

ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 154

“The Pre-Advent Judgment - Part II”

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The last newsletter no. 153 on “the Pre-Advent Judgment - Part I,” generated an unusual volume of positive responses. Many found very enlightening the survey about the concept of the Pre-Advent Judgment in the teachings of Jesus, Paul, Hebrews, Daniel, and Revelation.

Some lamented that this study should have been posted earlier on in July when our new Sabbath School Quarterly began the study of our Adventist understanding of the final judgment. They urged me to post without delay the second part of this study which builds upon part I by examining the following three aspects of the final judgment:

1. The Post-Advent Phase of the Final Judgment
2. The Outcome of the Final Judgment
3. The Theological Significance of the Final Judgment

In response to the urging of fellow believers, I decided to hasten to post this second part of our study on “The Pre-Advent Judgment” before leaving tomorrow for London, England, where I will spend the next 10 days speaking at two rallies. The first rally is at the Croydon SDA Church, on August 18-19 and the second at the Wood Green SDA Church on August 25-26. At the end of this newsletter you will find the address and contact person for each church. If you live in London, please accept my personal invitation to attend these powerpoint SABBATH/ADVENT seminars. We look forward to a blessed time of worship and fellowship together.

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LONDON: A PERENNIAL ATTRACTION

During the past 5 years I have been invited to present my powerpoint seminars in London an average of two times each year. It is always with a sense of joyful expectancy that I fly to London, for two reasons. First, because the reception and response of our members is always marvellous. Most of our members come from developing countries and are eager to improve not only their socio-economic status, but also their understanding and experience of Bible truths.

The second reason is the opportunity to enjoy a peaceful retreat in the home of an Adventist couple, Gary and Araxi Keshishian . They have adopted me as their “spiritual son” and have designated my guest room as “the prophet upper room.” It is always with a sense of relief that I come to London, knowing that in-between weekend engagements, I can enjoy for few days a peaceful time for creative reading, thinking, and writing.

This time I plan to devote my time to prepare the powerpoint lecture on *CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE*. I have been working on this project on and off for the past three months. I have collected all the pictures and information needed for the lecture. At this point all what I need is a few days to work in peace without the constant interruption of phone calls or visits. The home of Gary and Araxi Keshishian, a lovely Adventist couple, offers me such peaceful retreat.

If your travels include a stop in London, feel free to contact Gary and Araxi Keshishian at 44 (0) 20 8866 8821, or gary@advent.plus.com They will offer you *royal* hospitality. For pictures and details, visit <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/BED&BREAKFAST.htm>

CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE

God willing, the video taping of the lecture *CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE* should take place at the end of August. I believe that this live presentation will meet an urgent need. Dan Brown’s book and movie are unsettling the faith of million of people. This is becoming evident not only by polls taken in several countries, but even in the messages I receive from different part of the world.

For example, yesterday three times I exchanged email messages with a reader of this newsletter. He has come to believe that the Bible is the product of man, not of God. It was written by men influenced by their contemporary culture and it has been edited countless times in accordance to political agendas. When I suggested him that such view is promoted by *The Da Vinci Code*, not by reputable scholarship, he responded: “Have you seen the extensive bibliography of the book? Dan Brown is not inventing the story of the production of the Bible. He is simply telling an unpopular truth.”

The Amazing Accurate Transmission of the Bible

Such a comment could only be made by a person who is biblically and historically illiterate. It is a known fact that we have today over 5000 manuscripts of the New Testaments, some of which go back to the second and third centuries. The minor textual discrepancies, known as *variants*, among the documents, reveal not politically motivated editorial changes, but simply unintentional minor mistakes that occurred in the process of copying. Such mistakes as “Holy Spirit,” instead of simply “Spirit,” or “Jesus Christ,” instead of simply “Christ,” do not alter the overall meaning of the text.

The existence of thousand of Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, offer a compelling evidence that the text of the New Testament has come down to us with amazing accuracy. What is true of the New Testament is equally true of the Old Testament. The discovery of the Dead Seas Scroll has shown the amazing accuracy of the Hebrew text of the OT Scripture. When comparing the text of some OT books found in the Dead Sea Scrolls (written a century before Christ), with the Hebrew text of the Masorettes (written a thousand years later), scholars were amazed at the accurate transmission of the Hebrew text.

It seems that no amount of biblical scholarship can stop the popular acceptance of the deceptive lies about the Bible and the person of Christ (mortal man married to Mary Magdalene), promoted by novels and movies. This remind us of the end time condition described by Paul, when he writes about “The coming of the lawless one . . . with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God send upon them a strong delusion to make them

believe what is false, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess 2:9-12).

Prophetic Significance of *The Da Vinci Code*

What a description of our times! A time when many people prefer to believe what is false, rather than what is truth. A time when people find “pleasure in unrighteousness” by reading and watching that which desecrates the Bible and Jesus Christ. But, the question is, Why would persons prefer to read and view a false gospel rather than the True Gospel? The answer is to be found in the storyline of *The Da Vinci Code*, namely, that Jesus Christ was a merely human person who came to establish an earthly dynasty. He came to help us celebrate the divine feminine through ritual sex in order to become part of his enlightened circle. Thus, we do not need to worry about being sinners, needing redemption from our sins. All what we need is to be enlightened and informed. The fact is that most people would rather be told that they are uninformed than they are sinful.

The false gospel of *The Da Vinci Code* is more attractive to many of the True Gospel of the Bible, because it makes people believe that their problem is to be found, not internally within themselves, but externally in conspiracies. Mankind has been in darkness because some powerful secret societies have conspired to suppress the truth.

In my lecture I plan to discuss the socio-religious conditions that may account for the unprecedented success of such sacrilegious book and movie. More important still, I intend to look at this social phenomenon in the light of the endtime false worship predicted especially in Revelation 13-14.

In researching Revelation 13-14 for the DVD recording on *The Mark and Number of the Beast*, I was impressed by the repeated warning against end-time false worship. The warning against end-time false worship, promoted by satanic agencies like *The Da Vinci Code*, is given with frightening words: “If any one worships the beast and its image, an receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also shall drink the

wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and he shall be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb" (Rev 14:9-10).

In the DVD on *The Mark and Number of the Beast*, I discuss at length how the dragon, the sea-beast, and the land-beast are presented in Revelation as an unholy trinity that will attempt to lead the world away from the true worship of God into idolatrous forms of worship. *The Da Vinci Code* represents a significant fulfilment of this end time prophecy, especially by its denial of the divinity of Christ. I am looking forward to complete this project and to offer you the live lecture on a DVD format as soon as it is released.

THANK YOU FOR PROMOTING *MORE THAN A PROPHET*

Words fail to express my gratitude to all those who have helped in promoting Prof. Graeme Bradford's timely book *MORE THAN A PROPHET*. Over 3000 copies have been sold during the past six weeks. This is largely due to the efforts of many of our readers to inform their church members and friends. Thank you immensely for promoting this long overdue book that will do much to restore confidence in the prophetic ministry of Ellen White.

Several fellow believers told me that after showing Prof. Bradford's live video lecture, which summarizes the highlights of *MORE THAN A PROPHET*, many were eager to buy a copy. This is encouraging because it shows that it was a wise decision to invest time and money to make a live recording of Prof. Bradford's lecture on Ellen White.

If you or your church have not yet ordered copies of *MORE THAN A PROPHET*, we would be glad to send them to you immediately. To facilitate the distribution of this timely book, we offer it by the case of 30 copies for the basic cost price of \$5.00 per copy, instead of the retail price of \$25.00. This means that the cost for a case of 30 copies is only \$150.00, mailing expenses included, instead of the regular price of \$750.00.

Furthermore, to facilitate your promotional efforts, with a case of 30 books, we offer also Prof. Bradford CD/DVD album containing two

disks, one with his publications and the other with his two hour live video lecture on Ellen White. See the details below or at the website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/BradfordOffer/offer.htm>

A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT FROM ELLEN WHITE

Some fellow believers are critical of the discussion generated by some of the studies presented in our newsletters. They frown upon any effort to open up old doctrines to a fresh study with the intent of expanding our understanding. They feel that we should be satisfied with the way our pioneers have defined our doctrines and interpretation of Bible text. They view as suspect any new interpretation that gives rise to difference in opinions. Surprisingly, Ellen White did not feel that way.

Few moments ago a Bible teacher emailed me an encouraging statement from Ellen White, which I decided to post because of its timeliness. Commenting on Peter exhortation “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18), Ellen White writes: “Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end. But as real spiritual life declines, it has ever been the tendency to cease to advance in the knowledge of the truth. Men rest satisfied with the light already received from God’s word and discourage any further investigation of the Scriptures. They become conservative and seek to avoid discussion.

“The fact that there is no controversy or agitation among God’s people should not be regarded as conclusive evidence that they are holding fast to sound doctrine. There is reason to fear that they may not be clearly discriminating between truth and error. When no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in ancient times, who will hold to tradition and worship they know not what.” (*Testimonies* 5:706-707 [1889]; also in GW 297-98 and CWE 38-39).

Such compelling testimony constitute a solemn warning against the danger of conservatism, of defining truth on the basis of traditional teachings. Our calling is to grow both in grace and knowledge. If there is no growth, there is stagnation and eventually death. Let us not be afraid to seek for a fuller understandings of the truths that God has revealed.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AT THE END OF THE NEWSLETTERS

A detailed description of the special offers on goods and services is provided at the end of this newsletter. Here is a brief listing of the announcements that are expanded at the end of this newsletter.

1. CALENDAR OF FORTHCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS for the months of August and September 2006. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

2. PROF. BRADFORD NEWLY RELEASED BOOK *MORE THAN A PROPHET*, AND HIS CD/DVD ALBUM. Both the book, the CD/DVD album, are being offered at a special introductory price. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

3. DR. BACCHIOCCHI'S NEW DVD ALBUM ON THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

4. DR. BACCHIOCCHI'S PACKAGE OF ALL HIS RECORDINGS. The package consists of 5 albums which are offered for only \$100.00, instead of the regular price of \$500.00. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

5. PROF. JON PAULIEN PUBLICATIONS IN ONE CD ALBUM. The album contains more than a dozen of books and scores of articles written during the past 20 years of research. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

6. PROF. JON PAULIEN'S 60 CD DISKS containing 120 lectures that explain verse by verse the book of Revelation. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

7. TAGNET SPECIAL NEW WEB HOSTING OFFER for Adventist churches and members. TAGnet provides an incredible number of web-hosting services to our churches and members. This newsletter comes to you through their gracious and efficient service. For detail information, visit their website at <http://www.netadventist.org> or <http://home.tagnet.org/> You may also call their office 800 - 9TAGNET. They are ready and eager to help you.

8. SPECIAL OFFER ON HITACHI PROJECTORS: HITACHI has offered an additional discount to help especially our churches and schools in developing countries. For examples, the special offer for the new 2000 LUMENS PROJECTOR CP-X250 IS ONLY \$1095.00, instead of the previous SDA price of \$1995.00. See the details at the end of this newsletter or call me at 269-471-2915

9. SPECIAL OFFER ON NEW TOSHIBA LAPTOP TECRA A8 released on June 28, 2006. See details at the end.

10. REMOTE PRESENTER: Special offer on the smallest and most powerful REMOTE powerpoint presenter by Honeywell. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

“The Pre-Advent Judgment - Part II”

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In the first part of this Bible study we traced the concept of the Pre-Advent Judgment in the teachings of Jesus, Paul, Hebrews, Daniel, and Revelation. In the second part of this study we examine the following three important aspects of the final judgment:

1. The Post-Advent Phase of the Final Judgment
2. The Outcome of the Final Judgment
3. The Theological Significance of the Final Judgment

If your time is limited, I would advice you to skip the first two parts and go directly to the last part of this study, which reflects on the practical

and existential implications of the Doctrine of the Pre-Advent Judgment for our Christian life today. Chances are tht you will enjoy the last part of this Bible study, more than the first and second parts.

THE POST-ADVENT PHASE OF THE FINAL JUDGMENT

The Fact of a Post-Advent Judgment

The Testimony of Christ. Several Scriptural passages clearly attest that a judgment will be conducted by the redeemed after Christ's Return. Christ promised to His followers that "in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt 19:28).

The number twelve, which is used in this verse to refer both to thrones and to tribes, must not be understood as referring exclusively to the twelve disciples judging only the twelve literal tribes of Israel, but rather inclusively to all Christ's followers judging all the unsaved. This interpretation is supported both by the symbolic meaning of the number twelve, which stands for the totality of God's people, and by other passages to be considered below which speak inclusively of all the redeemed participating in the judgment of all the unsaved.

The Testimony of Paul. In rebuking the Corinthians for taking fellow-believers to court, Paul makes this startling statement: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, matters pertaining to this life!" (1 Cor 6:2-3).

Three points in this statement deserve attention. First Paul's rhetorical question ("Do you not know . . . ?") implies that it was a *well-known fact* that the saints "will judge the world." Thus the doctrine of the redeemed participating in a Post-Advent judgment process is viewed by Paul as a well-known and established fact.

Second, "the saints will judge *the world*." Obviously "the world" must be the world of the unsaved, otherwise the saints would be judging

themselves. The fact that the “saints” are doing the judging implies that they themselves have already been judged in the Pre-Advent judgment which has granted them admission into God’s kingdom.

Third, the saints will judge also the “*angels.*” The reference here must be to the fallen angels whom, according to Peter, God has “kept until the judgment” (2 Pet 2:4; cf. Jude 6). In summary, according to Paul, the resurrected saints will participate in a Post-Advent judgment process that will examine the cases of both the unsaved human beings and the fallen angels.

The Testimony of John. John the Revelator corroborates and elaborates the above testimonies in his description of the millennial reign of the saints: “Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection!” (Rev 20:4-6).

This passage informs us first of all that a work of judgment is committed to redeemed persons. The identity of these people has been disputed. Many interpreters limit them to the “martyrs” who have died “for their testimony to Jesus.” The language in Greek, however, suggests two groups, as correctly translated by the NIV: “I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus” (Rev 20:4).

In other words, John envisaged two groups: one larger group of all the saints to whom judgment was given and then a smaller group—the martyrs—who are singled out for special mention. This interpretation harmonizes also with Christ’s promise found in Revelation that *all* His followers would share in His throne (Rev 3:21; 2:26; 5:9-10; cf. Matt 19:28; 1 Cor 6:2).

This passage tells us also that the saints will begin their work of judgment after they come to life at the time of the first resurrection. The latter is differentiated from the resurrection of “the rest of the dead” who come to life a thousand years later to be destroyed in the lake of fire. The time of the first resurrection is the Second Advent of Christ, which is symbolically portrayed in the preceding narrative through the imagery of a dazzling rider on a white horse coming with the armies of heaven (Rev 19:11-16).

The outcome of Christ’s Coming is the destruction of the beast, the false prophet, and the wicked, and the chaining of Satan (Rev 19:17 to 20:3). In the context of these events which transpire at Christ’s coming, John sees the enthronement of the saints who begin a work of judgment. The above testimonies of Jesus, Paul, and John make it abundantly clear that there is a Post-Advent phase of the final judgment which is conducted by the resurrected saints.

The Scope and the Basis of the Post-Advent Judgment

The Scope. The Post-Advent judgment will include all the unbelievers and fallen angels who ever existed. This total inclusiveness is expressed in a variety of ways. We noted that Jesus said that the judgment will include “the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt 19:28). Paul speaks of the saints judging “the world” and “angels” (1 Cor 6:2-3). John expresses this inclusiveness in a most dramatic way: “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened . . . And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done” (Rev 20:12-13).

No matter how important (“great”) or unimportant (“small”) a person may have been, no one will be immune from the final judgment. No matter how a person died, he will be brought to life to appear before the judgment seat of God. Contrary to the prevailing notion that only those who died on dry land would rise from the dead, John says that even those who drowned and were lost in the bottom of the sea will be revived to stand before God in judgment. In this final judgment are included not only impenitent human beings, but also “the devil and his angels” (Matt 25:41; cf. Rev 20:10).

The Basis. The judgment is conducted on the basis of evidences supplied both by the record contained in the books of the deeds and by the record found in the book of life. These two kinds of books are mentioned in Revelation. The first of these apparently contains the record of human deeds: “And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done” (Rev 20:12). The parallelism suggests that the content of the books is the record of “what they had done.” We have seen that the idea of the judgment based on the records of people’s deeds is common in the Scripture. “The court sat in judgment,” says Daniel, “and the books were opened” (Dan 7:10).

Earlier we have shown that there is no conflict between judgment according to works and justification by faith apart from works because the works that save are those that derive from an active, working faith. By the same token, the works that will condemn people are the evil deeds that derive from unfaithfulness to God.

The concept of a record kept by God of each person’s deeds suggests that each person is writing his or her own destiny. Through the life we daily live, we are acquiring a record that will bring us either shame or honor in the final judgment. In a sense it is not so much God judging each person as it is each person writing his or her own final judgment.

The Purpose. The other book is called “the book of life”: “Also another book was opened, which is the book of life . . . and if any one’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:12, 15). This is the book which contains the names of all those who have believed in Christ. Both the Old and New Testaments often speak of the book including all the names of the righteous (Ex 32:32-33; Dan 12:1; Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 13:8; 21:27).

The relationship between the books of deeds and the book of life is not clear. Austin M. Farrer aptly suggests that those whose names are missing from the book of life are given the chance to understand the reason by checking the books containing the record of their lives.

It seems plausible that this verification is also part of the judgment process performed by the saints. As stated at the introduction of this

chapter, there will be surprises in God's Kingdom as some of the respected "saints" will be absent and some of the reputed "sinners" will be present. The book of deeds will explain why some names are present while others are absent from the book of life. Thus an important function of the Post-Advent judgment, like that of the Pre-Advent judgment, is to enable moral beings fully to understand and accept the justice of God's judgments.

The Relationship Between the Pre-Advent and the Post-Advent Judgment

Similarities. A comparison between the Pre-Advent and the Post-Advent phases of the final judgment suggests several similarities and some differences. There is a conceptual similarity between the description of the Pre-Advent judgment found in Daniel 7 and that of the Post-Advent judgment found in Revelation 20. George Eldon Ladd notes, for example, that in both passages are mentioned the seeing of thrones, the setting of a judgment, the presence of many beings and the reception of the Kingdom by the saints. To these can be added the opening of books and the destruction of God's opponent (Little Horn—Satan).

There is also a functional similarity. Both the Pre-Advent and Post-Advent judgments are a judicial process that precedes God's executive act of granting final rewards or punishments. Both are designed to enable moral intelligences to evaluate and accept the justice of God's judgment in saving some and condemning others. Both decide eternal destinies of intelligent, moral beings.

Differences. There are also some differences. While the Pre-Advent judgment is held in the presence of unfallen heavenly beings, the Post-Advent judgment is conducted before saved human beings. While the former reveals God's justice in saving believers, the latter reveals His justice in punishing unbelievers. While the former results in Christ's Coming to grant eternal life to the righteous, the latter terminates with the eternal destruction of the wicked.

THE OUTCOME OF THE FINAL JUDGMENT

Two Outcomes

Two Resurrections. In the preceding study of the Pre-Advent, the Advent and the Post-Advent phases of the final judgment, mention has already been made of its two outcomes: eternal life for the saved and eternal death for the unsaved. This truth is expressed by Christ in a most simple and emphatic way in John 5:28-29: “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (NIV). In this statement, the two resurrections, one to life and the other to condemnation, are presented by Christ as one event because His concern was to emphasize their ultimate outcome rather than the sequence or the manner of their occurrence.

John the Revelator, however, clarifies that there is a millennial time gap between the resurrection of the “blessed and holy” (20:6) which takes place at the time of Christ’s Coming, and the resurrection of “the rest of the dead” which occurs a thousand years later (20:5). The first resurrection is the outcome of the Pre-Advent judgment which concerns primarily the saved, and the second resurrection is the result of the Post-Advent judgment which regards the unsaved.

Disagreement on the Nature of the Punishment. There is a general consensus among Christians regarding the reward of eternal life that Christ will grant to His followers at His Advent judgment. A marked disagreement exists, however, regarding the nature of the punishment that will be meted out upon the wicked. Three different views are held today regarding God’s final judgment of the wicked. These are known as *universalism*, *eternal punishment*, and *annihilationism*. Brief consideration will now be given to each of them.

Universalism

Definition. Universalism is the belief that ultimately God will succeed in bringing every human being to salvation and eternal life so that no one in fact will be condemned in the final judgment either to eternal

torment or annihilation. This belief was first suggested by Origen in the third century and it has gained steady support in modern times, especially through the writing of such men as Friedrich Schleiermacher, C. F. D. Moule, J. A. T. Robinson, Michael Paternoster, Michael Perry, and John Hick. The arguments presented by these and other writers in support of universalism are both theological and philosophical.

Theological Arguments. Theologically, appeal is made to “universalist passages” (1 Tim 2:4; 4:10; Col 1:20; Rom 5:18; 11:32; Eph 1:10; 1 Cor 15:22) which seem to offer hope of universal salvation. On the basis of these texts, universalists argue that if all human beings are not ultimately saved, then God’s will for “all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4) would be frustrated and defeated. Only through the salvation of all human beings can God demonstrate the triumph of His infinitely patient love.

Philosophical Reasons. Philosophically, universalists find it intolerable that a loving God would allow millions of persons to suffer *everlasting* torment for sins committed within a span of a few years. Jacques Ellul articulates this view admirably, asking the following probing questions: “Have we not seen the impossibility of considering that the New Creation, that admirable symphony of love, could exist *beside* the world of wrath? Is God still double-faced: a visage of love turned toward his celestial Jerusalem and a visage of wrath turned toward this ‘hell’? Are then the peace and joy of God complete, since he continues as a God of wrath and of fulmination? Could Paradise be what Romain Gary has so marvelously described in *Tulipe*, when he said that the trouble is not the concentration camp but ‘the very peaceable, very happy little village *beside* the camp’—the little village alongside, where people were undisturbed while millions died atrociously in the camp.”

Purgatorial Process. Furthermore, universalists argue that it is unthinkable that in the final judgment God would condemn to eternal torment the countless millions of non-Christians who have not responded to Christ because they have never heard the Christian message. The solution proposed by some universalists is that God will save all the unfaithful by enabling them to be gradually transformed through a “purgatorial” process after death.

This view represents a revision of the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory which limits this remedial process only to the souls of the faithful. The universalists extend this privilege also to the souls of the *unfaithful*. Thus beyond death, God continues to draw all the unsaved to Himself until ultimately all will respond to His love and so rejoice in His presence for all eternity.

An Appealing View. No one can deny that the theological and philosophical arguments of universalism appeal to the Christian conscience. Any person who has deeply sensed God’s love longs to see God saving every person, and hates to think that God would be so vindictive as to punish millions of persons—especially those who have lived in ignorance—with eternal torments. Yet, our appreciation for the universalists’ concern to uphold the triumph of God’s love and to justly refute the unbiblical concept of a vindictive God who inflicts *eternal* suffering, must not blind us to the fact that this doctrine is a serious distortion of Biblical teaching.

Desire, not Fact. First of all, the “universalist passages” declare the *scope* of God’s universal saving *purpose*, but not the *fact* of universal salvation of every human being. For example, in Colossians 1:19-23, God’s plan “to reconcile to himself all things” is said to include the Colossian believers “*provided that you continue in the faith.*”

Similarly, in 1 Timothy 2:4, God’s *desire* for “all men to be saved” is expressed together with the *fact* of a final judgment that will bring “ruin and destruction” to the unfaithful (1 Tim 6:9-10; cf. 5:24; 4:8). God extends to all the provision of salvation, but He respects the freedom of those who reject His offer even though it causes Him utmost anguish.

Everlasting Torment. Second, the argument that God will ultimately save all because the doctrine of *everlasting* torment for the unsaved is impossible to accept, inasmuch as it negates any sense of divine justice and the very peace and joy of paradise, is a valid argument. However, such an argument, as will be shown below, rests upon an erroneous interpretation of the Biblical teaching regarding the nature of the final punishment of the wicked. Universal salvation cannot be right just because eternal suffering is wrong.

Remedial Punishment. Third, the notion of a remedial punishment or of gradual transformation after death is a notion totally foreign to the Scripture. The destiny of each person is firmly fixed at death. This principle is explicitly expressed by Christ in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-21). In Hebrews 9:27 also it is clearly stated that “it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment.” For the impenitent sinners “the prospect of judgment” is a “fearful” one because they will experience not universal salvation but “a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries” (Heb 10:26-27).

The Non-Christian. Fourth, regarding the challenge of those who had no opportunity to learn and to respond to the message of Christ, it is *not* necessary either to surrender the belief in salvation solely through Jesus Christ or to consign all the non-Christians to everlasting torment. We noted earlier that the less privileged may find salvation on the basis of their trusting response to what they have known of God.

Conclusion. Universalism, then, though attractive at first sight, is erroneous because it fails to recognize that God’s love for mankind is manifested not by glossing over sins, nor by limiting human freedom, but rather by providing salvation and freedom to accept it. This truth is aptly expressed in the best known text about God’s love and the danger involved in rejecting it: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Eternal Punishment

The Traditional View. Those Christians who reject the universalist view of the destiny of unbelievers generally hold to one of the following two alternative views: punishment of eternal suffering, or annihilation. The doctrine of eternal punishment is the traditional view that arose in early Christianity and has predominated throughout the centuries. Even today both Roman Catholicism and the major historic Protestant Churches generally hold the view of the eternal punishment of the unsaved.

Essentially, this view maintains that those who are condemned in the final judgment will suffer eternal punishment. It is alleged that the suffer-

ing will be both privative (*poena damni*) and positive (*poena sensus*). The former is the eternal separation and isolation from the presence of God, the latter is the eternal, unimaginable pain caused by both inner tortures of despair and external torments by fire, demons, etc.

The Basis of Eternal Punishment. The belief in eternal punishment rests on three basic arguments: (1) the belief in the unconditional immortality of the soul which presupposes eternal survival after death; (2) the assumption that divine justice requires that the sins of a moment must be punished eternally in the next life because sin causes eternal consequences that cannot be undone; and (3) the literal interpretation of those Biblical references which speak of “eternal punishment” (Matt 25:46), “eternal fire” (Matt 18:8; 25:41; Jude 7), and “eternal destruction” (2 Thess 1:9); “the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever” (Rev 14:11; cf. 19:3; 20:10). An evaluation of these arguments will follow immediately in conjunction with the presentation of the third view: annihilationism.

Eternal Annihilation

Definition. Annihilationism denies the doctrine of eternal suffering, maintaining instead that the Scripture teaches the eternal annihilation or permanent destruction of the wicked, Satan, and fallen angels. The annihilation of the wicked was already taught by some early Church Fathers and by the Socinians in the sixteenth century. It was, however, only in the mid-nineteenth century that this view began to gain ground.

Seventh-day Adventists are generally regarded as the chief exponents of this doctrine, though other churches share the same belief. In recent times, numerous scholars—influenced perhaps by Oscar Cullmann’s booklet *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?*—have adopted some forms of annihilationism. Stephen H. Travis, for example, in his recent book *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus*, admits: “If pressed [between eternal punishment and annihilationism], I must myself opt for the latter.”

Two Different Forms. This doctrine takes at least two different forms. According to some the annihilation of unbelievers takes place at the moment of their death by ceasing to exist. According to Seventh-day

Adventists, however, the eternal annihilation of the unsaved will take place at the end of the Post-Advent phase of the final judgment (end of millennium). At that time the unrighteous dead will be resurrected and after a period of punitive suffering, they will be consumed and thus cease to exist.

The Basis of Annihilationism. The belief in the annihilation of unbelievers at the final judgment is based on at least four major Biblical and philosophical reasons. First, the Bible does not teach that human beings possess immortal souls which continue to exist independently after the death of the body. This belief derives from Greek anthropology (nature of man) according to which the human soul is naturally and inherently immortal and thus it lives on independently after the body's death. This philosophical dualism has given rise to the Christian doctrine of eternal suffering. At death, the souls of unbelievers allegedly depart from the body to be cast into the fiery Hell to suffer eternal torment, while the souls of believers are ushered into the beatitude of Paradise.

Such a view ultimately makes the Second Advent, the resurrection, and the final judgment unnecessary because at death each human being already receives eternal punishment or eternal life. This view also explains why the most confused chapters of Catholic and Protestant theological manuals are the final chapters dealing with the resurrection and the final judgment. The purpose of these events is far from clear because their outcome has already been largely anticipated at the death of each person.

Conditional Immortality. Biblical anthropology perceives man as a psychosomatic unity, that is to say, a unity of body and soul which excludes the independent survival of the soul after death. The only life after death is the resurrection of the whole person. This resurrection is presented in the Scripture, not as the reunion between disembodied souls and resurrected bodies, but as the restoration to life of the whole person of "those who are asleep" or "the dead in Christ" (1 Thess 4:13, 16).

The New Testament teaches that God "alone has immortality" (1 Tim 6:16). Human beings are "conditionally immortal," that is to say, they have the possibility of receiving the *gift* of immortality at the Parousia, but do not possess such a gift as a natural endowment. What this means is that the only way unbelievers could be made to suffer eternally would

be if God would first resurrect them immortal at the time of their final judgment and then inflict upon them an everlasting suffering. Nowhere does the Scripture suggest that the unrighteous dead will be resurrected immortal so that they may experience the punishment of eternal suffering.

Images of Permanent Destruction. Second, the Biblical images used to describe the fate of the wicked such as “fire” (Matt 25:41; 3:12; 5:22; 2 Pet 3:10-12; Rev 20:10, 14, 15), “destruction” or “perish” (Matt 10:28; Luke 13:3; John 3:16; 10:28; Phil 3:19; 2 Thess 1:9) and “death” (John 5:24; 8:51; Rom 6:23; Heb 2:14-15; James 1:15; Rev 2:11; 20:14; 21:8), are images which clearly suggest annihilation rather than a continuous form of conscious existence.

It is noteworthy that Revelation uses four times the phrase “second death” (Rev 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8) to emphasize the final, permanent death of the wicked from which there is no return. It is said, for example, that the lot of the wicked “shall be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev 21:8).

The phrase “second death” is used frequently in the Targum—which is the Aramaic translation and interpretation of the Old Testament—to refer to the final irreversible death of the wicked. For example, a Targum on Deuteronomy 33:6 reads: “Let Reuben live in this world and die not in the second death in which death the wicked die in the world to come.”

Another Targum on Isaiah 65:6 is strikingly similar to Revelation 20:14 and 21:8. Speaking of the faithless Jews, it says: “Their punishment shall be in Gehenna where fire burns all the day . . . I will deliver their body to the second death.” These and similar examples from nonbiblical literature suggest that the phrase “second death” in Revelation means the final, irreversible cessation of existence of the wicked.

The Meaning of “Eternal.” Third, the New Testament references to “eternal punishment” (Matt 25:46), “eternal destruction” (2 Thess 1:9), “eternal fire” (Matt 25:41; Jude 7), and “eternal judgment” (Heb 6:2), do not necessarily mean a process that goes on forever. “Eternal” often refers to the *permanence of the result* rather than the *continuation of a*

process. The English words “eternal,” “everlasting,” and “forever,” are used interchangeably to translate the Greek term *aionos* which comes from *aion* meaning literally “lasting for an age.”

The actual duration of *aionos* is determined by the context. For example, the fire by which the wicked are punished is said to be “eternal” (Matt 18:8; 25:41) or “unquenchable” (Matt 3:12). This can hardly mean that the wicked will be agonizing forever in the midst of inextinguishable fire. The latter is clear from Jude 7, which says that Sodom and Gomorrah suffered “a punishment of eternal fire.” Here “eternal—*aionou*” obviously means not never-ending but complete and permanent.

The same is true of the “eternal fire” that will punish the wicked. It is eternal in the sense that it will burn up completely and forever the last vestiges of sin and sinners. This is clearly indicated by the fact that the lake of fire is explicitly called “the second death” (Rev 20:14; 21:8), because, as noted earlier, it causes final, radical, and irreversible extinction of life.

The Context of “Eternal.” Following the principle stated above, the punishment of “eternal destruction” suffered by the wicked (2 Thess 1:9) can not signify a *process* that goes on forever but an act which brings about permanent *results*. Some reason that “if the word ‘eternal’ means without end when applied to the future blessedness of believers, it must follow, unless clear evidence is given to the contrary, that this word also means without end when used to describe the future punishment of the lost.”

Such reasoning fails to recognize that what determines the meaning of “eternal” is the object being qualified. If the object is the life granted by God to believers (John 3:16), then the word “eternal” obviously means “unending, everlasting,” because the Scripture tells us that the “mortal nature” of believers will be made “immortal” by Christ at His Coming (1 Cor 15:53).

On the other hand, if the object being qualified is the “punishment” or “destruction” of the lost, then “eternal” can only mean “permanent, total, final,” because nowhere does the Scripture teach that the wicked will

be resurrected immortal to be able to suffer forever. Eternal punishment requires either the natural possession of an immortal nature, or the divine bestowal of an immortal nature at the time the punishment is inflicted. Nowhere does the Scripture teach that either of these conditions exists.

A Misrepresentation of Divine Justice. Fourth, eternal torment serves only the purpose of misrepresenting divine justice by making God appear a vindictive Being inflicting eternal agony upon those who sinned for the temporary duration of their lives. Some reason that if the wicked were to be punished by annihilation, “it would be a happy relief from punishment and therefore no punishment at all.”²⁴ Such reasoning is appalling, to say the least, since it implies that the only just punishment that God can inflict upon the unrighteous is the one that will torment them eternally.

It is hard to believe that divine justice can be satisfied only by inflicting a punishment of eternal torment. The human sense of justice regards the death penalty as the most severe form of punishment that can be imposed for capital offenses. There is no reason to believe that the divine sense of justice should be more exacting by demanding more than the actual annihilation of the unrighteous. This is not a denial of the principle of degrees of accountability which, as noted earlier, will determine the “gradation” of the suffering of the lost. The punitive suffering, however, will not last forever but will terminate with the annihilation of the lost.

Eternal Cosmic Dualism. Fifth, eternal torment presupposes an eternal existence of a cosmic dualism. Heaven and hell, happiness and pain, good and evil, would continue to exist forever alongside each other. It is impossible to reconcile this view with the prophetic vision of the new world where there shall be no more “mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4). How could crying and pain be forgotten if the agony and anguish of the lost were at sight distance, as in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).

The presence of countless millions forever suffering excruciating torment, even if it were in the camp of the unsaved, could only serve to destroy the peace and happiness of the new world. Sinners would remain an eternal reality in God's universe and God would never be "everything to every one" (1 Cor 15:28).

In the light of the above considerations we conclude that the outcome of the final judgment is not universal salvation for all, nor eternal punishment for the unsaved, but eternal life for the righteous and permanent annihilation for the unrighteous. This view provides a consistent interpretation of the Biblical references to the final judgment, and enhances our appreciation for God's justice and mercy.

THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FINAL JUDGMENT

The study of the various aspects, phases, and outcome of the final judgment raises questions on its overall significance. What does this doctrine of the final judgment tell us about God's nature, His relationship to the universe, the outcome of the conflict between good and evil, the value of human life and actions, our attitude toward God, and our view of ourselves? We will attempt to answer questions such as these by considering four major theological implications of the doctrine of the final judgment.

A Transcendent Moral Order

Security to our World. The final judgment points first of all to the existence of a transcendent moral order in the universe. It tells us that there is a supreme Moral Arbiter in this universe who is working out His eternal purposes. This message has tremendous significance in our time when the world seems out of control.

At a time when disorder, hate, immorality, wars, and senseless destruction of human life and property prevail, the message of the judgment reassures us that the eternal destiny of each individual and of the world as a whole is not in the hands of some mad, blind forces, but in the hands of

our Almighty God. “He’s got the whole world in His Hands.” The scroll of human destiny rests safely in the hands of the Lamb (Rev 5:7).

The judgment conducted around God’s throne, in the presence of myriads of beings and on the basis of a perfect record of each individual, tells us that there is a moral order governing this universe, an order to which each individual is ultimately accountable. Those who think they have fooled everybody and every system will be surprised to discover that they never fooled God. The final judgment will disclose all their deeds and punish them accordingly.

Meaning to Human Existence. By pointing to a moral order that governs the universe, the doctrine of the final judgment gives meaning to our human existence. To be truly human means to express moral sensitivity, moral responsibility, and moral choices. This would not be possible if a moral order did not exist.

It would be frightening to live in a world where there was a total breakdown of the moral and civil order, where everyone was a law unto himself. The final judgment constantly reminds us that we cannot flaunt God’s moral principles with impunity because “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body” (2 Cor 5:10).

The reality of the moral order attested by the final judgment makes all our actions, decisions, and choices significant because they have both immediate and ultimate consequences. The violation of moral principles cannot be ignored or taken lightly, because it represents an act of rebellion against God, the Moral Ruler of the universe. This rebellion results in separation from our only Source of being (Is 59:2) and in a process of self-destruction. The final judgment reveals God’s concern to terminate destructive rebellion in order to restore eternal security to the universe.

Substance to our Faith. The final judgment challenges us to substantiate our faith in God not only through words but also through deeds. It reminds us that our relation to God, the Moral Ruler of the Universe, is based not merely on the profession but on the practice of our faith. At the final judgment, Christ will invite into His kingdom “not every one

who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ . . . but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt 7:21).

“Works” are the criteria of the final judgment because, as noted earlier, they substantiate faith. Salvation is a divine gift that brings upon us a divine claim “to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:12-13).

Seriousness to our Living. All of this means that the way we live our daily life is most important. The final judgment gives seriousness to our daily living. Our day-by-day round of thoughts, words, deeds, and attitudes counts for eternity. When the records will be examined in the final judgment, daily living will reveal what kind of persons we have been. Have we lived self-centered lives ignoring God’s moral principles, or God-centered lives reflecting His moral values?

Mankind needs to hear the message of the final judgment. When governor Felix invited Paul to speak to him, the Apostle used the opportunity to talk not about the social unrest in Palestine or the political situation in the Empire, but rather “about justice and self-control and future judgment” (Acts 24:25).

The three are interrelated because it is the final judgment that challenges a person to live justly and temperately. “Felix was alarmed” by such a challenge, but he chose to ignore it. Many today, like Felix, would rather not hear about the final judgment, preferring to live under the false assumption that they will never have to give account for their immoral and intemperate behavior.

Sobering Effect on Living. One day I asked a Capuchin monk—a classmate at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome—why some of their rosaries had a little skull attached to them. He replied: “To remind us constantly of death. When we think about death we are less apt to sin.” In Catholic theology, death is in a sense the time of judgment because it is at that moment that each person receives the eternal reward or punishment.

We disagree with the Catholic timing of the final judgment, but we wholeheartedly agree with the view that the thought of judgment can have a sobering effect on our living. Perhaps, instead of carrying a skull, we may wish to hang in a visible place the motto: “Remember the Final Judgment!” Such an awareness can constantly remind us of the seriousness of our living.

A Revelation of Individual Worth

God Views Each Person as Important. The fact that the apocalyptic description of the Pre-Advent and Post-Advent judgment mentions “books” where our “names,” thoughts, attitudes, and actions are recorded indicates that God places great value on each individual person. In a society where people are often regarded as cogs in a machine, numbers in a computer, it is reassuring to know that God places a transcendent significance on our personal identity. He has written the name of each believer “before the foundation of the world in the book of life” (Rev 13:8).

A name in the Scripture often represents the character and personality of the person it designates (Ex 6:3; Acts 1:15; Rev 3:4). This means that God knows us not merely by our first name or family name, but He knows us as a total person and preserves a perfect record of the totality of our personality. In the sight of God, the meaning and destiny of our life is determined not by our church affiliation, our family lineage, or our racial belonging, but by the values and decisions which characterize our personality.

God Views Each Action as Important. The importance which God attaches to each person extends to the single decisions and actions. The final judgement teaches us that nothing we do is worthless or inconsequential in the sight of God. Even the “careless word” (Matt 12:36) is considered in the investigative phase of the final judgment. A reason is that careless, thoughtless talk is often a most accurate reflection of our inner self. Moreover, “idle talk” may sometimes have even a greater impact on others than “serious talk.” Thus, every thought, word, and action is potentially determinative of our destiny.

Moral Worth to Living. The far-reaching inclusiveness of the final judgment is awesome. Yet at the same time the thought that all we do, think, and say matters in God's sight makes our life worth living. The fact that even the most insignificant action, such as the giving of a cup of cold water (Matt 10:42; 25:35-40), will not go unnoticed gives a sense of dignity, of importance to all that we do, think, and say.

Sometimes it seems that even our highest motives and best efforts are misunderstood. The judgment gives us courage to face human misunderstanding and criticism, reassuring us that God understands and takes notice of all our overt and covert actions. Nothing is ignored in the sight of God and everything will receive due consideration in the final judgment. In summary, to live without the consciousness of the final judgment means to be robbed of the sense of awfulness, grandeur, and moral worth this event gives to our life.

A Vindication of God's Justice and Mercy

The Biblical concept of the final judgment defined in this chapter raises some vital questions: Why does the Scripture speak of a final judgment process through which God terminates the problem of sin in this universe? Does God need a judicial process to gather information necessary to execute a just universal judgment? Why does the Scripture mention heavenly and human beings participating in a judicial process regarding the eternal destiny of moral beings? Seventh-day Adventists believe that the answers given to these questions are important because they can help us understand and appreciate God's final solution to the present conflict between good and evil.

God is not Seeking New Information. In the first place, it must be understood that the investigative phases of the final judgment are not intended to supply God with information which He does not already have. After all, God is the Author of the books which are used in His final judgment. The heavenly records represent not the acquisition on the part of God of new knowledge, but the revelation of old knowledge to moral intelligences.

One of the most telling evidences that God is not seeking new information through an investigative judgment is the Post-Advent judgment of the

unsaved. This judgment, we noted, is designed to enable redeemed humanity to understand more fully God's justice in not saving the unrighteous. The very fact that the lost have no part in the first resurrection of believers (Rev 20:5) indicates that God has already decided their destiny.

Yet, before their final destruction at the end of the millennium, God offers redeemed humanity the opportunity to examine the record of their lives to understand the justice of His judgment. It is noteworthy that both before rewarding believers with eternal salvation and before punishing unbelievers with eternal destruction, God invites His moral creatures to evaluate the basis of His judgment.

God is not on Trial. In a sense the ones who are "on trial" in the investigative phases of the final judgment are not the saved or the unsaved, but God Himself. It is God's justice and mercy manifested in His decision to save some and condemn others that is being judged by moral intelligences. But why should God submit His judgments to the scrutiny of His created beings? Obviously, God is not morally obligated to go "on trial" before the universe. First, He has no moral debt toward His creatures. He has no confession to make as to possible defects in the making of the universe or of human beings. Nor has God any admission to make as to possible unfairness in His administration of the universe.

Second, God has no external obligation because He is the Sovereign Ruler who has freely created and redeemed His creatures. As He has freely created the universe, so He could freely dissolve it, starting all over again, without being in default toward anyone. Third, even if heavenly or human beings should find some fault in God's creation or administration—an absurd hypothesis—they could not dethrone God and enthrone another God in His place.

Whether the universe accepts or rejects the justice of God's government and judgments, this does not affect His Sovereignty. God would still be the Sovereign Ruler of the Universe. What is in jeopardy is not

the eternal security of God but that of moral beings in the universe. Thus, fundamentally the one who is on trial is not God, but the moral universe. If the latter as a jury should find God, the Defendant, guilty of injustice, it is the jury and not the Defendant that would face a decisive punishment.

God is on Trial. There is a sense, however, in which God is “on trial” before His moral universe. For several reasons God is willing and expected to give an account of His creative, redemptive, and punitive activities. First, God has chosen to operate on the principle of freedom of choice. God has granted His moral creatures the freedom to choose between His love and justice and Satan’s hostility and injustice. Not only has God granted this freedom of choice, but He also invites His moral beings to exercise this freedom by examining His moral principles and His judicial actions.

Second, God has chosen to operate on the principle of love and not of coercion. It was love that motivated God to create a universe of free moral beings who could be the recipients of His love and who could in perfect freedom reciprocate His love. It was love that motivated God to redeem mankind by entering into the limitations, suffering, and death of human flesh in order to provide moral beings with the greatest incentive to choose His love rather than Satan’s hostility. It is love that motivates God to submit the records of His judgments to the scrutiny of the moral universe, so that His love and justice may be fully understood and accepted.

Judgment Deepens Trust in God. Love can render this universe eternally secure only if it becomes grounded on unquestionable *trust*.. An attitude of trust and loyalty cannot be demanded, it must be freely given. It is only when we have had occasion to see the integrity, fairness, and trustworthiness of a person that we develop an attitude of trust toward such a person. A vital function of the Pre- and Post-Advent judgment is to provide an opportunity to the moral beings of the universe to deepen their trust in God by verifying, validating, and vindicating the justice of His judgments.

Questions About God's Justice. The presence of evil and injustice on this planet raises questions regarding the validity of God's government. Why do innocent people suffer? Why is "truth" so often trampled down? How long will injustice, wickedness, and immorality prevail? Can God be just in saving some and destroying others? Questions such as these are raised in the Scripture. The Psalmist admits that it was "a wearisome task" for him to understand why the wicked "have no pangs" and "are not in trouble as other men are" (Ps 73:16, 4, 5). These questions bothered him "until," he says, "I went into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end" (Ps 73:17).

At the sanctuary, the Psalmist "perceived the end" of the wicked through the typological services performed there. He saw God offering atonement and salvation to penitent sinners and condemnation and destruction to the wicked. On the Day of Atonement, God judged penitent sinners by offering them full cleansing and restoration to covenant relationship while He judged impenitent sinners by punishing them with permanent destruction (Lev 23:29).

A similar picture is found in Daniel 8 where a heavenly being asks, "For how long is the vision concerning the continual burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled under foot?" (Dan 8:13). God's answer in this case is that after a prophetic period of 2300 days, the sanctuary, which is the center of God's redemptive/judicial activity, will be "restored," or "vindicated" or "made right" (Dan 8:14).

In Revelation also, those who "had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne," are figuratively seen as asking with a loud, crying voice: "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?" (Rev 6:9-10). God's answer to these martyrs is to wait "a little longer" (Rev 6:11).

A Vindication of God's Justice. God's final answer to all the above troubling questions is given especially through the evaluative and executive phases of His final judgment. We have seen how numerous Scriptural passages speak of God's inviting heavenly and human beings to participate

in an evaluative judgment in order to verify the fairness and justice of His decisions regarding the salvation or perdition of each human being.

This verification will ultimately result in a deeper trust in God and a vindication of His righteousness. This trust is expressed by the redeemed—represented in Revelation as standing beside a sea of glass—singing: “Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are they ways, O King of the ages! Who shall not fear and glorify they name, O Lord? For thou alone art holy. All nations shall come and worship thee, for they judgments have been revealed” (Rev 15:3-4).

It is noteworthy that the reason given for the universal acclamation of the greatness, justice, and truthfulness of God is the fact that His “judgments have been revealed” (Rev 15:4). Ellen G. White aptly comments in this regard: “Every question of truth and error in the long-standing controversy will then have been made plain. In the judgment of the universe, God will stand clear of blame for the existence or continuance of evil.”

A Vindication of God’s People. This revelation of the justice of God’s judgment is in a sense also a vindication of the redeemed. We have seen that in the vision of Daniel 7, the Ancient of Days is seen as pronouncing “judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom” (Dan 7:22, NIV). Similarly, John the Revelator sees a great multitude in heaven crying: “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgements are true and just; he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants” (Rev 19:1-2).

It is noteworthy that the vindication of God and of His people is followed by the announcement that the marriage of the Lamb to His bride is about to take place (Rev 19:7). The metaphor of a wedding feast is used by Jesus Himself to describe the perfect union to be established at His Second Advent between Himself and His followers (Matt 22:1-14; 25:1-13; Mark 2:19; cf. Is 54:5-6; Jer 31:32).

Final Celebration. Paul also likens the relationship between Christ and His church to that of a husband to his wife (Eph 5:25ff), but the actual wedding is viewed as a future event when the church is presented before Christ “in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27).

It is this eschatological celebration of the perfect union between Christ and His church that John sees as taking place after the judicial vindication of God and of His people. As God’s vindication of His people on the Day of Atonement closed with celebrations and every 49 years with the inauguration of the Jubilee Year—a symbol of the ultimate restoration—so the antitypical vindication of God and of His people closes with the “marriage” celebration between Christ and the church and the final restoration of this earth (Rev 21:1-8).

A Basis for Hope and Confidence

Solemnity and Joy. The Biblical view of the final judgment as the decisive and final triumph of God’s justice, manifested in the vindication and salvation of believers and in the condemnation and destruction of unbelievers, is an event to be anticipated with solemnity and joy. It is to be viewed with *solemnity* because it deals with the eternal destiny of moral beings which for the unrighteous will be eternal destruction. It is to be looked forward to with *joy* by believers because it represents for them their final vindication and salvation, the dawn of God’s New World rather than the doom of their life.

The Pre-Advent judgment does not destroy our joy and assurance of salvation because it is not a scheme or retribution, but a revelation of our standing before God as we are found to be in Christ. “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect?” asks Paul. “It is God who justifies; who is to condemn?” (Rom 8:33-34). As our records are opened in the Pre-Advent judgment, we have nothing to fear because our Mediator stands for us. Essentially, this judgment is the outworking of the message of the Gospel which contains the Good News that God not only justifies penitent sinners in this present life, but also vindicates them on the day of His judgment by giving them the reward of eternal life.

Confidence and Hope. The close connection between the Gospel and the final judgment is clearly expressed by Paul when he speaks of the “day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” (Rom 2:16). The judgment is according to the Gospel in the sense that it is part of the gracious provision of salvation through Jesus Christ who offers us both forgiveness of our sins in this present life and vindication of our forgiven sins in the final judgment. Thus the Christian can look forward to the final judgment, not with fear and despair but with confidence and hope.

John sees an evidence of the love of God being made perfect in us in the fact “that we may have confidence for the day of judgment” (1 John 4:17). This confidence rests on the assurance that Christ “is able to keep [us] from falling” in this present life and “to present [us] without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing” on the Day of His judgment (Jude 24). It is also based on the assurance that “God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love which you showed for his sake” (Heb 6:10).

Human beings easily forget the good deeds done by others, but God preserves a remarkable and trustworthy record of every good deed, including the giving of a drink to a stranger (Matt 25:35). Thus, for God’s people, the final judgment, especially its Pre-Advent evaluative phase, represents the revelation of their faith and love for Christ and their vindication before the angelic host. It represents the coming of better days when Christ will ultimately reveal the truth about them.

Conclusion

The doctrine of the final judgment enshrines many vital truths. It points to the existence of a transcendent moral order and of a Moral Ruler. This gives meaning and seriousness to our daily living. It reveals that God places a great value on each person as well as on each of our decisions and actions. This gives a sense of accountability and moral worth to our living. It reassures us that God operates on the principle of love and freedom and that ultimately all the moral universe will be given the opportunity fully to understand and accept the justice and mercy of God. The vindication of God’s justice will result in the vindication of His people.

The final judgment guarantees that the conflict between good and evil will not last forever, but will be terminated by God in a final and decisive way. It helps us overcome a self-centered type of religion by reminding us that our eternal destiny is linked to the cosmic vindication and triumph of God's love and justice which will guarantee the eternal security, peace, and harmony of this universe and its inhabitants. Lastly, the final judgment inspires us to live godly lives with joy, confidence, and hope while "awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

ENDNOTE

For the sake of brevity, the endnotes has been left out. Interested readers are welcome to contact me <sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com> for the complete version of this study, including the endnotes.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the months of August and September 2006. I wish to extend my personal, warm invitation to all who are able to attend one of the followings rallies.

AUGUST 11-12: AUGUSTA SDA CHURCH

Location:4301 Wheeler Road, Augusta, GA 30907

For information call Pastor Dale Tunnell at (706) 651-0412

AUGUST 18-19: LONDON - CROYDON SDA CHURCH

Location: 95 Selhurst Road, South Norwood, London SE25 6LH

For information call Pastor Brighton Kavaloh at (020) 8851 3383

AUGUST 25-26: LONDON - WOOD GREEN SDA CHURCH

Location: Northcott Avenue (Off Bounds Gree Road), London N22 7DB

For information call Pastor Keith Boldeau at 01923 460 968 or Elder Tristan Cuniah at 0207 539 5826

SEPTEMBER 15-16: CANADA - KENDALWOOD SDA CHURCH

Location: 300 Kendalwood Road, Whitby, Ontario L1N 2G3, Canada

For information call Pastor Hymers Wilson, at (905) 728-6459

SEPTEMBER 22-23: LOS ANGELES: RIDGECREST SDA CHURCH

Location: 555 West Las Flores Avenue, Ridgecrest, CA 93555

For information call Pastor John D Aiken at (760) 499-7475 or (760) 221-5448

SEPTEMBER 29-30: ORLANDO -ALTAMONTE SPRINGS SDA CHURCH

Location: 455 Mailand Avenue, Altamonte Springs, Florida 32701

For information call Pastor Ron Bentzinger at (407) 767-7522

ANNOUNCEMENTS OF SERVICES AND PRODUCTS

NEW RELEASES BY PROF. GRAEME BRADFORD

- * **The book *More than a Prophet***
- * **The CD/DVD album with Prof. Bradford's writings and live video lecture on Ellen White**

The book *More than a Prophet*

The book *More than a Prophet* was born out of the raging controversy over the credibility of Ellen White as an inspired writer. This timely book that can restore confidence in the prophetic ministry of Ellen White and help reclaim former Adventists who have left the church because of unresolved questions about Ellen White's writings.

With clear reasoning and compelling documentation, Prof. Bradford helps the reader to rediscover the TRUE Ellen White—a frail woman used by God in a mighty way, in spite of her limitations and personal problems. She has left a rich legacy not only for the Seventh-day Adventist Church but for the world at large.

The CD/DVD Album with Prof. Bradford's Publications and Video Recording

The CD-ROM Disk

The CD disk offers a searchable data base of most of Prof. Graeme Bradford published and unpublished writings. It includes also the latest book *More than a Prophet!* During the past 30 years, he has written books and articles on a wide variety of subjects such as occultism, near death experiences, Israel in Prophecy, expository preaching, kids and drugs, the Bible and Archeology, and endtime prophecies. His articles always offer a refreshing biblical perspective on current issues.

Until now Prof. Bradford's books and articles were available only in a printed form, often unavailable at local ABC stores. In view of my indebtedness to Prof. Bradford scholarship, I have offered to help him to place all of his books and articles on a CD album. This makes it possible with the ACROBAT global search, to locate immediately what he has written on biblical texts or current topics.

You will find in this collection a priceless resource to enrich your understanding and experience of biblical truths. You will especially appreciate his latest book *More than a Prophet*—a book that has been long overdue and will do much to restore confidence in the validity of Ellen White's prophetic ministry.

The DVD Video Recording

On June 20, a professional crew recorded Prof. Bradford's popular two hours powerpoint lecture on "More than a Prophet," at the Avondale College Media Center in Australia. With the help of 75 slides, he discusses in an open and objective ways the major issues related to the prophetic ministry of Ellen White.

This lectures clears the air of prevailing misconceptions about Ellen White which have caused thousands of Adventists to leave church. Listening to this dynamic, visual presentation will enhance your appreciation for the gift of prophecy manifested in the writings, preaching, and teachings of Ellen White.

SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY OFFER***MORE THAN A PROPHET***

1 copy of *More than a Prophet* for \$20.00 (instead of \$25.00), plus \$5.00 for mailing in the USA of \$10.00 for airmailing overseas.

2 copies of *More than a Prophet* for \$30.00 (instead of \$50.00), plus \$5 for mailing in the USA of \$10.00 for airmailing overseas.

10 copies of *More than a Prophet* for \$100.00 (instead of \$250.00), plus \$5 for mailing in the USA or \$20.00 for airmailing overseas.

30 copies of *More than a Prophet* for \$150.00 (instead of \$750.00), plus \$5 for mailing in the USA or \$20.00 for overseas surface mail.

Package of 30 copies of *More than a Prophet* and CD/DVD Album for \$170.00 (instead of \$850.00), plus \$5 for mailing in the USA or \$20.00 for overseas surface mail.

CD/DVD ALBUM WITH PROF. BRADFORD'S PUBLICATIONS AND VIDEO LECTURE

The Album contains both the CD disk with all Prof. Bradford's publications and the DVD disk with his two hours video lecture. The introductory offer is only \$50.00 (instead of \$100.00). Airmailing expenses are included to any foreign destination.

PACKAGE OFFER OF THE BOOK & THE CD/DVD ALBUM

The package of both one copy of *More than a Prophet* and one Album containing the CD disk with Prof. Bradford's writings and the DVD disk with his two hours video lecture for only \$70.00 (instead of \$125.00). Airmailing expenses are included to any foreign destination.

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SPECIAL OFFER ON THE NEW DVD ALBUM ON *THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST*

The DVD album consists of two disks which contain the live recording that was done at the Andrews University Towers Auditorium on Wednesday, February 1, 2006. The marathon lecture lasted over two hours and was delivered with the help of 175 powerpoint slides. The lecture was introduced by Prof. Jon Paulien and Prof. Ranko Stefanovich, two foremost Adventist experts on the book of Revelation.

You will be thrilled by this passionate lecture that will help you understand what the mark and number of the beast are all about. This prophecy is not about external markings, barcodes, biochips, or pope's titles, but rather about the internal control of the mind of every human being. It is a battle over who will people worship in the final showdown: the true God or Satan. This visual presentation will help you to see the role of the Sabbath in the battle over worship in the endtime showdown.

At the end of the second DVD disk, there is a separate powerpoint file with all the 195 slides and accompanying script. This should prove to be a valuable resource for evangelists, pastors, and anyone engaged in sharing the prophetic message of Revelation. They can use some of the stunning pictures for their own presentation.

How to Order the DVD Album

The special introductory offer on the DVD Album on *The Mark and Number of the Beast*, is only \$50.00, instead of \$100.00. The air-mailing expenses to any foreign country are included in the special price. You can order the DVD album in four different ways:

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(3) Email: By emailing your order to <sbacchiocchi@biblicalpherspectives.com>. Be sure to provide your postal address, credit card number, and expiration date.

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SPECIAL OFFER ON THE 5 ALBUMS CONTAINING ALL OF DR. BACCHIOCCHI'S PUBLICATIONS AND RECORDINGS

In occasion of the release of the new DVD album on *The Mark and Number of the Beast*, I am pleased to offer you **the complete package of all my DVD and CD recordings, consisting of 5 Albums, for only \$100.00**, instead of the regular price of \$500.00. This is a one-time incredible offer.

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CD-ROM WITH PROF. JON PAULIEN BOOKS & ARTICLES

Prof. Jon Paulien is one of the most respected Adventist scholars. Besides serving as the chairman of the New Testament at Andrews University Theological Seminary, he writes and lectures extensively in many parts of the world.

Until now Prof. Paulien books and articles were available only in a printed form, often unavailable at local ABC stores. In view of my indebtedness to Prof. Paulien's scholarship, I have offered to help him to place all of his books and articles on a CD disk. This makes it possible with the ACROBAT global search, to locate immediately what he has written on biblical texts or current topics.

The new CD-ROM, released on May 1, 2006, contains more than a dozen of books and scores of articles written by Prof. Paulien during the past 20 years of research. You will find in this collection a priceless resource to enrich your understanding and experience of biblical truths. Prof. Paulien examines fundamental biblical beliefs in a profound and yet popular way. He is a recognized expert on the book of Revelation. Several of his books will help you to unlock the secrets of Revelation.

The special introductory offer of the newly released CD-ROM ALBUM with all of Prof. Paulien books and articles is only \$35.00 instead

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SPECIAL OFFER ON PROF. JON PAULIEN'S 5 ALBUMS (60 CD DISKS), called *The Bible Explorer Series on Revelation*

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Prof. Paulien is rightly regarded inside and outside the Adventist community, as a foremost authority in Johannine literature, especially the book of Revelation. Students have told me that listening to his lectures, is a mind-opening experience. Personally I esteem Prof. Paulien as the leading Adventist authority on the prophetic books of the Bible.

If you wish that you could go back to school and seat in Prof. Paulien classes, I have good news for you. You do not need to worry about your age or your financial limitations. You do not even need to enroll at Andrews University and spend thousands of dollars of tuition to benefit from Prof. Paulien's instruction.

All what you need to do is simply to order his 120 lectures which have been professionally recorded and packaged in **FIVE ALBUMS, EACH CONTAINING 12 CD-ROMs, for a total of 60 CD disks.** The set is called *The Bible Explorer Series on Revelation* and takes you verse by verse through the whole book of Revelation. These lectures are

the equivalent of four Seminary courses (about \$2000.00 of tuition), yet they are presented in a way that lay people can understand. Each lecture concludes with spiritual lessons for everyday life.

To express my appreciation for the contribution that Prof. Paulien has made to the understanding of Revelation, I am promoting and distributing his *The Bible Explorer Series on Revelation* consisting of 5 albums with a total of 60 CD-ROMS, as a **free service without any commission**. I have offered my service to facilitate the purchase of this timely set of 120 lectures through the shopping cart at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/paulien/>

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