

THE KEY THAT UNLOCKS MYSTERIES

**A theologian confesses, “Little did I dream all that
I’d find behind the sanctuary doors.”**

Our Seventh-day Adventist pioneers found a key. A mysterious key that when turned, unlocked the mystery of what they called “The Great Disappointment.” The key opened to their astonished eyes a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing conclusively that God’s hand had directed the great Advent movement.

The key, of course, was the sanctuary in heaven.

In our day, the “key” has frequently proven to be a storm center for disagreement and criticism both within and without the Adventist Church.¹ The storm has had one positive result: It has compelled us to rigorously test the scriptural soundness of this distinctive tenet of our

faith. Since the Glacier View Conference in 1980, the result has been agonizing doubts for many and even rejection of the historic Adventist viewpoint for some. For others, the “key” has opened minds to a gracious and loving High Priest, who ministers on their behalf.

I freely admit that questions were raised at the conference that I had never considered, questions that struck at the heart of the pioneer Adventist understanding of the sanctuary, Daniel 8:14, and the

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Investigative Judgment. Several of my colleagues from pastoral days left the ministry and the Adventist Church. They urged me to read material they considered to be cogent refutations of our long-held viewpoints. I read, and again had to admit that I didn't have satisfactory answers to all their arguments.

I was not alone in this confession. For months, many of my colleagues and others throughout the church wrestled with Scripture and agonized in prayer. We determined that our criterion should not be, "What do the commentaries and the theologians say?" but "What does the Scripture say?" On my knees I pledged that I would, if convicted of error, leave the Adventist Church.

I can testify to the presence of God's Spirit of truth working mightily at Andrews University and elsewhere during those months and years. I was indebted particularly to the Daniel and Revelation Committee that the General Conference appointed and charged to grapple honestly with the issues raised at Glacier View. I am also indebted to the doubters, the questioners, for they forced not only me, but also the church itself to dig deeper into God's Word. Many of us, including old-timers in the church, learned anew what is meant by the saying, "God has no grandchildren!"

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result of my study, I can now testify that the Adventist sanctuary doctrine can stand the most searching investigation. Point by point the objections and questions raised melted away like hoarfrost before the warm light of Scripture. And now my conviction is based on better reasons than I had thought existed.

My study yielded fresh insights into old truths. Deeper study has not caused me to remove a single pin or pillar of the old landmarks; rather, the sanctuary truth shines with even greater beauty and richness than I had imagined. A doctrine once dry and irrelevant to me, has come alive. So much so that I'm compelled to share some fresh, rich insights gleaned by various students of Scripture among us.

Investigative Judgment

The concept most widely rejected in recent critiques of Adventist sanctuary teachings is the pre-advent investigative judgment of God's people. I was excited to find that this doctrine is supported by far more than the few standard texts we have traditionally used. Adventist scholar William H. Shea has examined at least 28 Old Testament passages outside of Daniel, all of which deal with judgment from the sanctuary.² In 20 of these passages, the judgment being discussed concerns the professed people of God. A number of passages clearly involve aspects of

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the investigative judgment as revealed in both the earthly and the heavenly sanctuaries. Even the word *investigative*, which many claim is non-biblical, is explicitly mentioned. For example, in Psalm 11:4, 5, the Lord, from His heavenly temple is said to *bachan*—“examine” or “investigate”—the children of men.

In addition to the 28 passages Shea cites, numerous other verses—though not mentioning that the sanctuary is the place of judgment—indicate God’s *procedure* for dealing with His professed people before executive judgment is meted out. The Old Testament often gives this procedure a technical name—a *rib*, or covenant lawsuit—and it usually involves a divine investigation of the evidence before sentence is pronounced. Note, for example, the covenant lawsuits or investigative judgments described by Hosea and Micah upon the Northern Kingdom, and that of Malachi in the post-exilic period (see Hosea 4, Micah 6, and Malachi 3).

Illuminating examples of God conducting an investigative judg-

ment of His professed covenant people are found Daniel, Hebrews, Revelation, and Ezekiel.³ Here I want to concentrate on Ezekiel, leaving the other books for the next two issues of *PD*. (I must admit, however, that I can hardly wait to tell you of new evidence from within Daniel itself, and that each of the visions of the Book of Revelation opens with an introductory sanctuary scene!)

Ezekiel: Sun Worship

Perhaps the most dramatic and illuminating examples of an investigative judgment conducted by God are found in the first 10 chapters of Ezekiel, a contemporary of Daniel, who wrote in the last days of Judah’s history before the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the monarchy. Ezekiel’s mission was to give God’s last warning to the professed people of God before their probation closed.

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In particular, note that the picture of the seal of God and the close of probation in Revelation 14 and 15 is built on Ezekiel 9, where a mark is placed on the forehead of those sighing and crying for the abominations in Jerusalem. John's extended citations and allusions to Ezekiel 1 to 10 in his portrayal of God's dealings with His people in the last days give us reason to believe that events surrounding the end of probation for Judah may be seen as a type of God's dealing with His professed people before the close of probation.

And what was God's procedure in Ezekiel's day before the curtain was pulled, before executive judgment was meted out? An investigative judgment, conducted over an extended period, from the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary!

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headed for the Most Holy Place of the Jerusalem temple, where He takes up residence (see chapters 9 and 10).⁴ Why has He come? Chapters 3 to 8 invite us to witness His purpose. We see Israel arraigned before the divine tribunal for a covenant lawsuit, an investigative judgment. Not, we note, of the world at large, but of the professed people of God. We hear the charges made, from lesser to greater. Then, the climax—the sin that brings down the curtain on Judah:

“And he brought me into the inner court of the house of the Lord; and behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs to the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east, and they worshiped the sun toward the east” (Eze. 8:16, KJV).

Here is the ultimate sign of rebellion that closes the probation of Judah! And God delivers the verdict: “*I will not spare*” (2 Cor. 13:2).

Worship of the sun! Does that

sound familiar in terms of the last great issue highlighted in the Book of Revelation? False worship centered in the *day* of the sun!

In chapter 9, the investigative judgment is over. What is the result? Separation of the professed people of God into two classes: Those who really serve Him; that is, those who sigh and cry over the abominations done in the city; and, on the other hand, those who profess, but do not really serve Him; those who practice a counterfeit worship. The former receive the mark on their foreheads—the mark of the *tav*, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet: they are the faithful remnant. The latter await the execution of the sentence.

Loathe to Leave

Ezekiel reveals not only the divine procedure before the close of probation, namely, an investigative judgment, but also the attitude of God at this time. We see Him as no vengeful Judge, eager to condemn all. To the contrary, He repeatedly cries out, “Why will you die, O house of Israel?” “For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!” (Eze. 33:11; 18:32, NIV).

Another detail in chapters 10 and 11 adds a poignant touch to the scriptural portrait of a gracious and loving High Priest. As God leaves the temple at the conclusion of the investigative judgment, the celestial

chariot awaits Him. We see it hovering at the south side of the temple. Then the glory of the Lord slowly rises from its position over the ark in the Most Holy Place. He moves to the threshold of the temple and pauses. Then, in His chariot, He moves again, only to hover at the east gate of the temple precincts. It is as if the Lord is loathe to leave His people, as if He is waiting for still others to change their mind, to repent.

Slowly His chariot moves across the Kidron Valley, this time to pause over the Mount of Olives where He, as the Son of man, will stop six centuries later to weep:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Matt. 23:37, NIV).⁴

It’s hard to join the Lord in His chariot, even in imagination, and not weep with Him when I envision Him, in anguish, bending tearfully over His end-time church, pleading, “Will you be made whole?” Somehow it helps me understand why He delays His return. Thus the sanctuary is the key that unlocks the mystery of the 1844 disappointment and the subsequent years of waiting.

Day of Atonement

Ezekiel adds a couple more

brush strokes that further illuminate and enrich the investigative judgment. The final chapters of his book (40-48) portray a cleansed and restored temple. Of great significance, I believe, is the date on which this vision was given—the 10th day of the New Year (Rosh Hashana), the seventh month (40:1). That’s the Day of Atonement, the day of the cleansing of the sanctuary, Yom Kippur! In fact, scholars have calculated that the Day of Atonement came that year on October 22, the same date that it arrived in 1844! How crucial, this date of the vision of the cleansed and restored temple! Put with this Ezekiel’s book-wide emphasis upon the cleansing of God’s people (see chapter 36:25-27). Not only a cleansed sanctuary, but a cleansed people!

And finally, Ezekiel reveals the even larger issue at stake in the investigative judgment: “Through you I *vindicate* my holiness before their eyes”—the eyes of the watching nations (see 36:22, 23; 39:27, 28, RSV, NASB). It is for their sakes that God acts to vindicate His character through the experience of His people.

God acts to set things right in His sanctuary; God acts to cleanse a people; God acts to vindicate His holy name—that is, His character. And in so doing, He reveals a “complete system of truth, connected and harmo-

nious, showing that God’s hand had directed the great advent movement and revealing present duty as it is brought to light the position and work of His people.”⁵ No wonder that for a century and a half the doctrine of the sanctuary has retained its position at the foundation of Adventist theology and mission⁶ and has remained the most distinctive contribution of Adventism to Christian thought.⁷ □

NEXT: “Surprised by Joy”—the year-day principle in Daniel.

REFERENCES

¹ For an overview of the various detractors from the Adventist understanding of the sanctuary doctrine, see Arnold V. Wallenkampf, “Challenges to the Doctrine of the Sanctuary,” in *Doctrine of the Sanctuary: A Historical Survey*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 5, Frank B. Holbrook, ed. (Silver Spring, Md.: Biblical Research Institute, 1989), pp. 197-216. More recent detractors include Dale Ratzlaff, *The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists* (Sedona, Ariz.: Life Assurance Ministries, 1996), although this later critique presents nothing essentially new.

² William H. Shea, “Biblical Parallels for the Investigative Judgment,” *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1982), pp. 1-24.

³ For basic insight and much supporting data regarding the investigative judgment in Ezekiel 1 to 10, I am indebted to Shea, *Selected Studies*, pp. 13-20.

⁴This analysis of the movement of the glory of God from the Most Holy Place of the earthly sanctuary to the waiting chariot throne is confirmed by the research of Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, Anchor Bible, volume 22 (New York: Doubleday, 1983), pages 195-198.

⁵Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p.

423.

⁶_____, *Evangelism*, p. 221.

⁷ See LeRoy Edwin Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1971) pages 541-560, for an affirmation of the distinctive and central place of the sanctuary doctrine in Adventist theology.