

INVESTIGATING THE JUDGMENT

Revelation 11:15, 18-19¹

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If a ship sinks into the depths of the sea, is it gone forever? Many like to quote Micah 7:19 that says that when we confess our sins, the Lord promises to cast them into the depths of the sea. They ask, “Then why have an investigative judgment?”

But we have a problem here. Back in Micah’s day, if a ship sank into the ocean, it was goodbye forever. But now, no longer. It’s great business, diving into wrecks on the ocean floor. Even the Titanic has been disturbed in its resting place in the North Atlantic where it has lain since that April night in 1912.

No, casting our sins in the depths of the ocean might not be the end of them. That’s not good enough, now. The depths of the ocean are not an eternal resting place, even now. And when God recreates the earth anew, He will also clean up the oceans. Heaven won’t be what we want if the eternal ocean floor is forever littered with wrecks that remind us of this earth’s sinful, cruel past, any more than if ugly wrecked cars and burned out buildings will still cover the surface of the earth made new. Some day the hidden secrets of every “shipwreck” and downed passenger jet will be revealed. So, sins that are hidden, even from our knowledge, must be revealed. And for those who

¹ “Before Jehovah’s Awful Throne,” (82) “Have Thine Own Way, Lord.”

are ready for Jesus to return, that means that it must all come out in the open beforehand in a judgment before He returns. But that’s not bad news; it’s good news because the deeper is the knowledge of your sins, the deeper is your heart appreciation of His grace. And no one can be happy when Jesus returns unless he/she has learned that lesson!

Jesus’ life and death demonstrate a phenomenon because of the mysterious opposition He had to endure: He proved to the world that the natural mind of humanity is “enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7). This is the true source of all the evil there is.

Even before His birth in the stable in Bethlehem, His mother had to endure rejection because the people would give her no shelter there, even though she was great with child (see Luke 2:7). Although they did not know that she carried the Saviour of the world, they did not welcome suffering humanity in the person of His mother. “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not” (John 1:10, 11). And then as soon as Jesus was born as a baby in the stable, King Herod tried to kill Him (see Matt. 2:3-8, 16). Thus “enmity against God” again flared forth.

Strange to say, hatred and rejection dogged His steps all His life. He complained to His own people, “All I have ever done is to tell you the truth I heard from God, yet you are trying to kill me.” A few minutes later “they picked up stones to throw at him” (John 8:40, 59, GNB). Finally, their enmity knew no bounds. They could not endure His

presence among them, and they yelled, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Imagine! Treating the Son of God like that!

Mankind have spent thousands of years searching for God. They have speculated, guessed, reasoned, imagined, philosophized about Him. But Jesus came to *reveal* Him. “He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father,” He says. The Chinese have a proverb, “One picture is worth a thousand words.” The life and character of Jesus tell us more about God than a thousand philosophers’ opinions.

Thus, as Jesus came to reveal God to us, in so doing He revealed another important truth: God has some people who hate Him. Like the truth of *agape* which took the world by surprise, this was also a new revelation. We humans always have plenty of enemies, but no one had ever before imagined that *God* has enemies, least of all the people who professed to worship Him!

This Sheds Light on Other Dark Mysteries

The apostles told the people, “Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead” (Acts 3:14, 15). The people who treated Him so cruelly were “the princes of this world” (1 Cor. 2:8). Is the world the same today? If Jesus were to return, would they welcome Him now?

Many may claim that they would, but would they endure His searching reproofs? His example of unselfishness would expose their selfishness. Strangely enough, it was that revelation of *agape* love that so angered “the princes of this world.”

Jesus does not expect that the world itself will welcome Him when He comes the second time, for He asked mournfully, “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).

Why does the world reject Him? What do they have against Him? The idea that God must go into court and stand trial is not so farfetched. In the person of His Son, He has already been arrested and put on trial, several times. Though He was the innocent Son of God, He was arrested and hailed into court on imagined charges of wrongdoing. He had no lawyer to plead His case, so He defended Himself (the story is told in John 5:19-46). Again He was arrested and taken to court for His final condemnation. But there is an even greater court case in which God is on trial.

The Great Final Battle of Armageddon

The Bible declares that the evil world will organize to make war against God. The pent up resentments and enmity of the ungodly will finally erupt in a battle known as Armageddon. In holy vision the prophet John saw this final conflict develop. First, he saw that two “harvests” on earth will ripen side by side: those who are the good grain and are loyal to God; and those who are rebels against Him, the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. . . . And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress” (Rev. 14:15, 19, 20). This is the final crisis.

All upon earth will join one side or the other. Those who rebel against Him will “[a] make war with the

Lamb [Jesus], and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and [b] they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful” (Rev. 17:14). “The spirits of devils, working miracles, go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty . . . into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon” (Rev. 16:14, 16).

This sheds light on many mysterious developments in the world. This war is not to be understood as *a literal* one with armaments. Since the “carnal mind is enmity against God,” and “whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer” (1 John 3:15), it is clear that this is *a spiritual war*. But it is even more real than any physical war, because these are the final spiritual issues lurking in the shadows behind all of humanity’s wars. This great controversy between God and Satan will be resolved for all eternity, and truth will win the victory. In symbolic language, John beheld this final conflict:

“I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; . . . and he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the

fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev. 19:11-16).

The picture becomes clear from these several passages:

- (1) The enemies of God initiate this last battle.
- (2) The “kings of the earth and of the whole world” will join in the cause against “the Lamb”.
- (3) Some serious world crisis will provoke this eruption of “enmity against God,” as they imagine that somehow God is responsible for the evil that has become by then unmanageable throughout the world.
- (4) As The Word of God, Christ wins the victory.
- (5) There are those loyal to Him, on His side, “clothed in fine linen, clean and white.” Because they are loyal to Him, the world’s enmity will be directed against them also. Jesus said, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own, . . . but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:18, 19). Christ comes to defend and save them.
- (6) The reason for God’s “fierce wrath” is not a selfish one; the world will seek to destroy those people who choose to remain loyal to Him. As a parent is angry when some dacoit tries to beat up or kill his helpless child, so this is what arouses God’s anger (see Rev. 13:11-17).
- (7) The ones who stir up the nations to “make war” against Him are “the spirits of devils, working

miracles.” But those who “make war” against Him *think* they have good reason to do so.

The ancient patriarch Job did not fight against God, but he complained against Him because he thought that it was God who was tormenting him, when in reality it was man’s enemy, Satan. Job even wanted to take God into court: “If God were human, I could answer him; we could go to court to decide our quarrel” (Job 9:32, GNB).

When a prominent national leader we trust is arraigned in court, the case attracts front-page newspaper or TV coverage. What kind of publicity would a case attract if God Himself were on trial? Revelation says such a court case will convene: “Fear God, and give glory to Him, for the hour of *His* judgment is come” (Rev. 14:6). The original language indicates that it is God Himself who is on trial. As in the case with Job, He has become the accused in the dock, and He needs a defense.

In fact, Jesus denies that His Father will judge His enemies: “The Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, . . . because He is the Son of man” (John 5:22, 27). Further, Christ refuses to serve as Judge to anyone who rejects Him: “If anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world” (John 12:47). Thus the only people whom Christ will finally judge will be those who are loyal to Him, and then He will acquit or vindicate them. Therefore “the hour of His judgment” can mean the hour when God Himself is on trial, as much as that He judges others.

Why So Many People Are Angry with God

Great numbers of people on earth blame God for their troubles, and especially for the horrendous injustices that plague the world at large. For example, why should the larger percentage of the people of the world live in squalid poverty while the other the others live in comfort? Is God to blame in some way? Isn’t He all-powerful?

Why does God permit horrendous floods and earthquakes to come? In our legal language, these disasters are often called “acts of God.” Many people, if they had a chance, would join a class-action suit against Him something like the class-action suit against God. God could zap His opponents out of existence, but that would not solve the problem. It would only play the final issue into the hands of Satan who would accuse Him of gross injustice. Even a great nation on earth does not dare to destroy a weaker nation, for it would be hailed into the “court” of world opinion and condemned. So God must face the even greater “court” of the entire universe. This is a spiritual reality, a “court” more real than any which meets in earthly chambers.

An apostle of Jesus saw that God will have to go in the dock, yet he was confident “that You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged” (Paul, Rom. 3:4, NKJV). The NEB says, “and win the verdict when Thou art on trial.” The Goodspeed translation says, “and win your case when you go into court.” God must meet the accumulated charges of the ages.

Many people have never thought of the possibility of God being on trial. The Islamic Qu'ran has no such idea, nor the *Upanishads* or the *Bhagavad Gita*. It is an insight found only in the Bible. The Muslim's Allah requires the worshiper to prostrate himself in a blind submission to His capricious will. But the God of the Bible says, "Come now, and let us reason together" (Isa. 1:18). God is not a tyrant who forces devotion, like an ancient autocrat who executed anyone whom he chanced to dislike. Only when the case is settled openly to the satisfaction of everyone, can the controversy be ended and sin and evil finally be vanquished. Then "affliction shall not rise up the second time" (Nahum 1:9).

This final "hour of His judgment" is the Day of Atonement, prefigured in the ancient sanctuary service which was a kindergarten lesson to explain the Gospel in Old Testament times. Those who had true faith in God always knew that "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). Only the blood of the great Lamb of God could ever do that (John 1:29). When the believer offered an animal sacrifice, he confessed his faith in the Lamb of God yet to come. Likewise, the ancient Day of Atonement could never resolve the final judgment of God; it only pointed *forward* to it.

The Meaning of the Great Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement came on the tenth day of the seventh month, when all were required to leave their usual work and gather around the sanctuary as "an holy convocation," a calling-together of all the people. They were told to "afflict your souls"

(Lev. 23:27). This meant fasting and deep spiritual concern, for it was an emergency crisis. *But it was not a selfish concern for themselves.* Their high priest had little bells sewed on the bottom of his garment as he entered the Most Holy Apartment of the sanctuary (something like the inner chamber in Hindu temples). They could not go in with him personally, but *by faith* they entered with him. They were concerned for *him* as he came into the symbolic presence of God Himself. Would he be slain in that holy presence, for "our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29)? As long as they heard the tinkling of those bells, they knew their high priest was safe, and they rejoiced. Because they considered themselves incorporate in their high priest, they were concerned for him.

So in this grand cosmic Day of Atonement, our concern is not for ourselves, for our own petty security. The state of the world is a cosmic emergency. "Business as usual" is no longer good enough. Our concern is for the honor and the vindication of the God of truth and righteousness that He may be victorious in the final struggle with evil. Thus the first angel of Revelation 14 issues his call to all the world: "I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. . . . Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the

commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:6, 7, 12).

Several important truths here deserve our attention:

(1) This message can be given only in our modern times; never before has it been *possible* for any message to go to all the world in this way. The message appeals to people of all races and cultures, in all lands. God sends the message, and not even all the forces of hell can prevent its proclamation.

(2) The message is the Good News of the saving grace of Jesus. It awakens the attention of the world because it is pure Good News.

(3) “The hour of God’s judgment” can mean the hour when He Himself is on trial.

(4) We can “give glory to Him,” honor Him, and in so doing we can help to vindicate Him because we can be witnesses to His saving power.

(5) The call to “worship Him” is a quotation from God’s commandment to “keep holy” the Sabbath day in remembrance of His creation of the world in six days, and His resting on the seventh day (Ex. 20:8-11). As a memorial of creation, the Sabbath is a defense against worldly materialism which comes with the theory of evolution. It is a call to spiritual living, in harmony with God’s holy will. This message is a worldwide call to repentance.

(6) The fruit borne by it is to raise up a people who gladly cherish the faith of Jesus and follow Him in obedience to all His commandments. The love of Christ constrains them!

While the nations may not deign to notice it, this work is going forward in all the world today. No other work is as important. It is our privilege to demonstrate in our lives the beauty of Christ’s holiness, to give evidence to the world at large that His grand sacrifice was not in vain. Instead of being concerned for *our* reward, what is important is that Jesus receive *His* reward. And He will, for the promise is that “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isa. 53:11).

When Does This Work Begin and End?

According to the prophecy in Daniel 8:11-14, the heavenly Day of Atonement must begin at the end of the 2300 year prophecy, in the year 1844 A.D. “Then shall the sanctuary be cleansed,” that is, then shall come the beginning of the hour of God’s judgment of which Revelation 14:6, 7 speaks.

Should you and I be afraid of the judgment? Is it like a final exam that students face, the kind where they cram the night before and come to it trembling with fear? There is a judgment that comes before Christ returns—otherwise He could not bring His reward with Him to give every man according as his work has been (Rev. 22:12). There is a Bible teaching not generally admitted by most Christian churches: “The Pre-Advent Judgment.” It is a subject that sets apart as unique the Christian people who believe this teaching (also known as “The Investigative Judgment”). Scholars of different churches have labeled it an “extra-biblical teaching.”

This derogatory label has of course been embarrassing for a people who really want to believe “the Bible and the Bible only.”

That is my personal ideal of faith; I have long been impressed by Isaiah 26:2, 3, “Open the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in. You [Lord] will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You.”

However, it is impossible for anyone to believe in a “pre-Advent judgment” unless he also believes in the resurrection from the dead as the Bible presents it. When someone who believes in Jesus dies, he “sleeps in Jesus” until “the first resurrection” (1Thess. 4:16, 17; Rev. 20:5).

Then, as surely as $2 + 2 = 4$, there must be some kind of judgment before that resurrection at the second coming of Jesus to determine who of those multitudes who are in the grave shall be the privileged ones to be called from their sleep by the awakening voice of Jesus, and who shall be left to sleep on for the 1000 years until the second resurrection [of damnation] pictured in Revelation 20:5, 7-10.

To this simple-minded reader of the Bible, the words of Jesus establish the truth of some kind of a judgment that must take place before the second coming of Jesus: “Those who are counted worthy to attain . . . the resurrection from the dead, . . . can [not] die anymore, . . . being sons of the resurrection” (Luke 20:35, 36). To those who will be living when Jesus returns, He says they too will experience the pre-Advent judgment, “Watch

therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy . . . to stand before the Son of Man” (21:36).

But can we know anything about when that pre-Advent judgment is to take place? Does the 2300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14 make any sense?

(1) The Day of Atonement in the Hebrew sanctuary service was an object-lesson of that final pre-Advent judgment.

(2) The Lord did not intend that its purpose should be to condemn Israel or the people, but “on that day shall the [high] priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord” (Lev. 16:30).

(3) That precisely is the purpose of the investigative judgment—not to condemn God’s people, but to cleanse them so they can meet Jesus in person when He returns.

(4) There is sin, conscious and unconscious, that must be discovered, repented of, “overcome” (Rev. 3:21), so that those who follow the great High Priest in His closing work of Atonement may not be consumed by the brightness of Jesus’ coming. That’s going to be a serious moment!

(5) The High Priest doesn’t want to condemn you; He wants to vindicate you—that’s the only judgment He wants to make in your case.

(6) Don’t stop Him, don’t hinder His on-going work! Revelation 11:15-19 describes it: “The seventh angel sounded [his trumpet], and there were great voices in heaven, saying. The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever. . . . And the nations were angry, and Thy wrath is

come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that Thou shouldst give reward unto Thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear Thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth. And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His testament.”

(1) The judgment will result in total victory and vindication for God, and establish His kingdom.

(2) While this work goes forward to completion, the nations on earth are “angry.”

(3) All of God’s faithful people of all ages, many of whom have been martyrs, will be vindicated.

(4) This time of heavenly judgment is also a time of unprecedented ecological crisis on this planet.

(5) The work of judgment is accomplished in the heavenly “temple of God,” namely, in the Most Holy Apartment where “the ark of the covenant” is located.

(6) This is the last work to be completed before the end of the world when Jesus returns in glory.

When He comes, the work of judgment will be completed. Each person will have determined where he or she will stand. Just before the return of Jesus, the decree is passed in heaven:

“The time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Rev. 22:10-12).

Here is no harsh, vindictive pronouncement of doom on anyone. It is simply leaving every person to choose what he or she wants to be for eternity! There could be no more sad judgment than to realize, if you are “unjust” or “filthy,” that you must be that way forever!

But a Saviour is provided, so that he or she who is “unjust” or “filthy” can become “righteous” and “holy” through faith in His blood. Ask Him to receive you as His child; He will! The hour of judgment still lingers. Do not delay any longer!