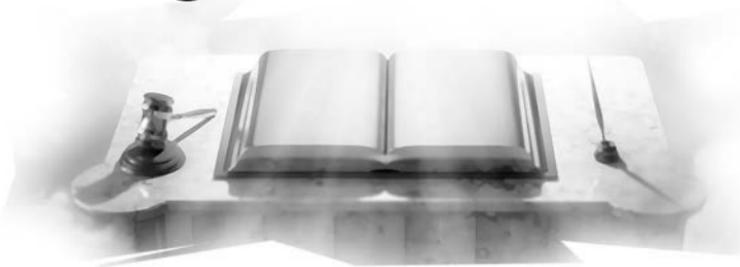


The Pre-Advent Judgment



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Daniel 7, Gen. 3:8–20, 2 Tim. 2:19, Ps. 51:4, Ps. 96:11–13, 2 Cor. 5:10.

Memory Text: “ ‘ “Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him” ’ ” (Daniel 7:27, NASB).

As the book of Hebrews so clearly shows, after His death and resurrection, Jesus began a new phase of work for us. He became our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. The visions in Daniel 7 and 8 reveal that at some point in history this heavenly work of Christ in our behalf had entered a new phase, the judgment. This is sometimes called the “eschatological Day of Atonement”: eschatological, because it pertains to the end time; Day of Atonement, because it is prefigured by the Day of Atonement service in the earthly sanctuary.

Daniel 7, our focus this week, contains a sequence of kingdoms, symbolized by four animals, that parallels the sequence in Daniel 2: Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome.

As we study, we'll see that the judgment is good news, because our Lord God works for His people. He judges in their behalf before the onlooking universe and grants them entrance into Christ's eternal kingdom, the culmination of all their hopes as followers of the Lord.

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

The Vision and the Judgment

“A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened” (*Dan. 7:10*).

Read Daniel 7:1–14. What is happening here?

After Daniel sees the four beasts, he observes another horn coming up among the horns of the fourth beast. This “little horn” becomes the main enemy of God and His saints. Then, suddenly, Daniel’s attention turns from the dark earth to a bright judgment scene in the heavenly throne room (*Dan. 7:9–14*).

The judgment scene is the pivot of the entire vision and involves two key figures, the Ancient of Days and the Son of man. Angels also are there, witnesses to the judgment. The scene unfolds in three steps: first is the court scene (vss. 9, 10), then the outcome of the judgment on the beastly powers on earth (vss. 11, 12), and finally the transfer of dominion and kingdom to the Son of man (vss. 13, 14). God the Father is portrayed as the majestic Ancient of Days, the wise and sage judge par excellence. The Son of man represents humanity, Jesus Himself, in the heavenly court. Jesus used this title many times to refer to Himself, and at least twice He clearly evoked the images of Daniel 7 (*Matt. 24:30, 26:64*).

The Day of Atonement functions as the most natural typological setting for this heavenly temple scene. In fact, it is portrayed as if the heavenly High Priest comes, surrounded by clouds of incense, to the Ancient of Days. In Daniel 7:10, the “books were opened.” Books play a major role in the heavenly judgment. There are several books of heavenly origin known in the Bible: the “book of life” (*Ps. 69:28, Phil. 4:3, Rev. 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, NASB*), the “book of remembrance” (*Mal. 3:16*), the books of “deeds” (*Rev. 20:12*), and God’s “book” (*Exod. 32:32, 33; Ps. 56:8*).

Imagine being judged by God. (You will be.) Imagine everything you have ever done being judged. (It will be.) If you have to stand on your record, your own deeds, your own good works, what hope do you have? What, then, is your only hope in judgment?

Judgment Pattern

Read Genesis 3:8–20. What does God do before He pronounces judgment?

The concept of an investigative judgment is biblical. God's judicial procedure often includes a phase of investigation and inquiry. A first instance is reported in Genesis 3, where God investigates before He pronounces the verdict (*Gen. 3:8–19*). God's dealings with Cain (*Genesis 4*), Babel (*Genesis 11*), and Sodom (*Genesis 18, 19*) follow a similar pattern. We see God undertaking the same action that He requires of the judges in Israel: namely, to "investigate and search out and inquire thoroughly" (*Deut. 13:14, NASB; see also Deut. 19:18*).

Investigation involves deliberation and fairness. It is often public. God allows others to see for themselves what He is doing. In this way, when God announces the verdict—be it salvation or condemnation—onlookers are assured that God's action is the best. This is exactly the reason why the heavenly judgment in Daniel 7 involves books. The books are not for God's sake, so that He would remember more easily, but for the benefit of the celestial beings surrounding Him, who, unlike God, don't know all things.

How does judgment turn out for the saints? *Dan. 7:22*.

In talking about the judgment, Ellen G. White wrote: "The fact that the acknowledged people of God are represented as standing before the Lord in filthy garments should lead to humility and deep searching of heart on the part of all who profess His name. Those who are indeed purifying their souls by obeying the truth will have a most humble opinion of themselves. . . . But while we should realize our sinful condition, we are to rely upon Christ as our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption. We cannot answer the charges of Satan against us. Christ alone can make an effectual plea in our behalf. He is able to silence the accuser with arguments founded not upon our merits, but on His own."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 471, 472.

How do these words help us to understand why the judgment is such good news?

Time of the Judgment

Read Daniel 7:7–10, 21, 22, 25, 26. When does the judgment of Daniel 7 take place?

Both in the vision and in the angelic interpretation, the judgment follows as God's response to the horn's presumption and climaxes with the transfer of the kingdom to God's saints. The Bible describes the judgment as occurring during the time when the horn power is still in existence (*Dan. 7:8, 9*). The horn's dominion is taken away only after the court sits in judgment; then, when the judicial procedures are ended, all earthly kingdoms are destroyed (*vs. 26*).

What this means, clearly, is that the judgment must take place before the Second Coming. It is a pre-Advent judgment that begins sometime after “a time, times, and half a time” (*vs. 25, NASB*). How could there be a final reward or punishment if there were not a judgment that preceded it?

Indeed, the saints are rewarded at the time of Christ's advent, which presupposes that they have already been judged. Similarly, the wicked, including the demonic powers, will be judged during the millennium before God executes the final judgment (*see Revelation 20*).

Why does God need a judgment? Doesn't “the Lord know those who are His’”? *2 Tim. 2:19, NASB.*

Of course our omniscient God is fully aware of who His people are. He does not need a judgment in order to decide who is going to be saved. The pre-Advent judgment, rather, shows the Judge to be just in the saving of His people. Heavenly beings need to be sure that the saints are safe to save. As we seek to understand the meaning of the judgment, we need to remember the reality of the great controversy scenario, which is hinted at in these texts, because we see the angelic host witnessing the judgment. Other beings have an interest in the final outcome of the plan of salvation.

“ ‘The Lord knows those who are His’ ” (*NASB*). How can you be sure you are one of “His”? What's the only way to be sure? (*Rom. 8:1*).

When the Judgment Ends

Read Daniel 7 again. What are the results of the pre-Advent judgment?

The judgment results in several far-reaching actions:

1. *The Son of man is crowned.* He receives “dominion, glory, and a kingdom” (*Dan. 7:14, NASB*).

2. *The saints receive the kingdom forever.* The judgment is for the benefit of the saints who will receive God’s kingdom (*Dan. 7:22*). Unmistakably, the Son of man and the saints have a very close relationship. When the Son of man receives His kingdom, He invites the saints to join Him. His kingdom is their kingdom (*Dan. 7:27*). This judgment leads to a time when the King of the everlasting kingdom is reunited with His people. This is their greatest reward and His.

3. *The rebellion is defeated and destroyed.* The enemies of God’s people are judged. After the horn makes war with the saints, it is defeated itself and destroyed forever (*Dan. 7:25, 26*).

4. *The absolute justice of God is demonstrated.* Because the judgment in the heavenly court is public and the angels attend the inquiries into human affairs, all can see for themselves that God is fair in His actions. He is able to uphold both love and righteousness. Thus, in the end, God Himself will be vindicated, and all will acknowledge that God is just and that God is love. The whole procedure ensures that the universe will be a secure place for eternity (*see Ps. 51:4, Rom. 3:4*).

The pre-Advent judgment results in fulfilling the hopes of both God and the believers. God’s desire is to save His people and eradicate sin while leaving no doubt about His love and justice. Humanity’s yearning is to have salvation from sin and its oppression in every form and to enjoy eternal life in the presence of the One who loves them. The judgment thus becomes the guarantee for an eternal and trusting relationship between God and His creation.

“The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 678.

Responsible Assurance

Read Psalm 96:11–13. What is the reason for all creation to rejoice?

Why would anyone cry out “Judge me, O LORD” (*Ps. 7:8, NKJV*)? The reason is simple. Judgment means salvation: “Save me, O God, by Your name, and vindicate me by Your power” (*Ps. 54:1, NASB*). Psalm 26 is a heartbreakingly honest plea for justice and righteousness. David expresses marvelously the idea that God, the Judge, is always on the side of His loyal people and that His judgment is more than desirable (*Pss. 26:1, 35:24, 43:1, 54:1*). This is because judgment also implies vindication.

So, does the pre-Advent judgment threaten our assurance of salvation? No, because the outcome of this judgment is certain. It is “in favor of the saints” (*Dan. 7:22, NKJV*). God’s work in the judgment reaffirms our forgiveness and intensifies our assurance by making our sins eternally irrelevant. Judgment is actually another manifestation of the salvation that is ours. The judgment is not the time when God decides to accept or reject us; rather, it is the time when God finalizes our choice of whether or not we have truly accepted Him, a choice revealed by our works.

For the believer, then, judgment increases assurance. To put it more radically, judgment lies at the heart of the doctrine of Christian assurance.

Read Romans 14:10–12 and 2 Corinthians 5:10. How should the reality of judgment affect the way in which we live?

To exempt the righteous from judgment is not what the Bible teaches. Though the righteous are vindicated in the judgment and their sins are forever blotted out, the anticipation of the judgment encourages them to live a life of loyalty and accountability. The assurance of salvation is thus accompanied by the motivational impetus for moral behavior. Because God has done so much for us, we love Him and seek to express that love through being faithful in all that He asks of us.

Suppose a fellow believer expresses his or her fear of God and especially of the judgment. How can you help that person to understand the good news about the judgment and to develop a personal sense of assurance regarding salvation?

Further Study: “He who dwells in the heavenly sanctuary judges righteously. His pleasure is more in His people, struggling with temptation in a world of sin, than in the host of angels that surround His throne.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 176.

“Satan has an accurate knowledge of the sins that he has tempted God’s people to commit, and he urges his accusations against them, declaring that by their sins they have forfeited divine protection, and claiming that he has the right to destroy them. He pronounces them just as deserving as himself of exclusion from the favor of God. . . . But while the followers of Christ have sinned, they have not given themselves up to be controlled by the satanic agencies. They have repented of their sins and have sought the Lord in humility and contrition, and the divine Advocate pleads in their behalf. He who has been most abused by their ingratitude, who knows their sin and also their penitence, declares: ‘The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan. I gave My life for these souls. They are graven upon the palms of My hands. They may have imperfections of character; they may have failed in their endeavors; but they have repented, and I have forgiven and accepted them.’”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 588, 589.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Where did questions about God’s justice, law, and fairness first arise, on earth or in heaven? What are the implications of your answer, especially in the context of helping us to understand why there is a heavenly judgment of any kind?
- ❷ The Seventh-day Adventist Church has proclaimed the message of the judgment for many years now. Still, Christ has not returned. How are we to respond to what seems to be a very long time? Why is it so important to remember that, as humans, we have a very limited understanding of time itself? Think about some of the very long time prophecies in the Bible and how someone living in those times could easily have been discouraged about what, from their perspective, seemed to be taking forever.
- ❸ Many Christians believe in the biblical concept of judgment. (How could they not? It’s all throughout the Bible.) How, though, does linking the judgment to the sanctuary help to reveal crucial truths about the nature of judgment and the assurance that it offers us?

Spreading the Light

High on a lush mountaintop in Papua New Guinea (PNG) stands the village of Kora. People live in simple houses made of roughly cut wood and a thatched roof. They raise crops of yams, bananas, and sweet potatoes.

Most of the older people can't read, and they speak only the local language, which we call wontok [*one talk*]. Teaching them the Bible was a challenge. But your mission offerings have made it easier. Many adults come to the children's Sabbath School to hear Bible stories. We now have flip charts, modern picture rolls, to illustrate the week's lessons. These picture rolls were given to us because people around the world gave a special Thirteenth Sabbath Offering a few years ago. The flip charts help focus the attention of children and adults while they hear the stories.

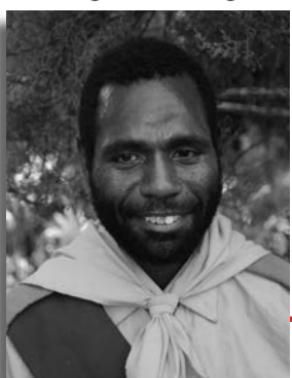
Recently we received MP3 players, audio devices that contain the entire Bible plus children's lessons on them. Because the Bible and the stories are in pidgin, I listen and then translate the story or Bible text into the wontok. For those who understand pidgin, I turn up the volume so they can hear the story in pidgin, and then I translate it so everyone can understand it.

I teach the kindergarten Sabbath School, and the lessons are on the MP3 player. So, if I can't get a Sabbath School lesson quarterly, I can still hear the story and tell the children. To the children, it's like listening to the radio, only they're hearing God's Word.

Another important mission project has vastly improved the lives of the people living in Kora and in similar villages across the rugged Papua New Guinea terrain. Several years ago, the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped purchase a mission plane for PNG. The plane brings us our Sabbath School supplies, drops off missionaries or other church officials, and sometimes carries seriously ill or injured villagers to the hospital just 30 minutes away. Without the mission plane, it would take days of difficult and dangerous hiking to cross several mountain ridges to the nearest town.

Recently, another Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped raise funds to open medical clinics in several isolated areas. The offering will help thousands more hear God's Word on MP3 players and will help buy Bibles for children to share with their families across the South Pacific.

The people of Kora and across the South Pacific thank church members in places they've never heard of for helping in so many ways to teach them about Christ.



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