



THOMAS HALE MINISTRIES

A Kingdom Multiplier

A COMPILATION OF CONTEMPORARY BIBLICAL COMMENTARIES AND DICTIONARIES RELATED TO HELL AND ETERNAL JUDGEMENT

“HELL”

Seal, David. “Hell.” The Lexham Bible Dictionary, edited by John D. Barry et al., Lexham Press, 2016.

HELL (γέεννα, geenna). The Greek word is often translated in English versions of the New Testament as “hell.” It is a noun derived from the Hebrew phrase גיא הנום (gy' hnwm), which means “Valley of Hinnom.” The Valley of Hinnom was a ravine along the southern slope of Jerusalem (Josh 15:18; 18:16). In Old Testament times, it was a place used for offering sacrifices to foreign gods. Eventually, the site was used to burn refuse. When the Jews discussed punishment in the afterlife, they employed the image of this smoldering waste dump.

The Afterlife in the Old Testament

Sheol

Sheol generally refers to the dwelling place of a person after death. In a few texts, Sheol is represented as the place where everyone goes—though, this is likely hyperbole (Psa 89:48; Eccl 9:10). Other texts indicate it is the dwelling place for the good or righteous (e.g., Gen 37:35; Pss 88:3; 89:48; Isa 38:10). Still other passages indicate it is the final abode of the wicked (e.g., Num 16:30, 33; 1 Kgs 2:6, 9; Job 21:13; 24:19; Pss 9:17; 31:17; Isa 5:14).

According to the descriptions in the Old Testament, Sheol is located in the “Underworld.” In order to get there, one must descend (Num 16:30, 33; Job 17:16; 21:13; Prov 5:5; 9:18) and one must dig towards it (Amos 9:2). In order to get out, a person would need to ascend (Psa 30:3). Sheol is located opposite of heaven (Psa 139:8; Amos 9:2). It is infested with worms and maggots (Isa 14:11). This language could be figurative.

Valley of Hinnom

In the Valley of Hinnom, King Ahaz and King Manasseh offered their sons as sacrifices to the gods of Baal and Molech (2 Chr 28:3; 33:6; 2 Kgs 16:3).

In condemning the valley as a place of idol worship, the prophet Jeremiah anticipated that it would become a “Valley of Slaughter,” a place of judgment for worshipers of foreign gods (Jer 7:30-34; 19:1-13; 32:34-35).

Isaiah predicted that Israel’s enemy Assyria would be destroyed with fire at Hinnom (Isa 30:29-33). Hinnom became closely associated with death, corpses, and punishment—it became a fitting image of God judging the wicked.

The Concept of the Afterlife in Second Temple Period Literature

In the second temple period (16 BC–AD 70), Jewish writers’ views on hell were likely shaped by foreign ideas about the afterlife. Persian and Hellenistic ideas of retribution after death may have encouraged a Jewish belief in different fates for the righteous and the godless. For example, in 1 En. 22:8-13 the author describes a divided dwelling for the dead—a sphere for sinners and another sphere for the righteous.

The author of the book of 1 Enoch does not seem to distinguish between Sheol and gehenna—the terms are used interchangeably (1 En. 51:1-3).

Sheol also began to be viewed as an intermediate holding place for the dead, prior to resurrection. In Iranian thought, the dead had to pass over the Chinvat Bridge in order to reach paradise; demons lurked below the bridge and caused sinners to fall into a pit of torment (Russell, *The Devil*, 255). The book of 2 Esdras discusses these dual destinies (2 Esd. 7:36). The righteous alone will experience resurrection, according to 1 Enoch (1 En. 22:12-13; 51:1-3). Since resurrection from the dead was only for the righteous, Sheol began to be considered a place of fiery punishment solely for the wicked.

New Testament

The New Testament often distinguishes between ἄδης (hadēs) and γέεννα (geenna). For instance, a few passages simply use ἄδης (hadēs) as a synonym for the death or the grave. For example, Acts 2:27 and 2:31 state that Jesus was not left in ἄδης (hadēs) or “the grave.”

The term γέεννα (geenna) occurs ten times in the Gospels (Matt 5:22, 29; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5) and also in Jas 3:6. The word ἄδης (hadēs) occurs ten times in the New Testament (Matt 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; Rev 1:18, 6:8; 20:13, 14).

Jesus’ Teaching on Hell

Jesus teaches that, after their death, people either enter the kingdom of God or are cast into γέεννα (geenna) (Matt 10:28; Luke 13:28). In addition, Jesus discusses three aspects of hell in his teaching: its inhabitants, its features and the extent of its punishment.

Hell's Inhabitants

Jesus frequently describes those who are destined for ἅδης (hadēs). Jesus tells the inhabitants of Capernaum that their unbelief will lead them to ἅδης (hadēs) (Matt 11:20-24). Jesus also warns of several sins that might condemn one to ἅδης (hadēs), including calling a spiritual brother or sister a fool (Matt 5:22) and giving into sinful tendencies (Matt 5:29-30). For Jesus, a person is either a child of ἅδης (hadēs) or a child of Abraham (Matt 23:15; Luke 19:9). Jesus questions the scribes, Pharisees and hypocrites about how they expect to escape the condemnation of ἅδης (hadēs) if they are committing the sins of their ancestors (Matt 23:31-33). In His preaching, Jesus promises the gates of ἅδης (hadēs) shall not prevail against the church (Matt 16:18).

Descriptions of Hell

Jesus describes hell as an eternal fire where the devil and his angels are destined (Matt 25:41). He also calls it the abyss (Luke 8:31). It is a place of darkness, where a person experiences weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 8:8-12). The weeping suggests suffering and pain while the gnashing of teeth suggests despair and anger.

Beyond these images, Jesus also portrays hell (or ἅδης, hadēs) in Jesus' parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). In this passage, ἅδης (hadēs) is depicted as a permanent abode and a place of torment. Further, it seems it accommodates some individuals, but not others. The rich man went there after dying, and Lazarus did not. Instead, Lazarus is in Abraham's bosom, a traditional designation for the place of the dead who were righteous in life. This parable also teaches about the irreversible nature of punishment in the afterlife.

The Duration of Hell's Punishment

There are two primary perspectives on the extent of hell's punishment. One view contends that the wicked experience eternal conscious suffering (Walvoord, "The Literal"). The other view argues that the wicked eventually are consumed by hell's fire, thereby forfeiting their existence (Fudge, "The Final End").

Matthew 10:28 might imply that hell destroys both the body and the soul, making punishment only temporary. However, other texts support the eternal duration of hell's punishment. For example, Jesus, drawing on Isa 66:24, speaks of hell as the place where the worm never dies and the fire is never extinguished (Mark 9:48). In Matthew 25:46, it seems that the punishment is forever rather than for a while. Jesus claims that upon death some people will go to eternal punishment while others will enter into eternal life.

Paul's Teaching on Hell

Paul stresses the expectation of salvation, and does not emphasize the topic of hell or its torments. The idea of torture as a punishment for wicked deeds is totally absent from his teaching about the last days. For Paul, salvation is the opposite of death (2 Cor 7:10). In Second Thessalonians 1:8-10, he describes the final days: Jesus will come with flaming fire, and will impose a penalty on those

who do not acknowledge God or who refuse to accept the gospel of Jesus (Kyrtatas, “The Christian Origin,” 286).

The Concept of Hell in the Rest of the New Testament

The remainder of literature in the New Testament primarily focuses on the judgment of those sentenced to hell. The Second Letter of Peter includes the verb τάρταρόω (tartaroō), which is often translated as “cast into hell” (2 Pet 2:4 NRSV). In this passage, Peter describes the divine power, which has imprisoned the rebellious angels (Bernstein, *The Formation*, 251). The verb τάρταρόω (tartaroō) is related to the noun Τάρταρος (Tartaros). Τάρταρος (Tartaros) is the Greek word for a subterranean place, lower than ἄδης (hadēs), where divine punishment was conducted. The passage suggests that if God did not spare the rebellious angels from the fire of ἄδης (hadēs) then He certainly will not show mercy on false teachers leading people astray (2 Pet 2:1-10).

Hebrews 10:26-27 also describes those who are bound for the punishment of ἄδης (hadēs)—a raging fire will consume the enemies of God. Whether this imagery of fire is metaphorical or literal is debatable (see Crockett, *Four Views on Hell*).

While Revelation does not mention the term ἄδης (hadēs) directly, the author provides the most pointed descriptions of those who will experience the torment of ἄδης (hadēs) in the life to come. Two themes concerning ἄδης (hadēs) emerge in the last book of the New Testament. First, Jesus is the one who possesses power over ἄδης (hadēs) (Rev 1:18). Second, the lake of fire eventually will house all the “authors of evil” and all whose names are not found written in the book of life (Bernstein, *The Formation*, 259). Therefore, ἄδης (hadēs) itself is judged and thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:13-14), the beast and false prophet are sent to the lake of fire (Rev 19:20) and finally, the devil is thrown into the eternal fire (Rev 20:10).

The Concept of Hell in Post-Biblical Writings

In post-biblical literature, hell usually retains its characteristic imagery, with variations and elaborations. The Bishop Polycarp (ca. AD 69-155) contrasts a martyr’s death by fire—which is eventually extinguished—with the eternal flames of judgment that never cease (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 11:2).

The Christian writer Origen of Alexandria (ca. AD 185-254), had an entirely different perspective on hell’s flames. He considered the flames of hell to be a refining or purifying fire. It was corrective rather than punitive. Origen uses Malachi 3:3 to support his view (*Principles* 2.10). However, there seems to be little evidence in the New Testament that a person’s experience of hell ever brings about genuine repentance.

In the mid-second century, the Ethiopic text of the *Apocalypse of Peter* describes Jesus leading Peter through the abode of the dead. The punishments of sinners are described in detail. For example, murderers are cast into the fire, a place full of venomous beasts. Victims are tormented without rest and worms are a persistent pest. In addition to the more elaborate detail, the *Apocalypse* depicts hell as a much noisier place than in the biblical record. One hears the taunts of

tormenting angels, the cries for mercy from the damned, and the hymns of the victims in praise of divine justice (Bernstein, *The Formation*, 288-289).

Fleming, Don. "Hell." AMG Concise Bible Dictionary, AMG Publishers, 1990, p. 171.

HELL

It is unfortunate that many of the older versions of the English Bible use the one word 'hell' to translate several words in the original languages. In the minds of most English-speaking people, hell is a place of terrible torment where the wicked dead are sent for final punishment. While this idea of hell may be true for the word gehenna, it is not true for other biblical words translated 'hell'. The Hebrew sheol and its Greek equivalent hades mean simply the place of the dead or the state of the dead.

Gehenna was the name Jesus used for the place of final punishment of the wicked. The word appears in the New Testament as a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew 'Valley of Hinnom'.

The Valley of Hinnom was a place just outside the wall of Jerusalem where, in times of apostasy, the people of Israel burnt their children in sacrifice to the god Molech (Jer 7:31). In the place where the people committed this wickedness, God punished them with terrible slaughter (Jer 7:32-34). Broken pottery was dumped in this valley, and the place became a public garbage dump where fires burnt continually (Jer 19:1-13). Because of this association with judgment and burning, 'gehenna' became a fitting word to indicate the place or state of eternal punishment (Matt 10:28; 18:9; 23:33; Mark 9:43-48; cf. James 3:6).

According to the New Testament, the punishment of hell (gehenna) is one of eternal torment. It is likened to eternal burning (Matt 13:42; 18:8-9; Rev 20:10), eternal darkness (Matt 8:12; 22:13; 2 Peter 2:4, 17), eternal destruction (Matt 7:13; Phil 1:28; 2 Peter 3:7, 10) and eternal separation from God and his blessings (2 Thess 1:9).

Another symbolic picture of eternal punishment is that of a lake of fire prepared for the enemies of God (Rev 19:20; 20:10; cf. Matt 25:41). Into this lake God throws his great enemy, Death (Rev 20:14; cf. 1 Cor 15:26), along with all whose names are not written in the book of life (Rev 20:15). Just as heaven is something far better than the material symbols used to picture it, so hell is something far worse than the material symbols used to picture it.

Powell, Ralph E. "Hell." Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, vol. 1, Baker Book House, 1988, pp. 952-55.

Hell. Place of future punishment for the lost, unrepentant, wicked dead.

Definition and Description. Hell is the final destiny of unbelievers and is variously described by the figures of a furnace of fire, eternal fire, eternal punishment (Mt 13:42, 50; 25:41, 46); outer darkness, the place of weeping and torment (8:12); eternal sin (Mk 3:29); the wrath of God (Rom 2:5); everlasting separation from the Lord, never to see the glory of his power (2 Thes 1:9); the bottomless pit (Rv 9:1, 11); continuous torment (14:10, 11); the lake of fire, the second death (21:8); a place for the devil and his demons (Mt 25:41). The foregoing designations clearly show that the state of those in hell is one of eternal duration.

Other expressions that indicate that the final state of the wicked is eternal are: "burn with unquenchable fire" (Mt 3:12); "to the unquenchable fire ... where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (Mk 9:43, 48); there is sin which "will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Mt 12:32). When Scripture is understood properly, there is no hint anywhere of the termination of the terrible state of unbelievers in hell. Their doom is unending; there is a solemn finality about their miserable condition. (It is significant that the most descriptive and conclusive utterances about hell come from the lips of our Lord.)

A summary of all Scripture that speaks of hell indicates that there is the loss and absence of all good, and the misery and torment of an evil conscience. The most terrifying aspect is the complete and deserved separation from God and from all that is pure, holy, and beautiful. In addition there is the awareness of being under the wrath of God and of enduring the curse of a righteous sentence because of one's sins that were consciously and voluntarily committed.

Although the biblical descriptions of hell are stated in very physical and literal terms, the essential character of hell should not be conceived in or limited to designation such as the worm that devours, the stripes that are inflicted, the burning or being consumed by fire. This affirmation does not detract from the horror or the gravity of the situation in hell, because nothing could possibly be worse than separation from God and the torment of an evil conscience. Hell is hell for those who are there essentially because they are completely alienated from God, and wherever there is alienation from God there is always estrangement from one's fellows. This is the worst possible punishment to which anyone could be subject: to be totally and irrevocably cut off from God and to be at enmity with all those who are around oneself. Another painful consequence of such a condition is to be at odds with oneself—torn apart from within by an accusing sense of guilt and shame. This condition is one of total conflict: with God, one's neighbors, and oneself. This is hell! If the descriptions of hell are figurative or symbolic, the conditions they represent are more intense and real than the figures of speech in which they are expressed.

Punishment for sin is a persistent teaching of the Bible. The doctrine of judgment is as extensive as the canon itself. Typical of such passages are Genesis 2:17; 3:17-19; 4:13; Leviticus 26:27-33; Psalm

149:7; Isaiah 3:11; Ezekiel 14:10; Amos 1:2-10; 2:1-11; Zechariah 14:19; Matthew 25:41, 46; Luke 16:23, 24; Romans 2:5-12; Galatians 6:7, 8; Hebrews 10:29-31; and Revelation 20:1-15.

Biblical Terms. The Hebrew word “Sheol” in the OT is predominantly used for “the grave, the pit, the place of the departed dead” (Gn 37:35; Jb 7:9; 14:13; 17:13-16; Pss 6:5; 16:10; 55:15; Prv 9:18; Eccl 9:10; Is 14:11; 38:10-12, 18). There does not seem to be a very clear distinction in the OT between the final destiny of the good and the evil. They all alike go to the grave, to the world below, a world of gloom, weariness, darkness, decay, and forgetfulness, where one is remote from God (Jb 10:20-22; Ps 88:3-6), yet accessible to him (Jb 26:6; Ps 139:8; Am 9:2). It is a place characterized by silence (Pss 94:17; 115:17) and rest (Jb 3:17). Other texts, however, seem to suggest some aspect of consciousness, hope, and communication in Sheol (Jb 14:13-15; 19:25-27; Pss 16:10; 49:15; Is 14:9, 10; Ez 32:21). A few texts seem to suggest the threat of divine judgment after death (Pss 9:17; 55:15). On the whole, Sheol was regarded with dismay and foreboding (Dt 32:22; Ps 39:13; Is 38:18).

It was not until the time of the postcanonical Jewish literature, the writings which were developed between the close of the OT and the beginning of NT times, that clear distinctions were made between the final destinies of the righteous and the unrighteous. The idea of separate divisions within Sheol for the good and the evil was developed. It is unmistakable that there was in Jewish thought, as reflected throughout the OT, a belief in a future and continued existence beyond death, however shadowy and indefinite the concept.

The Greek word “Hades” in the NT is used very similarly to “Sheol” in the OT. It was, in fact, used by the translators of the Septuagint, the Greek version of the OT, for Sheol. It designated in general the place or state of the dead, the grave, or death itself. In some versions the word is not translated at all, but is transliterated simply as “Hades.” The NT is not always very explicit about the meaning of Hades, other than what has just been described. Use of the word often does not reveal much about the specific condition of the dead. There are some passages, however, which indicate a distinct advance over the use of Sheol in the OT. Some NT passages definitely describe Hades as a place of evil and punishment of the wicked, and may appropriately be translated “hell” (Lk 16:23).

Some Bible scholars held on the basis of the Luke passage (16:19-31) that Hades consists of two compartments where the dead are kept, “the bosom of Abraham,” or Paradise, where Lazarus resided, and the place of torment where the rich man suffered. This teaching seems derived more from a pagan Greek origin than from the Gospel of Luke. The contrast here seems to be a distinction between “the bosom of Abraham” and an altogether different place, antithetical and exclusive of the place where Lazarus was. It does not naturally seem to be speaking about two separated divisions both included in Hades, but about two altogether different locales and conditions separated by an impassable and fixed gulf. The intent of the passage is not to give topographical information about the realm of the dead, but to give a warning to those who are not prepared for life after death.

The Greek word “Gehenna” is used in a number of NT texts to designate the fiery place for punishment of sinners and is often translated “hell” or “the fires of hell” (Mt 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28;

18:9; 23:15, 33; Mk 9:43, 45, 47; Jas 3:6). It is usually used in connection with the final judgment and often has the suggestion that the punishment spoken of is eternal. Gehenna is derived by transliteration from the Hebrew of the OT, “valley of Hinnom” or the “valley of the son of Hinnom,” a ravine on the south side of Jerusalem. This valley was the center of idolatrous worship in which children were burned by fire as an offering to the heathen god Molech (2 Chr 28:3; 33:6). In the time of Josiah it became a place of abomination, polluted by dead men’s bones and the filth of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 23:10-14) and by garbage and rubbish dumped there. A fire burned continuously in this valley. It thus became a symbol of the unending fires of hell where the lost are consumed in torment. It was a symbol of judgment to be imposed on the idolatrous and disobedient (Jer 7:31-34; 32:35).

Another Greek word used to designate hell or “the lower regions” is Tartarus (2 Pt 2:4), a classical word for the place of eternal punishment. The apostle Peter uses it for the fallen angels who were thrown into hell, “committed ... to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgment.”



The Gehenna Valley outside of Jerusalem, the location of the garbage dump with its fire that was never quenched (Mk 9:43, 44, 45, 46, 48).

As noted above, there are, in addition to these terms, the very explicit and vivid phrases that clearly teach the doctrine of hell, as developed at the beginning of this article. The biblical doctrine is determined much more by these decisive phrases than by the somewhat indecisive but frequently used terms “Sheol” and “Hades.”

Justice of Eternal Punishment. It is difficult for us as sinners to understand the righteous judgment of a holy God who, on one hand, hates all evil, yet, on the other hand, loves the evildoers enough to sacrifice his only Son for their salvation from sin. Divine wrath is the necessary reaction of a holy God who hates all that is contrary to his righteous nature. When the only remedy for human sin is rejected and all appeals of a loving, seeking God for the reconciliation of rebellious sinners are refused, there is no other course of action which God himself can pursue but to leave the sinner to his self-chosen destiny. Punishment for sin is then the inevitable and inescapable response of holiness to that which is morally opposite, and it must continue as long as the sinful condition requiring it continues. There is no indication anywhere in Scripture that lost sinners in hell are capable of repentance and faith. If in this life they did not turn away from sin and receive Christ as Savior with all the favorable circumstances and opportunities afforded them on earth, it is unreasonable to think they will do so in the life to come when none of the encouragements to believe and to forsake sin are present. Punishment cannot come to an end until guilt and sin come to an end. When the sinner ultimately resists and rejects the work of the Holy Spirit whereby he is convicted of sin, there remains no more possibility of repentance or salvation. He has committed an eternal sin (Mk 3:29; Rv 22:11), which deserves eternal punishment. (Incidentally, the same word “eternal” is applied to the duration of the punishment in hell as is used for the duration of the bliss in heaven, Mt 25:46.)

The impossibility of faith and repentance in hell is seen also from the tragic reality of the depraved will, conditioned and determined by its repeated rebellion against God. Sin reproduces itself in the will, and character tends to become irrevocably fixed. God responds to endless sinning with the necessary counterpart of endless punishment.

If the question be raised, How can a loving God send men to an everlasting Hell? it must be replied that God does not choose this destiny for men; they freely choose it for themselves. God simply concurs in their self-chosen way and reveals the full consequences of their evil choice. It must always be remembered that God is not only loving; he is also holy and righteous, and there must be some adequate reckoning with justice in the universe where a revolt against God has brought evil consequences of enormous proportions.

While the duration of punishment in hell is eternal for all who have chosen that destiny for themselves, there are degrees of punishment proportional to the degrees of guilt of each individual. Only God is able to determine what those degrees are, and he will assign the consequences with perfect justice according to the responsibility of each one. Evidence of such gradations in future punishment is found in Scripture (Mt 11:20-24; Lk 12:47, 48; Rv 20:12, 13; cf. Ez 16:48-61). An obvious comparison is made in these texts between the differing intensities of punishment that are involved in the contrasting privileges, knowledge, and opportunities.

From all that has been said it should be obvious that a variety of nonbiblical views must be ruled out, however attractively they may be presented by their advocates and however popular they may be from time to time. Among these views are the erroneous, but sometimes persuasive, doctrines of universalism, annihilationism, and second probation. It must always be remembered that the Bible is our rule of faith for the doctrine of hell, however difficult the doctrine may seem for

natural reason or for human sentiment. Scripture leaves no doubt about the terrible nature and the eternal duration of hell. Rejection or neglect of this doctrine will have dire effects upon the true health and mission of the church.

Innes, D. K. "Hell." New Bible Dictionary, edited by D. R. W. Wood et al., 3rd ed., InterVarsity Press, 1996, pp. 463-64.

HELL. 'Hell' in the NT renders the Gk. word transliterated as 'Gehenna' (Mt. 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mk. 9:43, 45, 47; Lk. 12:5; Jas. 3:6). The name is derived from the Heb. gê(ben) (benê) hinnôm, the Valley of (the son[s] of Hinnom, a valley near Jerusalem (Jos. 15:8; 18:16), where children were sacrificed by fire in connection with pagan rites (2 Ki. 23:10; 2 Ch. 28:3; 33:6; Je. 7:31; 32:35). Its original derivation is obscure, but Hinnom is almost certainly the name of a person. In later Jewish writings Gehenna came to mean the place of punishment for sinners (Assumption of Moses 10:10; 2 Esdras 7:36). It was depicted as a place of unquenchable fire—the general idea of fire to express the divine judgment is found in the OT (Dt. 32:22; Dn. 7:10). The rabbinic literature contains various opinions as to who would suffer eternal punishment. The ideas were widespread that the sufferings of some would be terminated by annihilation, or that the fires of Gehenna were in some cases purgatorial (Rosh Hashanah 16b-17a; Baba Mezi'a 58b; Mishnah Eduyoth 2. 10). But those who held these doctrines also taught the reality of eternal punishment for certain classes of sinners. Both this literature and the Apocryphal books affirm belief in an eternal retribution (cf. Judith 16:17; Psalms of Solomon 3:13).

The teaching of the NT endorses this past belief. The fire of hell is unquenchable (Mk. 9:43), eternal (Mt. 18:8), its punishment is the converse of eternal life (Mt. 25:46). There is no suggestion that those who enter hell ever emerge from it. However, the NT leaves the door open for the belief that while hell as a manifestation of God's implacable wrath against sin is unending, the existence of those who suffer in it may not be. It is difficult to reconcile the ultimate fulfilment of the whole universe in Christ (Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20) with the continued existence of those who reject him. Some scholars have contended that an eternal punishment is one which is eternal in its effects; in any case eternal does not necessarily mean never-ending, but implies 'long duration extending to the writer's mental horizon' (J. A. Beet). On the other hand Rev. 20:10 does indicate conscious, never-ending torment for the devil and his agents, albeit in a highly symbolic passage, and some would affirm that a similar end awaits human beings who ultimately refuse to repent. In any case, nothing should be allowed to detract from the seriousness of our Lord's warnings about the terrible reality of God's judgment in the world to come.

In Jas. 3:6 Gehenna, like the bottomless pit in Rev. 9:1ff.; 11:7, appears to be the source of evil on the earth. NT imagery concerning eternal punishment is not uniform. As well as fire it is described

as darkness (Mt. 25:30; 2 Pet. 2:17), death (Rev. 2:11), destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord (2 Thes. 1:9; Mt. 7:21-23), and a debt to pay (Mt. 5:25-26).

In 2 Pet. 2:4 only, we find the Verb *tartaroō*, translated in RSV 'cast into hell', and rendered by the Pesh. 'cast down to the lower regions'. Tartaros is the classical word for the place of eternal punishment but is here applied to the intermediate sphere of punishment for fallen angels.

Kilcrease, Jack. "Hell." Lexham Survey of Theology, edited by Mark Ward et al., Lexham Press, 2018.

According to biblical teaching, hell is the state where those who do not have faith in Christ are consigned to suffer eternally.

The term hell is an Anglo-Saxon word, possibly of Norse origins. The term originally seems to have been associated with mythological rulers of the Germanic underworld. For this reason, it came to be a word referring to the underworld. Later, hell became the way that the biblical terms *gehenna* and, often, *sheol* were translated in the King James Version (modern English Bible translations tend to follow the KJV's rendering of *gehenna* but to leave *sheol* untranslated). The New Testament, following the lead of the LXX, often translates *sheol* with *hades*, a term borrowed from the Greek mythological underworld.

In the Old Testament, *sheol* frequently has a more neutral meaning. Oftentimes it refers to the realm of the dead in general (Deut 32:22; 1 Sam 28:11-15; Job 26:5; Pss 88:3, 5; 86:13; Isa 7:11; Ezek 31:14-16; 31:18). Other times, it simply refers to the grave (Num 16:33). *Gehenna* originally referred to the Valley of Hinnom, a place believed to have been cursed because it was the location of child sacrifice (Jer 7:31; 19:2-6). Later rabbinical literature and the Targums of the Old Testament use the term to refer to a place of suffering of the damned (see Isa 66:24). Jesus appropriates *gehenna* to refer to a state of eternal suffering throughout the Gospels (Matt 10:28; Mark 9:43).

Although the early books of the Old Testament do not explicitly speak of hell, the later books increasingly speak of the judgment of the wicked in the world to come. For example, Daniel 12 consigns the resurrected wicked to unending shame (Dan 12:2). Isaiah 66 speaks of the eternal destruction of the wicked through flame and worm (Isa 66:24). Intertestamental Jewish literature followed the trajectory of Old Testament prophecy and saw the dead being raised at the end of time to an eternal destiny, which included redemption and damnation.

Jesus himself speaks of hell often. Those who reject his message of judgment and forgiveness will suffer worse than Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt 10:28). At the end of time, Jesus will sit on a throne as the Son of Man at the end of time and judge the living and the dead. Those who have rejected Jesus will go into an eternal fire prepared for Satan and his angels (Matt 25:41). In hell, Jesus states that there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 13:50). The other books of the New

Testament also affirm the eternity of hell and its infernal nature—although interpreters disagree as to how literally these descriptions are intended to be taken. Paul talks of the eternal destruction of the wicked (2 Thess 1:9). The book of Revelation speaks of those who oppose Christ as being tormented eternally in a lake of fire (Rev 20:7-15).

The medieval and early modern Roman Catholic Church taught that hell was at the physical center of the earth. It existed alongside limbus infantum (where souls of unbaptized children dwell), limbus patrum (where the Old Testament fathers lived after death, prior to their release by Christ in the harrowing of hell on Holy Saturday), purgatory, and hell proper. According to medieval church teaching, hell and purgatory contained literal fire, albeit of a supernatural nature that is able to burn even the souls of the damned. The modern Roman Catholic Church has largely revised its teaching, making hell more into a state than a physical location.

By contrast, Protestants have generally held the idea that hell is a real and eternal state that nevertheless exists on a different plane of reality. Some, like those in the Adventist tradition, have promoted the idea that hell actually refers to God's annihilation of the damned at the last judgment and not their eternal suffering. Nevertheless, this remains a minority position.

The Orthodox church has no official dogmatic definition of hell. Nevertheless, it is the consensus view of Orthodox theologians that hell is a genuine state, though not a physical location. Heaven and hell are viewed as being spiritual states that express the departed's intensified experience of God's loving presence (heaven) or his justice (hell). The emphasis in Orthodox teaching is that hell is not actually a realm of God's active torture of the wicked but rather a state in which persons who have separated themselves from God suffer the anguish of their self-imposed separation.

Clendenen, E. Ray with Shackelford David G. "Hell." Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, edited by Chad Brand et al., Holman Bible Publishers, 2003, pp. 745-46.

HELL Usually understood as the final abode of the unrighteous dead wherein the ungodly suffer eternal punishment; the term translates one OT word and several NT words.

Old Testament Usage The only Hebrew word translated "hell" in the KJV (though not in modern translations) is Sheol. Sheol itself is a broad term that, depending on the context, may signify the abode of both the righteous dead and the ungodly dead. See Sheol.

New Testament Usage In the NT three words are translated "hell": Gehenna (Matt. 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:19; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6), Hades (Matt. 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; Rev. 1:18; 20:13-14), and Tartarus (2 Pet. 2:4). It is significant that, contrary to Sheol, none of the NT terms for hell or Gehenna are used simply for the grave. See Gehenna; Hades.

In paganism Hades originally referred to the god of the netherworld but later came to refer to the place of the dead. In Luke 16:23 Hades is definitely depicted as a place of torment (Luke 10:15). Revelation 20:13 depicts Hades as an interim place of habitation for the lost until the final judgment. Gehenna was the name of a valley on the southeast of Jerusalem into which little children were thrown as sacrifices to a god named Moloch.

There is a fundamental difference between Hades and Gehenna that is vital to the understanding of God's punitive justice. From its use in the NT, Hades is viewed as the place that receives the ungodly for the intervening period between death and resurrection. Gehenna may be equated with the everlasting fire that was originally prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41), and the lake of fire in Rev. 20:14 into which are cast death and hell. Following the resurrection and the judgment of the lost, Gehenna becomes the final place of punishment by eternal fire.

Tartarus was regarded by the ancient Greeks as that abiding place where rebellious gods and other wicked ones were punished. Its only NT use is in 2 Pet. 2:4 which says that the angels that sinned "were confined in Tartarus" and "kept unto judgment."

Additional Descriptions of Suffering After final judgment, the lost experience continual and unimaginable suffering and torment. Such phrases as "weeping and gnashing of teeth" and "outer darkness" (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; 13:28) and "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44, 46, 48 HCSB) indicate emotional and physical, as well as spiritual, suffering. Degrees of judgment and suffering are also indicated by such texts as Matt. 10:15; 11:22, 24; 18:6; Mark 6:11; Luke 10:12, 14.

Interpretations There are two broad questions to be answered which are vital to a proper understanding of the biblical teaching concerning hell. First, is the punishment of hell eternal or temporary? Second, does the Bible teach a literal or figurative hell?

Eternal or temporal? The Word of God teaches that the suffering of the lost in hell is eternal (Isa. 66:24; Matt. 25:46; Mark 9:44, 46, 48; Rev. 14:11). The assertion that God would be unfair to punish eternally a temporal sin underestimates the seriousness of sin, the spiritual nature of sin, and the supreme holiness of God.

Figurative or literal? That the Scriptures teach a literal hell is clear. The story of the rich man and Lazarus is most likely a true historical narrative revealed by Christ rather than a parable (Luke 16). Jesus teaches in Matt. 10:28 that both the soul and body can be cast into hell. This requires that hell be a literal place, for a physical body (the only kind of body there is) cannot be cast into anything metaphorical.

Among evangelicals, the most common difference of opinion is whether hell as a place of suffering is described with figurative language, literal language, or a combination of the two. Some believe the Bible teaches that hell is real, but the language used to describe it is figurative. This is an approach consistent with one taken by many concerning John's descriptions of heaven in Revelation. As heaven is more magnificent than the description in Revelation, also hell is so terrible that human language falls short.

However, there is strong evidence to indicate that literal language is used and that the Bible does in fact teach literal fire and other sufferings. The parable of the tares in Matt. 13, which discusses eternal judgment, is helpful here. The Son of man, the world, children of the kingdom, the children of the wicked one, the devil, the end of the world, the angels, the gatherings—all are literal figures in the parable. It is then natural to conclude that the burning of the tares should also be taken literally.

Few would question that the Bible reveals hell as a place of spiritual and emotional torment for the finally impenitent. Since man is a physical being (body) as well as emotional and spiritual (soul and spirit), it is most consistent with Scripture to conclude that physical suffering is also a part of the destiny of the lost. It is no wonder why “it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31 HCSB), and why the emphasis on evangelism is what makes the Great Commission great.

“ETERNAL JUDGEMENT”

Kilcrease, Jack. “The Duration of the Punishment of the Wicked.” Lexham Survey of Theology, edited by Mark Ward et al., Lexham Press, 2018.

The duration of the punishment of the wicked refers to the period of time that the damned will suffer after the last judgment.

The eternity of damnation has generally had a wide ecumenical consensus in the history of the church. However, there have been a number of significant dissents from this opinion.

Although the Old Testament does not discuss the last judgment and the eternal destiny of humanity at much length, there are a number of key passages that address the subject. Isaiah 66 speaks of the destiny of the wicked as being perpetually consumed by worms and fire. Later, Jesus would borrow this language in his descriptions of hell. Daniel 12 speaks of the righteous being raised from the dead to eternal salvation and the wicked to unending judgment. Intertestamental Jewish literature followed the trajectory of Old Testament prophecy and saw the dead being raised at the end of time to an eternal destiny.

The New Testament writings focus more on the eternal destiny of believers and unbelievers and provide a series of clear texts on the subject. Jesus describes himself as the Son of Man, an eschatological heavenly figure from Daniel 7. Many Second Temple Jews came to view the Son of Man as a cosmic judge. In keeping with this, those who respond to Jesus’ word have a positive judgment from the cosmic judge in the present, while those who reject him are already condemned. On a number of occasions in the Gospels, Jesus transfers this word of grace and judgment to his disciples. When Jesus commissions the seventy to preach in Luke 10 and Matthew 10, we are told that those who reject their word will suffer a worse fate on judgment day than Sodom and Gomorrah.

In Matthew 25, Jesus also speaks of the final judgment of the Son of Man. Those who responded to the word preached by Jesus and possess the fruit of faith are given eternal life, and those who do not are consigned to the eternal fire prepared for Satan and the fallen angels. The eternity of the final judgment is also presupposed by the rest of the New Testament.

The eternity of damnation has been relatively uncontroversial in the history of the Christian church. The Roman Catholic Church as well as the churches of the Reformation have affirmed the eternity of hell in their conciliar documents and confessions of faith. Although the Eastern Orthodox tradition lacks a specific dogma regarding hell, there has been a general consensus among Orthodox theologians that hell is a genuine state of separation from God (rather than active torture) and that it is everlasting. This being said, there have been a number of thinkers within the history of Christianity who have been uncomfortable with the idea of the eternity of hell.

In the early church, the second and third century Alexandrian theologian Origen proposed that hell was not eternal. All creatures possess free will, he argued, and therefore at any time can accept God's grace and come into a state of reconciliation with him. According to Origen, God's goodness and grace are so persistent that they will eventually bring about the salvation of all rational creatures, including Satan. Nevertheless, since even the righteous in heaven have free will, it will likewise always be possible for them to fall away. Indeed, Origen speculated that ultimately the fall into sin would be repeated by the redeemed in heaven, and, in this case, it would be necessary for the redemptive process to begin again.

An illustration of a similar view may be found in C. S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce*. In an imaginative literary form (his story, he says, is "not even a guess or a speculation at what may actually await us"), Lewis pictures people responding to the offer of God's grace in hell. For those who use their free will to escape the state of damnation, hell becomes a purgatory. For those who do not respond to God's grace, hell represents a self-imposed eternal punishment.

Yet another alternative to the eternity of hell is the theory of annihilationism. This doctrinal position was held by the early church father Arnobius and has been promoted by the Adventist tradition along with other groups coming out of the Millerite movement of the nineteenth century. Outside of these groups, it is also a position held by a minority of Anglo-American evangelical theologians. According to this view, immortality is conditional upon being a righteous believer. Judgment therefore does not consist in eternal suffering in hell; rather, the damned will be annihilated at the last judgment. Those who hold this view point to the fact that the Bible describes damnation as an eternal death. From this they draw the conclusion that death must mean a form of nonexistence.

“COMMENTARY”

11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who 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, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. 14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (NKJV)

Barker, Kenneth L. Expositor's Bible Commentary (Abridged Edition: New Testament). Zondervan Publishing House, 1994, pp. 1223-24.

Great White Throne Judgment (20:11-15)

11-15 John describes in vivid pictures the sixth last thing (see comment on 19:11-21), the final judgment of humankind. Unlike many of the vivid, imaginative paintings based on this vision, here John describes a strange, unearthly scene. Heaven and earth flee from the unidentified figure who sits on the majestic white throne. The language of poetic imagery captures the fading character of everything of the world (1Jn 2:17). Now the only reality is God seated on the throne of judgment, before whom all must appear (Heb 9:27). His verdict alone is holy and righteous (the symbolism of “white”). Since vv.11-12 make use of the theophany of Da 7:9-10, the one seated on the throne is presumably God himself; but since 22:1, 3 mention the throne of God and of the Lamb, it may well be that here Jesus shares in the judgment (Jn 5:27). God has kept the last judgment in his own hands. This vision declares that even though it may have seemed that earth's course of history ran contrary to his holy will, no single day or hour in the world's drama has ever detracted from the absolute sovereignty of God.

But who are “the dead” (vv.12-13)? Earlier in the chapter, John has mentioned the “rest of the dead” who are not resurrected till the thousand years are completed (v.5). While no resurrection is mentioned in vv.11-15, the dead are probably those who did not participate in the first resurrection. Since the second death has no power over those who were raised in the first resurrection (v.6), only the enemies of God now stand before this throne (Jn 5:24).

A moment of tension arrives. The books are opened. It is sobering to ponder that in God's sight nothing is forgotten; all will give an account of their actions (v.13). Divine judgment always proceeds on the basis of human deeds (Mt 25:41ff.; Ro 2:6; 2Co 5:10; Heb 4:12-13), recorded in the “books” (v.12). John is probably alluding to Da 7:10. We are not told whether these books contain both good and evil works or only the latter. John is more concerned about another book, the book of life, which alone seems to be decisive (vv.12, 15; cf. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 21:27). How can judgment by works and eternal life given by grace be harmonized? There is no conflict. Works are the unmistakable evidence of the loyalty of the heart; they express either belief or unbelief,

faithfulness or unfaithfulness. The judgment will reveal whether or not one's loyalties were with God and the Lamb or with God's enemies. John's theology of faith and its inseparable relation to works is the same as Jesus' and Paul's (Jn 5:29; Ro 2:6ff.). This judgment is not a balancing of good works over bad works. Those who have their names in the Lamb's book of life will also have records of righteous deeds. The opposite will also be true. The imagery reflects the delicate balance between grace and obedience (cf. comments on 19:6-8).

Three broad places are mentioned as containing the dead: the sea, death, and Hades (v.13). The sea represents the place of unburied bodies while death and Hades represent the reality of dying and the condition entered on at death (cf. 1:18; 6:8).

The imagery suggests release of the bodies and persons from their places of confinement following death; i.e., it portrays resurrection. They rise to receive sentence (Jn 5:29b). Death and Hades are personified (cf. 6:8) and are cast into the lake of fire, to be permanently destroyed (cf. 19:20; 20:10). This not only fulfills Paul's cry concerning the last enemy, death, which will be defeated by the victorious kingdom of Christ (1Co 15:26), but also signals the earth's new condition in 21:4.

In the final scene in this dark and fearful passage (v.15), it is clear from the specific Greek form of "if" that John uses that some people will be thrown into the lake of fire. We might paraphrase the verse: "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, and I assume there were such, he was thrown into the lake of fire." When taken seriously, this final note evaporates all theories of universalism.

Robertson, A. T. Word Pictures in the New Testament. Broadman Press, 1933, p. Re 20:11-15.

Revelation 20:11

A great white throne (θρονον μεγαν λευκον [thronon megan leukon]). Here μεγαν [megan] (great) is added to the throne pictures in 4:4; 20:4. The scene is prepared for the last judgment often mentioned in the N. T. (Matt. 25:31-46; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10). "The absolute purity of this Supreme Court is symbolized by the colour of the Throne" (Swete) as in Dan. 7:9; Ps. 9:1; 97:2. The name of God is not mentioned, but the Almighty Father sits upon the throne (4:2f., 9; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 21:5), and the Son sits there with him (Heb. 1:3) and works with the Father (John 5:19-21; 10:30; Matt. 25:31ff.; Acts 17:31; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1). From whose face the earth and the heaven fled away (οὐ ἀπο προσωπου ἐφυγεν ἡ γη και ὁ οὐρανός [hou apo prosōpou ephugen hē ge kai ho ouranos]). Second aorist (prophetic) active of φευγω [pheugō]. See 16:20. The non-eternity of matter is a common teaching in the O. T. (Ps. 97:5; 102:27; Is. 51:6) as in the N. T. (Mark 13:31; 2 Pet. 3:10). Was found (εὗρεθη [heurethē]). First aorist passive indicative of εὕρισκω [heuriskō]. All is now spiritual. Even scientists today are speaking of the non-eternity of the universe.

Revelation 20:12

The dead, the great and the small (τους νεκρους τους μεγάλους και τους μικρους [tous nekrous tous megalous kai tous mikrous]). The general resurrection of verse 13 is pictured by anticipation as already over. No living are mentioned after the battle of verses 7-10, though some will be living when Jesus comes to judge the quick and the dead (2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Thess. 4:13ff.). All classes and conditions (11:18; 13:16; 19:5, 18) John saw “standing before the throne” (ἑστῶτας ἔνωπιον του θρονου [hestōtas enōpion tou thronou]). Books were opened (βιβλια ἠνοιχθησαν [biblia ēnoichthēsan]). First aorist passive of ἀνοίγω [anoigō]. Like Dan. 7:10. The record of each human being has been kept in God’s books. Were judged (ἐκριθησαν [ekrithēsan]). First aorist passive indicative of κρίνω [krinō]. The sentence upon each rests upon written evidence. Another book which is the book of life (ἄλλο βιβλιον ὃ ἐστίν της ζωης [allo biblion ho estin tēs zōēs]). This book has already been mentioned (3:5; 13:8; 17:8). “It is the roll of living citizens of Jerusalem” (Swete), “the church of the first born enrolled in heaven” (Heb. 12:23). The books are “the vouchers for the book of life” (Alford). We are saved by grace, but character at last (according to their works) is the test as the fruit of the tree (Matt. 7:16, 20; 10:32f.; 25:31-46; John 15:6; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 2:10; Rev. 2:23; 20:12; 22:12).

Revelation 20:13

Gave up (ἔδωκεν [edōken]). Just “gave” (first aorist active indicative of δίδωμι [didōmi]), but for the sea to give is to give up (effective aorist). Sea as well as land delivers its dead (all kinds of dead, good and bad). Swete notes that accidental deaths will not prevent any from appearing. Milligan is sure that the sea here means “the sea of the troubled and sinful world.” Death and Hades (ὁ θανατος και ὁ ἄδης [ho thanatos kai ho haidēs]). “An inseparable pair” (Swete) as in 1:18; 6:8; 20:14. So in Matt. 16:18 “the gates of Hades” means the power of death. Etymologically Hades is the unseen world where all who die are as opposed to this visible world, but in actual use Hades is sometimes treated as the abode of the unrighteous (Luke 16:23). Charles thinks that this is true here, though there is nothing to show it apart from the personification of death and Hades and the casting of both into the lake of fire in verse 14. Here again “each man” (ἕκαστος [hekastos]) receives judgment according to his deeds (Matt. 16:27; 1 Cor. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 2:6; 14:12; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2:23).

Revelation 20:14

Were cast (ἐβλήθησαν [eblēthēsan]). As the devil (20:10) followed the two beasts (19:20) into the same dread lake of fire. Death is personified and is disposed of, “the last enemy” (1 Cor. 15:26) and Paul sings the paean of victory over death (1 Cor. 15:54f., from Hos. 13:14). Hades has no more terrors, for the saints are in heaven. There is no more fear of death (Heb. 2:15), for death is no more (Rev. 21:4). The second death (2:11; 20:6; 21:8) is here identified as in 21:8 with the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:15

If any was not found written in the book of life (εἰ τις οὐκ εὕρεθη ἐν τῇ βιβλῷ τῆς ζωῆς [ei tis ouch heurethē en tēi biblōi tēs zōēs]). Condition of first class with εἰ [ei] and the first aorist passive indicative of εὕρισκω [heuriskō]. In this short sentence the doom is told of all who are out of Christ, for they too follow the devil and the two beasts into the lake of fire (the counterpart of the Gehenna of fire, Matt. 5:22). There is no room here for soul sleeping, for an intermediate state, for a second chance, or for annihilation of the wicked. In Dan. 12:2 there is a resurrection to death as well as to life and so in John 5:29; Acts 24:15.

Walvoord, John F. "Revelation." The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, edited by J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2, Victor Books, 1985, pp. 982-83.

The judgment of the great white throne (20:11-15)

1. THE RESURRECTION AND JUDGMENT OF THE WICKED DEAD (20:11-13)

20:11. The final five verses of chapter 20 introduce the judgment at the end of human history and the beginning of the eternal state. John wrote, I saw a great white throne. The events here described clearly follow the thousand years of verses 1-6. The great white throne apparently differs from the throne mentioned more than 30 times in Revelation beginning with 4:2. It apparently is located neither in heaven nor earth but in space, as suggested by the statement, Earth and sky fled from His presence, and there was no place for them. It is not indicated who sits on this throne, but probably it is Christ Himself as in 3:21 (cf. Matt. 19:28; 25:31; John 5:22; 2 Cor. 5:10—though the throne in these references is not necessarily the same throne as in Rev. 20:11). While Christ is now seated on the throne in heaven and will be seated on the Davidic throne on earth in the Millennium (Matt. 25:31), this white throne judgment is a special situation.

The question has been raised as to whether the earth and the starry heavens as they are today will be destroyed at this point in the future or will be simply restored to a new state of purity. Many references in the Bible suggest that the earth and the heavens, as now known, will be destroyed (cf. Matt. 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 16:17; 21:33; 2 Peter 3:10-13). This is confirmed by the opening statement of Revelation 21, "the first heaven and the first earth had passed away."

The present universe was created like a gigantic clock which is running down, and if left to itself, would ultimately come to a state of complete inactivity. Inasmuch as God created the universe and set it in motion for the purpose of enacting the drama of sin and redemption, it would seem proper to begin anew with a new heaven and a new earth suitable for His eternal purpose and built on a different principle. The new heaven and new earth described in chapter 21 has no similarity to the present earth and heaven.

20:12. The purpose of establishing the great white throne is to judge the dead. John wrote that the dead, great and small, stood before the throne. From other Scriptures it seems that all the righteous dead have been raised, including Old Testament saints, the dead of the Great Tribulation, and the church saints, the body of Christ (see comments on v. 5). Thus it may be assumed that verses 11-15 refer to the judgment of the wicked dead, who according to verse 5 would not be resurrected until after the thousand years and will have no part in what is called “the first resurrection.”

At that judgment John saw books ... opened, including a book called the book of life. The text does not state clearly what these books are, but the first opened books may refer to human works and “the book of life” is the record of those who are saved (cf. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27). The fact that these dead have not been raised before is evidence in itself that they do not have eternal life and that their judgment is a judgment of their works.

All final judgments deal with works, whether the works of Christians rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ or the works of the unsaved which are in view here. The question of who is saved is determined not in heaven but in life on earth. What is revealed here is the confirmation of one’s destiny by means of God’s written records.

Some view the book of life as the record of all the living and that when the unsaved die their names are deleted from it. A better view is that the book is the record of those who are saved whose names were “written in the book of life from the creation of the world” (17:8). Regardless of which view is taken, at this time only the saved are in the book of life.

20:13. In order for the wicked dead to be judged ... the sea ... death, and hades will give up their dead. Those who are unsaved at the time of death go immediately to a state of conscious punishment described in the Old Testament as sheol and in the New Testament as hades. Neither sheol nor hades ever refer to the eternal state and should not be considered equivalent to the English word “hell,” which properly is the place of eternal punishment. The lake of fire (vv. 14-15) referred to as “the fiery lake of burning sulfur” (19:20) is the same as gehenna (cf. Matt. 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6) and is translated “hell” in the NIV and KJV with the word “fire” added in several passages. Actually gehenna was originally a name for the place of burning refuse, located in the Valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem. The term, however, goes far beyond this geographic background and refers to eternal punishment.

The statement “death and hades gave up the dead” means that the physical bodies of the unsaved will be joined with their spirits which have been in hades. The mention of “the sea” giving up its dead makes it clear that regardless of how far a body has disintegrated, it will nevertheless be resurrected for this judgment.

2. THE LAKE OF FIRE (20:14-15)

20:14-15. Following the great white throne judgment death and hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death, the final destination of the wicked. The doctrine of eternal punishment has always been a problem to Christians who enjoy the grace of God and

salvation in Christ. The Bible is clear, however, that the punishment of the wicked is eternal. This is confirmed in verse 10, where the beast and the false prophet are still in the lake of fire after the thousand years of Christ's millennial reign. Though the wicked dead will receive resurrection bodies, they will be quite unlike the resurrection bodies of the saints. The former people will continue to be sinful but will be indestructible and will exist forever in the lake of fire.

Though many have attempted to find some scriptural way to avoid the doctrine of eternal punishment, as far as biblical revelation is concerned there are only two destinies for human souls; one is to be with the Lord and the other is to be forever separated from God in the lake of fire. This solemn fact is motivation for carrying the gospel to the ends of the earth whatever the cost, and doing everything possible to inform and challenge people to receive Christ before it is too late.

Morris, Leon. Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary. InterVarsity Press, 1987, pp. 228-30.

The last judgment (20:11-15)

John speaks now of an awe-inspiring judgment. All the dead are judged. This is the final overthrow of the wicked and even of death and Hades. Beasley-Murray points out that in chapters 6 to 19 we have the judgment of God in history, here his judgment on history.

11. John depicts a scene of infinite majesty. He saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. He does not tell us whether this was God or Christ but 'he that sits on the throne' usually means God (e.g. 5:1, 7, 13), so it is probably the Father who is meant here. Sometimes we are told that Christ is to be the Judge of all (Matt. 25:31-46; John 5:22), while Paul can refer to both the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10) and that of God (Rom. 14:10). We should understand that the Father is the Judge, but that he judges through the Son (he 'has entrusted all judgment to the Son', John 5:22).

Of this scene Kiddle says, 'every irrelevance is cast aside, until the theme is stated in stark simplicity; nothing is allowed to distract our eyes from the spectacle of the Judge, and the judged. It is John's rare power of laying bare an essential truth, without swerving aside into unnecessary qualification and expansion, that is responsible for the omission of Christ's figure in the last Assize.' John invests the scene with the greatest solemnity. There was something so terrible in the demeanour of him on the throne that earth and heaven themselves fled away from him. There was no place for them, i.e. they were completely destroyed.

12. The dead stood before the throne, great and small. None was excepted. Books were opened (cf. Dan. 7:10). John does not say what books these were, but the context shows that they were books in which were recorded the deeds of all people. Another book sets this one off from the rest. As it is called the book of life, it is that in which are inscribed the names of those to whom God gives eternal life. Sweet points out that NEB, 'the roll of the living', misses the truth that the book

'embodies the redemptive intention of (the Lamb's) sacrifice; cf. those "written for life" in Jerusalem in Isa. 43'. The dead were judged according to what was written, according to what they had done. It is the common New Testament teaching that judgment is on the basis of works.

13. The separate mention of the sea and death and Hades as giving up the dead in them is a way of indicating that all the dead are included. None is overlooked. It is carping criticism to complain that the sea was destroyed in verse 11 and is in existence here. We have seen many times that John does not try to keep his visions consistent (see on 1:17). Earlier his thought was that in the end the universe will pass away. Here it is that all the dead, wherever they have died, are included in the judgment. He expresses both ideas vividly as befits a seer relating visions.

Some have said that only the wicked are in mind here, affirming that in Revelation Hades is never neutral but that it always refers to the abode of the departed wicked. This is sharply criticized by Kiddle: 'If "Hades" is so evil that the righteous may not dwell there, "Death" also is so evil that the righteous may not die; the two are wedded in one phrase. We must set ourselves against such absurdities: "Death" is the common fate of men, Christian and pagan together: and "Hades" is their common destination, until the Judgment day brings release.' Some, again, think that the mention of the dead in the sea separate from those in Hades means that those who perish at sea do not go to Hades. But John is not concerned with the minutiae of the disposal of the dead. He is affirming strongly that all the dead, wherever they are, are included in the judgment. And he repeats that all were judged according to what they had done.

14. Just as the beast and the false prophet and the devil had all been thrown into the lake of fire (19:20; 20:10), so now death and Hades were thrown into the same lake. This is not an easy idea, but John appears to mean that death and Hades are ultimately as powerless as the other forces of evil. Finally there is no power but that of God. All else is completely impotent. The end of the verse explains that being cast into this lake is the second death.

15. The chapter ends with the affirmation that anyone whose name did not appear in the book of life ... was thrown into this lake. John sees a sharp division into the saved and the lost. In the end people will either share in the bliss of heaven or find their place in the lake of fire.

Jamieson, Robert, et al. Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible. Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, p. 600.

11. great—in contrast to the "thrones," Rev 20:4.

white—the emblem of purity and justice.

him that sat on it—the Father [ALFORD]. Rather, the Son, to whom "the Father hath committed all judgment." God in Christ, that is, the Father represented by the Son, is He before whose judgment-seat we must all stand. The Son's mediatorial reign is with a view to prepare the

kingdom for the Father's acceptance. When He has done that, He shall give it up to the Father, "that God may be all in all," coming into direct communion with His creatures, without intervention of a Mediator, for the first time since the fall. Heretofore Christ's Prophetic mediation had been prominent in His earthly ministry, His Priestly mediation is prominent now in heaven between His first and second advents, and His Kingly shall be so during the millennium and at the general judgment.

earth and heaven fled away—The final conflagration, therefore, precedes the general judgment. This is followed by the new heaven and earth (Rev 21:1-27).

12. the dead—"the rest of the dead" who did not share the first resurrection, and those who died during the millennium.

small and great—B has "the small and the great." A, Vulgate, Syriac, and ANDREAS have "the great and the small." The wicked who had died from the time of Adam to Christ's second advent, and all the righteous and wicked who had died during and after the millennium, shall then have their eternal portion assigned to them. The godly who were transfigured and reigned with Christ during it, shall also be present, not indeed to have their portion assigned as if for the first time (for that shall have been fixed long before, Jn 5:24), but to have it confirmed for ever, and that God's righteousness may be vindicated in the case of both the saved and the lost, in the presence of an assembled universe. Compare "We must ALL appear," &c. Ro 14:10; 2 Co 5:10. The saints having been first pronounced just themselves by Christ out of "the book of life," shall sit as assessors of the Judge. Compare Mt 25:31, 32, 40, "these My brethren." God's omniscience will not allow the most insignificant to escape unobserved, and His omnipotence will cause the mightiest to obey the summons. The living are not specially mentioned: as these all shall probably first (before the destruction of the ungodly, Rev 20:9) be transfigured, and caught up with the saints long previously transfigured; and though present for the confirmation of their justification by the Judge, shall not then first have their eternal state assigned to them, but shall sit as assessors with the Judge.

the books ... opened—(Da 7:10). The books of God's remembrance, alike of the evil and the good (Ps 56:8; 139:4; Mal 3:16): conscience (Ro 2:15, 16), the word of Christ (Jn 12:48), the law (Ga 3:10), God's eternal counsel (Ps 139:16).

book of life—(Rev 3:5; 13:8; 21:27; Ex 32:32, 33; Ps 69:28; Da 12:1; Php 4:3). Besides the general book recording the works of all, there is a special book for believers in which their names are written, not for their works, but for the work of Christ for, and in, them. Therefore it is called, "the Lamb's book of life." Electing grace has singled them out from the general mass.

according to their works—We are justified by faith, but judged according to (not by) our works. For the general judgment is primarily designed for the final vindication of God's righteousness before the whole world, which in this checkered dispensation of good and evil, though really ruling the world, has been for the time less manifest. Faith is appreciable by God and the believer alone (Rev 2:17). But works are appreciable by all. These, then, are made the evidential test to decide men's eternal state, thus showing that God's administration of judgment is altogether righteous.

13. death and hell—Greek, “Hades.” The essential identity of the dying and risen body is hereby shown; for the sea and grave give up their dead. The body that sinned or served God shall, in righteous retribution, be the body also that shall suffer or be rewarded. The “sea” may have a symbolical [CLUVER from AUGUSTINE], besides the literal meaning, as, in Rev 8:8; 12:12; 13:1; so “death” and “hell” are personifications (compare Rev 21:1). But the literal sense need hardly be departed from: all the different regions wherein the bodies and souls of men had been, gave them up.

14. Death and Hades, as personified representatives of the enemies of Christ’ and His Church, are said to be cast into the lake of fire to express the truth that Christ and His people shall never more die, or be in the state of disembodied spirits.

This is the second death—“the lake of fire” is added in A, B, and ANDREAS. English Version, which omits the clause, rests on inferior manuscripts. In hell the ancient form of death, which was one of the enemies destroyed by Christ, shall not continue, but a death of a far different kind reigns there, “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord”: an abiding testimony of the victory of Christ.

15. The blissful lot of the righteous is not here specially mentioned as their bliss had commenced before the final judgment. Compare, however, Mt 25:34, 41, 46.

Kistemaker, Simon J., and William Hendriksen. Exposition of the Book of Revelation. Baker Book House, 1953-2001, pp. 545-49.

The Judgment Day

20:11-15

The fourth picture reveals a heavenly aspect of the final judgment. In five verses John discloses the end of cosmic time and thus the end of world history. God’s plan has been fulfilled and everything that had to be taken care of has been completed. God now calls everyone into his courtroom, and as the books are opened, everyone is judged in accord with divine justice. The division between the saints and the ungodly is irrevocable and final. The ones whose names are recorded in the book of life are forever with the Lord, but those who have spurned him are forever cut off.

11. And I saw a great white throne and him who sat on it, from whose face earth and heaven fled, and their place was not found anymore.

a. “And I saw a great white throne and him who sat on it.” The uncomplicated description of the throne is preceded by two adjectives, great and white. John writes the Greek adjective *me-gas* (great) eighty times in Revelation to denote something that is larger than life. In this verse, John

portrays God's throne in eschatological dimensions, because human beings are unable to fathom heavenly proportions. Further, the throne is white, the color depicting purity, holiness, and victory. But here it has the additional meaning of divine justice that eminently describes this throne. It means that not even one speck or wrinkle mars the whiteness of God's perfect justice.

When John portrays God, he avoids referring to him by name. In typical Jewish fashion, he circumscribes him with the words "him who sat on it [the throne]." Similarly, with reference to the throne room scene, John uses the same phraseology (4:2-3, 9-10; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16). God is too awesome to be described in human terms. John undoubtedly had in mind "the Ancient of Days" taking his seat in the throne room to render judgment (Dan. 7:9-10). But also the Son of Man, namely, Jesus, sits on the throne of his Father to judge the living and the dead, spiritually speaking. In fact, there are numerous passages in the New Testament that testify to the fact that God has given the Son authority to pass judgment. God judges the human race in and through his Son.

b. "From whose face earth and heaven fled, and their place was not found anymore." When the Judgment Day comes, God's creation will be affected in such a way that the earth will undergo a complete change. At that moment catastrophic events of enormous proportions will happen, for the atmosphere will be rolled up like a scroll to be replaced by the new heavens and the new earth (6:14; 16:20; 21:1; 2 Pet. 3:7, 10, 12-13). The old order disappears to give place to the new. The substance and the existence of this earth does not disappear, but its external form dissolves. Although a literal interpretation would suggest the complete destruction and annihilation of the heavens and earth, Scripture teaches a meltdown of the elements but not their elimination (2 Pet. 3:10, 12). That is, they are renewed rather than replaced. In his sermon at Solomon's Colonnade, Peter spoke of a time when God would "restore everything" (Acts 3:21). Also Paul does not speak of a dissolution of creation but of its deliverance from bondage (Rom. 8:21). Not creation itself but the defects of the old order are removed to make place for the new.

12. And I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before the throne. And the books were opened, and another book was opened which is the book of life, and the dead were judged according to their works by the things written in these books.

John is given a view of the last judgment, and he notices the dead standing before God's throne. All those who have died since God pronounced the curse on the human race appear before the Judge of all the earth. All of them are raised from the dead to receive a sentence of acquittal or condemnation, of life or "second death." All people great and small, that is, all human beings, appear before the Judge.

Repeatedly, John returns to Daniel's prophecy that portrays the Judgment Day with multitudes standing before the court of heaven; when the court is seated, the books are opened (Dan. 7:10; 12:1-2). The books contain records of everyone's deeds of good and evil, for God knows everything that has been said and done and rewards each one accordingly (Rev. 2:23; 18:6; 22:12; Ps. 28:4; 62:12; Rom. 2:6). Thus, everyone is judged in accordance with the records, but this does not imply a doctrine of works righteousness. A person is judged and declared absolved on the basis of whether his or her name is recorded in the book of life. Scripture often refers to the book of life or

a similar record. In Revelation this book is of greater importance than the books that have recorded a persons's deeds. The term book of life appears six times (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27), and the expression books occurs twice (v. 12). It is not because of anyone's works but because of God's electing grace that one's name is recorded in the book of life. What then is the purpose of opening the books? Paul supplies the answer by saying, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Although believers are responsible for their actions, they are forgiven through Christ. But those who have rejected Christ are held accountable for their words and deeds that testify against them.

For believers, God's grace goes hand in hand with human responsibility. Paul exhorts his readers to "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:12a-13). Scripture puts divine election on the one hand and human responsibility on the other, but it refrains from solving the mystery of where these two meet. God has graciously chosen his people through Christ, which is evident in the names of his people recorded in the book of life. They keep the Word of God and live by the testimony of Jesus, and they love God's commandments and cherish his precepts (Ps. 19:7-11; 119:127-28). They are the Lord's faithful witnesses even to the point of death (2:13; 6:9), and they perform good works to show their thankfulness to God, so that his name is honored and praised. By contrast, the incriminating evidence the opened books present against the unbelievers results in their banishment and never-ending separation from the living God (Matt. 25:46).

13. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each one was judged according to his works.

a. "And the sea gave up the dead that were in it." The Bible views the sea as a source of fear. Jonah overcame his fear when through willful disobedience he boarded a ship that set sail in a westerly direction directly opposite from Nineveh to which God had instructed the prophet to go (Jonah 1:3). Paul traveled mostly by land and occasionally sailed by ship, prompted by either haste or necessity. And John writing about the new heavens and the new earth, remarks that "the sea was no more" (21:1). The capricious and unpredictable sea has no place in the new creation.

Having claimed the lives of countless multitudes, the sea at God's command gave up the dead that were in it. The sea is symbolic of a demonic power that holds the invisible graves of its victims. The ancients attached great importance to burial, which was denied those whom the sea had swallowed, and whose bodies decomposed. For a corpse to be left unburied, here because of the sea's power, was an act of irreverence (compare Jer. 8:1-2; 14:16; Ezek. 29:5). Some scholars note that the disappearance of heaven and earth (v. 12) seems to conflict with the presence of the sea. But this is a matter of authorial freedom of placing "events in the reverse of their logical order (see 3:3, 17; 5:5; 6:4; 10:4, 9; 22:14)."

b. "And Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each one was judged according to his works." If the sea is a power that holds the dead, so are Death and Hades, which are always mentioned together in the Apocalypse (v. 14; 1:18; 6:8). Jesus hold the keys of both Death and Hades, depriving them of their authority. Now is the time for judging to determine the eternal

destiny of every individual, regardless of whether death was by drowning, murder, or natural causes. Aside from the fact that multitudes of sinners stand before God's judgment seat, the records of each person will be carefully reviewed with verdicts of either innocent or guilty. There is neither time nor place for repentance, because repentance belonged to the cosmic era. The verdicts are irrevocable.

14. And Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

15. And if anyone is not found written in the book of life, he is cast into the lake of fire.

The phrase lake of fire occurs only in Revelation, and that for a total of six times (19:20; 20:10, 14 [twice], 15; 21:8). John explains the significance of this phrase by identifying it as the second death. This is the place where the wicked are forever separated from the living God to suffer eternally the torments of hell. It is the place in which the wicked spend eternity. But how do we understand the terms Death and Hades? First, Death is a state and Hades a place. Next, these two are intricately connected, as in the fourth seal where the rider on the pale horse is Death, and Hades is following closely behind him (6:8). Hades as the place where the souls of unbelievers are kept is not to be identified as the grave in which the bodies of both believers and unbelievers repose. By contrast, hell is the place of endless suffering. When both Death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire, the authority they exercised in cosmic time has ended.

If Death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire, which is the same as the second death, will their authority continue in that state and place? Their temporary power will become a permanent power in the lake of fire over the unbelievers suffering in hell. The anguish and distress of the wicked in hell is unimaginable. The parable of the rich man (Luke 16:19-31) describes hell as agony, fire, and a place of torment. There the rich man was cut off from Abraham and Lazarus in heaven, and there he suffered the second death that is both spiritual and physical.

John comes to the conclusion of his judgment vision, and once more he stresses the lot of the wicked. Their names are not recorded in the book of life, and therefore they are thrown into the lake of fire. "Not every lost person will undergo the sufferings of a Judas! God will be perfectly just, and each person will suffer precisely what he deserves."

The comfort God's people receive is that their names are recorded in the book of life; they are the possession of the Lamb who was slain for them. John links the expression book of life to the Lamb (13:8; 21:27). To be forever with the Lord is the reward he grants his people whose names are in this book.

Greek Words, Phrases, and Constructions in 20:11-13

Verse 11

οὗ ἀπὸ τοῦ προσώπου—the construction is disputable because the normal flow would be to place the possessive personal pronoun αὐτοῦ following the noun instead of the genitive relative pronoun at the beginning (compare Jer. 22:25 LXX).

Verse 13

ἐκρίθησαν ἕκαστος—the plural verb is followed by the singular subject, which is understood as distributive.

Lenski, R. C. H. The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation. Lutheran Book Concern, 1935, pp. 599-612.

What Happens at the End of the 1,000 Years: the Judgment, 20:11-15

11) This vision presents the last judgment. Practically all symbolism is dropped. The dead stand before the throne, both the great and the small, and “judged were they, each one, according to their works”—language that is as literal as can be written. This vision completes the group presented in chapter 20. It does more: it interprets the preceding vision of the battle and thus all three visions of battle, which we have found to be three views of one and the same battle, see the introductory paragraphs in 19:11. “For the πόλεμον of the day, the great one, of God the Almighty” in 16:14, is the same battle as ποιῆσαι τὸν πόλεμον, “to do the battle with the One sitting upon the horse and with his army” in 19:19, and the same as “to gather them together for the πόλεμον, the battle,” in 20:8. Three times not “α πόλεμος” but “the πόλεμος,” the one, not now one, now another, now a third.

Yet in the views we have in these visions, all marked so plainly by “the battle,” there is never a trace of a battle mêlée, one warrior piercing another, many in the army of the King of kings going down before the victory is won. The prominent verb is συναγαγεῖν (συνήγαγεν) in 16:14, 16; συνηγμένα (participle) in 19:19; and again συναγαγεῖν in 20:8. The antichristian forces do this “assembling” on the grandest scale in 20:8. The King of kings, even in 19:14, has no need of assembling: his angel armies simply “follow” him. For with his angels he comes to the final judgment of all the antichristian hordes with their leader “the Gog” (20:8), their dominating power (the beast), and their propaganda (the second beast, the pseudo-prophet), their infatuating seduction (the whore, the seductress). The final judgment is still withheld in 16:16; we are shown only the assembling. But in 19:20, and in 20:9, 10 the final judgment is put into the symbolism by means of the significant ἐβλήθησαν—ἐβλήθη which are repeated in the vision of the actual final judgment in 20:14, 15: ἐβλήθησαν ἐβλήθη, compare Matt. 25:46, “and these shall go away into punishment eternal.”

All this means, as we see it, that these visions of battle symbolize the final judgment, Satan and all the antichristianity and the antichristian power, seduction, and following he has produced are thrown—thrown—THROWN into the lake of the fire, hell. It is thus that the vision of 20:11-15 properly closes the series, closes it by now at the end furnishing the one thing yet needed, the literal interpretation, which is couched, as we have indicated, in literal language. The coherence is complete. The “Hallelujah” of 19:1, etc., is in its proper place.

In this light we translate: And I saw a great white throne and the One sitting upon it, from whose face fled the earth and the heaven, and place was not found for them. 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 of the life. And judged were the dead from the things having been written in the books according to their works. And the sea gave the dead, those in it; and the death and the hades gave the dead, those in them. And judged were they, each one, according to their works. And the death and the hades were thrown into the lake of the fire. This death is the second one, the lake of the fire. And if anyone was not found as having been written in the book of the life, thrown was he into the lake of the fire.

“A throne” is here again the symbol of power, rule, and dominion, and thus the seat of the King. In this significance is included the power of judging even as in Scripture kings always act as judges, namely as the final and supreme court. In v. 4 those who sat on their thrones received the judgment as their royal right. Here now is the supreme throne for the final judgment of the universe. It is “great” indeed, fitting “the One sitting upon it,” i.e., exercising the royal power of judging, and befitting the final, universal judgment that is now being held. Some think that this One is God and not Christ and point to 4:2, but overlook 3:21. While this is a minor point, yet when Jesus describes the judgment in Matt. 25:31 (compare 24:30) and there, as well as in John 5:27, names himself, “the Son of man,” as the judge, we interpret “the One sitting on the great white throne” accordingly. Why raise issues on every point? “White” is throughout the symbol of holiness. See this color in 19:11 and the names of the One sitting and the defining clause, “and in righteousness he judges,” he who is “King of kings and Lord of lords” (19:16) and now judges on his “white” ’ throne.

“From whose face fled the earth and the heaven, and place was not found for them,” reveals his greatness but does far more. This is not an additional, preliminary judgment such as the earth has often seen before; this is the last, supreme judgment. It is not held on earth. Those who think that the throne will rest on this globe and then wonder about its globular shape, etc., should look anew at Matt. 24:29, 30. There will be no difficulty on this or on any other score, in particular as to how all will stand and find place before this throne and this Judge. It is hopeless with our poor mundane imagination to try in any way to picture the actual judgment scene which transcends all human conception. “The earth and the heaven” are mentioned together: the earth and the heaven as they have stood since creation, on which and under which men have lived since Adam, on which and under which Satan has built up sin and antichristianity.

“Ἐφυγεν, “fled,” is less strong than παρελεύσονται, “shall pass away,” in 2 Pet. 3:10; Matt. 24:35; Mark 13:31, and ἀπολοῦνται, “shall perish,” in Heb. 1:11. “Fled” is more like παλαιωθήσονται, “shall become old,” in Heb. 1:11. This last verb matches Rev. 21:1, 5. “Fled from his face” does not mean “were annihilated,” for many flee and still exist. The question as to what will become of our mundane heaven and earth, whether they shall be annihilated by fire or shall be made new and rejuvenated, cannot be decided on fractional evidence; one must consider all the passages together, including Rom. 8:22, etc., and Rev. 21:1-5, which plainly teach a rejuvenation, and not an annihilation. It is unfair to say of this finding that “it is dictated by the basic view which does not reckon with creative acts of the living God but would like to comprehend everything as being due

to evolution” (Kliefoth). It is a plain question of what the Word says. “No place was found,” none whatever, for the earth and the heaven, not even a place where Christ could now use them for the final judgment.

12) Since this section centers on the judgment, nothing more is said about what became of the earth and the heaven. John writes: “I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne.” “The dead” means those who had died during the whole time that the old heaven and the earth stood, all the dead, from Adam on to the last one who gave up his soul in physical death, which is briefly expressed by the apposition: “the great and the small,” even the tiny babes. “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad,” 1 Cor. 5:10. “We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ,” Rom. 14:10. “And before him (who sits upon the throne of his glory) shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats,” Matt. 25:32. In all these passages as here in Revelation the resurrection of all of these, sheep as well as goats, is implied: “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,” John 5:28, 29.

Why do we add this proof for the simple Catechism truth which we teach our children, which the church has ever unitedly confessed: “From whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead”? Because the chiliasts and the double resurrectionists deny this truth. They posit a bodily resurrection at the beginning of the 1,000 years of the millennium for the martyrs and the confessors mentioned in v. 4, which they call “the first resurrection” (v. 5), making this a bodily one. “The dead, the great and the small,” standing before the throne they refer to the wicked dead who died before and also during the millennium; these are before the throne by virtue of what the chiliasts call the second bodily resurrection. In regard to the godly who die during the millennium we receive different answers. What “the first resurrection” means has been explained: it is not bodily and also not spiritual. The only bodily resurrection of which the Scriptures know is the one occurring at the last day when all the bodily dead, both the godly and the ungodly, shall rise at the voice of the Lord (John 5:28, 29). About all of them John speaks here.

But did not Jesus say in John 5:24 that the believer “comes not into κρίσις, judgment”? Yes, but why cite only this statement and not John 3:18: “The one believing in me is not judged; the one not believing has already been judged”? If, according to these two statements, the believer is not judged at the last day (as the double resurrectionists and the Chiliasts say), then, by the same token, also the unbeliever is not judged at the last day, for he has already been judged, long, long ago when he was in his unbelief, even before he died, Jesus himself says so apart from any vision. The Scripture speaks of two judgments; one that is secret and occurs now during the earthly life and at death, the other that is public and occurs at the last day before the universe. Both of these judgments apply to both the godly and the ungodly of all time. As to the latter judgment, Jesus himself describes it in detail in Matt. 25:31-46. Are the godly there? Is a verdict pronounced on them? Just as there is on the ungodly!

“Not to come into κρίσις” and “not to be judged” do not mean: not to stand among the dead at the last day. We have two verdicts that shall be pronounced at that day. They are exact opposites.

Read them in Matt. 25. John says: “And judged were the dead from the things written in the books according to their works,” which is precisely what Jesus says in Matthew, all are judged. To pronounce verdicts is to judge, to hear the verdict regarding oneself is to be judged. But to hear it as one among those at the right hand of the Judge is to hear the sweetest music, is not to come into judgment, not to be judged, but to have judging and judgment changed into the invitation: “Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom!” Matt. 25:34.

“And books were opened; and another book was opened which is of the life.” Thus was the judgment held, “judged were the dead from the things written in the books according to their works.” So Jesus says in Matt. 25 and names the works, those of both the godly and the ungodly. In Rev. 3:5 we have explained the book of the life at length and need not repeat. But other books are mentioned here. What they contain is stated: judged “from (ἐκ to indicate source) the things that have been written in the (these) books” (and are thus things of permanent record), judged thus “according to their works.” These books contain the record of their works. It is the constant teaching of the Scriptures that at the final public judgment we shall be judged according to our works. This is repeated here in v. 14 with the addition of ἕκαστος: they, “everyone.” The record and the judgment are not en masse but individual. As regards the book of life, this contains the names of the godly (3:5; 13:8).

All that is said in regard to the books and the book and their being opened is figurative and indicates the infallibility of the omniscient Judge on this great white (holy) throne and is Old Testament language (see 3:5). Thus also the number of the “books” and in addition to them this “book of the life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (as it is termed in 13:8; compare 21:27) is figurative, the plural expressing the many, many works of all the many, many who are to be judged. The idea is not that the one book is large enough to record the names of the godly because they are few in number; but that, many though they are, their names are precious and are all recorded in this one book. In this book Calvinism finds its decree of absolute election. The idea that the “books” contain only the works of the ungodly is as untenable as that the book contains the vouchers for what is in the books.

But if the books contain a record of the works of all the dead, will they not contain also the bad works which the godly have done as well as their good works? Not one bad work will they show. Peter’s denial you will seek in vain. The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin, 1 John 1:7. Ours is the ἄφεσις, “the dismissal,” remission, which blots out all our sins. Those “books” contain nothing but our good works and even these as made perfect by the righteousness of Christ, and these works as the public evidence of our faith, as such evidence demanding of the holy Judge the corresponding verdict, publicly justifying him in rendering it, demanding from the universe acknowledgment for the justice of the verdict and of the Judge. That is why the final judgment is public and why it includes and must include all men despite the chiliasts’ contention to the contrary.

13) When John writes: “The sea gave the dead in it,” this means that the natural sea gave the bodies of the dead for the last judgment. Nothing is said about the rivers and the lakes, and, more important still, nothing about the earth giving the bodies that were buried in graves or scattered in disintegrated dust. Fortunately, no one has thought that the sea held souls. Yet a few make “the

sea” symbolical, like 17:15, “the waters, peoples, and multitudes are and nations and tongues”; but how “peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues” can give the dead symbolically or in any other sense they do not explain to others. The sea alone is mentioned in regard to the bodies because the sea is so deep. A body sunk in its depth seems to be beyond all recovery (Matt. 18:6), yet if all the bodies in the sea come back to judgment, it does not need to be said that those on the earth will also return. To think that all the dead in the sea are wicked dead is obviously impossible.

The dead who stand before the throne are neither only bodies devoid of their souls, nor only souls devoid of their bodies, but the dead whose souls and whose bodies are united again, thus to be judged at the last day. Hence John writes, “and the death and the hades gave the dead in them.” Separated from their bodies by death, the souls, too, are returned for the final judgment and are now again joined to their bodies. Whether one regards ὁ θάνατος and ὁ ᾄδης as personifications of two powers or leaves them unpersonified like “the sea,” the Greek articles would be used, and although but one verb is used, it is the plural and, like the two articles, indicates a plural subject: “the death” is not identical with “the hades.” “The death” is the power which separated the soul from the body in the godly as well as in the ungodly and removed the soul. Where the souls of the godly are taken by “the death” has been plainly told us in v. 4. Now “the death” gives these souls that were in it so that in their bodies they may “stand before the throne” on the day of final and public judgment.

“The hades” is thus properly added; for the souls of the ungodly, which at death were transferred to hades or hell (Luke 16:23), must also appear in their bodies “to stand before the throne” for the final public judgment. This is the reason for indicating this fact about the souls of the ungodly, which is done briefly by adding “and the hades.” Hell, too, will “give.” The forms ἔδωκεν and ἔδωκαν imply no compulsion but only ready and willing giving. All shall alike stand before the throne for the public judgment, the souls again being united with their bodies. The supposition that “the hades” leads us to think that all “the dead, both the great and the small, standing before the throne” (v. 12) are only the ungodly is untenable, for it disregards what is said about “the sea,” disregards also all that is said about the last judgment in the rest of Scripture, notably in Matt. 25, as already indicated.

The double statement in v. 13 and the one in v. 11 about the flight of the earth and the heaven cause no difficulty for him who reads Matt. 24:29-31; v. 13 is added in order briefly to explain v. 12, where only the fact is stated that the dead stand before the throne. Yet once more, again with the verb placed emphatically forward, John writes: “And judged were they, each one (personally, each without exception), according to their work,” i.e., according to the public evidence that is required in a public judgment. The fact that they were judged is the main thing in this vision, judged in this way as also all Scripture states. Twice it is stated in so many literal words. What has hitherto been put into picture form, in that of battle as far as the ungodly and antichristian are concerned, is now interpreted and put into literal language; wherefore also we now have the whole of it; this judgment will pronounce publicly also on the godly. The interpretation must necessarily include the latter otherwise it would be incomplete for Scripture readers and thus also misleading.

14) “And the death and the hades were thrown into the lake of the fire. This death is the second, the lake of the fire.” The commentary on this figurative expression, “were thrown into the lake of the fire,” is 1 Cor. 15:26: “Ἐσχατος ἐχθρὸς καταργεῖται ὁ θάνατος, “as last enemy there is put out of effect (out of commission, abolished) the death” (here, too, the article), this dread power ὁ θάνατος, which, according to Rom. 5:12, “came into the world by means of the sin, and thus the death went on through to all men.” Compare also 1 Cor. 15:54, 55. Here we see the end of this death which from Adam onward tore apart all men’s souls and bodies. In the vision this end is stated symbolically, in 1 Cor. 15:26 it is stated literally.

In order to see why “the death and the hades” are made companions review the notes on 1:18 and on 6:8 where they ride out together. Here they end together. We need not say again that “the hades” is not the Totenreich. Zahn’s argument that “to be thrown into the lake of fire for the eons of the eons” means annihilation for Satan, etc., thus also for “the beast and the pseudo-prophet,” and now also for “the death and the hades,” need not again be answered; he is interested in having Satan, the devils, the damned, and the lake of fire put out of existence, for him “the second death” thus = annihilation. Here, as in 6:8, “the death and the hades” are associated as companions very much like the “beast and the pseudo-prophet” (v. 10); both pairs are personifications and not actual persons. Thus in figurative or in symbolical language all of them, like the person Satan, are “thrown into the lake of fire,” they end where Satan ends even as all four are due to Satan.

Some make “the beast and the false prophet” two human beings who are cast into the lake of fire. See, however, chapter 13. With “the death” nobody can do this, nor with “the hades.” They are not two human beings. As regards “the death,” the commentators seem well satisfied that it is here “thrown into the lake of fire.” We, too, care nothing about elaborating the figurative expression by asking what becomes of “the death” in the lake. It is enough to know that it will never kill any more.

The same is true with regard to death’s companion, “the hades.” It will never receive another wicked human soul as it did when “the death” killed wicked men on earth. The only difficulty is that, when hades means hell, and the lake of fire also means hell, we may wonder how the one can “be thrown” into the other. We have the answer in the statement: “This death (οὗτος ὁ θάνατος, subject, not οὗτος alone as in our versions) is the second death, (namely) the lake of the fire” (apposition to ὁ δεύτερος). “This death” = the throwing of the two companions, death and hades, into the lake of fire. This is the second death, namely, to put it tersely: this death is the lake of fire. Here “the second (death)” is the term that corresponds to “the first resurrection” (v. 6). Both are alike symbolical expressions. The latter refers to the transfer of the souls of the blessed into heaven, the former to the transfer of death and hades and therefore also of all the wicked who were killed bodily by the death and whose souls were at first sent to the hades into the lake of eternal fire, i.e., the wicked, now with both body and soul, are after the final judgment in hell, the lake of the fire.

The difficulty regarding the hades being thrown into the lake of the fire thus solves itself. “The Gehenna” (“the Gehenna of the fire,” Matt. 5:22), “the hades,” “the abyss,” “the lake of the

fire,” etc., all mean hell and not so many different terrible places despite what commentators and even dictionaries may say. Each of these terms has only its own connotation which is derived less from the etymology than from the use to which it is put. Thus ὁ ἄδης, “the unseen place,” (found ten times in the New Testament) = hell as the place into which the souls of the wicked go at the time of death until at the time of the resurrection the death and the hades give up these souls so that they may again be united with their bodies and thus stand before Christ’s judgment throne and receive their verdict. “The lake of the fire,” like the Jewish term “Gehenna” and “the Gehenna of the fire” = hell but as the place into which the wicked will be thrown with body and soul at the time of the final judgment.

Thus Jesus uses the right word in Luke 16:23: “In the hades having lifted up his eyes,” in the hades because the reference is to the soul of Dives, his body being buried on earth as the parable itself states. Thus again Jesus uses the right word in Matt. 10:28: “Fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna,” in Gehenna because soul and body, reunited on judgment day, are sent to hell as the place for both. As in Luke 16:23 Gehenna could not be substituted for the hades, so in Matt. 10:28 the hades could not be used in place of Gehenna. In Acts 2:27, “hades” is properly used with reference to “my soul” and is there a translation of the Hebrew sheol.

More becomes plain. Of the ten instances of the use of hades four appear in Revelation, and each of the four joins “the death” and “the hades.” We see why. Because “the death” separates the body of the wicked from, the soul and, while the body of the wicked lies in the grave (or the sea, v. 13) until judgment day, the wicked soul is kept in the hades until that day. It is thus that “the death” and “the hades” are companions in Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14. It is thus that the death and the hades are on the judgment day thrown into the lake of the fire into which the bodies and the souls of the damned are thrown (v. 15). This means an end of hell’s (hades’) holding only wicked souls that were transferred to it by the killings of temporal death. Now, after the last judgment, there is only “the second death,” “the lake of the fire,” i. e., no more holding only of souls but only the everlasting burning for Satan (v. 10) and for all his antichristian powers (19:20) and for all his dupes, the latter with body and soul, in quenchless fire (20:10).

15) This is stated in so many words: “And if anyone (at the last judgment) was not found as having been written in the book of the life, thrown was he (forward for the sake of emphasis) into the lake of the fire,” thrown body and soul. “These shall go away into everlasting punishment,” Matt. 25:46. Compare Rev. 21:8; 22:15. What about the godly? The answer is given in chapters 21, and 22. In all the visions the law of paucity governs: so much and no more is told, the reader is kept in expectation to the very end of the last vision.

Easley, Kendell H. Revelation. Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998, pp. 379-81.

The Judge at the White Throne (20:11-15)

SUPPORTING IDEA: At the last judgment, only those whose names were written in the Book of Life will escape being sent into eternal torment by Christ the Judge.

20:11. During his earthly ministry when Jesus taught about his Second Coming, he connected kingship closely with judging: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (Matt. 25:31-32). In Revelation 19 we saw the conquering King of kings. The presentation of Christ as Judge was delayed by the two explanatory interludes. Now John sees Jesus in his role of the Judge of all humanity.

As with the immediately preceding symbolic portraits of Christ (Lamb-Bridegroom, 19:6-10; rider on a white horse, 19:11-21), John avoids the names Jesus and Christ. He is simply him who was seated on the throne, fulfilling John 5:22: “the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son” (see also 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1). Until the victorious coming of Christ, the occupant of the throne was God; now Christ has taken his seat on a great white throne (see also 21:5). This is heaven’s throne John had first seen without describing in 4:2.

Christ as the Judge is so unimaginably great that earth and sky (literally, “heaven”) fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. This marks the disappearing of the old universe to make way for the new heaven and earth (21:1). Peter had also predicted this: “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare” (2 Pet. 3:10).

20:12-13. Not only will the Christian martyrs live again, but so will everyone else who had ever lived: the dead, great and small. None will be forgotten. Premillennialists generally believe that “the dead” here are only the wicked dead in that the righteous were already judged before the thousand-year reign of Christ. (On this view, the judgment of Matt. 25:31-46 occurs long before the judgment at the white throne.) This means both judgments conclude identically with the wicked cast into everlasting fire and so serve the same purpose. Does God take time for one judgment of those alive when Christ returns and then wait until after the millennium to let the vast majority of the wicked, those who died before Christ returned, face the same judgment?

Two kinds of “witnesses” will be brought to bear as the Judge pronounces the verdict for each one. These two witnesses John sees symbolized first as books and second as the book of life will, in each case, be in agreement.

First are the books in which what they had done was recorded. Righteous character is always revealed in righteous deeds. Thus, Scripture teaches in many places that each person will receive divine judgment based on his or her deeds (see “Deeper Discoveries”). This is not salvation on the basis of good works, but good works as evidence of salvation.

Second is the book of life. This looks at human destiny from the basis of divine sovereignty (17:8). This Book of Life has already made its way into Revelation three times as a kind of citizenship register of heaven (3:5; 13:8; 17:8). The only names written in this book were those who were saved by faith. The exact same group that believed in God alone for salvation produced righteous deeds. The exact group that had never believed in God alone for salvation failed to produce righteous deeds.

To emphasize clearly that all human beings will face final judgment, John notes that all temporary places that receive the bodies of the dead gave up the dead. This includes both the watery graves of the sea and those buried in dry-ground graves (Greek hadés). For the second time in as many verses, John notes the primary basis of judgment: each person was judged according to what he had done. John then described the destiny of the wicked before he described the destiny of the righteous.

20:14-15. Death and Hades in Revelation are always personified as evil twins that swallow up all humanity, even the redeemed. After they have been relieved of all the corpses they were holding, they will themselves finally be destroyed. The apostle Paul also had foreseen the final death of Death: “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:26).

Those whose names were not written in the citizenship register of heaven are condemned to spend eternity in the lake of fire. Their bodies had died once. They had received a temporary body so that they could stand before the great throne. Now that their condemnation is confirmed, both by their failure to do righteous deeds and by their name not found written in the book of life. They must die once again, the second death. This time, their death is not into the grave but into the lake of fire. Unlike the lurid descriptions of hell found in non-biblical materials, the grim fate of the wicked is described in the simple but unmistakably clear language of verse 15.

MAIN IDEA REVIEW: After the martyrs have been gloriously rewarded for their sacrifice and the devil has been finally forever defeated, Christ will judge all the dead at the last judgment.

Wilcock, Michael. The Message of Revelation: I Saw Heaven Opened. InterVarsity Press, 1986, pp. 194-97.

The Sixth Vision: The Last Judgment (20:11-15)

So far we have understood this Scene to be showing us underlying realities, at an even deeper level than Scene 4. That Scene depicted ‘the drama of history’, the forces of good and evil and the cosmic conflict in which they are engaged. It was geared to the historical process because the conflict is caused by the old age, in which Satan the usurper is ‘ruler of this world’, colliding with and overlapping the new age, the age of the kingdom of God; and the new began with Christ’s first coming, while the old will end with his second coming, both of them datable points in history. This

Scene depicts the same drama, and the beginning and end of the 'thousand years' here coincide with the beginning and end of the 'three and a half years' there. But everything is simplified. The historical setting of Christ's incarnation in chapter 12 and the complex struggle of chapters 13 and 14 are reduced to the most starkly drawn outline yet. The first five Visions of this 'drama behind history' show simply Christ and his victory, Satan and his defeat, and the church, in whose life the war between them is fought out. Such is the character of Scene 7; and it agrees well with our earlier conclusions about the meaning of the number seven, that the seventh scene of Revelation should deal with such matters.

Its sixth section is like the corresponding section of almost every other Scene, in that most of them have a sense of finality. Seal 6 shows the world's death throes, Trumpet 6 God's last warning, Vision 6 of the fourth Scene the appearance of the last plagues, Bowl 6 God's last punishment, and Word 6 the last mention of Babylon.

We may plot the meeting-point of two lines of thought, therefore, and expect that here in 20:11-15 we shall see what is in two senses the ultimate: fundamental reality, as in the rest of Scene 7; and a termination of some kind, as in the rest of the sixth sections. And so it proves to be. It is the end of the created order (verse 11), the end of all whose names are not in the book of life (verse 15), and the end of the power of death, 'the last enemy to be destroyed' (verse 14; 1 Cor. 15:26). The last great reality is, basically and necessarily, judgment: the payment of all accounts, the righting of all wrongs.

This may throw light on the question of who exactly are 'the dead' who appear before the great white throne.

They could be simply the spiritually dead, who, according to our interpretation of Vision 5, are to rise again at the end of the thousand years (20:5). Christ teaches in John 5:24-29 that a man 'has passed from death to life' when he receives the gospel. That whole passage forms an illuminating commentary on Visions 5 and 6. The present hearing of Christ's voice, which gives eternal life to the spiritually dead (verses 24, 25), could thus be the 'first resurrection'. The future hearing of it will awaken all who are dead (verses 28, 29): those who have already received spiritual life but have since died physically will be brought to life a second time (the resurrection of life), and those who have never risen from spiritual death will be awakened for the first and only time, simply to receive their condemnation (the resurrection of judgment). Either of these might be the 'second resurrection' which is implied as a counterpart to the first one. As the saints are exempted from judgment (verse 24), they may not even have to stand before the great white throne, let alone be judged there; in which case the dead of Vision 6 and those of Vision 5 are identical, namely the wicked, the spiritually dead.

Alternatively, Vision 6 may depict all the dead, saints and sinners alike, appearing before the judgment of the throne. This is the plain sense of the words, if read independently of Vision 5; it accommodates the statements of Paul, that we must all appear before the divine judgment (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10); yet it allows that the saints will not 'come into judgment' in the sense of John 5:24, since the appearance of their names in the book of life will countermand the accusations found against them in the books of human responsibility.

There are possible objections to the second view; but it would be supported by what has been said earlier about the position of this passage in the over-all plan of the book. What it describes is fundamental, being a part of Scene 7; and terminal, being the sixth section of that scene. In two words, it portrays judgment, and more precisely the last judgment. In doing so, one would expect it to use the broadest of brush-strokes and the boldest of colours; so that the plainer interpretation would be preferable to the more complicated one. We may even be off the mark in enquiring too closely into who ‘the dead’ are; perhaps John is simply being shown the stark truth that after death comes judgment (Heb. 9:27).

The only additional factor, but one of prime importance, is the basis on which the judgment is made. First the books of accountability are opened, and men are ‘judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done’ (verse 12). According to the strict rule established far back in Scene 1, Christ says, ‘I will give to each of you as your works deserve.’ Yet it is not on this alone that the eternal destiny of man depends; for there is also the book of life to be opened, and whether or not a human soul is consigned to the lake of fire turns on whether or not his name is found in that book. But there is no evasion of divine justice. The judgment is still according to works; the question is, whose works? The book of life belongs to the Lamb (13:8), and all whose names are in it belong to him; his obedience covers their sin, and his power within them produces holiness. They are therefore accounted righteous because of his righteousness, both imputed and imparted to them. Those however who have not accepted the shame of sin and the glory of salvation, and have never had their names written in the book of life, have nothing to plead but their own righteousness; and that is woefully inadequate to exempt them from the ‘second death’, the death of the soul. John’s statement in 20:6 implies that there is a ‘first death’, which does have power over the saints, and which is presumably the death of the body; the two deaths are no doubt what Christ has in mind when he says, ‘Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell’ (Mt. 10:28).

Beasley-Murray, George R. “Revelation.” New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition, edited by D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed., Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, p. 1453.

20:11-15 The last judgment

If the fleeing of heaven and earth from the face of God is to be viewed as the precursor of the new heavens and earth (cf. 2 Pet. 3:10-13), the spectacle of the great white throne as the one reality on which humankind can gaze is indeed an awesome sight. But the description is likely to be symbolic, to enhance the terrifying grandeur of the scene—the last overwhelming theophany from which creation wants to escape but cannot (cf. 6:12-17).

12 The dead, great and small, stand before the throne, i.e. all humankind is summoned to judgment. Is the church exempted from this? 20:4-6 suggests that it is, but in that case believers will have been judged earlier (cf. 3:5; 2 Cor. 5:10), but John gives no hint of this. The passage

stands for the necessity of all to be judged, saints and sinners alike, and there's plenty of time for it to happen! The judgment proceeds according to two criteria: first, according to what they had done, and secondly, the testimony of the books. This latter feature is taken from Dn. 7:10, which reflects both ordinary court procedure and the habit of Persian kings to record every detail of events in their provinces. The important thing is that the joint testimony of the two criteria agrees, and the book of life will reveal it.

14-15 Death and Hades represent the fact of dying and the condition entered on after death. Both were thrown into the lake of fire, a circumstance that shows the sheer pictorial nature of the scene, including the lake of fire. Into that lake were thrown any whose name was not found written in the book of life. That lake has its origin in the Abyss, the home of the monster, the enemy of God, and traditionally the abode of evil spirits and the place where fallen angels were punished. It is the alternative to the city of God. Accordingly, John represents the same reality by the very different symbol of life outside the city (21:27) in contrast to life inside the city (21:24-26). Significantly it all begins in connection with the new creation, the work of God in Christ; we can be assured that grace and truth (Jn. 1:17) will be as truly united in the judgment as they were in the cross of Christ.

Wiersbe, Warren W. The Bible Exposition Commentary. Victor Books, 1996, pp. 620-21.

Sinners Are Recompensed (Rev. 20:11-15)

There shall be a second resurrection, and the unsaved will be raised and will stand before God's judgment. Do not confuse this judgment at the White Throne with the Judgment Seat of Christ, where believers will have their works judged and rewarded. At this judgment, there will be only unbelievers; and there will be no rewards. John described here an awesome scene. Heaven and earth will flee away and no place will be left for sinners to hide! All must face the Judge!

The Judge is Jesus Christ, for the Father has committed all judgment to Him (Matt. 19:28; John 5:22-30; Acts 17:31). These lost sinners rejected Christ in life; now they must be judged by Him and face eternal death.

From where do these "dead" come? Death will give up the bodies, and hades (the realm of the spirits of the dead) will give up the spirits. There will even be a resurrection of bodies from the sea. No sinner will escape.

Jesus Christ will judge these unsaved people on the basis of what is written "in the books." What books? For one thing, God's Word will be there. "The Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). Every sinner will be held accountable for the truth he or she has heard in this life.

There will also be a book containing the works of the sinners being judged, though this does not suggest that a person can do good works sufficient to enter heaven (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). Why, then, will Jesus Christ consider the works, good and bad, of the people before the White Throne? To determine the degree of punishment they will endure in hell. All of these people will be cast into hell. Their personal rejection of Jesus Christ has already determined their destiny. But Jesus Christ is a righteous Judge, and He will assign each sinner the place that he deserves.

There are degrees of punishment in hell (Matt. 11:20-24). Each lost sinner will receive just what is due him, and none will be able to argue with the Lord or question His decision. God knows what sinners are doing, and His books will reveal the truth.

“The Book of Life” will be there, containing the names of God’s redeemed people (Phil. 4:3; Rev. 21:27; note also 13:8; 17:8). No unsaved person will have his or her name in the Lamb’s Book of Life; only true believers are recorded there (Luke 10:20).

When the judgment is finished, all of the lost will be cast into hell, the lake of fire, the second death. Many people reject the biblical doctrine of hell as being “unchristian,” and yet Jesus clearly taught its reality (Matt. 18:8; 23:15, 33; 25:46; Mark 9:46). A sentimental kind of humanistic religion will not face the reality of judgment, but teaches a God who loves everyone into heaven and sends no one to hell.

Hell is a witness to the righteous character of God. He must judge sin. Hell is also a witness to man’s responsibility, the fact that he is not a robot or a helpless victim, but a creature able to make choices. God does not “send people to hell”; they send themselves by rejecting the Saviour (Matt. 25:41; John 3:16-21). Hell is also a witness to the awfulness of sin. If we once saw sin as God sees it, we would understand why a place such as hell exists.

In light of Calvary, no lost sinner can condemn God for casting him into hell. God has provided a way of escape, patiently waiting for sinners to repent. He will not lower His standards or alter His requirements. He has ordained that faith in His Son is the only way of salvation.

The White Throne Judgment will be nothing like our modern court cases. At the White Throne, there will be a Judge but no jury, a prosecution but no defense, a sentence but no appeal. No one will be able to defend himself or accuse God of unrighteousness. What an awesome scene it will be!

Before God can usher in His new heavens and earth, He must finally deal with sin; and this He will do at the Great White Throne.

You can escape this terrible judgment by trusting Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. By so doing, you never will be a part of the second resurrection or experience the terrors of the second death, the lake of fire.

“He that heareth My Word,” said Jesus, “and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation [judgment], but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24).

Have you trusted Him and passed from death unto life?

MacDonald, William. Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments. Edited by Arthur Farstad, Thomas Nelson, 1995, pp. 2378-79.

The Judgment of Satan and All Unbelievers (20:10-15)

20:10 The devil himself is cast into the lake of fire to join the beast and the false prophet.

It may seem surprising that Satan would be able to assemble an army of unbelievers at the end of the Millennium. However, it should be remembered that all children born during Christ's Reign will be born in sin and will need to be saved. Not all will accept Him as rightful King, and these will scatter throughout the earth, trying to get as far away from Jerusalem as possible.

Note that the beast and the false prophet are still in hell after one thousand years. This disproves the doctrine of annihilation, as does the statement, And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

20:11 Next we are introduced to the great white throne judgment. It is great because of the issues involved and white because of the perfection and purity of the decisions handed down. The Lord Jesus is sitting as Judge (John 5:22, 27). The expression from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away indicates that this judgment takes place in eternity, after the destruction of the present creation (2 Pet. 3:10).

20:12 The dead, small and great, stand before God. These are the unbelievers of all ages. Two sets of books are opened. The Book of Life contains the names of all who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. The other books contain a detailed record of the works of the unsaved. No one who appears at this judgment is registered in the Book of Life. The fact that his name is missing condemns him, but the record of his evil works determines the degree of his punishment.

20:13 The sea will yield up the bodies of those who have been buried in it. The graves, here represented by Death, will deliver up the bodies of all the unsaved who have been interred. Hades will give up the souls of all who died in unbelief. The bodies and souls will be reunited to stand before the Judge.

Just as there will be degrees of reward in heaven, so there will be degrees of punishment in hell. This will be based on their works.

20:14 When we read that Death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire, it means the complete persons: spirit, soul, and body. The text explains that this is the second death, and the NKJV margin adds, the lake of fire.

There is a difference between Hades and hell. For the unconverted who have died, Hades is a disembodied state of conscious punishment. It is a sort of holding tank, an intermediate condition where they await the Judgment of the Great White Throne.

For believers who have died, Hades is a state of disembodied blessedness in heaven, awaiting the resurrection and glorification of the body. When Jesus died, He went to Paradise (Luke 23:43),

which Paul equates with the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2, 4), the dwelling place of God. In Acts 2:27 the Lord's disembodied state is called Hades. God did not leave His soul in Hades, but clothed it with a glorified body.

Hell is the final prison of the wicked dead. It is the same as the lake of fire, Gehenna, and the second death.

20:15 The deciding factor at this judgment is whether one's name is written in the Book of Life. Actually if a person's name had been inscribed there, he would have already been a part of the first resurrection. So this verse applies only to those who stand before the Great White Throne.

Stern, David H. Jewish New Testament Commentary : A Companion Volume to the Jewish New Testament. Electronic ed., Jewish New Testament Publications, 1996, p. Re 20:11-15.

11-15 Everyone is to face God's judgment. Although God is a God of mercy, he is also a God of judgment. This is taught equally by the Tanakh, the New Testament, and Jewish tradition.

The Prophets speak of this judgment as the Day of YHVH; see Isaiah 2:12, 13:6-13 (a verse of which is alluded to in Mt 24:29); Ezekiel 30:3; Joel 1:15, 2:1, 3:4(2:31) (quoted at Ac 2:20), 4:14(3:14); Amos 5:18-20; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:17-18; Zechariah 14:1-9 and Malachi 4:5(3:23) (alluded to at Mt 17:10-11).

"The prominent feature of these passages is a dramatic sense of doom, underlined by a few characteristic motives, such as a darkness and wailing The warning is given that the Day of the Lord is near The wicked will be punished, justice established, mankind confounded, and its destiny somehow definitely changed God will ... act—suddenly, decisively, and directly, in a single day, with vehemence and terror." (Encyclopedia Judaica 5:1387-8)

In the New Testament can be found the terms "Day of God" (2 Ke 3:12), "Great Day of Adonai-Tzva.ot" (16:14 above), Day of the Messiah Yeshua (Pp 1:6, 10; 2:16), and the ambiguous phrase, "Day of the Lord," which can mean either "Day of YHVH" or "Day of the Lord [Yeshua the Messiah]" (1C 1:8, 5:5; 2C 1:14; 1 Th 5:2-3; 2 Th 2:1-2; 2 Ke 3:10). (Also see 1:10&N, where the Greek expression is unique, making my rendering, "Day of the Lord," controversial.)

Moreover, God judges not only outward deeds, but the inner man. In the New Testament we see this when Yeshua confronts the P.rushim (Lk 12:1-5, Mt 23:23-28) and in the whole tenor of his Sermon on the Mount (Mattityahu 5-7); also compare Yn 2:23-25; Ro 2:16; MJ 4:13, 10:30. The Tanakh too speaks of secret deeds and motives when it says: "God will bring every work into judgment, concerning every hidden thing, whether it be good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). Compare also Psalm 139. The Oral Torah affirms this:

“Rabbi [Y’hudah HaNasi, 135-219 C.E.] said, ‘ ... Pay attention to three things and you will not come under the power of transgression: know what is above you—an all-seeing eye, an all-hearing ear, and all your deeds recorded in a book’ ” (Avot 2:1)

So there is no room either for the common misunderstanding on the part of both Christians and Jews that the Old Testament portrays God as stern, judgmental and lacking mercy, with the New Testament picturing him as so merciful that he overlooks judgment and even justice; or for the opposite mistake of thinking that the New Testament, with its talk of hellfire, focuses on judgment more than the Tanakh.

Quoting Hosea 10:8, which depicts how the inhabitants of Samaria will feel when God judges them by having Assyria carry them away, Yeshua warns that the Day of God’s judgment will be fearful: “Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’ ” (Lk 23:30).

The Bible gives a symmetrical picture of salvation history. In its first two chapters, at the beginning of history, a sinless world is described; and at the beginning of the third chapter (Genesis 3:1-7) Satan the serpent (see above, v. 2) entices Eve and Adam into sin, resulting in damage both to humanity and to the world (Ro 8:19-22). God’s plan from the very beginning was to remedy this damage through the death and resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah, the slaughtered Lamb (5:6, 9; 13:8; Ep 1:4-7; Yn 1:29); 1,256 chapters of the Bible deal with the outworking of this plan. Now, at the end of history, here in the third-to-last chapter of the Bible, sin is judged, with Satan (v. 10) and the wicked (v. 15) condemned to the lake of fire; while the final two chapters of Revelation present a newly created world and a humanity restored to Eden-like sinlessness. This is what is meant when God says (21:6), “I am the ‘A’ and the ‘Z,’ the Beginning and the End.” There is but one asymmetry: Satan and the first man, Adam, cause sin at the beginning; while God the Father and the second man, Yeshua, cause sinlessness at the end (1C 15:45-49, Ro 5:12-21).

11 The One sitting on the throne is Yeshua. Although he shares the throne with God the Father (3:21), it is through Yeshua alone that God renders the final judgment (see also v. 12aN). According to Yochanan’s Gospel,

“The Father does not judge anyone, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son [The Father] has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Don’t be surprised at this; because the time is coming when all who are in the grave will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to a resurrection of life and those who have done evil to a resurrection of judgment.” (Yn 5:22, 27-29)

What the Gospel calls the “resurrection of life” is in this chapter called the first resurrection, for believers only; while the “resurrection of judgment” applies to “the rest of the dead” (v. 5), who experience the second death (v. 14). See Yn 5:22N and compare Ac 17:31.

Earth and heaven fled from his presence and no place was found for them, because they are corrupted by sin, unholy and impure (Ro 8:19-22). Although in the present age the impure defiles the pure, when God himself appears in glory his purity banishes the impure, for his holiness cannot

abide that which is corrupted by sin (see Mt 9:20&N). The only remedy is “a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had passed away” (21:1).

12a I saw the dead, both great and small, standing in front of the throne.

“All of us will stand before God’s judgment seat ... For we must all appear before the Messiah’s court of judgment, where everyone will receive the good or bad consequences of what he did while he was in the body ... on a day when God passes judgment on people’s inmost secrets. (According to the Good News as I proclaim it, he does this through the Messiah Yeshua.)” (Ro 14:10, 2C 5:10, Ro 2:16)

12b Books ... another book, the Book of Life. There seem to be two elements in the Final Judgment. First, there is judgment for eternal salvation (v. 5) or damnation (vv. 14-15) on the basis of being written in the Book of Life. Second, there is judgment according to works from what was written in the books (plural); this concept appears in the Tanakh at Daniel 7:9-10. From these books God judges all our deeds (see Ro 2:6&N), both public and secret, and even our innermost thoughts (see vv. 11-15, v. 12aN). For the saved this judgment determines rewards (1C 3:8-15&N), while for the lost it determines degrees of punishment (Lk 12:47-48). But third, in traditional Judaism there is yet another meaning to these books—they determine what a person will experience in this world, not in the world to come.

The Hebrew term “sefer-chayim” (“book of life,” “book of the living”) appears in the Tanakh only at Psalms 69:28-29(27-28),

“Add iniquity to their iniquity, don’t let them come into Your righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of life And not be written with the righteous.”

(Incidentally, this is a continuation of the passage quoted at Ro 11:9-10.)

The first reference to such a book is in Exodus 32:32-33. After the Israelites made the golden calf, Moses prayed that God would forgive them for this great sin, “and if not, then I pray that you blot me out of your book which you have written” (compare what Sha’ul writes at Ro 9:2-4a&N). Adonai’s response to Moses was, “Whoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.”

Other places in the Tanakh referring to a book containing individual destinies in the *olam haba* are Malachi 3:16 (“a book of remembrance was opened”) and Daniel 12:1 (“every one whose name shall be found written in the book”); while Psalm 139:16 (“your book”) seems to refer to the *olam hazeh*. In the New Testament the term “Book of Life” appears at Pp 4:3 and MJ 12:23 (and compare Lk 10:20), as well as six times in Revelation (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27), always signifying eternal salvation. There are other references in the Pseudepigrapha (Jubilees 30:22, which mentions a second book, the book of those who will be destroyed, with the possibility of having one’s name transferred to it from the Book of Life; 1 Enoch 104:7; 108:3, 7; 1 Baruch 24:1) and in early Christian literature (Vision of Hermas 1:24, Similitude 2:12). In the Mishna it is spoken of in Pirkey-Avot 2:1 (quoted above in vv. 11-15), 3:17.

From God's answer to Moses in Exodus, together with 3:1-5 above, we learn that it is possible to fall from grace, to have one's eternal destiny changed from salvation to condemnation, in consequence of unrepented sin in one's life, even though such passages as Ep 1:3-14 and 1 Ke 2:9 suggest that salvation is predestined. One way to deal with this antinomy is to suppose that everyone's name is initially written in the Book of Life—babies who die before the age of responsibility go to heaven. But upon reaching the age of responsibility, everyone sins (Ro 3:23); and only those who turn to God through Yeshua the Messiah (Yn 14:6) can know that they are saved. A name is not removed from the Book of Life unless the person has committed the unpardonable sin, the sin against the Holy Spirit, of finally and definitively rejecting God and his Son Yeshua (Mt 12:32&N).

The term “book of life” finds a prominent place in the liturgy for the High Holy Days. Thus the final blessing of the .Amidah is expanded so as to conclude:

“May we and all your people, the house of Israel, be remembered and inscribed in the book of life, blessing, peace and prosperity, so that we will have a life of goodness and peace. Blessed are you, Adonai, the maker of peace.”

Some Messianic Jews take exception to the customary greetings for Rosh-HaShanah—“Shanah tovah tikatevu” (“May you be inscribed [in the book of life] for a good year”)—and Yom-Kippur—“Chatimah tovah” (“[May you have] a good sealing [of your destiny in the book of life]”)—on the ground that as believers in Yeshua our names are already written in the Book of Life. This is unnecessary scrupulousness, for here the “book of life” is not concerned with eternal salvation but with life in this world. The tradition is that on Rosh-HaShanah God opens the heavenly books and judges people according to their works, writing in them who will die and what kind of life the living will enjoy during the coming year. The Ten Days of Penitence, Rosh-HaShanah through Yom-Kippur, are thought of as offering an opportunity for repentance that will influence God to change these fates for the better. But on Yom-Kippur these fates are fixed or “sealed.” All of this is portrayed most clearly in the important High Holy Days prayer Un'tanneh Tokef (literally, “Let us recount the authority” of this day), quoted in full at MJ 9:22N.

13-14 All the dead who have not participated in the first resurrection are now resurrected and judged (see vv. 5-6 above). There is no longer any need for Sh'ol, where the dead are held for judgment, since this is the judgment. Nor is there need for death, the punishment for sin, since sin is now being banished from the universe, as foretold by Sha'ul at 1C 15:54-55. Likewise the sea, a biblical metaphor for death, destruction and turmoil (see Isaiah 57:20, Ezekiel 28:8, Psalm 107:25-28), harboring fearsome, Satanic creatures such as Leviathan (Isaiah 27:1, Psalm 104:27, Job 40:25-41:26(41:1-34)) and the beast of 12:18-13:8 above, releases its dead for judgment, so that, having served its purpose, it too disappears (21:1).

15 This is the event foretold by the parable of the sheep and the goats in Mt 25:31-46:

“Then he will also speak to those on his left, saying, ‘Get away from me, you who are cursed! Go off into the fire prepared for the Adversary and his angels!’ ... They will go off to eternal punishment, but those who have done what God wants will go to eternal life.” (Mt 25:41, 46)

The “eternal life” spoken of is depicted in 22:1-22:5.

It is possible that the lake of fire is meant literally, to the degree that the wicked, in resurrected physical bodies, will experience physically the torment of burning and stench forever. Or it may be a metaphor for the eternal pain of knowing that one is forever to be denied the bliss of being present with the God of the universe and must be separated from him, to burn forever with frustration, anger and regret; Jean-Paul Sartre’s play, “No Exit,” is one man’s expression of this understanding. For more on the lake of fire, see 19:20.

Anyone whose name was not found written in the Book of Life was hurled into the lake of fire. (On “Book of Life” see v. 12bN.) This is the climactic moment for the wicked. Yet it is not God who has determined their fate, but they themselves, by their deeds that fall short of God’s holiness, and by their lack of trusting Him for salvation through Yeshua the Messiah. “The Lord ... is patient with you; for it is not his purpose that anyone should be destroyed, but that everyone should turn from his sins” (2 Ke 3:9). And compare Ro 2:1-8, especially vv. 5b-6: “ ... by your unrepentant heart you are storing up anger for yourself on the Day of Anger, when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed; for he will pay back each one according to his deeds,” as taught in Psalm 62:13(12) and Proverbs 24:12. God’s desire is that the wicked should turn from his evil ways.

“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, says Adonai, God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against me and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says Adonai, God; so turn, and live!” (Ezekiel 18:30-32)

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who trusts in him may have eternal life, instead of being utterly destroyed. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but rather so that through him, the world might be saved. Those who trust in him are not judged; those who do not trust have been judged already, in that they have not trusted in the one who is God’s only Son.” (Yn 3:16-18)

The Judaism of today tends to finesse or minimize the punishment to be meted out to the wicked. Orthodox Judaism speaks of a probationary period (like the Roman Catholic purgatory) of not more than eleven months for members of the House of Israel. In this sense Judaism does not take sin seriously, in terms of its consequences to the individual sinner.

To those who cannot relate to vv. 11-15 because they find the doctrine of eternal punishment for the wicked too fearsome, or because they cannot accept that God would be “so mean—it’s against his loving nature,” the Tanakh replies, “The fear of Adonai is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10). Justice and mercy, holiness and love are qualities which God balances in his own way, which may not be the way we would choose.

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, says Adonai, and my ways are not your ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9)

“There is a way which seems right to a man, but at its end are the ways of death.” (Proverbs 14:12).

Moffat, James. “The Revelation of St. John the Divine.” The Expositor’s Greek Testament: Commentary, vol. 5, George H. Doran Company, pp. 475-78.

20:11-22:5. The connexion of thought depends upon the traditional Jewish scheme outlined, e.g., in Apoc. Bar. xxix.-xxx. (cf. 4 Esd. 7:29, 30) where the messiah returns in glory to heaven after his reign on earth; the general resurrection follows, accompanied by the judgment. Developing his oracles along these current lines, the prophet now proceeds to depict his culminating vision of the End in three scenes: (1.) the world and its judgment (20:11-15), (2.) the new heaven and earth (21:1-8), centring round (3.) the new Jerusalem as the final seat of bliss (21:9-22:5). The last-named phase was associated in eschatology (Sib. Or. v. 246 f., 414 f.) with the return of Nero redivivus and the downfall of Babylon which preceded the sacred city’s rise. The destruction of hostile forces, followed by the renovation of the universe, is essentially a Persian dogma (Stave, 180 f.), and is paralleled in the Babylonian mythology, where after the defeat and subjugation of Tîâmat in the primeval age creation commences. From this point until 21:9 f., Jesus is ignored entirely.

Vv. 11-15. The moral dignity and reticence with which this sublime vision of the last assize is drawn, show how the primitive Christian conscience could rise above its inheritance from Jewish eschatology. The latter spoke more definitely upon the beginning of the end than upon the end itself (cf. Harnack’s History of Dogma, i. 174).

Ver. 11. John hints where Isaiah is explicit (6:1). Nothing is said about the uselessness of intercession; cf. 4 Esd. 7:[102-115] 33: “and the Most High shall be revealed upon the judgment-seat, and compassion shall pass away, long-suffering shall be withdrawn”. Enoch xc. 20 sets up the throne near Jerusalem, and most apocalypses are spoiled by similarly puerile details. Compare with 11 b the tradition in Asc. Isa. iv. 18 where the voice of the Beloved (i.e., messiah) at the close of the millennium rebukes in wrath heaven and earth, the hills and cities, the angels of the sun and moon, “and all things wherein Beliar manifested himself and acted openly in this world”. John’s Apocalypse, however, follows (yet cf. 22:12) that tradition of Judaism which reserved the judgment for God and not for the messiah (2 Esd. 4:1-10, 7:33 f. anti-Christian polemic?) although another conception (En. xlv. 3, lix. 27 etc.; Ap. Bar. 72:2-6) assigning it to the messiah had naturally found greater favour in certain Christian circles.

Ver. 12. The books opened in God’s court contain the deeds of men, whose fate is determined by the evidence of these “vouchers for the book of life” (Alford); the latter volume forms as it were a register of those predestinated to eternal life (cf. Gfrörer ii. 121 f., and below on ver. 15). The figure of books containing a record of man’s career was a realistic expression of Jewish belief in moral retribution, which prevailed especially in eschatological literature (e.g., Jubil. xxx.; Enoch.

lxxxix.-xc.; Dan. 7:10, etc.) after the exile. “And in these days I saw the Head of days, when he had seated himself upon the throne of his glory, and the books of the living were opened before him” (Enoch xlvi. 3; cf. Driver’s Daniel, p. 86). It is obvious, from ver. 15, that the resurrection is general (as Dan. 7:20; 4 Esd. 6:20, 7:32; Test. Jud. 25; Test. Benj. 10; Apoc. Bar. 7, etc.; cf. Gfrörer, ii. 277 f.; and Charles’s Eschatology, 340 f.), in opposition to the primitive and still prevalent belief which confined it to the righteous (E. Bi. 1390). Hence the books contain not the good deeds alone of the saints (the prevalent Jewish idea, cf. Charles on En. 51:1; Mal. 3:16; Jub. xxx.; Ps. 56:8, etc.), nor bad deeds alone (Isa. 65:6; En. lxxxi. 4; cf. En. xl. 20; Apoc. Bar. xxiv. 1) but good and bad deeds alike (as Dan. 7:10; Asc. Isa. ix. 20 f.). This again tallies with the Iranian faith (Hübschmann, 229), according to which, at the command of Ormuzd, the righteous and the wicked alike were raised for their recompense. Here the tribunal is a throne, before which the king’s subjects have to answer for their conduct; rebels are punished and the loyal get the reward of good service (cf. 22:12, etc.). γεγραμμ., by whom? Jewish speculation conjectured Raphael as the recording angel (En. xx. 3) or a band of angels (Slav. En. xix. 5); but the Jewish idea of the heavenly tables (πλάκες τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) is omitted in the Apoc., nor is there the slightest mention of those living at the era of judgment. Did John mean that none would survive (cf. ver. 5)? Or were any survivors to be taken directly to heaven at the coming of Christ, as in Paul’s primitive outlook (see on 1 Th. 4:16-17)?

Ver. 13. See Pirke Aboth, iv. 32: “Let not thine imagination assure thee that the grave is an asylum” (for, like birth and life and death, judgment is appointed before the King of the kings of kings). “And the earth shall restore those that are asleep in her, and so shall the dust those that dwell therein in silence, and the secret chambers shall deliver up those souls (of the righteous, iv. 35) that were committed unto them,” 4 Esd. 7:32—reproducing, as here, Enoch li. 1, “and in those days will the earth also give back those who are treasured up within it, and Sheol also will give back that which it has received, and hell will give back that which it owes”. Also En. lxi. 5 where the restoration includes “those who have been destroyed by the desert, or devoured by the fish of the sea and by the beasts”. Evidently drowned people are supposed not to be in Hades; they wander about or drift in the ocean (Achill. Tat. v. 313), μηδὲ εἰς ᾄδου καταβαίνειν ὄλωσ. According to the prophet’s conception (cf. 13:8, 14.f.) the fate of pagans must have been a foregone conclusion, when the Imperial cultus was made the test of character; in which case “the scene before the white throne is rather a final statement of judgment than a statement of final judgment” (Gilbert). But the broader allusion to works here shows that the prophet is thinking of the general ethical judgment, which embraced issues wider than the particular historical test of the Emperor-worship.—ἄδης κ.τ.λ., cf. Plutarch’s (de Iside, 29) derivation of Amenthes, the Egyptian name for Hades, as “that which receives and gives”. As in Slav. En. lxxv. 6 and the later Iranian Bundeshesh (S. B. E. v. 123 f.), the resurrection of the body is not mentioned, though it is probably implied (cf. En. li. 1, lxii. 14 and Matt. 27:52 f.).

Ver. 14. Death as Sin’s ally must be destroyed along with Sin, while Hades, the grim receptacle of Death’s prey (the intermediate rendezvous for the dead, except for martyrs, cf. 6:10), naturally ceases to have any function. This was the cherished hope of early Christianity as of Judaism (Isa.

25:8). John's idea of the second death is much more realistic and severe than the Hellenic or the Philonic (cf. de Proem, et Poen. §12, etc.).

Ver. 15. In Enoch (xxxviii. 5, xlvi. 9) the wicked are handed over by God to the saints, before whom they burn like straw in fire and sink like lead in water. The milder spirit of the Christian prophet abstains from making the saints thus punish or witness the punishment of the doomed (cf. on 14:10). In Apoc. Pet. 25 the souls of the murdered gaze on the torture of their former persecutors, crying ὁ θεὸς, δικαία σου ἡ κρίσις. These features, together with those of torturing angels (Dieterich, 60 f.) and Dantesque gradations of punishment (Dieterich, 206 f.), are conspicuous by their absence from John's Apocalypse. There is a stern simplicity about the whole description, and just enough pictorial detail is given to make the passage morally suggestive. As gehenna, like paradise (4 Esd. 3:4), was created before the world, according to rabbinic belief (Gfrörer, ii. 42-46), it naturally survived the collapse of the latter (ver. 11). Contrast with this passage the relentless spirit of 4. Esd. 7:49 f. ("I will not mourn over the multitude of the perishing ... they are set on fire and burn hotly and are quenched"). If John betrays no pity for the doomed, he exhibits no callous scorn for their fate. The order of 20:13-15 and 21:1 f. is the same as in the haggadic pseudo-Philonic De Biblic. Anti-quitatibus (after 70 A.D.) where the judgment ("reddet infernus debitum suum et perditio restituet paratecen suam, ut reddam unicuique secundum opera sua") is followed by the renewal of all things ("et exstinguetur mors et infernus claudet os suum ... et erit terra alia et caelum aliud habitaculum sempiternum").

So much for the doomed. The bliss of saints occupies the closing vision (21-22:5). From the smoke and pain and heat it is a relief to pass into the clear, clean atmosphere of the eternal morning where the breath of heaven is sweet and the vast city of God sparkles like a diamond in the radiance of his presence. The dominant idea of the passage is that surroundings must be in keeping with character and prospects; consequently, as the old universe has been hopelessly sullied by sin, a new order of things must be formed, once the old scene of trial and failure is swept aside. This hope of the post-exilic Judaism (cf. Isa. 65:17, 66:22) was originally derived from the Persian religion, in which the renovation of the universe was a cardinal tenet; it is strongly developed in Enoch (xc. 16, civ. 2, new heaven only) and 4 Esd. 4:27 f. ("if the place where the evil is sown pass not away, there cannot come the field where the good is sown"). The expectation (cf on Rom. 8:28 f.) that the loss sustained at the fall of Adam would now be made good, is hardly the same as this eschatological transformation; the latter prevailed whenever the stern exigencies of the age seemed to demand a clean sweep of the universe, and the apocalyptic attitude towards nature seldom had anything of the tenderness and pathos, e.g., of 4 Esd. 8:42-48 (cf. 7:31). The sequence of 20:11 f. and 21:1 f. therefore follows the general eschatological programme, as e.g. in Apoc. Bar. xxi. 23 f., where, after death is ended (very mildly), the new world promised by God appears as the dwelling-place of the saints (cf. also 32:1 f.). The earthly Jerusalem is good enough for the millennium but not for the final bliss; the new order (21:5) of latter (cf. above) coincides, as in Oriental religion (Jeremias, 45 f.), with the new year (i.e., spring) festival of the god's final victory.—The literary problem is more intricate. With 21:1-8, which is evidently the prophet's own composition, the Apocalypse really closes. The rest of the vision, down to 22:5, is little more than a poetical repetition and elaboration of 21:1-8, to which 22:6 f. forms the appropriate conclusion,

just as the doublet 19:9b, 10 (in its present position) does to 19:1-8. When 19:9b, 10 is transferred to the end of 17 (see above), the parallelism becomes even closer. Both 17 (the vision of the harlot-Babylon, with her evil influence on the world, and her transient empire) and 21:9-22:5 (the vision of the Lamb's pure bride, with her endless empire) are introduced alike (cf. 17:1, 21:9) and ended alike, though 22:6-8 has been slightly expanded in view of its special position as a climax to the entire Apocalypse. As 17. represents John's revision of an earlier source, this suggests, but does not prove, a similar origin for 21:9-22:5. He might have sketched the latter as an antithesis to the former; certainly the "editorial" brushwork in 21:9-22:5 is not nearly so obvious and abrupt as, e.g., in 18. Upon the other hand there are touches and traits which have been held to imply the revision of a source or sources, especially of a Jewish character (so variously Vischer, Weyland, Ménégos, Spitta, Sabatier, Briggs, Schmidt, S. Davidson, von Soden, de Faye, Kohler, Baljon, J. Weiss, and Forbes), delineating the new Jerusalem (cf. 21:1-2). In this event the Christian editor's hand would be visible, not necessarily in 21:22 (see note), but in the ἀρνίον-allusions, in 21:14 b, 23 (cf. 22:5), 25 b (= 22:5 a), and 27 (= 20:15, 21:8, 22:3 a). Another set of features (21:12, 16, 24-27 a, 22:2 c, 3 a, 5) is explicable apart from the hypothesis of a Jewish source, or indeed of any source at all. Literally taken, they are incongruous. But since 21:9-22:5 may be equivalent not so much to a Jewish ideal conceived sub specie Christiana as to a Christian ideal expressed in the imaginative terms of a Jewish tradition which originally depicted an earthly Jerusalem surrounded by the respectful nations of the world, a number of traits in the latter sketch would obviously be inapplicable in the new setting to which they were transferred. These are retained, however, not only for the sake of their archaic associations but in order to lend pictorial completeness to the description of the eternal city. The author, in short, is a religious poet, not a theologian or a historian. But while these archaic details need not involve the use of a Jewish source (so rightly Schön and Wellhausen), much less a reference of the whole vision to the millennial Jerusalem (Zahn), or the ascription of it to Cerinthus (Völter) or a chiliastic Jewish Christian editor (Bruston), may not the repetitions and parallelisms, especially in view of 22:6 f., indicate a composite Christian origin, as is suggested, e.g., by Erbes (A = 21:1-4, 22:3-17, 20, 21, B = 21:5-27, 22:1, 2, 18, 19) and Selwyn (22:16-21, the conclusion of A = 21:2, 22:3-5, 21:3-6 a, 22:7, 21:6 b-8, or of B = 21:9-22:2, 22:6, 8-15)? Some dislocation of the original autograph or scribal additions may be conjectured with reason in 22:6-21 (see below), at least. But the reiterations are intelligible enough as the work of a single writer, whose aim is to impress an audience rather than to produce a piece of literature. The likelihood is that John composed 21:9 f. as an antithesis to the description of the evil city which he had reproduced from a source in 17, and that he repeated the incident of 22:8, 9 (as 19:9, 10 at the end of 17), adapting it to its position at the close of the whole book as well as of the immediately preceding oracle.

Boxall, Ian. *The Revelation of Saint John*. Continuum, 2006, pp. 288-92.

Sixth Vision: The Final Judgement

(20:11-15)

11 Then I saw a great white throne with someone seated on it. From his presence earth and heaven fled, but they found no place to hide. 12 Then I saw the dead, the great and the little ones,

standing before the throne. Scrolls were opened, and then another scroll was opened, which is the scroll of life. The dead were judged according to what was written about their deeds in the scrolls. 13 The sea handed over the dead in it, and Death and Hades handed over the dead in them; each of these was judged according to their deeds. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 Anyone whose name was not found inscribed in the scroll of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

This dramatic scene presents the other side of the coin to the destruction of the dragon, monster and false prophet: the definitive judgement of humanity. It contains elements associated elsewhere with the final judgement: the appearance before the divine throne (e.g. Mt. 25:31); the resurrection of the dead (e.g. Mt. 12:41-42; Jn 5:21-22); the opening of books or scrolls (e.g. Dan. 7:10); judgement in accordance with human actions (e.g. 1 En. 1:3-9; Rom. 2:5-11; 2 Cor. 5:10). This does not mean that it is to be regarded as following on chronologically from the demise of the dragon, still less from the fiery judgement of the nations (20:9-10). Its position here has again been suggested by Ezekiel, with his vision of judgement and restoration (Ezek. 39:21-29). Moreover, this scene presents one aspect, albeit a very prominent aspect, of Judgement Day: its corporate nature, highlighting the human solidarity both in sin and evil and in grace and righteous action. But when one goes below the surface, it is a remarkably restrained and matter-of-fact picture. Perhaps over the centuries artists have been among the better commentators on such scenes. Visual portrayals of the Last Judgement, from the portals of medieval cathedrals to the frescoes of Giotto and Michelangelo, have resorted to combining several of Revelation's visions (as well as other scriptural passages and in some cases non-biblical texts) in order to present a rounded and aesthetically satisfying account.

11 John first sees a great white throne, which stands in contrast to the many thrones of 20:4-6. The someone seated on it is surely to be identified with the one on the throne, the figure of God (white has functioned hitherto as the colour of heaven and of victory; here it may also connote the dazzling brightness of the throne). There is a strong parallel with Daniel's vision of the Ancient of Day's throne, white being the colour of his clothing (Dan. 7:9). The theme of judgement, and the ultimate vindication of God's holy ones, is clear. Given the recent use of the singular pronoun to cover both God and the Lamb, however (20:6), it is possible that the face of Christ is to be seen on that unnamed enthroned figure (an exegesis reflected in much of the artistic tradition, where the judgement is carried out by Christ on the throne).

But where one might have expected universal cataclysm and cosmic disaster, the terrible scenarios often envisaged of nuclear holocaust leading to the obliteration of the planet, John resorts to poetic hyperbole: From his presence earth and heaven fled, but they found no place to hide (cf. 12:8, where no place is found in heaven for the dragon and its angels). This cannot be a literal description, for if earth and heaven truly fled the heavenly throne would lose its location, and the sea would have no shore on which to disgorge its contents (see verse 13). Rather, Revelation describes in mythological terms the coming to an end of the old order, that aspect of creation fatally compromised by its association with evil, chaos and injustice. Such an order cannot stand before the terrifying presence of God, whose light exposes the darkness of deception and falsehood. Indeed, with the flight of earth and heaven, the demarcation between God's realm and

the place where humanity lives is beginning to disappear (it will lose all significance in the new Jerusalem, where heaven and earth, God and humanity, will be united: 21:3).

12-13 Moving outwards from the throne (as Revelation has done before: 4:1-5:14), John now sees those who are destined to be judged: the dead, the great and the little ones, standing before the throne. Death is the great leveller: all must ultimately appear before the judgement seat of God (e.g. Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10), without distinction in terms of status or power. That the great and the little ones include both God's servants and those in rebellion against him is clear from other uses of this phrase (11:18; 13:16; 19:5, 18): this is a scene of universal judgement. This does not necessarily contradict 20:4-6, however, which presents the faithful martyr-witnesses as having already received judgement in their favour; rather we glimpse here the wider picture, in which their vindication is paralleled by the possibility of unfavourable judgement against other human beings. Ironically, all are standing before the throne. Although this is the appropriate posture of suppliants before God, as also in the presence of the emperor, the question had been raised rhetorically at 6:17 in relation to the great day of the Lamb's anger: who is able to stand? Perhaps it is their resurrection state, like that of the Lamb (5:6), which enables them to 'stand' (Smalley 2005: 517).

In Daniel's vision, books or scrolls were opened (Dan. 7:10). So also John sees that scrolls were opened (the passive suggesting that they were opened by God, or Christ or the angels on God's behalf). These scrolls clearly contain a record of all human deeds which form the basis of the unfolding judgement, given that the dead were judged according to what was written about their deeds in the scrolls. This reflects the tradition of eschatological judgement being made according to the contents of books (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 21:27; cf. Isa. 4:3; Mal. 3:16; Dan. 12:1). Symbolically, they reveal that nothing which occurs in this world can elude the all-seeing God or the knowledge of the seven-eyed Lamb, whether that be the tiniest act of kindness and heroism or the cruellest act of barbarism and injustice. Reassuring though this is that every attempt at faithful witness will be rewarded, it also declares that every human being, irrespective of their rank or social station, stands under judgement. Those who may have appeared to escape justice in this life now find themselves confronted with the burning, searing eyes of divine judgement beyond the grave.

In order for this to happen, the resurrection of those still bound by death has to take place (the 'second resurrection': cf. 20:5). The martyrs and other faithful witnesses have already been raised with Christ to reign with him (20:4-6); now they are joined by their brothers and sisters in Adam. Jewish beliefs about the nebulous 'half-life' for the dead in Sheol have come together with Greek notions of Hades as the underworld abode of the departed. These departed need to be released from their current deathly abode. Hence Death and Hades handed over the dead in them (these personified figures have been encountered before, at 6:8). Theologically, they have no choice, given that by virtue of his victorious resurrection Christ himself holds the keys of Death and Hades (1:18). But if Christ has already conquered Death, it has still continued to affect human lives. Now this 'last enemy' (1 Cor. 15:26) is finally overcome. Along with Death and Hades, we hear that the sea also has died to hand over: those mariners and others who were drowned in the perilous waters of this evil Abyss, and who therefore never received an earthly burial. Their return ensures that all the dead of humanity rise to hear an account of what they have done.

However, Revelation distinguishes between the plural scrolls (derived from Dan. 7:10; cf. 1 En. 47:3; 4 Ez. 6:20) and the separate scroll of life (possibly the one scroll of Dan. 12:1). The first clearly reflects the books containing human deeds, a statement that human deeds have consequences, and humans will be held accountable for them. The scroll of life would then be that specific ledger containing the names of God's redeemed people (cf. Exod. 32:32-33; Ps. 69:28), which earlier has been associated particularly with the Lamb (13:8; cf. 21:27). It is an assurance, in the midst of a scene of judgement, that God's faithful people will participate in life with him. It is also a reminder that, although judgement is not an arbitrary affair but related to human action, life is ultimately the gift of God, that grace which makes righteous action and faithful witness a possibility. The tension between the two types of scroll is a reflection of this very tension between divine grace and human response.

14-15 Given that Death is the last enemy to be destroyed, the end of the victorious Christ's mopping-up operation, it should come as no surprise to hear that the mythological figures of Death and Hades are also thrown into the lake of fire to join those other cosmic powers of evil, chaos and injustice which have threatened to destroy the earth (19:20; 20:10; cf. 11:18). If these are not also thrown into the enduring place of fiery judgement, then Death's sting may continue to make itself felt (for the lake of fire, see on 19:20). However, this fiery lake is not simply reserved for mythological figures and cosmic powers: it remains a possibility also for humanity. It is presented, following conventional imagery, as the place or state to which those found wanting at the Last Judgement are consigned: Anyone whose name was not found inscribed in the scroll of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Some may feel uncomfortable with this statement, which reads rather too much like a threat (although compared with some other descriptions of the punishment of the wicked, Revelation is remarkably restrained: cf. e.g. Apocalypse of Peter 5-12). Yet the Apocalypse recognises the very real threat which stubborn allegiance to the dragon represents. It is a path on which one hurtles towards disaster, because the dragon's regime has always been at enmity with order, justice and peace. Nor can Revelation compromise over the basic truth that human actions have consequences, often fatal consequences, and that these must be confronted and judged appropriately. Finally, the presence of this consuming lake of fire, and the possibility of human participation in it, remains a necessity in a Christian worldview which accords any kind of freedom to humanity. It is logically possible to be blotted out, by one's own free action and decision, from the Lamb's scroll of life (cf. 3:5). God calls, God urges, God wills humanity freely to embrace him and his will for their harmony and well-being. Unless God is to coerce, however, his purposes must allow for the tragic possibility of humanity making a definitive choice against him.