

LESSON 13

In several respects the current lesson comes as a breath of fresh air. For its many references to God's superlative Plan of Salvation are mostly uplifting. Moreover, how very welcome it is to be positive in reviewing our author's efforts to enlighten us!

Regardless, in some others it is rather frustrating. For it is extremely difficult if not impossible to survey Seventh-day Adventism's dogma of a pre-Advent judgment largely within the confines of the Book of Daniel. Some reference must be made as well to the rituals of God's sanctuaries, both on earth and in heaven. The former, we are assured, is the type, polluted day by day by the sins of his servants, then purged annually, above all in the Book of Leviticus. The latter, we are equally assured, is the antitype, likewise polluted then cleansed, especially in Hebrews.

In all sincerity, this is no sales pitch. But if it achieves nothing else, my recently published *Cleansing God's Sanctuaries* evinces one thing: *such pollution and purgation demand **detailed** investigation in their own right!* My dilemma, therefore, is to do them anything even approaching comprehensible justice, in passing, in this review.

I will apologise in advance, therefore, if I leave any readers somewhat frustrated as well. However, what really counts is that I have demonstrated that *there is **no** nexus whatever between the cleansing of Dan. 8:14 and the Day of Atonement of Lev. 16.* It follows that, strictly speaking, our author's references to the Books of Leviticus and Hebrews can be ignored! I will nonetheless seek some compromise stance.

Our Author's Polemic

Introduction

Here our author focuses on *atonement* as the *good news* it should be for believers:

As Adventists, we believe that since 1844 we have been living in the antitypical day of atonement.

This means that the earthly day of atonement was simply a model... of this true day of atonement. In the same way that the animal sacrifices were symbols of the Cross, the earthly Day of Atonement was a symbol of the real one... inaugurated in 1844 by Christ's work of judgment in the heavenly sanctuary.

This, of course, is good news. After all, what is atonement other than the work of God saving us through Christ's blood? The law can't atone; obedience can't atone; character can't atone. Atonement comes only one way, through the Cross.

If, then, we are living in the day of atonement, shouldn't that be good news? Shouldn't any "day" dedicated to atonement, to God's work of saving us, be something we should be thankful for? Shouldn't we be rejoicing in the hope of living in the day of atonement?

... The judgment is good news because it forms an inseparable part of "the good news"; it is the climactic application of the Cross in our behalf. This week we'll look at the gospel and the judgment, because it's only through the lens of the gospel that we can fully see just what the judgment means for us.

Sunday, 17th September

Next, with his focus firmly upon this good news of judgment, our author explains how it remains *good news* despite the fact that imperfect human *works* are judged:

[T]he Bible is clear that there is a judgment and that this is... a judgment where our works come under scrutiny... Jesus said that we shall give an account of "every idle word" (*Matt. 12:36*). *Every* idle word? And is this not the same Lord who said that the "hairs of your head are all numbered" (*Matt. 10:30*), who knows when a sparrow falls to the ground (*Matt. 10:29*), and who said in His Word that He shall bring "every work into judgment, with every secret thing" (*Eccles. 12:14*)? *Every* work? *Every* secret thing? Thus, the whole idea of a scrutiny of works, an investigation in judgment, is biblical.

But more important is the question, How could any sinner stand when every *idle* [*sic*] word, *every* secret thing, comes into judgment? It's a pretty frightening thought, standing before God in a judgment when everything you have ever done comes under review, especially before a God who, in His holiness, is a "consuming fire" (*Deut. 4:24*). What person, no matter how obedient, righteous, or faithful, has the kind of record that could put him or her in good stead with such a God?

The good news of the judgment is that Jesus, in His righteousness, gets us through the judgment because He stands there in our place. This is what His intercession, His high-priestly ministry, is all about. Otherwise, all of us would be lost because none of us, no matter our works, has enough righteousness to stand before a Holy God. Unless we are clothed in a perfect righteousness that none of us possess [*sic*] or could ever earn, we would have to stand in our own works, our own righteousness; and because we are all sinners, we would all be condemned. [Sunday]

It is convenient to include here material for study on **Tuesday**, 19th September – “a powerful revelation of what it means to be covered by the righteousness of Christ in the judgment and what it means not to be covered”, in the parable of Mt. 22:

Whether through the imagery of the blood, or the garment, the point is the same: We need something other than ourselves to get us through the judgment. And the good news is that, through the sacrifice of Jesus, we have all that we need: the righteousness of God Himself (*see Rom. 3:21, 22; 10:3; 2 Pet. 1:1*) credited to us by faith. [Tuesday]

Likewise, for study on **Wednesday**, 20th September, our author continues to elaborate pastorally on the “good news of the judgment” in anything but legalistic terms:

[W]e don't have to stand in our own righteousness. We can stand in the righteousness of Jesus. That we are judged by works doesn't mean that we are saved by them; we are saved, instead, only through the righteousness of Jesus, which is credited to us by faith, a faith that is always manifested by works. This righteousness covers us the moment we, through a complete surrender of ourselves to Christ, claim it for ourselves, and it stays with us (though not unconditionally) right through the judgment...

But how do I know that I will have enough works to show that I have faith? That's a logical, but wrongly premised, question. It reflects that attitude of those who said, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?” (*Matt. 7:22*), or of the Pharisee who said, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess” (*Luke 18:11, 12*).

Instead, our attitude should be that of the publican, who smote his breast saying, “God, be merciful to me a sinner” (*Luke 18:13*). Those who have ever glimpsed the righteousness of Christ know that they must throw themselves on the mercy and grace of God and that their works—whatever they are, however much done out of a pure and loving heart—are never enough. This is why they have to live by faith, trusting in God's promises that He will save them because of Jesus and Jesus alone. It's the realization of the inadequacy of our works that drives us to faith and to the promises of salvation through Christ. And it's that faith—the faith that believes God's promises—that transforms the life, a transformation revealed in works. [Wednesday]

Likewise, for study on **Thursday**, 24th September, our author lists no fewer than 30 references for further study on this pastoral point! Although I see no need to probe them all in reviewing his lesson, I commend him for his close focus on the gospel.

Monday, 18th September

“Finally”, our tutor explains this good news of judgment in terms dear to his Church:

Central to our theology as Seventh-day Adventists is the sanctuary, both the earthly as a model of the plan of salvation and the heavenly as the place where Jesus is now ministering in our behalf the merits of His atoning death. We as Adventists believe—based on (1) the earthly sanctuary model, (2) the book of Hebrews, and (3) the prophecies in Daniel—that since 1844 Jesus has been in the Most Holy Place, where the judgment, clearly seen in Daniel 7, is now taking place.

Much of our understanding for this comes from the earthly Day of Atonement, in which once a year the high priest entered the Most Holy Place... This is found most clearly in Leviticus 16.

Central to the Day of Atonement ritual was blood, a symbol for the blood of Jesus, shed in our behalf at the Cross. Also, because the Day of Atonement is the day of judgment, then judgment and atonement are closely linked. And, because atonement is, indeed, good news, judgment should be, as well. And it is, but only because of the blood, which represents the life and death of Jesus in our behalf.

Blood is a symbol of life; shed blood means death. All this was a symbol of Christ's life and death for us. And because blood was shed and then ministered on the Day of Atonement, this tells us that, central to the Day of Atonement, [*sic*] are the life and death of Jesus—in our behalf! That's why the judgment, for Christians, is good news. We have a Substitute who stands in the presence of God “for us” (*Heb. 9:24*), now and especially in the judgment.

Evaluation

This week our author comes across as a sincere, devout Christian with far more than quite a commendable, *theoretical* knowledge of God's superlative Plan of Salvation. Patently, he rejoices in a very close, *personal* relationship with his precious Saviour. So, by and large, I have no desire to offer any criticism of his theology, especially when Christ's salvific ministry is mainly a *backdrop* to his Danielic studies.

Regardless, there are two relevant exceptions. First, the *opacity* of his references to *atonement*, especially in his Introduction, contrasts starkly with the *clarity* of almost everything else he mentions anywhere about God's Plan of Salvation! For instance, although there are other major aspects than atonement like redemption, justification, reconciliation and eternal life in “the work of God saving us through Christ's blood”,

what does he mean by *today* being “dedicated to atonement”? Likewise, what is “the hope of living in the day of atonement?” The simple fact of the matter is that **atonement was COMPLETED on the Cross**, as I establish briefly in my Addendum. Indeed, when Jesus returned to heaven, **he was enthroned permanently beside his Father in whatever counts as the MOST HOLY PLACE of his ethereal Temple!**

Secondly, our author is well aware of the caveat, as in Ro. 14:10, that we must all **stand** before God in judgment. And in large measure, he is perfectly correct that Christ the Righteous stands there in our imperfect stead. He is also aware, albeit briefly, that, as in Mt. 12:36, we must all **give account** of our lives before God. Indeed, this caution sounds repeatedly throughout the NT, as in Ro. 14:12; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 4:5. In what sense, though, does this mean that “Jesus, in His righteousness, gets us through the judgment because He stands there in our place”? It is one thing to *stand* vicariously; it is quite another – if at all possible! – to *give account* vicariously. I suggest, then, that such specifics should invite our Seventh-day Adventist friends to rethink their entire dogma of pre-Advent judgment very carefully – especially in view of the extra dilemma of converts deceased before 1844 giving account! Manifestly, within the limits of this brief appraisal, it is quite impossible to do justice even to this aspect of divine judgment beneath the broad rubric of God’s surpassing Plan of Salvation. I have no option, then, but to raise this issue only to move on.

Summary

How very refreshing it is, at long last, to review a lesson without the need to be often wielding the proverbial red pen! Moreover, it is richly rewarding to share our author’s joy over the wondrous blessings of God’s astounding Plan of Salvation!

Where there are noteworthy problems, they relate mostly if not exclusively to our tutor’s strenuous efforts to authenticate his Church’s unique dogma of pre-Advent judgment as **integral** to that Plan. This has profound consequences for his entire objective throughout this series: *to enable that dogma to reflect the Cross’ splendour.*

The simple fact of the matter, however, is that *God’s crucial Plan of Salvation loses nothing whatever if viewed as most Christians do – without the climactic events purportedly starting in 1844.* Of course it includes judgment: the strictly **biblical** model!

Addendum

Christ our Heavenly High Priest

Within the confines of this brief review, the most effective attention I can offer such a vast subject as atonement is to survey what the Book of Hebrews reveals about Jesus Christ’s ministry as our heavenly High Priest. Even then I must be selective, focusing my closest attention on the evidence treating the *locality* of that service.

For example, consider this very forceful typological *contrast* – not *comparison* – between the *earthly* high priest, 9:7, as he fulfilled his prime, yearly duties on the Day of Atonement, and our *heavenly* High Priest, 11f., 14. So paramount is this contrast in his total polemic, in fact, that he both revisits and amplifies it close by, in 24:27:

Earthly High Priest

The high priest
entered

the second tent [*skēnē*] = *ta hagia ta hagia* [literally *the holy things*]
once a year

with the blood of goats and calves
which he offered

for himself and for the sins of the people.

Heavenly High Priest

Christ as High Priest
entered

by his own blood.

He offered himself
unblemished.

It is extremely tempting to draw from this vivid contrast that Christ entered the *Most Holy Place* of heaven’s temple at his Ascension. This is entirely consistent with the transparent import of both 6:19f. and 10:19f., which I have verified elsewhere. How-

ever, this epistle equally intimates that he entered this sanctum merely as a *unit*. The strikingly simple solution to this “dilemma” is to grasp that *the Book of Hebrews says nothing whatever about either distinct apartments in the celestial temple or separate ministries of Jesus because there are neither two rooms in it nor two phases of his service*. This I have likewise verified elsewhere. For instance, most suitable for lay readers would probably be *Cleansing God’s Sanctuaries*, over which I laboured long and hard to preserve its lay approachability. I can only apologise sincerely, then, to my interested readers that it is quite impossible to elaborate here.

As for the sweeping subject of atonement, here is one patent case of a prime NT doctrine which is virtually *impossible* to comprehend except through its OT data! For example, in Heb. 2:17 the Greek verb *hilaskesthai* is rendered *make atonement*, without even a contextual clue to its precise import. Likewise, in 9:5 the cognate noun *hilastērion* is behind *atonement cover*. Why, then, does it invoke *sacrifice of atonement*, Ro. 3:25? Or, as if there really were some trophy for sheer *interpretation*, NLT explains it thus: “to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God’s anger against us.” And that, please note, is a reasonable summary of the OT doctrine.

The sole explicit reference to atonement in the entire epistle to the Hebrews is this one reason why Jesus became our High Priest: “that he might make atonement for the sins of the people”, 2:17. So the strident questions are: *When did he become our High Priest?; When did he achieve our atonement?* Both merit close attention.

All that 2:17 reveals about the first question is that becoming High Priest was one goal of Jesus’ incarnation. More instructive is 5:9 in context: “he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him”. Certainly, this evinces a nexus between his initiation and his sacrifice. He *entered* heaven, then, as our High Priest, 9:11. Yet it was also in this rôle that he *offered* himself once for all for our sins, 7:27; 9:14, 26, 28; 10:10, 12, 14. This permits the possibility that Jesus’ atonement mentioned in 2:17 was replete in his all-sufficient sacrifice at Calvary. The trouble is, its infinitive verb *hilaskesthai* is *present* not *aorist* tense. Quite apart from the fact that English has no aorist (past) tense, I have no wish to perplex any lay readers with the obscurities of Greek infinitives! Finality here depends, then, on the three weighty, salvific words, the noun *hamartia* (sin), and the verbs *anapherein* (offer) and *prospherein* (offer).

The noun *hamartia* first occurs in 1:3b behind *sins*: “After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.” Patently, this hints that *objective purging of human sin was achieved before Jesus returned to his Father*. Compare 10:12. In 7:27 he offered himself *once for all*. Compare 9:26, 28. Clearly again, *Jesus’ once-for-all self-sacrifice was the supreme solution to the full scope of human turpitude, with no delay or novel service whatever, even in heaven*.

Such consistent conclusions fortify in three assertions of God’s definitive response to the Christ-event. In 8:12 the climactic pledge of the new covenant, citing Jer. 31:34, is: “I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” Compare Heb. 10:17f. This hardly echoes in our author’s assertion that the celestial records of human sins remain until an investigative judgment starting in 1844! The sole exception is the solemn caveats of 6:4-6 and 10:26-31 that, if deliberate sin becomes habitual again, Christ’s sacrifice does not apply. Yet even this says nothing explicit about *ancient* sins, long regretted, forsaken and forgiven, rolling back on the rebel. It applies to this *fresh* state of turpitude. But even if old sins do roll back, this exception does not verify the general principle of Seventh-day Adventism’s prime dogma.

The verb *anapherein* appears in 7:27 and 9:28, mentioned *supra*, and requires no further comment here. Likewise, the verb *prospherein* occurs *supra* in 9:28 and 10:12.

In sum, the Book of Hebrews repeatedly stresses the Christ-event as *the once-for-all, all-sufficient solution to the problem of human iniquity*, allowing him to return in utter triumph to his Father’s side. It has *no* hint that *any* extra work was required in heaven to effect our legal salvation! So, when 2:17 speaks of making *atonement*, consistency demands that *it was achieved fully and finally in Jesus’ self-sacrifice*.