

God's Work as Judge



SABBATH—DECEMBER 17

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 25:31–46; Daniel 7:9–14; 1 Corinthians 6:2, 3; 2 Peter 2:4–6; Malachi 4:1.

MEMORY VERSE: “We must all stand in front of Christ to be judged. Each one of us will be judged for what we do while in our bodies. We’ll be judged for the good things and the bad things. Then each of us will receive [get paid for] what we are supposed [should] to get” (2 Corinthians 5:10, NIV).



We can hide things from people. But we can't hide anything from God.

THE BIBLE tells us that God will judge the dead and the living. Sometimes things in life are not fair. But the Bible tells us that God will make everything right.

The Bible says that God has “perfect knowledge” (Job 37:16, NIV). He “knows everything” (1 John 3:20, ERV). So, God knows everything we do, including the things we do in secret (Ecclesiastes 12:14; Jeremiah 17:10). We can hide things from people. But we can't hide anything from God.

What does God's knowledge about everything show us? God doesn't need to judge us to learn anything about us that He doesn't know already. So, why does God judge us then? Because God wants to show everyone in heaven and on earth that His final decisions are fair.

This week, we study God's work as Judge. This work has three parts: (1) God's work before the Second Coming, (2) His work during the 1,000 years in heaven, and (3) His punishment of the evil dead, who will wake up and die the second death. In the end, God will show that His people are innocent of the sins that Satan accused them of doing.

GOD’S FINAL WORK AS JUDGE (Matthew 25:31–46)

Some people think God’s work is all about punishment. Punishment only is part of God’s work as Judge. His work also includes the wonderful announcement that His people aren’t guilty. Daniel talks about this part of God’s work as Judge: “He decided in favor of his holy people” (Daniel 7:22, NIV). So, God’s work as Judge includes punishing evil people and rewarding people who obey Him. We see this important rule in Solomon’s prayer to God: “ ‘Please listen from heaven and judge them. If they are guilty, please show us that they are guilty. And if they are innocent, please show us that they are not guilty’ ” (1 Kings 8:32, ERV).

Read Jesus’ words in Matthew 25:31–46 and John 5:21–29. How does Jesus show us that God’s final work as Judge includes both punishment and reward?

Some Bible thinkers say that the words “ ‘is not judged’ ” (John 3:18, NASB) and “ ‘will not be judged’ ” (John 5:24, NIV) show that God’s people aren’t judged at all. But these words show that God’s followers aren’t punished. So, what Jesus really is saying is that God’s people “ ‘are not judged guilty’ ” (John 3:18, ERV).

What we do in this life shows our decision to accept or reject everlasting life. God’s holy people have His promise. God will announce that His people are innocent when He does His work as Judge. People who don’t accept Jesus are guilty. Jesus talks about this time (Matthew 25:31–46). He says that there will be two groups of people: goats (evil people) and sheep (holy people).

When we think about God’s work as Judge, we should always remember that God saves us by His mercy (Isaiah 55:1; Ephesians 2:8–10). Our faith in God’s mercy makes us holy and innocent (Genesis 15:6; Romans 5:1). We are judged by our behavior (Ecclesiastes 12:14; Matthew 25:31–46; Revelation 20:11–13). We are judged by the Ten Commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14; James 1:25; James 2:8–17). Our good behavior shows that our experience with Jesus is real. God will look at our behavior in His work as Judge.

Remember, God doesn’t force people to be saved or lost. We are responsible to keep our choice to be saved. God’s work as Judge is not the time when He accepts or rejects us. His work as Judge shows our final choice that we made to accept Him or reject Him.



What we do in this life shows our decision to accept or reject everlasting life.

GOD'S CAREFUL SEARCH (Daniel 7:9–14)

Before Jesus comes back, God will do part of His work as Judge. This work is known as the pre-Advent judgment. The word “pre” means before. The word “Advent” means the Second Coming. The word “judgment” is the time when God will judge His people. So, the time known as the “pre-Advent judgment” is the time when God will judge His people before Jesus’ Second Coming. Several books in the Bible talk about the pre-Advent judgment.

Read about the pre-Advent judgment in Daniel 7:9–14; Matthew 22:1–14; Revelation 11:1, 18, 19; and Revelation 14:6, 7. What do these verses teach us about the pre-Advent judgment that is happening right now in the courts in heaven? Why is this judgment so important?

The pre-Advent judgment is a time when God does a careful search. He carefully searches His people’s lives, their thoughts, hearts, and behavior. The Bible teaches us three important ideas about the pre-Advent judgment:

(1) During this time, all the dead stay asleep in their graves until Jesus wakes them up. The dead include both holy people and evil people. Jesus will wake up His holy people at the Second Coming. But evil people will stay in their graves for 1,000 more years.

(2) God’s careful search of His people’s lives is an important part of the Bible teaching that God will judge all humans (2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:11–15).

(3) God will reward His holy people at the first resurrection. As we already saw, the first resurrection is the time when Jesus wakes up His loyal followers at the Second Coming. The second resurrection will happen after the saved people stay in heaven with God for 1,000 years. Then Jesus brings His people back to earth and wakes up the evil dead. At that time, the lost will get their punishment: the second death (John 5:28, 29; Revelation 20:4–6, 12–15). No one who dies the second death will ever live again.

So, if every person will be judged, he or she will be judged **before** Jesus wakes them from the dead. Then each person will get his or her final reward, either life or death.

God is in heaven doing a careful search of our lives. How should this knowledge change how we live on earth?



The first resurrection is the time when Jesus wakes up His loyal followers at the Second Coming.

1,000 YEARS IN HEAVEN (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3)

The Bible tells us about three things that will happen after the Second Coming. (1) Jesus will wake up His people from the dead. Then these people along with God's people who are alive on the earth will "meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17, ERV). (2) Jesus will take His people to heaven for 1,000 years. They will live there in the homes that Jesus made for them (John 14:1–3). God's people will sit on thrones in heaven and be leaders with Jesus for 1,000 years. During this time, the earth is empty and ruined (Jeremiah 4:23). (3) After 1,000 years, Jesus will bring the New Jerusalem to this earth. The Holy City will become the new home of God's people (Revelation 21:1–3). God's people will live on the earth forever.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:2, 3 and Revelation 20:4–6, 11–13 about God's work as Judge during the 1,000 years in heaven. Why do God's people help God do His work as Judge in heaven during the 1,000 years?

God's work as Judge during the 1,000 years will show four Bible truths: (1) God is fair in all His decisions. (2) God gives everyone the correct reward. (3) God's punishments are fair. And (4) God shows that saved humans can be trusted to live in heaven. They won't sin again. In God's careful search of His people before the Second Coming, only the ones who live in heaven help God (Daniel 7:9, 10) in His work as Judge. But during the 1,000 years, God's saved people also will help God in His work. They will help God judge the evil angels and the evil dead (1 Corinthians 6:3; Jude 1:6; Revelation 20:4–6).

The pre-Advent judgment started in 1844. As we already learned, the pre-Advent judgment is the time when God will do a careful search of His people's hearts and lives before the Second Coming (Daniel 7:9, 10). God's work as Judge during the 1,000 years will start after God takes His people to heaven. God's children will sit on thrones and will help God judge the evil dead. God will open the books in heaven. "The dead were judged by what they had done. The things they had done were written in the books" (Revelation 20:12, NIV; read also Revelation 20:4). God's people will see that God is fair in all His decisions. God rewards humans for their choices. He also explains the decisions He made.



God will open the books in heaven.

GOD'S FINAL WORK AS JUDGE (2 Peter 2:4–6)

During the Middle Ages in Europe, people thought that God was a mean and nasty Judge. They believed that God enjoyed punishing people. Today, Christians believe that God is a loving Father who will never punish His children. Love without the law will cause people to disobey God. The law without love will cause people to hurt each other. God's work as Judge shows both His mercy and His fair decisions. Both things come from God's love.

God's final work as Judge also is known as the executive judgment. This decision is final because it can't be changed. God has punished people in a limited way in the past. (1) God threw Satan and his evil angels out of heaven (Revelation 12:7–12). (2) God sent Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). (3) God destroyed the earth with the Flood (Genesis 6–8). (4) God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19; Jude 7). (5) God sent an angel to kill all the sons who were born first in Egypt (Exodus 11; Exodus 12). And (6) Ananias and Sapphira were killed because they lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1–11). So, we should not be surprised that God will judge the evil dead at the end of human history.



God did everything possible to save humans from being lost forever.

Read 2 Peter 2:4–6 and 2 Peter 3:10–13. How do these verses help us understand what happens in the executive judgment? As we learned in this lesson, the executive judgment is the name for God's final work as Judge. How do these verses show us that after God finishes judging, humans will not have another chance to be saved?

“God is good and very patient. But His love will not stop Him from punishing the sinner who refused to obey His laws. Humans are criminals. They are guilty of breaking God's holy law. We humans are pardoned only by God's gift to us. This gift is God's Son, Jesus. Jesus died for the guilty because God can't change His law. So, guilty humans shouldn't think they can tell God what to do.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, volume 12, page 208, adapted.

God did everything possible to save humans from being lost forever. God saved us at a big cost to Himself. Anyone who will be lost made choices that led him or her to a bad end. God's work that He does to judge the lost ones and punish them shows His love and His mercy.

THE SECOND DEATH (Malachi 4:1)

God guides human history to its final end-time happenings. At the end of the 1,000 years, the evil dead will wake up from their graves. Then they will get their final punishment (Revelation 20:5, 11–15). When God’s final work as Judge is done, nothing else can be added to His decision. The evil ones will confess that God’s decisions are fair. “Everyone in heaven and on earth will understand what happened during the worldwide war between God and Satan. Both loyal people and evil people will announce: ‘You are always right [holy] and true [fair] in everything You do. You are King of all nations [people groups]’” [Revelation 15:3, NLV]. Satan himself bows down and confesses that God’s punishment against him is fair.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pages 670, 671, adapted.

Read these verses that talk about the lake of fire and the second death: Malachi 4:1; Revelation 20:14, 15; and Revelation 21:8. What do these verses teach us?

Satan, his evil angels, and all the evil people who ever lived on the earth finally will be destroyed. Then heaven and earth will be clean from sin. God’s punishment of evil shows His love for His holy people and for the evil people, too. Evil people will choose to die so that they won’t need to be near a holy God. “Our God is like [the same as] a fire that can destroy us” (Hebrews 12:29, ERV).

“The people who are lost want to run from that holy place. They welcome death so they will be hidden from the face of Jesus who died to save them. Lost people decided their own future by the choices they made. They can’t enter heaven. This punishment is from their own choice. God shows His mercy by giving them what they want.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 543, adapted.

The end of sin and sinners shows us that God’s punishment is fair. We also know that sin had a beginning. So, sin also will have an end. Then God will make heaven and earth new again and perfect. Heaven and earth will be free forever from sin and evil. There is no excuse for sin and evil. The reason for their beginning is a mystery.

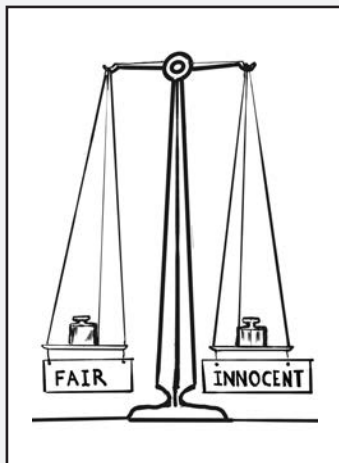
Praise God that He is our fair and holy Judge (2 Timothy 4:8)! God will make the fair decision to give everlasting life to His children and death to the lost.



“Our God is like [the same as] a fire that can destroy us” (Hebrews 12:29, ERV).

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “Without a Wedding Garment,” pages 307–319, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “Desolation of the Earth,” pages 653–661; “The Controversy Ended,” pages 662–673, in *The Great Controversy*.

“God will do His final work as Judge. At this time, every lost person will understand how he or she rejected Bible truth. God will show lost sinners a vision of the cross. Every person will see that the cross is very important. The people whose minds were controlled by sin will see this spiritual truth, too. As lost sinners watch the vision of Jesus on the cross, they will understand that they are guilty. They will see that every excuse they made to reject Jesus is a lie. They will see why sin and evil are very awful. Men will see that they made very bad choices. The lost people will fully understand the good side and evil side in the worldwide war between God and Satan. Everyone will see that God is fair. God also is innocent. God did not make evil. God will show that His decisions are holy. His decisions do not cause sin to happen. There was no problem with God’s government. There was no reason for Satan to war against God. In His final work as Judge, God will show us the thoughts and feelings in men’s hearts. Then everyone, both the saved and the lost, will announce, ‘You are always right [holy] and true [fair] in everything You do. You are King of all nations [people groups]’ [Revelation 15:3, NLV].”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 58, adapted.



“Everyone will see that God is fair. He also is innocent. God did not make evil.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① “If you refuse to give yourself fully to God, you choose death. God is the same as a destroying fire. He destroys sin. If you choose sin, and refuse to separate from it, God must destroy you.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, page 62, adapted. How does this quote help us understand God’s final work as Judge?
- ② 1,000 years after the Second Coming, God will wake up the lost ones from the dead. Before that time, God’s saved people will help Him judge the lost for 1,000 years. No one will be punished until we have a chance to see that God is fair. How does this help us understand God’s love and His work as Judge?

TWO DREAMS IN ANGOLA

Every time he went to church, little William Frederico João Lumbo heard the preacher say the same words. The big preacher stood in front of the church in Angola. He raised a hand into the air and said, “If you are not living to serve God, then you are not living life!”

The preacher’s words got his attention. But William also loved the pleasure and entertainment that this life offers. William decided that he wanted to dance more than he wanted to go to church. At age 14, he started a dance group. His group danced at parties and school programs in Angola’s capital, Luanda.

William enjoyed dancing very much. But deep inside his heart, William knew something wasn’t right in his life. He remembered the words of the preacher, “If you are not living to serve God, then you are not living life!”

Soon, William lost all joy in dancing. He started to smoke and drink. He felt empty inside. He prayed, “I am not living to serve You God. I feel that my life is useless. Help me!”

Shortly after he prayed, a friend sent William a sermon. The sermon touched William’s heart. He fell to his knees and asked God for forgiveness. He decided to go to church. All churches were closed in Angola because of COVID-19. So, William went to an Adventist house church.

A big surprise waited for William at the house church. The leader of the house church was a man named Filipe. Filipe had two dreams about William over the past two nights. In the first dream, Filipe was standing next to a big tree. Filipe held a small branch in his hand. Somehow, he knew he needed to connect the branch to the tree. Then the branch could grow again. In the second dream, Filipe was standing next to a big river. A small river flowed next to the big river. Somehow, Filipe knew he needed to connect the small river to the big river.

Filipe told William, “You are the small branch that needs to be connected to the big tree. The big tree is Jesus, who is the Tree of Life. You are the small river, and big river is Jesus. You need to be connected to Jesus, who is the River of Life.”

William was surprised. “Jesus wants me to be connected to Him?” he asked.

While William worshiped at the house church, peace and joy filled the empty space in his heart. William decided to be connected only to Jesus. Today, William lives only to serve God.

This story shows Spiritual Growth Task Number 5 of the “I Will Go” Plan for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Task Number 5 is: “We will help people and families live more Spirit-filled lives.” Read more at IWillGo2020.org.

INSIDE
Story
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