GOD’S HARD DRIVE

In our first lesson, we saw that God formed the physical body of Adam out of the dust of the ground with all its organs and systems. Adam's body was perfect but lifeless, so God infused into his nostrils the breath of life, and all the organs and systems began to function. From the start, the brain began to input, record, and classify all the information that came in through the five senses. From his first breath, Adam began to write his life history, which was recorded in his brain in the minutest detail. In the course of his life, he formed his own unique self-identity, distinct from that of any other person. Every act, thought, word, emotion, and motive was recorded in his brain.

When Adam died at age 930, his entire life had been stored in a few pounds of flesh! After death, Adam’s brain disintegrated and, along with it, his entire life record. God had a backup stored in heaven, however. “As the artist takes on the polished glass a true picture of the human face, so the angels of God daily place upon the books of heaven an exact representation of the character of every human being.” (Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1967), 360.) If written today, it might be said that God stores our character or life history on His “heavenly hard drive.”

This is where we begin our study. Three Bible topics will be looked at simultaneously: the state of the dead, the pre-Advent investigative judgment, and the second coming of Jesus. Seeing as these beliefs are so closely linked that misunderstanding one will lead to misunderstanding all three.
Read Daniel 7 and Revelation 20:11–15 from the translation of your choice. Write out Daniel 7:9, 10, 27. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
THE BOOKS AND THE BOOK OF LIFE

The system of jurisprudence in many nations of the world is a reflection of the divine method of judgment. First comes the trial, then the verdict and sentence based on the findings of the trial, and finally the implementation of the sentence. The accused is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Regarding judgment, Revelation 20:12 refers to books (plural) and a book (singular—which is the book of life). Records of the life of every human are kept in heavenly books (Eccles. 12:13, 14; Dan. 7:9, 10; Matt. 12:36, 37; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12, 13), and the book of life contains the names of those who claimed to trust in Jesus (Exod. 32:32, 33; Ps. 69:28; Dan. 12:1; Mal. 3:16; Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8).

The Bible teaches that each professed believer in Christ must appear before His judgment seat to render an account for the things done in this life (2 Cor. 5:10). This judgment takes place in heaven (Dan. 7:9, 10) during probationary time (Rev. 14:6, 7), and when Jesus returns, He will give the reward of eternal life to those who truly trusted in Him (Matt. 16:27; 1 Thess. 4:15–17; Rev. 22:12). This pre-Advent investigative judgment involves only those who claimed Jesus as their advocate and transpires in chronological order beginning with those who first lived: “As the books of record are opened in the judgment, the lives of all who have believed on Jesus come in review before God. Beginning with those who first lived upon the earth, our Advocate presents the cases of each successive generation, and closes with the living” (Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911], 483).

While the judgment transpires in heaven, the righteous dead are in their graves, not in heaven (John 5:28, 29). So, the question is, how can the righteous dead appear before the judgment seat of Christ in heaven before the Second Coming if they are dead and buried on earth? Does their immortal soul appear in heaven while their body remains in the grave? Of course not! The Bible clearly teaches that they appear in heaven through their biographical backup written in the books (Rev. 20:12, 13). “The righteous dead will not be raised until after the judgment at which they are accounted worthy of ‘the resurrection of life.’ Hence they will not be present in person at the tribunal when their records are examined and their cases decided” (White, The Great Controversy, 482).

After all who have claimed the name of Jesus are judged in heaven, human probation will close (Rev. 22:11), the time of trouble will ensue (Dan. 12:1), and then the righteous dead, who were found worthy in the judgment, will come forth from the grave, never more to die (cf. Dan. 12:2; Matt. 16:27; 1 Thess. 4:15–17; Rev. 22:12). Clearly, the pre-Advent investigative judgment, the state of the dead, and the second coming of Jesus are closely related.
THE SPIRIT THAT RETURNS

We generally think of the spirit that returns to God at death (Eccles. 12:7) as the breath that keeps the body alive—and it is. The spirit that returns to God is more than just the breath of life, however. It is the breath of life along with the person's biographical record and character that God keeps, so to speak, on His "heavenly hard drive." When believers die, God closes their life record and character in the heavenly books and stores it until the resurrection. At the resurrection, believers will have their own life record and character. True, God will restore the breath of life, but with it He will also restore the life record and character. This is why Job, with great certainty, said that he would see God at the resurrection in his own flesh, and not another's: "And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (Job 19:26, 27, emphasis supplied). Job was not saying that only he and no one else would see God at the resurrection. His emphasis was that the resurrected Job would be the same Job!

The Bible provides evidence that the spirit is more than just the breath. The apostle Paul used a personal pronoun and the word spirit interchangeably in his benedictions to the churches. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 5:28 he wrote, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen” (cf. Rom. 16:24; Phil. 4:23). In Galatians 6:18, however, he wrote, “Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen” (cf. 2 Tim. 4:22; Philem. 25). In these verses the word spirit is used interchangeably with the personal pronoun “you.” William Barclay has pointed out that “the spirit there [in Galatians 6:18] is what we might call the Christian personality of Paul’s friends” (Flesh and Spirit: An Examination of Galatians 5:19–23 [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962], 14).

When Jesus resurrected the daughter of Jairus, her spirit returned (Luke 8:55). Not the spirit, but her spirit! No doubt she remembered the past events of her life and recognized her parents. She picked up where she left off. Immediately before his death, Stephen cried out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59, emphasis supplied). Once again, not the spirit, but “my” spirit! And when Jesus died on the cross He cried out, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46, KJV, emphasis supplied).

Ellen White, in harmony with Scripture, wrote about the broader meaning of the word spirit: “Our personal identity is preserved in the resurrection, though not the same particles of matter or material substance as went into the grave. The wondrous works of God are a mystery to man. The spirit, the character of man, is returned to God, there to be preserved. In the resurrection every man will have his own character” (Ellen G. White Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 6 [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1956], 1093, emphasis supplied).
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What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Ecclesiastes 12:7, 13, 14
Philippians 4:3
Daniel 12:1, 2
John 5:28, 29
Job 19:25-27
Revelation 22:12

What other verses come to mind in connection with Daniel 7 and Revelation 20:11–15?

Review your memorized verse from Daniel 7 and Revelation 20:11–15.
LESSONS FROM BIG TECH

Hebrews 9:27 tells us that “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.” What comes to your mind when you hear the word judgment? Does it give you confidence, or does it conjure up fear? One thing is certain: if we have abided in Christ, we can face the judgment with confidence because He is our Advocate (1 John 2:1, 2; Heb. 7:26; 4:14–16). Death means little to believers because they know that God stores a record of their lives in the heavenly books. God knows that we are dust and that our body will return to dust at death (Ps. 103:14), and therefore He keeps a backup of our lives in the heavenly records.

Modern technology helps us understand how God stores and retrieves our life record. A computer is a magnificent piece of equipment with many complex components. It is “lifeless” until it is connected to a power source, however. When we plug in the computer, all its complex components begin to work, and as time passes, we input information into the computer’s “brain,” and it becomes our own computer. No other one is like it! If a fire destroys the computer, all its memory is lost. The good news is that smart people back up the information.

Suppose for a moment that a fire destroys your computer but you have backed up all the information on a separate hard drive. You can purchase an even better computer, plug it in, and transfer the information on the hard drive to the new computer. You are transferring the “identity” of the first computer to the second, so to speak. You can even delete some undesirable information from your old computer.

God created a magnificent human body with all its complex systems and gave it the breath of life. In the course of our lives we input information through the five senses into our brains and we form a unique self-identity. There is no one like us. At death our body disintegrates along with all the information in our brain. The good news, however, is that God keeps a backup on His heavenly “hard drive.” When Jesus comes, He will give us an indestructible body, connect us to the power source, and return our self-identity to our new body, having deleted in the pre-Advent judgment the undesirable information.

God does not forget us. Those who are in the grave will hear His voice and come forth (John 5:28, 29). The selfsame Job who went through unspeakable trials and sufferings will see Jesus with his own eyes. God will restore his self-identity, and Job will be Job! His heart yearned for that moment (Job 19:27) when he exclaimed, “You shall call, and I will answer You; You shall desire the work of Your hands” (Job 14:15). Jesus wants us with Him (Ezek. 48:35; John 14:1–3; 17:24; 1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 22:3). “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints” (Ps. 116:15).
ARISE ANEW

The grand judgment is taking place, and has been going on for some time. Now the Lord says, Measure the temple and the worshipers thereof. Remember when you are walking the streets about your business, God is measuring you; when you are attending your household duties, when you engage in conversation, God is measuring you. Remember that your words and actions are being daguerreotyped [photographed] in the books of heaven, as the face is reproduced by the artist on the polished plate. (EGW SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7 [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957], 972.)

As the books of record are opened in the judgment, the lives of all who have believed on Jesus come in review before God. Beginning with those who first lived upon the earth, our Advocate presents the cases of each successive generation, and closes with the living. Every name is mentioned, every case closely investigated. Names are accepted, names rejected. When any have sins remaining upon the books of record, unrepented of and unforgiven, their names will be blotted out of the book of life, and the record of their good deeds will be erased from the book of God’s remembrance. The Lord declared to Moses: “Whosoever hath sinned against Me, him will I blot out of My book.” Exodus 32:33. And says the prophet Ezekiel: “When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, . . . all his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned.” Ezekiel 18:24. (Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911], 483.)

Our personal identity is preserved in the resurrection, though not the same particles of matter or material substance as went into the grave. The wondrous works of God are a mystery to man. The spirit, the character of man, is returned to God, there to be preserved. In the resurrection every man will have his own character. God in His own time will call forth the dead, giving again the breath of life, and bidding the dry bones live. The same form will come forth, but it will be free from disease and every defect. It lives again bearing the same individuality of features, so that friend will recognize friend. There is no law of God in nature which shows that God gives back the same identical particles of matter which composed the body before death. God shall give the righteous dead a body that will please Him.

Paul illustrates this subject by the kernel of grain sown in the field. The planted kernel decays, but there comes forth a new kernel. The natural substance in the grain that decays is never raised as before, but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him. A much finer material will compose the human body, for it is a new creation, a new birth. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. (Ellen G. White, Maranatha [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1976], 301.)
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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.

How can initial fears regarding the judgment be overcome?

According to the Bible, what does God record on His “heavenly hard drive”? When will God reveal the total contents on the “hard drive” (cf. Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, 666–668)?

Who are the only ones examined in the pre-Advent investigative judgment? Why not the wicked?

Where are the righteous dead while the heavenly judgment transpires? If they are dead, how can they appear before the judgment seat of Christ in heaven?

What biblical evidence do we have that the pre-Advent investigative judgment transpires while the door of probation is still open?

If we are saved by grace through faith, why will we be judged by our works?

Death, Judgment, and Resurrection