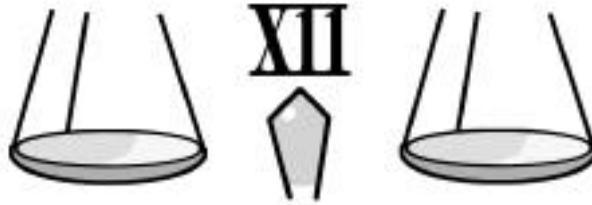


The Pre-Advent Judgment



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Dan. 7:9-14, 21, 22, 26-28.*

Memory Text: “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (*1 Peter 4:17, NKJV*).

During the closing days of World War II, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a young German theologian, was escorted from his prison cell and hanged for high treason. In 1996, a court in Berlin officially declared Dietrich Bonhoeffer innocent of the charges that led to his execution.

Something similar happens in the pre-Advent judgment. Though God's people are accused and maligned by Satan and his followers here on earth, before the universe they will be exonerated in the judgment. Indeed, the judgment is given in behalf of God's faithful people. The heavenly court will rehabilitate God's people and pronounce a judgment in favor of the saints (*Dan. 7:22*). This pre-Advent judgment is, then, part of the good news. Far from being a relic of Adventist history, the pre-Advent judgment is a vital part of God's plan of salvation—and only by understanding it can one fully appreciate the good news of the gospel.

The Week at a Glance: Why would an omniscient God need an investigation? How does the great-controversy motif help us understand the need for a judgment? How does the idea of a pre-Advent judgment appear in the Old Testament? In the New? What is the purpose of the judgment? What kind of assurance can we have in it? What is the link between the judgment and the Second Coming?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 20.*

Investigative Judgments in the Old Testament (*Gen. 3:9-19*).

Seventh-day Adventists believe that Daniel 7 teaches what has come to be known as the pre-Advent or investigative judgment. Interestingly enough, the concept of an investigation prior to judgment is found early on in the Bible.

What do the following passages teach us about the concept of an *investigative judgment*? *Gen. 3:9-19; 18:20, 21; 19:24, 25.*

From God's handling of the first sin, a pattern of judicial procedure emerges. First comes the inquiry, or investigation: " 'Where are you?' " " 'Who told you?' " " 'Have you eaten from the tree?' " " 'What is this you have done?' " (*Gen. 3:9-13, NKJV*). Only after this investigation is completed is the verdict announced (*vss. 14-19*).

The way Scripture depicts God's handling of Sodom and Gomorrah is also significant. Most of Genesis 18 and 19 describe God's deliberations prior to His punitive act.

When Moses writes that God said "I will go down now and see . . ." (*NKJV*), he is simply describing God's investigation of the actual facts before punishment is inflicted.

A natural question is Why would God, who knows all things (*see Job 37:16; Prov. 5:21; Isa. 46:9, 10; 2 Tim. 2:19*), need to conduct an investigation? Didn't He already know exactly what was going on in those two cities? Plus, why did He have to ask Adam and Eve what they had done? Certainly, He knew what they did.

First, at least in the case of Adam and Eve, it seems that He required an account from the perpetrators, and the process of inquiry heightens the awareness of the transgressors of the sinfulness of their actions.

Second, it's crucial to keep in context the idea of the great controversy. We are not alone in the universe; the whole question of sin and evil and rebellion involves more than just humans (*see Job 1; 2; Eph. 3:10; Rev. 15:4; Rom. 8:22, 23*). Other intelligent beings, not omniscient (as is the Lord), are watching (*1 Cor. 4:9*). With this context and background in mind, we can better understand the need of an open investigation prior to judgment.

How does the concept of the great controversy, with other intelligent life watching what is happening, help you understand the need for an investigation prior to the execution of a sentence? Why wouldn't it be fair to punish or to exonerate anyone in a trial without first presenting all the facts?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: *Daniel 7:9-14, 21, 22, 26-28.*

Teachers Aims:

1. To understand that the pre-Advent judgment occurs prior to Christ's second advent.
2. To become keenly aware of the character we must allow Christ to form within us.
3. To encourage faithfulness to Jesus and His commandments.

Lesson Outline:

I. Investigative Judgment: Old And New Testaments.

- A. God established a pattern of judicial procedure to handle sin and sinners.
- B. The concept of an investigation prior to judgment is found in the Old Testament (*Gen. 3:9-19*).
- C. God investigated Adam's and Eve's and Sodom's and Gomorrah's sins prior to taking punitive action.
- D. The parable of the wedding feast is a prime example in the New Testament of the concept of the investigative judgment (*Matt. 22:1-14*).

II. Vindication and Condemnation (*Dan. 7:22*).

- A. The Hebrew concept of justice and judgment involves not only the vindication of the innocent but the punishment of the guilty.
- B. Jesus, the Son of Man, is at the center of this judgment.
- C. The judgment brings about the demise of the little horn.
- D. The judgment vindicates the saints of God.

Summary: "So in the great day of final atonement and investigative judgment the only cases considered are those of the professed people of God. The judgment of the wicked is a distinct and separate work, and takes place at a later period."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 480.

COMMENTARY

I. Judgment.

Although the doctrine of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment are unique to Seventh-day Adventists, a day of judgment is common to many denominations who look to such a time when God will correct injustices.

In today's world, however, divine judgment—indeed, any form of moral discernment—has become feared and misunderstood. Many people assume that to be good is to be nonjudgmental. God's status as Judge is seen to conflict with His goodness. Matthew 7:1, "Judge not, that you be not judged" (*NKJV*) is often quoted out of context, in support of this general concept that judging is bad or distasteful.

The Pre-Advent Judgment in the New Testament (*Matt. 22:1-14*).

The concept of an investigative, pre-Advent judgment appears also in the New Testament. The parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22 is a prime example.

Read Matthew 22:1-14. Where do you see the concept of an “investigation” here prior to the execution of a judgment?

The king’s inspection of the guests represents a process of investigation. The result of this investigation determines who may remain and who may not. In this sense it is a picture of the pre-Advent judgment in heaven going on now.

Read carefully John 5:28, 29 and Revelation 20:4-6. Where in these verses do you see the idea that a judgment has already taken place prior to the events depicted in these texts?

Many Bible interpreters admit that Revelation 20 teaches two literal resurrections, separated by one thousand years. Inasmuch as only the “blessed and holy” come up in the first resurrection, a prior judgment must have taken place to determine who will take part in the first one.

The Lutheran theologian Joseph A. Seiss writes, “The resurrection, and the changes which pass ‘in the twinkling of an eye’ upon the living, are themselves the fruits and embodiments of antecedent judgment. They are the consequences of adjudications then already made. Strictly speaking, men are neither raised nor translated, in order to come to judgment. Resurrections and translations are products of judgment previously passed, upon the dead as dead, and upon the quick as quick. ‘The dead in Christ shall rise first,’ because they are already adjudged to be in Christ.”—*The Apocalypse, Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 1973), p. 181.

Meanwhile, in Revelation 14 the harvest of the earth (*vss. 14-20*) is preceded by the first angel’s message, “ ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come’ ” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*). When we look at the sequence of events portrayed in this chapter, we conclude that the judgment spoken of in verse 7 precedes the execution of the judgment at Christ’s second advent.

Read again the parable and focus on one point: the desire of the host to have people attend his son’s wedding feast. What does that tell us about the character of God and His desire to save all those invited to the feast?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

The problem is not that judging is bad but that it is not “nice.” We have come to value niceness above all else as a useful way of keeping our society from splitting apart into any number of divisions. However, it is a mistake to assume that God is bound by social convention. God is good, but He is not “nice.”

In fact, God’s goodness demands that He forego niceness. Niceness demands mostly that we do not get involved. Goodness, however, demands involvement. In order for God to fulfill His goodness, He eventually has to intervene and put an end to evil. This is where His final judgment comes in.

It is important to realize that God is judging people only secondarily. Primarily, He is judging sin and its results. God loves everyone, and He wants everyone to be in His kingdom. But He also wants everyone to be free from attachment to sin, which He is going to judge and destroy. The question is whether you want fellowship with God badly enough to let go of what is separating you from Him.

God has provided us with the means to let go—Jesus Christ. Anyone who accepts Jesus’ offer of salvation and His Lordship has already been judged, favorably.

II. Useful Quotes on Divine Judgment.

“Because the judge is God himself, we can be confident that, at that last judgment, everything will be absolutely just. Everyone will be judged on the basis of what he has known of God and his laws. Those who have never heard of God’s written law will be judged by what they can see of God and his standards from the evidence of the world around them. Their conscience also will have indicated to them what is right and wrong.”—*Eerdmans’ Handbook to Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), p. 255.

“Mention of this judgment in the New Testament frequently refers to its righteousness. . . . This righteousness is closely connected with the fact that everything will be revealed before the judgment seat: it is not only Christ who will be revealed, but also the living and the dead. This judgment is just; it corresponds to the way things are in this present reality. It will be a true unveiling, an unveiling of what was already seen by the eyes of God during the present, earthly existence.”—G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), p. 156.

“In one sense, however, judgment has already occurred. God’s wrath and righteous indignation against sin and evil has been manifested. Hell, the second death, happened—but instead of happening right away to those who deserve it, it happened to Jesus Christ on the cross. What killed Christ was the wrath of a holy God who allowed Jesus to face divine wrath—the Lord’s final righteous judg-

The Son of Man and the Pre-Advent Judgment

As Daniel watched the heavenly court scene, he saw “ ‘One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven’ ” to the Ancient of Days (*Dan. 7:13, NKJV*). The phrase “ ‘like the Son of Man’ ” simply means that this figure was in human form.

Who is this “Son of Man,” and what is His role in the pre-Advent judgment? *Mark 10:45, John 5:22, 1 Tim. 2:5.*

The “Son of Man” was Jesus’ own favorite title for Himself. Others called Him *Prophet* or *Messiah* or *Son of David* or *Son of God*, because these terms meant to them a glorious conquering king who would immediately fulfill their personal and national hopes. But Jesus used this title about forty times to emphasize His connection with humanity (*Matt. 8:20, 9:6, 10:23, 11:19, 12:8, etc.*). At the same time, it was a Messianic title (based on this text in Daniel), and the chief priests recognized it as such (*Matt. 26:64, 65*), which explained their reaction. Thus, one thing we can be sure of: Jesus is at the center of this heavenly judgment scene in Daniel 7.

What verdict is rendered in this heavenly judgment? *See Dan. 7:22.*

What’s crucial to understand is that this judgment ends with good news for God’s people. First, verse 22 says that “judgment was given in favor of the saints of the most High” (*NKJV*); that is, judgment was rendered in favor of the saints, of God’s people. This is a chapter depicting, among other things, more of God’s work in behalf of His “saints.”

Read Daniel 7:18, 22, 27. Whatever the differences in the texts, all refer to one common element. What is it, and what hope does it promise for God’s people?

In Daniel 7, we see the Lord working in behalf of His people amid the turbulence, the persecution, and violence depicted in the chapter. We are in the midst of a great controversy; Daniel 7 focuses on one aspect of that controversy. Even more so, He shows us how it will ultimately end, and that end is good news for His people.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

ment against sin—so that none of us would have to face the second death ourselves.”—Clifford Goldstein, *By His Stripes* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press®, 1999), pp. 134, 135.

“[The] certainty of ultimate judgment, when the imbalances of justice will be redressed [corrected], is several times repeated in the New Testament. Paul tells the Athenian philosophers that God has overlooked idolatry in the past only because ‘he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed,’ and he warns his readers in Rome not to presume on the riches of God’s ‘kindness, tolerance and patience,’ which are giving them space in which to repent. Peter addresses the same message to

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Daniel 7:9-28, Zechariah 3:1-7, Matthew 22:1-14, 1 John 3:11-24.*

① Judgment has both positive and negative meanings. Someone being oppressed or brutalized would welcome judgment against his or her oppressor; while wrongdoers would do well to tremble before the threat of judgment. Are your earliest memories of the term *judgment* positive or negative? Explain why. How about now? Do you fear or welcome the judgment?

② The Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the judgment has evolved from primarily an “investigative” process to a “pre-Advent” process. How would you characterize the difference between the two? Which one, in your opinion, best reflects God’s character? *Read John 3:16-21, 1 John 3:11-24.*

③ Jesus’ parable of the wedding (*Matt. 22:1-14*) describes some interesting dynamics: The ruler’s “friends” refuse to come to his son’s wedding, thus revealing themselves as enemies. Those unworthy of the ruler’s kindness are treated as honored guests. But one of the guests refuses to wear the wedding garment provided by the ruler. How does gratitude or ingratitude reveal itself in the salvation process? What is represented by the wedding garment? What does it say about the person who refuses to wear it? *Read Rev. 19:6-9.*

④ How does it feel to be declared innocent in Heaven’s judgment? How does it make you want to live, and why?

⑤ Part of the judgment has to do with how God is regarded by the citizens of heaven and earth. How do people know that you are dedicated to living by His principles? (Hint: It is not just what we do not do. It is also what we *do*.)

Vindication and Condemnation: the Little Horn, the Saints, and the Pre-Advent Judgment

If the judgment in Daniel 7 is really about the saints, why is it depicted in the context of the persecuting little horn?

Good question, and the answer, very briefly, can be found in the Hebrew concept of justice and judgment, which involves not only the vindication of the innocent but the punishment of the guilty. The little horn does its evil against God's people; ultimately, there is a judgment that not only vindicates the Lord's people—"and judgment was passed *in favor of the saints*" (*Dan. 7:22, NASB, emphasis supplied*)—but that brings the wicked little horn to final justice: "But the judgment shall sit, and they [the saints] shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end" (*vs. 26*).

In other words, in the context of the pre-Advent judgment, the depiction of the demise of the little horn, the symbol of evil, makes perfect sense. It's no mystery that they are linked. It's typical in the Hebrew understanding of justice, judgment, and vindication: All occur together.

Read Deuteronomy 25:1 and 1 Kings 8:32. How do we see the concept expressed above manifested in these two texts?

In both verses we see the principle shown in Daniel 7: the wicked punished, the righteous justified. This is judgment, and it's why Daniel 7 depicts in the context of the judgment the demise of the anti-Christian horn power. In the final judgment, not only are God's people vindicated, but the persecutor is punished.

No question that the *result* of the judgment brings about the final demise of the little horn (after all, it brings about the end of all earthly kingdoms). The judgment, which leads to the Second Coming, is simply not limited only to the end of the little horn. It's a much grander, broader event that leads to the vindication of the saints, as well as the demise of their (and God's) enemies.

"If there is a court case," wrote Roy Gane, of Andrews University, "that results in one party winning and the other losing, it is because the two parties are opposed to each other. Through investigation, one is found to be right and the other wrong. The 'horn' is opposed to Christ. It speaks arrogant words against 'the Most High,' oppresses His people, and intends to change God's law. The horn power is a rebel who claims control instead of Christ.

"When Christ wins in the judgment, His loyal people win with Him."—*Altar Call* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Diadem, 1999), p. 241.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

‘scoffers’ who ridicule the notion of a future day of judgment; the reason for its nonarrival is that God in his patience is holding the door of opportunity open a while longer.”—John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p. 208.

III. What the Bible Says About Divine Judgment.

“Jesus said, ‘For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind’ ” (*John 9:39, NIV*).

Witnessing

We are not alone in the universe. An evocative statement for some; dismissed out of hand by others.

Some individuals state, without doubt or hesitation, that science strongly supports extraterrestrial contacts; others recollect personal contact with extraterrestrials through actual alien abductions. These alleged encounters are generally described as highly traumatic, physically and mentally damaging, and frightening beyond imagination. Is any of this possible—could it be true?

The answer lies in the story of the great controversy, which is pivotal to Seventh-day Adventist belief. Satan began his earthly odyssey as a result of his failed attempt to bring about division in heaven. He was thrown out of heaven along with those angels who chose to follow him, and they were confined to this planet, and this one alone. Is it conceivable that God would permit Satan to spread his evil to other sinless worlds, or that they, in turn, would wish to visit this sad little planet?

We know that other sinless worlds in the universe watch the drama of good versus evil play out to the final act. These other worlds review the events as they unfold, because they are, and will continue to be, witnesses to the results of rebellion. Yet, regardless of how majestic the flight of the space shuttle is or the engineering brilliance of the international space station, space exploration will be confined according to God’s master plan.

Imagine how wonderful our existence would have been if our planet had not fallen into Lucifer’s evil hands! Think of the complete joy other worlds experience because of their sinless state. Doesn’t it make you long for our heavenly journey home? Rather than debate with nonbelievers about extraterrestrial visitations here on earth or in outer space, share with them the *certainty* of future fellowship with other intelligent beings when heaven becomes our home and this earth is made new again. Let those searching for truth know why you’re absolutely certain we are not alone in the universe!

The Time of the Pre-Advent Judgment

While Daniel 7 itself does not provide us with a precise date for the commencement of the pre-Advent judgment, it does give us a time frame within which the judgment takes place.

What does Daniel 7:8-10, 21,22,25, 26 tell us about the time of the investigative judgment?

In all three depictions of the judgment, it is shown to begin *after* a specific phase of the little-horn power. In each case, the little-horn power and its activities are mentioned; and then the judgment scene begins in heaven.

Meanwhile, we are given more details in Daniel 7:25, where the “time and times and the dividing of time” (or 1,260 years; see last week’s lesson) is mentioned in regard to the little horn, with the judgment scene occurring *after* that time period is depicted. And to repeat what we studied earlier: That 1,260-year period was linked with the little-horn power that arose out of the fourth beast, pagan Rome. This means that this judgment scene begins at least 1,260 years *after* the rise of the little-horn power (we use the dates A.D. 538 to A.D. 1798 to depict the beginning and the end of that 1,260-year period). The crucial point is that by the sixth century A.D. this entity had established itself as the great power in that part of the world.

If the little horn became a great power about the sixth century A.D., and the judgment occurs at least 1,260 years after, what approximate time do the texts show that this heavenly judgment began?

What’s important to understand about this judgment is that it is pre-Advent; that is, it occurs before the second advent of Christ. Indeed, verses 22 and 25 show not only that the judgment precedes the Second Advent but that the judgment is what leads to the Second Advent. As a result of the judgment, the saints possess the kingdom.

Thus, what we see in Daniel is a powerful presentation of a judgment that occurs after the 1,260 years and before the Second Coming.

Study carefully Daniel 7 until you can see for yourself the sequence of events: little horn, heavenly judgment, Second Coming. Know it well enough to share with someone in a clear and convincing manner.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

“Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” (*1 Cor. 6:2, NIV*).

“Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (*2 Tim. 4:8, NIV*).

“ ‘ “But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever” ’ ” (*Dan. 7:26, NIV*).

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Remember when you were a kid and studied current events in class? God appointed His servant, Daniel, to help unravel one of the greatest current-events assignments of all time in order to provide His people with a detailed road map to guide them toward their ultimate destination—heaven.

Gives an old assignment new meaning, doesn't it!

Thought Question:

Have you ever been invited to a formal event for which the invitation you received stated the event began promptly at 8:00 P.M., required formal attire, and asked you to RSVP? Let's say your response to the invitation was to arrive two hours late dressed in jeans and sweatshirt, and you had never bothered to RSVP anyone. What do you think you would find? Would the event be delayed until you arrived? Would the dress requirement be relaxed just in case you did not want to comply with it? Was your place *still* reserved even though you failed to give any indication that you were planning to attend? Is it possible that we often respond in much the same way to Christ's invitation to join Him on the journey toward eternal salvation? If so, what will be the final outcome? How can we comply with the terms of God's invitation?

Application Question:

God never forces; rather, He provides each of us with free will—the ability to choose for ourselves. He has provided each of us with the gift of intelligence, which He expects us to use in ways that will strengthen our relationship with Him. God also has provided us with the perfect resource to use whenever we are unclear as to the choice(s) we should make. What is this resource? (*See John 15:26.*) Finally, we know the positive side of free choice; is there a negative side? Discuss with others.

Further Study: “All who have truly repented of sin, and by faith claimed the blood of Christ as their atoning sacrifice, have had pardon entered against their names in the books of heaven; as they have become partakers of the righteousness of Christ, and their characters are found to be in harmony with the law of God, their sins will be blotted out, and they themselves will be accounted worthy of eternal life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 212.

“Jesus does not excuse their sins, but shows their penitence and faith, and, claiming for them forgiveness, He lifts His wounded hands before the Father and the holy angels, saying: I know them by name. I have graven them on the palms of My hands. ‘The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.’ Psalm 51:17. And to the accuser of His people He declares: ‘The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?’ Zechariah 3:2. Christ will clothe His faithful ones with His own righteousness, that He may present them to His Father ‘a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.’ Ephesians 5:27. Their names stand enrolled in the book of life, and concerning them it is written: ‘They shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy.’ Revelation 3:4.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 484.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Read the above quotes by Ellen White. How do you see in them a balance between grace and works? When she talks about those whose lives are found “in harmony with the law of God,” is she talking about salvation by works or a faith that works? Explain the difference.
- 2** The judgment in Daniel 7 leads to the Second Coming, an event of momentous importance. How should the realization of this importance help us to understand better our work as Seventh-day Adventists?

Summary: Following the three and a half times of the little horn’s dominion here on earth, a tribunal is being set up in heaven. In this pre-Advent judgment, the sins of God’s people are blotted out, the little horn is condemned, and the saints are given an everlasting dominion that will never be destroyed.