

LESSON 14

My astute readers will long have realised that, for various reasons, my reference throughout this entire series has been to the online, ssnet.org version of the Bible Study Guides. This week, though, I have returned to the official version because, curiously, the following introductory material is missing from the enhanced version.

So far, we've covered a lot of ground in our study of the 1844 pre-Advent judgment. *We have... **firmly established the biblical basis for this judgment.*** Using everything from the earthly sanctuary model to the prophecies of Daniel to the life and death of Jesus and to the book of Hebrews, we've seen that... *we are on **solid biblical ground with our teaching on the 1844 judgment.*** [stress supplied]

... So what? Here we are, in the twenty-first century; what does a judgment that began in 1844 mean for us today?... What does it reveal about God and about the salvation He offers? Sure, with our pioneers, the 1844 judgment helped answer the question of the Great Disappointment... But that was then... How do we, today, relate to this prophecy, which began its fulfillment in a time when most of our great-grandparents weren't even born yet? This, our final week, looks at some of these questions.

The tragedy for the many sincere devotees of our author's Church who thrill to his prefatory, enthusiastic assurance of authenticity is that, by any legitimate criterion, *he most certainly has **not demonstrated the Biblism of Seventh-day Adventism's paramount dogma, or anything like it!*** I will survey this tragedy in my Overall Summary. For it is only fair that our author be permitted to complete his defense beforehand.

Our Author's Polemic

Sunday, 24th September

This week our author's launching point is the crying need to *vindicate* God's name:

Perhaps one of the most important points of the 1844-sanctuary doctrine is its teaching that there will be a judgment, a just judgment in which evil will be condemned and righteousness vindicated. Our judgment-hour message not only tells us about this judgment but tells us when it takes place. In other words, what the 1844 message says is that God's justice will not delay forever. He has promised to bring judgment, and *"the hour of his judgment is come"* (*Rev. 14:7*). The 1844 judgment is part of our message to the world that God's justice is coming; that we can trust Him and that evil will be recompensed and goodness vindicated, no matter how hard it is for us to see it now. In fact, the message tells the world that *this judgment already has begun* and that one day we will see the final results. For now, we just have to live by faith, awaiting the day of final justice and vindication. [colour supplied]

Monday, 25th September

Our author continues his theme of vindication, reminding us of the term *theodicy*:

What the pre-Advent judgment tells us is that, even *now*, the Lord is working openly before the on-looking universe. They, right *now*, are seeing the righteousness and fairness of God's judgment. In Adventist theology, we understand that our day will come, too, when we shall "know even as also I am known" (*1 Cor. 13:12*)... In short, what the pre-Advent judgment tells us is that *this process has already begun* and that one day—just like the onlooking universe *now*—we will have all our questions answered, all issues about pain, suffering, and sin resolved, and so we, too, along with all God's creatures, will see the justice and righteousness of God in all His dealing with sin, evil, and rebellion. [colour supplied]

Tuesday, 26th September

Our author now invites us to return our attention to the judgment scene of Dan. 7, the very, dramatic and final event which "ushers in the Second Coming" of Christ:

Jesus Himself, while on earth, talked about His second coming over and over again. The early church lived with the expectation of His soon return. Since then, through long and painful centuries, Christians have awaited the return of Jesus. Each generation lives with the hope and expectation that theirs might be the one to be alive at the Second Advent.

We're still here, though, and with each passing year it has been easier and easier for people to lose the hope of His return.

Here's where the 1844 judgment comes in, for it's a powerful indicator of the times we are living in. It's a message from God, to us, saying basically, *Trust me, I am coming as I have said. It can't be too far off.* The 1844 pre-Advent judgment is, we believe, that last prophetic time element given to the world. It's God's way of telling us that final events are here, and His coming will be soon. As we saw in an earlier study, all the kingdoms predicted by Daniel came and went, just as predicted. He proved that we can trust Him regarding future events; thus, we can trust Him now that this pre-Advent judgment will, indeed, lead to the Second Coming, and because we know when this judgment began, we can know that the Second Coming is near.

As a class, talk about the signs of the times that we are living in... [W]hy is the revelation of the judgment *the most stable, unchanging, and certain sign* that heralds [Jesus'] return? [stress supplied]

Wednesday, 27th September

Our author now treats the “most important point about the... pre-Advent judgment”:

[I]t is a message of **assurance**. It's the promise that as long as we remain faithful to the Lord—living in humble faith, repentance, and obedience to Him and His commands—we have a faithful High Priest ministering in our behalf... who... stands as our Substitute in judgment... Though we are sinners, though we have violated God's law, though we deserve death, we have the assurance that we will be vindicated in judgment because we have Jesus standing there in our place... [stress supplied]

As Adventists, we (along with many other Christians) reject the idea of once saved, always saved. It's obvious that followers of Christ can, through their own choice, fall away. And it's in this context that we can understand better the meaning of the pre-Advent judgment, for *it is here in the judgment that **once and for all** our decisions for or against Christ are **finalized***. The judgment is not a time when God decides to accept or reject us; *it's the time when God **finalizes** our choice as to whether or not we have accepted or rejected Him*, a choice that always is made manifest by our works. The good news of the judgment is that we have the assurance that if we stay faithful to Jesus, if we claim His righteousness for ourselves, He stands in our stead, and *when our name comes up in judgment, we are **sealed forever** in the salvation that He freely has offered us*. Thus, and only in this sense—*once their names come up in judgment*, true Christians are, indeed, once saved, always saved. [stress supplied]

Thursday, 28th September

Next, our author's simple, loquacious message expands on Christ's edict, Mt. 5:16:

As certain as the Bible is that we are saved by faith and not by works (*Rom. 3:28*), it's just as certain that we are judged by our works (*Eccles. 3:17, 12:14, 2 Cor. 5:10, 1 Pet. 1:17*). Indeed, it's the realization that we are now living in the time when those works are being judged that Christians should be motivated to greater works, not in order to be saved (that's impossible) but because their works are a visible demonstration to the world and the universe of the reality of Christ's salvation in their lives.

... [O]ur works, while they can't save us, reveal that we are saved, reveal that we have indeed given our lives to Christ. At the same time, our works also do more: They, too, are part of the whole package regarding the question of theodicy and issues surrounding the nature and character of God.

In the end, what the judgment tells us is that, in a special way, our works are coming under scrutiny before the onlooking universe. If we love God, if we are rejoicing in the salvation He has given us, we will want to send a message to the world and to the universe that, indeed, we love and serve the Lord who has done so much for us. Good works testify to the reality of the faith that we have in Christ; and though they don't save us in the judgment, good works reveal that, though we are sinners, Christ has done the right thing in bringing us into “his kingdom that . . . shall not be destroyed” (*Dan. 7:14*).

Friday, 29th September

Finally, our author returns to the most likely, **sectarian** motivation for this entire series, bolstering the striking pattern that it seems crucial to repeat it around *once per year!*

... [O]ur foundation was erected on the understanding that, while... the Millerites, got the event wrong, they got the date, 1844, right. Thus, not just our heritage but the biblical foundation upon which our early pioneers worked stemmed from the 1844 foundation. Hence, it's important for us... to understand the biblical reasoning that leads to 1844. That we have grown since the early days in our understanding of this message is unmistakable; that we have a better grasp of what it means is unmistakable, as well. At the same time, however, by being firmly rooted in the biblical basis of 1844, we have the assurance that *the prophetic foundation upon which our church was founded is... rooted in the Word of God itself*. In short, it's important for us to be grounded in the 1844 teaching because it affirms *the biblical basis upon which we, as a church, with our distinctive message, exist*. [stress supplied]

Evaluation

Yet again this week, our author gives us good reason to rejoice in his sound, pragmatic knowledge of the gospel, free from extremes like legalism or Calvinism. He also has a good grasp of God's judgment *per se*, as it relates to his Plan of Salvation. However, by **no** means is his polemic free from problems small and large.

At very least, his curious notion of the revelation of the 1844, pre-Advent judgment as “the most stable, unchanging, and certain sign that heralds (Christ's) return” is ludicrous! *A sign is something **visible***. Indeed, although the NT is replete, almost from start to finish, with references to his Parousia, often enough in context with fearful warnings of divine judgment, as in Mt. 16:27, *nowhere is that judgment recognisable in Seventh-day Adventism's inflexible definition of pre-Advent judgment!* Even our author's backdrop that the judgment of Dan. 7 ushers in the Eschaton is of no assistance in that, as I have demonstrated quite decisively in reviewing Lesson 12, *this judgment of the **Little Horn** bears **no** relationship whatever to his Church's definition!*

Again, without treating the broad subject here, even our author's appeal to *theodicy* to bolster his thesis on pre-Advent judgment has its problems. For one thing, when do the righteous examine any heavenly records to evaluate God's dealings with humanity after his heavenly temple is purged? For another, as I deduced in reviewing Lesson 2, *the wicked have no chance to examine the records of the saints*. And for yet another, how comforting it is that, once my name comes up in judgment, *I am sealed forever* – as if once saved, always saved! If our author had thought through this point even half as carefully as it warrants, he would have realised that such a “sealing” necessitates an *incessant review of each living saint's life records!*

Finally, I am well aware that our author has had no opportunity, within the limits of a single series of Bible study guides, to do justice even to important aspects of his Church's prime dogma beyond the Book of Daniel. A case in point is his passing employment this week of Rev. 14:7 as a proof-text that its pre-Advent judgment “has already begun”. Nonetheless, because Seventh-day Adventism has long placed very heavy emphasis upon it, I have devoted my Addendum to the sober task of demonstrating quite decisively that such an interpretation is shallow and simplistic.

Summary

This week our author focuses both upon judgment *per se*, and upon his Church's unique, pre-Advent version. Sadly, it is in his latter polemic that most problems at all worth mentioning arise. Moreover, the biblical doctrine of divine judgment loses *nothing* whatever if *every* reference to 1844 is eliminated entirely from the dialogue!

Addendum

The Hour of God's Judgment

Seventh-day Adventism often focuses on the *three* angels of Rev. 14:6-12. Actually, there are *six* angels in 6:20, and *all* of them help us to plumb the first angel's edict. For example, the simplest way to grasp the true intent of God's judgment hour, 7a, is to compare its causal clause with the *closely* parallel clause in his fourth angel's directive. In launching Jesus' *Return*, he heralds, “the time to reap *has* come”, 15b. Then does our author equally claim that Jesus' *Parousia* has *already* taken place!?

Indeed, it is astounding that anyone, like our author, who has earned a Ph.D. in NT theology, and therefore has some facility in its Greek, would render any verb in its unique, *ao*rist tense by an English *perfect* without at least informing his lay readers that *it embraces a broad spectrum of temporal and aspectual nuances*. It is quite irresponsible to give the impression that it *certainly* bespeaks a judgment *already* in progress! Normally I would not burden my lay readers with John's bare Greek text, let alone expect them to grasp his relevant grammar/syntax. However, his fundamental point is so transparent, even to most amateur eyes, that I will do so here briefly, along with a hopefully reassuring, word-by-word, “literal” translation:

ὅτι ἦλθεν ἡ ὥρα τῆς κρίσεως αὐτοῦ – 14:7a

for has-come the hour of-the judgment his

ὅτι ἦλθεν ἡ ὥρα θερίσαι – 14:15b

for has-come the hour to-reap

Clearly, 14:7 bespeaks no extended *era* of *investigative* judgment, now more than 160 years long, but a short, sharp *instant* of *reward*. In fact, John uses the Greek noun *krisis* only three times elsewhere (16:7; 18:10; 19:2), ever relevant to *executing* divine judgment. This applies equally to all three occurrences of its cognate noun *krima* (17:1; 18:20; 20:4) and to all nine of its cognate verb *krinein* (6:10; 11:18; 16:5; 18:8, 20; 19:2, 11; 20:12, 13). Then why should *krisis* differ in any way at all in 14:7? Indeed, John labels the relevant time simply and casually as “the hour of *his* judgment”, as in 19:2. This also implies that *he has the very same judgment in view each time*.

Moreover, in a prophetic text one should be very well aware of the phenomenon of *prolepsis*, in which God's envoy delivers his forecast of *future* events as though they had *already* occurred. More here anon when the context shares its fuller message.

The Hour of God's Judgment

Seventh-day Adventism has also paid scant heed to John's exegetical detail, *hour* (*hōra*) of judgment, 14:7. This prime noun occurs seven times elsewhere, apart from the parallel, 14:15, and 9:15, dividing into two distinct classes. First, as in 9:15, is a *point* in time. Both 3:3 and 11:13 belong here. Four others are termed one *hour* (17:12; 18:10, 17, 19). In all but 17:12 – a *period* of time – the subject is harlot Babylon's punishment. Yet two extra details suggest that these three be included in the first category.

First, Babylon's judgment is also forecast thus: "(I)n one *day* her plagues will overtake her", 18:8. Secondly, an angel hurls a huge millstone into the sea, explaining: "With such *violence* the great city of Babylon will be thrown down," 21. Transparently, this is an extremely *brief* time span, as *rapid* retribution falls upon this tyrant.

Context

Returning to 14:7, close context speaks very clearly here, too, at times in striking terms. For example, in heralding *judgment*, the first angel sounds "the everlasting *gospel*", 6. Yet if this really is "the old, old story", how can it possibly be that pre-Advent judgment absolutely crucial to Seventh-day Adventism's very *raison d'être*?

John is always his own very best interpreter. Of course he teaches the Pauline gospel. "Jesus... freed us from our sins by his *blood*," 1:5. Compare 5:9; 14:3f. And none except those who "have washed their robes and made them white in the *blood* of the Lamb", 7:14, will enter God's holy presence. Yet even in the rest of the NT, at times the gospel views the future, not just the past. For instance, Paul concludes his protracted warning of God's looming wrath, Ro. 2:5-15, in these temporal terms: "This will take place on the day when God will *judge* men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my *gospel* declares", 16. Compare Lu. 3:18, in context. This is no fresh, foreign gospel, 2 Cor. 11:4, but a clear reflexion of the simple fact that my eternal destiny depends upon my response to the true gospel, 2 Thess. 1:8, compare 2:9-12.

Regardless, even this does not fully clarify the good news about judgment which the first angel heralds. John often looks far more to the OT than to the NT for his hundreds of allusions, if not direct quotations, upon which he typically founds his theology.* Even the Greek noun *euangelion* behind *gospel* is another case. For in 14:6, its cognate verb *euangelizein* is back of *proclaim*. The only other place where John employs it is in 10:6, where it is rendered *announced*. The decisive detail is that God preached good news specifically "to his servants the *prophets*." This is a stock OT phrase, as in Jer. 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4, while the gospel in its ultimate NT form was veiled in the OT, as in Ro. 16:25f.; Eph. 3:29; Col. 1:25-27. Quite patently, therefore, in Rev. 14:6 John's meaning is *good news in its OT sense*.

There is no mistaking the sharp focus of that nuance. The relevant verb *yāšaʿ* appears more than 180 times, often as Yahweh rescues his servants from their foes, as in Nu. 10:9; Deut. 20:4; 33:29. Its four cognate nouns – *y'sūʿā*, *yēšaʿ*, *môšāʿ*, *t'sūʿā* – occur almost 150 times, often with similar intent, as in Ps. 3:8; 9:14; 12:5; 13:5. The classic rescue was the Egyptian Exodus, as in Ex. 14:13, 30; 15:2, which bolstered hopes that there would be a second, out of Babylon, as in Isa. 49:8; Jer. 31:7; 46:27.

John himself confirms that this is precisely on target with his consistent employment of the Greek noun *sōtēria* behind his thematically related *salvation*. The vast multitude of oppressed saints emerges from the great tribulation, 7:14, singing, "*sōtēria* belongs to our God," 10, and rejoicing in his righteous judgment against the great harlot Babylon, 19:1, as the context reveals. Likewise, it is only after Satan and his minions are hurled from heaven, 12:7-9, not when Jesus finally regains his Father's throne, 5, that heaven's choir chants its great chorus: "Now have come the *sōtēria*

* E.g., as God's heavenly temple was opened, 11:19, in it "was seen the ark of his covenant." This is a common OT expression, as in Nu. 10:33; 14:44, for in the ark were the two stone tablets, 1 Ki. 8:9, specifically labelled the covenant of the LORD, 21. Likewise, in 15:5, the opened temple is called "the tabernacle of the Testimony". Uppermost in John's mind here is "the tabernacle, the Tent of the Testimony," Nu. 9:15. More typically and tersely, the first tabernacle is labelled the Tent of the Testimony, as in 2 Chr. 24:6, or the Tabernacle of the Testimony, as in Ex. 38:21. This refers to the ark, with its moral code, above which Yahweh's Shekinah glory abode, 25:22, in the Holy of Holies, 26:33f. Besides the ark of the covenant, this superlative focus of the entire sanctuary complex is frequently designated the ark of the Testimony, as in 25:22; 26:33f.; 30:6, 26. The Decalogue itself is specifically termed the two tablets of the Testimony, as in Ex. 31:18; 32:15; 34:29, or simply, the Testimony, as in Ex. 25:16, 21; 40:20; Nu. 17:4. This moral basis of the covenant, Ex. 34:27f., was placed within the ark, as in Ex. 25:16, 21; 40:20.

and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ”, 10. In fact, in every case, *deliverance* would be much more precise a translation of John’s *sōtēria*, just as in Acts 7:25, RSV; 27:34, Green’s Literal Translation (LITV); Phil. 1:19.

In brief, one peers in vain into John’s first angelic message even for any hint of the Cross, of Christ’s redemptive blood or even of Christ himself! The redemption mentioned in the interlude 14:1-5 is of no help here since such structural features rarely if ever mesh temporally with the contexts which they dissect. For instance, the bowl septet is interrupted, 15:2-4, to reassure the saints that their future with God is secure. Moreover, in the only clear reference to Christ in the context, 14:14-16, he is the Judge!

This all gains very strong support from John’s next two angelic proclamations. His second angel announces: “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries”, 14:8. This is all but reiterated in 18:2f. However, the initial report is far more forceful than the second, which states merely that “all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries.” So there is no *progression* at all from John’s first to his second account, as Seventh-day Adventism has long taught. Nor is Babylon’s fall *spiritual*, as it consistently holds, too. For, whenever applied to cities elsewhere, the Greek verb *piptein* behind *fall* always means *physical ruin through divine judgment*, 11:13; 16:19. Why should 14:8 or 18:2f. differ? John most definitely provides no such indication, or even hints at it.

Neither is there any mistaking John’s third angel’s depiction of those who submit to the beast: “If anyone worships the beast and his image..., he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury... There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image,” 14:9-11. Here, in effect, is his first angel’s message again. Only, it has been flipped over so that its stark, negative side will enhance its penetration.

Regardless, it may be asked, Is the declaration of Babylon’s *fall* not out of place between two warnings of *looming* judgment? By no means! For one thing, it anticipates the fuller record in 18:2f., which is *proleptic* itself. Compare the mighty angel’s dramatic warning, 21:24, appending a lengthy description of the corrupt city’s literal ruins. For another, John’s first angel of 14 voices his caution in the positive terms of the legitimate worship which alone can shield the faithful from satanic persecution. His second angel highlights the certainty of the judgment by speaking as if it had already transpired. His third angel takes advantage of the momentum of the second warning while virtually repeating the first one to “close the brackets”, as it were.

In all, then, close parallels and immediate context in 14:7 attest that *the hour of God’s judgment involves the execution of divine vengeance. There is no hint whatever of investigation!!* This entire section has a strong air of *pastoral* appeal. Indeed, both John’s call for fortitude, 12, and the Holy Spirit’s blessing, 13, imply looming slaughter. Furthermore, the former precisely parallels our prophet/shepherd’s highly dramatic appeal for endurance, 13:10, at the precise point where the murderous false prophet’s potent deceit is introduced. Therefore, *neither 1844 nor any hint of Seventh-day Adventism’s identity or mission appears here*, quite apart from the fact that John wrote his book *in toto* for his own flock, as I have outlined in reviewing Lesson 12.

Overall Summary

This quarter, our author’s commendable objective has been to defend Seventh-day Adventism’s prime dogma of a pre-Advent judgment of everyone who has ever professed his or her faith in God and/or Jesus Christ, individual by individual, starting with father Adam in 1844, against the broad backdrop of the Pauline gospel. His special emphasis has been judgment by works, above all in terms of theodicy.

To give credit where credit is due, by and large our author displays an excellent knowledge of the gospel, free from extremes like legalism or Calvinism. I for one have no desire to waste time with any minor criticisms which could be offered here.

In contrast to such a sweeping perspective, our author has chosen to concentrate heavily upon the evidence for that dogma which he believes is offered manifestly

in the Book of Daniel, with just an occasional glance back to Lev. 16 and its cultus of the Day of Atonement, and forwards to the Books of Hebrews and Revelation.

Unfortunately, our author scarcely begins well by trying to defend the quite indefensible – the decisive fact that Seventh-day Adventism is absolutely alone in embracing this dogma, quite apart from its insistence that it constitutes its very *sine qua non*. The striking fact that it cannot parade one single, respected, conservative exegete outside its ranks who shares its views should tame its arrogance. So should the obscenity that, even through virtual persecution, it strives to silence the massive dissent that has raged for decades in its theological ranks, both lay and professional.

Our author's first major objective has been to validate a pre-Advent judgment, one which ushers in the Return of Christ at that. And certainly, the judgment of Dan. 7: 9f. ushers in the Eschaton. Immediately, though, there is a major problem in that the Little Horn continues persecuting the saints until that Eschaton. There is no "1798" reprieve! Even worse, it is utterly astounding that any Bible scholar would as much as entertain the ludicrous notion that this judgment fits the Seventh-day Adventist definition! On one hand, the supreme subject of that investigation is the Little Horn. And Daniel nowhere intimates that he ever professed faith! On the other, the notion is equally ludicrous that the saints are on trial here, let alone individual by individual!

Secondly, our author strives to equate this judgment with the cleansing of Dan. 8: 14. While this is feasible in that the same Little Horn is destroyed in 7 and 8, would any OT scholar outside Seventh-day Adventism's ranks risk his or her reputation with its utter, sectarian nonsense that it is the saints who necessitate the purging of 8:14? For one thing, the immediate context makes it unequivocally obvious that the Little Horn so tramples God's sanctuary underfoot that it ceases to operate – proof positive, in passing, that his earthly sanctum is in focus. For another, it is our inspired prophet himself who explicitly identifies the Little Horn as the polluter in 11:31!

Thirdly, our author attempts to time the pre-Advent judgment as beginning in 1844 via the 2,300 evenings-mornings of Dan. 8:14. But this is quite beyond him. For one thing, repeatedly our prophet times all of his forecasts to finish in Jesus' day:

- in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of 2, God's Kingdom breaks into human history as the fourth world empire is still ruling, overthrowing it and its three predecessors;
- as the judgment of 7 finishes, it is the same fourth kingdom, along with the Little Horn, which is destroyed, allowing the saints to possess God's eternal Kingdom;
- as Daniel's final vision closes, he is directed to seal his complete book until the time of the End, which Christ identified clearly, if implicitly, as his very own era.

For another, our author fails to verify that the 70 "weeks" of 9 were cut off the 2,300 evenings-mornings. In fact, he fails to grasp the decade of delay between 8 and 9 as the structural watershed of the entire book! Before, the vision of 8 is sealed in 26. Beyond, all symbolism is passé, and both visions are wholly self-contained.

For yet another, there are several compelling reasons to question the popular notion that the 70 "weeks" are Messianic – including the striking fact that not even Jesus included it amongst the OT forecasts with which he defended his *bona fides*! For instance, there is no certainty about the date of either their outset or his baptism. There is such uncertainty about the punctuation involving the 70 "weeks" that the conservative translations divide into two broad camps. The covenant scarcely resembles the everlasting covenant which Jesus inaugurated. And even the prime noun *māšīah* is too familiar throughout the OT to designate Christ with any certainty.

These 70 "weeks" do not even assist our author in his thoroughly effete defense of Seventh-day Adventism's crucial, year-day ideology of prophetic interpretation.

Finally, its prime dogma fails almost completely as a vehicle to achieve theodicy.

In a word, it is glorious good news that there is salvation full and free in Christ. And sobering judgment really is part of that gospel. But neither is enhanced by Seventh-day Adventism's pre-Advent judgment! Rather, sacred truth is obscured when error hijacks it in its own interests.