

The Meaning of the Judgment Today



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 1:7-11; Ps. 73:1-17; Matt. 5:16; John 14:2; Acts 1:11; 1 Cor. 4:5, 9; Eph. 2:8-10; 3:10; 1 Thess. 4:14-18; Rev. 22:12.*

Memory Text: “Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (*Revelation 14:7*).

So far, we've covered a lot of ground in our study of the 1844 pre-Advent judgment. We have, we believe, firmly established the biblical basis for this judgment. Using everything from the earthly sanctuary model to the prophecies of Daniel to the life and death of Jesus and to the book of Hebrews, we've seen that, as Adventists, we are on solid biblical ground with our teaching on the 1844 judgment.

That being said, another question arises—So what? Here we are, in the twenty-first century; what does a judgment that began in 1844 mean for us today? What does it say to us as Seventh-day Adventists now? Why is it important for us to know and believe this teaching? What does it reveal about God and about the salvation He offers?

Sure, with our pioneers, the 1844 judgment helped answer the question of the Great Disappointment; it helped them understand what had just happened in regard to the Millerite prophecies. But that was then; this is now. How do we, today, relate to this prophecy, which began its fulfillment in a time when most of our great-grandparents weren't even born yet? This, our final week, looks at some of these questions.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 30.*

Judgment and Justice

Our world reeks of injustice; in every land, in every government, in every city, town, and village unfairness, inequity, and injustice, time and again, rear their ugly and evil heads. Probably no human being alive hasn't been stared down by the horrific visages of injustice and unfairness. To live in this sinful world is to face injustice; otherwise, it wouldn't be a sinful world.

Of course, the greatest injustice occurred at the Cross: Jesus, the sinless One, faced the punishment due all sinners. Thus, whatever injustices we suffer, we have the assurance that God, in the person of Christ, faced even worse.

Read Psalm 73:1-17. What's the point being made, and how does it relate to our understanding of the sanctuary and judgment?

Perhaps one of the most important points of the 1844-sanctuary doctrine is its teaching that there will be a judgment, a just judgment in which evil will be condemned and righteousness vindicated. Our judgment-hour message not only tells us about this judgment but tells us when it takes place. In other words, what the 1844 message says is that God's justice will not delay forever. He has promised to bring judgment, and "the hour of His judgments is come" (*Rev. 14:7*). The 1844 judgment is part of our message to the world that God's justice is coming; that we can trust Him and that evil will be recompensed and goodness vindicated, no matter how hard it is for us to see it now. In fact, the message tells the world that this judgment already has begun and that one day we will see the final results. For now, we just have to live by faith, awaiting the day of final justice and vindication.

Have you lately treated someone unfairly? If so, what can you do to make amends? Why should you make amends?

Vindication and God

We have, through the course of this quarter, touched on a crucial theme tied directly to the great controversy: the vindication of God in the face of evil. We even learned a fancy theological term for this idea: *theodicy*.

In this context the judgment is so important, because it tells us so much about the character of God. It tells us that God is willing to work openly in His dealing with sin, rebellion, and apostasy. We can trust God even when things seem really bad; that no matter how terrible the world is, our God can be trusted, for all His works and dealings will be open to the scrutiny of all the universe. We studied this in particular in week 12, for there we saw the whole idea of the judgment taking place before the onlooking universe. It's a theme worthy of more study, for in many ways it helps explain so much.

Look up the following texts. How do they, in their own way, teach the idea of the vindication of God?

Ps. 19:9

Rom. 3:26

1 Cor. 4:5

1 Cor. 13:12

What the pre-Advent judgment tells us is that, even now, the Lord is working openly before the onlooking universe. They, right now, are seeing the righteousness and fairness of God's judgment. In Adventist theology, we understand that our day will come, too, when we shall "know even as also I am known" (*1 Cor. 13:12*). We are, after all, told that "we shall judge angels" (*1 Cor. 6:3*); thus, the idea is that all things will be open to us, to our scrutiny, as well. In short, what the pre-Advent judgment tells us is that this process has already begun and that one day—just like the onlooking universe now—we will have all our questions answered, all issues about pain, suffering, and sin resolved, and so we, too, along with all God's creatures, will see the justice and righteousness of God in all His dealing with sin, evil, and rebellion.

What are some of the questions that you want to ask God? What are some things that you, right now, just can't understand? What does the promise mean to you that one day these will be answered and in a way that will cause us to praise the righteousness and goodness of God?

The Second Coming

Review the judgment scene in Daniel 7. Notice something important: This pre-Advent judgment is portrayed as the last *event* in salvation history before the second coming of Christ. It is, according to the text, the event itself that ushers in the Second Coming. The result of this judgment leads to the second coming of Jesus.

What do these texts have in common? What event are they all talking about? *John 14:2, Acts 1:11, 1 Thess. 4:14-18, Rev. 22:12.*

What other texts can you find that talk about the same event?

Jesus Himself, while on earth, talked about His second coming over and over again. The early church lived with the expectation of His soon return. Since then, through long and painful centuries, Christians have awaited the return of Jesus. Each generation lives with the hope and expectation that theirs might be the one to be alive at the Second Advent.

We're still here, though, and with each passing year it has been easier and easier for people to lose the hope of His return.

Here's where the 1844 judgment comes in, for it's a powerful indicator of the times we are living in. It's a message from God, to us, saying basically, *Trust me, I am coming as I have said. It can't be too far off.*

The 1844 pre-Advent judgment is, we believe, that last prophetic time element given to the world. It's God's way of telling us that final events are here, and His coming will be soon. As we saw in an earlier study, all the kingdoms predicted by Daniel came and went, just as predicted. He proved that we can trust Him regarding future events; thus, we can trust Him now that this pre-Advent judgment will, indeed, lead to the Second Coming, and because we know when this judgment began, we can know that the Second Coming is near.

As a class, talk about the signs of the times that we are living in. How do they portend the second coming of Jesus? At the same time, why is the revelation of the judgment the most stable, unchanging, and certain sign that heralds His return?

The Assurance of Salvation

Perhaps the greatest and most important point about the 1844 pre-Advent judgment is that it is a message of assurance. It's the promise that as long as we remain faithful to the Lord—living in humble faith, repentance, and obedience to Him and His commands—we have a faithful High Priest ministering in our behalf, a faithful High Priest who, indeed, stands as our Substitute in judgment (see last week's lesson). Though we are sinners, though we have violated God's law, though we deserve death, we have the assurance that we will be vindicated in judgment because we have Jesus standing there in our place. This is the most important message of the 1844 pre-Advent judgment.

Some Christians have no concept of a pre-Advent judgment because they believe in “once saved, always saved,” the idea that once they have accepted Jesus as Savior, then they are saved, regardless of the other choices they make in life, even completely turning away from Jesus unto a life of sin. Look up the following texts. How do they refute this false and dangerous doctrine? *Ezek. 18:24, Matt. 24:13, Luke 8:5-15, Rom. 11:16-21, 1 Cor. 9:27.*

As Adventists, we (along with many other Christians) reject the idea of once saved, always saved. It's obvious that followers of Christ can, through their own choice, fall away. And it's in this context that we can understand better the meaning of the pre-Advent judgment, for it is here in the judgment that once and for all our decisions for or against Christ are finalized. The judgment is not a time when God decides to accept or reject us; it's the time when God finalizes our choice as to whether or not we have accepted or rejected Him, a choice that always is made manifest by our works. The good news of the judgment is that we have the assurance that if we stay faithful to Jesus, if we claim His righteousness for ourselves, He stands in our stead, and when our name comes up in judgment, we are sealed forever in the salvation that He freely has offered us. Thus, and only in this sense—once their names come up in judgment, true Christians are, indeed, once saved, always saved.

If someone were to ask you, How do you know you are saved? what would you respond, and why? Share your answers in class on Sabbath.

Judged by Works

As certain as the Bible is that we are saved by faith and not by works (*Rom. 3:28*), it's just as certain that we are judged by our works (*Eccles. 3:17, 12:14, 2 Cor. 5:10, 1 Pet. 1:17*). Indeed, it's the realization that we are now living in the time when those works are being judged that Christians should be motivated to greater works, not in order to be saved (that's impossible) but because their works are a visible demonstration to the world and the universe of the reality of Christ's salvation in their lives.

Read Ephesians 2:8-10. How is the role of faith and works presented here in a balanced manner?

As we saw in last week's lesson, our works, while they can't save us, reveal that we are saved, reveal that we have indeed given our lives to Christ. At the same time, our works also do more: They, too, are part of the whole package regarding the question of theodicy and issues surrounding the nature and character of God.

Read Job 1:7-11, Matthew 5:16, 1 Corinthians 4:9, and Ephesians 3:10. From what you can piece together from these texts, what do they tell us about the role of our good works?

In the end, what the judgment tells us is that, in a special way, our works are coming under scrutiny before the onlooking universe. If we love God, if we are rejoicing in the salvation He has given us, we will want to send a message to the world and to the universe that, indeed, we love and serve the Lord who has done so much for us. Good works testify to the reality of the faith that we have in Christ; and though they don't save us in the judgment, good works reveal that, though we are sinners, Christ has done the right thing in bringing us into "his kingdom that . . . shall not be destroyed" (*Dan. 7:14*).

What kind of message do your works send to anyone who might be watching them? What changes do you need to make in order to send a better message?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, “God’s Law Immutable,” pp. 433–450.

Another important point about 1844 relates to the Adventist Church itself. As Adventists, our foundation was erected on the understanding that, while our spiritual forefathers, the Millerites, got the event wrong, they got the date, 1844, right. Thus, not just our heritage but the biblical foundation upon which our early pioneers worked stemmed from the 1844 foundation. Hence, it’s important for us, as a people, to understand the biblical reasoning that leads to 1844. That we have grown since the early days in our understanding of this message is unmistakable; that we have a better grasp of what it means is unmistakable, as well. At the same time, however, by being firmly rooted in the biblical basis of 1844, we have the assurance that the prophetic foundation upon which our church was founded is, indeed, a foundation rooted in the Word of God itself. In short, it’s important for us to be grounded in the 1844 teaching because it affirms the biblical basis upon which we, as a church, with our distinctive message, exist.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What do the answers to Wednesday’s final question tell us about how well we understand the plan of salvation?
- ❷ Though the 1844 judgment helps us to understand where we are in prophetic time, we are now in the twenty-first century. The year 1844 was a long time ago, and with each passing year that date gets further away. How should we deal with this ever-growing passage of time? As you think about your answer, consider some previous time prophecies: the 1,260 years, the 2,300 years, the 490 years, and so forth. How do these very long time periods help us keep things in perspective? That is, though 1844 was a long time ago, was it that long ago, at least in contrast to other prophetic times in which God’s people had to wait?
- ❸ As a class, take what you have learned this quarter and put together a seminar for the whole church, in order to help everyone understand the solid biblical foundation of our 1844 message and what it means for the church today.

Visitors' Day Dilemma

Penieli Kitomary

Penieli Kitomary was a lay pastor in a charismatic church in Tanzania. He had raised up two churches and was starting a third congregation. Following his members' urging, Penieli enrolled in a seminary near the campus of Tanzania Adventist College (now University of Arusha).

Someone at the Adventist university invited Penieli to attend the Visitors' Day worship on campus, but he declined, feeling unprepared to confront Adventist beliefs. He warned his church members not to accept an invitation to the Adventist church either.

During that week Penieli remembered a debate he had heard on the Sabbath. This doctrine intrigued him, and he decided to visit the Adventist church to learn more about this Sabbath issue. When he arrived, he found several members of his church who had also decided to attend the Adventist worship.

Penieli was pleased with the welcome he received and the invitation to stay for the afternoon program. He enjoyed the choir and the message. He could find nothing to refute what he heard and wondered why people feared this church so much. He left the church with many questions.

When Penieli talked to the deacons, he realized that some of them had attended the Adventist church and had questions, as well. Several believed in the Sabbath and were willing to accept it. Penieli wanted to know more. He visited the chaplain at the Adventist school and asked many questions. Then he reported to his congregation on what he had learned.

"Bring the chaplain here," the members said. The chaplain met with the believers and spent several hours answering questions and explaining Adventist doctrines. The group invited the chaplain to return, and then several members visited the Adventist church.

Other members of the charismatic church urged the new believers not to visit the Adventist church. When they could not convince them to stay away, some even went with the new believers to protect them from Adventist heresy. The chaplain explained that the Sabbath and every other Adventist teaching comes from the Bible. At the close of the meeting, he invited those who wanted to follow God's will to stand, and Penieli and several of his church members stood up. Following evangelistic meetings, the new believers asked to be baptized. Penieli continues to pastor them, teaching the new doctrines that he loves.

Your mission offerings each week help fund the witness of your church around the world.

Penieli Kitomary is a lay pastor living near Arusha, Tanzania.

Beginnings and Belongings, written by the late Arthur Ferch, gives us an inspired account of the miracle that created us; we'll also get, in hints and symbols, the earliest revelations of the miracle that saves us: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. All this is found in the book of Genesis, a book about Creation and Redemption, and the focus of our study.

Lesson 1—Foundations

The Week at a Glance

SUNDAY: Genesis and the New Testament (*Matt. 19:3-8, Luke 17:26-30, Acts 7:1-15*)

MONDAY: The Mighty and Merciful God (*Gen. 1:1, 7:11*)

TUESDAY: Close Encounters (*Gen. 2:7, 3:8*)

WEDNESDAY: Foundations (*Acts 7:2-17*)

THURSDAY: The Just Shall Live by Faith (*Rom. 1:17*)

Memory Text—Psalm 11:3.

Sabbath Gem: As Christians, our principles are found in and through the person of Jesus Christ, the One in whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (*Acts 17:28*). Yet, we know about Jesus through the Bible. So, the Bible, in essence, works as the foundation for our lives and our faith. Thus, in a sense, Genesis serves as the *foundation* of the Bible.

Lesson 2—“In the Beginning . . .”

The Week at a Glance

SUNDAY: “In the Beginning, God . . .” (*Gen. 1:1, Exod. 20:11*)

MONDAY: The Creation (*Gen. 1:1, 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24; compare Ps. 33:6-9*)

TUESDAY: The Creation Days (*Gen. 1:4, 5; Exod. 20:8-11*)

WEDNESDAY: The Chicken or the Egg? (*Gen. 1:2*)

THURSDAY: The Creation of Humanity (*See Gen. 1:24; 2:7, 19*)

Memory Text—Psalm 33:6, 9.

Sabbath Gem: The Bible tells us that we are here only because a loving, benevolent Creator-God purposely created life on earth in a process that took six literal, contiguous 24-hour days. As we'll study this week, in the creation of the world, particularly humans, it doesn't appear that God left anything to chance.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.