

The Pre-Advent Judgment



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Deut. 25:1, 1 Kings 8:32, Ps. 51:1-4, Matt. 22:1-13, Heb. 9:22-24, Rev. 20:12, 22:12.

Memory Text: "And behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Revelation 22:12).

Last week we looked at the pre-Advent judgment mostly in Daniel 8; this week we'll look at it again but from the perspective of Daniel 7 and some of the fascinating insights given to us there. As with the Gospels, we are given here more than just one rendering; both chapters contain crucial truths that need to be understood together. Each one, however enlightening, needs what the other has and, taken together, they reveal to us much about this judgment.

What's important to remember is that these chapters are not just deep theology or prophecy or history; instead, they together send a message to us, a message of hope, a message of promise. Together they tell us that no matter how bad things are, they aren't going to last; that despite appearances, the God who outlines for us the history of the world from Daniel's time until ours and into the future will bring about a wonderful end in which evil will be punished and the just shall be saved. How important, amid our study of charts and graphs and historical events, not to lose sight of this crucial point. How important, too, that as we share with the world these truths, we always keep before the people not just beasts and little horns but the wonderful promise of eternal life in God's kingdom that's been assured to us through the blood of Jesus and His death in our behalf.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 16.

“Until the Ancient of Days Came”

One point that we touched on earlier this quarter was the importance of the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8. We saw (see week 5) four events depicted in the vision (Media-Persia, Greece, Rome, sanctuary cleansed); with the first three of obvious major importance, and with the vision climaxing with the cleansing of the sanctuary, it's more than obvious that whatever the cleansing of the sanctuary was, it had to be of major importance, as well.

Thus, the question is, What is this cleansing of the sanctuary that was of such importance that it would be linked with the great empires that Scripture uses to depict the history of the world?

Daniel 8 itself doesn't yield much, in and of itself, on the answer; fortunately, the Lord didn't give us just Daniel 8. We have the obvious parallel with Daniel 7, which, in a great way, helps unfold the mysteries of Daniel 8.

We earlier saw the parallel between the judgment in Daniel 7 and the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8. Read Daniel 7:9, 10, 13, 14, 18, 21, 22, 26, 27. What does this judgment (the same as the cleansing of the sanctuary) lead to? What is the result of this judgment? What one specific point is emphasized over and over?

Notice a theme reiterated in these verses: The saints will be given God's kingdom, an everlasting kingdom that will not pass away as did all the ones before it. Over and over, after the depiction of various kingdoms, especially the blasphemous and persecuting little horn, the final victory of God and His saints is shown. In other words, no matter how bad things get or how long things take, in the end, as a result of this heavenly judgment/cleansing of the sanctuary, evil will be eradicated, and God's eternal kingdom will be established.

In this context, how much easier now to understand why the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8 climaxes the vision of these earthly powers. No wonder, too, it's shown to be so important!

All the other kingdoms came and went or finally will be destroyed. In contrast, the saints will “possess” (vs. 18) God's eternal kingdom. What does that promise mean to you? What's the first thing you want to do when you get there?

Key Text: *Revelation 22:12*

Teachers Aims:

1. To review the crucial truths in Daniel 7 and 8.
2. To emphasize the significance of the pre-Advent judgment as outlined in these two chapters.
3. To underscore that God's final kingdom will be vindicated through His righteous elect.

Lesson Outline:

- I. **Sanctuary Revisited** (*Daniel 7 and 8*)
 - A. The cleansing of the sanctuary, both worldly and heavenly, was of major importance in Daniel's prophecy.
 - B. The final victory of God and His saints is shown after all the worldly empires are phased out. This victory takes place upon the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary.
- II. **Judgment Revisited** (*Ps. 51:1-4, Matt. 24:13*)
 - A. The little horn shall be judged, condemned, and punished while the saints shall be vindicated and exonerated.
 - B. Justice is part and parcel of the pre-Advent judgment that leads to the second coming of Christ.
 - C. God judges His people in an open way before the onlooking universe.

Summary: A close connection exists between the cleansing of the sanctuary and the pre-Advent judgment. May we, by faith in Christ's righteousness, have the assurance in the day of judgment that we will be sealed in the book of life forever.

COMMENTARY

Daniel 7:23-25, 8:9-12, and 9:24-27 describe the anti-God activities of the little-horn power. These activities include a rebellion in heaven, which ended with the crucifixion of the Prince of heaven, the trampling down of truth, the substituting of the "daily" with a false system of salvation, and the persecution of the saints. In answer to the question "How long will it take for these things to be fulfilled?" (*Dan. 8:13; paraphrased*), a holy one replies, "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed" (*vs. 14*).

Greatly disturbed and needing more clarification, Daniel faints and remains ill for several days until, in answer to his earnest prayer, God sends Gabriel (*vs. 27, Dan. 9:20-27*). Gabriel's answer provides a starting point for the 2,300 years. That starting point, the 457 B.C. decree to rebuild Jerusalem, is the same as the one for the 490 years (*vs. 24*), since both periods run concurrently. Add 2,300 years to 457 B.C., and one gets A.D. 1844, the time when "the sanctuary [shall] be cleansed." This week's lesson looks at the meaning

Judgment and the Little Horn

As Adventists, we understand the cleansing of the sanctuary as a judgment that involves those who have professed to be followers of Christ (*see Matt. 22:1-13*). We see this especially because in the earthly type of the cleansing of the sanctuary, the Day of Atonement (*see Leviticus 16*), the judgment centered around God's people.

Nevertheless, the question arises, Why in both Daniel 7 and in Daniel 8 is the judgment/sanctuary cleansing depicted in the context of the little horn, at least the phase of the little horn shown in the vision? What does the little horn have to do with the pre-Advent judgment?

Read again the texts looked at yesterday. What is the difference in the fate of the little horn and the fate of the “saints of the most high”? See especially *Dan. 7:22*.

It's very clear: The little horn is punished, condemned, while the saints are vindicated, exonerated. This is typical of the Hebrew concept of justice and judgment: It involved not just the punishment of the guilty or the vindication of the righteous—but both. Both are crucial elements of justice in Hebrew thinking, and both are seen here in this depiction of the pre-Advent judgment.

Read Deuteronomy 25:1 and 1 Kings 8:32. How do these two verses reveal the principles seen in Daniel 7 and Daniel 8 together?

Of course, the judgment in Daniel 7 results in the end of the little horn, but that's only because the judgment results in the Second Coming, which brings about the end of the whole world anyway (at least as we know it now). The point is that the judgment, though expressed here in the context of the little horn, a symbol of evil, involved more than just the little horn. What we see here are two elements: evil punished, the saints vindicated. It hardly would seem like justice if it were any other way.

The righteous vindicated, evil punished. That's God's promise. How should that promise help you through times when, so often, it seems only the opposite happens?

of the cleansing, the results of the cleansing, and implications of the cleansing for the end-time history portrayed in Daniel.

I. The Meaning of the Cleansing of the Sanctuary

Daniel 8:14 must refer to the heavenly sanctuary, for in A.D. 1844, there was no earthly sanctuary in which a priestly ministry operated. To help us understand what the cleansing of this heavenly sanctuary involves, we must study the earthly sanctuary of the Old Testament, for it was a copy of the heavenly one (*Heb. 8:5*).

Leviticus 16 speaks of the annual great Day of Atonement when a cleansing took place. On this day, and this day only, the high priest entered the Most Holy Place to make an atonement for the sanctuary, symbolically cleansing the sanctuary from the confessed sins of Israel. The entire nation came under divine scrutiny, typifying the last-day judgment. All the activities of the day were part of the cleansing process, which symbolized judgment against Satan, the final atonement of sin by Christ, and the purification of God's people. In addition, the process symbolized the vindication of God's character and His power to save all who confess their sins and seek His grace.

II. 1844 and the Cleansing of the Heavenly Sanctuary

The 2,300-year prophecy ending in 1844 initiated a process whereby the heavenly sanctuary was to be cleansed. Paul states: "It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these" (*Heb. 9:23, NIV*).

The cleansing of the earthly sanctuary cannot be transferred literally to the heavenly, but Paul makes a transition of immense significance. The earthly sanctuary was cleansed annually by a human high priest. But the heavenly sanctuary is cleansed once for all by Christ, the high priest who mediates the sanctification of the believers through His blood. The cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary must be understood not in the sense of a physical cleansing but of a moral and spiritual one. For here in the courts of heaven began Satan's rebellion and his charge against God's character of love and justice. Now, at the end of the 2,300 years, even as Satan's wickedness climaxes through the work of the little horn and the end time draws near, Christ begins in heaven the antitypical Day of Atonement service. The unfallen intelligences of the universe, the angels, and Satan himself will see the just and righteous basis on which the character of God is vindicated. That vindication (eventually to climax in the final destruction of Satan and sinners and the gathering of God's people into His kingdom) is itself the restoration of the heavenly sanctuary.

Theodicy, Again

In the first week of this quarter we looked at a term, *theodicy*, which meant the vindication of God in the face of evil. It's the idea that despite all the evil in the world, we can trust that God is good and righteous and just.

We saw, too, that sin and evil began in another part of the universe and that sin and the questions it raised weren't limited only to earth. On the contrary, the earth is merely the place where they are being played out. We also looked at the fact that other intelligences in the universe also are involved, and interested, in the question raised about sin and rebellion.

Read Daniel 7:9, 10 and then answer the following questions:

① What event is taking place here?

② Where is it taking place?

③ Before whom?

Not only do we have a heavenly judgment scene here, a judgment that leads to the destruction of the little horn and the establishment of God's kingdom, this judgment takes place before a multitude of heavenly beings. "Ten thousand times ten thousand" is a way of depicting an uncountable multitude. Thus, what we see here is the onlooking universe watching God execute the judgment that leads to the establishment of His eternal kingdom.

Keeping in mind this judgment scene in Daniel 7, read Psalm 51: 1-4 and Romans 3:4. How do these texts fit in with the judgment as revealed in Daniel 7?

The crucial point to remember here is that God is judging His people in an open way before the onlooking universe. And He's going to do it in a manner that, when it's over, it will be said that "you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge" (*Ps. 51:4, NIV*).

How open and transparent are you in all your dealings and judgments with others? If you're not, why not, and what does your answer tell you about the quality of those dealings? What might you need to change?

III. The Pre-Advent Judgment

The interpretation of 2,300 years led Adventists to teach not only the vindication of the heavenly sanctuary but also a pre-Advent judgment of all those who profess the name of Christ. Why is there a need for such a judgment? There are two reasons.

1. When Christ returns, He rewards His people (*Matt. 16:27*) and gathers them into His kingdom. Is it not, then, appropriate to have a judgment process before the Second Coming so that Satan and his forces can no longer charge God as unfair and His law as impossible to obey? The pre-Advent judgment seals the character of the saints against these false accusations.

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Leviticus 16, Psalm 51, Matthew 22:1-13, Hebrews 9:22-24, Revelation 20:11-15, 22:12*

① Many people are threatened by the idea of a judgment, especially at the hands of an all-knowing God. But the judgment process described in Daniel 7:8-14, 19-27 primarily reveals the condemnation and destruction of the little horn and the vindication of the “ ‘saints of the most high’ ” (*Dan. 7:22, NIV*). What issues are involved in this judgment? Who are the main characters? How is this related to the “cleansing of the sanctuary”?

② Throughout the great struggle between truth and error, Satan has been able to use lies, coercion, violence, hatred, and other weapons that are inconsistent with God’s character of love, justice, mercy, and grace. Although glimpses of this cosmic conflict have revealed Satan’s methods through the centuries, the pre-Advent judgment will reveal the issues at stake for the entire universe to see. What evidence would indict Satan and, by extension, the little horn and other oppressive powers?

③ Read Leviticus 16. How does the cleansing of the earthly sanctuary at the Day of Atonement relate to the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary? According to the symbolism, who is being justified? Who is being condemned?

④ If our standing in the judgment were based only on our performance, we would be in trouble. For as Paul reminded the believers in Rome: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (*Rom. 3:23, NIV*). Fortunately, we face the judgment on the basis of Christ’s merits, not our own. How does that truth change the way we look at the judgment? How does it change the way we talk about it to others?

Pre-Advent Judgment

Read Daniel 12:1, Matthew 16:27, and Revelation 20:12. Each, in its own way, talks about judgment. What evidence can you find in these texts that shows why this judgment is *before* the Second Coming; that is, a pre-Advent judgment?

If, at the Second Coming, the saints receive the kingdom and the little horn is destroyed, there must have been some sort of reckoning *before* the execution of the sentence. After all, even corrupt earthly courts do as much! How fair would it be to sentence someone and then, only after the sentence, have a trial and investigate the facts?

If, when Christ returns, “my reward is with me, to give every man as his work shall be” (*Rev. 22:12*) and we all are to be judged by our works (*Eccles. 12:13, 14; 1 Cor. 3:13; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 20:12*), then it’s fairly obvious that there must be a judgment prior to the Second Coming. Or, as Adventists phrase it—a pre-Advent, or investigative, judgment. (After all, what kind of judgment prior to a sentence doesn’t entail an investigation of some kind?)

Read carefully, again, the judgment scene as depicted in Daniel 7 (if need be, look at some of the previous charts that parallel the chapters). Putting aside any of the numbers and dates, why is this so clearly a pre-Advent judgment? In fact, what evidence do you find in the texts that hint at an investigation? See also *Ps. 56:8, 69:28, Dan. 12:1, Rev. 13:8, 20:12*.

We can see, then, from Daniel 7 that there is, indeed, a massive pre-Advent judgment, a judgment that leads not only to the demise of the little horn but to the end of this world and the inauguration of the next, in which the saints live forever in God’s eternal kingdom. What’s depicted here is, obviously, an event of tremendous importance, an event in which the eternal destiny of untold numbers is involved. No wonder we deem the judgment-hour message as crucial to what we believe as Adventists.

2. The entire universe will witness the vindication of God's character, realize the unreasonableness of Satan's charges, and marvel at Christ's redemptive and mediatorial satisfaction of God's justice and love. As the process comes to a close, there will be a universal acclaim: " 'Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed' " (*Rev. 15:3, 4, NIV*).

Witnessing

On his deathbed, Harold Marshall Sylvester Richards, Jr., a longtime radio evangelist who succeeded his father, H. M. S. Richards, Sr., as speaker of *The Voice of Prophecy*, was thinking about preaching. He told his daughter, Mary Richards King, and he told Lonnie Melashenko, his VOP successor, the same thing: He wanted to preach about Jesus' return. The key point: "He's on His Way!"

The hope that Jesus is coming has sustained the faith of Christians for centuries, from that first-century Roman Empire backwater where He was crucified to the twenty-first century metropolises in which many of us live and work.

But what is Jesus bringing with Him? "My reward," He says in Revelation 22:12, "to give every man according as his work shall be." Oh, and that's also Jesus' gift for every woman and every child.

Determining who gets what reward is a process that's going on right now. It's part of the pre-Advent judgment, and it's another source of comfort for the Christian.

God isn't just sitting around doing nothing. Jesus isn't reclining on a heavenly chaise lounge. The Holy Spirit isn't on vacation.

Instead, the lives and work of all who've ever lived are under review. During America's great Civil War, Julia Ward Howe wrote in the anthem "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" that God "is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat."

That's good news. God actively is involved in our lives. Better news: Jesus pleads our case, if we've trusted Him for salvation. Best news: He's on His way, and a reward is with Him!

The Heavens Purified

Read Hebrews 9:22-24 and then answer the following questions:

1. What two sanctuaries are being talked about here?

2. What parallel is being drawn between them; that is, what is the author saying that must happen to both sanctuaries?

These texts have baffled non-Adventist scholars because of the clear reference to the idea that the heavenly sanctuary itself needed to be cleansed. “One might conclude that the earthly sanctuary was cleansed because its heavenly counterpart also was to be cleansed.” —Craig Koester, *Hebrews*, Anchor Bible Series (New York: Doubleday, 2001), p. 427.

In fact, the Greek word in Hebrews 9:23 for “purified” or “cleansed” comes from the same Greek word used in an ancient Greek translation of Daniel 8:14. Thus, those ancient Greeks who, before the time of Christ, translated the Old Testament understood the Hebrew in Daniel 8:14 to mean that the sanctuary was to be cleansed; years later, the author of Hebrews had the same idea, however different the immediate context: Just as the earthly sanctuary was cleansed, so must the heavenly. Indeed, the whole point of the earthly cleansing was to point to the greater one, the real one in the heavenly sanctuary.

Look again at Daniel 8:14. Considering the time frame of this prophecy, why must this cleansing of the sanctuary be the same cleansing that the author of Hebrews referred to?

In Jewish thought, the Day of Atonement, when the sanctuary was cleansed, was also the great day of judgment, the time when people had their last chance to repent before facing judgment. In fact, on the Day of Atonement Jews still sometimes say this blessing to one another: “May you be sealed in the book of life forever.”

Why is Christ’s righteousness covering you, by faith, your only assurance that, indeed, in the day of judgment you will be sealed in the book of life forever?

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: The Web site <http://unusualchurches.blogspot.com> lists unusual churches and religions that have a unique belief system. Some of them are:

“The Temple of the Vampire is . . . devoted to the Vampire religion, legally registered with the U.S. federal government since 1989.”

The Church of the Friendly Ghost provides “a venue and environment for high-quality art, music and theatre that is overlooked, under-appreciated, or otherwise marginalized by mainstream complacency.”

The Temple of Godzilla offers “everything you ever wanted to know about Godzilla.”

Hair Religion, where hair is revered.

Thought Questions:

① Those “churches” listed above are unique. Yet, unique isn’t necessarily bad, is it? After all, as Adventists we are, in some ways, unique. How so? What things about us, not just in doctrine but in anything, helps make us different from other churches?

② The pre-Advent judgment belief is what helps to make the Seventh-day Adventist Church unique. When we have 27 other fundamental beliefs that are shared by one Protestant church or another, why is it important to emphasize the belief that makes us stand out? Or should we seek to downplay the role of the pre-Advent judgment in our theology?

Application Question:

When the Millerites first read and interpreted the prophecies of Daniel 8 and 9, they were convinced that Christ was coming. They were so convinced, and many of them neglected their crops that year. Why waste time working in the fields? Jesus was coming! But when He didn’t come, many were left disillusioned and confused. Though we can admire their sincerity and dedication, we don’t want to make the same mistake. How can we as a church strike the right balance between believing that Jesus is coming and yet getting on with the daily tasks and chores of life?

Further Study: In Jewish thought, what happens on the Day of Atonement, when the sanctuary is to be cleansed? Compare the quotes below with how Ellen White describes the pre-Advent judgment in *The Great Controversy*, as well as the images that are seen in the judgment scene of Daniel 7.

“God, seated on His throne to judge the world, at the same time Judge, Pleader, Expert, and Witness, openeth the Book of Records; it is read, even man’s signature [name] being found therein. The great trumpet is sounded; a still small voice is heard; angels shudder, saying, this is the day of judgment. . . . On the Day of Atonement, it is sealed who shall live and who shall die.”—“The Day of Atonement,” quoted in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*.

Some prayers uttered on the Day of Atonement read like this: “Justify me in the judgment. . . . O silence the accuser, and suffer the advocate to take his place . . . and in consequence of his pleading, declare, I have pardoned. . . . O blot out the transgression of the people that have been saved. . . . He, the Ancient of Days, sits as Judge. . . . In the book of life . . . may we be sealed by Thee.”

Discussion Questions

- ❶ Think about all that God already has done for us, especially in the Person of Jesus. Yet, despite all this, in order to ensure that all the universe sees His justice and fairness in dealing with sin and rebellion, He allows Himself to be judged on how He judges. What does that tell us about the character of God and why He is so worthy of our praise, worship, and fealty?
- ❷ If you believed that folks go immediately to heaven or hell at death, why would all this talk of a pre-Advent judgment, or any kind of future judgment, sound silly? What does this tell us about how interlocked many of our beliefs are?
- ❸ Do you know people who are struggling with our understanding of pre-Advent judgment? Why not, as a class, plan a house meeting in which, after prayer and fellowship and food, you can share some of the things you have been learning?