

The Great White Throne Judgment

By Ellen J. DeWitt

- *What is the Great White Throne judgment?*
- *Who is judged there?*
- *What are the grounds for judgment?*
- *What is the judgment?*

Death is the one certain fact in everyone's life. C. S. Lewis observed that the statistics on death are impressive--so far it is one out of one! Death awaits us as the concrete floor awaits the falling light bulb. The Bible says, *It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment* (Hebrews 9:27).

The idea of future judgment after death for every person is found in both the Old Testament (Psalm 96:13; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Daniel 12:2) and the New Testament (Acts 17:31; 2 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 9:27). Those who accept Christ as their Savior will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Those who have not accepted Christ as their Savior appear before another judgment seat called the Great White Throne.

The Throne

Revelation 20:11-15 is the main passage of Scripture which describes the Great White Throne Judgment. John says, *I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it* (v. 11). Its greatness conveys the idea of intense or mighty authority. The whiteness indicates its purity and complete justice. There will be no corruption at this throne. The fact that it is a throne shows that sovereign decisions are made there. Though the Judge is not specifically named here, we know from John 5:22 that Jesus said, *For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son* (see also Acts 17:31; 2 Timothy 4:1; and Matthew 25:31). So Jesus Christ is the Judge sitting on the Great White Throne.

John continues in verse 11, *from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them* (see also 2 Peter 3:10-12). The throne stands alone. None of the things of this earth are there to distract. All material possessions, homes, clothing, cars, etc. are gone, *no place was found for them*. The picture is one of a person standing alone in front of the presence of his or her Judge, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who Is Judged

And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne (v. 12). This verse implies a bodily resurrection. Jesus said, *for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth, those who did the good, to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil, to a resurrection of judgment* (John 5:29). Notice in verse 13, John says, *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*. It doesn't matter how long a person has been dead or the condition of their dead body, or even its location. It could be somewhere in the sea. Jesus said that **all** come forth. Hades is the place where after death the unrighteous wait for the last judgment (Luke 16:19-31). Also notice it does not matter whether a person was a great important person on earth or whether they were a small seemingly insignificant person on earth. They **all** will stand before the throne for judgment, for there is no partiality with God (Romans 2:11).

The Grounds for Judgment

The evidence is found in the books. *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* (v. 12; see also Romans 2:6). The

point of this verse is not salvation by works. It is damnation by works. Every person is responsible for what they have done while on earth. *For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil* (Ecclesiastes 12:14). Every person is accountable to God.

The first set of books are opened to show from the deeds of a person's life, that they are truly sinful. Then the book of life is opened. When the person's name is not found there, this will prove that he or she has not received Christ's payment for his or her sins. Then the books of deeds are again consulted to determine his or her punishment, based on the deeds done in this life.

The Book of Life

This is a very important book for each person.

In verse 15, John tells us that *if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire*. So to keep from appearing before the Great White Throne judgment and being thrown into the lake of fire for eternity, you must have your name written in this book.

But what is the book of life and how do you get your name written in it? The people written in this book are sinners, just as the people whose names are not there. Romans 3:23 tells us *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* [emphasis mine]. So the amount of sin does not determine whether your name is there.

Earlier in Revelation, John gives us some information about this book of life. He calls it *the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain* (13:8), i.e., Jesus Christ (John 1:29; Revelation 5:6, 12-13). John also said, *God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life* (1 John 5:11-12). Getting your name in the book of life comes by receiving Jesus Christ and His payment for your sins on the cross (John 1:12). It is not good works vs. bad works. Paul said, *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The Books of Deeds

The first look at the books of deeds showed that each person is a sinner, and Paul wrote, *For the wages of sin is death* (Romans 6:23).

Not having his or her name in the book of life, Christ Jesus, the Judge, looks back at the books of deeds. *And the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds* (Revelation 20:12, 13). With modern technology, mere humans can produce instant replay, a disc capable of storing the entire Encyclopedia Britannica or 50,000 photographs. It should not be surprising that the Creator of the universe should have data on all His creatures.* Jesus said, *every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment* (Matthew 12:36). Paul wrote, *God will judge the secrets of men* (Romans 2:16). Every thought, every act, every moment, every everything. It has all been recorded in heaven, and God will look at it to judge and determine a person's degree of punishment.

What is the Judgment?

Two times John mentions that these people *were judged, every one of them according to their deeds* (20:12, 13). Therefore, there are levels of torment in the lake of fire. Jesus also confirms this. He said, *it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for those who have heard and rejected the Savior* (Matthew 10:15). In John 19:11, Jesus told Pilate that *he [Judas] who delivered Me up to you has the greater sin*. In describing the actions of the scribes, Jesus said, *these will receive a greater condemnation* (Mark 12:40; see also Luke 12:47-48).

Then *death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire* (Revelation 20:14). Death is the ending of physical life (Genesis 2:16-17). Hades is where the spirits of people await judgment at the Great White Throne (Luke 16:19-31). These last signs of human rebellion against God will be destroyed.

This is the second death (20:14). Death has three stages. First is spiritual death. Each one of us born into the world is spiritually dead, i.e., *dead in their trespasses and sins* (Ephesians 2:1). The remedy for this death is receiving Jesus as our Savior (John 3:16). Second, all people die physically. The remedy for this death is the resurrection of the body of those who have received Christ to eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:50-57). Third, there is the second death, i.e., the conscious existence in the lake of fire. [This is against the view that there is no conscious suffering in the lake of fire. In 20:10 the antichrist and

false prophet have been in the lake of fire for 1,000 years. See Matthew 25:46.] For this there is no remedy.* *If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (20:15).*

The full wrath of God is seen at two great moments in human history--at the Great White Throne judgment and at the cross of Christ, where it has already been poured out for those who trust Christ as their Savior. At which point will you choose to face it? If you choose to come to Christ, then His substitutionary death will protect you from the last judgment. *There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).**

Questions and Answers

Q: *What is the Great White Throne judgment?*

A: The final judgment of mankind by God.

Q: *Who is judged there?*

A: All humans who have not received Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Q: *What are the grounds for judgment?*

A: The books of a person's deeds are opened to show a person is a sinner. Next, the book of life is opened to show they have not received Christ's payment for that sin. Then the books of deeds are looked at again to judge their deeds and determine the level of punishment.

Q: *What is the judgment?*

A: *If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15; see also v. 10; Matthew 25:41, and 46).*

*Excerpts from "The Sixth Last Thing: The Last Judgment and the End of the World (Revelation 20:11-15)" by David J. MacLeod, *Bib Sac*, Vol. 17.