

The Pre-Advent Judgment – Fact or Fiction

Part II

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Seventh-day Adventists believe that the judgment in Daniel 7 is a pre-Advent, investigative judgment. Does this concept find its roots in Scripture or is it an Adventist fiction?

The Investigative Judgment Concept in Scripture

Right from the beginning of God's dealing with sinners in Genesis 3 a pattern of judicial procedure emerges. First comes the investigation: "Where are you?" "Who told you?" "Have you eaten of the tree?" (Gen 3:9-13). Following this investigation God announces the verdict in verses 14-19. We find a similar divine approach in God's dealing with Cain (Gen 4:9, 10) and in His handling of Sodom and Gomorrah. Most of Genesis 18 and 19 describes God's investigations and deliberations prior to His punitive act. It is significant that the New Testament projects the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah as an "example," or a "type" of God's judgment at the end (2 Peter 2:6; Jude 7).

In the writings of Israel's prophets, Israel or the nations are arrayed before God's judgment seat, an investigation is made, facts are stated, witnesses are called upon, and finally a verdict is pronounced (e.g., Isa. 5:1-7; 43:8-13; 22-28). The sequence is always the same: sin, investigation, and judgment.¹

The concept of a pre-Advent, investigative, judgment appears also in the New Testament. The parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22 is a prime example. "When the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment" (Matt 22:11 NKJV). The king's inspection of the guests represents a process of investigation. The result of this investigation determined who of the guests could remain and who could not. In this sense it is a picture of the investigative, pre-Advent judgment in heaven going on now.

Other New Testament texts which presuppose a pre-Advent judgment are John 5:28-29, where John mentions a resurrection for life and a resurrection for condemnation, and Revelation 20:4-6. Most biblical exegetes agree that Revelation 20 teaches two literal resurrections of the dead, separated by one thousand years. Inasmuch as only the "blessed and holy" come up in the first resurrection, a prior judgment must have taken place to determine who will take part in the first resurrection.

The Lutheran theologian Joseph A. Seiss recognized this and wrote, "The resurrection, and the changes which pass 'in the twinkling of an eye' upon the living, are themselves the fruits and embodiments of antecedent judgment. They are the consequences of adjudications then already made. Strictly speaking, men are neither raised nor translated, in order to come to judgment. Resurrections and translations are products of judgment previously passed upon the dead as dead, and upon the quick as

quick. 'The dead in Christ shall rise first,' because they are already adjudged to be in Christ, and the living saints are caught up together with them to the clouds, because they are already adjudged to be saints, and worthy to attain that world."²

In Revelation 14 the harvest of the earth (14-20) is preceded by the first angel's message, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come." (Rev. 14:7 NKJV). The sequence of events portrayed in this chapter clearly indicate that the judgment spoken of in 14:7 precedes the execution of the judgment at Christ's second advent described in verses 14-20.³

Thus throughout Scripture we find the concept of an investigative judgment prior to the Second Advent.

The Judgment in Daniel 7

Daniel 7 consists essentially of a vision, its interpretation and the prophet's reaction to the vision. It is framed by a prologue (verses 1-2a) and an epilogue (verse 28). The vision (verses 2-14) depicts four beasts, with the focus on the fourth beast which has ten horns out of which arises another little horn. This little horn becomes the main opposition to the "Most High" and the saints in the rest of the chapter.

While the activities of the little horn continue here on earth, Daniel's attention is drawn to a heavenly judgment scene (vs. 9-14) in which the little horn is condemned, the saints are vindicated, and dominion, glory, and a kingdom are given to "one like the Son of Man."⁴

The judgment passage in Daniel 7:9-14 contains three scenes: (1) a judgment in heaven in verses 9-10; (2) the end of the fourth beast, i.e., the outcome of the judgment in verses 11-12; and (3) the reception of the kingdom by Son of Man (Christ) in verses 13-14.

It is important to recognize that this judgment is going on while the little horn is active on the earth. At the end of verse eight Daniel hears the "pompous words" of the little horn. Then his attention is diverted to the heavenly judgment scene (vs. 9-10). But after describing the judgment scene, Daniel's attention is again arrested by the great words which the horn spoke. The text says "at that time," i.e., while he was beholding the heavenly assize, this speaking with great words took place here on earth.

Having dealt with the little horn and the beasts, whose dominions had been taken away but their lives were prolonged here on earth (vs 11-12), the vision returns to the heavenly realm and the ultimate triumph of God's plan (vs. 13-14).

The Time of the Judgment

There are three passages in Daniel 7 which refer specifically to the judgment. These are found in verses 9 - 14, 21, 22, and 26. Because the actions of the little horn clearly intersect and, for a time at least, coincide with the heavenly judgment, this judgment cannot be the final judgment of Revelation 20. Rather it must be a preliminary judgment going on in heaven prior to the Second Advent, as Seventh-day Adventists have always taught.

This has been recognized by a number of non-Adventist commentators: The Roman Catholic author F. Düsterwald, for example, wrote, "Without question, the prophet

Daniel here describes God's judgment concerning the hostile powers. The judgment ends with the total condemnation of the world empires and the triumph of the cause of God. However, what is described here is not as many older interpreters (Theodoret and others) have assumed the general judgment of the world, it is not God's judgment here on earth, rather the place of the judgment is in heaven. The context indicates, that it is a preliminary judgment which is later confirmed in the general judgment of the world"⁵

The Protestant interpreter T. Robinson saw this judgment sitting during the 19th century when he wrote his commentary on Daniel. He said, "As already observed, this is not the general judgment at the termination of Christ's reign on earth, or, as the phrase is commonly understood, the end of the world. It appears rather to be an invisible judgment carried on within the veil and revealed by its effects and the execution of its sentence. As occasioned by the 'great words' of the Little Horn and followed by the taking away of his dominion, it might seem to have already sat. As, however, the sentence is not yet by any means fully executed, it may be sitting now."⁶

Who Is Being Judged?

In this judgment scene books are opened and studied (v. 10). In the Old Testament we find references to the "book of the living" (e.g., Psalm 69:28), the "book of remembrance" (e.g., Malachi 3:16) and to God's "book" (e.g., Exodus 32:32; Psalm 56:8). The same thought occurs in the literature of later Judaism and in the New Testament (e.g., 1 Enoch 47:3; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 20:12; 21:27). The important question is, who is being judged from these books? From the context we conclude that this judgment includes:

1. *God's people*. Because "a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High" (7:22 NKJV), they must be in some way the subject of this judgment. This fact is not recognized outside of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, though this should not surprise us. Because most Christians believe in the immortality of the soul, they believe that a person's future state is decided the moment when he or she dies. A pre-Advent judgment, therefore, in which a final decision is rendered as to whether a person is saved or not, does not make sense to them. They see the dead already in heaven or hell (or purgatory for Roman Catholics). Hence, Christians, by and large, have no room for a pre-Advent judgment, though the context in Daniel 7 clearly demands it.

2. *The little horn*. The context of the judgment scene repeatedly refers to the little horn (vs. 8 and 11). The judgment, therefore, must somehow also involve the little horn. "Internal contextual evidence suggests that the saints and the little horn equally share in the pre-Advent judgment verdict"⁷ -- the saints in the sense that they receive the kingdom (v.27) and the little horn in that dominion is taken away from it. Thus the vindication of the saints (v.22) implies the condemnation of the little horn.

The Purpose of the Pre-advent Judgment

The primary purpose for the investigative pre-advent judgment is the final confirmation of salvation and vindication of God's people (7:22). "From time to time some of these saints have been adjudged guilty of various crimes by earthly tribunals when actually they were serving God and man faithfully. In the pre-Advent judgment

these unjust sentences by earthly courts will be reversed by the courts of heaven. In this way God will vindicate His saints”⁸

Beyond the vindication of the saints and the condemnation of the little horn, the pre-Advent judgment also vindicates God justice in His dealings with humanity. When the unfallen beings in the universe examine the records of the saints during the pre-Advent judgment, they will come to the conclusion that indeed God has been just and merciful in each case. In this way the character of God which has been at the center of the great controversy between Christ and Satan will be vindicated.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our study confirms that Daniel 7 depicts a judgment *prior* to the Second Advent. This judgment concerns both God’s people and the little horn. While the evil tyrant suffers extinction, God’s people, experience His saving justice and receive eternal life. Moreover, through this judgment process God Himself is vindicated before the universe. At the second advents of Jesus, when rewards are bestowed, only those who have maintained a living relationship with their Savior and whose names remain inscribed in the book of life become partakers of the eternal kingdom.

Endnotes:

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1. For other examples of investigative judgments in the OT see, William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, Revised edition, DARCOM.(Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 1-29; Eric Livingston, “Investigative Judgment – A Scriptural Concept,” *Ministry* (April 1992): 12-14;
 2. J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse* (reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973), p. 136. PLEASE NOTE, THIS IS A DIFFERENT EDITION OF THE BOOK. THEREFORE, I HAVE CHANGED THE FOOTNOTE.
 3. Other examples are found in Samuel Bacchiocchi, “The Pre-Advent Judgement in the New Testament,” *Adventists Affirm* (Fall 1994), 37-44.
 4. Concerning the identity of the “Son of Man” see Arthur J. Ferch, *The Son Of Man in Daniel Seven*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series vol. 7 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1979).
 5. F. Düsterwald, *Die Weltreiche und das Gottesreich* (Freiburg: Herder’sche Verlagsbuch- handlung, 1890), 177.
 6. T. Robinson, *Daniel*, Homiletical Commentary, vol. 19 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1892), 139 [PLEASE NOTE THE CORRECTION OF THE PAGE]. Similarly, S. P. Tregelles, *Remarks on the Prophetic Visions in the Book of Daniel*, 8th edition (Chelmsford: The Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony, n.d.), 36-38.
 7. Norman Gulley, *Christ is Coming!* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1998),413. See also Arthur J. Ferch, “The Pre-advent Judgment–is it Scriptural?” *Australasian Record* (August 28, 1982): 5-7.
 8. William H. Shea, “Theological Importance of the Preadvent Judgment” in *70 Weeks, Leviticus, Nature of Prophecy*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 328.