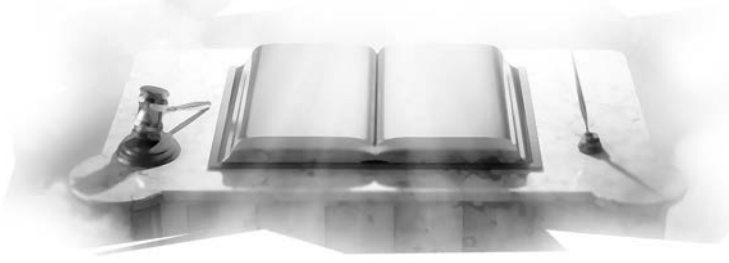


The Pre-Advent Judgment



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 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? *See 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 heartbreaking 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?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Daniel 7:27*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand the good news of the pre-Advent judgment, which gives the believer assurance of salvation because of Jesus Christ taking the initiative to affirm in front of a heavenly court that we belong to Him.

Feel: Foster the feeling of love toward God, who pronounces judgment in favor of the saints, gives them courage and strength to live, and condemns the little horn with its followers.

Do: Submit to God’s plan and be part of His solution for humanity.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Jesus Christ Our Judge

- A** How can you know that Jesus is for you and not against you?
- B** Why does truth really matter?
- C** Why is it so important to unmask the activities of the antichrist?

II. Feel: Jesus Christ Secures Your Heavenly Place

- A** How do you feel knowing that Christ is not only your Judge but also your Advocate?
- B** When and how will Jesus pronounce judgment in favor of His children?
- C** What is so destructive, repulsive, and evil in the little horn’s activities?

III. Do: Rejoice in the Lord, Your Judge

- A** How can God secure His victory over Satan and evil for all eternity?
- B** Can Jesus be “bribed” by our exemplary moral behavior, good deeds, or excellent service? Why, or why not? Why can these different ethical activities not make God more merciful to us?

► **Summary:** When God judges His people, He justifies, delivers, and vindicates; but on the other hand, He condemns, punishes, and destroys evil.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Daniel 7:9, 10, 13, 14, 22–27*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The pre-Advent judgment gives more assurance of salvation than if it did not occur. God takes the cases of His faithful followers and presents them in the heavenly court. The purpose is to affirm our decision for Him during our lifetime in front of the representatives of the whole universe and thus secure our place in heaven for all eternity. This judgment also condemns the little horn and all who follow him, thus confirming that evil will cease to exist.

Just for Teachers: This week’s lesson provides insight into understanding the pre-Advent judgment. The explanation is given from the perspective of a believer in Christ Jesus and is very positive, because God is for us and never against us. Judgment is an integral part of the gospel, a unity that needs to be presented in a right way in order not to scare people but bring them hope.

Opening Discussion: What is the first reaction and feeling of the members of the class when they hear that God will judge them? This question has been asked on all continents to people from various backgrounds, and the answer has always been “fear.” Why do we fear God’s judgment? One of the main reasons is that we have a narrow understanding of the nature of judgment and a one-sided definition. What, really, is divine judgment, and how should it be biblically defined?

► **STEP 2**—Explore

Just for Teachers: Daniel 7 is written in a beautiful literary structure that helps one to grasp the main points of the chapter. After an introduction (*vs. 1*), a vision follows (*vss. 2–14*), then its interpretation (*vss. 15–27*), and finally the epilogue (*vs. 28*). The vision is divided into different parts, which are expressed in a chiasm:

- (A) Setting a background—*vss. 2, 3*
- (B) Description of the three beasts—*vss. 4–6*
- (C) Terrifying fourth beast—*vs. 7*
- (D) Activity of the little horn—*vs. 8*
- (E) Heavenly judgment—*vss. 9, 10*
- (D’) Little horn—*vs. 11a*
- (C’) Fate of the fourth beast—*vs. 11b*

(B') Fate of the first three beasts—*vs. 12*

(E') Glorious triumph in judgment—*vss. 13, 14.*

Thus, the heavenly pre-Advent judgment is at the center of the vision and is its climax. In chapter 7, there are three key passages written in poetry: the two heavenly scenes (*vss. 9, 10, 13, 14*) and the crucial interpretation of the vision (*vss. 23–27*).

Bible Commentary

I. Divine Judgment as Gospel—God’s Smile for His People (*Review Daniel 7:22 with your class.*)

Daniel explains what will occur in the pre-Advent judgment in chapter 7 and points to two kinds of judgment:

1. Judgment of condemnation in connection with the little horn (*Dan. 7:26*).

2. Judgment of salvation. Before Daniel underscores the judgment of destruction, he clearly interprets what will happen to the believers. The judgment will be proclaimed to their advantage, “for” them: “ ‘Until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom’ ” (*Dan. 7:22, NKJV*). Glory and hallelujah to God!

Activity: Compare different translations of John 5:24. According to the NKJV, Jesus states: “ ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and **shall not come into judgment**, but has passed from death into life’ ” (*emphasis author’s*). The NIV puts this statement in the following words: “ ‘I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and **will not be condemned**; he has crossed over from death to life’ ” (*emphasis author’s*). Which translation is correct? According to the original Greek, both versions are correct, and there is good reason to believe that this textual ambiguity is intentional. The truth is that those who believe in Christ and His gospel will not be condemned, and they will not even come into judgment.

How does one understand this? Is Jesus in contradiction with Paul who assures that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (*2 Cor. 5:10a, NIV*)? What does Jesus mean when He states that those who believe will not come into judgment? It means that they will not come under the judgment of condemnation. There is only one judgment that is 100 percent condemnation, and it is the last judgment at the end of the millennium when all the wicked will

be annihilated. At that time, all the redeemed are already in the New Jerusalem with Christ, so they will not come into this judgment (*Rev. 20:6, 9–15*). Believers in Christ do not need to fear any divine judgment, because “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (*Rom. 8:1, NIV*).

Discussion Question: How can you train your mind to see God’s judgment as being positive and not scary?

II. God’s Judgment as “for” His People (*Review Isaiah 35:4 with your class.*)

Consider carefully the following texts, which prove that our definition of judgment is biblical. There are plentiful scriptural examples of divine positive judgments, but study at least these few examples:

1. The book of Judges. When God’s people were under the oppression of their enemies, they cried to God for help, and He sent them judges—i.e., deliverers who liberated and protected them.

2. David prayed several times to God: “Judge me, O Lord” (*Pss. 7:8, 26:1, 35:24*). He does not ask for condemnation but vindication from enemies who were against him and wanted to destroy him.

3. For God, to judge really means to save: “From heaven you pronounced judgment, and the land feared and was quiet—when you, O God, rose up to judge, to save all the afflicted of the land” (*Ps. 76:8, 9, NIV*).

4. Through the prophet Isaiah, God powerfully encourages: “Say to those with fearful hearts, ‘Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you’ ” (*Isa. 35:4, NIV*). This text plainly but beautifully explains that we need to trust in the Lord (not in ourselves) in order to have assurance of salvation.

Discussion Questions: When Paul explains the “in Christ” motif, he states that after we surrendered to God and believed in Him, He in His rich mercy “raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (*Eph. 2:6, NIV*). What does it mean that by faith we sit already with Christ in the heavenly realms, i.e., at the right hand of the heavenly Father (*see Eph. 1:20*)? Why do we not need to worry and doubt that one day we will be physically with Him in heaven?

III. God’s Judgment and Joy (*Review Psalm 96:11–13 with your class.*)

We usually associate divine judgment with fear and condemnation, but the psalmist put judgment together with joy. Study the verbs he uses in Psalm 96:11–13 and the reason he gives: “Let the heavens **rejoice**, let the earth **be glad**; let the sea **resound**, and all that is in it; let the fields **be jubilant**, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will **sing for joy**; they will

sing before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth” (*NIV*; *emphasis author’s*). Divine judgment brings final victory for God’s people and the end to evil. The redeemed will sing with joy at the second coming of Jesus: “ ‘Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. . . . let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation’ ” (*Isa. 25:9, NIV*).

Discussion Question: Why can believers in Christ rejoice about divine judgment? Be sure that your reasons are unselfish.

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Explain to your class why it is necessary that God stands for justice when He executes the judgments of condemnation. Why can’t love and truth exist without justice?

Activity: Read aloud with your class 1 John 2:28 and 4:17 and discuss these pertinent texts in small groups of two or three people. On what condition did John build his assertion that we can have bold assurance in the day of judgment and the second coming of Christ? What does it mean to “continue in Him” or “stay in Christ”? Jesus assures that we can bear fruit only if we abide in Him (*see John 15:1–17, Hosea 14:8*). Apply this saying to practical life. How can we remain in God in order to be fruitful?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Contrast for the members of your class the positive and negative dimensions of God’s judgment activities. Invite them to give biblical examples and apply them to modern life.

Activities:

① How can you help your friends or church members who have doubts about their salvation, are not certain that God can accept them, and live in spiritual schizophrenia, because they fear God’s judgment?

② Ask your class to go to the Web site of the Adventist Theological Society, www.atsjats.org, and find in the archives of the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* Jiří Moskala’s article entitled “The Gospel According to God’s Judgment: Judgment as Salvation.” This article will provide further details, study, and discussion about today’s topic.