

Revelation 20:11-15

The last judgment – justice will be done

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Introduction

- ❖ Justice will be done.
 - There are so many crimes which go unpunished. Take for instance Adolf Hitler. He didn't appear in court for all the people who died during the Second World War.
 - And if he would have appeared in court, what punishment could ever have done justice to all the victims of war crimes?
 - There are so many crimes which have been accepted by society. Many people from Africa were transported as slaves to America. Many died during transport. Others lost their freedom and were sold and bought and often kept under harsh inhuman conditions.
 - The list of unpunished crimes is long.
 - There is a difference between crime and sin.
 - A crime is an action against the law of a state. There are actions which will be condemned as crimes by the legal authorities, which are equal to sins.
 - “Peter and John (standing in front of the Jewish religious court, the Sanhedrin) replied, ‘Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God’ ” (Acts 4:19; 5:29).
 - Corruption is a part of life in many countries; at the same time it is a sin in the eyes of God. Adultery is ‘accepted’ in many countries, but not in the eyes of God.
 - A sin is an action against the will of God. There are actions which will be regarded as sins, but not as crimes by the legal authorities.

- “Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell” (Mt 5:22).
 - Evangelism is prohibited in some countries, and at the same time approved and rewarded by God.
- ❖ Justice will be done.
 - God will judge all sins committed by those who didn’t believe in God.
 - “I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town” (Mt 10:15).
 - God will also judge all sins committed by believers!
 - “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb 4:13).
 - ❖ Justice will be done.
 - This is a very important theme of this Biblical story. By doing justice God will eradicate evil and the new creation will dawn.
 - ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Revelation to John. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a “stand-alone”. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.¹

Context

- ❖ The book of Revelation is like a beautiful painting, depicting the promises of God with regard to the “end of time”, the victory and the judgment of Christ. It is impossible to study one passage without looking at the book as a whole.
- ❖ A brief outline of the Book of Revelation:

Introduction (Rev 1:1-3)	
	The origin and the command to write this Revelation.
The Book of Revelation (Rev 1:4-22:21)	
Rev 1:4-8	The opening liturgical setting.
Rev 1:9-3:22	PART 1

¹ This outline for sermons is brief and does not discuss all the (many) different theories about the structures and outlines of the Book of Revelation. Beale (1999) provides a detailed outline. For discussion see Garrow (1997).

Rev 4:1-22:11	PART 2
Rev 22:12-21	The closing liturgical setting.

- PART 1: The risen and exalted Christ sends his seven messages to the seven churches in the Roman Province of Asia.
- PART 2: The heavenly courtroom and the judgment of God, ending with the descent of the new heaven and earth.
 - PART 2: Three main stages can be distinguished in this part of the Revelation. Each stage is introduced by a vision of the heavenly courtroom where God resides as the Creator-King and Judge of all creation.

Part 2 (Rev 4:1-22:11)	
Stage 1	Rev 4:1-7:17 > the first six seals.
Stage 2	Rev 8:1-11:14 > (the seventh seal) and the first six trumpets.
Stage 3	Rev 11:15-22:11 > (the seventh trumpet) and the seven bowls of God's wrath > the two cities: Babylon versus the New Jerusalem.
Stage 3 (Rev 11:15-22:11) – in more detail	
Rev 11:15-16:21	The war between Christ and the powers of Satan, the Beast, the false prophet, and Babylon. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rev 11:15-19 > The heavenly courtroom, the kingship of Christ announced. • Rev 12:1-14:20 > The war between Christ and Satan, the victory of Christ. • Rev 15:1-16:21 > The seven bowls of Gods' wrath, the victory over and the destruction of Babylon.
Rev 17:1-21:8	The destruction of Babylon and the final judgment. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rev 17:1-19:10 > The Fall of Babylon. • Rev 19:11-21:8 > The final judgment.
Rev 21:9-22:11	The vision of the New Jerusalem and the New Creation.

- Revelation 20:1-10 is the second part in which John describes the victory of Christ and final judgment of the death and the living. This is important for the explanation and understanding of Revelation 20:1-10.

- The final judgment can be divided into four parts. Each part ends with the execution of the judgment: **the fiery lake of burning sulfur**.

Rev 19:11-21:8 > The victory of Christ and the final judgment.	
Rev 19:11-22	Christ and his Victory: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The beast was captured, and with it the false prophet (...). The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur” (Rev 19:20).
Rev 20:1-10	Christ and his Victory: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown” (Rev 20:10).
Rev 20:11-15	Christ and his Judgment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15).
Rev 21:1-8	Christ and his Judgment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur” (Rev 21:8).

Form and structure

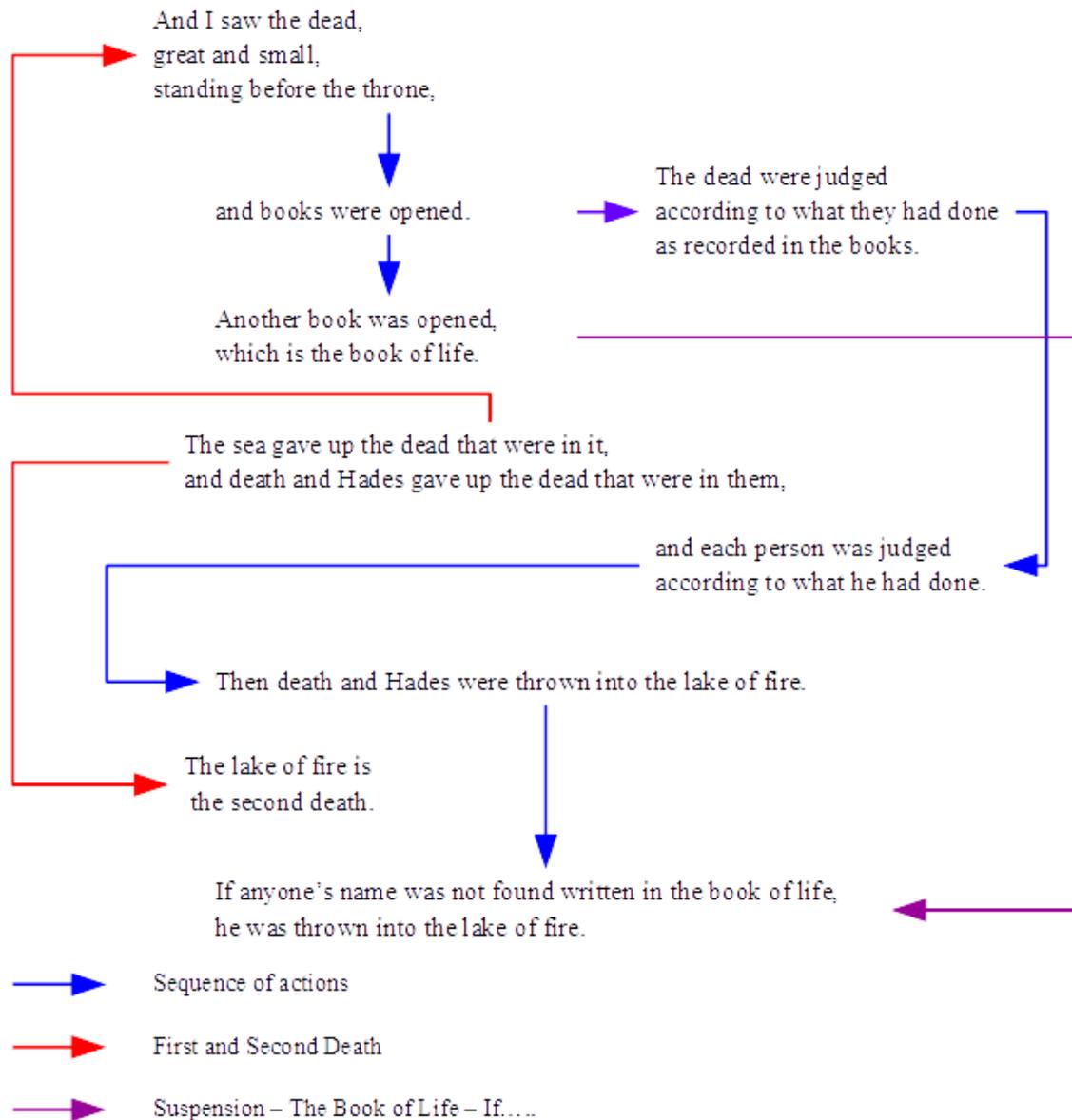
- ❖ Revelation 20:11-15 consists of four parts.
 - **A1.** The introduction of the throne and its solemn holiness (11).
 - **A2.** The dead standing in front of the throne and the books (12a).
 - **B.** The judgment of the dead (12b-13).
 - **C.** The punishment (14-15).

<i>The throne of God:</i> (verse 11) – A1	Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.
<i>The “dead”:</i> (the first death)	And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne,

<i>(verse 12a) – A2</i>	<p>and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life.</p>
<i>The judgment: (verse 12b-13) – B</i>	<p>The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.</p> <p>The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done.</p>
<i>The condemnation: (verse 14-15) – C</i>	<p>Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.</p> <p>The lake of fire is the second death.</p> <p>Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.</p>

- ❖ The analysis of the thematic relationships reveals the following. There are three kinds of internal relations.
 - A sequence of actions: the opening of the books, the judgment of the dead and finally the condemnation (the blue relationships).
 - The thematic relation of the first and the second death. The dead are standing before the throne. They were held by the sea, death and Hades, the first death, and finally, they will suffer the second death (the red relationships).
 - The book of life. This book is opened together with the other books, but the listener (reader) has to wait until the end of this paragraph before he understands the importance of this book. This creates a suspension (the magenta relationship).

Analysis of internal relationships – Revelation 20:11-15



Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

Verse 11-12a

- ❖ Place = “τόπος”: 3. a position held in a group for discharge of some responsibility, *position, office*, in a judicial body.²
- ❖ “The earth and the heavens fled from his presence.” The earth and the heavens are personified. Another very interesting personification of “the earth” is found in Genesis 4:11: “Now you (Cain) are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.”
 - The use of words is different from Revelation 21:1: “the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.”

Verse 12b-13

- ❖ Throne = “θρόνος”: 1. *chair, seat* (...) of the 12 apostles as judges or rulers in the time of the final consummation; **Mt 19:28b**; **Lk 22:30**; compare **Rev 20:4**.³
- ❖ Death and Hades = “ὁ θάνατος καὶ ὁ ᾅδης”: Both are references to places where dead people reside until their judgment. They might be compared to a prison. Christ has the power to unlock: “And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (Rev 1:18). Hades: *the netherworld*, as a place of the dead.⁴ Death and Hades are not two separate realms, but this is an instance of hendiadys (“one through two”), a figure of speech used for emphasis.

Exposition

Verse 11-12a

- ❖ “A great white throne.” This is the only instance where two adjectives are used to describe the glory of this throne. This throne reflects the glory of “him who was seated on it.” (Compare Mt 25:31-32.)
 - Everything is ready for the last judgment.
 - “The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.” This doesn’t imply that the earth and the heavens will be destroyed. It seems probable

² Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 1011).

³ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 460).

⁴ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 19).

that they are personified and introduced as “persons,” who cannot take part in the judgment of mankind.

- Some commentators note a contradiction between this verse and Revelation 20:13, where the sea is mentioned. There would be a contradiction if the heavens and the earth were destroyed. Since this is not the case, they “fled”, there is no contradiction.
- Instead of “the earth and the heavens,” John sees all the dead people. There are people who held important positions during their lives, like rulers, kings, and the rich, bearing a lot of responsibility and accountability towards God. They are “**the great.**” There are also “**the small.**” They are the numerous people, who were serving “the great.” (Compare Dan 12:2; Jn 5:28-29; Ac 24:15.)
- The judgment will be given to Christ (Jn 5:22, Ac 10:42).
 - “**For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.** He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead” (Ac 17:31).
- In his judgment God will show his righteousness and his glory:
 - “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water” (Rev 14:7).

Verse 12b-13

- ❖ “**And books were opened.**” All our deeds have been recorded.
 - All men’s secrets will become public (Rom 2:16; Ec 12:14; Jude 14, 15). “**He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts.**” (1 Cor 4:5).
 - “**to what they had done**” = “**τὰ ἔργα**”. This translation (NIV) obscures the fact that the same Greek words are used in Revelation 2:2: “**your deeds,**” and in some other messages to the seven churches. The glorified Christ says that he knows the “**deeds**” of the congregation and the deeds of others, who oppose the congregations (Rev 2:2, 5, 6; Rev 2:19, 23, 26 (here: “**τὰ ἔργα**”= “does (my) will”); Rev 3:1, 2; Rev 3:8; Rev 3:15; Rev 14:13.)
 - It is important to study these “deeds.”
 - “For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? **For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat.** It is written:
“‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord,
‘every knee will bow before me;

every tongue will confess to God.'

So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Rm 14:9-12).

- ❖ **"Another book was opened, which is the book of life."** This book has been mentioned earlier:
 - "He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. **I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angel**" (Rev 3:5).
 - The importance of this promise has been made clear in this passage (Rev 20:11-15). It is a matter of eternal punishment or eternal life in communion with God and Christ.
 - During the last judgment, Christ will acknowledge the names written in the book of life.
 - This book is probably the same book or scroll, written on both sides and sealed with seven seals, which only Christ is worthy to open (Rev 5:1-11).
 - And God will reward the faithful: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor 5:10).
 - "The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great— and for destroying those who destroy the earth" (Rev 11:18).
 - His judgment is a just judgment:
 - "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged (Rev 16:5; see also Rev 16:7; 19:2).
- ❖ John doesn't call this a second resurrection. The resurrection implies a glorified body (1 Cor 15:35-58). Only those who are in Christ will be resurrected and inherit the Kingdom of God.
- ❖ Book of life > it is by grace that we are saved < Jacob and Esau.

Verse 14-15

- ❖ **"Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire."** Death and Hades as 'a prison' won't be part of the new creation. This doesn't mean the end of their existence. But they will receive (part of) the dead.
 - **"The lake of fire is the second death."** This stands in opposition to the "first resurrection" (Rev 20:5).

Application

Verse 11-12a

- ❖ Christians should be aware of the fact that God has created this world and will judge this world accordingly (Rev 4:11; Rom 1:18-24). He will sit on his glorious throne to judge the dead.
 - Christians are called to serve him as priests and to glorify and worship his holy name (Rev 1:5-6).

Verse 12b-13

- ❖ Because everyone will be judge, this should humble Christians not to pass judgment on others too easily.
 - “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Mt 7:1-2).
- ❖ In applying these words of God, it is important to study Revelation 2-3, where Christ approves and disapproves the deeds of Christians and their congregations.
 - In Matthew 25:31-46 Christ refers to the acts of mercy.
- ❖ It is also a call to act according to the “Book of Life.”

Verse 14-15

- ❖ The camp of God, the beloved city, the Christian church will be protected by God himself in the final attempt of Satan to destroy the work of God in creation and salvation.
 - “Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Cor 15:58).

Eternal punishment?

- ❖ Some people are troubled by the idea (fact) that the punishment will be eternal. They still hope that the dead will have a second chance to enter heaven. Or they prefer the thought that the eternal punishment is equal to annihilation, the end of existence.
- ❖ We should never forget that sins have ‘eternal’ consequences.
 - Take for instance a murder. Someone has taken the life of somebody else. The result of this sin is not only “death” but it can break the chain of generations. In such a case a murder has “eternal consequences”.
 - Not to mention all those sins which led to the killing fields of this earth.
 - Sexual abuse is not only a case of sexual harassment. It is not true that when sexual abuse stops a girl or a woman can enter a new and loving relationship. Some women

can't become pregnant because of damage or of fear. Also, in this case, the sin of sexual abuse breaks the chain of generations and has "eternal consequences".

- Therefore we should be troubled by the severity and the consequences of sin.

Quotes⁵

- ❖ "My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?" (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)

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⁵ Justice (n.d.). Popular Quotes. Retrieved October 27, 2016, from <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag?utf8=✓&id=justice>

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