

Keeping the Judgment in Perspective¹

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This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim 2:3-4)²

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 4:8)

Introduction

The chapter and verse references for the two passages quoted above are easy to remember – 1 Tim 2:4 (1, 2, 4) and 2 Tim 4:8 (2, 4, 8) – and they are well worth remembering. Together they make an important contribution to our concept of the judgment, or I should say to our understanding of Paul's concept of the judgment.

Paul's positive Christian concept stands in contrast with that of Felix. "As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, 'That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you'" (Acts 24:25). If a pagan like Felix fears the idea of having his life come in review before a God he does not know, that's understandable. But when Christians share his fear, something's wrong.

In this paper I would like to restore a sense of balance in our thinking about the judgment. The topic has been much misunderstood. This much could be approached as merely an academic problem to be resolved by academic means, but the real issue is that by misunderstanding what the Bible says about the judgment we show that we misunderstand God.

Judgments Before and After the Second Coming

We use the term "the judgment" as though there were no distinctions to make, but there are. There is a judgment that takes place before Christ's return and a judgment which takes place afterward.

¹ The thoughts brought together in this paper were presented as a sermon at Berkeley Springs, WV, Seventh-day Adventist Church on Sabbath, October 27, 2007.

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Pre-advent judgment

Christ announces the results of the pre-advent judgment by coming to the earth and placing the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. In doing this He is not dealing with those who have never claimed to be His. Both the sheep and the goats are His own professed flock. And yet not all claims are of equal value. Some claims bear scrutiny, while others do not. A typical goat might say, "My master is taking a long time in coming," and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk" (Luke 12:45). He acknowledges God as his Master, but beats his fellow servants. These two postures are not consistent with each other. They require evaluation.

The popular concept of being "judged by the gospel" contains some elements of truth. And yet merely saying, "Lord, Lord," is not proof of sincerity.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (Matt 7:21)

If those who speak of being judged by the gospel are right, then all who say to Jesus, "Lord, Lord," do enter the kingdom of heaven. If they are wrong, there is need of a judgment to show whose claims bear scrutiny. There is a potential conflict here.

In Matt 25:31-46 it is clear that there will one day be only two classes of people – sheep and goats – but there is a question who belongs in which class. No one needs to deliberate over what those who are saved will receive as their reward. The reward is eternal life (see Rom 6:23). That's a given. But the question of who should receive it needs an answer. This is one reason for calling the pre-advent judgment into session. The results are announced by placing people in one of two broad classes – saved and lost. But prior to this each case is discussed individually. So in Matt 25 Jesus is announcing the results of the pre-advent judgment, and yet the announcement and the judgment which leads to the announcement must not be confused with each other. The judgment is over before its results can be announced.

Post-advent judgment

When Paul says, "Do you not know that we will judge angels?" (1 Cor 6:3), he's referring to a judgment which takes place after Christ comes again in glory. On this occasion also there is a who question and a what question, but this time the focus is reversed. By the time Christ leaves the earth with His saved ones, there is no question who is lost. It is all who remain on the earth after Christ rescues those who love Him. But not all who are lost deserve the same punishment, as the following makes clear.

"That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. ⁴⁸ But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Luke 12:47-48).

An example of a servant who knew His Master's will but did not do it is Judas Iscariot (see Matt 26:24; Mark 14:21). On the other hand, there are many who, although they lived faulty lives, have never heard the name of Jesus. These do not deserve to be

punished in the same way as Judas, and they will not be. So the issues before the pre-advent and post-advent judgments are widely different. In the first case, the question is who (Who will be saved?); in the second case, the question is what (What punishment is appropriate for those who are lost?).

Background for the Pre-Advent Judgment

Seventh-day Adventists take Dan 7 as their main source of information on the pre-advent, or investigative, judgment. In what follows, however, I would like to point out that there are precedents in other parts of Scripture for what we find in Dan 7.

Judgment as an occasion for making pronouncements

William H. Shea assembled an impressive list of passages where God makes divine pronouncements from a sanctuary – whether the tabernacle in the desert, the sanctuary in heaven, or the temple of Solomon here on earth.³ Below I present a summary outline based on Shea's work.

1. Judgments from the early tabernacle
 - a. Unfavorable judgments
 - i. Immediately fatal
 1. Lev 10 (Nadab, Abihu)
 2. Num 16 (Korah, Dathan, Abiram)
 - ii. Delayed sentences
 1. Num 14 (the 10 spies)
 2. Num 20 (striking the rock)
 - iii. Lesser sentence
 1. Num 12
 - b. Favorable judgments
 - i. Judgments with regard to office
 1. Num 11
 2. Num 17
 - ii. Judgment with regard to land
 1. Num 27
2. Judgments from the heavenly temple
 - a. Psalms
 - i. Ps 11 (4-5a)
 - ii. Ps 14 (5-6)
 - iii. Ps 29
 - iv. Ps 53 (duplicate of Ps 14)
 - v. Ps 76

³ *Daniel and Revelation Committee Series*, vol. 1: *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), pp. 1-24.

- vi. Ps 102
- vii. Ps 103
- b. Prophets
 - i. Mic 1
 - ii. 1 Kgs 22
- 3. Judgments from the earthly temple
 - a. Psalms
 - i. Ps 9
 - ii. Ps 50
 - iii. Ps 60
 - iv. Ps 73
 - v. Ps 99
 - b. Prophets
 - i. Isa 6
 - ii. Isa 18
 - iii. Ezek 1-10⁴
 - iv. Amos 1
 - v. Joel 2-3
 - vi. Mal 3

Judgment as an occasion for coming together

In Job 1, and again in Job 2, God gathers a vast multitude of representatives from various parts of the universe to discuss whatever the occasion called for. Those present are called *b^enê hâ^elôhîm*, an expression that literally means "sons of God." It has been translated in a variety of ways, e.g., "angels" (NIV), "sons of God" (NKJV), "heavenly beings" (NRSV), "divine beings" (TNK).

For two reasons I think NKJV comes closest to the intended meaning in this case. First, in Luke's genealogy of Jesus, where the series works its way backward from Jesus to Adam, it ends by saying: "the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God" (Luke 3:38). If Luke had been writing in Hebrew rather than Greek, this would be a literal translation of *ben hâ^elôhîm*, the singular counterpart of *b^enê hâ^elôhîm*, as found in Job 1:6.

And second, when God addresses Satan He says, "'Where have you come from?' Satan answered the LORD, 'From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it'" (Job 1:7). Adam was the rightful ruler of this world, but he had died as a result of sin and Satan had usurped his position. So here Satan represents planet Earth and the others had presumably come from worlds similar to ours elsewhere in the universe. We know that they came specifically for this occasion because vs. 6 says, "One day the angels [*b^enê hâ^elôhîm*] came [*yâbô^eû*] to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them" (vs. 6). If they came, it must have been from other places.

⁴ Shea places Ezek 1-10 last in his outline because he discusses these chapters at greater length than the others (see idem, pp. 13-20).

We don't know what the occasion was in Job 1-2 or what items the agenda contained, but we do know that at least one person's life came in review before the assembly. "Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil'" (vs. 8). Satan challenges the nature of God's relationship with Job and God allows Satan an opportunity to substantiate his claims, within certain limits. In chap. 1 Satan could not afflict Job's body, and in chap. 2 he could not take Job's life.

This scene is enormously instructive. It shows, among other things, (1) that from time to time God assembles representatives of other worlds to discuss matters of importance, (2) that the nature of God's relationship to mankind has been challenged, (3) that Satan has been given a certain amount of freedom to demonstrate whether or not his claims are credible, (4) that this freedom operates within a defined framework, (5) that the universe is made fully aware of the circumstances surrounding this challenge, (6) that when God is proved right Satan is proved wrong, (7) that when we succeed God is honored, and (8) that when we fail Satan is honored.

God could not help taking pride in His servant Job as He and the entire universe watched Satan publicly and spectacularly fail to make Job renounce his integrity and curse God. As Job succeeded in the face of every difficulty, God also succeeded. Their interests were intertwined with each other. God wanted Job to succeed and when this happened, Job's success brought God honor and praise. God allowed the test to come, but had every desire for Job to succeed in passing the test. This is an important point. We return to it below.

Judgment as an occasion for deliverance

We now turn to a source that has been unfairly neglected in discussions of the judgment. What better place to look for biblical insights into the matter of judging than the book of Judges?

In Judg 2 we see three roles being played out. Apart from God Himself, there are the people of Israel, raiders who oppress, and judges who deliver and save.

Table 1
Judges 2:10-19

The People	Raiders	Judges
<p>¹⁰ After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. ¹¹ ¶ Then the Israelites <i>did evil</i> in the eyes of the LORD and <i>served</i> the Baals. ¹² They <i>forsook</i> the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They <i>followed</i> and <i>worshiped</i> various gods of the peoples around them. They <i>provoked</i> the LORD to anger ¹³ because they <i>forsook</i> him and <i>served</i> Baal and the Ashtoreths.</p>	<p>¹⁴ In his anger against Israel the LORD handed them over to raiders who <i>plundered</i> them. He sold them to their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. ¹⁵ Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the LORD was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress.</p>	<p>¹⁶ ¶ Then the LORD raised up judges, who <i>saved</i> them out of the hands of these raiders.</p>
<p>¹⁷ Yet they <i>would not listen</i> to their judges but <i>prostituted themselves</i> to other gods and <i>worshiped</i> them. Unlike their fathers, they <i>quickly turned from the way</i> in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the LORD's commands.</p>	<p>they groaned under those who <i>oppressed</i> and <i>afflicted</i> them.</p>	<p>¹⁸ Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and <i>saved</i> them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the LORD had compassion on them as [they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them.]</p>
<p>¹⁹ But when the judge died, the people <i>returned</i> to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They <i>refused</i> to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.</p>		

The structure of this passage is interesting. It contains a description of the sins of the people (vss. 10-13), then something else (vss. 14-16), then the sins of the people (vs. 17), then something else (vs. 18), then the sins of the people (vs. 19). So this much could be described as an ABABA chiasm, where A is the sins of the people and B is whatever else. But the B material has its own structure as well. In the first case this B material consists of raiders, then judges (BC). In the second case it consists of judges,

then raiders (CB). So overall what we have is an ABCACBA chiasm. The reason why I raise this point is to show that the author places heavy emphasis on the sins of the people. Later on we will see that Daniel does not.

The Judgment in Daniel 7

We draw on the above background material in certain portions of Dan 7, but begin with vss. 9-10 and some reflections on what these verses say in and of themselves.

Verses 9-10

"As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. ¹⁰ A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened." (Dan 7:9-10)

Thrones were set in place. When one has guests over for lunch it might be necessary to bring out an extra chair for the company. We've all done this, so it shouldn't come as a surprise that you can't set a chair where it already is. That's not what "setting" means. In the same way, you can't set a throne where it already is. What we have here is a change of location. The thrones described in the first clause of vs. 9 move.

We come to the same point from the second clause as well, where "the Ancient of Days took his seat" (vs. 9). This also represents a change of location. Saying, "The court was seated" reinforces this same point. The session of the heavenly court described in Dan 7:9-10 brings the parties involved together from places other than where the session itself occurs. The Ancient of Days comes to the judgment hall from another place.

We have said that the many who attend the proceedings come from all over God's universe as representatives of their various worlds. The parallel for this is in Job 1 and 2. But where do the thrones come from and where was God before this session of the court convenes? The wilderness tabernacle might help provide an answer. It was built according to a pattern. The pattern is what we're reading about in Dan 7, not the wilderness tabernacle that was based on it. In any event, a major feature of the tent that Moses erected in the desert was that it had two apartments with different functions. The function of the first apartment was to bring sin in (every day); the function of the second apartment was to take sin out (once a year). The only way to enter the second apartment was from the first apartment. What we read in Dan 7:9-10 is consistent with this. What we are witnessing in Dan 7 is the beginning of the antitypical day of atonement in the second apartment of the heavenly sanctuary. The thrones are being moved into the second apartment from the first.

After the Ancient of Days comes in and takes His seat (vs. 9), One like a Son of man "approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence" (vs. 13). On earth He "looks like a son of the gods" (3:25); in heaven He is "one like a son of man" (vs. 13).

The books were opened. Why are the books opened and who opens them? We take the second question first. Since God knows all things, there is no one who could present information to Him that He does not already have. God opens the books.

The question why He would do this is worth considering. If it is true that God really does know all things, then He could not be opening the books of record for His own benefit. If not His, then whose? Well, others. He does not open the books in order to be informed by them, but to explain what they contain to others. Who these others are has just been mentioned. "Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him" (vs. 10).

What might God wish to explain on this occasion? Something that those listening do not already know. If the books contain a record of human lives, as they surely do, are there aspects of our lives that are potentially knowable in advance? I suggest that when we do something, our actions become a matter of public record. If this is so, then God would not primarily need to tell the heavenly court what we have done. Our actions, once performed, are potentially knowable. What then? Ellen White speaks to this issue in chap. 28 of *The Great Controversy*, "Facing Life's Record."

Jesus 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. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." Psalm 51:17. And to the accuser of His people He declares: "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Zechariah 3:2. Christ will clothe His faithful ones with His own righteousness, that He may present them to His Father "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." Ephesians 5:27. Their names stand enrolled in the book of life, and concerning them it is written: "They shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy." Revelation 3:4.

He "shows their penitence and faith." These are not actions, but inner qualities of mind. Here is one purpose for opening the books, i.e., so that those in attendance at the judgment might know our "penitence and faith." But this is not the only reason.

Where do penitence and faith come from? Do these qualities simply well up within us? That's not how it has worked in my experience. People don't have penitence or faith unless God leads them in a way that causes these qualities to develop. It is at this point that we come to the heart of the matter. If the onlooking universe cannot know our penitence and faith unless God reveals these things to them, they certainly cannot know the means by which the Holy Spirit spoke to our hearts and led us to respond in this way. They can't know the secret ways in which God has worked on our hearts. In showing the court how He has worked to save individuals, applying the principles of the gospel, God is revealing not primarily something about us, but something about Himself.

Discussion. This leads to an important question. If God is revealing something about Himself in the judgment, and is doing this through His Son, how is this different from the gospel? The same dynamics apply in both cases.

The gospel, as well as the judgment, involves more than merely saving people. That in itself is an important thing, but not the most important thing. More important than the well-being of our little world is the integrity of God's government as a whole. We are

only a part of this. By saving us, God shows Himself willing to go to any lengths in order to do what works to our benefit. He shows in detail, and on a case by case basis, how He has worked in each person's life individually.

When a sinner comes to Christ and is forgiven, that brings honor not to the sinner, but to God, who was willing to forgive him or her. When Moses asks God to reveal His glory, what the Lord proclaims is primarily His willingness to forgive and to save.

"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." (Exod 34:6-7)

It is to God's glory to be compassionate and gracious, to abound in love and faithfulness, to maintain love to thousands – even when those who receive His love do not deserve it – and to forgive wickedness, rebellion and sin. When He is able to do such things in a person's life, that brings Him honor and praise.

It is also true that He tells the truth and will not call sin anything other than what it is. He does not leave the guilty unpunished, but makes every effort to ensure that if people stay guilty they have themselves to thank for their resulting condition. It is none of His doing. There is no angry Judge in heaven. There is an honest Judge, but He wants us to be saved more than we ourselves can want this. The only angry party is the prosecution – the "accuser of the brethren" (Rev 12:10, KJV). But let us not confuse the two. Satan has always wanted to take Christ's place (see Isa 14:13-14) and to ascribe to God his own unholy traits of character. Let us not reverse the roles and do for him what he could not do for himself. Satan is the one who is angry; God desires our good. If even committed Christians become confused over this point, it is clear that much more needs to be revealed about God's character than is commonly understood.

There are other points we may have missed. Wishing the judgment out of existence would not have the effect of ensuring that all are saved, because there would still be those who refuse to accept the gospel. No one who does this can be saved. With or without a judgment, decisions about human destiny still need to be made and the results will not be the same in every case. There are people who accept the gospel and people who do not.

Pushing the question back one more step by requiring that all who profess Christ will be saved doesn't work either. Saying, "Lord, Lord," is not enough. Jesus Himself tells us so. There are people who say they have accepted the gospel whose lives testify that they haven't. We are not saved without works, but we are not saved by our works. In the same way, we are not saved without professing Christ, but we are not saved by the mere fact of professing Him either.⁵ Neither our works nor our words are sufficient.

⁵ In Matt 12:37 the comparison is not between our words and our profession, but rather between our words and our works. Uttering words, as opposed to incubating unspoken thoughts, is something we choose to do. The context is made clear by the preceding verse: "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken" (Matt 12:36).

I submit that there is still a need for the judgment even after someone says, or does not say, Jesus is Lord. Nor is it the case that having a judgment is merely OK. The judgment is to the onlooking universe as the gospel is to those who live on planet Earth. In both cases God's primary purpose is to reveal Himself through His Son. When the judgment is understood from this point of view, the two processes (judgment and gospel) are not incompatible with each other. On the contrary, they are fully equivalent in every way. Both are vitally important. In the gospel Christ makes provision for everyone to be saved. Here there are no distinctions. In the judgment He comes down to cases showing precisely what effects that provision has had, or not, in the life of each person who has professed to accept it.

Verses 15-18

In vss. 15-16a Daniel asks a short question and in vss. 16b-18 receives a correspondingly short answer. He doesn't understand the vision and asks what it means. The angel tells him: (1) there will be four great empires on earth, but (2) ultimately the saints are the ones who will receive the kingdom.

This is an important summary of what the judgment is all about. In vs. 18 the judgment is the occasion on which "the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever-- yes, for ever and ever." Paul says something very similar to this, writing to Timothy at a later time: "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 4:8). The crown of righteousness is something that the Lord, the righteous Judge will award to Paul "on that day." What day is "that day"? The day on which the Lord acts in His capacity as righteous Judge. The day of judgment.

The judgment is convened for the purpose of saving anyone with any hope of being savable. It would not take long for God to point out that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 2:23) and just walk away. Of course we're sinners. Everyone knows that going in. But the question is, which of us who have sinned will God be able to save? The answer is impressive. "After this I looked and there before me was a 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). This fact speaks volumes about God.

Perhaps the one most remarkable thing about the judgment is the fact that there would be one. Why would God stoop to explain His actions and open His decisions to public scrutiny? And yet it so much like Him to do this. Christ has shown, by being who He is, that the Father also is "gentle and humble in heart" (Matt 11:30). Jesus does not say, I and the Father are two. He says, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). It is not that they are indistinguishable, but rather that they are in complete agreement. The Father, like the Son, is "gentle and humble in heart." This is what the Father Himself has always been like. But clothed in indescribable glory, how would God ever make the universe know this about Him? Even Lucifer, standing beside the throne, was able to miss this point, with disastrous consequences.

Verses 19-27

Now we circle back to some of the information we gleaned earlier from other passages. Recall that in Judg 2:10-19 there were both raiders and judges. What was the role of those judges? Was it to harass, accuse, and torment those who had sinned? No, the raiders did those things. The judges' task was to save and deliver. I submit that the role of the divine Judge in Dan 7 runs parallel to that of the human judges in Judg 2. His purpose and intent is only to deliver and save. He will condemn if He must, but it is not anything that gives Him pleasure. It is, however, something that brings Him glory. Even His curses are blessings, and the universe will know this by the time all His decisions have been announced.

Table 2
Daniel 7:19-27

Enemy	Friend
Question	
<p>¹⁹ ¶ "Then I wanted to know the true meaning of <i>the fourth beast</i>, which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws-- the beast that <i>crushed</i> and <i>devoured</i> its victims and <i>trampled</i> underfoot whatever was left.</p>	<p>²² until <i>the Ancient of Days came</i> and <i>pronounced judgment</i> in favor of the saints of the Most High, <and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.></p>
<p>²⁰ I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about <i>the other horn</i> that came up, before which three of them fell-- the horn that <i>looked more imposing</i> than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that <i>spoke boastfully</i>. ²¹ <As I watched, this horn was <i>waging war</i> against the saints and <i>defeating them</i>,></p>	
Answer	
<p>²³ ¶ "He gave me this explanation: 'The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will <i>devour</i> the whole earth, <i>trampling</i> it down and <i>crushing</i> it. ²⁴ The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom.</p>	<p>²⁶ "'But <i>the court will sit</i>, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. ²⁷ <Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High.> His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.'</p>
<p>After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. ²⁵ He will <i>speak against</i> the Most High and <i>oppress</i> his saints and <i>try to change</i> the set times and the laws. <The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.></p>	

Not all will be saved, even though God wants them to be. Some, through their own obstinate refusal to listen to His Holy Spirit, exclude themselves from grace. God has a clear concept of what sin is and is not. He will not leave the guilty unpunished, but it is His purpose to save everyone He can. This is why everyone who has ever expressed any interest in Him or in what He has to offer will come in review before the judgment. Everyone who has any chance of receiving the kingdom will be given every possible opportunity to receive it.

Seventh-day Adventists have been accused of presenting a message that conflicts with the gospel when we speak of a pre-advent judgment in heaven before Christ returns. But the judgment is soundly biblical in all its parts.

In the judgment, as described in Dan 7, God makes pronouncements about those who have loved Him, and yes, about those who have not. We see something similar to this in Shea's series of pronouncement parallels.

In Job 1-2 God assembles a vast multitude of observers. On the strength of this parallel I submit that those who assemble in Dan 7 have a similar role. They come as representatives from other worlds, just as Satan came as the usurping representative of planet Earth in the earlier passage. Notice also that a person's life comes in review in Job 1-2. In the same way, human lives come in review before the court in Dan 7. This is what God reveals as He opens the books of record to the universe's inspection.

In Judg 2 there are enemies (raiders) and saviors (judges). In Dan 7 we find these same roles occupied respectively by the beast and the little horn on the one hand, and by the divine Judge on the other. From this, and from what the passage itself says, I draw that the Judge in Dan 7 is a Friend of those whose lives come in review before Him. He wants them to be saved.

An important difference between the two passages is that in Judg 2 the sins of the people are laid under heavy emphasis, whereas in Dan 7 there is no mention of them. In Dan 8 there is one passing reference to the sins of God's people.

Because of rebellion, the host of the saints and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground. (Dan 8:12)

In Dan 8 the sin of rebellion is not ignored, but it is not emphasized. The judgment does not have the primary purpose of publicizing human failings, but of bringing salvation to the saints and conferring the kingdom on them. Yes, they have sinned, but God saves them. A second example of this type of balance between sin and acceptance can be seen in the letter to Thyatira.

Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. (Rev 2:20)

The church during this period includes Christ's people, but it also tolerates "that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess." The record is honest. It does not hide the fact that rebellion or apostasy has occurred, but it does not focus on such failings. A third illustration of the way Christ approaches human weakness and sin is found in the story of the woman taken in adultery.

Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"¹¹ "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." (John 8:10-11)

Here again, Jesus does not ignore the woman's sin, but it is not His purpose to embarrass, or wound, or condemn. It is His purpose to save and to heal. In the judgment can we not trust this same Jesus to handle our own cases in such a way as not to embarrass or wound us before the universe? If our God is like this, let Him demonstrate the fact without objection. Let Him reveal in detail how He has worked to save us. He deserves to talk about these things, and the universe needs to hear them. On the cross Christ demonstrated His willingness to do such things and provided a way by which all could be saved. In the judgment He shows the effects that His provision has had in individual lives. These processes are two parts of one whole. There is no way to separate them. They relate to each other as cause and effect.

Keeping Perspective

Understanding the character of God correctly is not a small or inconsequential matter. The problem of sin arose initially over precisely this point, i.e., a misunderstanding of who God is and what He is like. Speaking of Lucifer, Isaiah writes,

You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." (Isa 14:13-14)

Notice what Lucifer is and is not saying here. He is not saying he wants to be greater than God. Even his twisted mind realizes that this can never be. He wants to ascend to heaven, he wants to raise his throne above the stars of God (not God, but the stars of God), he wants to sit enthroned on the "mount of assembly" – an interesting expression in the context of such passages as Job 1-2 and Dan 7 –, and he wants to sit on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. He wants to ascend *above* the tops of the clouds. But he follows this by saying, "I will make myself *like* the Most High" (vs. 14). He wanted to be greater than everyone and everything else, but equal to God. It was an argument for equal time, equal representation.

Actually, in wanting to be like God Lucifer desired a good thing. There's nothing God wants more than for His creatures to be like Him. But what is He like? In Lucifer's mind God is a Being who receives honor, praise, obedience, those things. And in and of itself this is true. God does receive these things, and deserves them. But is that the real essence of who He is? Does this seal up the sum?

There is no way that God, in infinite glory, could have told His creatures that He is "gentle and humble in heart" (Matt 11:29) and have His words mean anything at all. Just telling people these things would not have conveyed any real understanding. To convey an accurate picture of what He was really like He had to illustrate His point tangibly, and He did this by sending His Son to our world, giving Him to humanity. The reason for this Gift goes far beyond merely securing our salvation. Our world is fallen and we need saving, but more is at issue. The well being of the entire universe hinges

crucially on having an accurate understanding who God is and what He is like. In the gospel, and the judgment, He has the interests of all His creatures in view – not only those who have sinned and live on this one world.

Conclusion

In the gospel God offers a free provision for all mankind to be saved without distinction through His Son. In the judgment He points out, not His offer of salvation, but the results it has had in individual human lives. The offer is one, but the responses to it are as many and as varied as those to whom the offer has come. The issues are the same in both cases. Only the perspective is different. And if sins are reviewed that He has been able to forgive, that might disturb us but it brings glory to Him.

So let God have an opportunity to show, not only that He was willing to save, but that salvation has actually resulted from His efforts – in case, after case, after specific case. Let Him show how He has worked to save us and document the innumerable examples where His efforts have been successful.

Seen in this context, the gospel and the judgment are not inimical to each other. Instead they are two aspects of a single unified self-revelation of God. This revelation has the effect of saving many who have fallen into sin here, and of preventing such a fall from ever occurring in the future anywhere else in the universe.

It is really true that God "wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4). More than this, He wants all His creatures – not just those who live here, but everywhere throughout the vast universe – to come to know Him in such a way that our collective welfare will be forever secure against any recurrence of sin. If this displeases us, if we would prefer not to have our lives come in review before the heavenly court, that is something we will have to learn to deal with. The judgment is real, it is thoroughly biblical, and it is in session now. When we understand these things correctly we will see them as an occasion for joy and will join the rest of the universe in praising God for doing things just as He has done them.