the Ungodly (20:12b, c; 13b)

_The precepts from and the prominence of the books_... “and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life...” (20:12b). When one stands before Christ at the white throne judgment, books will be opened. There are four kinds of books mentioned in Scripture.

1. There is the Word of God... Jesus said, “The word which I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48); God’s Word tells us
exactly who God is, how He revealed Himself in the Person of Christ, what we must do to be saved, and how to live the life that pleases God, both morally and spiritually; it is essential that we know God’s Word for by it we will be judged—the righteous as well as the unrighteous.

2. The Book of Life... From the foundation of the world God knew those who are His and those who would spurn His Word; everyone whom God knew, by His Omniscient nature, has had their name written down in that Book of Life; when the unsaved stand before the Lord, they will discover their name is missing from that Book (Revelation 20:12; 21:27).

3. The Book of Remembrance... The prophet Malachi wrote, “Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name” (Malachi 3:16); it should be obvious that the unsaved do not have their names in the Book of Remembrance since they never feared the LORD nor meditated on His name.

4. The Books of Accounting... In Daniel 7, the prophet has a vision of the Ancient of Days sitting on His throne; His garment and hair were white and His throne was a fiery flame as thousands upon thousands ministered to Him and thousands upon thousands stood before Him; then Daniel says, “The court was seated, and the books were opened” (Daniel 7:9–10); Daniel, whose name means, “God is my judge,” sees God as the final Judge of the kingdoms of the world; however, this vision could also refer to the great white throne judgment on all unbelievers, and the books that were opened contain an account of the life of every unbeliever that will be used as evidence against them on that final day of judgment.

The performance of the people... “And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books... And they were judged, each one according to his works” (20:12c, 13b).

1. The standard is based on works... The standard of judgment is absolute; it is according to their deeds or works; one’s works is the determining factor of one’s faith; James tells us you cannot separate faith from works (James 2:17–20); what do we mean by works?
We are called to be perfect. Jesus said, “… be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48); if perfection means sinless then that is a very high standard, one that is unreachable; if we are to be sinless as God is sinless, then none of us would be saved, for “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23).

The word translated “perfect” (teleios) means to be complete, full grown, and mature; while none of us can be sinless as God is sinless, we can be complete, in that we fulfill God’s purpose for our lives; it is when we discover our spiritual giftedness and use it for His glory that we are deemed to be perfect.

We are called to be holy. Peter wrote, “… He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” (1 Peter 1:15); the word “holy” (hagios) refers to moral separation; that is, we are to be morally different from the world; our actions are to mimic the actions of Christ whom we serve, and to abhor the sinful ways of the world.

The dead unbelievers are going to be judged based on their living a life that fulfilled the purpose for which they were born, as well as their moral conduct as being different from that of the world; obviously they will fall short on both counts; their deeds or their behavior will not measure up to God’s standards.

2. The standard is based on words… Jesus said, “For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned” (Matthew 12:37); God is going to judge every word, every thought, and even the intents of the heart; thank God, we as believers have been forgiven and are beyond condemnation; but that is not true of the unbeliever; he will stand before the great white throne and be reminded of his vile language, his evil thought life; his blasphemous words spoken against Almighty God.

The unsaved are going to be judged based on what is “written in the books.” What are those books? As we have seen in Daniel 7:10, we have the phrase, “And the books were opened.” As stated earlier, there is a record that God keeps on every unbeliever; every word that they speak, every thought that they have, every evil deed that they have done is recorded in that book; God keeps this record so on the day of judgment, the unbeliever cannot claim his innocence; he cannot say, “I never said that, I never thought that, I never did that.” The record of their life will be unveiled and they will have to acknowledge all of that is true; the sad
thing is, it will be too late to repent; their life has been spent; it was a wasted life
for they missed out on the whole purpose for living, and that is to experience
God’s grace and to be forgiven of sin by the blood of Jesus Christ and then to
live a life that brings glory to God!

The Sentencing of the Ungodly (20:14–15)

*The reality of hell...* “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is
the second death” (20:14).

1. The doctrine of hell in other religions... Hell is not a teaching unique to
Christianity; all major religions have their teachings on hell.

Islam teaches that when “the hour” comes there will be the resurrection of
the dead. The inhabitants of heaven will be raised first; Allah will cause
their bodies to start growing underground; when the bodies are fully
grown, Allah will order the blowing of the third trumpet and the spirits of
the dead will enter their bodies and they will come out of their graves;
Mohammad will be the first to be raised; all will be naked, barefooted and
uncircumcised; Abraham will be the first one raised who is clothed and will
be seated at the right hand of Allah; the saved and the unsaved are raised
in one resurrection.

There will be an interval between the resurrection and the final judgment; it
will be a time of unbearable toil and agony, both physical and
psychological; great fear will grip the people; no one is exempt except for
Muhammad and those devout Muslims whom Allah chooses to spare; for
ture Muslims who are not spared it will be a type of purgatory.

When the day of judgment comes, Allah descends from heaven to judge all
humanity as well *jinus*, who are genies created from smoke; genies are
supernatural spirits who are condemned because they heard the message
of Allah and rejected it because they were allured by the pleasures of the
world.

People will be judged based on their reception of Muhammad’s message
and their ethical conduct; each person will stand before Allah at their grave
site and their deeds, good and bad will be weighed on “the Scale”;
following judgment, each individual will be questioned by two angels
before walking across a bridge that spans the gulf of hell; Muhammad will
be the first to cross; those condemned will fall off the bridge into hell, while the faithful will cross over safely to the other side but still be in fear that Allah will change his mind.

Muslim hell has seven levels of punishment including being roasted, boiled and afflicted with pus; those condemned will continually be given new skin so they will continue to burn forever.

Buddhists speak of many hells on one’s unpleasant journey to Nirvana, a kind of blissful non-existence; classical Buddhists teach there are seven hot hells, each surrounded by torture chambers which include fiery pits and quagmires, while other versions of Buddhism speak of cold hells which have less traumatic punishment for minor offenders; according to certain Chinese Buddhists, devils in human form inflict all kinds of gruesome torture including pulling out slanderous tongues with red-hot wires and pouring molten lead down liars’ throats.

Hinduism has twenty-one hells tailor-made to match a person’s behavior on earth; if you fail to feed the hungry, you might be chained to a rock where birds gather to eat your stomach; an adulterer might be forced to embrace a beautiful woman whose temperature is white hot while the worst offenders face incarceration in a series of lower hells where they are scorched in hot sand, boiled in jars, or eaten by ravens.

Jainism, a spinoff of Hinduism, teaches there are 8,400,000 hells as well as a bottomless pit where the worst sinners are kept forever.

Taoism teaches the god of walls and moats sends the wicked to one of several hells for a fixed period of time.

What does all of this signify? It says that people have an innate sense of justice, a belief that somehow, some way, someday people will pay for their sins; if not on this side of the grave, certainly on the other side of the grave; it is the belief that evil will be righted and grave wrongs will be crushed; it is a stubborn instinct of man that he may be punished for his sins.

2. The description of hell in Scripture… Jesus used the word Gehenna to describe hell; it refers to a garbage dump that was located southwest of the city of Jerusalem in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom; this Valley had been a place
where Israelites engaged in idolatrous worship of the Canaanite gods Moloch and Baal; it was where children were sacrificed to Molech, who was the god of appeasement (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6); Ezekiel writes of parents taking their sons and daughters and offering them as harlotry by causing them to “pass through the fire” (Ezekiel 16:20–21).

When Jeremiah began to preach, the Hinnom Valley took on a metaphorical reference for the place where the bodies of the wicked would be placed (Jeremiah 7:29–34; 19:6–9; 32:25). For the first century Jews, the violent image of evildoers being punished there provided a fitting analogy for God punishing people in hell (Isaiah 66:14–17; Daniel 12:2); this Valley was known for fire, smoke, maggots, and stench; not only were dead bodies of the wicked cast there, but also the bodies of strangers or those who were too poor to afford a burial place.

Gehenna is not hell, but an analogy for the judgment of the wicked; hell is described in very vivid ways by Jesus; it very much depicted what Gehenna was like: the most prominent word used to describe hell is fire; it is eternal fire (Matthew 25:41); it is “the lake of fire and brimstone” where those cast there “will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 20:10); it is a place where the worm never dies but feeds on the constant flow of garbage that was thrown there (Mark 9:44); even Isaiah wrote, “Their worm will not die” (Isaiah 66:24); it is a place of outer darkness for there is no darkness greater than being in the middle of a fire (Matthew 8:33); it is a place of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, which speaks of the consciousness, and the misery of those tossed there (Matthew 8:33); the writer of Hebrews summed up matters when he writes of the sinner that he faces “a certain, fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation that will devour the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:27).

3. The degrees of hell... Not everyone will suffer the same in hell; the punishment will fit the crime; a good moral atheist will suffer less than the vile evil Adolf Hitler and others of his ilk; where in Scripture do we get this teaching?

There are several places. In Matthew 10, Jesus is sending out the twelve for missionary work; they were to go to the lost sheep of Israel and tell them, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Then He says, “Whoever does not receive you nor hear your words... Assuredly 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 10:5–15). There is more and less tolerable punishment; those who reject the gospel after hearing it will suffer more than those who never heard it.

In Matthew 11, Jesus speaks of the impenitent cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida; He speaks of the mighty works and miracles He performed in those cities; He then says, “But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you” (Matthew 11:20–22). He then goes on to speak of Capernaum saying, “If the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you” (Matthew 11:23–24). There are degrees of punishment, some more tolerable than others.

In Mark 12, we find Jesus giving warning not to follow after the teachings of the Pharisees: “Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation” (Mark 12:38–40).

In Luke 12, Jesus tells the parable of the faithful and evil servants; concerning the servant that was unfaithful to his master Jesus said: “And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes, but he who did not know, yet committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few...” (Luke 12:47–48a); here are few lashes verses many lashes.

In Hebrews 10:29: “Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the spirit of grace?” Again there is less and worse punishment.

John MacArthur wrote: “If a person is to remain unconverted, the sooner he dies the better. The less he hears, the better, because the longer he lives and the longer the list in the book becomes, and the more he hears and rejects, the greater the punishment.”
The reason for hell... “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (20:15). Hell is a place of God administering His final justice; God is not always a God of immediate justice, but He is a God of ultimate justice. Amos had it right when he told Israel, “Prepare to meet your God” (Amos 4:12); the final courtroom is the great white throne and the final sentence is hell for those who have not prepared themselves to meet their God.

Every one of us has choices to make and it seems to me that no choice has greater consequence than that of being prepared to meet your God; I am prepared and I trust you are as well; if that is so, it is good to know that when the Book of Life is open, your name and mine are both written there! Amen!