

## LESSON 12

Before I utter another word in reviewing what in several ways is the *pivotal* lesson of this entire series, let me ensure that our author receives all due commendation for these soaring sentiments of pastoral concern, so easily sidelined in any debate:

[T]hese chapters are not just deep theology or prophecy or history; instead, they together send a message to us, a message of hope, a message of promise. Together they tell us that no matter how bad things are, they aren't going to last; that despite appearances, the God who outlines for us the history of the world from Daniel's time until ours and into the future will bring about a wonderful end in which evil will be punished and the just shall be saved. How important... that as we share with the world these truths, we always keep before the people not just beasts and little horns but the wonderful promise of eternal life in God's kingdom that's been assured to us through the blood of Jesus and His death in our behalf. [Introduction, compare Monday]

As for his own survey, our author's agenda this week appears to be very succinct: Last week we looked at the pre-Advent judgment mostly in Daniel 8; this week we'll look at it again but from the perspective of Daniel 7 and some of the fascinating insights given to us there... [B]oth chapters contain crucial truths that need to be understood together. Each one, however enlightening, needs what the other has and, taken together, they reveal to us much about this judgment.

However, there is more here than meets the eye. So my readers may find it helpful in grasping this week's appraisal first to peruse my review of Lesson 5 again.

### Our Author's Polemic

For study on **Sunday**, 10<sup>th</sup> September, our author does little more than to enquire: What is this cleansing of the sanctuary that was of such importance that it would be linked with the great empires that Scripture uses to depict the history of the world?

Daniel 8 itself doesn't yield much, in and of itself, on the answer; fortunately, the Lord didn't give us just Daniel 8. We have the obvious parallel with Daniel 7, which, in a great way, helps unfold the mysteries of Daniel 8.

For study on **Monday**, 11<sup>th</sup> September, our author reminds us briefly what Seventh-day Adventists mean by this sanctuary purging, then poses a paramount question:

[W]e understand the cleansing of the sanctuary as **a judgment that involves those who have professed to be followers of Christ...** because in the earthly type of the cleansing of the sanctuary, the Day of Atonement..., the judgment centered around God's people. [stress supplied]

Nevertheless, the question arises, Why in both Daniel 7 and in Daniel 8 is the judgment/sanctuary cleansing depicted in the context of the little horn, at least the phase of the little horn shown in the vision? **What does the little horn have to do with the pre-Advent judgment?** [stress supplied]

He offers this answer to his question, which seems to challenge his very dogma!

The little horn is punished, condemned, while the saints are vindicated, exonerated. This is typical of the Hebrew concept of justice and judgment: It involved not just the punishment of the guilty or the vindication of the righteous—but both. Both are crucial elements of justice in Hebrew thinking, and both are seen here in this depiction of the pre-Advent judgment.

Of course, the judgment in Daniel 7 results in the end of the little horn, but that's only because the judgment results in the Second Coming, which brings about the end of the whole world anyway... The point is that the judgment, though expressed here in the context of the little horn, a symbol of evil, involved more than just the little horn. What we see here are two elements: evil punished, the saints vindicated. It hardly would seem like justice if it were any other way.

For study on **Tuesday**, 12<sup>th</sup> September, our author revisits his Lesson 1, where “we looked at a term, *theodicy*, which meant the vindication of God in the face of evil.” He now suggests that this is precisely the surpassing principle evident in Dan. 7:9f.:

Not only do we have a heavenly judgment scene here, a judgment that leads to the destruction of the little horn and the establishment of God's kingdom, this judgment takes place before a multitude of heavenly beings... Thus, what we see here is the onlooking universe watching God execute the judgment that leads to the establishment of His eternal kingdom.

For study on **Wednesday**, 13<sup>th</sup> September, our author appeals to three references – Dan. 12:1; Mt. 16:27; Rev. 20:12 – to prove that this is a *pre-Advent* judgment. He also appeals to mere logic: “How fair would it be to sentence someone and then, only after the sentence, have a trial and investigate the facts?” Finally, he turns to Dan. 7, where he infers complete justification for the uniqueness of his Church's prime dogma:

[W]hy is this so clearly a pre-Advent judgment? In fact, what evidence do you find in the texts that hint [*sic*] at an investigation? See also Ps. 56:8, 69:28, Dan. 12:1, Rev. 13:8, 20:12.

We can see, then, from Daniel 7 that there is, indeed, a massive pre-Advent judgment... that leads not only to the demise of the little horn but to the end of this world and the inauguration of the next, in which the saints live forever in God's eternal kingdom. What's depicted here is, obviously, an event of tremendous importance, an event in which the eternal destiny of untold numbers is involved. No wonder we deem the judgment-hour message as crucial to what we believe as Adventists.

For study on **Thursday**, 24<sup>th</sup> September, our author suggests that we probe Heb. 9:22-24, a passage which has "baffled non-Adventist scholars because of the clear reference to the idea that the heavenly sanctuary itself needed to be cleansed."

In fact, the Greek word in Hebrews 9:23 for "purified" or "cleansed" comes from the same Greek word used in an ancient Greek translation of Daniel 8:14. Thus, those ancient Greeks who... translated the Old Testament understood the Hebrew in Daniel 8:14 to mean that the sanctuary was to be cleansed; years later, the author of Hebrews had the same idea, however different the immediate context: Just as the earthly sanctuary was cleansed, so must the heavenly. Indeed, the whole point of the earthly cleansing was to point to the greater one, the real one in the heavenly sanctuary.

Finally, in view of the dearth of exegetical material for Friday, our author's question:

Look again at Daniel 8:14. Considering the time frame of this prophecy, why must this cleansing of the sanctuary be the same cleansing that the author of Hebrews referred to? [Thursday]

This may be dismissed immediately since the scope of Daniel's *blueprint* reached no further than Christ, as I have demonstrated conclusively in reviewing Lesson 4.

## Evaluation

Let me begin by again offering credit where credit is due. There can be no cogent doubt whatever that *Dan. 7:9f. depicts a divine judgment preceding the Eschaton*. Indeed, so potent is the temporal evidence of Daniel's sequence of observations, 9-11, that *it schedules his fourth great beast's destruction back in Christ's day*. Right from the outset, then, the exegete is cautioned that this passage may not assist our author's case for 1844! Nor is it bolstered by the equally significant fact, as I have also verified in reviewing Lesson 4, that *the Little Horn continues persecuting God's saints until destroyed at the Eschaton*. Compare the transparent intimation of 12:6f.

Our author is correct *in principle*, too, that there are parallels regarding the career of the Little Horn between Dan. 7 and 8. However, he *far* outpaces the inspired evidence to equate the sanctuary *purging*, 8:14, KJV, and the *investigative judgment*, 7:9f., especially as I have verified in evaluating Lesson 11 that this sanctuary is *earthly!*

My evaluation of the current lesson will therefore proceed with two major objectives:

- ***Does the relevant Hebrew verb *niṣdaq*, 8:14, include any cleansing nuance, as in the KJV? If it does after all, What is the substance and schedule of that purging?***
- ***What is the nature of the judgment of Dan. 7:9f.? For, unless it equates precisely with Seventh-day Adventism's dogma, inspired truth confines the latter to oblivion.***



### Is There any *Cleansing* Nuance in Dan. 8:14?

It is quite correct that the KJV and its various derivatives render *niṣdaq* *cleansed*, following the ancient Greek renditions, while most modern versions prefer some reparative sense like *restore*, as in NLT. This obtains since *niṣdaq* is a passive form of the ethnic verb *ṣādaq*. Consequently, the ancient nuance has few current advocates.

Regardless, this entire issue is clouded by the fact that *niṣdaq* *appears nowhere else in the entire OT*. So, depending on one's grasp of OT Hebrew, it is *naïve* if not *irresponsible* to seek more than *general* guidance from *ṣādaq* in rendering *niṣdaq*.

Fortunately, though, Daniel himself clearly explicates the latter – as long as we are prepared scrupulously to practise our author's own profession, Lesson 3, that "we must take the Word for what it says, as opposed to what humans say instead."

For one thing, although our author scarcely raises any dust in tiptoeing cautiously past the crucial point, Lesson 11, the very *basis* of Seventh-day Adventism's prime dogma is that, *day by day, individual saints constantly defile God's sanctum*, obliging its eventual cleansing. The latter's location may be ignored for the moment. So, whatever the actual sense of *niṣdaq*, his entire polemic crumbles before him unless Daniel teaches beyond quibble in 8 that *individual saints thus defile God's temple!*

Having granted our author much latitude in momentarily ignoring the huge problem of this sanctuary's earthly location, let me extend the favour by probing our prophet's *every* major point in search of his *slightest* evidence that the angel cries "nišdaq", 14, specifically because God's sanctuary had been defiled by **saintly** sins.

There follow five major, predictive details regarding God's sanctuary. If the saints are in view, it must be amongst them. For we are not otherwise informed to whom *nišdaq* refers specifically. In each of these five particulars, then, the question is, **Who**

- removed the *tāmîd* from the Prince, 8:11b, 12a, compare 11:31a?
- threw down the place of the Prince's sanctuary, 8:11b?
- stomped the Prince's sanctuary under foot, 8:13b?
- set up the desolating abomination, 11:31b (compare 8:13b)?
- desecrated the temple, 11:31a?

Look Mom!!  
No saints!!



Would that all questions were as simple as these! In *every* case the culprit is the **Little Horn**. God's saints are **nowhere** to be seen! Indeed, lest there be any last, lingering doubt that perhaps it is they who pollute God's tabernacle after all – despite the indubitable fact that the **answer**, 8:14, relates specifically to the **question**, 13b, which itself **summarises** the atrocities of the **Little Horn**, 10-12 – his envoy especially instructs Daniel that *this fiend's forces* "will... **DESECRATE** the temple fortress", 11:31a.



## Attention!! Attention!! Little Horn Desecrates God's Temple!!

If ever there were a clear case for our author to practise his profession that **Holy Writ is its own interpreter** it is here, if he can possibly face the decisive fact that *this inspired interpretation blasts a hole the size of a tourist bus right through his dearly beloved dogma!* Yet, before its critics open the proverbial champagne, let me expose the incredible lengths to which its devotees will go in defending the utterly indefensible – *even when they purport to be Bible scholars of impeccable integrity!*

*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown: R&H, 2000) is a major, official volume defending this Church's Fundamental Beliefs through Holy Writ, in specifically lay accessible terms, *ibid.*, xf. In his article, "The Sanctuary", *ibid.*, 395a, Dr. Angel M. Rodríguez summarises the atrocities of the Little Horn in these terms:

It attacks the host of heaven, defeats them (verse 10), and goes after the Prince and the sanctuary... The *tāmîd* is taken away from the Prince, and the foundation/place of the sanctuary is cast down and rejected. Then, in a spirit of rebellion/transgression (verse 12), the little horn sets up its own force to control the *tāmîd*. The "truth" associated with the sanctuary is obscured by this anti-God power... The cultic language used by Daniel makes it clear that the little horn does not **contaminate** the sanctuary; the attack on the sanctuary **profanes** it (cf. Dan. 11:31), but does not **contaminate** it. The sanctuary is treated by the horn-power as a **common** place. [stress supplied]

Likewise, in his article, "Divine Judgment", Dr. Gerhard F. Hasel offers his apologetic colleague his complete support here, *ibid.*, 841a:

It has been claimed that the "little horn" of Daniel 8 has defiled the sanctuary and therefore should enter into judgment, which typifies the cleansing of the sanctuary. Careful study of the cultic language of verses 9-14 shows that the cleansing, vindication, and restoration of the sanctuary in verse 14 is not a response required by the activity of the "little horn." It attacks the "Prince of the host," but it does not **contaminate** the sanctuary... Therefore... Daniel 8 does not claim that the "little horn" is included in the cleansing of the sanctuary.



## PLEASE!!

This shocks us with the **sciolism** of Seventh-day Adventism's most pliant scholars at its very worst! Indeed, in their efforts to enlist this in their sectarian campaign, they flirt with **intellectual dishonesty!!** For one shakes one's head in sheer **disbelief**

at the inane suggestion that the Little Horn **profanes** God's sanctuary but does not **defile** it!! For one thing, the patent inference of the tyrant's seizing control of its **tāmîd** is simply that *it completely fails to function*. For another, the desolating rebellion implies **idolatry**. For in parallel references the phrase is *desolating abomination*, 9:27; 11:31; 12:11. And behind *abomination* is the Hebrew noun **šiqqûš**, bespeaking **idolatry**, as in Jer. 16:18; Eze. 7:20; 11:18, 21; 20:7, 8; 37:23. Most assuredly, moreover, idolatry is a potent **pollutant** of God's sacred tabernacle, as in Jer. 7:30; 32:34; Eze. 5:11. In fact, most astoundingly of all, in Eze. 8-10 *it drives him uniquely from his temple!*

For another, most significantly, in the closely parallel 11:31, the Hebrew verb behind *desecrate* is **hālāl**. And beyond all rational quibble, **defilement** is *prominent among its nuances*, as in Lev. 20:3; 21:4; Eze. 23:38. It follows, ironically, that Seventh-day Adventist sectarian scholars could have saved themselves quite some time and effort in demonstrating that the verb **nišdaq** embraces cleansing. For, despite contrary opinions among their critics, *this sense must obtain in any patent antonym of hālāl*.

The simple, decisive flaw in all reasoning over this dogma – which even Church pioneers could *easily* have avoided, had they respected their own, primitive hermeneutics for Bible study – is this. Daniel is not discussing the sanctuary's **normal** function of treating the people's sins but the **aberrant** circumstances of an enemy sabotaging the complete cultus. And the OT happens to record a parallel desecration, along with the precise procedure in its reversal! Had Seventh-day Adventism's pioneers employed their concordances more rigorously, they would have interpreted Dan. 8:14 in light of 2 Chr. 29:3-19, not Lev. 16, even if they saw nothing more than



cleansing in Dan. 8:14. For both Lev. 16:19 and 2 Chr. 29:15, 16, 18 utilise the identical Hebrew verb **tāhēr** behind both *cleans* and *purify*. In the latter case, though, the purging instrument is not *blood* but a **wheelbarrow**, as it were! Interested readers may benefit from the fuller documentation than possible here, which I have recently published in *Cleansing God's Sanctuaries*.

The first of my major objectives is therefore achieved, and the verb **nišdaq** embraces cleansing after all in Dan. 8:14!! Regardless, this not only offers no support to our author's darling dogma; it actually destroys it. Yet what of my second objective? For surely something can still be salvaged if the saints' records are probed in 7:9f.

### The Nature of the Judgment of Dan. 7:9f.

Although I have accepted that Dan. 7:9f. depicts a pre-Advent judgment, our author is rather careless with his choice of references supporting the doctrine of investigation. For example, neither Ps. 56:8 nor 69:28 indicates that God keeps any *register* of sins in order to purge his heavenly temple. Rather, observe this glorious assurance of 130:3f.: "If you, O LORD, kept *a record of sins*..., who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness". Would that we had the time to delve into Christian assurance.

Our author even appeals to Rev. 20:12. But though this evinces *judgment by works*, it scarcely assists his polemic! For *this is no pre-Advent appraisal*. Rather, **as** the vast throng of freshly resurrected wicked tremble before God's great white throne *at the close of the millennium*, their fate is decided *on the spot* from their records. In passing, it is interesting to notice Ellen White's gross error here, too, as in GC 480.

Whatever, the crucial question before us is this. Does Dan. 7:9f. depict any pre-Advent judgment **precisely as Seventh-day Adventism defends its dogma**? Specifically, it teaches a pre-Advent judgment of all who have ever professed **faith** in God and/or Jesus Christ, **individual by individual**, beginning with Adam in 1844. Here there are two vast problems, quite apart from Daniel's *blueprint* not reaching 1844.



First, our author seems to sense trouble proving his point in his decisive question, which he attempts to answer through several paragraphs of repetitious rationale:

**What does the little horn have to do with the pre-Advent judgment?** [stress supplied]

For our prophet offers not even one solitary hint that this fiend ever professed **faith** in God and/or Jesus Christ!! That is, *Seventh-day Adventism itself unwittingly implies that Dan. 7:9f. depicts no pre-Advent judgment as it understands this dogma!* Nor does this Church's *sine qua non* survive this catastrophic verdict through any appeal to the "obvious" interpretation of the Little Horn as Roman Catholicism. For quite enough has already been said to verify that *Daniel never had any such notion.*

Secondly, *there is not even the slightest hint of the saints ever being scrutinised, let alone individually, in this pre-Advent trial!* Nor does 22 sway me. For judgment "in favour of the saints of the Most High" is merely the positive expression of the Little Horn's damnation. By removing this fiend from their path, the saints can possess God's eternal Kingdom. Furthermore, *they are "judged" collectively and simultaneously, not in sequence since 1844!* So ludicrously **alien** to the complete context is the very thought of the records of their works being perused to determine their fitness for this blessing that it should never have entered any Bible student's mind. Even Daniel's implicit reference to judgment in 12:1 does not assist our author's case. For its *single* book is surely the Book of Life, as in Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27, while 7:10 speaks of books, which are only ever applied in God's Word to the wicked, as in Rev. 20:12.



*ously, not in sequence since 1844!* So ludicrously **alien** to the complete context is the very thought of the records of their works being perused to determine their fitness for this blessing that it should never have entered any Bible student's mind. Even Daniel's implicit reference to judgment in 12:1 does not assist our author's case. For its *single* book is surely the Book of Life, as in Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27, while 7:10 speaks of books, which are only ever applied in God's Word to the wicked, as in Rev. 20:12.

### Cleansing the Heavenly Temple in Heb. 9:23

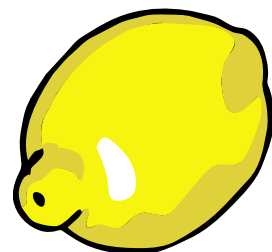
Let me commence by chiding our author for his psychological tactic of implying that Seventh-day Adventist NT scholars *dominate* if not *exhaust* the list of exegetes of the Book of Hebrews who are not "baffled... because of the clear reference to the idea that the heavenly sanctuary itself needed to be cleansed." Anyone with access even to the English commentaries of giants like F F Bruce, Paul Ellingworth or William Lane well realise that their Seventh-day Adventist peers have **no edge whatever** in comprehending this enigma or any other in this challenging epistle.

Much more regrettably, our author offers a *naïve* interpretation of Heb. 9:23. At first sight, this well-worn proof-text certainly seems to bespeak ridding God's heavenly temple of the pollution from the records of the sins of his people. However, its context makes it quite manifest that a comparison is being drawn between the earthly and the heavenly sanctuaries, but *quite specifically in terms of their DEDICATION before employment.* There is no hint whatever in either the antitype or the type that the sanctuary, having long served the Lord's purpose, is being *cleansed at long last of the accumulated sins of God's people.* In fact, the reference to *forgiveness* in 22b is a parenthesis anticipating 26-28, where Christ's superlative qualifications to **inaugurate** God's heavenly temple are surveyed. It does not define the substance of any of the purgations of either the typical or the antitypical sanctuary *in operation.*

Also, it may be mentioned in passing that the Septuagint employs *katharizein*, the Greek verb back of *cleansed* in 23a, several times concerning various aspects of **dedicating** the OT sanctuaries, as in Ex. 29:36, 37; Lev. 8:15; Nu. 8:15; Eze. 43:26.

Moreover, when one attempts the challenge of plumbing the depths of one of the most highly rewarding of all NT documents with an open mind, it soon becomes quite apparent that it offers **no support whatever** to Seventh-day Adventism's prime dogma. The pity is that such a study far exceeds the strict limits of this critique. But again, among others, my **Cleansing God's Sanctuaries** may assist some readers.

Let me therefore suggest that this Church's own astonishing summary, albeit in passing, of its scholars' extensive apologia speaks very eloquently regarding its effectiveness: **the Book of Hebrews neither explicitly teaches nor denies Christ's twofold priestly service in heaven!!** ("To the Reader", *Issues in the Book of Hebrews* (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, 1989), xi) For **nowhere else does the NT treat the realities of his High Priesthood as fully.**



## Summary

As I have observed a number of times already, one of the distinguishing features of Seventh-day Adventism's version of a pre-Advent judgment is its composition of a string of small segments tenuously connected by unique links, often of possible dubiety. This raises the suspicion of heresy from the outset. For God's normative method of imparting his more salient, sacred truth is as a tightly woven fabric with quite sufficient redundancies to neutralise even the loss of some important data.

There is little doubt that two of the weightiest segments in the pre-Advent judgment which our author vigorously defends are the *cleansing* nuance of Dan. 8:14 and the *judgment* of 7:9f., supposedly linked by *structural* considerations. In numerous ways, therefore, this week's lesson is patently *pivotal* to our author's entire series.

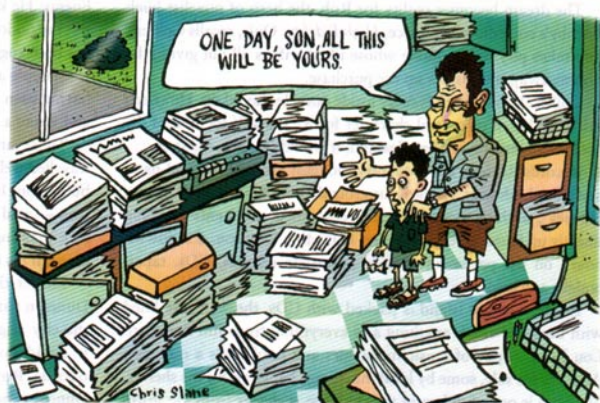
In evaluating our author's initial, *cleansing* assertion, the irony is that Seventh-day Adventist apologists are correct after all, despite the protests of their many critics, that the verb *nišdaq* actually embraces cleansing in Dan. 8:14! However, this is no more than a Pyrrhic victory. For this nuance emerges mostly as an antonym of the verb *ḥālal* behind *desecrate* in the closely parallel 11:31. *Per se*, this verb exposes the pathetic lengths to which even Seventh-day Adventism's more pliant Bible scholars will go in defense of their darling dogma. Yet likewise, their hidebound denial that the Little Horn ever pollutes God's sanctuary – *even though he employs it for idolatry!!* – is readily refuted time and again by the details of desecration in the context.

Because our author's dogma is quite specific that his Church's pre-Advent judgment involves professing believers alone, it is very important to observe that the Little Horn is nowhere depicted as a believer, not even in his past experience. So, right from the very outset, he is excluded from that judgment. Conversely, there is no intimation whatever that God's saints participate in any way in defiling his sanctum. Yet again, therefore, Seventh-day Adventism waits completely in vain for the remotest invitation to scrutinise their brand of pre-Advent judgment anywhere in 8!

What, then, of its cleansing? This had **NOTHING** to do with the Day of Atonement in Lev. 16 and its shedding of sacrificial *blood*, but **EVERYTHING** to do with Hezekiah's purifying God's temple by removing its accumulated *garbage* with a "wheelbarrow".

Our author waxes eloquent over the striking fact that it is this Little Horn who completely dominates the context and outcome of God's pre-Advent judgment in 7:9f. This bolsters his dogma not one whit, though. For this judgment cannot accord with his Church's specifications in condemning this great fiend! Regardless, surely something can still be salvaged if the life records of God's saints are equally reviewed. Disastrously for our author's dogma, they are not. For they receive God's eternal blessing corporately and completely, not individually, with the loss of some.

Nor is our author's case assisted in any way whatever by Heb. 9:23, Seventh-day Adventism's hoary proof-text. For, although this speaks explicitly about *cleansing* God's heavenly temple like his earthly tabernacle, not even the latter refers to the cultus of the Day of Atonement. Rather, in manifest perspective is its inauguration. And just so, the blood of Jesus Christ ordained the former for his High Priesthood.



***Seventh-day Adventism has now clung tenaciously to this remnant of Millerite delusion for 16 long decades – despite a crescent throng of increasingly vocal, well informed critics, even within its progressively disillusioned ranks. Indeed, so paramount in executive minds is this sine qua non that it is quite prepared to practise virtual persecution on dissenting members!***

***My wife is so typical in scarcely tolerating the mess in my study. Seventh-day Adventism has very little time to tidy its "study" before its next generation of adherents tolerates it no longer.***

# Addendum

## The Authentic pre-Advent Judgment of Scripture

It is a sorry trait of human nature, even among sincere, mature Christians, that we often throw the doctrinal baby out with the heretical bath water. For example, the critics of Seventh-day Adventism rightly chide it for ignoring Scripture's context and sweeping scope in favour of proof-texts like Dan. 8:14, Heb. 9:23 and Rev. 14:7 in its sectarian efforts to defend its pre-Advent judgment. Yet all too often these very critics *equally* abuse Holy Writ in rejecting this patent heresy! For a careful study of even the NT reveals that *there is a genuine pre-Advent judgment in God's Word after all!*

Is this a final judgment to update the count of Christians to inform Christ whom to take home? Such a notion ignores one cardinal fact. At every instant, "(t)he Lord *knows* those who are his", 2 Tim. 2:19, compare Heb. 4:13. He who sees each sparrow fall always knows my spiritual state. ***Divine omniscience embodies judgment as a divine attribute!*** Pre-Advent judgment is no process involving "books", nor one beginning in 1844 or at any other time. Rather, *God is ever fully informed simply because he is God!* Such soaring, balanced averments pave the way for our perusal of the NT's pre-Advent judgment. At least, within the strict confines of this succinct review, we will consider the ample evidence of the Book of Revelation.

### The Fundamental Chronology of the Book of Revelation

This is no place to treat Seventh-day Adventism's claim that the Revelation must be interpreted in historicist terms as a series of pre-ordained events between the First and Second Advents of Christ. Moreover, although a broad appreciation of its chronology would probably facilitate comprehension of my primary point, here it is possible to do no more, in general, than to stress that it reveals "what must soon take place", 1:1 – *God's purpose for his book*. True, some commentators prefer to render the relevant adverbial phrase *quickly*. However, this option is untenable in light of John's unequivocal assertion at the close of his introduction, just two verses distant: "the time is *near*." And beyond quibble, *this imminence applied to his pristine reader and his audience* – so much so that, unlike Daniel, who was directed to seal his book till the time of the end, Dan. 12:4, 9, John was instructed from the very outset: "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is *near*", Rev. 22:10. Even Satan fully comprehends such imminence, 12:12c!

### Jesus' "Letters" to the Seven Asian Churches

Specifically, it is in Jesus' "Letters" to the seven churches of Asia that we find the genuine pre-Advent of Holy Writ. So a little time invested here should be rewarding.

### Comfortable Fit?

Broad parallels with successive epochs of church history may be seen in each church experience. But how close is the fit? No prophecy is fulfilled unless it dovetails with *every* inspired detail. They therefore "fit" *only if some of John's very own prime specifications are completely ignored!* Without exception, when Jesus names a church, he has that *total* church in mind. Within his message, if he wishes to address just *part* of any congregation, he does so explicitly, whether to praise, as in 2:24; 3:4, or to rebuke, as in 2:14f., 22. His overall opinion of every church is thus:

Church	Proportion Praised	Proportion Rebuked
Ephesus	whole	whole
Smyrna	whole	none
Pergamum	whole	part
Thyatira	whole	whole/part
Sardis	part	part
Philadelphia	whole	none
Laodicea	none	whole

What, then, is history's supreme verdict? Ephesus allegedly typifies Christians *in toto*, beginning to falter as the first century closed. Yet Jesus' own *pure* praise of contemporary Smyrna and Philadelphia is ample rebuttal. Historicism would have more credibility had he rebuked the Ephesians only *partially*. In contrast, Smyrna applies to a *select* group of persecuted saints, not the *majority* slipping deeper into apostasy. Where, then, is Christ's rebuke? Pergamum reverts to the *entire* church. But as the historic church was then decidedly corrupt, why does he laud it *pervasively*, and chide it only *partially*? Worse, if Thyatira actually depicts the fearful nadir of apostasy in the Dark Ages, why does Jesus laud it *overall*, criticise it mildly *in toto*, and damn only *part* of it sternly? Sardis is likewise the *whole* church, this time being awakened by the Protestant Reformation. Yet, since even leaders like Luther needed to "wake up", whom did Jesus mean by the few who had *never* "soiled their clothes", 3:4? In contrast, if Philadelphia is just the faithful *core* of Christians rejoicing in the Reformation, where is his censure of the rebel *majority*? Laodicea reverts to the *whole* church. But do *all* Christians merit his utter rebuke today? If he stands outside his *total* church, 3:20, where is the gospel's myriad of true converts?

Like most women, my wife keeps a loving eye on her husband's wardrobe. At times she runs the gauntlet of my cryptic tastes and buys an item of clothing. Yet, even if it meets my *general* approval, she may have to return it because "it doesn't fit." Even on this partial evidence, historicism's stance on Jesus' "letters" should be "returned", too, as a sorry misfit, baggy in places, stretched tightly at others, but fitting snugly hardly anywhere. This is the garb of paupers and clowns, not kings!

### Firmly Anchored in Space and Time

At the other end of the spectrum, John's several fine details firmly anchor Jesus' "letters" in space and time. Just one case must suffice. It makes perfect sense to describe Antipas to the localised Pergamenes in John's day as the one "who was put to death in your city", 2:13. Yet it makes little if any to fit the historical let alone geographical detail to the totality of saints of the alleged Pergamene era, A.D. 313-538. For then they were scattered extremely widely indeed in both space and time!

### In the Shadow of the Parousia

It is striking that Jesus explicitly mentions his Return to every church except Smyrna and Laodicea. Even then, the first omission is quite explicable – the Smyrnans face the threat of death, 2:10. Possibly, too, Jesus' pledge, "I will come in and eat", 3:20, implies the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, 19:6-9. Whatever, even historicists agree that the Advent is *near* for the Laodiceans, last on his list. Still more striking is his uniform, *parousial* counsel for each church, as even this brief survey reveals.

Jesus warns the Pergamenes, "I will soon *come* to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth", 2:16. This weapon is clearly *parousial*, 19:15, 21. Likewise, Jesus' simple pledge to the Philadelphians, "I am *coming* soon", 3:11, repeats his sweeping *parousial* promise of 22:7, 12, 20. Significantly, the identical temporal Greek syntax is employed in John's *statement of intent*: to reveal what "must soon take place", 1:1; 22:6. As we have already observed, this he defines specifically and unequivocally through his assertion, "the time is *near*", 1:3. So at very least, these two churches both share Christ's personal assurance that *he will return in their day*.

Jesus is most lucid for the Sardians: "I will *come* like a *thief*, and you will not *know* at what time I will come to you", 3:3. The *parousial* simile *thief* is his own, Mt. 24:43, and his apostles echo it, 1 Thess. 5:2, 4; 2 Pet. 3:10. As Rev. 16:15 verifies, its import is unaltered for John. Likewise, the familiar caveat, *you will not know at what time*, is distinctly end-time, Mt. 24:44, 50; 25:13, in company, too, with *grēgorein*, the Greek verb behind *wake up*, Rev. 3:3, and *keep watch*, Mt. 24:42; 25:13. Why should the former differ in Rev. 3:3, especially when, very impressively, *grēgorein* recurs only in 16:15 in the entire Book of Revelation? So Sardis easily joins Laodicea, Pergamum and Philadelphia. This is a striking majority, especially in view of the simple, tragic fact that no Smyrnan martyr qualifies for any list of those alive at Christ's Return.



Again, as Jesus punishes Jezebel at Thyatira, 2:22f., “*all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will reward each of you according to your works*”, 23. The forceful inference is that *her judgment occurs while all seven churches still coexist*, as an exemplary caveat to all the wayward. Indeed, the sins which she implants, 20, also trouble Pergamum, 14. Even the verb *teach* recurs. Moreover, Jezebel suffers on the very verge, at least, of the Parousia. For the phrase *according to your works* is transparently eschatological, 18:6; 22:12. And Jesus’ directive, “*hold on to what you have until I come*”, 2:25, excludes all intervening death. He makes the striking distinction, in fact, whenever relevant, as at Smyrna. So Thyatira readily joins this long list of pre-Advent churches, too. As for the Ephesian church, Jesus’ caution, “*I will come*”, 2:5, scarcely denotes a different advent than his Return in 16, 25; 3:3, 11; 16:15; 22:7, 12, 20! Ephesus is not unique.

Finally, the imminence of Jesus’ Return for every church is manifest in his vow to the faithful Philadelphians: “*I will... keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth*”, 3:10. Scope and intent both affirm that this is *parousial*. So such care is not confined to the Philadelphians. Generally, too, what Jesus says to *one* church he says to *all*: “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*”, 2:7a, 11a, 17a, 29; 3:6, 13, 22.

### The Diction of Judgment

John’s initial view of Jesus, 1:12-18, sets the tone of his following counsel. Typically, he introduces himself to each church through a symbolic feature especially apropos to its need. For example, he who walks among the lampstands, 1:13; 2:1, is about to cast Ephesus from the select circle of fellowship, 5. He who wields the sharp sword, 1:16; 2:12, is about to employ it on Pergamene rebels, 16. He who died to rise again, 1:18; 2:8, has eternal life for the Smyrnans who are faithful until death, 10f. And he whose eyes burn like fire, 1:14; 2:18, utilises them to search Thyatiran hearts and minds, 23. Moreover, these details attest that *John first sees Jesus as a judge*. This is confirmed even by the vision’s other minutiae. His stark white hair, 14, is reminiscent of Yahweh’s as *Judge*, Dan. 7:9. And his golden sash, Rev. 1:13, recurs only on the *judgment* angels with those fearful, final plagues, 15:6. Even his foot-length robe, 1:13, befits a *judge*. The Septuagint uses the relevant Greek noun for the High Priest’s garb, Ex. 28:4. Yet it also details the *judgment* angel’s attire, Eze. 9:2, 3, 11. Moreover, John does not even view Jesus in the heavenly temple, as some Seventh-day Adventists surmise, but on earth, among the seven churches.

In all, then, John’s first vision is as replete with patent tokens of Jesus’ *judgmental* rôle as it lacks any hint of his High Priestly office. And, as noted, such tokens punctuate most of his advice to the churches, too. Equally, this is repeatedly *judicial*. To each one he says, “*I know...*”, 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15, and most details of his praise or rebuke bespeak *assessment*. More forcefully, he warns the Sardians, “*I have not found...*”, 3:2. This implies *scrutiny*. Above all, he identifies himself to all seven churches as “*he who searches hearts and minds*”, 2:23. This has eternal consequences: “*I will repay each of you according to your deeds*” – a patent reference to Jesus’ *judicial* Parousia, 22:12. In brief, *the primary purpose of John’s first vision, including Jesus’ letters, is to depict him as judge of all John’s fellow Christians*, typified by seven local churches. Moreover, as they live in the very shadow of his Return, to which his assessment often refers, this may well be termed their pre-Advent judgment, with 1844 not even remotely in view. This merely verifies that ***divine omniscience embodies judgment as a divine attribute***. No books are required, and no specific timetable is necessary. For ***God always knows simply because he is God!***

