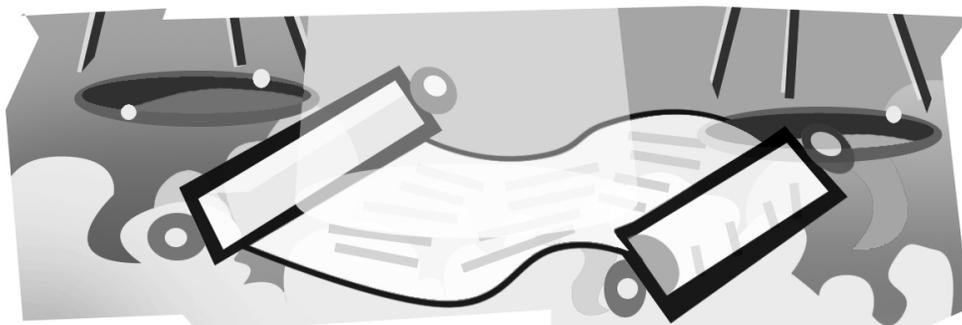


Judgment Must Begin



SABBATH—JULY 1

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ecclesiastes 12:14; Daniel 12:1, 2; Matthew 8:12; Matthew 22:1-13; Matthew 25:31-33, 46; John 3:18; 2 Corinthians 5:10.

MEMORY VERSE: “People will be judged on the day God appoints [chooses] Jesus Christ to judge their secret thoughts. That is part of my good news” (Romans 2:16, NIV).

GRAFFITI (WRITING) WRITTEN ON A WALL BY AN ITALIAN ATHEIST (NON-BELIEVER) READS: “There is no God—and Mary is His mother!”

This is funny, but it also is important. We try to be fair. We try to look at things honestly. But we always bring our own opinions into whatever subject we discuss. Even the idea of not having an opinion about something is really to have an opinion about something.

We know we have limits. But this week we are going to be as neutral as we can as we look at what the Bible says about judgment. Let us forget for the moment about 1844, the pre-Advent judgment,¹ Ellen White, Hiram Edson in the cornfield, et cetera. Let the Bible speak for itself on the judgment. Let us see what answers the Bible gives to the following questions: (1) How are judgment and the gospel connected? (2) What are the final results of judgment? (3) Are Christians judged? (4) What part do works play in judgment? (5) When is the judgment?

None of the answers tell us all we need to know about the judgment. But together, the answers will help us better understand the idea of judgment, no matter what opinions we may already have about it.

¹pre-Advent judgment—the judgment that will take place before Jesus' second coming. Adventists believe that God's judgment comes in three parts. The first part began in 1844 and is continuing until Jesus' return to the earth. This is the pre-Advent judgment. The pre-Advent judgment is also called the investigative judgment.

SUNDAY—JULY 2**HOUR OF HIS JUDGMENT
(Daniel 12:2)**

As Adventist Christians, we say that the gospel of Jesus is “good news.” The Greek word translated “gospel” means “good news.”

But good news about what? It is the good news that Jesus died as our Substitute² (1 Peter 2:24). At the Cross, Jesus paid the penalty for our sins (Isaiah 53:6). Through faith in Him, we stand perfect in God now because we are covered with perfect righteousness (holiness) (Romans 3:22). And because of what Jesus has done for us, we have the promise of eternal³ life (1 John 5:11, 12).

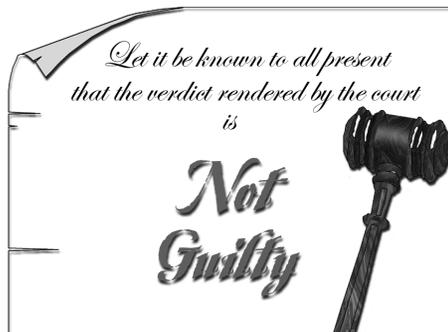


Good news!

So the good news is that we have eternal life. Why else is this good news?

What is the choice for those who will not have eternal life? Daniel

12:2; Matthew 8:12; Matthew 25:46; John 3:18; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 14:11.



More good news!

How do Romans 2:15 and Revelation 14:6-8 show the connection between the gospel and judgment? How does today's lesson help you understand why we are so blessed by Jesus' sacrifice?

MONDAY—JULY 3**LIFE OR DAMNATION?
(Matthew 12:37)**

What are the two final classes of people pictured in the verses below?

Daniel 12:2 _____

Matthew 12:37 _____

John 3:16 _____

²substitute—someone who takes another person's place. Jesus is our Substitute because He died for our sins.

³eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

John 5:29 _____

Judgment results in only two classes of people: (1) people who are saved eternally (forever) and (2) people who are lost eternally. In the end, the fate of all of us is (1) eternal life or (2) eternal destruction.

It is clear that judgment divides the righteous (holy) from the wicked. A final separation takes place. It is a judgment in which the final fate of everyone is decided forever.

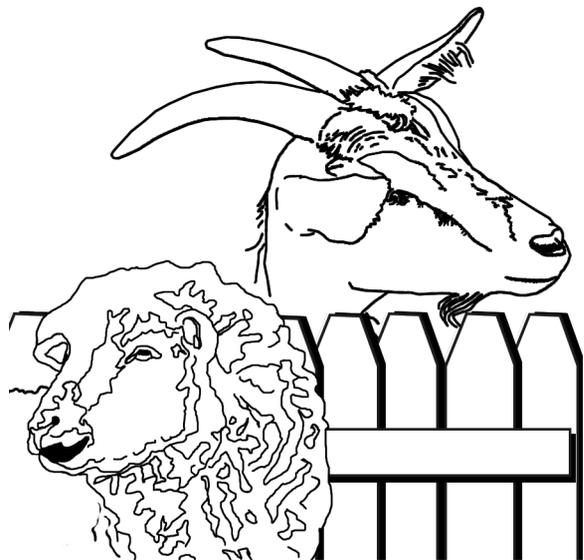
Read the following verses: “The Son of Man will come in all his glory. All the angels will come with him. Then he will sit on his throne in the glory of heaven. All the nations will be gathered in front of him. . . . He will be like a shepherd who separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep to his right and the goats to his left’ ” (Matthew 25:31-33, NlrV). What more do these verses teach us about the judgment?



“Those who have done good will rise and live again” (John 5:29, NlrV).

Several interesting points are brought out in these verses. First of all, what is being judged? The verses say that “all nations” shall be gathered in front of Jesus as Judge. So, a universal judgment. All nations come under His inspection. This means that everyone comes under Him because He is “the Judge of the whole earth” (Genesis 18:25).

Here, too, we are faced with the same clear division: the sheep and the goats, the saved and the lost. There are those who shall “go away to be punished forever. But those who have done what is right will receive eternal life” (Matthew 25:46, NlrV).



The judgment is the same as separating the sheep from the goats.

Think seriously about what the verses for today’s lesson suggest. How much more serious should you be about your own soul and about working for the salvation of others?

TUESDAY—JULY 4**HOUSE OF GOD (Hebrews 10:30)**

Yesterday we learned about an end-time judgment that involved all people. But what about the church? What about people who claim to have accepted Jesus? What about people who appear to be living the Christian life sincerely and faithfully? Will they be judged?

As Christians, we understand that Jesus was judged and punished at the Cross in our place. Jesus faced the punishment for sin that we should face (Isaiah 53:4-6; Matthew 20:28; Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:14; Ephesians 5:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:10). “All our sins were put upon Christ as our Substitute. He was charged with law-breaking so that He might save us from the heavy penalty of the law. The guilt of every person from Adam was pressing upon His heart.”—Adapted from *The Desire of Ages*, p. 753. Does this mean that Christians do not face judgment because Christ accepted the penalty of death in our place?

What do the following verses tell us about Christians being judged?

Matthew 7:21-23 _____

Hebrews 10:30 _____

Romans 14:10 _____

1 Peter 4:17 _____

These verses and many others make it clear that God’s people do face judgment. Jesus scolded those who claimed that they did many wonderful things in His name. He was not talking to atheists,⁴ Hindus,⁵ or Wiccans.⁶ They do not do things in His name. Paul’s words that “we shall all” stand before the judgment seat includes himself.

According to the Bible, people who claim to be followers of Christ will face some kind of judgment at the end of time.

When was the last time someone judged you? What difference does it make for you knowing that in the end, God will judge both with mercy⁷ and with justice (fairness)? Why do you want mercy more than justice? Why will you need it?

⁴atheists—nonbelievers.

⁵Hindus—followers of a religious group in India.

⁶Wiccans—a group of people who practice beliefs similar to astrology, black magic, and witchcraft.

⁷mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

WEDNESDAY—JULY 5**“EVERY SECRET THING”
(Ecclesiastes 12:14, NIrV)**

Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes 12:14 is one of the clearest statements in the Bible about judgment that includes our works and “every secret thing.”

Solomon is not the only one to tell us about a judgment by works. Jesus was clear in Matthew 12:36, 37. “On judgment day, people will have to account [explain] for every careless word they have spoken. By your words you will be found guilty or not guilty” (NIrV). Peter wrote, “You call on a Father who judges each person’s work without favoring one [person] over another [person]. So live your lives as strangers here. Have the highest respect for God” (1 Peter 1:17, NIrV). Paul, too, understood the part works play in judgment. “We must all stand in front of Christ to be judged. Each one of us will be judged for the good things and the bad things we do while we are in our bodies. Then each of us will receive what we are supposed to get” (2 Corinthians 5:10, NIrV). In Revelation, John also wrote about a judgment by works: “I saw the dead, great and small, standing in front of the throne. Books were opened. Then another book was opened. It was the Book of Life. The dead were judged by what they had done. The things they had done were written in the books” (Revelation 20:12, NIrV).

What other Bible verses can you find that talk clearly about a judgment by works?

Why does a judgment by works make sense? To think about all the evil in this world, how could God be just (fair) if there were not such a judgment by works? On the lines below, write why a judgment by works is important.

THURSDAY—JULY 6**REWARD IS WITH HIM
(Matthew 22:1-13)**

Read Matthew 22:1-13. Then answer the following questions:

1. What does the wedding symbolize? (Isaiah 62:5; Hosea 2:19; Matthew 9:15; Revelation 21:2).
2. What does it mean that a person who accepted the invitation had to face judgment?
3. What happened to the man who was found without a garment (robe)?

This parable also teaches that there is some kind of judgment before

sentencing is given. Even in human courts, whoever heard of a sentence being given before questioning that led to judgment? In Revelation 22:12, Jesus says that when He returns, His “reward is with me.” This also suggests that there has been a judgment beforehand. (Why would the reward be with Jesus if there were not a judgment beforehand that decided who should get the reward?) Second Corinthians 5:10 suggests a judgment before a final reward or punishment. In this way, “each of us will receive what we are supposed to get” (NIRV). This idea is also shown in Daniel 12:1. In this verse, people found in the book of life are rescued (freed).

Any judgment of works suggests a judgment of those works before the reward or punishment is given. It does not matter if that judgment is a hundred years or a hundred seconds before a person receives punishment or reward. Many of this week’s verses have told us that the reward or punishment comes at the Second Coming. Because of this, there must be some kind of judgment before the Second Coming.

How would you like to be judged, even punished, before a trial or a fair inspection of facts? Then, why does the idea of a prior (earlier) judgment make so much sense? Think about the question of *theodicy*. *Theodicy* means that God is cleared in His dealing with Satan, sin, and evil. How does the idea of

***theodicy* help us understand the need for an inspection before a sentence is given?**

FRIDAY—JULY 7

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Judgment deserves careful attention. It is involved in the issues of (1) divine⁸ justice (fairness) in an unjust (unfair) world (theodicy), (2) punishment for wrong done, (3) the suffering of the innocent, (4) the answer to the struggle of good and evil, and (5) the end of sin and suffering. But most important of all, final (last) judgment clears God. Final judgment clears His character, law, and ability to rule—in the minds of all created people. In this way, He can guarantee safety and peace for the universe. So, judgment is pictured in the Bible as a very important part of the ‘eternal gospel’ (Revelation 14:6, 7).”—Adapted from *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, vol. 12, p. 815.

This week, we have seen that the Bible teaches the following points about judgment: (1) Judgment and the gospel are closely connected. (2) There is some kind of final judgment or judgments near the end of time. (3) Among those judged are the people who claim to follow Christ. (4) Works clearly are part of this judgment. (5) Only two final results are available: eternal life or eternal destruction. And (6) some kind of judgment takes place before the sentence is given.

⁸divine—of God; belonging to God; godly.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. As a class, study your answers to the question at the end of Wednesday's lesson. What can you learn from one another? How does the question of theodicy fit in with your answers?
2. Go around the class and ask each person to answer this question: How do you feel about being judged by your works?
3. Ask different people in the class if they have ever had to place judgment upon another person. What was it like to judge a person step by step? How important was it to be fair? How seriously did they take their responsibility? Why was it important to get all the facts before making a judgment? What can the class learn from this week's lesson that could help us better understand the idea of God's judgment?