

ASSURANCE IN THE JUDGMENT

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The Bible is replete with references to divine judgment. In the Old Testament one can find over three hundred examples of divine legal proceedings (covenant lawsuits), followed by executive judgments.¹ A full-orbed biblical theology of God's judgment includes seven different phases of universal divine judgment in Scripture, centered in the cross of Christ.² Seventh-day Adventists believe that we are now living in the fourth phase of this sevenfold judgment, which is commonly termed the "Pre-Advent Judgment."³ This judgment is seen as a fulfillment of the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) typology of Leviticus 16.⁴ As in Jewish

1. See Richard M. Davidson, "The Divine Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society [JATS]* 21 (2010): 45–84.

2. Jiří Moskala, "Toward a Biblical Theology of God's Judgment: A Celebration of the Cross in Seven Phases of Divine Universal Judgment (An Overview of a Theocentric-Christocentric Approach)," *JATS* 15 (2004): 138–165. These seven phases include: (1) Old Testament pre-Cross judgments (Gen. 3:9–19); (2) the Cross judgment (John 12:31–32); (3) personal judgments whenever the gospel is preached (John 5:22–24); (4) pre-Advent investigative (trial) judgment (Dan. 7–8); (5) judgment at the second coming of Christ (Rev. 19:17–21); (6) millennial review judgment (Rev. 20:4–6); and (7) the "Great White Throne" judgment after the millennium (Rev. 20:7–15).

3. The biblical basis for this understanding is conveniently summarized by Marvin Moore, *The Case for the Investigative Judgment: Its Biblical Foundation* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2010).

4. See the summary of biblical data in Richard M. Davidson, "The Good News of Yom Kippur in Seventh-day Adventist Theology," *Shabbat Shalom* 54, no. 2 (2007): 4–8.

theology, *Kippur* is interpreted by Adventists as a time for the completion of a divine investigative (legal trial) phase of judgment dealing with human beings.⁵ Daniel 7:9–10 records the prophet's vision of this heavenly eschatological judgment: "I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated. . . . The court was seated, and the books were opened."⁶ The three angels' messages of Revelation 14 present this judgment as an integral part of the gospel—*euangelion* [εὐαγγέλιον], "good news": "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel [*euangelion* (εὐαγγέλιον = 'good news')] to preach to those who dwell on the earth . . . saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come'" (Rev. 14:6–7).

Is the message of divine judgment in Scripture really reassuring good news? The answer to this existential question cannot be given simply as an academic biblical study. Hence, with the encouragement of the editors of this volume, in this study I combine biblical data with personal experience.⁷ I have not always considered the judgment to be good news. While growing up as a fourth-generation Seventh-day-Adventist Christian, I used to tremble when the subject of divine judgment was mentioned. I listened to numerous evangelistic sermons on the subject, and I heard the

5. For the Jewish understanding, see, e.g., *b. Roš Haš. 16a*: "For it has been taught: 'All are judged' on New Year and their doom is sealed on the Day of Atonement." cf. Philip Birnbaum, *High Holyday Prayer Book: Yom Kippur* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1960), 508, quoted in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Students' Source Book*, ed. Don F. Neufeld and Julia Neuffer (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1962), 9:62: "On Rosh Hashanah their destiny is inscribed, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed."

6. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Italics in quotations from Scripture reflect emphasis added by the author.

7. I first published my personal experience with regard to the judgment in an article, "Assurance in the Judgment," *Adventist Review*, January 7, 1988, pp. 18–20. Here I retell it in an expanded form and further develop the theology of Christian assurance in a more scholarly format. See also my article, "Good News of Yom Kippur," *JATS* 2/2 (Autumn 1991): 4–27, from which some of the concepts of this chapter are adapted, sometimes using the same or similar wording in order to retain the freshness and accuracy of first expression, but here further developed and updated, as my thinking and research on the subject has matured and expanded. In this chapter these concepts are now placed in a new framework of seven reasons for assurance in the judgment.

evangelists read the solemn biblical pronouncements: “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:14, KJV); “Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment” (Ps. 1:5); “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). The prospect of my name coming up in the heavenly court, with all my sins brought before God and the on-looking universe, made me think, *I’ll never make it! I surely hope my name doesn’t come up today.*

Throughout teenage and young-adult years, the subject of the judgment had an unsettling effect on me. Even as a young pastor, I avoided preaching about the judgment. After several years of pastoral ministry, I conducted a prayer meeting series on the Psalms, following the outline of the classic work on the Psalter by C. S. Lewis⁸—except that I skipped his chapter dealing with the judgment. Then my conscience smote me, and I decided to see what the Psalms really taught about the judgment.

I was surprised to see that the Psalmist often welcomed and even rejoiced over the coming judgment (e.g., Pss. 82:8; 96:11–13). But I could hardly believe my eyes when I read that David longed for *his own case* to come up in judgment. Several times David prayed, “Judge me, O LORD!” (Pss. 7:8; 26:1; 35:24; 43:1).⁹ He seemed to be saying, in effect, “Hurry up, Lord! Send the judgment. Bring it on! Let my name come up. I can hardly wait!”

How could David pray such a prayer? He had not only *thought* about committing adultery and murder and lying but had actually carried out

8. C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958).

9. The Hebrew of these four psalms all have the same imperative verb plus first-person common singular object pronoun *shapteni* “Judge me!” The first three of these psalms are explicitly identified as Davidic, according to their superscription. The fourth has the superscription “A Contemplation of the sons of Korah.” This may refer to the melody and not to the lyrics, in light of Psalm 88:1 where the superscription identifies the psalm as “a psalm of the sons of Korah” but then adds that it is also “a contemplation of Heman the Ezrahite”; it seems that in this case the sons of Korah wrote the tune and Heman the lyrics. Ellen White attributes the words of Psalm 42 (and thereby also Ps. 43, which is integrally—structurally and thematically—linked with Ps. 42) to David. See Ellen White, *Education* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1952), 164 (cf. *idem*, *Gospel Workers* [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald], 1915), 257; *Testimonies to the Church* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1948), 4:534–535.

these actions. Did he not understand how serious his sin was or how certain the judgment? His prayer of deep repentance after the power rape¹⁰ of Bathsheba and the murder of her husband indicates that he did understand: “For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge” (Ps. 51:3–4).

David grasped the seriousness of his sin and the solemnity of the judgment. But he also grasped the message of the gospel. He understood that even though he was a great sinner, his sins could be atoned for by the blood of the Substitute. He prayed: “Purge [Heb. *khata*’ in *piel*, ‘cleanse from sin’] me with hyssop [the plant used to apply the blood of the Pass-over sacrifice upon the doorposts of the house; Lev. 14:4–6; Num. 19:18; Exod. 12:22], and I shall be clean” (Ps. 51:7). In effect, he prayed, “Cleanse me with the blood of the Lamb of God, my Substitute, and I shall have assurance of acceptance with You in the judgment.”

My personal study through the years has brought to light at least seven biblical reasons for joyous assurance in the judgment. The remainder of this chapter develops each of these reasons.

CHRIST IS OUR SUBSTITUTE

As just mentioned with the testimony of David, the Bible teaches that the antitypical Lamb of God has been accepted as our Substitute. When we receive Christ, we are covered with the robe of His righteousness (Isa. 61:10; Zech. 3:4; cf. Gen. 3:21).¹¹ The Lord says to Satan, the great Accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10), “The LORD rebuke you, Satan!” (Zech. 3:2). We are forgiven and exonerated, pronounced “not guilty.” We need no longer have anxiety about our acceptance with God. “We may enjoy the favor of God. We are not to be anxious about what Christ and God think of us, but about what God thinks of Christ, our Substitute.”¹² What does God

10. See Richard M. Davidson, “Did King David Rape Bathsheba? A Case Study in Narrative Theology,” *JATS* 17, no. 2 (Autumn 2006): 81–95.

11. See also Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1941), 170, 206, 311.

12. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 2:32–33.

think of Christ our Substitute? He is accepted. Thus when we are in Christ, we may know that we are “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6).

Assurance in the judgment is good news—almost too good to be true. And I dared not believe it even as a seminary student. I was privileged to take the course called Righteousness by Faith, taught by one of the leading Christian expositors of righteousness by faith. I studied hard for the course, and for the only time in my academic career, I received an A+ on the final exam. Imagine—an A+ in Righteousness by Faith! I had “arrived.” Yet I had never personally experienced righteousness by faith.

I had been taught by earnest and well-meaning but misguided teachers that we should never claim assurance of salvation. One statement in particular was given to us to memorize: “Those who accept the Saviour, however sincere their conversion, should never be taught to say or to feel that they are saved.”¹³ It is tragic that the context of this passage was not recognized. In this statement the author is warning against the erroneous belief of “once saved, always saved.” It does not teach that one could never have present assurance of salvation. In the very same paragraph is found the assurance that we can “give ourselves to Christ and know that He accepts us.”¹⁴

For several years after graduating from the Seminary, many of my sermons were focused on Christ but were lacking the assurance in Christ. One summer, after we had finished pitching tents for the upcoming camp meeting, a pastor friend of mine, recognizing my spiritual plight, asked me directly, “Do you have assurance of salvation?” I answered, “I hope so!” Then he began to share the powerful promises of Scripture. He asked me to read John 6:47: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me *has* eternal life.” “Do you believe in Jesus?” he queried. I answered, “Of course! I’m a pastor.” He proceeded to drive the question home with another, “Then do you have eternal life?” I could only reply: “I hope so!” So he told me to read another passage, 1 John 5:13: “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may *know* that you *have* eternal life.” Once again he probed, “Do you believe in the name of the Son of God?” My answer “Of

13. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 155.

14. *Ibid.*

course!” was followed by his question, “then do you know that you have eternal life?” And my response, “I hope so!” After many rounds of reading the promises, followed by questions by my pastor friend, and my answers of “I hope so!” I finally dared to say, “Yes! I have eternal life, not because I feel it, but because God has promised it.” And my life has never been the same. I later discovered the same magnificent affirmation of Gospel assurance in the words of Ellen White: “If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ’s character stands in place of your character, and you are *accepted* before God just as if you had not sinned.”¹⁵ This has become my favorite passage in the entire Ellen White corpus.

The glorious good news that Christ is my Substitute brought to me that same peace and joy as described by those who accepted the gospel message after the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference session in 1888. Ellen White expressed my own experience in her description of the events at the Ottawa, Kansas, camp meeting in 1889: “Light flashed from the oracles of God in relation to the law and the gospel, in relation to the fact that Christ is our righteousness, which seemed to souls who were hungry for the truth, as light too precious to be received.”¹⁶ I identified with the young pastor at that camp meeting who “saw that it was his privilege to be justified by faith; he had peace with God, and with tears confessed what relief and blessing had come to his soul.”¹⁷

How precious is the doctrine of Christian assurance, even during the time of the judgment. In ancient Israel on the Day of Atonement (the Hebrew day of judgment), the “daily” (*tamid* “continual”) sacrifice continued to burn on the altar of burnt offering (Num. 28:2–7; 29:7–11), and the incense continued to waft over the inner veil, fill the holy of holies, and cover the holy ark (Exod. 30:7–10). So during the anti-typical Day of Atonement, we are still accepted by God solely on the basis of the atoning blood and intercessory merits of Christ. Christ is my Substitute who has paid the penalty for my sins with His blood.

15. Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1956), 62. Italics added.

16. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:356.

17. Ibid.

CHRIST IS OUR LAWYER/ADVOCATE

In the judgment, Christ is also our Advocate, our Lawyer. “And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate [παράκλητος (*paraklētos*)] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). Our heavenly Advocate has never lost a case that has been committed to Him (John 18:9). A courtroom loses its fear for the one being tried if the lawyer can guarantee that he has never and will never lose a case that is committed to his hands. This is what Jesus promises, based upon His sacrifice in our behalf.

In the heavenly assize, Christ eloquently and persuasively pleads our case based upon His blood: “Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and . . . purifying blood which pleads more insistently than Abel’s” (Heb. 12:24, NJB; cf. Mic. 7:9). In the judgment “Jesus pleads in their [His followers’] behalf His wounded hands, His bruised body; and He declares to all who would follow Him: ‘My grace is sufficient for thee.’ 2 Corinthians 12:9.”¹⁸ The word “plead” used to trip me up, as I visualized the Son begging the Father to change His mind and love and forgive me because of Christ’s blood. But I came to realize that in the context of the investigative judgment, the word “plead” is a legal term for what a lawyer does: he “pleads the case” of his client. So Jesus presents the evidence in behalf of the ones He is representing. The Father does not need to be begged to love and forgive us—He also is on our side. “For God [the Father] so loved the world that He [the Father] gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16).

I used to have some old doctrinal books in my basement, with various artists’ depictions of the repentant sinner standing in the heavenly courtroom when his name came up for judgment. Invariably, the face of the true child of God appeared filled with terror, sweat was pouring down from his brow, and worst of all, God’s child was standing all alone in the courtroom. Are these accurate portrayals? They do correctly emphasize that there is a real investigative judgment now transpiring in heaven, where cases of the living will one day be examined. In a manner of speaking, “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:10). But the illustrators that picture the repentant sinner standing in terror all alone in the midst of the heavenly tribunal have missed the crucial biblical point: “He [our Advocate] always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). For those in

18. White, *Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950), 489; see also 482.

Christ, the heavenly courtroom is a friendly place. Our heavenly Lawyer stands beside them with His arm around them, as it were; He “does not excuse their sins, but shows their penitence and faith, and, claiming for them forgiveness, He lifts His wounded hands before the Father and the holy angels, saying: I know them by name. I have graven them on the palms of My hands.”¹⁹ I am thankful that in a recent fire at our house those old books with their distorted illustrations of the judgment were consumed, so that they will not mislead my children or grandchildren as they did me.

Christ is my Lawyer who has never lost a case that has been committed to Him. That is assuring good news.

CHRIST IS THE STAR WITNESS IN OUR BEHALF

To the church at Laodicea (the name means “people of the judgment”), representing the people who are living during the time of the pre-Advent judgment, Christ reveals Himself as the “Faithful and True Witness” (Rev. 3:14). Not only does He warn the Laodicean people of their true spiritual condition; but for those who repent of their sins and open the door of their hearts for Him to come in and dine with them, He also testifies in their behalf in the heavenly assize.²⁰ As their Star Witness as well as Advocate, He brings evidence to the heavenly jury in support of His people that silences the false accusations of the adversary. Christ is my Star Witness in the heavenly assize. Yet He is not only our Substitute, our Lawyer/Advocate, our Star Witness. . . .

CHRIST IS OUR JUDGE

While still on earth, Jesus announced, “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22).²¹ Our Elder Brother,

19. White, *Great Controversy*, 484.

20. For evidence of the legal setting of this divine “Witness” (μάρτυς [*martyrs*]) and of the messages to the seven churches (Rev. 2–3) and even the book of Revelation as a whole, see William Shea, “The Covenantal Form of the Letters to the Seven Churches,” *AUSS* 21 (1983): 71–84; and Alan S. Bandy, *The Prophetic Lawsuit in the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Monographs 29 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010).

21. Cf. John 5:27, 30; Ellen G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7A (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1985), 7:989; idem, *Desire of Ages* (Mountain View,

our Best Friend, is the Judge. This Judge has never made a mistake, and He is on our side. He is not a stern, harsh magistrate seeking to damn all He can, but a loving, gracious God seeking to save all He can. With tender pleading He urges us to accept the provisions of the court so He can exonerate us:

“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways,” says the LORD God. “Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,” says the LORD God. “Therefore turn, and live.” (Ezek. 18:30–32)

The multiple function of a single individual in the judgment may seem strange to our modern Western legal system, but it is entirely in keeping with the biblical concept of administering justice.²² At the city gates the same elder(s) could convene the judicial proceedings, argue as an advocate, give testimony, and render the verdict. At the Israelite sanctuary the priest not only did all of this (Deut. 17:8–13) but also bore the penalty of the sins (Lev. 10:17).

With Christ as our Substitute and Surety, our Advocate and Mediator, our Witness and Friend and Judge, what better assuring news can we ask for? The One who has paid the price for our sins is our Lawyer who has never lost a case committed to Him, our Faithful and True Witness testifying on our behalf, and also the Judge. How can we lose our assurance in such a courtroom scene? We can lose assurance only if we refuse to accept the provisions of salvation that Christ freely offers daily to us as a gift.

CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 210; idem, *Testimonies for the Church* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1948), 9:185. It is true that according to Daniel 7 the Ancient of Days does preside in the investigative judgment (White, *Great Controversy*, 479), but it appears that when the investigative judgment is over, Christ then assumes the role of Supreme Judge in order to pronounce the sentence and execute the judgment. See the analysis of the pertinent Ellen White quotations in Robert W. Olson, comp., “The Investigative Judgment in the Writings of Ellen G. White,” Ellen G. White Estate pamphlet, 25 February 1980.

22. See Hans J. Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and Ancient Near East* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1980), 34–35.

What we have described thus far is the *basis* of our acceptance in the judgment—justification by faith.²³ The ground of our salvation in the judgment is totally what Christ has done for us by shedding His blood at Calvary, then applying His blood for the pardon of our sins and covering us with His robe of righteousness as we daily give ourselves to Him and take Him as our Savior. This is the ultimate and only *foundation* of our assurance, both now and in the judgment. Yet there are three more reasons for joyous assurance in the judgment.

CHRIST IS OUR PURIFIER

On the Day of Atonement in ancient Israel, while maintaining the continual (*tamid*) intercessory ministry, the priest carried out an additional service, as summarized in Leviticus 16:30: “For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to *cleanse* you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the LORD.” Throughout the year the people received forgiveness and cleansing for their sins by faith in the ministry of Christ who was to come, but at the end of the year there was a special work of cleansing the sanctuary (Lev. 16:15–20), which involved a special work of purification for the people (Lev. 23:27–32). In the antitype, according to the prophecy of Daniel 8:14, at the end of the 2,300-day prophecy, “then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.”²⁴ Seventh-day Adventists interpret this prophecy as pointing primarily to the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 9:23–28), but as the heavenly sanctuary is being cleansed, there is a corresponding special work of cleansing to be accomplished in the soul temple of each individual worshiper.

In his depiction of the end-time pre-Advent judgment, Malachi portrays the cleansing work the Messiah, the Messenger of the Covenant: “For He is

23. For a comprehensive biblical study of the meaning of justification by faith, see Richard M. Davidson, “How Shall a Person Stand before God? What Is the Meaning of Justification?” in *God’s Character and the Last Generation*, ed. Jiri Moskala and John C. Peckham (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2018), 58–102.

24. For evidence that the word נִטְסָדָק (*nitsdaq*) in Daniel 8:14 has (among other meanings) the semantic connotation of “purify, cleanse” in a judgment setting, see especially Eric M. Livingston, “A Study of נִטְסָדָק (*tsdq*) in Daniel 8:14, Its Relation to the ‘Cleanse’ Semantic Field, and Its Importance for Seventh-day Adventism’s Concept of the Investigative Judgment” (PhD diss., University of New England, Australia, 2007); cf. Richard M. Davidson, “The Meaning of *Nitsdaq* in Daniel 8:14,” *JATS* 7, no. 1 (1996): 107–119.

like a refiner's fire and like launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness" (Mal. 3:2–3).²⁵

Also in the context of eschatological judgment, Ezekiel records God's promise of cleansing for His people:

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. (Ezek. 36:25–27)

What is crucial to note in each of these passages is *who* takes responsibility for doing the cleansing. Mark what the texts say: "the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you" (Lev. 16:30); "He [the Messenger of the Covenant] will purify the sons of Levi" (Mal. 3:3); "I [the LORD] will cleanse you . . . I will . . . cause you to walk in My statutes" (Ezek. 36:25, 27).²⁶ God Himself assumes ultimate responsibility for the cleansing and for the obedience of His people.

I formerly thought that during the time of the pre-Advent investigative judgment I needed to cleanse myself—to try harder, to lift myself up by own bootstraps, to use my willpower to subdue all my sins, in order to be good enough for Jesus to accept me. But I found by experience that there was no victory in that kind of exercise. Even if I could somehow manage to keep from sinning outwardly, I still wanted to sin. My thoughts and motives were still polluted. And then came the joyous message of righteousness by faith. I came to realize that I do not undergo a work of cleansing in order

25. See White's application of this passage to the end-time investigative judgment, in *Great Controversy*, 425.

26. For full discussion of the interpretation of this passage, see James Matua, "The Spirit of the Lord and Obedience to the Law: An Exegetical, Intertextual, and Theological Study of Ezekiel 36:27" (PhD diss., Andrews University, forthcoming). Matua shows how the original Hebrew of this verse reads "I [God] will do . . . and you [God's people] will do," implying that God supplies the motivation and power to obey, and the people freely cooperate in "working out" what God "works in." The equivalent passage in the New Testament is Philippians 2:12–13: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."

for God to accept me; rather, I receive cleansing because He has already accepted me. And it is God who promises to provide both the motivation and power for me to be cleansed and live the life of holiness.

The Day of Atonement brings a call to holiness, but the life of holiness is rooted in justification by faith in the atoning blood of Christ.²⁷ Ellen White forcefully summarizes this relationship between justification by faith and holy living in a way that resonates with my own personal experience:

There are conscientious souls that trust partly to God, and partly to themselves. They do not look to God, to be kept by His power, but depend upon watchfulness against temptation, and the performance of certain duties for acceptance with Him. There are no victories in this kind of faith. Such persons toil to no purpose; their souls are in continual bondage, and they find no rest until their burdens are laid at the feet of Jesus.

There is need of constant watchfulness, and of earnest, loving devotion; but these will come naturally when the soul is kept by the power of God through faith. We can do nothing, absolutely nothing, to commend ourselves to divine favor. We must not trust at all to ourselves nor to our good works; but when as erring, sinful beings we come to Christ, we may find rest in His love. God will accept every one that comes to Him trusting wholly in the merits of a crucified Saviour. Love springs up in the heart. There may be no ecstasy of feeling, but there is an abiding, peaceful trust. Every burden is light; for the yoke which Christ imposes is easy. Duty becomes a delight, and sacrifice a pleasure. The path that before seemed shrouded in darkness becomes bright with beams from the Sun of Righteousness. This is walking in the light as Christ is in the light.²⁸

The cleansing of our soul temple is by virtue of Christ's blood alone, and Christ by His Spirit takes responsibility for this cleansing as we allow Him to do His purifying work in our lives. At the same time, it is true that when our name comes up in the heavenly courtroom, there is an examination of the heavenly records (Dan. 7:10; 12:1). According to

27. See Leviticus 16:30, where it states that "on this day [Yom Kippur] shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins you shall be clean before the LORD" (RSV). Note that the focus of even the people's "cleansing" is upon the atonement made by the blood of the Substitute.

28. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:353–354.

Adventist understanding of the biblical data, the cleansing of the sanctuary involves an investigative judgment, in effect, a judgment according works.

In the years following the discussion of righteousness by faith in the General Conference of 1888, some advocates of Christian assurance within Adventism (e.g., Albion Ballenger) felt that a belief in assurance of salvation could not be reconciled with the Adventist teaching regarding concerning the pre-Advent investigative judgment of the saints, and they therefore chose to retain the belief in assurance of salvation and jettison the belief in the pre-Advent investigative judgment.²⁹ This view that Gospel assurance is incompatible with an investigative judgment has again been advocated by some Adventists in recent decades. However, the biblical evidence discussed in the Daniel and Revelation Committee (DARCOM) and other scholarly research has shown that a choice between Christian assurance and the investigative judgment is unnecessary. Both doctrines are biblically sound.³⁰ Furthermore, research has shown that the examination of the deeds or “works” of God’s professed people³¹ as part of the eschatological judgment is clearly found in Scripture, as Adventists have consistently asserted,³² and as many Christian theologians of various denominations recognize.³³

29. See the analysis and critique of Ballenger’s view in Roy Adams, *The Sanctuary Doctrine: Three Approaches in the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, vol. 1, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981), 91–164.

30. See especially Ivan Blazen, “Justification and Judgment,” in *Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy*, vol. 3, ed. Frank Holbrook; Daniel and Revelation Committee Series (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 339–388; cf. Moore, *The Case for the Investigative Judgment*, passim.

31. Blazen, “Justification and Judgment,” in *Seventy Weeks*, 353–368, examines the major passages supporting this position (Rom. 2:16; 8:5–13; 14:10, 12; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5; 6:9; 2 Cor. 5:9–10; Gal. 5:21; 6:7–8; Eph. 5:5–6; Col. 3:5–6; 1 Thess. 4:6; Heb. 2:1–3; 10:26–31). In my own study, I have found at least one hundred biblical passages which either explicitly or implicitly affirm judgment according to works. See Richard M. Davidson, “Final Justification According to Works: Is N. T. Wright Right?” (paper presented at the national convention of the Evangelical Theological Society, Atlanta, Georgia, November 19, 2010), 3–10.

32. Blazen, “Justification and Judgment,” in *Seventy Weeks*, 353–368, reviews various attempts to resolve the tension between justification and judgment, and shows the biblical mandate to retain the tension and understand it in terms of the “dynamic, salvation-historical” perspective of the “already” and the “not yet.”

33. See, e.g., N. T. Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove,

The Christian church since shortly after the apostolic period has struggled to bring together what seemed like two disparate teachings of Scripture: the assurance of salvation by grace and the judgment according to works. My study on this subject has persuaded me that the biblical message of the antitypical Day of Atonement enables a more harmonious and clear understanding and proclamation of these two realities than ever before. The Day of Atonement contains the key to keeping in balance the relationship both between grace and works, and between assurance and judgment.

This balance can be seen in the literary placement of the primary Day of Atonement passage, Leviticus 16, within the framework of Leviticus and of the entire Pentateuch. Recent literary studies have shown how the entire Pentateuch is arranged in a chiasmic structure, with Leviticus as the central book of the Pentateuch.³⁴

C. Leviticus

B. Exodus

B'. Numbers

A. Genesis

A'. Deuteronomy

Within this central Pentateuchal book of Leviticus, other scholars have shown that the central chapter of Leviticus is chapter 16.³⁵ Thus Leviticus 16, focusing on Yom Kippur, is the very center of Torah.³⁶

IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 184–185; other scholars are cited in Davidson, “Final Justification According to Works,” 1–31. See Richard M. Davidson, “Final Justification According to Works: Is N. T. Wright Right?” (paper presented at the national convention of the Evangelical Theological Society, Atlanta, Georgia, November 19, 2010), 3–10; to be published in *JATS* (forthcoming).

34. See Yehuda Radday, “Chiasm in Tora,” *Linguistica Biblica* 19 (1972): 21–23; idem, “Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, ed. John Welch (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981), 84–86.

35. William Shea, “Literary Form and Theological Function in Leviticus,” in *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy*, ed. Frank Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 131–168; and Wilfried Warning, *Literary Artistry in Leviticus*, *BibInt* 35 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 86–87, 178.

36. Rolf Rendtorff, “Leviticus 16 als Mitte der Tora,” *BibInt* 11 (2003): 252–258.

Here is the chiastic structure of Leviticus, as analyzed by William Shea, reformatted in customary chiastic display style and including only the main (bold) items of the structure:

CHIASTIC STRUCTURE OF LEVITICUS³⁷

“Justification” (blood) **“Sanctification” (holiness)**

D. chap. 16: Day of Atonement

C. chaps. 11–15:	C'. chaps. 17–20:
Personal Laws	Personal
of Uncleanness	Moral Laws

B. chaps. 8–10:	B'. chaps. 21–22:
Priestly History	Priestly Legislation

A. chaps. 1–7:	A'. chaps. 23–25:
Cultic Legislation	Cultic Legislation

Notice in Shea's diagram that the book of Leviticus is divided into two halves, each with a different emphasis: “the first half of the book covers the sacrificial system; the second outlines the way the people are to live.”³⁸ In the first half the underlying theme is “blood,” while the leading motif of the second half is “holiness.” Or, as Shea summarizes in the headings of each half: “justification” and “sanctification.” And right in the middle of the book stands chapter 16, the message of the Day of Atonement.

Literary form highlights theology. The literary-structural setting of Leviticus underscores the balanced Gospel message: we are saved by grace alone—by the blood of Christ's sacrifice. Yet we are judged according our works of holiness, which are the natural fruit of atoning grace. The efficacy of the blood for the believer becomes manifest by its holy fruit.³⁹

37. Shea, “Literary Form and Theological Function,” 149.

38. *Ibid.*, 150.

39. Cf. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 312 (discussing the investigative judgment): “Righteousness is right doing, and it is by their deeds that all will be judged. Our characters are revealed by what we do. The works show whether the faith is genuine.”

Ivan Blazen succinctly summarizes the relationship between justification by faith and judgment according to works:

The investigative judgment, rightly understood, is in harmony with justification by faith and judgment according to works. It encompasses within itself the ingredients of these two fundamental teachings. . . . Plainly, the investigative judgment does not deal merely with the sins of mankind but with the forgiveness of Christ. Consequently, when the whole package is put together, and justification by faith and future judgment according to works are seen as the content of the investigative judgment, it can be stated that there are two questions this judgment answers. First, has the sinner sought and received Christ's forgiveness of his sins? Second, has this forgiveness brought forth good fruit in his life? . . . Only when the answer to such questions is a fundamental Yes can the final revelation of God's forgiveness and mercy be extended to believers.⁴⁰

The concept of fruits of righteousness at the final judgment is especially evident in the New Testament passage of Philippians 1:6, 9–11:

And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. . . . And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the *fruits of righteousness* which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (RSV)

This concept of fruits of righteousness at the last judgment does not destroy Christian assurance in the judgment. As Blazen puts it, "If justification *grants* assurance, judgment *guards* it. *It guards it from the illusion that assurance is possible without a fundamental relationship to Christ and a committed following of Christ.*"⁴¹ In the final judgment, works of faith in the life of the Christian provide the evidence that his or her faith is genuine. But the ultimate ground of one's acceptance in the judgment is not the believer's Spirit-enabled works, but the imputed righteousness of Christ. "While the character of Christ can be imitated and approximated, the infinite character of His goodness can never be equaled." Hence, as Blazen points out, "two things must remain true for the [final] judgment:

40. Blazen, "Justification and Judgment," in *Seventy Weeks*, 379–381.

41. *Ibid.*, 367.

(1) the sanctified fruit of justification must be present, but (2) justification itself must continue its function of pardon.”⁴²

In the Day of Atonement assurance and judgment meet and take on ultimate meaning. This is assuring good news indeed.

CHRIST IS OUR VINDICATOR

David prayed, “Judge me, O LORD my God, according to Your righteousness” (Ps. 35:24, NASB); it may better be translated as captured by many modern versions: “Vindicate Me!” (NKJV, ESV, NIV, RSV). The outcome of the eschatological judgment is certain. It is “in favor of the saints of the Most High” (Dan. 7:22). The judgment brings condemnation upon the little horn power, and Satan who is ultimately behind this power, and at the same time brings vindication for God’s people who have been falsely accused by Satan. John the Revelator delivers the same basic message as Daniel regarding the vindication of God’s people: “for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down” (Rev. 12:10).

I was delighted to learn, from examining the more than three hundred examples of covenant lawsuits (investigative judgments) in Scripture, that the preponderance of legal proceedings are for the purpose of vindicating God’s people.⁴³ In fact, the concept of judgment in Scripture is generally a positive one, and the primary usage of judgment terminology refers to God’s work of justification, salvation, deliverance, and vindication of His people.⁴⁴

This assurance of vindication in the judgment will become more and more precious to us in the last days, as persecution begins, as God’s people are falsely accused, and as guilty verdicts are rendered against them by the highest earthly courts.⁴⁵ In such bleak circumstances, God’s people confidently trust that in the investigative judgment the truth will come out and justice will be served. Like Job, who in a setting of cosmic investigative judgment⁴⁶ faced false accusers, God’s end-time people can confidently proclaim:

42. Ibid.

43. Davidson, “Divine Covenant Lawsuit Motif,” 83.

44. See Jiří Moskala, “The Gospel According to God’s Judgment: Judgment as Salvation,” *JATS* 22 (2011): 28–49.

45. See Revelation 12:17; 13:11–17; and White, *Great Controversy*, 582–592.

46. For analyses of the book of Job as a רִיב (*rib*) or covenant lawsuit, see especially

“For I know that my Vindicator [margin] lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side!” (Job 19:25–27, RSV).⁴⁷

Ellen White powerfully captures the picture of our final vindication in the pre-Advent investigative judgment:

John in holy vision beholds the faithful souls that come up out of great tribulation, surrounding the throne of God, clad in white robes, and crowned with immortal glory. What though they have been counted the offscouring of the earth? In the investigative judgment their lives and characters are brought in review before God, and that solemn tribunal reverses the decision of their enemies. Their faithfulness to God and to His Word stands revealed, and Heaven's high honors are awarded them as conquerors in the strife with sin and Satan.⁴⁸

The investigative judgment reveals to the unfallen universe the standing of the saints before God. The salvation of God's people is not placed in jeopardy. While those who have neglected and rejected the provisions made for their salvation have good reason for anxiety, for those who belong to Christ the investigative judgment is a reason for exuberant singing. For thousands of years (since the death of Abel) the blood of the martyrs has been crying out, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (Rev. 6:9–10). At last Yom Kippur is here! The final judgment has begun—the process through which God reveals to the unfallen inhabitants of the universe the evidence in favor of His people, the reality of their repentance and faith as demonstrated by the faithful fruits of their actions, and His forgiveness of their sins. Satan's accusations against His people are shown to be false, and the full truth can finally come out vindicating God's people.

B. Gémser, “The *Rîb*- or Controversy-Pattern in Hebrew Mentality,” in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Martin Noth and D. Winton Thomas, *VTSup* 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 120–37; Heinz Richter, *Studien zu Hiob* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1959); Sylvia Scholnick, “Lawsuit Drama in the Book of Job” (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1976); and Claus Westermann, *The Structure of the Book of Job* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1981).

47. See the analysis of this passage by Gordon E. Christo, “The Eschatological Judgment in Job 19:21–29: An Exegetical Study” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 1992). According to this literary analysis of the book of Job, this passage stands at the chiastic apex of the book.

48. Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1961), 361.

Truly the first angel's message—"The hour of His judgment has come"—is part of the "eternal good news" (Rev. 14:6-7).

Vindication of the saints in the judgment is assuring good news. But the best news of assurance is saved for last. And it is ultimately not about us, but about God Himself.

THE VINDICATION OF GOD

The assuring good news of Yom Kippur has implications far beyond our personal experience. The plan of redemption focuses not only (or even primarily) upon our personal salvation. The Bible presents a theocentric view of salvation history. For example, Ezekiel, in the larger context of the earthly type of the antitypical investigative judgment⁴⁹ underscores the "bigger picture"—the cosmic dimension. In Ezekiel 36:22-23 (and again in 39:27-28), God reveals to Judah the ultimate result of their judgment: "through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes [the eyes of the onlooking nations]" (ESV). It is for their sakes, to vindicate His character before the onlooking intelligences, that God acts.

The investigative judgment is not conducted to reveal to God who are His and who are not. He who is omniscient knows who are His (Isa. 46:9-10; John 10:4, 14, 27; 2 Tim. 2:19; Heb. 4:13). It is for the sake of assuring the onlooking universe that serves as the jury in the cosmic investigative judgment (1 Cor. 4:9, NIV). God, who throughout biblical history consistently has set forth the evidence in open court through "mini-investigative-judgments" (i.e., covenant lawsuits) before executing judgment upon any individuals or nations,⁵⁰ does not depart from this procedure in the final judgment. Since the rise of evil in the universe, the cosmic conflict has been concerning the character of God, with Satan accusing God of being unjust and/or unmerciful.⁵¹ At the end of the Great Controversy, in the final

49. See Richard M. Davidson, "In Confirmation of the Sanctuary Message," *JATS* 2/1 (Spring 1991): 97-100; idem, "The Chiasmic Literary Structure of the Book of Ezekiel," in *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea*, ed. David Merling (Berrien Springs, MI: The Institute of Archaeology/Siegfried H. Horn Archaeological Museum, 1997), 71-93.

50. See Davidson, "Divine Covenant Lawsuit Motif," *passim*, for discussion of this consistent procedure of God throughout history.

51. See the biblical evidence for this conclusion in Richard M. Davidson, "Back to the

heavenly assize, all the universe will have opportunity to witness “one great and final reaffirmation of all that He [Christ] has accomplished through the plan of salvation”;⁵² and they will be able to attest to the justice and truthfulness of God’s dealings with humankind. Satan’s charges against God will be proven false.

The mind-boggling aspect about this cosmic trial is that we have a part in God’s vindication. Note how in Ezekiel 36:23 (ESV) God says that “*through you* I vindicate my holiness before their eyes,” and then in succeeding verses He describes the work of cleansing that He will perform for His people.

In the Old Testament type, Judah’s sins and the resulting captivity caused surrounding nations to charge that God could not keep His promises to His people. In gathering them from captivity and cleansing them, He vindicated His holy character from the false accusations (Ezek. 36:17–32). So in the antitype, against Satan’s false claim that God cannot fulfill His new covenant promises, God gathers His faithful people to Himself at the consummation of history and through the power of His Spirit demonstrates the ultimate effectiveness of the gospel. The new covenant promise—“I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances” (Ezek. 36:27)—will find ultimate fulfillment among God’s remnant people. They will become fully settled into the truth as it is in Jesus. Sealed as the spiritual 144,000, they will have the name (character) of the Lamb and the Father written on their foreheads (Rev. 7:4; 14:1). Then the investigative judgment can close for the living (Rev. 22:11).⁵³ No glory will accrue to the people—“It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the LORD GOD; let that be known to you” (Ezek. 36:32, ESV). To God alone be the glory!

Not only does God vindicate His character by revealing the faithfulness of the *saints*. Ezekiel 38:16, 22–23 (RSV) uses the same language to

Beginning: Genesis 1–3 and the Theological Center of Scripture,” in *Christ, Salvation, and the Eschaton*, ed. Daniel Heinz, Jifí Moskala, and Peter M. van Bemmelen (Berrien Springs, MI: Old Testament Publications, 2009), 5–29.

52. William Shea, “Theological Importance of the Preadvent Judgment,” in *Seventy Weeks*, 327.

53. See Doug Bennett, “The Good News About the Judgment of the Living,” *Adventist Review* 16 (June 1983): 14–15, for evidence that probation does not close upon the living until after the latter rain and the sealing; cf. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:66; idem, *Early Writings* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1945), 85–86.

describe the final judgment upon the *wicked*, and in particular their leader:

In the latter days I will bring you [Gog, symbol of Satan leading his wicked hordes] against my land, that the nations may know me, when *through you, O Gog, I vindicate my holiness before their eyes*. . . . With pestilence and bloodshed I will enter into judgment with him [Gog]; and I will rain upon him and his hordes and the many peoples that are with him, torrential rains and hailstones, fire and brimstone. So I will show my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord.⁵⁴

The final judgment reveals not only the ultimate effectiveness of the gospel but also the full ripening of iniquity (Rev. 14:18). In Revelation 16 the seven last plagues serve the purpose of revealing that God's final judgments find no answering chord of repentance in the hearts of the wicked—they only curse God all the more (Rev. 16:9, 11). God reveals Himself to be just and yes, merciful, in bringing the Great Controversy to an end. Before the Cosmic Conflict is over, even the rebels, though still unrepentant, will admit that God is just (Isa. 45:20–23; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10–11). The mouth of Satan himself, the ringleader in the conflict, will finally be silenced as his charges against God are shown to be false.

At the grand climax to the Great Controversy, there will be a time of great rejoicing—and the good news will be about the vindication of God in the judgment. The redeemed will sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb: “Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!” (Rev. 15:3). The angel of the water will say, “Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments” (Rev. 16:5, ESV). Another from the altar will cry, “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments!” (Rev. 16:7). After this “the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just . . .’” (Rev. 19:1–2, ESV).

54. For discussion of the Gog and Magog passages in Ezekiel and Revelation, see Jiří Moskala, “The Historical-Eschatological/Apocalyptic Fulfillment of the Gog and Magog Prophecy in Ezekiel 38–39,” in *Christ, Salvation, and the Eschaton*, 287–313; and idem, “Toward the Fulfillment of the Gog and Magog Prophecy of Ezekiel 38–39,” *JATS* 18, no. 2 (Autumn 2007): 243–273.

The message of the antitypical Yom Kippur—of the whole final judgment including the pre-Advent investigative trial, the millennial review, and post-millennial execution of the sentence—swells to a grand climax of assurance. The entire universe will be sure that God is just and true in all His ways, including the saving of His people. Thus, God's saved people have assurance forever. By means of the entire process of end-time judgment, God fully vindicates His character of love, and thus the universe will be rendered eternally secure. Assurance in the judgment will give way to assurance for eternity!