JUSTICE AND JUDGMENT FOR ALL

Those who most adamantly cry out for justice are often young adults, for they want to do something about the corruption they have only recently begun to see. They wonder why progress is so slow and regression so fast. Thankfully, Leviticus brings hope to every soul that dreams of a world in which equity and justice are valued.

Leviticus 16 details the Day of Atonement. On the tenth day of the seventh month (Sept. or Oct. in the Jewish calendar), Israel’s high priest entered the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary wearing the breastplate of judgment (Exod. 28:15). On this day, every Israelite repented of their sins and earnestly prayed that God would atone for them with the blood of the sacrifice. God promised that those who sincerely repent of their sins can be assured that they are forgiven and atoned for (Lev. 16:34), and that same promise is offered to us today.

The Feast of Trumpets was on the first day of the same month. As the name suggests, trumpets would blast, preparing the people for God’s approaching presence and judgment. What a reminder to make sure our own lives are right with God and with those around us if we seek to hold others accountable! Perhaps we can discern the sound of modern trumpet blasts in the many cries for justice in the world today, for God’s judgment is coming.

We should humbly enter the work of bringing justice, mercy, equity, and compassion to our communities, knowing our shortcomings and remembering the mercy God extends to us through Christ. This kind of activism is both biblical and world changing if it comes from a place of humility, not from judgment or self-righteousness.
Write out Leviticus 16:29–34 from the translation of your choice. If you're pressed for time, write out Leviticus 16:29–31. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map it.
THE ADVENT OF THE ADVENTISTS

If there was one verse that inspired the Adventist movement, it would be Daniel 8:14: “For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.” This verse led Adventists to a deeper understanding of the Day of Atonement, since it pointed clearly to Leviticus 16:30: “For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord.”

For many years Christians had been teaching that the earth was the sanctuary and that the earth would be cleansed with fire when Jesus returned. In line with this belief, they concluded that Daniel 8:14 was pointing to Jesus’ second coming and the end of the world. This idea became especially powerful when William Miller began preaching that all this would happen in 1844. His biblical evidence seemed overwhelming: Using Daniel 9:25–27, he showed that the 2,300 days found in Daniel 8:14 began in 457 b.c. when Artaxerxes commanded the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem. He then showed that a day symbolizes a year in biblical prophecy (Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:4–6), so the 2,300 prophetic days were actually 2,300 literal years that began in 457 b.c. You can imagine the growing excitement as William Miller did the math in front of the thousands of people who came to hear him preach when he showed that the 2,300 years would be ending soon in the year 1844.

When Jesus did not return in the specified year, many either gave up their faith or rejected Daniel’s prophecy altogether. Fortunately, there was a group of people (who would later organize themselves into the Seventh-day Adventist Church) who found strong biblical evidence that the date was right, but the event was wrong! They saw that the start date, 457, had to be correct, as well as the end date, 1844, since they lined up perfectly with the predictions regarding the Messiah found in the same passages. Sixty-nine weeks (483 prophetic years) from 457 b.c. pointed to a.d. 27, the very year the Messiah was anointed with the Holy Spirit and baptized. Seventy weeks from 457 b.c. (490 prophetic years) pointed to the death of the Messiah in a.d. 31 in the middle of the prophetic week, and the end of that week pointed to the ultimate rejection of Christ and His disciples by the Jewish nation in a.d. 34.

So what actually took place in 1844? What sanctuary needed to be cleansed in Daniel 8:14? They didn’t have to wonder long. First, they discovered that the Bible never calls this earth a sanctuary. Next, they learned that this passage could not be talking about the Old Testament sanctuary in Jerusalem since the event in question took place in 1844. The Jewish temple service had long since ended in a.d. 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed, so this was not an option. As they studied the books of Hebrews and Revelation in connection with Daniel, they were impressed by the fact that there is a sanctuary in heaven. They found that the sanctuary discussed in Leviticus was a smaller version of the heavenly sanctuary where millions of angels minister to God the Father and God the Son (Dan. 7:10; Heb. 8:1–5; 9:23, 24; Rev. 11:19). Moses, Daniel, Paul, and the apostle John all confirm this idea!

(Cont. on p. 93.)
Some accuse the Seventh-day Adventist Church of setting dates for Jesus’ second coming. This is not true; the Seventh-day Adventist Church was organized as an official denomination in 1863, many years after 1844. William Miller and many others from various denominations of the day were part of proclaiming that Jesus would return on October 22, 1844. It’s true that there were some who would become Seventh-day Adventists in the future who shared, preached, and taught that the second coming of Jesus would occur in 1844, but Seventh-day Adventists have always taught that “no one knows the day or hour” of Christ’s return (Matt. 24:36, NLT). However, Seventh-day Adventists do appreciate William Miller’s emphasis on Jesus’ second coming and the need to ready ourselves through repentance and faith in Christ every day. This passion, ignited by Miller and resounding through Scripture, no doubt inspired the word “Adventist” in our denomination’s name.

Another argument sometimes leveled at the church is that our founders’ focus on the sanctuary in heaven was contrived later in order to escape the embarrassment of the Great Disappointment. In other words, they came up with the idea to keep the concept that something special happened in 1844 alive rather than simply admitting they were wrong. However, as we have already discussed, when we humbly and prayerfully study Scripture, we are brought to the same inescapable conclusion that these early church pioneers came to: there is indeed a sanctuary in heaven, the cleansing of which began in 1844. Revelation 11:19 is clear that the temple in the book of Revelation is none other than God’s temple in heaven: “Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple.” The whole book of Hebrews is predicated on the understanding of the true sanctuary being in heaven where Jesus is “a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man” (Heb. 8:2). Indeed, there is no purpose to the wilderness sanctuary, except that it teaches us something about the sanctuary in heaven. The wilderness sanctuary can only have real meaning when understood as a “copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (v. 5).

Now if the earthly sanctuary needed cleansed from defilement, is it true that the heavenly sanctuary also needs cleansing? Hebrews 9:23 affirms the need for cleansing in the heavenly sanctuary as well: “Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.” Just as the earthly sanctuary needed cleansed from a trail of blood that was left in the sanctuary as evidence of sin, so the heavenly sanctuary has a record of sins that also needs cleansing. The blood sprinkled on the horns of the altar represented sins being written down in the records in heaven. “The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron…. on the horns of your altars” (Jeremiah 17:1).

(Cont. on p. 93.)
Review your memorized verse from Leviticus 16:29–34.

(Cont. from inGest, p. 91):
This was an incredible discovery for the founders of the Adventist movement. They realized that Miller and the others had missed this crucial detail. Rather than the earth being the sanctuary that needed to be cleansed, the Bible was instead pointing to the sanctuary in heaven. Leviticus 16 suddenly became an extremely important chapter for Adventists. By studying this chapter, students of biblical prophecy could get a glimpse into Jesus’ work in the heavenly sanctuary—work that began in 1844.

(Cont. from inTerpret, p. 92):
The Day of Atonement was a reminder to them—and to us—that we must fully and from the heart turn from our sins. The blood of Jesus justifies us, but it never justifies sin (The Sanctuary Service, pp. 178, 179). Since we are living in the Day of Atonement and our eternal destinies are being decided right now, we need to get right and stay right with God through the blood of Jesus and His indwelling Spirit. This is a time to reflect solemnly upon our lives and to disentangle ourselves from all sin (Lev. 16:31).
QUESTIONS ON THE CLEANSING

Why did the sanctuary need to be cleansed? Previously, we learned that the people's sins were transferred to the sanctuary throughout the year. The priests would either eat the meat of the sacrifice or take the blood of the sacrifice into the sanctuary and sprinkle it before the curtain leading into the Most Holy Place. Either way, the sins of the people and the record of their sins were carried by the priests into the tabernacle, making it a receptacle of sin (Lev. 10:16–18). The sanctuary therefore required the annual cleansing on the Day of Atonement to return it to its original holy and clean state.

How was the sanctuary cleansed? On the Day of Atonement God provided a simple yet profound way to remove all sins from the sanctuary. First, the high priest set aside two goats (chosen by lots). The first one, or the “Lord's goat,” was used to make a sacrifice for the sins of the people and cleanse the sanctuary. The priest carried its blood into the Most Holy Place and sprinkled it on the mercy seat, which was directly above the Ten Commandments, which the people had broken (Lev. 4:2; 1 John 3:4). This goat was not contaminated with sin. No confession was made over it, so its blood was for cleansing and removing sin from the sanctuary. In the eyes of God, who hovered in radiant glory above the mercy seat, the blood of this goat covered His people's sins. Through this simple act performed by the high priest, who represented Jesus (Heb. 4:14–16), the people avoided God's just judgment for their sins.

Next, the high priest sprinkled the blood of that first goat on the altar of incense located in the Holy Place and on the bronze altar of burnt offerings in the courtyard. This was all part of the cleansing process, and this soap for sin pointed to Christ's blood (Heb. 9:22).

Finally, Aaron placed both hands upon the second goat, transferring all the sins of Israel upon it. Just like a garbage truck, this goat carried their sins away, far into the wilderness. This goat was not sacrificed and therefore was not a symbol of Jesus. It was instead a symbol of Satan, who will one day be left to roam earth by himself for 1,000 years before facing God's judgment and complete extermination for all the suffering he has caused (Rev. 20). The Day of Atonement is very good news for everyone who longs for justice, but very bad news for those who think they can do evil and get away with it.

What does all this teach us about Jesus and His work in the heavenly sanctuary? There are two things the Day of Atonement reveals about Jesus: First, He is right now ready and willing to grant atonement for our sins because of His great sacrifice on the cross 2,000 years ago. Christ's nail-scarred hands are still open to all who will receive Him.

Second, the Day of Atonement reveals that we have a Savior who is praying for us (Rom. 8:34). When the high priest entered the Most Holy Place, he put incense in his censer and filled the room with a cloud of fragrance (Lev. 16:12). In Scripture, incense symbolizes prayer (Rev. 8:3). This simple practice assures us that Jesus prays for us. And who else would you rather have praying for you than Jesus Himself!
THE WORK OF INVESTIGATION

“His intercession is that of a pierced and broken body, of a spotless life. The wounded hands, the pierced side, the marred feet, plead for fallen man, whose redemption was purchased at such infinite cost” (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911], p. 416).

“And as the typical cleansing of the earthly was accomplished by the removal of the sins by which it had been polluted, so the actual cleansing of the heavenly is to be accomplished by the removal, or blotting out, of the sins which are there recorded. But before this can be accomplished, there must be an examination of the books of record to determine who, through repentance of sin and faith in Christ, are entitled to the benefits of His atonement. The cleansing of the sanctuary therefore involves a work of investigation—a work of judgment. This work must be performed prior to the coming of Christ to redeem His people; for when He comes, His reward is with Him to give to every man according to his works. Revelation 22:12” (*The Great Controversy*, pp. 421, 422).

“When Christ, by virtue of His own blood, removes the sins of His people from the heavenly sanctuary at the close of His ministration, He will place them upon Satan, who, in the execution of the judgment, must bear the final penalty. The scapegoat was sent away into a land not inhabited, never to come again into the congregation of Israel. So will Satan be forever banished from the presence of God and His people, and he will be blotted from existence in the final destruction of sin and sinners” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 422).

“Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort they must be conquerors in the battle with evil. While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of the penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God’s people upon earth....

“When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 425).

“If there ever was a time when serious reflection becomes every one who fears God, it is now, when personal piety is essential. The inquiry should be made, ‘What am I, and what is my work and mission in this time? On which side am I working--Christ’s side or the enemy’s side?’ Let every soul now humble himself or herself before God, for now we are surely living in the great Day of Atonement. . . . Are my sins confessed and am I repenting of them before God, that they may be blotted out? Do I esteem myself too highly? Am I willing to make any and every sacrifice for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ? Do I feel every moment I am not my own, but Christ’s property, that my service belongs to God, whose I am?” (Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events* [Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1992], pp. 72, 73).

“We should ask ourselves, ‘For what are we living and working? And what will be the outcome of it all?’ ” (*Last Day Events*, p. 73).
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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.

Have we minimized sin in the church today? What does the Day of Atonement teach us about sin?

Is there a need for more solemnity in the church today? If so, what would that look or sound like?

What aspect of Christ’s work in the Most Holy Place do you appreciate the most?

How can we be conquerors over sin and why is this important if salvation is not by works?

How is the Day of Atonement good news for those who want to see justice prevail?

How does the Day of Atonement help us be more balanced in our Christian activism?

Like Jesus, are you praying for your enemies?