

OBSERVATION STUDY SERIES

# REVELATION

THE GREAT  
WHITE THRONE  
JUDGEMENT

20:11-15

# Revelation Observation Study Series

## Revelation 20:11-15

### The Great White Throne Judgment

We so often hear people claiming they know specific details concerning the end of the earth, either believing they know when it will end or how it will end. Let me be clear, "Do not listen to them!" They are either lying or flat out wrong, probably both. Truth comes from God through His Word. Period. If you want to gather information about the end of the earth, go to God's Word! The world is not going to end because we humans are bad stewards; it's going to end because *God* ends it. Period.

In our study of Revelation, we just happen to be on the cusp of heaven's and earth's demise, (along with some more judgments, and some more inhabitants moving into the lake of fire and brimstone) so let's open the book of Revelation!

***Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.*** Revelation 20:11

The next thing John sees (after the devil is thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone) is a great white throne. The word for great is "*megas*" and means exceedingly large in size, enormous in dignity and significance. The Greek word for white is "*leukos*" and is the same word for white that we saw used for the white horse the Rider sat on in Revelation 19:11. This cosmic throne is a brilliant white, a bright, lustrous, gleaming white. Thrones always indicate power and dominion; this one, the greatest of all.

Who sits on the throne? Him. God. God is on His throne and is about to judge, but first, a cataclysmic event takes place. Earth and heaven are not able to bear the presence of this Sovereign Ruler. Without a word, this imposing, formidable potentate causes the earth and heaven to flee from His face. Was there a place of refuge? No. None. So they were consumed by fire, completely destroyed, and were no more.

This will be the destruction of our present-day universe, which leaves us with an eerie, surreal scene before us. The present-day heaven and earth are no more; the new heaven and earth are not yet in place. The picture is of the great white throne, perhaps in the midst of a dark expanse, with the only light coming from the throne and its Glorious Occupant. Or possibly, because of God indescribable light, there will be no darkness and it will be a picture of blinding, tortuous light for those who will soon be judged

This event also signals that the Day of the Lord will soon be finished. The Day of the Lord will begin when Satan is thrown down from heaven for good. Do you remember the "great big intersection" of events? The Day of the Lord continues through heaven and

earth passing away and the final judgments. According to the passage below, the destruction of heaven and earth happen *before* the Day of the Lord concludes. (By the way, the new heaven and the new earth are right around the corner in Revelation 21 and 22.)

*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.*

*Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people 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 destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. 2 Peter 3:10-13*

***And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.*** Revelation 20:12

Who does John see before the throne? He sees all the dead, whether they had been celebrated or unknown, essential or insignificant during their time on earth. Now, they are standing upright before the great white throne about to receive their final sentencing.

How do you think the dead feel at this moment? Can you imagine the terror? They would love to go back to Hades, even with all its fire and torment, at this point, knowing what was coming. The lake of fire and brimstone prepared for Satan and his angels will soon be their eternal abode. Their fear must be horrifying!

God, formidable and frightful, is sitting on His throne, not as Savior, but as Judge. The occasion is solemn and grave. Their eternal destiny is in His hands, and there is no hope at all for a reprieve. They will never see the new heaven or earth, and they have just witnessed the present heaven and earth explode, melt, and vanish before Him, who is sitting on this great white throne.

The dead stand before Him, seemingly hung in the vacuum just created. They are horrified and waiting for His judgment of vengeance.

The dead will stand before a Judge, but there will be no jury.  
The Judge will present the prosecution, but there will be no defense.  
The Judge will declare His verdict, but there will be no appeal.  
The Judge will open His books, and the dead will have no excuse.

What about believers and the rest of God's creatures? Their sentiments cannot be compared. They will wait in solemnity until He is finished with His tasks, but then, God will be praised! Their joy will be endless and unrestrained.

I plan on being there. I think I will understand God's mercy in a way that I have never understood before. He chose me! He called me! He saved me! I think I will appreciate His goodness and His power and His holiness in a way that I never have before.

Can you imagine the excitement of His chosen ones? Sparkling justice is about to be meted out to all the evildoers. All of those who rejected your God are about to receive their perfect punishment!

At that time, you, as a believer, will have been on the earth with your God for over 1,000 years! Before that, you were with Him in heaven! You were wed to Him! Can you imagine the excitement you will feel, knowing that God is about to vindicate His glorious Name once and for all! The dead and the living will exhibit utterly conflicting emotions at the very same event.

Just thinking about it causes praise and thanksgiving to well up inside me, to the point I need to close my eyes to truly experience my soul's delight!

Take a moment, just now, and go to Him in prayer. Make sure you are His. There are only two destinations; you will go to one or the other.

Now, just who are these dead? These are the "rest of the dead" from Revelation 20:5. They are the unbelievers who are still in Hades; they have not yet been judged. Hades has always been the holding place for the dead. It used to be divided into two sections. The cool side, or Abraham's bosom, was emptied out when Christ went to heaven after His crucifixion.

Unbelievers are still kept in the hot side of Hades. (Perhaps God remodeled the place when Abraham's bosom was evacuated, expanding the hot side of Hades into the vacated cool side, taking out the air conditioning, of course, so it would have enough room to contain the expanding horde of unbelievers?)

Those who are about to be judged are the unbelieving dead (both spiritually and physically) from throughout the ages. (The exception being the goats, the nations of unbelievers, whom Christ threw into the lake of fire at the judging of the nations 1,000 years earlier.)

At the Great White Throne Judgment, God will sit and judge every one of the unbelieving dead. He will summon them to His throne and judge them individually according to their deeds. Take note this is not the same as the Judgment Seat of Christ, where the saints in the church will have their deeds in the body made known to them and will be judged accordingly. The Judgment Seat of Christ will not be for salvation, because they are already saved, but for rewards or lack of them according to their

deeds during the time they were part of the body of Christ on earth. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, Christ will sit on His throne. At the Great White Throne Judgment, God, the Father, will sit on His throne.

And while we're at it, the Judgment Seat of Christ is also not the same as the judgment of the nations which Christ will carry out when He returns at the second coming. (Just wanted to test your staying power! Actually, I want to commend you for your tenacity in studying the fantastic book of Revelation! Stick with it, I can almost see the finish line!)

As the Great White Throne Judgment gets underway, books are opened; plus another book is opened, which is identified as the book of life. All the unbelieving dead will be judged according to the deeds which are written in the books.

How many books do you see here, minimum? Let's count. Books will be opened; the word "books" is plural, so there will be at least two. Another book will be opened, which is the book of life. That makes three, minimum, but keep in mind there might be volumes upon volumes of books containing the account of all the deeds of these unbelieving dead. We don't know how many, but we can know there will be at least three.

That makes sense. Easy peasy!

We need to keep the books separate in our minds, though. There are the deed books, however many. They contain the records of each deed of each and every unbeliever who ever lived. Additionally, there is the book of life, which we will discuss in verse 15. There are two categories of books.

Have you ever thought about individual degrees of judgment for those who will spend eternity in the second death, the lake of fire? Not everyone will have the same address in the lake of fire. No one's retribution will be bearable, but some will be more horrific than others. The punishment will be custom formulated by the Judge; it will be the perfect verdict based on the deeds the dead have done.

***And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.*** Revelation 20:13

John continues to fill in the details of the scene before him. He tells us the sea will give up all the dead which are in it. Additionally, death and Hades will give up all the dead which are in them. And for the second time declares they will be judged, every single one of them individually, according to their own deeds. Many people ponder the significance of the sea, giving up its dead, resulting in varying conclusions.

I'm going to keep it sweet and simple (Sweethearts!). The canvas John is painting for us starts with two main elements; God sitting on His great white throne and the earth and heaven fleeing from His presence. As John now fills in more specifics, we learn that the sea, just as it takes flight into oblivion, will need to "airdrop" its dead bodies to the Great

White Throne. Death and Hades themselves, however, are required to make a stop at the throne before their journey's end, where they have a surprise waiting for them (the very next verse!) It all seems to happen in a flurry, but they are powerless to defy God's command to give up all the dead which are in them. Death (grave) will give up its bodies, and Hades will give up its spirits.

***Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.*** Revelation 20:14

This is when Mr. Death and Mr. Hades get their "death-day" present. Death and Hades are always together; they've been a pair since the beginning of sin and death. Wherever Mr. Death goes, so goes Mr. Hades. So it is fitting they remain together on their short journey to their eternal destination. They are thrown into the lake of fire, which is defined for us as the second death.

Let's review. Who will already be in the lake of fire, and what will be the order of everyone's arrival? Right. (Don't you love it that I always give you credit for a correct answer.) The goats go in first; this will happen at the judgment of the nations. Then the beast and the false prophet are thrown in, which will occur when Christ defeats them at His second coming. That makes three times so far that the lake of fire has welcomed incoming guests. Satan's turn comes next. He is thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone shortly after the Millennial Reign when he has a disastrous last run against the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Satan is number four. Who's next? Numbers five and six; Death and Hades.

This scene brings to mind 1 Corinthians 15:26. *The last enemy that will be abolished is death.* I have a question for you. If death is thrown into the lake of fire, will there be any more dying? No. More. Death. Period. Our God is Life!

***And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*** Revelation 20:15

If you remember, the unbelieving dead will be judged by the deeds recorded in the books; I'll call them the deed books. The dead will be judged according to their personal deeds, which have been recorded in those books. A contrasting book entirely is called the book of life. This book is not a record of deeds; instead, it is a book that records life. What will the dead desperately hope is found in the book of life? Their name. But will they find it? No. So what will happen to them? They will be given an address in the lake of fire based on their deeds, following which, they will be provided air transportation. And, they will be thrown in, free of charge.

Many people get confused when it comes to God's books, so I'm going to throw in three more books in hopes that I can clear up a few questions you might have. Honestly, it's not going to make things worse! It will make things Hmmm... less bad? Just kidding! This should really help. *So try to keep up!* Just kidding again! You can always read this over (and over) until it makes sense. I am so laughing right now!

Here are the books we will consider:

1. The "deed" books.
2. The book of life.
3. The Lamb's book of life.
4. The book of conscience.
5. The book of books, the Bible.

1. The deed books, or books of remembrance, determine the degree of judgment or reward. That's it. Take note these particular deed books (in this chapter of Revelation) do not contain deeds of believers, *only unbelievers*. Believers' deeds (not their salvation) will have already been judged at the judgment seat of Christ, determining their rewards or lack of them from other books of remembrance. *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."* 2 Corinthians 5:10.

2. The book of life. This book records when you are given existence. The Scriptures that deal with "blotting out" your name from the book refer to this book.

3. The Lamb's book of life. This book records the names of the righteous, those who will receive spiritual life. Believers will *never* be blotted out of this book. *Won't happen! Can't happen!* Believers' names have been written in this book from the foundation of the world.

I think the deed books are reasonably clear, agreed? They are books that keep a record of people's deeds. Although it's not really in the scope of this study, (I know, I know, I've gone outside our purview several times during this overview of Revelation. I've really tried not to, but sometimes I just can't help myself. Sigh...) there are other books of deeds, or remembrance, in which God has recorded the acts of those in Christ. Things we have done since the time of our salvation; since we entered the body of Christ. As I have already mentioned, these remembrance books will be used at the judgment seat of Christ to determine rewards or lack of rewards for believers. This takes place much earlier, shortly after the church is raptured.

Let's reason through the book of life (2). Wilbur is a believer. (All names have been changed to protect the innocent.) From before the foundation of the earth, God decided that He would create Wilbur, that Wilbur would exist, so He wrote Wilbur's name in the book of life (2), the book of existence.

Let's leave Wilbur for a moment and look at Lulu. Lulu is an unbeliever. Is Lulu in the book of life (2)? Yes, God also decided to create her so He wrote her name in the book of existence right alongside Wilbur's. The names of both believers and unbelievers are written in this book of life.

Now let's look at the Lamb's book of life. (3) Will Lulu's name be in it? No. Was Lulu's name ever in it? No. Only those that God chooses to be His will be written in the Lamb's book of life (3). But her name *is* written in the book of life (2).

What about Wilbur? His name will have been written in the Lamb's book of life (3) from the foundation of the earth, along with the names of everyone else God has chosen. All the righteous, every single one, (of course, including Wilbur) are written in the Lamb's book of life from the foundation of the earth, which is not the same as when Jack will choose the Lord and be saved. I'll deal with that in a moment.

You may not be sure "who is on first" at this moment, but don't give up. It might get a little foggier before it clears up, but it *will* clear up! (I hope. Probably. Laughing again. Not *at* you, really... just *with* you.)

4. When God created Wilbur and Lulu, He gave them something to live by during their existence here on earth; a book of conscience. Conscience comes from two words; con, which means with, and science, which means knowledge. The Greek word for conscience is "*suneidesis*" and means to have the inward ability of moral judgment. They both had the means to unerringly judge right from wrong because God gave it to them. They both had the book of conscience.

*For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus." Romans 2:14-16*

5. God also made the Law (Torah or Pentateuch), the Tanakh (the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures), and the rest of His word, the entire Bible, available to them. He made His truth accessible to each of them. He would speak to them personally through His Word if they would only listen.

What did Lulu do with her book of conscience and the Bible? Ultimately she rejected both; she did not respond rightly to God. What about Wilbur; what did he do with what he knew? He believed what God wrote in his book of conscience, so God sent him more and more light until he eventually heard the gospel. He embraced the gospel and was saved. Now, in Christ, he is righteous.

Before we go on, let's remember what life and death mean. Life is oneness or union with God, while death is separation from God.

When Lulu dies, she will be sent to the Hades' holding tank (the hot side) until the great white throne judgment. Her destiny is decided. There is no going back. She will spend eternity separated from God. What does God do with the book of life (2) when she dies? He blots out her name because she will never be in union with God. She is dead, separated eternally from God.

What about Wilbur? What will happen to him since he believed the gospel and was saved? Because Wilbur entered into eternal life in Christ where there is no death, he will go immediately to be with the Lord. He has union, or life, with God for eternity! *Being absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.* 2 Corinthians 5:6-8.

So, will his name be blotted out of the book of life (2)? No! He will never be separated from God again; those who have died with Christ (identified with Him in His death to sin) will never die again. Believers will never die again! The wages of sin is death, and sin no longer has any power over those who are in Christ! Death is no longer our master!

*For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.*

*Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.* Romans 6:5-11

Will Wilbur be judged? Yes, at the judgment seat of Christ. What allows him to even *be* at the judgment seat of Christ. That is determined by two of the books; the Lamb's book of life (3) and the book of life (2). His name needs to be in both of them, and it is. The books reconcile! Because these two books balance, Wilbur is allowed to be judged at Christ's judgment seat (as all true believers will be).

What will Wilbur be judged with, or by, at the judgment seat of Christ? He will be sentenced according to his behavior recorded in the book of deeds (1). This book is synonymous with the book of remembrance and the book of wanderings in the Psalms. (Just had to throw that in, didn't !!)

What does Wilbur want the book of deeds (1) to reconcile with? He wants his deeds to reconcile with the righteous standard of the Bible (5). Christ will open both the Bible and the book, which holds Wilbur's deeds. Wilbur will receive or lose rewards based on what he has done (in the body of Christ) that measures up to the Bible's righteousness or falls short of it.

Wilbur's right to stand at this judgment seat is based on the Lamb's book of life (3) and the book of life (2); they must reconcile. His name *must* be found in both.

Wilbur's rewards are based on what is recorded in the book of deeds (1) and the Bible (5). His rewards, or lack of them, are based on how well his deeds reconcile with God's Word.

Are you with me, still? I hope so. Maybe you should get up and run around your house, flapping your arms a bit to get blood to your brain, or perhaps just some coffee or tea would help at this point. I'll let you decide. (I'm doing both, flapping and coffee, that is.)

What about the other judgment, the great white throne judgment? Who will be there? Lulu will. Her name was blotted out of the book of life (2) at her physical death because she was separated from God for eternity. Her name was never, ever written in the Lamb's book of life (3). The books reconcile because her name is not found in either book.

What will Lulu be judged according to when she stands before the great white throne and Him who sits on it? The same books that Wilbur will be judged by; the book of deeds (1) and the Bible (5). When God looks at Lulu's chapter in the books of deeds, will they line up with the Bible? No. She will be judged according to her deeds; all of them bad, all of them worthless because nothing she ever did was done in the power of the life that is in the Spirit of God. Not one of her deeds will help her. Just how far her deeds fall short of what is written in God's Word will determine her degree of punishment and torment, which she will receive in the eternal lake of fire.

What ultimately determines which throne Lulu will stand in front of? Do her deeds help her out at all? No, because it won't be determined by that. It will be determined by the Author of all salvation; He did not choose Lulu. And yet, while she lived on earth, was there even one time when God *wouldn't* let her believe Him? No. The one who comes to Jesus, He will not cast out. John 6:37.

She could have believed; she had help. She could have (and should have) surrendered to her God and Creator. God made it evident to her that He was God and Creator, and as such, He deserved honor and thanks. Since the creation of the world, God's invisible attributes, eternal power, and divine nature have been clearly seen. She saw this! She knew this! She understood this! Even though she knew God, she did not honor him or give Him thanks. She became futile in her speculations, and her foolish heart was darkened. She became a fool. She knew her actions were worthy of death, but she would not surrender to Him.

She said, "No!" to God! It was of her own free will that *she* decided her fate. God did not "keep her" from Himself. It was her responsibility to respond rightly to God, but she *chose* to respond wrongly to Him. She suppressed the truth God had given her.

The sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man—beyond our full understanding, to be sure, but entirely true, nevertheless.

Nobody but a believer can truly appreciate faith; unbelievers can't; however, both believers and unbelievers can understand works. You are justified by faith, not works. You stand saved or unsaved according to faith, not works. Yet you will be judged, believer and unbeliever alike, according to your deeds.

*God, You are so awesome! You do not have to open the books; You don't even have to keep them. You have all rights over Your creation. You don't have to tell us why You judge us in whatever measure You decide. And yet, here, at this last great event before the new heavens, new earth, and new Jerusalem are created, You vindicate Your righteousness, Your holiness, and Your perfect justice in front of all Your creation one last time! Glory to Your Name!*

What should our response be? Yes, we can be excited and grateful now. But shouldn't we also have a fear for those who don't understand, for those who don't know the truth? That would include those in the church who've been given a false gospel, who will one day approach the Lord and try to convince Him that are one of His flock. But He will tell them He never knew them; that He never, ever knew them! Then they will hear the most horrific words ever spoken, "*Depart from Me!*" Eternal separation from God! We must fear for the unsaved!

What kind of people ought we to be knowing that there are people on our streets, people in our neighborhoods, people in our pews, that are headed for this horrific judgment? We know what will happen, and yet we are too selfish and too timid to go to them! We won't take a chance on offending anyone, even temporarily, who goes to church or professes to be a Christian.

I don't want anyone to go to the lake of fire, or to suffer at all. I want people to know the joy of being in Christ. So even if they won't listen, I will still warn them. I can't make anybody bow their knees to Jesus, but I can open my mouth!

Is your head swirling! Mine sure is! Revelation 19 and 20 are both event-filled, aren't they? The reaction to Babylon's fall, the Lamb's marriage, the Lamb's coming in power and glory, the supper of God, Satan is bound for 1,000 years, the first resurrection, the battle of Gog and Magog, and finally, the great white throne judgment! All eight of these major events are contained in these two chapters of Revelation! Your head has every right to be swirling! You have every right to lean back, close your eyes, and fondly remember the time when you weren't quite so confused... Grinning.)

We are about to begin something new, and when I say new, I really do mean new. Chapter 21 and 22 unveil the new heaven, the new earth, and the new Jerusalem!