THE STANDING DEAD

The focus of this week’s lesson is Revelation 20:12: “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” (NKJV, emphasis supplied).

The immediately preceding and succeeding contexts of this verse indicate that it is describing the millennial judgment of the wicked in heaven. Revelation 20:5 affirms that all the wicked will be dead on earth during this judgment: “The rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished” (NKJV). So the question is, How can dead people stand before God in judgment in heaven while they are dead on earth?

Some of those who believe in the immortality of the soul claim that it is the immortal souls of the wicked that will stand in judgment before God. This is reading into the text what is not there. Furthermore, the text does not say that the dead stood before God after they resurrected. The text explicitly states that the dead stood before God.

The judgment process of the wicked during and after the millennium will follow the same three-step process as the judgment of the righteous dead had done before (see Week 08). First, the heavenly court in heaven will review their life records in the books. Second, based on the evidence, the heavenly jury will pronounce the verdict and sentence. Finally, the sentence will be executed in the lake of fire after the thousand years. So let’s begin our study on the standing dead.
Write out Revelation 20:11–21:1 from the translation of your choice. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
Three Stages

As we pointed out in Week 08, the judgment of the righteous before the millennium follows a three-step process:

• The judgment review in heaven before the Second Coming (Rev. 14:6, 7; Dan. 8:14).
• The announcement of the verdict and sentence in heaven (Rev. 22:11).
• The implementation of the verdict (the reward) when Jesus returns to earth (Rev. 22:12).

The judgment of the wicked during and after the millennium will follow the same three-step process. Before the process begins, however, Jesus will return to earth in power and glory. Revelation 6:14–17 describes the second coming of Jesus, when every mountain and island will be moved out of its place (not be found) and the wicked will cry out for the mountains and rocks to fall on them to hide them from the face of the One who is seated on the throne. Revelation 20:11 further describes the Second Coming, where there is One sitting on a throne before whose face heaven and earth find no place. The brightness of Christ’s coming will destroy the wicked, and they will remain dead for one thousand years (2 Thess. 1:7, 8; Rev. 20:5). The three-step process will then begin:

1. The Millennial Review: At the Second Coming, the faithful martyrs will come to life (Rev. 20:4, 5), and they, along with the redeemed of all ages (1 Cor. 6:1–3), will participate with Jesus in the heavenly millennial judgment. During this judgment, the wicked dead will stand before God’s judgment bar, not in person but through the record of their lives (Rev. 20:12, 13). It is in this sense that the dead stand before God.

2. The Verdict/Sentence: After the judgment reviews the lives of the wicked, the heavenly court will pronounce the verdict and sentence. The redeemed “meted out to the wicked the portion which they must suffer, according to their works; and it was written against their names in the book of death” (Ellen G. White, Early Writings [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1882], 291).

3. The Execution of the Sentence: The third stage, the execution of the sentence, will take place on earth after the millennium. The wicked will resurrect and see with their own eyes the record of their lives, and will confess the justice of their sentence (Isa. 45:23; Phil. 2:9–11). They will then be cast into the lake of fire to suffer the second death (Rev. 20:14, 15).

Here is the summary of events from the Second Coming to the destruction of the wicked (Rev. 20:11–15):

• Revelation 20:11: The Second Coming
• Revelation 20:12: The investigation and sentencing of the wicked in heaven during the thousand years. The dead will stand before God, not in person but through the record of their lives.
• Revelation 20:13: After the millennium, the sea and the grave will give up the wicked dead, and they will see with their own eyes the record of their lives and confess the justice of their sentence.
• Revelation 20:14, 15: The sentence will be executed in the lake of fire.
THE SECOND RESURRECTION

Revelation 20:13 describes the resurrection of the wicked after the millennium: “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” (emphasis supplied). The expressions “gave up” and “delivered up” are similar to the language of Isaiah 26:19: “Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead” (emphasis supplied).

As with the righteous, the wicked will resurrect with the selfsame character they had in life. They will pick up at the precise point where they left off when they died. God preserved a precise record of their lives on His “heavenly hard drive,” and He will return to them their self-identity without the minutest change. Whereas during the thousand years the wicked dead will appear in judgment through their records, after the thousand years they will live again (Rev. 20:5) and appear in person.

“There are kings and generals who conquered nations, valiant men who never lost a battle, proud, ambitious warriors whose approach made kingdoms tremble. In death these experienced no change. As they come up from the grave, they resume the current of their thoughts just where it ceased. They are actuated by the same desire to conquer that ruled them when they fell” (Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911], 664). Clearly, the wicked not only receive the breath of life but also the precise record of their lives that God preserved on His “heavenly hard drive.”

As we noted in an earlier lesson, the spirit is more than just the breath of life; it is the breath along with the life record and character of the person: “Our personal identity is preserved in the resurrection, though not the same particles of matter or material substance as went into the grave. The wondrous works of God are a mystery to man. The spirit, the character of man, is returned to God, there to be preserved. In the resurrection, every man will have his own character” (Ellen G. White, Maranatha [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976], 301).

The wicked will stand before the judgment bar of God for high treason against the government of heaven. Their works will be revealed to them and the irrevocable sentence pronounced: “The whole wicked world stand arraigned at the bar of God on the charge of high treason against the government of heaven. They have none to plead their cause; they are without excuse; and the sentence of eternal death is pronounced against them” (White, The Great Controversy, 668). Then the sentence will be executed, when the wicked are cast into the lake of fire to suffer the second death (Rev. 20:11–15).
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Hebrews 12:22–24
Matthew 22:11–13
Revelation 15:2–4
1 Corinthians 6:1–3
Isaiah 26:19
Philippians 2:9–11

What other verses come to mind in connection with Revelation 20:11–21:1?

Review your memorized verse from Revelation 20:11–21:1.
INSIDE OR OUTSIDE?

The three-step judgment process has a specific objective—to demonstrate to the entire universe, both to the loyal and the rebellious, that God adjudicated every case correctly. In the pre-Advent investigative judgment, God will prove to the heavenly universe that He has a legal right to take the redeemed to heaven. As the redeemed participate in the heavenly millennial judgment they will agree that God was just and true in condemning Satan, his angels, and the wicked. Finally, the post-millennial judgment of Satan, his angels, and the wicked will persuade them that God was loving, fair, just, and merciful in condemning them to eternal destruction. The prophet Isaiah described this climactic moment of world history: “I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear” (Isa. 45:23).

Then, and only then, can God destroy sin and sinners and the final enemy, death (1 Cor. 15:27, 28). When the great controversy concludes, the universe will be clean and in perfect harmony. The judgment process will leave no loose ends. No one will blame God for being partial or for the existence of evil.

After the millennium, there will be only two groups, those inside the city of God and those outside. Those inside were saved by grace through faith in the righteousness of Jesus. However, they were judged by their works (Rev. 22:12: Matt. 16:27), because works reveal whether faith is genuine. Human beings are not saved by a bare faith or by works, nor by faith plus works, but by a dynamic faith *that* works (James. 2:14–26). The “heroes of faith” in Hebrews 11 not only believed but also acted out their faith.

The book of Revelation contrasts those inside the city with those outside: “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie” (Rev. 22:14, 15). “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev. 21:7, 8).

We must come to Jesus now and claim Him as our advocate. If we repent of our sins, confess them, and trust His righteousness, He will defend us in the judgment. At death or the close of probation, however, all cases are decided and there will be no changing sides (1 John 2:1, 2; Heb. 7:26; 4:15).
JUDGING ANGELS

Then I saw thrones, and Jesus and the redeemed saints sat upon them; and the saints reigned as kings and priests unto God. Christ, in union with His people, judged the wicked dead, comparing their acts with the statute book, the Word of God, and deciding every case according to the deeds done in the body. Then they meted out to the wicked the portion which they must suffer, according to their works; and it was written against their names in the book of death. Satan also and his angels were judged by Jesus and the saints. Satan's punishment was to be far greater than that of those whom he had deceived. His suffering would so far exceed theirs as to bear no comparison with it. After all those whom he had deceived had perished, Satan was still to live and suffer on much longer. (Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1882], 290, 291.)

During the thousand years between the first and the second resurrection the judgment of the wicked takes place. The apostle Paul points to this judgment as an event that follows the second advent. “Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.” 1 Corinthians 4:5. Daniel declares that when the Ancient of Days came, “judgment was given to the saints of the Most High.” Daniel 7:22. At this time the righteous reign as kings and priests unto God. John in the Revelation says: “I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them.” “They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.” Revelation 20:4, 6. It is at this time that, as foretold by Paul, “the saints shall judge the world.” 1 Corinthians 6:2. In union with Christ they judge the wicked, comparing their acts with the statute book, the Bible, and deciding every case according to the deeds done in the body. Then the portion which the wicked must suffer is meted out, according to their works; and it is recorded against their names in the book of death.

Satan also and evil angels are judged by Christ and His people. Says Paul: “Know ye not that we shall judge angels?” Verse 3. And Jude declares that “the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, He hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.” Jude 6. (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911], 660, 661.)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

What parallels do you find between Revelation 6:14–17 and Revelation 20:11? What event are these verses describing?

If God knows all, does He really need a judgment?

Revelation 20:12 tells us that during the thousand years the wicked dead will stand before God in judgment. How can dead people stand before God?

Why does God allow the righteous to participate in the judgment of Satan and the wicked during the millennium (1 Cor. 6:1–3; Rev. 20:4–6)?

Why is it necessary that Satan and the wicked will witness the record of their lives after the millennium?

How do you explain that we are saved by grace through faith, but we are judged by works?