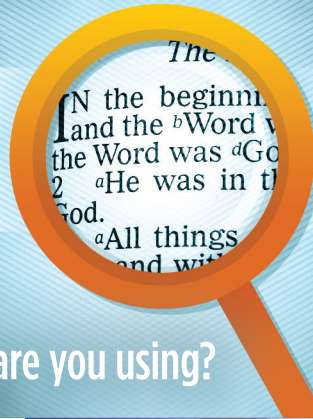


BIBLE OPTICS



What lens are you using?

The WORD or the world?

Special issue on God's Judgment

All your questions about the judgment answered.

- Why is God judging us?
- Is it something to fear?
- Has the judgment already begun?
- and more...



From the Pastor

The last years of Judah are dreadful. Treachery and strife dominate the moral and political landscape. Idols stand on every corner. The prophet Jeremiah is alternately ignored, laughed at, and scorned. Yet he persistently calls his beloved people to return to God.

One day God warns him of a plot on his life. The priests in his hometown, his own relatives, plan to kill him for prophesying in God's name. How does Jeremiah respond? By appealing to God as judge.

"O Lord of hosts, you who judge righteously, testing the mind and the heart, let me see Your vengeance on them, for to You I have revealed my cause" (Jeremiah 11:20).

Jeremiah understood something that we often overlook today—God's "judgment [is] given for the holy ones of the Most High" (Daniel 7:22).

God judges to vindicate His cherished people and reveal their true loyalty to Him. Justice is served to the wicked, not out of despotic rage, but as the fair result of their actions and to prevent them from ever again hurting themselves and others. Judgment is a good thing when God is our judge!

Know this beloved child of God: Your Father is on your side. He is judging for you!



Nelson Mercado | Pastor
Nashville First Seventh-day Adventist Church

Love Weighs More

"Could it all have been for love?" I asked myself as the morning light poured through my window. I sat cross-legged at the end of my bed with my brown leather Bible open before me. Many mornings had been just like this, sitting in God's presence, but this time something was different. This time...the idea of following His laws *and* receiving His love began to connect in my heart.

For years I had not realized that these two ideas were connected. Every morning I'd go straight to my Bible because I was afraid God would be disappointed with me if I didn't. After an hour of repenting of my sins and being hyper aware of my unworthiness to be in His presence, I'd walk away feeling He was pleased with my mournful spirit. But there was a whole world to the love of Jesus I had not experienced—another side to "Jesus loves me" that my heart had not grasped. I had no idea what God truly thought of *me*.

As a child, hearing the word *Judgment* was scary. I didn't want to be on God's bad side. Pastors were passionate when they said, "Get ready! The end will soon come! Don't be with the lost who will experience God's wrath!" I certainly didn't want to be lost. They would finish with, "The ones who have repented will be saved. Christ will stand as their advocate, covering them with His righteousness!" Christ's vindication and my fear of being lost jumbled together inside my head. God's love didn't sink in. I would walk away happy those sermons were over.



Don't get me wrong, they were *saying* the right things—even beautiful things! The timeline and concept of the final judgment were right, but they left out the life-changing truth that *my Father wanted me*.

Even though I struggled with the idea of a judgment, I knew God was loving. During high school, I was quite a preacher. I preached God's love, but I didn't know what it felt like for me. His grace seemed unattainable and I felt unworthy of His love.

My sense of unworthiness choked me spiritually. Six feet deep in shame and guilt, I believed I would never measure up to the godliness God wanted me to reach. I didn't realize the devil was lying to me. He had trapped me into believing that I simply wasn't good enough for a good Father.

What is beautiful about God is that *He knows us intimately*. There wasn't one aspect of my bondage that He wasn't already aware of. I never asked to be freed, because I didn't know I was trapped in wrong thinking. I thought I was living a life that pleased Him. Thankfully He pursued me. He wanted me, and He wanted me freed. He knew my heart didn't truly know Him or His love.

It all began to change one day when He had a friend text me, "Tell Sara how beautiful she is to Me. Tell her how in love I am with her!" I didn't take it to heart at first, but over time the messages started to get through to me. She ended up praying over me and I felt chains of bondage and darkness fall off of me. It was truly life changing.

My morning worships began to change. I could feel our Father's smiling face of love shining over me as He spoke to my heart, "You're already enough for Me, Sara. I only have good things for you, and they begin with Me. I deeply love you." It was from this personal encounter God introduced me to, that I began to know who He really was! Instead of the strict Being I had perceived Him to be, I learned that God is a Father with a *good and beautiful heart*.

All fear I had related to the judgment and end-times disappeared. Instead of getting myself ready for a court date, I simply spent time with my Father who loved me. Now that I knew *God's heart*—and that it was for me (Romans 8:31),

studying the judgment was no longer scary.

Yet my question remained, Am I truly being *judged*? I wanted to understand so I prayed, "Father, where is Your heart in this judgment?" To my surprise, I discovered our Father's heart of love was written all over the judgment. And that's exactly what the devil doesn't want us to see. He doesn't want us to appreciate who God really is—that He's a *good Father*, not a bad one. (**Dig deeper** Hebrews 12:1-11). He isn't simply a supreme being somewhere in the cosmos judging us for our deeds. No, He knows when we sit down, and when we rise up (Psalm 139). He knows the number of hairs upon our heads (Luke 12:7). Just as our hearts need to be loved, He longs for love from us. This is a relationship designed to fill both hearts with love and joy. It is the relationship *you* were made for and it's the relationship that Jesus *defends* in the final judgment.

Jesus promises that "... judgment will be made in *favor* of the saints" (Daniel 7:22). The judgment is the Father's greatest act of grace towards you. When Jesus could condemn us for our sinfulness, He chooses to present His love for us instead. Simply put, His *love* for you weighs more in His heart than your past behaviors. Proudly standing at His Father's throne, Jesus defends the close heart relationship you have with Him. He says, "Me and (*insert your name here*) know each other. We are best friends! She loves My heart and I love her's. *My* death has covered her shame, guilt and consequence for sin. This child is part of my family. She belongs to us."

The judgment is not to be feared. It is meant to be celebrated. You are a member of the royal family, a precious child of the Most High! You will inherit the riches of heaven as a co-heir with the Prince of princes—the King of Kings. God's house is your house. You belong. The judgment celebrates His love for you and the evidences in your life of your love for Him! Someday very soon, our Father is coming to bring us to our heavenly Home. My heart's desire is that we'll look into His eyes together as He embraces us. We'll proclaim, "Truly Father, You never failed me."

By: Sara Scarpino

Bible Q&A

Questions About the Judgment

What's So Great About the Judgment?

The judgment is God's amazing plan to finally rid the universe of sin. It is the last part of the plan of salvation that will reconcile heaven and earth.

All judgment has been committed to Jesus (John 5:22). This is the best possible news because "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). Jesus, who "was in all points tempted like we are" (Hebrews 4:15), will decide the destiny of all created beings. We can trust Him because He has already taken our sin and suffered our penalty so that we can be counted righteous in the judgment (2 Corinthians 5:21).

God's character and those whose lives are "hidden with Christ" (Colossians 3:3) will be vindicated by the judgment. "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God" (Romans 14:11). The righteous and the wicked will all finally agree that God is both just and merciful, that He is love (1 John 4:8).

? GOT A QUESTION ABOUT THE BIBLE? PRAYER? FAITH? WITNESSING?

We'd love to help you find the answers you are seeking. Send us your questions at: godled@kytn.net.

Tragically, this confession will be too late to avert the punishment of the wicked. Sin and all those who have chosen to be identified with it will cease to exist forever (Nahum 1:9). The persecutors of His people will be repaid for their cruel acts. This will be a "strange work" (Isaiah 28:21 KJV) for God, because He is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9).

As sobering as this is, the judgment demonstrates that we serve a God of justice, mercy, and love. He desires all His children to live free from pain and suffering. When judgment is complete, "God will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4). Now that's something to celebrate!

What's the Purpose of the Judgment?

"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25).

From the beginning of his rebellion, Satan has hurled false accusations at God and His government. The primary purpose of the judgment is to vindicate the character of God by unmasking the enemy's lies. After the record books of heaven have been reviewed, all the inhabitants of the universe will exclaim, "true and righteous are His judgments" (Revelation 19:2).

In the judgment, the results of Satan's government will be contrasted with the wisdom of God's government. Every question regarding the controversy between Christ and Satan will be answered. It will be seen that God has handled the sin problem in the best way possible for all His created beings. We will see that Christ is the embodiment of love and Satan is the epitome of selfishness.



“With all the facts of the great controversy in view, the whole universe, both loyal and rebellious, with one accord declare: ‘Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints’ (Revelation 15:3)” (E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 670)

What Does the Judgment Reveal about God’s Character?

The skeptic and atheist argue that a good God cannot exist while pain, suffering, and evil rampage our world. “God could not be good or capable of love when He allows wickedness to continue,” they argue. “If he was truly good, all-powerful, and loving he would stop the evil and pain in our world.”

The Bible tells us a different story. The good news is that God will bring justice to the wicked, “The face of the LORD is against evildoers, to cut off the memory of them from the earth” (Psalm 34:16). “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

The judgment shows us that God has no intention of letting evil reign forever. Wickedness will be destroyed, and holiness rewarded. Our God is a beautiful God who demonstrates both justice and mercy in His judgment.

What are the Three Phases of the Judgment?

Phase 1 – The Pre-Advent or Investigative Judgment

“I watched till thrones were put in place,” the prophet Daniel says, “and the Ancient of Days was seated . . . the court was seated, and the books were opened” (Daniel 7:9, 10). During this first phase of the judgment, the life-record of each

professing Christian is examined before Christ returns to grant immortality to the redeemed (Revelation 22:12). The great standard of judgment is the Ten Commandments (James 2:10 - 12).

“The Lord knows those who are His” (2 Timothy 2:19), but the examination process is for the sake of the angels and inhabitants of unfallen worlds (1 Corinthians 4:9). The evidence reveals who has, or has not, accepted the new covenant promise of having the law written on their hearts (Hebrews 8:7–12). The books of heaven show that Jesus fulfilled the righteousness of the law in all His true children (Romans 8:3, 4). It is shown that the sins of God’s faithful have been confessed, forgiven, and forsaken. If you have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of your life, then fear not my friend. In this investigative phase, “judgment [will be] made in favor of the saints” (Daniel 7:22).

This pre-advent judgment is happening now. According to Bible prophecy, it began in 1844. (See the article *Disappointed, But Not Disheartened*, Bible Optics, April 2021)

Phase 2 – The Millennial Judgment

At the close of the pre-advent judgment, God will declare, “He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still” (Revelation 22:11). Shortly thereafter, Jesus will come to take us home to heaven. This begins the one-thousand-year period called the millennium. “I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them... And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4). During this time, God gives us access to His record books so we can review His verdict for every lost individual, as



well as the Devil and his angels. “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? . . . Do you not know that we shall judge angels?” (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3). Ultimately, just like the angels and unfallen beings, we will come into agreement with the righteous verdict Jesus made in the investigative judgment.

Phase 3 – The Executive or Great White Throne Judgment

At the end of the thousand years, the New Jerusalem and all its inhabitants will descend from heaven and rest upon the earth (Revelation 21:2). At that time, every lost soul will be resurrected to face God in judgment (Revelation 20:5). “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened” (Revelation 20:12). Satan will convince the wicked to surround the New Jerusalem in order to take it by force, (Revelation 20:9) but as God reveals the life-record of each human and fallen angel, one by one they will fall down and worship (Romans 14:11, Philippians 2:10, 11). Both the wicked and the righteous will acknowledge the righteous judgment of God. Each lost soul will recognize, “Thou hast destroyed thyself” (Hosea 13:9 KJV). Then fire from God will devour the wicked, bringing them to ashes upon the earth (Revelation 20:10; Malachi 4:3). The universe will finally be completely purged of sin and Jesus will “make all things new” (Revelation 20:5). Hallelujah!

TODAY, JESUS’ DESIRE FOR HIS CHURCH IS “THAT HE MIGHT SANCTIFY AND CLEANSE HER WITH THE WASHING OF WATER BY THE WORD, THAT HE MIGHT PRESENT HER TO HIMSELF A GLORIOUS CHURCH, NOT HAVING SPOT OR WRINKLE OR ANY SUCH THING, BUT THAT SHE SHOULD BE HOLY AND WITHOUT BLEMISH” (EPHESIANS 5:26,27).

What Does the Day of Atonement Teach Us About the Judgment?

God’s end-time judgment corresponds with the Hebrew Day of Atonement described in Leviticus 16. On this day, the sanctuary was cleansed, and every record of confessed sin was removed. Because it sealed the fate of each worshiper for the year to come, it was the most solemn day of the year.

On the Day of Atonement, the Israelites were to “afflict their souls” (Leviticus 16:29). This meant humbling oneself before God, surrendering the will to Him, and renouncing all sin and worldly attachments. The cleansing work in the Most Holy Place was to have a corresponding work in the heart temple of each individual Israelite.

Today, Jesus’ desire for His church is “that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:26,27). The purifying of His church as a whole is accomplished by the cleansing of each individual heart. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Will you let Jesus cleanse you from all unrighteousness?



How Does the Pre-Advent Judgment Affect Me?

According to the Bible, the pre-advent judgment is currently taking place in heaven. God is judging His people now. What does that mean for how you and I live our lives today?

To find the answer, we must look back to the ancient Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). This annual ceremony was a day of judgment for God's people. On this sacred day the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place to make atonement for the sins of the people. The people spent the day humbling themselves before God and resting from all work. It was a time of deep heart searching, repentance and trust in God.

Today, we are living in the time of the pre-advent judgment which was foreshadowed by the ancient Day of Atonement. Like the ancient Israelites, we are called to humble ourselves before God, repent of our sins, and rest in Jesus' gift of grace. God invites us to confess our sins to Christ, our high priest, so He can cleanse us of all unrighteousness.

Once we are cleansed of sin, our Heavenly Father calls us to grow with Him. The parable of the virgins in Matthew 25 highlights the vital work of the Holy Spirit in preparing us to meet our Lord. "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13). The Holy Spirit is the one who enables us to repent, change our ways and stand against temptation. This is the work of conversion.

Real conversion will always bear fruit. The parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25 explains who will enter the kingdom and who will not. The defining difference between the sheep and the goats is that one group neglected to serve the needy while the other group lovingly served the poorest and most vulnerable. The actions of the saved reveal that they have been transformed by the love of God. "You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:20).

God's books are open, and the events of our lives are being recorded. Does your daily life reveal that your Father is the love of your life? Does it show that God has first place and that you love and serve those around you? If not, invite Him today to reveal His love for you so that you can love Him with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself.

Are We Judged by Our Works?

God "will render to each one according to his deeds" (Romans 2:6).

Sounds scary doesn't it? To make matters worse, we are told, "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

Thank God there is more to the story! God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (2 Corinthians 5:21). Righteousness equals obedience to the commandments of God (Deuter-

NEXT MONTH'S FOCUS: GOD'S LAW.

* IS IT STILL VALID? * HOW DID JESUS RELATE TO THE LAW? * IS IT POSSIBLE TO KEEP GOD'S LAW?
PLUS, FIVE PRACTICAL WAYS TO GAIN A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON GOD'S LAW.

onomy 6:25). When we fully surrender our lives to Christ, His righteousness is revealed in us (Romans 1:17) and we become obedient. This is the good news of the gospel!

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8 - 10).

Our works cannot add to what Jesus has done for us, but they can condemn us. “All our righteousnesses are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). That’s why we need Jesus. With Him as our Lord and Savior, we have nothing to fear. After we give our hearts to Jesus, we will gladly perform the works that He prepared for us. The record of these works will give evidence that we have surrendered our lives to Christ and have accepted His righteousness in place of our own. His righteous works are revealed in our lives of obedience now and His perfect life record replaces our sinful one in the judgment.

What more could we ask for?

THE JUDGMENT IS THE
 “PROFOUND AND TIMELY BIBLE
 TEACHING THAT GOD
 DEMONSTRATES HIS CHARACTER
 OF LOVE THROUGH A JUDGMENT
 IN HIS HEAVENLY SANCTUARY
 BEFORE CHRIST’S
 SECOND COMING.”

ROY GANE. *WHO’S AFRAID OF THE JUDGEMENT?*
 PACIFIC PRESS. 2006. 4.



Are catastrophes part of God’s judgment on our world?

Revelation is an intense book filled with strange creatures, symbols, and numbers that foretell the end of everything as we know it and the beginning of God’s glorious eternal kingdom. It is “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants things which must shortly take place” (Revelation 1:1).

Revelation has been widely misinterpreted and used as conspiratorial ammo. Christians often attach its apocalyptic scenarios to events unfolding in the world around us. Are they right? Are the things we see in the news a part of God’s judgment or a sign of the nearness of the end? It’s a valid question.

When we see tsunamis that kill thousands, or hurricanes that wipe out cities, our natural human response is to assume that there must be a divine reason for the catastrophe. We feel that we must find a logical explanation for these events.

Yet, we must understand that there are severe ramifications for assuming divine judgment in catastrophic events. Why? Because we are assuming to be God. We take on the role of judge when we try to psycho-analyze the mind of the divine and define justice.

We know that God’s judgment will come. But let us not jump to the conclusion that every hurricane, tornado, or tsunami are acts of God. What we can be sure about is that God hates evil and He is actively working in the courts of heaven to bring justice. Psalms 9:7-8 says, “But the Lord abides forever; He has established His throne for judgment, And He will judge the world in righteousness; He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity”.

Q&A’s written by: John Cloud and Elijah Ramjattan

“CHRIST’S SACRIFICE IS SO GREAT THAT IT NOT ONLY PURCHASES OUR FORGIVENESS. IT PAYS THE COST OF MERCY AFTER FORGIVENESS, THEREBY REAFFIRMING OUR ATONEMENT, OUR RECONCILIATION WITH GOD... CHRIST’S BLOOD APPLIED TO YOU IN THE JUDGMENT SAYS: YOU ARE REALLY FORGIVEN AND FINALLY CLEANSED FROM ANY IMPEDIMENT TO YOUR COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. YOU BELONG TO GOD, NOT TO SATAN.”

ROY GANE. ALTAR CALL. BERRIEN SPRINGS, MICH.: DIADEM, 1999. 340.

Resources for Further Study on the Judgment

<https://www.amazingfacts.org/media-library/study-guide/e/4996/t/the-final-judgment>

<https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/response-to-the-investigative-judgment-a-bible-based-doctrine/>

<https://ssnet.org/blog/why-the-investigative-judgment-doctrine-is-sound/>

<https://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental-beliefs/restoration/christs-ministry-in-the-heavenly-sanctuary/>

E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, chapters 28 & 43

Daniel 7; Leviticus 16 (Day of Atonement); Revelation 20:12, 15; Isaiah 65:6; Psalms 69:28; 56:9; Daniel 12:1; 2 Corinthians 5:10

Roy Gane, *Who’s Afraid of the Judgment?*, Pacific Press, 2002



Nelson Mercado
Pastor

Our goal is to help you grow in your understanding of key Bible teachings, gain a Biblical perspective on what is happening in our world today, and find tools to share your faith more effectively.

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