

## **THE JUDGMENT**

Zechariah 3:1 gives us a brief and memorable view of the judgment. As it opens, Joshua, the high priest, stands before the angel of Yahweh, and Satan stands by to accuse him.

As an intermediary, the ministry of the high priest is a type of Christ's ministry; he represents God to the people and represents the people before God. In Zechariah 3, the high priest stands on trial in a courtroom, and he wears dirty clothes—a clear symbol of his sin. With his dirty clothes, Joshua represents the people. The high priest's identification with the people was so complete that when he entered the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement, if there was sin in the camp, he dropped dead. When he entered the sanctuary, he was the people.

Joshua's case is dire; his clothes are "filthy" (v. 3). But he has a Defender: "And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" (v. 2). His dirty clothes are exchanged for clean ones (vv. 4, 5) and he receives the promise of a place to walk in the heavenly courts.

### **There are four things to notice:**

1. The roles played in this drama. Who is the accuser? Satan. Who is the defender? The Angel of Yahweh. God is the judge. In Zechariah's view, God is not the accuser; He is trying to get everyone He can into heaven. Satan plays the accuser role: in fact, the name Satan means "accuser, prosecutor." The angel of Yahweh is the judge. Joshua stands "before" Him (v. 1), but He also turns out to be Joshua's Defender (vv. 2–5).
2. We note that Satan does not have to lie. The clothes are already dirty; all he has to do is point to them. The record of our lives is plain. The Bible says our clothes (Zech. 3:3; Isa. 64:6) are "filthy," and no further inquiry is necessary.
3. God does not argue with Satan about Joshua's merit. He does not rationalize or trivialize Joshua's guilt. The clothes are dirty, the record says, and that's all it notes. In the record, and in the mind of the court, there are no subtle distinctions or shades of guilt, no excuses or explanations.
4. On what does the judgment focus? Not on the state of Joshua's clothes! God's only reply is, "The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" (v. 2). If you and I get to heaven, it will not be because our clothes are clean; it will be because somebody stuck His hand in the fire and pulled us out. The conclusion to draw from Zechariah 3 is the judgment's primary concern is not our state of guilt or innocence; rather, the question of whether pulling us out of the fire is just.

## **DANIEL 7: THE TASKS OF THE JUDGMENT**

The great picture of the judgment in Daniel 7 shows us its three tasks. We Adventists have spent most of our time on Daniel 7 identifying the beasts at the expense of the more important point: what is the judgment doing? In Daniel 7, the judgment takes three parallel actions.

### **1. First, the Son of Man is crowned.**

The crowning may be a surprise, but that is the message of Daniel 7. When the Son of Man<sup>6</sup> comes into the courtroom (vv. 3–14), He is brought in. He does not come in with the Ancient of Days, nor does He take His seat as a judge. Next, there “was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him” (v. 14). “Was given”—refers to an award granted by a court and occurs repeatedly in this chapter. In Daniel 7, the Son of Man is not one of the judges: He has a case before the court, He is a litigant in the great dispute, and the court awards Him a kingdom.

The Son of Man is crowned by the court because His rule is justified. The question before the court is, this Divine-Human Person, who gave His life for the lost world, the One who is Lord of the church—can we, on the basis of these records, crown Him King of the cosmos as well? His ministry on earth justifies His role as King. “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, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (v. 14).

### **2. The saints are awarded a kingdom.**

Closely identified with the Son of Man, in Daniel 7, are His people, the “saints of the most High” (vv. 18, 22, 27). They also have a case before the court, because “judgment was given” in their favour (v. 22) and the time will come when “the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High” (v. 27).

In Daniel 7 the saints are closely identified with the Son of Man. He earns the award, and they profit from it. Their kingdom, like His, is eternal (v. 18).

### **3. The destruction of the rebellion.**

Daniel 7 began with dramatic pictures of beasts and horns that war against God and His people and closes with a reply to this great attack. The repetitive use of these parallel, related legal terms—“was given” (vv. 14, 22), “shall be given” (v. 27), and “shall take away” (v. 26)—shows that the three actions discussed here are parallel actions of a court; they are the three actions the court takes during the great judgment session in heaven. Thus, Daniel 7 has shown the three great accomplishments of the last judgment: (1) the crowning of the Son of Man, (2) awarding a kingdom to His saints, and (3) stripping the beasts and horns of their kingdoms and finally destroying them.

This third task is the handing down of a sentence of eternal destruction. A decision of this weight dare not be made lightly, and for this reason the judgment becomes a long, careful, and complex process. We see something of what is involved in an important Old Testament ritual.

## **THE DAY OF ATONEMENT**

The annual Day of Atonement provides another picture of the last judgment (Lev. 16). On this day, the transferring of the people's sin from the sanctuary to the scapegoat indicates, symbolically, that in the last judgment, the blame for sin is placed where it belongs. The responsibility has symbolically accumulated in God's sanctuary, but the great Day of Judgment is coming, and the final responsibility—and blame—will go where it belongs.

In Israelite society there was a role called go'el. The go'el was the kinsman-redeemer: the head of the extended family or clan responsible for bailing you out of trouble, buying you back from slavery, defending you in court (see Lev. 25:23–25; Jer. 32:6–9; Ruth 2:20; 4:3–8). When Elimelech died, he had a go'el (Boaz), who would accept responsibility for the defenceless women and truncated lineage he left behind. But in other passages, the word go'el is translated “avenger of blood” (see Num. 35:11–19; Deut. 19:6–12; Josh. 20:3–9).

The redeemer is also the defender/ avenger; and God plays both roles (see Job 19:25; Ps. 78:35; Prov. 23:10, 11; Isa. 41:11–15; 43:14; Jer. 50:34; etc.). The day of His judgment will come—a great day of cosmic deliverance. His people will be delivered and returned to their inheritance. God will redeem His people; and He will avenge their injuries.

## **THE PROCESS OF JUDGMENT**

The Adventist Church has long acknowledged three phases of judgment— lasting from the initiation of the pre-Advent phase in 1844 and continuing through the millennium to the final destruction of the rebellion in the post-millennial phase of the judgment.

Its complexity lies in the fact that the task of judgment is to arrive at agreement— unanimous, cosmic agreement—on the justice of the three decisions taken by the court in Daniel 7. Can we, with justice, (1) crown the Son of Man, (2) award a kingdom to His saints, and (3) destroy the rebellion? The question is enormous, formidable, and complex; a single mistake would imperil the entire cosmos and its future. Let's return to Daniel 7 and see the judgment at work.

The Ancient of Days takes His seat, and the books are opened (v.10). But the Ancient of Days is not alone; an entire court is seated. In verse 9, thrones are set in place; in verse 10, thousands of thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before God; and then “the court was seated.”

Next, the books are opened (v.10). For whose benefit? The picture suggests that they are opened for the huge court to study. God invites universal inspection.

Why? God proposes to do three momentous things: He will crown His Son, the Ruler of the cosmos; He will award an eternal kingdom to His chosen people; and He will send

those who rebelled against His rule to eternal destruction. These decisions are irrevocable. Furthermore, they must be universally agreed to be fair.

## **THE THREE PHASES OF THE JUDGMENT**

God conducts the judgment carefully and openly, respectful of the hearts and minds of all the persons He has made. In fact, He does it in three stages.

### **1. The pre-Advent phase.**

From the beginning, Adventist theology has argued for a pre-Advent stage of the last judgment. Because Adventist writings on this topic are so voluminous, I will not revisit the arguments here. I will simply say that a pre-Advent phase of the judgment makes sense because when Christ returns, His reward is with Him (Rev. 22:12).

Any judgment that takes place prior to the Second Coming cannot include the active input of people from the earth. But the records of their lives are present, and these clearly and exhaustively show the love and justice of God (and also that of His people), and the malignity of Satan and his rebellious followers. But none of these latter parties are present in the courtroom to join in the review of the records. Those capable of being present include angels and inhabitants of worlds other than the earth.

God has a threefold agenda: crowning Jesus as King of the cosmos, awarding a kingdom to the saints, and destroying sin and evil forever. When the first phase of judgment closes, all the inhabitants of the cosmos— except those on earth—have agreed that crowning the Son of Man, awarding a kingdom to the saints, and destroying the great rebellion are all necessary and just.

The first phase of the judgment will close; Christ will return, and take His people to heaven and the millennium will then begin.

### **2. The millennial phase.**

“Don’t you know that we will judge angels?” Paul asks (1 Cor. 6:3, NIV). The 1,000 years have just that serious purpose. The records are opened to the redeemed from earth; they have the question of the justice of God’s three proposals laid before them. The opinions of those redeemed from the earth are critically important for two reasons:

First, their loved ones are the ones who will go down to destruction. The saved must be satisfied of the justice— indeed the love—of this decision.

Second, the best systems of jurisprudence insist that the accused have a right to a trial by a jury of their peers. Such a jury will be provided. This stage takes a thousand years (Rev. 20). Then, the New Jerusalem comes down to earth, the “second resurrection”<sup>13</sup> takes place, and the third phase of judgment begins.

### **3. Post-millennial phase.**

The resurrected wicked attack the New Jerusalem—only to find they have answered a summons to appear in court.<sup>14</sup> During the first two phases of judgment, all other persons in the universe have studied the records. Satan and his followers are the only ones so far left out; and now it is their turn to face the record.

The clothes of the wicked, too, are dirty. But they turned down the clean clothes God offered, they would not let Him pull them out of the fire, now they try to explain away, rationalize, or excuse the dirty clothes they would not give up. But the dirt cannot be justified or explained before the eyes of all, and by the end of the third phase every knee has bowed and every tongue confessed the justice of God's three-point agenda.

Cosmic vindication has finally been achieved; the justice of God's three-point agenda has been acknowledged by all. With universal acclaim Christ will reign as King of the cosmos, the rebellion will be eternally destroyed, and God's people will receive an everlasting kingdom.