

Investigating the Investigative Judgment

What Adventists Teach about the Investigative Judgment

1. The judgment described in verses such as **Eccl 12:14, Matt 12:36, Acts 17:31, Rom 2:16, Rom 14:10** and others, is perceived by Christians as a single event, while Adventists regard it as including at least 4 events:
 - a. **PHASE 1:** a pre-advent investigative judgment that determines the destiny of each person in the planet, for life or death (**Dan 7:9-14; Dan 8:14**)
 - b. **PHASE 2:** second advent judgment—separation of the sheep from the goats (**Matt 25:31-33**)
 - c. **PHASE 3:** judgment during the millennium to determine the punishment of the wicked (**Rev 20:11-15**)
 - d. **PHASE 4:** execution of the wicked at the end of the millennium resulting in their annihilation (**Rev 20:7-10**)
2. Moreover, it is thought that this judgment is only for the wicked; that the saints are exempt from it.
3. Adventists teach that a work of investigative judgment commenced in the heavenly sanctuary in 1844 in connection of the final cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary :

The investigative judgment and cleansing of the sanctuary—last acts of Christ ministration

"And, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away." Daniel 7:13, 14. The coming of Christ here described is not His second coming to the earth. He comes to the Ancient of Days in heaven to receive dominion and glory and a kingdom, which will be given Him at the close of His work as a mediator. It is this coming, and not His second advent to the earth, that was foretold in prophecy to take place at the termination of the 2300 days in 1844. Attended by heavenly angels, our great High Priest enters the holy of holies and there appears in the presence of God to engage in the last acts of His ministration in behalf of man--**to perform the work of investigative judgment** and to make an atonement for all who are shown to be entitled to its benefits. **GC 479-480.**

The Investigative judgment is done to determine who will receive the benefit of the final atonement before Jesus leaves the Most holy Place

"...as the typical cleansing of the earthly was accomplished by the removal of the sins by which it had been polluted, so the actual cleansing of the heavenly is to be accomplished by the removal, or blotting

out, of the sins which are there recorded. But before this can be accomplished, **there must be an examination of the books of record** to determine who, through repentance of sin and faith in Christ, are entitled to the benefits of His atonement. The cleansing of the sanctuary therefore involves a work of investigation--a work of judgment. This work must be performed prior to the coming of Christ to redeem His people; for when He comes, His reward is with Him to give to every man according to his works. Revelation 22:12. **GC 421-422.**

4. Adventists believe that this work of investigative judgment commenced at the end of the 2300 days prophecy in 1844 (**Dan 8:14**) and is the event announced in **Rev 14:7**, "the hour of his judgment is come;"

Objections to the Investigative Judgment

5. Unfortunately, this teaching of a pre-advent judgment by Adventist is under vigorous attack by the Christian world and even by people within the SDA church itself;
6. Objectors say the Adventist investigative judgment robs the Christian of the assurance of present salvation;
 - a. **Rom 5:10, Rom 5:1**, If we have been reconciled to God by the death of Christ and if we already have peace with God, why still an investigative judgment?
 - b. **1 John 5:12**-- If those who have the Son already have life, then what is the point of an investigative judgment?
 - c. If a believer is already accounted righteous by faith, what's the point of convening an investigative judgment? This was E. J. Waggoner's objection to the investigative judgment
 - d. And of course, if the righteous dead go to heaven at death and the wicked already in hell when they die, the idea of an investigative judgment before the second coming of Christ simply doesn't make sense!
7. Objectors say that the doctrine of the investigative judgment is not taught in the Bible and is only a fabrication of Ellen White
8. A few specific objectors:
 - a. **Donald Barnhouse** called it "the most colossal face-saving device in Christian history" to explain away the great disappointment of 1844
 - b. **Desmond Ford** claims that there is an investigative judgment in heaven, but that it is the little horn that is judged, not the saints
 - c. **Walter Martin** a strong opponent of the Adventist teaching of the investigative judgment asserts that

"Since our Lord knows the disposition of cases allegedly being reviewed in heaven. What need is there of an investigative judgment? We believe that the Scriptures decidedly do not warrant such a doctrine" (**The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism, p. 182**)

“The Greek deals a devastating blow to the Seventh-day Adventist concept of investigative judgment: ‘He that hears my word and believes on Him that sent me has everlasting life and shall not come under judgment but has passed from death to life.’ Christians therefore, need not anticipate any investigative judgment for their sins.” –*ibid*, p. 178

Dealing with Walter Martin’s Objection

9. Martin concludes from Greek text of **John 5:24** that there is no future investigative judgment of the saints. But the text does not bear out his position.
 - a. Since the Greek word “krisis” translated “condemnation” in **John 5:24**, KJV, is translated as “judgment” in **Rev 14:7**, it is assumed that **John 5:24** teaches that the believers do not go through the judgment; but that Greek word is also rightfully translated “condemnation” in **John 3:19**;
 - b. Also, the verb “come” (ἔρχεται) “under condemnation” is in the present tense Indicative, not future tense. “Shall not come under condemnation” in the KJV should really be translated as “is not come under condemnation.” John is not speaking of judgment in the future eschatological sense, but rather of the current Christian status; this is also indicated by the verb “is passed” (present tense) “from death unto life;”

Ἀμήν ἀμήν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ὁ τὸν λόγον μου ἀκούων καὶ πιστεύων τῷ πέμψαντί με ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον καὶ εἰς κρίσιν οὐκ ἔρχεται, ἀλλὰ μεταβέβηκεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν.

John 5:24,

- c. It parallels Paul’s statement: “There is therefore **now** no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (**Rom 8: 1**).
10. If Dr. Martin teaches that there is no future judgment of the saints, then he is in plain disagreement with the truth of Scripture which declares that everyone, including the saints pass through the judgment:
 - a. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (**2 Corinthians 5: 10**).
 - b. For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (**Romans 14:10**).
 - c. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (**Ecclesiastes 12:14**)
 - d. The Lord shall judge his people (**Heb 10:30**)
11. It seems that Martin tries to build an argument from one Greek word without considering the whole meaning of the passage, without finding out whether John is speaking of the Christian’s current standing before God or whether he has in mind the eschatological aspect of judgment. Dr. Martin has failed to take into consideration other related texts that argue more strongly for a future judgment for the saints.

Origin and Development of the Adventist Teaching of an Investigative Judgment

12. Just because Ellen White wrote a lot about the investigative judgment and just because the expression “investigative judgment” is not found in the Bible, critics somehow get the impression that the teaching originated from her:
- A lot of the doctrines that Christians hold on to, like the doctrine of the Trinity, can be gleaned from the Bible, but the term “Trinity” itself is not found in the Bible.

In 1844 our great High Priest entered the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, to begin the work of the **investigative judgment**. The cases of the righteous dead have been passing in review before God. When that work shall be completed, judgment is to be pronounced upon the living.. **1SM 125**

It is while men are still dwelling upon the earth that the work of **investigative judgment** takes place in the courts of heaven. The lives of all His professed followers pass in review before God. All are examined according to the record of the books of heaven, and according to his deeds the destiny of each is forever fixed. **COL 310.**

When we become children of God, our names are written in the Lamb's book of life, and they remain there until the time of the **investigative judgment**. Then the name of every individual will be called, and his record examined, by Him who declares, "I know thy works." If in that day it shall appear that all our wicked deeds have not been fully repented of, our names will be blotted from the book of life, and our sins will stand against us **7BC 987.**

. . .as the typical cleansing of the earthly was accomplished by the removal of the sins by which it had been polluted, so the actual cleansing of the heavenly is to be accomplished by the removal, or blotting out, of the sins which are there recorded. But before this can be accomplished, there must be an **examination of the books of record** to determine who, through repentance of sin and faith in Christ, are entitled to the benefits of His atonement. The cleansing of the sanctuary therefore involves **a work of investigation--a work of judgment**. This work must be performed prior to the coming of Christ to redeem His people; for when He comes, His reward is with Him to give to every man according to his works. Revelation 22:12. **GC 421-422.**

While the **investigative judgment** is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God's people upon earth. This work is more clearly presented in the messages of Revelation 14. **GC 425.**

When the work of **the investigative judgment** closes, the destiny of all will have been decided for life or death. Probation is ended a short time before the appearing of the Lord in the clouds of heaven. . . . **SD 355.**

13. The doctrine of the **investigative judgment** did not originate with Ellen White; The concept was introduced to the advent believers as early as 1840-1842 by the Methodist Millerite theologian named **Josiah Litch**;
14. After the great disappointment of 1844, the non-Sabbatarian Millerites continued to promote Litch's concept of a pre-advent judgment which was based on **Daniel 7**, the Day of Atonement of **Leviticus 16** and the marriage parables (**Matthew 22** and **25**); these were published in the Millerite papers;
15. Ellen White had no input whatsoever here;
16. The idea of an investigative judgment was soon abandoned by the non-Sabbatarian Millerites; the Sabbatarian Adventists however retained it and developed it further;
17. **Joseph Bates** then became the principal writer on the matter of the **investigative judgment** from 1846 to 1850;
18. **James White** first rejected it, but in 1857, embraced it; **James White** saw the connection between the **investigative judgment** and the message to the church of Laodicea and saw it as a much needed appeal for repentance and spiritual preparedness on the part of God's people living in the time of judgment;
19. Over the years, pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist church have developed the doctrine of the investigative judgment not by deriving it from a single isolated proof-text, but using as large pool of Biblical data from both the Old and the New Testament
 - a. **Dan 7:9-13**—the investigative judgment in heaven is convened; both the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man come to the Most Holy Place; context locates this judgment as occurring later than the 1260 years of activity by the little horn power, but prior to the second advent;
 - b. **Dan 12:1-2; Rev 20:6**—at the second coming, those whose names are found in the book of life are resurrected to receive eternal life; here is another evidence that shows that the judgment is pre-advent, enabling the true saints to be identified prior to the resurrection;
 - c. **Dan 8:14**—Daniel 8:14 provides the date for the commencement of the investigative judgment of Daniel 7;
 - d. **Lev 16 and 23**—those who do not afflict the soul on the Day of Atonement are cut off; the work of cutting off and not cutting off presupposes a work of selection, a work of judgment;
 - e. **Malachi 3**—the purging of the sons of Levi in the temple is parallel with the events of Dan 7, Lev 16, and Dan 8;
 - f. **Heb 8 and 9**—the existence of a heavenly sanctuary is confirmed, with its need to be purified with better sacrifices, at some point in time in the future;
 - g. **Acts 3:19**—sheds light on the blotting out of sins by the heavenly High Priest, prior to His return to earth; this work of blotting out of sins presupposes a work of examining the records to see whose sins will be blotted out, and whose sins will not be blotted out prior to the return of Jesus to earth;
 - h. **The wedding parables**—the examination of the guests in the parable of the wedding garment (**Matt 22**) portrays a work of investigation and judgment to determine who have a part in the marriage supper; the parable to the 10 virgins (**Matt 25**) presupposes to work of investigative judgment to determine who will have part in the marriage of the Lamb and those who will not;

- i. **Rev 14:6-13**—the first angel’s message announces the commencement of the investigative judgment at the time when the everlasting gospel is preached; the destiny of men is determined in the judgment based on their response to these messages;
- j. **1 Pet 4:17**—judgment begins at the house of God; begin at my sanctuary (**Eze 9:6**)
- k. **Rev 7:1-3**—sealing work presupposes a work of judgment to determine who receive the seal of God on the foreheads
- l. **Rev 22:11**—investigative judgment ends with a solemn verdict for each individual from which there is no appeal—he that is holy let him be holy still and he that is filthy let him be filthy still. . .
- m. **The doctrine of perseverance**—the judgment determines who have endured until the end; believers who have the Son have life right now, but they will be saved if they endure until the end (**1 John 5:12; Matt 24:13**);
- n. **Spring and Autumn typology**—Spring ceremonies (Passover, wave sheaf, Pentecost) were fulfilled in connection with the first advent of Jesus whereas the autumn ceremonies (feast of trumpets, Day of Atonement and the feast of tabernacles) apply to events associated with the second coming of Jesus; this argument places the judgment on the Day of Atonement at the end of time;

20. Adventists argue for the validity of their teaching of an **investigative judgment** on 3 grounds or on 3 arguments:

Argument #1: The Investigative Judgment part of Christ’s High Priestly Work

- 21. The Investigative judgment is part and parcel of Christ’s High Priestly ministration and scratching it out diminishes that work.
- 22. After offering Himself up as a Sacrifice once, Jesus continued His High Priestly ministration in the heavenly sanctuary (**Heb 1:3; Heb 8:1**)
- 23. This High Priestly ministration in the heavenly sanctuary corresponds to the two-fold aspect revealed in the types, i.,e. Daily service and the Day of Atonement ministrations (**Heb 8:5-6**), expect His ministration in the heavenly sanctuary s so much better
- 24. The Daily ministration of Christ as High Priest includes:
 - a. Intercession (**Heb 7:25; Rom 5:10; Rom 8:24; Acts 5:31**)
 - b. Succoring his people (**Heb 2:17-18; Heb 4:15-16**)
 - c. Advocate or Mediator (**1 John 2:1; John 16:26; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 9:15**)
 - d. Director of His church on earth (**Rev 1:1-3**)
 - e. Judge of all men—(**John 5:22**)
- 25. In His Yearly ministration He is revealed in the book of Leviticus as not only doing a work of cleansing (**Lev 16:30-33**) but also a work of passing judgment (**Lev 23:29-30**)
 - a. A work of investigative judgment is implied in the mandate to cut off certain individuals on the Day of Atonement, because only through that work can it be ascertained who among the congregation are worthy of such punishment;

26. Christ's High Priestly work of investigative judgment is also implied in **Rev 6:9-10**, for how else can it be determined who among the dead, are worthy to receive Christ's white robe of righteousness, unless there is a work of investigation of the books of records first?
- a. Indeed, It was in this sense that the Jews understood that the Day of Atonement was a day of judgment
 - b. In traditional Judaism, Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement marked the climax of the 10 days period of repentance called Days of Awe. According to the rabbis, on this day, the destiny of the *tzaddikim* (the righteous) was inscribed in the Book of Life, while the destiny of the *resha'im* (the wicked) was written in the Book of death; On Yom Kippur, every soul's name was sealed in one of these two books;
 - c. Those that are found worthy are entered in the Book of Life (Ex. 37:32; Isa. 4.3; Ps. 69:29; Dan. 12:1; Hence the prayer: "Enter us in the Book of Life"(inscribe us"; but "seal us," that is, "seal our fate"—in the closing prayer on the Day of Atonement. Hence also the formula of salutation on New-Year's Eve: "May you be inscribed in the Book of Life for a happy year.

Argument #2: The convening of an investigative judgment is included in the proclamation of the gospel

27. The announcement about an investigative judgment is intrinsic to the proclamation any gospel message and to deny it is to destroy the completeness of the gospel proclamation
- a. **Law and Grace** union recognized by many but the **Gospel and Judgment** union is not, even though they are pointing to the same truth;
 - b. **Rev 14:6-7**—the everlasting gospel and the hour judgment proclaimed in unison
 - c. **Rev 2:16**---gospel and the judgment go together
 - d. **John 16:8**—the work of the Holy Spirit is to convict the world of sin, of righteousness (gospel) and of judgment; again, the gospel and the judgment go hand in hand in the work of the Holy Spirit
28. Hence, not only the salvation of man, but also the judgment of man have been wrought by the redemptive act of Jesus Christ and to accept the gospel while denying the judgment, destroys the completeness of such redemptive act by Christ;
29. Also, that those who profess to have accepted the gospel and profess to have faith in Christ are included in the judgment (not exempted), is obvious in the parable of the wedding garment of **Matt 22**;
- a. **Guests at the wedding**---Those who accept the wedding invitation are those who have accepted the gospel proclamation and have become professors of faith in Christ and become guests at the wedding
 - b. **The examination of the guests**---a work of investigation to determine who are false and who are true-hearted Christians
 - c. **Pre-advent judgment**—this work of examination is pre-advent because it is done prior to the marriage supper and is done to determine who are allowed to have a part in that event
30. **Heb 10:30, 1 Pet 4:17; Rom 14:10**—all teach that the people of God are included in the judgment

Argument #3: The investigative judgment is God's response to Satan's challenge

31. **The book of Life, the book of remembrance**--God keeps meticulously keeps record of the deeds of men in books not for His own benefit (He already knows who are His) but for the benefit of an on-looking universe
32. The investigation of the records contained in those books is necessary because Satan challenges the ultimate salvation of each person;
 - a. Satan not only castigates every soul and makes life hell for those that seeks deliverance from sin, but also disputes Christ's right to wrest that soul from his control
33. **Jude 1:9**—Satan disputes with Michael concerning the redemption of the body of Moses; this shows Satan's attitude towards every person who God attempts to save
34. **Zech 3:1-5**—Satan's work of accusation brought to light in this passage of Scripture
 - a. **"The Lord rebuke thee"**---While Satan thinks he has legitimate claims over every redeemed sinner, Christ's powerful intercession silences his arguments
 - b. **Dan 7:21-22**---The purpose therefore of the investigative judgment is to vindicate the saints against Satan's objections; this judgment reveals God's justice in saving the elect in spite of Satan's accusations and the vindication of the saints also vindicates God's character

Conclusion

35. God has committed a serious responsibility to the church of proclaiming the everlasting gospel to the world in connection with the hour of judgment, through Christ's final ministration in the second apartment of the heavenly sanctuary, and
36. More than ever before, He asks our total commitment to Him in order we might proclaim this message along with the cleansing of the sanctuary, fearlessly in the face of objections, mockery and scorn
37. The investigative is part and parcel of the good news of the everlasting gospel to be proclaimed to every nation, kindred, tongue and people in a loud voice