LOOKING FORWARD TO JUDGMENT

If the Bible is ever clear about anything, it’s clear on the fact that God is a God of judgment and that sooner or later, in one way or another, the judgment so lacking here and now is going to come and be administered by God Himself, “the Judge of all the earth” (Gen. 18:25; see also Ps. 58:11; 94:2; 98:9). As Paul himself wrote: “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:12).

Scary thought, isn’t it? Having to give an account of ourselves before the God who knows the deepest things, the God who will “bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Eccles. 12:14).

Yet the judgment ultimately reveals the goodness and grace of God and that He is both just and merciful in how He deals with both the saved and the lost.

This week we will explore the deeper themes of the judgment in relation to the great controversy raging in the universe, and we will look especially at what happens when God’s faithful people face the inevitable “judgment to come” (Acts 24:25).
inScribe

Write out Daniel 7 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out Daniel 7:22. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map it.
THE CROSS AND THE GAVEL

The last book of the Bible, Revelation, focuses on the culmination of the age-long controversy between good and evil. Lucifer, a rebel angel, challenged the justice, fairness, and wisdom of God. He claimed that God is unfair and unjust in the way He administers the universe. Revelation’s final judgment is at the very center of this conflict over God’s character.

Revelation 14:7 reads, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.” The gospel and the judgment, both parts of the first angel’s message, are inseparably intertwined. Were it not for the “everlasting gospel,” we would have no hope in facing the impending judgment. In fact, as we will see, the “everlasting gospel” is our only hope as we approach the judgment. There is no question that part of the gospel is the announcement of this event.

During the judgment the unfallen worlds will see that God has done everything He can to save every human being. It reveals God’s justice and mercy. It says something about His love and law. It speaks of His gracious willingness to save and His power to deliver.

The judgment is part of God’s ultimate solution to the sin problem. God answered Satan’s charges on the cross, but in the judgment, He reveals that He has truly done everything possible to save us.

Heaven’s infinite, exact, detailed records will be opened (see Dan. 7:10) at the judgment. We are so precious to God that the entire universe will pause to consider the choices we have made in light of the call of the Holy Spirit and the redemption so freely provided by Christ on Calvary’s cross.

Both the cross and the judgment reveal that God is just and merciful. The law demands the death of the sinner. Justice declares, “The wages of sin is death,” but mercy responds, “The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). If God’s law could be changed or abolished, it would be totally unnecessary for Jesus to die. Christ’s death establishes the eternal nature of the law, and the law is the basis of the judgment.

Our works reveal our choices and our loyalty to God. According to Ephesians 2:8, 9, “by grace you have been saved through faith . . . not of works, lest anyone should boast.” But when Christ saves us, He changes us, “for we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works” (verse 10). Our good works, even when empowered by the Holy Spirit, do not save us, but they do testify that our faith is genuine. God’s final judgment strips away all pretense, all hypocrisy, all falsehood, and pierces into the very depth of our being.
The Good News of the Judgment

44

inTerpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks seem to point to overall?

What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

There are 24 humans around God's throne in this scene. What does that imply about what heaven will be like? About the judgment?

What does it mean to you personally to be part of the "royal priesthood" of believers? How does it impact your day-to-day life?

Read more at
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The Good News of the Judgment

BEHIND THE SCENES

The prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation are companion volumes that point us to the unfolding events in the last days of earth's history. The book of Revelation announces that the hour of God's judgment has come. The book of Daniel reveals when the judgment began.

In Daniel 7 God revealed the history of the world to the prophet. He watched as nations rose and fell and persecuting powers oppressed His people. After describing Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, Rome, the fall of the Roman Empire, and the persecution of the church for the 1,260 years depicted in the text (Dan. 7:25; see also Rev. 12:6, 14), God focused Daniel's mind on a glorious celestial event that will set all things right. The prophet's attention was directed from the rise and fall of nations and the oppressive powers of the earth to the throne room of the universe and God's final judgment, when He will right every wrong and establish His everlasting kingdom of righteousness.

God took Daniel in prophetic vision from the chaos and conflict of the earth to the glories of heaven's sanctuary and the sitting of the supreme court of the universe, where Christ, the rightful ruler of this world, would receive from His Father the kingdom that was rightfully His.

The destiny of all humanity is decided in heaven's courtroom. Right prevails, truth triumphs, justice reigns. This is one of the most amazing, most marvelous, most spectacular scenes in all of Scripture. And the good news is that it ends very well for God's faithful people, those clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Jesus approaches His heavenly Father in the presence of the entire universe. Heavenly beings crowd in around the throne of God, and the entire universe of unfallen beings stands in awe of this judgment scene. The long conflict that has waged for millennia is soon to be over. The battle for the throne of the universe is fully, completely decided.

In Revelation 4 John beholds an open door in heaven and receives the invitation to "come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this" (verse 1). Jesus invited the apostle to look through the open door to view cosmic scenes in the great controversy between good and evil. With John we too can look through that open door and receive a glimpse of the eternal plan of salvation. We are witnesses of issues that are being decided in heaven's celestial court. Fundamental issues in the great controversy between good and evil develop before our eyes through these verses.

Revelation 4:2–4 obviously reveals a throne room scene. God the Father sits upon the throne surrounded by heavenly beings. There is thunder and lightning, symbolizing God's judgments. We also notice in Revelation 4:4 that 24 elders are present around God's throne.

Who are these 24 elders? There were 24 divisions in the Levitical priesthood of ancient Israel. These priests represented the people before God. In 1 Peter 2:9 the apostle declares that New Testament believers are a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood." Perhaps these 24 elders represent all the redeemed that will one day rejoice around the throne of God, or perhaps they represent those who were resurrected when Christ was resurrected—those who ascended to heaven with Him (Matt. 27:52; Eph. 4:7, 8).

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(Cont. from inTerpret, p. 44):

Either way, this is good news. These are some of the redeemed from the earth sitting around the throne of God. They faced temptations just as we face them. Through the grace of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, they overcame. They are clothed in “white robes,” signifying the righteousness of Christ that covers and cleanses their sins. They have a golden crown upon their heads, signifying that they are victorious in the battle against evil and are part of heaven's royal line of faith-filled believers (Rev. 4:4).

We see a throne in heaven with God seated upon it. Soon after the scene begins, all of heaven starts to sing, and the crescendo of praise builds higher and still higher: “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created” (verse 11).
In Revelation 5:1–5 we once again see a throne. A scroll is introduced with writing on both sides. It is sealed with the divine seal, and no one in heaven or on earth is worthy enough to open the scroll. Heavenly beings tremble. The issue is serious. No angelic being can represent humanity in earth’s final judgment. John weeps because no one can open the scroll or even look at it. Then one of the elders, one of those redeemed from the earth, speaks words of encouragement to John’s heart. Jesus, the Lamb of God, is worthy to open the scroll.

John beholds the ultimate answer to the problem of sin in Revelation 5:5. Here the aged prophet beholds the only way anyone can pass the final judgment at the throne of God: “But one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll.’... And I looked, and behold, ... a Lamb as though it had been slain” (Rev. 5:5, 6).

In Revelation 5:8–12 Jesus, the Lamb of God who sacrificed His life for the salvation of all humanity, takes the scroll of judgment and opens it. All of heaven bursts forth in rapturous praise, for His victory over Satan’s temptations, His death on Calvary’s cross, His resurrection, and His ministry as high priest provide salvation for all who choose by faith to respond to His grace. The judgment is incredibly good news for the people of God. It speaks of the end of the reign of sin and the deliverance of God’s people.

Jesus stands for us in the judgment. His perfect righteous life covers us. His righteousness works within us to make us new. His grace pardons us, transforms us, and empowers us to live godly lives. Can anything be more encouraging?

We need not fear. We are not alone in the judgment, and the powers of evil are soundly defeated. Judgment is passed in “favor” of the people of God (Dan. 7:22). The purpose of the judgment is not to find out how bad we are but to reveal how good God is.

Think about the amazing words of Paul in Hebrews 7:25, which, talking about Jesus as our high priest, says that “He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him” Save to the uttermost. The Greek word for “uttermost” means “full, complete, total.” It is Jesus who saves us; our job is to surrender to Him, claiming His victory for us. Our trust must be in Him, not in ourselves.
Review the memory verse.

How does it apply to your life this week?

After this week's study, what are some decisions that must be made in your personal life?

What are some practical decisions you must make in your school, family, workplace, and church?

Read more inSight from the Spirit of Prophecy at www.inversebible.org/3am05-7

HOPE IN THE JUDGMENT

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. The more closely they view the spotless character of Christ, the stronger will be their desire to be conformed to His image, and the less will they see of purity or holiness in 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. (Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948], vol. 5, 471, 472.)

Their only hope is in the mercy of God; their only defense will be prayer. As Joshua was pleading before the Angel, so the remnant church, with brokenness of heart and earnest faith, will plead for pardon and deliverance through Jesus their Advocate. They are fully conscious of the sinfulness of their lives, they see their weakness and unworthiness, and as they look upon themselves they are ready to despair. The tempter stands by to accuse them, as he stood by to resist Joshua. He points to their filthy garments, their defective characters. He presents their weakness and folly, their sins of ingratitude, their unlikeness to Christ, which has dishonored their Redeemer. . . . The people of God have been in many respects very faulty. Satan has an accurate knowledge of the sins which he has tempted them to commit, and he presents these in the most exaggerated light, declaring: “Will God banish me and my angels from His presence, and yet reward those who have been guilty of the same sins? Thou canst not do this, O Lord, in justice. Thy throne will not stand in righteousness and judgment. Justice demands that sentence be pronounced against them.” But while the followers of Christ have sinned, they have not given themselves to the control of evil. They have put away 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 repentance, declares: “‘The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan.’ I gave My life for these souls. They are graven upon the palms of My hands.” (White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, 473, 474.)

In the Judgment, God will ask those who profess to be Christians, Why did you claim to believe in My Son, and continue to transgress My law? Who required this at your hands—to trample upon My rules of righteousness? “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.” The gospel of the New Testament is not the Old Testament standard lowered to meet the sinner and save him in his sins. God requires of all His subjects obedience, entire obedience to all His commandments. He demands now as ever perfect righteousness as the only title to heaven. Christ is our hope and our refuge. His righteousness only is imputed to the obedient. Let us accept it through faith, that the Father shall find in us no sin. But those who have trampled on the holy law will have no right to claim that righteousness. Oh that we might view the immensity of the plan of salvation as obedient children to all God's requirements, believing that we have peace with God through Jesus Christ, our atoning sacrifice! (Ellen G. White, in Review and Herald, Sept. 21, 1886.)
inQuire

Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

Why is the judgment good news and not bad news?

How does the knowledge that “the hour of His judgment has come” impact our daily lives?

How can Christ’s role in the judgement motivate us to be more faithful to Him, knowing that only because of what He did for us can we have the hope of salvation?

How does the judgment reveal God’s character to the universe?

What does it mean to you personally to be part of the “royal priesthood” of believers? How does it impact your day-to-day life?

How does Psalm 51 help shed light on the meaning and purpose of the judgment?

What are some simple steps you could take today to start living differently because we know the judgment is real?

The Good News of the Judgment