

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 judgment 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?

Key Text: *Revelation 14:7*

Teachers Aim:

1. To discern the significance of the pre-Advent judgment for us today.
2. To reveal the implications of the pre-Advent judgment for the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
3. To help class participants understand what the judgment reveals about God and the salvation He offers.

Lesson Outline:

I. Judgment and Justice (*Ps. 73:1-17*)

- A. The hour of God's judgment has come.
- B. Judgment will reveal God's character in dealing with sin.

II. The Last Event in Salvation History (*John 14:12, Acts 1:11, Rev. 22:12*)

- A. Judgment culminates in the second coming of Christ.
- B. Judgment reassures us that the Second Coming is near.

III. The Assurance of Salvation

- A. Judgment reveals that our salvation rests in Christ.
- B. Full salvation shall be attained upon the vindication of Christ's righteousness in us.
- C. Our works can never save us, but they do play a role in demonstrating the reality of Christ's salvation in our lives.

Summary: The pre-Advent judgment, with the date 1844 and its teachings, is important for us because it affirms the biblical basis upon which we as a church, with our distinctive message, exist.

COMMENTARY

Many years have passed since 1844. Why does it take God so long to wrap up the cosmic conflict? This question reflects our failure to understand God's purposes. After sin came to this planet, Adam and Eve certainly would have expected the Redeemer to come soon and solve their dilemma. Indeed, Eve named her first son Cain, which means "I have received a man from God." For more than four thousand years, the human race waited for the Redeemer to arrive—in "the fulness of the time" as Inspiration states (*Gal. 4:4*). Then came the promise of the Second Coming, and even as early as Peter's time, scoffers wondered why Christ had not yet returned. He had to reply: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you,

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?

not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9, NIV). God has His own time, His own clock.

During what we view as delay, yet another question regarding judgment seeks an answer: What is the purpose of the pre-Advent judgment today? Three answers may be given: the vindication of God’s character, the assurance of salvation, and the cosmic victory of God after which we shall go home at last.

I. The Vindication of God’s Sovereignty

We have noted that Daniel 7:13, 14, 26, 27 and 8:14, 23-25 are parallel passages describing the same event. Daniel 7 speaks of a judgment prior to the establishment of God’s kingdom (vs. 27). Daniel 8 speaks of the cleansing of the sanctuary, leading to the destruction of the little horn (vs. 25). The scene in Daniel 7 describes the seating of the Ancient One in the heavenly court, the coming of the Son of Man, and the restoration of the Son’s “authority, glory and sovereign power” (vs. 14, NIV). These are the powers Christ had in heaven and the powers Lucifer coveted. Satan would never acknowledge that Christ is coeternal, coequal, and copowerful with God the Father—a point he contested powerfully and lost in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11).

Daniel 8, on the other hand, speaks of the cleansing of the sanctuary, providing the time of 1844 for when the judgment events of Daniel 7 will take place in order for the entire universe to see the true nature of God and Christ. Daniel 7 also speaks of Satan’s attack against God’s law (vs. 25). This, however, is brought to the universe’s full attention by the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8. How was the unchanging nature of God’s law’s proven to the universe? By the Messiah’s death on the cross. If God’s law could have been changed, Jesus need not have died. By approaching the Ancient of Days with His sacrificial blood, Christ proved that He had kept the law. Thus, in the pre-Advent judgment, the character of God—His love and justice—is fully vindicated.

II. The Assurance of Salvation

Salvation is a gift of God’s grace, accomplished through the Cross. It is a gift we should freely accept. Just as choosing to side with Satan results in sin, choosing to live by what Christ has accomplished results in salvation. This latter choice gives us the following assurance: “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:1, 2, NIV).

As a result of the pre-Advent judgment, the entire universe will witness that “those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 3:13, NIV).

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?

III. Home at Last

The ultimate focus of biblical history is the Second Coming. The One who brought the good news of grace will stand at the last day as the Judge of a rebellious order. The climactic moment in the history between good and evil will witness the unleashing of divine wrath to cleanse the universe of every hostility toward righteousness. This cleansing is described in terms of fire that will melt the elements and purify the earth (*2 Pet. 3:10-13*). But before this

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Job 1:6-11, 2:1-6, Psalm 73:1-17, Matthew 5:13-16, Ephesians 2:6-10, Revelation 14:6-13*

- 1 Spend a few moments listing some specific injustices in the world. They include militant terrorism and ethnic cleansing, child abuse and terminal illnesses. What does the Adventist doctrine of the heavenly sanctuary say to people who suffer under those horrible conditions? Is that message being heard? How could it be broadcast more effectively?
- 2 Compare Daniel's dream of the four beasts (*Dan. 7:2-14*) with the three angels' messages (*Rev. 14:6-13*). What are some obvious similarities? Are these passages fundamentally threatening or encouraging? What is the primary message we should take away from them?
- 3 "Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets," wrote Amos (*3:7, NIV*). While some people are frustrated by what they do not know about God's activities in the course of human events, He is remarkably open in terms of His plan of salvation. Give at least five concrete examples of how God has chosen to reveal Himself. List five questions you would ask God if you could interview Him. What is the most important thing you know about God that makes Him trustworthy?
- 4 The 2,300-day prophecy is the last great Bible prophecy to be fulfilled before Jesus returns. How should that information alter the way we live our lives? Or should it? Can we justify living at the same level of commitment that we are living now?
- 5 Read Galatians 5:22, 23. Say that you wanted to exhibit these characteristics in your life. How would you begin? How would they show that you are involved in a saving relationship with Christ?

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.

occurs, the pre-Advent judgment provides the universe and unfallen beings with an opportunity to understand why Christ is the judge and purifier. Before He returns to earth, the pre-Advent judgment confirms who will be saved and who will not.

Out of the cleansing will come the fulfillment of God's promise: "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth" (*Isa. 65:17*). This new cosmos will forever be in harmony with God's eternal purposes and the home of the redeemed. The only evidence it will contain that sin ever existed will be the scars in the Redeemer's hands and feet. In that new earth, we will celebrate throughout eternity the love of God and the faithfulness of His promises these scars symbolize.

Witnessing

What is the most heart-stopping question in the world? In the universe? In your life?

Since I don't know you, friend reader, I can't say for sure, but I suspect it includes the word *why*. Like the cards in an old trivia game, all those questions are buried in our memories and written on our hearts. If any of us could have a few minutes with God, speaking frankly as Abraham and Moses once did, we could sum up all our questions, perhaps, in that word: *why*.

By now, as we conclude this look at the motive, method, and means of God's judgment, perhaps something is beginning to form in your mind. Can you see it? I'll give you a hint: It's the answer to all those whys.

Another component of a competent judgment is justice. The answer to why there is sin in the world. Why did we have decades of Attila the Hun, Genghis Khan, Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein? Why are there husbands who beat their wives, mothers who kill their children, neighbors who attack neighbors? Why do diseases ravage young lives, or full lives that should be spent in quiet retirement?

The entire reason for the judgment is to find out the answers to these why questions. That's good news; it's something you can depend upon in the darkest hours of life.

But are you the only person in the world with those why questions? Of course you're not. Everyone has those questions. Now, though, through this study, you and I both have the means to share that with people who are weighed down under those questions. What can we share? The answer—and the Answer!

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?

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: The best gifts in a relationship are those received without asking, those given without any motivation other than love. The best gifts are those given as a spontaneous gesture of an overwhelming need to make “feelings” tangible. In this respect, being saved by faith is similar to being in love. When you are saved by faith, you are not able to smugly and idly wait to enter heaven’s pearly gates. You are overwhelmed with a desire to do good things, to make a difference. And you are not doing this for any reason other than love. And the world, and the universe, see this. When you are saved, when you have the joy of salvation, then everyone sees the reality of that salvation in your actions. Your works are a testimony of God’s saving grace in your life.

Thought Questions:

❶ With the Icebreaker in mind, compare and contrast the following texts: Romans 4:5; Ephesians 2:8, 9; 2 Corinthians 5:10; and Revelation 22:12. How would you explain the relationship between “saved by faith” and “judged by works?” How does this affect a person who is saved on his or her deathbed and has no time for good works?

❷ Why is it often so hard for us to accept that salvation is by faith alone? Why is it so easy to get caught up in the idea that our works can get us to heaven or that they have saving merit before God?

Application Question:

What do you think constitutes “quality” works? Think of situations that tempt you to gain God’s acceptance by works, hoping He won’t notice that His grace is not your motivating factor. Think of other circumstances in which people’s opinions force you to do good works. What should ultimately be our motivation in all that we do?

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:

- 1 What do the answers to Wednesday’s final question tell us about how well we understand the plan of salvation?
- 2 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 farther 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?
- 3 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.