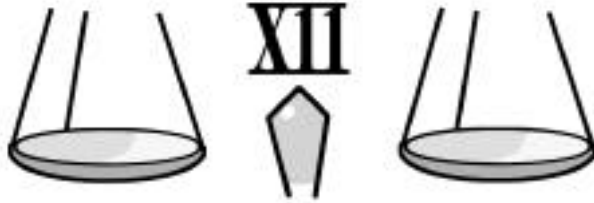


The Pre-Advent Judgment



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?

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?

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.

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."—Roy Gane, *Altar Call* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Diadem, 1999), p. 241.

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.

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.

Five Friends

Alex Leupin

Five Adventist friends worked together in a woodworking company in southern Chile. Times were tough, but the company had plenty of work. One day the five men were called into the supervisor's office and told that the company was going to work six days a week to meet orders.

The Adventist men already were working extra hours every weekday in order to avoid working on Sabbath. But the boss pressured them to agree to work even more. When the supervisor saw that the men would not budge in their refusal to work on Saturdays, he asked the five Adventists to resign.

The friends talked it over and decided to trust God to provide work. They agreed to quit. "God will provide for us," they said. "We are not worried."

The men applied for work at a similar company in town and were hired as sub-contractors. Their work continued for two years, until that company began having financial trouble, and they were laid off.

The friends built furniture to earn a living, but eventually this, too, did not adequately support them. So the men found various jobs—one as a bus driver, another as a chauffeur, and one continued making furniture.

Alex, one of the friends, had long resisted an impression he felt to become a pastor. He worried that he could not support his family and attend college. But his wife urged him to follow his calling, so the couple sold their car, and Alex went to school. It was tough, but God provided. Today Alex is a pastor working two hours from his hometown.

Jerman [Herman] found work as a carpenter. But he loved talking to people about God's love. He began working longer and longer hours as a Bible instructor. He works without pay because the mission has no budget for a Bible worker, but Jerman does not care; he is doing the work he loves.

Jerman says, "I have grown in my faith over the years of trials. God has helped me in the past; I trust Him for the future."

One of the five men has stumbled in his walk with God, but the other four are supporting him to strengthen his faith.

Alex sums up the men's experience this way: "Losing our jobs was a blessing as well as a trial. It made us trust in God, and God never fails."



Alex Leupin pastors a congregation in southern Chile.