

Three Brief Notes

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I.

"An Illustration For The Present Time"

This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. (Heb 9:9)

There is a question whether "an illustration for the present time" means an illustration portraying the present time so that we can better understand something about it or an illustration designed to instruct those who live during the present time about something else. Below I argue for the latter alternative.

Some wish to interpret the sanctuary symbolism in the book of Hebrews such that the first apartment represents the time before the cross and the second apartment represents the time after the cross.¹ So, is the first apartment symbolic of the time before the cross or the time after the cross? If before, what is Heb 9:9 trying to tell us? If after, how does the first apartment contrast with the second? Personally I do not accept either interpretation.

What the author intends in Heb 9:9 is for the sanctuary to instruct those who live during "the present time," along the same lines as 1 Cor 10:11 ("These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come"). The best evidence that this is what he means is that the present epistle is one of the books of the New Testament--that he wrote it, that it exists at all, quite apart from what it says. By writing on this topic the author of Hebrews has ensured for all time that the sanctuary will continue to instruct those of us who live at "the present time," i.e., now--after the cross.²

Seventh-day Adventists have always taught that the sanctuary should be allowed to inform the church's understanding of the atonement, one part of which involves an actual high priestly ministry by Christ in heaven, similar in many ways to that of the ancient types. Correctly understood, Heb 9:9 strongly supports this position.

II. "And After that to Face Judgment"

(27) Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, (28) so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. (Heb 9:27-28)

In the first section of this brief paper the topic was atonement; here it is judgment. Some believe that all judgment was completed at the cross and that because of what Christ accomplished there there is no need for any judgment afterward. Thus, none occurs. Such a position is simply unbiblical. In Hebrews we read that "man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Heb 9:27). This statement was written after the cross. It says "man," i.e., mankind. It does not refer only to those who would be condemned by a judgment if one were to occur. In any event, how would one know who to summon for condemnation? The reference is to all of mankind. "For we will all stand before God's judgment seat" (Rom 14:12).

What does Paul imply by using the word "we"? What he implies is that he also will stand before God's judgment seat. When he does that, will he be condemned? Toward the end of his life Paul himself addresses this question:

(7) I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (8) Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (2 Tim 4:7-8)

If Paul appears before God's judgment seat at a time subsequent to his writing the passage in which he says this will happen, and if he is given the verdict of eternal life as he says in 2 Tim 4:7-8, it follows that there is more to the judgment than condemnation. So how is this a negative message? But let us suppose that I am wrong. Appearing before God's judgment seat means being condemned. What concept of God does such a belief imply? Seventh-day Adventists talk about a judgment but they do not have a negative concept of God. The "great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Rev 7:9) have all stood before God's judgment seat, just like Paul, and have been freely welcomed as God's children.³

If the judgment is still future for Paul, as he states in Rom 14:12 (above) and if it is not limited to condemnation, then what is it? It is a process of investigation. Paul in Rom 14:12 and again in 1 Cor 10:11 is referring to an investigative judgment. The cross provides a fully adequate basis for judgment. But if I could use a metaphor, the pedestal a statue rests on is not the same as the statue that rests on it. The cross itself is not the judgment that Paul has in view.

Jesus is not in competition with Himself. His life does not compete with His death. In everything He does He is entirely at one with His Father. Nor does His sacrifice on the cross need any supplementing. It is fully adequate in every way. Christ's death accomplishes everything that pertains to His death. But there are some facts of His experience which go beyond the matter of dying. Otherwise, what need would there be for His resurrection? For Christ to rise out of death is fully as important for our salvation as for Him to descend into it

initially. He died but also lives. This is the gospel. What kind of message would the apostles have carried everywhere if Jesus had remained in the tomb?

Paul tells us that "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor 15:17). When did this event occur? Not the day before Passover Sabbath, but the day after. His tomb was near the cross (see John 19:41-42), but we are talking here about different events at two separate moments of time. In between the death of Christ on Friday and His resurrection on Sunday there was a hiatus during which our Savior could at last have rest. What is the significance of this intervening Sabbath? We could talk about this at greater length, but--whatever it means--a Sabbath did in fact intervene between Christ's death and His resurrection.

Paul does not say, "if Christ has not been crucified, our preaching is useless and so is your faith," although that would also be true. Instead he says, "if Christ has not been raised, . . ." (1 Cor 15:17). What does he mean by this? There are two possibilities. The resurrection must occur to fulfill a precondition or illustrate some self-contained point. It had to happen to fulfill a prediction that it would happen, or something on that order. Here the emphasis is on the fact that the resurrection took place. Alternatively, the resurrection must occur because if Christ had not come back to life He would be unable to perform a function without which the process of saving us could not go to full completion. Here the emphasis is on what Christ needed to be raised in order to accomplish--some further thing that would not get done unless He did it because no one else in all the universe had the necessary qualifications (see Rev 5:1-5). What that necessary function consisted of was the high priestly office by which Christ ministers His own blood before the Father. As Victim He shed it; as Priest he ministers it.

The sacrifice of the cross is resoundingly complete. That is why its benefits can be ministered for all time without having to repeat the sacrifice that makes them possible. But the fact that the sacrifice was complete is not an argument that its benefits need not be ministered. That conclusion does not follow from the premise. Unless Christ's blood were ministered as well as shed, it could have no atoning value.

If we believe Paul's testimony, Christ's living has just as much significance as His dying--and for all the same reasons. It was Christ who died. This is the only reason why the middle cross has any more significance than the two on either side. It was Christ who rose from death the third day. This is what gives His resurrection significance. It is Christ who ascended to the Father and continually ministers on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary. This is what gives the work carried forward in the heavenly sanctuary its significance. And Christ also stands before His Father in the judgment, still ministering the undiminished benefits of His one all-sufficient sacrifice on our behalf.

If, after the cross, the judgment is past rather than future, then what is the author of Hebrews trying to convey when he writes: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb 10:25)? What day? The corresponding Aramaic word would be *yōma*--the name of a tractate in both the Mishnah and the Talmud.⁴ For first century Jews and their later Tannaitic interpreters "the Day" could mean only one thing. It was the "day of the Lord" that we read about in the Old Testament--the day of final judgment at the end of the world.⁵ There was no ambiguity in Heb 10:25 for its first readers.

Moreover, we can be sure that this interpretation of vs. 25 is correct because of what we read immediately following in vss. 26 and 27: "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have

received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God" (Heb 10:26-27). Thus, the day of judgment--in this case executive judgment--is precisely the context for vs. 25.

In the above passage judgment is something the reader expects and for those who despise God's grace it is "a fearful expectation." The judgment they look forward to so apprehensively has not already occurred. (Paul warns the Thessalonians against the false belief that it has in 2 Thess 2:2.) The reason why the judgment must come subsequent to the cross has to do with any sins we deliberately keep on doing "after we have received the knowledge of the truth." There must be a truth to receive before people can be condemned for not receiving it. The truth in this case is that Jesus lived and died and rose again the third day. Thus, the cross comes first, then the sin of rejecting it, and then the fearful expectation of judgment--i.e., the expectation is fearful if we reject the gospel.

But in any event, it would be unfair to judge our response to the gospel before we respond to it and we cannot do that until we are born and learn what is offered to us in it (see Rom 10:14-15). It would be unfair and God does not do so. The judgment comes after the cross and also after those lives are lived that come in review before it--with one fairly restricted class of exceptions. The generation that sees Jesus come will be witnessing a post-judgment event when they do so. They will be alive when the investigative phase of the judgment ends, i.e., they will be alive when their names come in review before it.

There is another fact to consider. The basis on which we are judged, as I have stated, is our response to the gospel. But not all claims to have accepted the gospel are of equal value. Some are accurate while others are misleading. That is one reason why a judgment is necessary--not for God's sake but for that of His creatures throughout the unfallen universe. They deserve to know whether the God who claims their loyalty deserves it. Is He fair? How would they know? They judgment tells them. Before us and them He shows that in every case, dealing with each individual who claims to be His, He has been more than fair.⁶

Christ tells the church in Thyatira, "You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess" (Rev 2:20). And again, to Philadelphia He says, "I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars--I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you" (Rev 3:9). These are not isolated examples. At the end of the age Christ gathers all nations before Him "and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on the right and the goats on his left" (Matt 25:32-33). In this parable both the sheep and the goats claim the blessings God has promised. Both classes of people claim to be in relationship with the Good Shepherd. It is His flock, rather than someone else's, that He calls in review.

Moreover, to both sheep (see vss. 37-40) and goats (see vss. 44-45) the Shepherd's final decisions come as a surprise. How can we account for this fact? Professing to be a sheep while still wishing to go one's own way does not change a goat into anything other than what he is. It is not the profession of sheephood that works a transformation of character but the daily results of choosing to follow the Shepherd.

III.

Was There a "Closed Door" Theory in the First Century?

If the judgment occurs at the end of the gospel age rather than its beginning (see 2 Thess 2:2), what implications does this fact have for our concept of world mission? When a church believes, as we do, that the judgment is in session now, what practical implications does that fact have?

Elsewhere I argue that the great disappointment of 1844 has its counterpart in the great disappointment of A.D. 31.⁷ The disciples firmly believed that Christ would be made king (see Matt 21:1-11) and instead He was put to death under the most humiliating of circumstances. In 1844 some thought that He would come as King to cleanse the earth by fire. He did not do that either. These two parallels are very close. Below I would like to add yet another element to the comparison.

Seventh-day Adventists are sometimes criticized for the "closed door" theory their predecessors held immediately following the disappointment of 1844. For a time these people thought that they would only have to work for those who at some time had responded favorably to the 1844 message.⁸ It took time for Seventh-day Adventists to develop their present concept of world mission. The belief in an ongoing judgment at first restrained them from and then propelled them into a program of broad evangelistic outreach. It took time for even Jesus' closest disciples to develop a similar concept of world mission.

In Acts 10 "a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment" (Acts 10:1) searches to know God and is led by the Holy Spirit to send for Peter, who by instinct and training believes that it would be defiling to talk to him. Peter's attitudes before, during, and after this encounter are recorded in Acts 10:1-11:18. This part of the book ends with the response of the Jerusalem mother church to Peter's bold action of sharing Christ with a heathen. "When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, 'So then, God has even granted the Gentiles repentance unto life'" (Acts 11:18).

The change of outlook that Peter and the other leaders of the Jerusalem church experienced in Acts 11:18 was a necessary precondition for accomplishing the work God expected them to do after the end of the seventy weeks prophecy in Dan 9. The time cut off for the Jews was over and it was now time to expand their efforts, with the result that ultimately the eternal gospel would go to "every nation, tribe, language and people" (Rev 14:6).

In the same way, the handful of Millerites who went on to become the first Seventh-day Adventists started out with a concept of world mission essentially like that of the mother church in Jerusalem, i.e., they thought they should only work for their own and were surprised to learn otherwise. But God was patient with them and they learned the lesson He was trying to teach. The door of mercy for a lost world was still very much open. This later change of attitude (described in Rev 10:9-11) was a necessary precondition for accomplishing the work God expected them to do after the end of the 2300 days prophecy in Dan 8. Their work on earth was not yet done. They would even now have to "prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings" (Rev 10:11).⁹ The fact that they benefitted from the instruction thus received should not be held against them.

Note: All Scripture quotations in this paper, except when noted otherwise, are from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright (c) 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society.

¹"The Levitical system then, represented by 'the first Tabernacle,' is described here as a parable 'to serve for' or, perhaps 'to last as long as' the present season. It conveyed its lessons while the preparatory age continued up to the time of change" (B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], p. 253).

²There is a question whether the author's emphasis in Hebrews is on past v. present or on the present v. the future. Westcott discusses this matter at length, but one comes away wondering what his position is. "In technical language all time was divided into 'the past, the present (*enestōs*), and the future' (Sext. Emp. *Pyrrh. Hypot.* iii. 17, 144 *ho chronos legetai trimerē einai: kai to men parōchēkōs, to de enestōs, to de mellōn*); and the use of the word *enestēka* in the N.T. is decisive in favour of the sense *the season that is present* (not *the season that is at hand*): see 2 Thess. ii.2; Gal. i.4; I Cor. vii.26. Things 'present' (*enestōta*) are contrasted with things 'future' (*mellonta*): I Cor. iii.22; Rom. viii.38" (ibid., p. 252). Thus, *enestēkota* in Heb 9:9 refers to the present and not the future. This much would be clear without the next paragraph, but Westcott goes on to state: "It may therefore be reasonably laid down that *ho kairos ho enestōs* must be taken in connexion with that which the writer of the Epistle speaks of as 'future,' 'the future world' (ii.5), 'the future age' (vi.5), 'the future blessings' (x.1)" (ibid., pp. 252-53). Here *enestēkota* in Heb 9:9 refers to the future and not the present.

³That this has not happened is clear from the fact that the judgment is not yet over. And one reason why we can be sure that the judgment is not yet over is that Christ has not yet come.

⁴The scholars whose teachings are codified in the Mishnah were called Tannaim. The pre-Tannaitic period began c. 200 B.C. and the post-Tannaitic period ended c. A.D. 240. The Babylonian Talmud (there was also a Palestinian Talmud) consists of the Mishnah plus a gemara or later commentary on the Mishnah in thirty-seven lengthy tractates by later scholars called Amoraim. Their work was originally preserved only by memory. It was produced in writing at the end of the fifth century A.D. Thus, the Mishnah was produced two and a half centuries after Christ's birth and the Talmud was produced two and a half centuries after the Mishnah.

⁵In the book of Amos, where it appears first (see Amos 5:18-20), there is a debate as to whether the "day of Yahweh" refers to events in the prophet's lifetime or to the end of the world (see Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Alleged 'No' of Amos and Amos' Eschatology," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 29 [1991]: 3-18). In later books it did definitely take on this meaning, which is clearly the author's intent in Heb 10:26-27.

⁶See Hardy, *w^enišdaq* in Dan 8:14, Part 2: The Context of Judgment," *Historicism* No. 4/Oct 85, pp. 9-11; "Is the Judgment Inimical to the Gospel?" *Historicism* No. 26/Apr 91, pp. 89-92.

⁷Hardy, "Why Is the Book of Hebrews a Problem?" *Historicism* No. 25/Jan 91, pp. 13-14.

⁸See P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 104-15, 149-64. ⁹If all of this seems like an afterthought, it was not. On the contrary, that God knew many long years in advance that the events surrounding 1844 would happen just as they occurred is clear from the fact that He predicted them in Rev 3, 10, and 14 (see Hardy, "Why a Problem?" p. 14-15). In this fact also there is a notable similarity between the experience of the disciples and that of the Millerites. The disciples' disappointment and subsequent missionary activity was also foretold--not least by Christ Himself (see John 13:36-38; Matt 24:14).