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CHRIST'S HEAVENLY SANCTUARY MINISTRY

The Adventist understanding of the heavenly sanctuary pertains to the church's one unique contribution to theology.

The fifth core belief affirmed by the Adventist Theological Society (ATS) as a teaching of Scripture and of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is as follows: "I affirm a real sanctuary in heaven and the pre-advent judgment of believers beginning in 1844, based upon the historicist view of prophecy and the year-day principle as taught in Scripture." This briefly summarizes Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Belief 24 and adds explicit reference to the

historicist interpretive approach, including recognition of the year-day principle, which makes it possible to identify 1844 A.D. as the date when the pre-advent judgment began.

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Importance of Pre-Advent Judgment

Outside the Seventh-day Adventist movement, some Christians accept the reality of the heavenly sanctuary, priestly mediation of Christ there, and a judgment of believers. However, the biblical teaching of a judgment that serves as a second, final phase of atonement through Christ's mediation in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary before His second coming, beginning in 1844 and continuing through to the present, is unique to Seventh-day Adventist understanding. In fact, this combination of Great Controversy and sanctuary themes comprises *the only unique contribution of Seventh-day Adventists to biblical theology*.

Many wish Adventists would abandon their distinctive pre-advent judgment view and be absorbed into the evangelical mainstream. But the importance of this sanctuary teaching goes far beyond the historical fact that it began the Adventist movement when some disappointed followers of William Miller realized the connection between Daniel 8:14 and the biblical teaching of a heavenly temple (Hebrews 8–9; Revelation 4–5, etc.). Understanding what Jesus is doing for us now during the final stage of atonement helps us to realize the imminence of His coming, to get in touch with Him, and to cooperate with His end-time mission for the world.

From Christ we receive the gift of

empowerment from the Holy Spirit (Joel 2; Acts 2) to proclaim the last gospel invitation during the time of the Creator's judgment (Rev. 14:6–12). The Spirit's power shows itself in lives transformed by love poured into hearts (Rom. 5:5), lives characterized by "love, joy, peace, . . ." (Gal. 5:22, 23, NIV) that bring healing to broken relationships (Mal. 4:5, 6). Just as the apostles received the Spirit at Pentecost when they looked by faith to Christ in heaven at the time of His priestly inauguration, end-time Christians are to receive the Spirit from Him where He is now in the heavenly holy of holies.

Locating ourselves in salvation history as living during the end-time judgment defines Adventist identity and the urgency of our interconnected teachings, such as the Second Coming of Christ (soon!), the seventh-day Sabbath (end-time pledge of allegiance to the Creator), and the non-immortality of the "soul"/life (needing resurrection and/or transformation at the Second Coming). Our end-time context depends upon the historicist approach to biblical apocalyptic prophecies, which prevailed among Christians for many centuries. *Historicism* refers to an interpretive approach that sees how the apocalyptic (meaning "revelatory") prophecies of Daniel present continuous overviews of history from the time of the prophet to the second coming of Christ (chapters 2, 7, 8, 11, 12).

Biblical Support for Pre-Advent Judgment and Historicism

There is solid biblical support for the interdependent concepts in the ATS statement regarding the pre-advent judgment and historicism.

A Real Heavenly Sanctuary. God has a real sanctuary/temple center of divine administration that has been in heaven since at least Old Testament times (Ps. 11:4). In this and other passages, “sanctuary” is not simply a symbol; nor does it refer to all of heaven. The sanctuary on earth was patterned according to the pre-existing heavenly temple (Ex. 25:9).

When Christ ascended to heaven after His resurrection, He was inaugurated as Priest to continue His work of atonement by distributing the benefits of His sacrificial death to those who believe (Heb. 4:14-16). This mediation is an essential part of Christ's atonement, just as ritual activities performed by an Israelite priest following slaughter of an animal victim were an integral part of the sacrificial process (Leviticus 1, 4).

Christ's sacrifice on earth and priestly mediation in the heavenly sanctuary, illuminated by the dynamic model of the ancient Israelite ritual system, show us how God saves people by extending mercy without compromising His justice, the other side of love (Ex. 34:6, 7). The biblical sanctuary services teach us a balanced view of atonement, which is both “legal” by removing our condemna-

tion (Lev. 4:31; 5:1, 6) and “experiential” by giving repentant sinners the experience of receiving God's transforming grace (Lev. 4:27-29).

Judgment of Believers. There is a phase of judgment concerning those who have had a connection with God through at least nominal belief in Him (Heb. 10:30). At the Old Testament sanctuary, a second and final stage of atonement on the Day of Atonement involved judgment between loyal and disloyal Israelites. Ritual purification of the sanctuary reaffirmed those who were loyal to God (16:29-31), but the disloyal received no benefit and were condemned (Lev. 23:29, 30).

Cleansing of the sanctuary, God's place of administration, represented His justification/vindication as Judge. This was necessary because He condemned the disloyal but had forgiven guilty people when they accepted sacrificial atonement throughout the year (Leviticus 4, 5), which a just judge normally should not do (Deut. 25:1; 1 Kings 8:32). Vindicating the Judge for having saved loyal people showed that He was right in having forgiven them. For the loyal, whose forgiveness and unhindered connection with God was reaffirmed, the judgment was good news.

Similarly, the end-time judgment in Daniel 7:9-14 benefits God's faithful people. In the overlapping parallel prophecy of Daniel 8, the same event is the ultimate, end-time

Day of Atonement in that it justifies/vindicates God's sanctuary (vs. 14). This event is good news for those who stay loyal to God.

The judgment is not to find out who has sinned. God doesn't need a judgment for that. Neither is it for for His own information because He already knows everything. The purpose of the judgment is to show the universe of God's created beings that His love (= justice + mercy) is not compromised when He saves the right people because Christ's sacrifice makes Him just when He justifies *those who believe* (Rom. 3:26). This means that they keep on believing, as shown by the fact that their faith works through love (Gal. 5:6). Works are used in the judgment (Eccl. 12:14) as evidence of faith.

Location of Judgment in Heavenly Sanctuary. The judgment of believers takes place in God's heavenly sanctuary, where One like a human being (Christ) comes to the divine "Ancient of Days" to receive His kingdom through a judgment that determines who His subjects will be (Dan. 7:9-14). Because the judgment is an end-time event, the sanctuary through which it is justified in Daniel 8:14 cannot be the earthly temple in Jerusalem, which was destroyed long ago (in 70 A.D.).

Judgment Before Christ's Second Coming. The judgment of believers occurs before Christ comes to earth again. Use of books/records (Dan.

7:10) indicates investigation or demonstration of evidence before announcement and execution of the verdict. Final destruction of God's human archenemy (symbolized as the "little horn" in Daniel 7-8), who opposes His rule and law, will come at Christ's second coming (Dan. 8:25). Therefore, the investigative/demonstrative phase of judgment must precede Christ's second coming.

Judgment Beginning in 1844, Shown by Historicist Year-Day Principle. Timing the pre-advent judgment more precisely, it begins in 1844 at the end of 2,300 years prophesied in Daniel 8:14. Historicism recognizes that Daniel includes some predictions of long time periods in which expressions for "days" represent years (8:14; 12:11-12). Though a year-day or day-year principle should not be applied indiscriminately, several factors support the possibility of "years" and require this meaning in these contexts. The following factors are most relevant to Daniel 8:14:

1. The Hebrew word for "days" can also mean "years" (1 Sam. 27:7).
2. Periods of years corresponding to the same number of days appear elsewhere in the Bible (Num. 14:34).
3. In Daniel 9:24-27, "seventy weeks" (NKJV) must be weeks of years, that is, 70 sabbatical year cycles of seven years each (compare Leviticus 25) = 490 years. They cannot be weeks of literal days because

the period covers too much history: It reaches from the Persian decree in 457 B.C. to restore Jerusalem to the Jews as their civil capital (Dan. 9:25) until the coming of the Messiah at the beginning of the 69th "week." Confirming that "weeks" are "years" and identifying Jesus as Messiah, He began His public ministry in 27 A.D. (Luke 3:1—15th year of Tiberius, following Jewish inclusive reckoning and with no zero year between B.C. and A.D.), 483 years after 457 B.C. This accurate fulfillment in the Roman period, after even the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes when preterists say Daniel was written, validates real predictive prophecy.

4. In Daniel 8:14, the 2,300 evenings-mornings (= 2,300 evenings and 2,300 mornings) are "days" that must represent 2,300 years: They cover the period of Daniel's "vision" (Dan. 8:13), which begins by symbolizing the Medo-Persian empire (vss. 1-4, 20), continues through the Greek/Macedonian domination by Alexander the Great and his successors (vss. 5-8, 21), and keeps going through the oppressive rule of a subsequent "little horn" power (vss. 9-12, 23-25). If the "days" were literal (= 6 and 1/3 literal years), Daniel would not have been so upset when he realized that only for this long would the 70-year domination of the Jews by foreign power be prolonged.

5. In Daniel 9:22-27, the angel Gabriel answers Daniel's distress over

the "vision" of 2,300 evenings-mornings in chapter 8 by explaining its first segment ("cut off"/ "determined"; 9:24) regarding the near future of the Jewish people, which lasts "seventy weeks." These are weeks of years, so the longer period of 2,300 to which they belong must also consist of years. Since the "seventy weeks" segment began in 457 B.C., the 2,300 began at the same time and lasted (with no zero year) until 1844 A.D.¹

We have found that interpretation of Daniel 8:14 in its context yields 1844 as the beginning of the end-time justifying of the heavenly sanctuary through the pre-advent judgment. Thus 1844 is not a self-standing doctrine based on a single text; it is one important detail regarding an event that is well-attested in Scripture. It is important for God's people to know when the judgment begins so that they can cooperate with Him (Rev. 14:6-12), just as the ancient Israelites needed to know when the Day of Atonement began so that they could participate (Lev. 16:29-31). □

¹ For more information on the meaning and timing of the pre-advent judgment, see Roy Gane, *Who's Afraid of the Judgment? The Good News About Christ's Work in the Heavenly Sanctuary* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 2006) and other works cited there.