

# **GOSPEL ISSUES IN ADVENTISM**

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## Chapter 1

# The Everlasting Gospel

## Matthew 24:14-22

### Introduction

Out of the rubble of the great disappointment of 1844 God raised the Advent Movement. As Adventists, we believe this was in fulfillment of the prophecy recorded in Revelation 10. As an introduction to our next series of studies, which I have entitled “Gospel Issues in Adventism,” please note what this text says [read Rev. 10:8-11]. The verse I would like to draw your attention to is verse 11:

You must prophesy [i.e., proclaim] again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings.

The question I would like to raise in this first study is, what is it that God wants us to proclaimed again before the entire human race? It is very

important that we answer this important question correctly, that is, if we as a people are to fulfill the divine commission God has given us. The only correct answer to this question is found in Rev. 14:6 [read].

This proclamation of the everlasting gospel is in fulfillment of another prophecy, made by Christ Himself [read Matt. 24:14]. Jesus had just predicted the distraction of Jerusalem. This concerned the disciples, and we read in verse 3 of Matthew 24, that they came to him privately and asked Him:

Tell us, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?

Obviously, Christ disciples had assumed that the distraction of Jerusalem would take place at the second coming of Christ. Jesus knew that His poor disciples would not be able to handle the fact that there would be approximately a 2,000-year gap between the two events. So, in this chapter 24 of Matthew, He combined the signs that would

precede the distraction of Jerusalem with the signs that would precede the second Advent.

According to verse 14, and verses 21, 22 — all three of which refer to the events that will precede the second coming — Jesus predicted that before probation closes and the great tribulation that will culminate in the end of the world will take place, the gospel of His kingdom will be fully restored and proclaimed as a testimony or a witness. This will be God's final plea to the world, that this is their only hope of salvation.

This is what God raised the Advent Movement for. But to understand and appreciate this high calling, we need to first consider what the apostle Paul predicted concerning the falling away that would take place before the second coming. This prediction is recorded in his second letter to the Christians in Thessalonica [read 2 Thes. 2:1-4].

According to this prophecy, the Christian church would depart from the true and pure gospel. We know this took place before and during the

Dark Ages. But before He would come again, Jesus predicted that the true gospel, in all its fullness and power, would be restored and proclaimed again. This restoration of the gospel began at the time of the 16th Century Reformation, but it is in our day it will be fully restored and proclaimed with a loud and mighty voice [read Rev. 18:1-5].

The devil, the enemy of souls, has been fully aware of this great commission God has given us as a people. Therefore, from the very beginning of the Advent Movement, he has tried to keep us from reaching our goal and fulfilling our mission. Sad to say, he has had great success. Note this statement made by Ellen G. White to a group of ministers at Battle Creek in 1890, over a hundred years ago:

The danger has been presented to me again and again of entertaining, as a people, false ideas of justification by faith. I have been shown for years that Satan would work in a special manner to confuse the mind on this point. The law of God has been largely dwelt upon and has been presented to congregations, almost as destitute of the knowledge

of Jesus Christ and His relation to the law as was the offering of Cain. I have been shown that many have been kept from the faith because of the mixed, confused ideas of salvation, because the ministers have worked in a wrong manner to reach hearts. The point that has been urged upon my mind for years is the imputed righteousness of Christ. I have wondered that this matter was not made the subject of discourses in our churches throughout the land, when the matter has been kept so constantly urged upon me and I have made it the subject of nearly every discourse and talk that I have given to the people. (FW 18).

This is our sad history and the fact is that, after over 150 years of existence, we are no closer to our goal that we were when E. G. White made that statement. In fact, our situation is worse today than it was a hundred years ago. We are so confused and polarized concerning the gospel that one Australian scholar challenged us some 16 years ago:

Will the true Seventh-day Adventist please stand up?

Within Adventism today some five different kinds of gospels can be heard:

1. The conservatives in our midst are preaching the Armenian gospel, which is anything but good news: that I must first meet God's requirements of faith, repentance, and confession before He will put me into Christ and save me. Thus, instead of being good news, the gospel has become good advice. Unfortunately, the great majority of our people have failed to meet all of God's requirements and, therefore, have been robbed of the joy and assurance of salvation. As a result, many are leaving the church in discouragement.

2. Then you have the traditionalists who claim to be upholding Historist Adventism. They are preaching a Galatian type of Gospel: salvation is not by faith alone or grace alone but by faith plus works or grace plus keeping the law. This is a subtle form of legalism that has produced a Pharisaical people who are always criticizing those who do not see as they do or whose behavior is not

conforming to the do's and don'ts of the church.

3. At the other extreme we have the liberals who are preaching the social gospel. That is: the gospel is practicing the life of Christ, going about doing good. This is a sophisticated form of legalism. Yes, the true gospel will produce a people who will go about doing good, but that is the fruits of the gospel and not the gospel itself. Any form of works that we do that is equated with the gospel is legalism. The gospel is the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, period. Nothing must be added to that or we are perverting the gospel.

4. Since the sixties another gospel has been introduced into Adventism: the evangelical gospel. While there is much truth in this gospel, it is an incomplete gospel. Its emphasis is on salvation from the guilt and punishment of sin only, our ego-centric concerns. But the gospel did not only save us from the guilt and punishment of sin but also from sin itself and our slavery to it. This brings us to the fifth gospel, which I believe is the true and



full gospel God raised the Advent Movement to restore and proclaim.

**5.** This is the everlasting gospel of Revelation 14. During the rest of this study, we are going to examine from Scripture what this gospel is all about, along with the issues it is creating and why. Also, I will also try and clarify some of the misunderstandings some are having regarding certain theological terminologies regarding the everlasting gospel.

## Chapter 2

# Objective & Subjective Salvation

## Ephesians 2:4-10

### Introduction

Out of the Reformation of the 16th Century developed two main distinct concepts of salvation that has since dominated Protestantism. The most popular one today is the Calvinist concept of salvation (John Calvin). According to this view, God actually redeemed or reconciled to Himself the human race on the cross of Christ. However, since the Bible clearly teaches that some will be lost, the Calvinists teach that Christ did not die for the entire human race on the cross, but only for those whom God predetermined He would save. Hence, they believe in a limited atonement.

In the other camp you have the Arminians

(Jacob Arminius). They teach that Christ died for the entire human race on the cross. However, they also take into consideration that some will be lost. Therefore, according to their view, Christ did not actually save anyone on the cross, but simply made provision for our salvation. Hence, for this salvation to become an actual reality, one has to meet certain conditions, namely: believe, repent, and confess all sins. Only then will God put you into Christ and save you.

Both views of salvation defend their position from Scripture. Both camps have been meeting in a verbal battle for the last 400 years with no sign of a reconciliation. Both are presenting certain aspects of truth, while both have ignored certain texts. The Calvinists have great difficulty explaining the universal text of the New Testament, that Christ came to save the entire human race [see Jn. 3:16,17; 12:47; 1 Tim. 2:5,6; Tit. 2:11]. The Arminians, on the other hand, have great difficulty with those texts that clearly state that on the cross God actually saved, redeemed, or reconciled to Himself the entire human race [Rom. 5:10, 18; 2

Cor. 5:18,19; 1 Tim. 4:10; 1 Jn. 2:2].

While we saw in our last study that present day Adventists are polarized into various groups, concerning the gospel, historically we [Adventists] belong to the Arminian camp. As a result, most, if not all, Adventists have been raised up to believe that Christ did not actually save anyone on the cross, but simply made provision for the salvation of all mankind; that unless we take the initiative and believe, repent (i.e., turn away from sin), and confess all our sins, we stand as lost or condemned sinners before God.

In practice this concept of the gospel has done two things to our people.

1. Since we are still struggling with the sin problem, no matter how hard we try, many Adventists question whether their repentance has been genuine. This, in turn, has robbed our people of the assurance of salvation. Hence, most Adventists are very insecure about their salvation. Value Genesis confirmed this fact, when the

majority of our youth admitted they had no assurance of salvation because their conduct was not meeting God's high standard.

2. Added to this problem is the fact that every time one sins one becomes unjustified, until confession of that sin has been made. This has added to the problem of having no assurance of salvation. Because of this twofold problem, we have produced a people who are experiencing no joy of salvation and who are trying to live the Christian life, either out of fear of the judgment, or a desire to make it to heaven.

But the greatest tragedy of all is that this Arminian mind-set has become a real stumbling block to many Adventists. When they hear the true good news of the gospel, to them it sounds like heresy, or it is too good to be true. It's beyond belief. One major area of difficulty they have understanding is the objective and subjective aspects of salvation. This has become a major problem to some. This is the issue I would like to address this morning.

## **Objective and Subjective Salvation**

What do these theological terms mean? When one reads the Bible, especially the New Testament, one realizes that, on the one hand, Scripture speaks of salvation as an already accomplished fact, while, on the other hand, it is an on-going process that will not be completed until the second advent. In other words, the Bible describes two phases of salvation — objective and subjective.

On the one hand, a Christian can say I am already saved, while, on the other hand, has to admit I am being and will be saved. This is a paradox, and that is why so many have difficulty accepting this dual concept of salvation. But the Bible is full of paradoxes which we have already accepted. For example, take Christ Himself. We believe that He was God and man at the same time. That means He was immortal and mortal at the same time. This is a paradox. Or take us Christians. According to the truth of Righteousness by Faith, we are sinners and righteous at the same time

(Luther). In ourselves we are sinners, while in Christ we stand righteous. Again, this is a paradox.

The best way to understand this paradox about salvation is to look at our situation in Adam. When Adam sinned he actually or objectively condemned the entire human race. But this condemnation in Adam, that objectively was passed on to mankind thousands of years ago, did not become ours personally or subjectively until we are born in this world.

In the same way, the entire human race was placed into Christ, the second Adam, at the incarnation. Thus by His obedience the entire human race was objectively justified unto life at the cross [Rom. 5:18]. But this actual or objective salvation does not become ours personally or subjectively until we experience the new birth [read Jn. 3:3].

But there is one major difference between being subjectively in Adam and subjectively in Christ. Our birth in Adam was through procreation

in which we had no choice. That means that the condemnation Adam brought to the entire human race at the Fall is inherited by all who are born into this world. In contrast, the justification unto life objectively obtained by Christ for the entire human race at the cross is experienced only by those who believe in Him and have experienced the new birth.

You see, the objective or actual salvation that was obtained for the entire human race in Christ is God's supreme gift to mankind. And, like any gift, it cannot be enjoyed subjectively if it is rejected or not received. So while condemnation in Adam is inherited and, therefore, applies to all mankind, this is not true with salvation as an experience. Only believers who have received Christ by faith will experience salvation [Rom. 5:17].

When we consider the objective facts of salvation we are looking at the gospel from God's point of view. And as far as God is concerned He has already redeemed or saved the entire human race in Christ. But when we consider the subjective truth of salvation, we are looking at it from man's



point of view. And from our point of view, only believers will be saved.

It is for this reason the Bible clearly teaches that no one will be lost for being born a child of Adam. The only reason anyone will be lost is because they have deliberately and ultimately rejected the objective facts of salvation in Christ [Mk. 16:15, 16; Jn. 3:18,36; Heb. 2:1-3; 10:26-29].

Further, because God has actually redeemed the entire human race in Christ, He can take to heaven all those who have never heard the gospel, through no fault of their own, but who were faithful to the light they had, whatever that light may have been. These will here about Jesus for the first time in heaven and at that time will give Him the glory for saving them.

This understanding of the objective and subjective aspects of salvation will dramatically change our whole approach to evangelism and witnessing. No longer will we preach the gospel as good advice but as good news.

## Chapter 3

# The In Christ Motif

## Ephesians 1:3-8

Many years ago, a Swiss scientist invented the quartz watch and offered it to the Association of Swiss Watch Makers. They were horrified at his offer. “What, no springs or internal moving parts?!! Don’t you know that we are the experts in watch making and have mastered the trade!! How can you insult us by offering us a watch that has no internal moving parts.” They were right at the time. The Swiss were masters at watch making and 80% of the world’s market for watches went to Switzerland. Discouraged, this scientist showed this new invention at a trade show in Japan. The Japanese grabbed the idea and as a result today only 10% of the world market for watches goes to Switzerland. The Swiss lost out because they were not willing to make a paradigm shift.

This illustrates one of human’s major problems.

We do not like changes and will often oppose anything new, including new ideas in worship or theology. That is why traditional Christianity is on the decline today while the nonconformist and the nondenominational churches are flourishing.

Ever since the 3rd Century A.D., the Christian church has assumed that all persons are born eternally lost and only those whom the Bible declares will be saved will make it to heaven. The Reformation of the 16th Century did not change this assumption. As a result, both views of salvation that we discussed in our last study, i.e., Calvinism and Arminianism, still maintain these assumption, even though they disagree on their views on salvation.

But is this the assumption of the New Testament? When one carefully reads the epistles of Paul, with an open mind, one begins to realize that this great apostle, whom God especially set aside to expound the gospel of Jesus Christ, presents the very opposite view: that God has already redeemed, saved, or reconciled to Himself,

the entire human race in Christ and only those who deliberately, persistently, and ultimately resist the convictions of the Holy Spirit will be lost.

This paradigm shift of the gospel is the conclusion I have come to, when considering the central theme of Paul's theology — the In Christ Motif. But the idea that the in Christ motif includes the entire human race is a stumbling block to many Adventists and, therefore, it has come under fire. It is one of the main gospel issues in Adventism today. I would, therefore, like you to put aside your preconceived ideas of salvation that you were raised up with, and consider with me what Paul actually taught about the in Christ motif.

Because of the assumption held by the Christian church, that all persons are born lost, we as a church have applied the in Christ motif only to believers. Since we hold to the Armenian view of the gospel, that salvation in Christ is only provisional, we have been teaching our people that only after we have taken the initiative, by believing in Jesus Christ and repenting of our sins, that God

is able to put us into Christ and save us.

As mentioned in our last study, this is the main reason why so many Adventists have been robbed of the assurance of salvation. Consequently, many are living subnormal Christian lives or remaining nominal Christians, while others are leaving the church. After all, why remain in a church that is constantly putting you on a guilt trip and offering no peace with God?

On the other hand, I have observed that, when God's people begin to understand that they were already saved in Christ 2,000 years ago, a tremendous change takes place in their lives. Suddenly they come alive and are on fire for Christ. That is why I believe that it is this truth as it is in Christ that will be the means by which God will turn our church around and use it to lighten this doomed world with the good news of the everlasting gospel.

But some of you may be asking, "What is this in Christ motif you are talking about?" Ever since I

came to be the pastor of CMC, I have been harping on this truth. However, there may be some here today, or who will be listening to this tape [or reading this webpage], who do not know what this truth is all about. For their benefit, let me give a brief explanation of this glorious truth which constitutes the very heart of the gospel message, the good news of salvation.

According to the apostle Paul, God saved the entire human race in Christ in the same way Satan caused the entire human race to be lost in Adam. That is why he uses Adam as a type or pattern of Christ in Romans 5 [Rom. 5:14b]. Just as sin and death, says Paul, entered the human race through one man, i.e., Adam; so likewise, justification to life came to the entire human race through one man, i.e., Christ, the second Adam [Rom. 5:18; 1 Cor. 15:21, 22].

When God created Adam, He did not create just one individual, but the entire human race in that one man. According to Acts 17:26, the human race is the multiplication of Adam's life. That is

why God called him Adam. In Hebrew, the word Adam, used some 510 times in the Bible, means mankind [note Gen. 5:1,2 (in the NKJV, Adam is translated Mankind)].

Therefore, just as God created all humanity in Adam, so likewise, in the incarnation, God united the life of the entire human race to Christ. This is what made the God-man Christ to be the last or 2nd Adam [read 1 Cor. 15:45]. This union did not save us but qualified Christ to be our substitute and legally represent the human race in His work of redemption.

Thus, by His perfect life in our corporate humanity, which met the full demands of the law, and His sacrificial death on the cross, which met the justice of the law, God rewrote the history of mankind in Christ and changed our status from condemnation to justification. This is the good news of the everlasting gospel. [Read 1 Cor. 1:30,31.]

Does this mean that because Christ actually

saved the entire human race at the cross all will go to heaven? The Bible's answer is a definite NO! As I explained in our last study, because we are by nature the children of Adam, all mankind inherit the condemnation he incurred at the Fall. But what God did to us in Christ is His supreme gift to mankind. And like any gift, it cannot be enjoyed if it is rejected or not received [read Rom. 5:17.]

However, the objection I often face regarding this glorious truth as it is in Christ is that Paul does not apply the in Christ motif to all mankind but only to believers who have experienced the new birth. But this creates major problems. If we insist that the in Christ motif applies only to those who believe in Christ, then we have to admit that there is no hope for millions of people who, through no fault of their own, have never heard the gospel message.

Further, if the in Christ motif applies only to believers, then the believer's faith becomes a subtle form of works, since it is because of our faith that we are placed in Christ. But nowhere in Scripture



do we find that we are saved because of our faith. Scripture tells us that we are saved through or by faith. Faith is only an instrument or a channel by which we receive the salvation that God has already obtained for the entire human race in Christ.

Again, others condemn the in Christ motif because they conclude that if we obeyed in Christ then we become our own saviours. No way! Just as we are not guilty for Adam's sin, the heresy of Original sin, likewise, we get no credit for Christ's obedience. It is Christ alone who obeyed the law in our place, and died for us. But because we were in Him by God's act, we can by faith legally claim the benefits of what He did. When it comes to our salvation, all the honor and glory goes to Christ alone [read 2 Cor. 5:18; Rom. 1:16,17].

In concluding this most important study, I would like to share with you the evidence that Paul's in Christ statements include the entire human race and that this is what constitutes the real good news of the gospel.

## **Objective Truth – The in Christ Motif**

- We know that the apostle Paul was called of God to evangelize the Gentile world; but we must keep in mind that, unfortunately, none of Paul's evangelistic sermons preached to the non-Christians or unchurched have been recorded or preserved. All that we have are his epistles to believers.

- In spite of this fact, there is enough evidence in these epistles to show that Paul gave the in Christ motif an objective application that included all of mankind. That is to say, Paul does not limit the in Christ motif only to believers but includes the entire human race that was redeemed in Christ. To Paul, believers are those who are faithful to the truth as it is in Christ. Note, for example, Paul's introduction to the Ephesians [Ephesians 1:1].

- Here is my evidence that clearly proves Paul gave the in Christ motif an objective application that included the entire human race:

1. Paul reminds believers that they were redeemed or chosen in Christ before their conversion [Romans 5:6-10; Ephesians 1:4; 2:5,6]. If we limit these statements only to believers, than we would have to admit that Calvin's doctrine of predestination is correct. But we don't.

2. Paul points out to the Corinthian believers that just as "in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive," that is, resurrected to life [1 Corinthians 15: 22]. The point Paul is making in this passage is that Christ is the source of the resurrection for the entire human race. The first resurrection will be experienced by the saints unto eternal life, because they believed in Christ; and the second resurrection will be experienced by the lost unto eternal damnation, because they rejected the truth as it is in Christ.

3. Paul refers to Christ as the "last Adam" in 1 Corinthians 15:45. As already pointed out, the word "Adam" in Hebrew means mankind. In the majority of cases, this word is not used as a proper

name but as a truth, i.e., the solidarity of mankind in Adam. When Christ assumed our corporate humanity at the incarnation He, like the first Adam, became mankind, i.e., the entire human race was placed in Him. That is why Paul calls Christ the last Adam, i.e., Mankind.

**4.** Paul's universal texts indicate an accomplished salvation for the entire human race in Christ. But since this salvation is a gift from God, it is made effective by faith only to the believers in Christ [Romans 5:18; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; 1 Timothy 2:6; 4:10; Titus 2:11; Hebrews 2:9].

**5.** In most cases, Paul's subjective application of the in Christ motive to believers, as well as himself, is based on an objective truth already accomplished in Christ [Galatians 2:20; 6:14; 2 Corinthians 5:14. Ephesians 1:3-6; Colosians 2:20; 2 Timothy 2:11]. Faith does not put us into Christ but rather means abiding in Christ [John 15:4-8].

**6.** To Paul, baptism, as a subjective experience, is always "into Christ." By it, the believer is

confessing his or her faith obedience to an objective truth that took place some 2,000 years ago in Christ and Him crucified, buried, and resurrected [Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3-8].

- All these facts point to the in Christ motif as the very heart of the gospel message Paul preached in his evangelistic efforts. When the good news of salvation is presented in the context of the in Christ motif, men and women will come to the realization that God has already reconciled them to Himself [read Jn. 12:32]. What is left is for them to be reconciled to God through faith in His Son [2 Corinthians 5:18-20]. Incidentally, it is this goodness of God that leads to true repentance and conversion [Romans 2:4.]

## Chapter 4

# The Doctrine of Substitution

### Isaiah 53:4-11

Closely related to the in Christ motif, which was our last study, is the doctrine of substitution. This is another Biblical truth that Satan hates and therefore has created opposition against it since the Reformation times. It is still being challenged today, especially by Muslim scholars. It is also one of the issues in Adventism today and that is why I am including it in this series of studies on the gospel issues in Adventism.

The word substitute means one person acting on behalf of another. In this country we have substitute teachers; and the practice of substitution is very common in sports. While the word substitute is not found in Scripture, it is definitely a Biblical truth and a central pillar of the gospel message. The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus lived and died in our place. Note these clear texts [Isa.

53:4-6, 11; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; Heb. 2:9; 9:28; 1 Pet. 3:18].

Since the Scriptures so clearly teach that Christ lived and died as our substitute, why is there so much opposition against it, especially within the Christian Church? The problem is that, unlike the teaching profession or sports, the Biblical doctrine of substitution creates a legal or ethical problem. According to the book of the law, no innocent person is allowed to be punished for the guilt of another [read Deut. 24:16; note also Ezk. 18:20.]

Since Christ committed no sin, the big question is: how could God punish Him on the cross for our sins? Is He not going against His own law? In other words, how can God justify sinners on the basis of what Christ did and still maintain His integrity to His own law which condemns us to death?

This was the main issue fought over the doctrine of justification by faith, in the Counter Reformation. Roman Catholic scholars, like Osiander and Newman, accused the Reformers of

legal fiction. If God can justify sinners without first making them righteous, they argued, than He Himself is guilty of breaking His own law. Today, the Muslim scholars are putting forth the same argument and accusing Christianity of being the most unethical religion in the world.

How do we solve this ethical problem? Make no mistake, the Reformers were Biblically right in teaching the doctrine of substitution, but where they failed was to show how Christ qualified to be our substitute. Before Christ could be our Saviour He first had to be qualified to be our substitute. And the reason why the Reformers failed here was because they failed to identify the humanity of Christ with the fallen sinful humanity He came to redeem.

Thus they taught what is commonly known today as Vicarious Substitution. This simply means that Christ took our place, lived and died instead of us, without first identifying Himself with our humanity that needed redeeming. The word “vicarious” means being sympathetic towards



another's need without actually experiencing their situation.

This is how the vicarious substitution of Christ is generally explained: Christ came to this earth to save mankind from sin, but sin is a dual problem. In the first place, sin is what we are by nature; it is a condition we are born with [Eph. 2:3b]. Secondly, sin is behaviour; it is the transgression of the law [1 Jn. 3:4]. How did Christ save us from this two-fold sin problem? The answer they give is, by His sinless human nature He substituted our sinful nature, and by His perfect performance, i.e., His life and death, He substituted our sinful performance. Thus He became our perfect substitute.

This sounds wonderful, but is this what the Scripture teaches? Nowhere will you find in the Bible this idea of vicarious substitution. On the contrary, the Bible is clear that, in order for Christ to qualify to be our substitute, He had to become one of us in every way except participate in our sin. Please note how two of the gospel writers

describe Christ's genealogy [read Matt. 1:1; the first and last verse of Lk. 3:23-38; and Rom. 1:4.]

Turning to the book of Hebrews, we find that the writer of this epistle clearly identifies the humanity of Christ with our fallen humanity that needed redeeming. Note these clear statements at the very beginning of this epistle [read Heb. 2:10, 11; 14-17]. I will have much more to say about the humanity of Christ in our next study, since this will be our topic. But now I would like to point to two things: first, the two-fold problem this vicarious substitution has created and second, the true Biblical teaching of substitution.

1. As already mentioned, vicarious substitution presents an unethical gospel, that Christ illegally representing us. But vicarious substitution has also opened the door for cheap grace. That is, since Christ lived and died instead of me, without me being actually implicated in His life and death, all I have to do to be saved is simply believe in Him, that is, mentally consent to what He did for me, and I can live as I please and still be saved. But this

is not what the Bible teaches [read Romans 6:1, 2, 10, 11; Col. 3:3; 1 Pet. 2:24].

2. The only true explanation of the doctrine of substitution is the in Christ motif, which we considered in our last study: that, in order to save fallen humanity, Christ had to first be qualified to be our substitute and representative. How did God do this? By uniting the divinity of Christ with our corporate humanity that needed redeeming. Thus, by becoming the second Adam, i.e., the second mankind, Christ fully qualified to act on our behalf. This is the clear teaching of Scripture [1 Cor. 1:30, 31; Eph. 2:5, 6].

That is why true righteousness by faith is more than a mental assent to the truth of the gospel, what Christ did for us in His life and death, but an actual submission to the new history God has given us in Christ. This means by faith we obey the gospel and identify ourselves with the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ [read Romans 6:17, 18].

This is the true meaning of baptism, the putting

on of Christ or entering into Christ's experience of His death burial and resurrection. Baptism in the New Testament is always into Christ [Romans 6:3-8; Gal. 3:27; 1 Pet. 18-22].

By actually becoming us, Christ could legally or lawfully be our substitute and His holy history, His life and death, can legally be applied to all those who by faith receive Him as their personal Saviour. That is why, in the light of this truth, true Christianity is more than a mental assent to the truth as it is in Christ but an actual participating in Christ. This is clearly demonstrated every time we partake of the Lord's Supper [read 1 Cor. 10:16].

Such an understanding of the doctrine of substitution and our response to it leaves no room for cheap grace. Every believer who has by faith received Christ as his or her personal Saviour has to confess what Paul confessed about himself to the Christians of Galatia [read Gal. 2:19, 20; note also Col. 2:6, 7].

Correctly understood, the doctrine of

substitution offers us Christians two things. On the one hand, it gives us full assurance of salvation, since we are already sitting in heavenly places in Christ [Eph. 2:6]. But, on the other hand or at the same time, this truth does not give us license to live as we please. Our lives are now hidden in Christ and, as a result, we must put on Christ and make no room for the flesh [read Rom. 13:14].

May this two-fold experience be ours as we grow in grace and truth.

## Chapter 5

# The Humanity of Our Saviour

### Hebrews 2:14-18

After the apostles passed from the scene, the leadership of the early church fell into the hands of the Church Fathers, most of whom were of Greek origin. Being great philosophers one of the first major theological controversy that took place in the history of the Christian church was the Christological Controversy.

This controversy was over the divine/human nature of Christ. How can one person be both God and Man at the same time, they argued? Consequently, some defended only His divinity while others only His humanity. It took two major councils, Nicea (320?), and Chalcedon (450?), for the church to finally agree on the unipersonality of Christ's dual nature: that He was fully God and fully man at the same time. This, they said, is a mystery, i.e., unexplainable, but a Biblical truth.

While this decision was generally accepted a new argument developed. It was over Christ's human nature. Was it like Adam's before the Fall, (i.e., Pre-Fall), or sinful like ours (i.e., Post-Fall)? For the first five centuries, the Church Fathers concluded that Christ could not redeem what He did not assume, therefore, His humanity had to be like ours that needed redeeming. This view, unfortunately, is not held today.

Why does the Christian church today uphold the pre-Fall view? History tells us that this view became dominant because of the church of Rome's doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. While the Reformation rejected this doctrine, they nevertheless accepted the results of this heresy and taught that Christ Himself was born immaculate, i.e., with a sinless spiritual nature, like that of Adam before the Fall.

This became the established view of the Protestant churches to this day. But this was not the view that our pioneers held. While we as a church

have never had an official position, most of our literature — books, Sabbath School lessons, etc. — presented the post-Fall position. That is, until the 1960s when, to gain acceptance by the Evangelicals, we changed our position to the pre-Fall.

This created the great controversy that is raging today over the human nature of Christ. Unfortunately, most of the arguments are not being discussed in the context of the gospel but Christian living. The majority of those who teach the post-Fall view, and these are the independent ministries, do so to defend sinless living: that Christ took on our sinful nature in order to be our EXAMPLE. The result is legalism or perfectionism. No wonder, those who uphold justification by faith rightly defend the pre-Fall view.

But if we are to come to a correct understanding of Christ's human nature, we must study it in the context of the gospel, because all through the New Testament, this is the emphasis of the Bible writers. In other words, Scripture teaches



that Christ became a man for the sole purpose of being the Savior of the World. (Hence the title of my book.) It is only to those who first accept Christ as their Savior does the Bible present Him as our example.

According to the New Testament, the human nature of Christ is presented in the context of three fundamental truths. They are:

1. That the gospel constitutes the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ.
2. This gospel redeemed us sinners from every aspect of our sin problem.
3. All Christian experience must be based on the finished work of Christ.

Any discussion concerning the human nature of Christ outside of these three fundamental facts of Scripture becomes futile and meaningless.

## **1. The Gospel Constitutes the Birth, Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ.**

The birth of Christ plays an important part in our salvation since it qualified Him to be our Substitute and Representative. We saw this in our last study, the doctrine of Substitution. At His birth, God united the divinity of Christ with our corporate humanity that needed redeeming. This made Christ one with us so that He could rewrite our history and change our status and destiny from that of condemnation to death, which we inherited from Adam, to justification to life [read Rom. 5:18; 1 Cor. 15:21, 22.]

The life of Christ is important to our salvation since He lived a perfect life on our behalf and thus met the positive demands of the law. The law says we have to obey it perfectly in order to live. In this we have all failed. But what we have failed to do Christ did our corporate humanity, which He assumed at birth [read Jn. 3:17; Gal. 4:4, 5; Heb. 10:5-9].

The death of Christ is important because it redeemed fallen humanity from the curse of the law. The same law which says “obey and live” also says “disobey and die.” Since we have all sinned and come short of the laws demands, Christ could not save us only by His perfect life. To redeem us fully He had also to meet the just demands of the law. This He did by His death on the cross [read 1 Pet. 1:18, 19; 2:24; 3:18].

The resurrection of Christ plays a vital part in our salvation because it is in the resurrection that God gave us the eternal life of His Son, in exchange for our condemned life which came to an end at the cross. This made it possible for Christ’s humanity to rise from the dead. This new life is what makes it possible for all who believe in Christ to pass from death to life. This is the good news of the gospel [read Jn. 5:24; 2 Cor. 5:14, 17; 1 Pet, 1:3].

## **2. The Gospel Redeemed Us from Every Aspect of the Sin Problem**

Scripture presents sin as a three-fold problem. In the first place, sin is the transgression of the law which results in the curse. Since all have sinned, we all face the guilt and punishment of sin. But, thank God, Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us [read Gal. 3:10, 13].

But sin is more than the transgression of the law. Secondly, sin is also a force, a principle, or a law which has us in its grips. Because of Adam's sin, we have all been sold under sin and are slaves to it. This is something we fully discover only after we become Christians and try to live the holy life in our own strength. Christ also came to redeem us from this predicament — the power and slavery to sin. That is why He had to assume our sinful nature in order to be our complete Savior [read Rom. 3:9; 7:14, 24, 25; 8:2-4].

Finally, sin is part of our very nature. In order

for Christ to save us from the very nature and presence of sin, He had to deliver us from this evil world and make us sit in heavenly places in Christ. This He did in the resurrection and His ascension into heaven [read Eph. 2:3b, 5,6; Phil. 3:20, 21].

### **3. All Christian Experience Must be Based on the Finished Work of Christ**

Every subjective experience of the believer must be based on what Christ has already accomplished for the fallen human race 2,000 years ago. The peace and assurance of salvation we experience through Justification by Faith, the victory over the flesh and holy living we are experiencing through Sanctification by Faith, and the redemption of our bodies we will experience through glorification at the second coming are all based in the fact that all three experiences have already been obtained for us in Christ. The Holy Spirit does not add anything to this but simply makes it real in our experience [read 1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:10].

The only way Christ could have accomplished these three facts is by assuming the self-same human nature we are born with and which needs redeeming. This is the message of the New Testament. Christ was made what we are so that we might be made in Him what He is [read 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 2:14-18].

## Chapter 6

# Justification & Sanctification

## Romans 5:1-5

### Introduction

One of the major areas of confusion among Adventists, as well as many other Christians, has to do with the relationship between Justification and Sanctification, or as some would put it, between the imputed and the imparted righteousness of Christ. I would like us to focus our attention on this major issue of the gospel in Adventism, an issue closely related to the objective and subjective salvation we considered earlier.

Since most of you were raised up in the Adventist church, we will begin our study of this subject by a brief description of what has been traditionally taught within Adventism. Unfortunately, this is also the view that is still being taught by the majority of the independent

ministries, those who claim to defend historic Adventism.

Following this we will define these two terms, i.e., Justification and Sanctification, or imputed and imparted righteousness, and then examine how they are used in Scripture, especially in the New Testament.

## **SDA's Traditional Teaching on Justification & Sanctification**

We have already seen in a previous study that traditionally Adventists have been teaching the Arminian gospel — that the salvation Christ accomplished on the cross was only provisional, so that for it to become a reality one must first repent (i.e., turn away from the life of sin), believe in Jesus Christ, and confess all sins already committed.

This traditional understanding of the salvation has to a large degree affected our understanding and therefore our teaching on justification and



sanctification, as well as some of our major doctrines.

As a result, justification has been defined as only the forgiveness of past sins. But since forgiveness of sins, wonderful as this may be, is negative, i.e., it only cancels a bad debt, this in itself does not make us righteous and, therefore, cannot save us. Hence, justification has to be accompanied by sanctification or holy living if one is to make it to heaven. Consequently, justification plus sanctification is what will ultimately qualify us for heaven.

However, we all know that sanctification is an on going process which, unfortunately, is accompanied by failure. What do we do with the new sins we have committed, since justification is only the forgiveness of past sins? Our response has been that every time we commit a new sin we go back to condemnation until we repent and confess that sin. As a result, the Christian experience of most Adventists has been like a yo-yo, between justification and condemnation. This, to say the

least, is very frustrating.

It is this view of justification and sanctification that is to a large degree responsible for robbing God's people of the assurance of salvation and driving them out of the church. Tell me, who wants to remain in a church that offers no real peace with God and is constantly putting you on a guilt trip?

This confused idea of salvation is what led E. G. White to correct the pastors at Battle Creek in 1890. I quoted her statement to them when we studied the Objective and Subjective salvation. Here is the essence of what she said:

“The danger has been presented to me again and again of entertaining, as a people, false ideas of justification by faith. I have been shown for years that Satan would work in a special manner to confuse the mind on this point.... I have been shown that many have been kept from the faith because of the mixed, confused ideas of salvation, because the ministers have worked in a wrong manner to reach hearts. The point that has been

urged upon my mind for years is the imputed righteousness of Christ.” (FW, 18).

Unfortunately, this mixed, confused idea of salvation is still being taught by those who defend historic Adventism. Justification or imputed righteousness is still defined by them as only the forgiveness of past sins. When asked to defend this view of justification from Scripture, the typical answer given are two texts, both of which are taken out of context. The two texts are 1 John 1:9 and Romans 3:25. Let us examine them in context.

Nowhere in all of Scripture do we find justification defined as only the forgiveness of past sins. Furthermore, no where in all of the Bible do we find that justification plus sanctification is what qualifies us for heaven.

Yes, the Bible clearly teaches that genuine justification by faith always results in sanctification or good works. But these good works are the evidence of salvation, they witness true justification by faith, but do not contribute one iota

towards our ticket to heaven. James made it very clear in his epistle, the faith that justifies, if not accompanied by works is dead. [Read James 2:14, 17, 20.]

## **How Then are Justification and Sanctification Defined in Scripture?**

The word justification, as with the word condemnation, is a legal term used in the court room. A good example of this is Deut. 25:1. Justification means to be declared righteous. When used in the context of the gospel the word justification is used in two ways — as an objective fact as well as a subjective experience. As an objective fact, justification is applied to the entire human race fully redeemed in Christ. [Read Rom. 5:18.]

But since this objective justification is God's supreme gift to mankind, the good news of the gospel, it has to be received in order to be experienced. Therefore, justification, as a subjective experience, applies only to those who

have believe and obey the gospel, and are baptized into Christ. The Bible refers to this as justification by faith [Mk. 16:15, 16; Rom. 5:1].

This dual application of justification is also true of the word sanctification. When used in a spiritual sense sanctification means holy or set apart for holy use. Here are examples of sanctification used as an objective truth as well as an subjective experience

Objective Truth: 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11.

Subjective Application: 2 Thes. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2.

In Christ, the whole world has been sanctified or made holy [Eph. 1:4]. This is the objective use of sanctification. But sanctification as a subjective experience, applies only to believers who have been justified by faith, and this is an on going process. True justification by faith means NOT I BUT CHRIST, and this sets the believer aside for holy use. [Read Gal. 2:20; 5:13, 14.]

In justification by faith, God declares sinners, who believe in Christ, as righteous [Rom. 4:5]. This means He declared believers as being perfect in performance, in justice, as well as in nature. The question this raises is: how can God do this and still maintain His integrity to His law which condemns us sinners to death?

The answer is that the word justification can be applied in two ways, both of which are legally acceptable. The first is when the accused is found innocent or not guilty. Naturally, this cannot be applied to us since all have sinned and come short of God's glory. But the second use of justification is when the guilty one has met the full demands of the law.

As sinners the law condemns us to death. But when we were baptized into Christ we were baptized into His death, which incidentally was to sin. Hence, God can legally declare believers righteous since faith, accompanied by baptism, means identifying with Christ's death. [Read Rom.

6:3, 7, 8.]

Thus justification by faith means, on the one hand, we stand complete in Christ and fully qualify for heaven, now and in the judgment [read Col. 2:10]. But, on the other hand, it also means that we must consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God [Col. 2:6; Rom. 6:10, 11]. The result is a life of sanctification, the fruits of justification by faith.

## Chapter 7

# The Assurance of Salvation

## Hebrews 10:19-22

### Introduction

This may come to some of you as a surprise, but, believe it or not, there are some Adventists who strongly object to preaching assurance of salvation. Some of them feel that by doing so we pastors are taking away from our members the incentive to keep the law. As one church leader said to me, “You may be Biblically correct, but if you give our members the assurance of salvation what incentive do they have for keeping the law?” Amazing!!!

Others object or condemn the preaching of assurance of salvation because they equate it with the Calvinist teaching of once saved, always saved.

And again, some others remind me that E. G.



White has warned us as a people that we are never to say “I am saved.” They equate this statement with the assurance of salvation. As a result of all these objections, the teaching of assurance of salvation has become a gospel issue in Adventism and therefore needs to be addressed. This will be our topic.

But before we answer to these objections, let us first look at the Biblical record. Does the Bible teach that Christians should have full assurance of salvation? Or are we to be kept in suspense until Christ comes? Please turn to Hebrews 10:19-22 and note what it says regarding our assurance of salvation. This, incidentally, is not an isolated statement of Scripture. Note how Christ Himself gave full assurance of salvation to believers [read Jn 5:24; Mk. 16:15, 16]. The same truth was also preached by the apostles [read Acts 15:1, 10, 11; 16:28-31.]

Having established the fact from Scripture, that Christians should have full assurance of salvation, let us now consider the threefold objections to this

wonderful truth:

**Objection #1.** Does assurance of salvation take away the incentives to obeying the law? The answer is yes, if you are using the law as a means of salvation. In other words, why should I struggle to keep the law if I am already saved? That may sound like good human logic, but the fact is, by observing the law no one will be saved [read Rom. 3:20].

Therefore, anyone who uses this argument, what does it tell you? Obviously, they have not understood the good news of the gospel. This, by the way, is the fruits of the Armenian gospel: that salvation is only provisional and only when I meet God's requirements will He save me. Sad to say, many of our people, young and old, have been trapped into this false gospel.

Whenever we use selfish motives — like fear of the judgment or desire for reward — to get our people to keep God's law or do good works, we are no different than any pagan or non-Christian

religion. The principle of self belongs to Satan and this evil world. That is why all man-made religions are based on salvation by works. God's ways are the very opposite [read Isa. 55:8, 9].

The principle of self was introduced by Lucifer when he became Satan and which he infected the human race with at the Fall [read Isa. 53:6; Phil. 2:21]. In contrast, God's kingdom is established on the principle of selfless agape love. This selfless unconditional love is the bases of our salvation as well as Christian living [read Matt. 5:43-48; 1 Cor. 13:1-5.]

God's love has no self in it: it seeketh not its own. When we appeal to man's selfish nature in trying to get our people to keep the law or do good works, no matter how sincere or good our intentions are, we are actually upholding Satan's kingdom and contradicting the true gospel motivation to live the Christians life [read 2 Cor. 5:14, 15; Jn. 13:34, 35.]

**Objection #2.** Is assurance of salvation the

same as once saved, always saved? The answer is a big NO! The doctrine of “once saved, always saved” is based on the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. While the assurance of salvation is based on the doctrine of justification by faith. Let me explain.

The doctrine of predestination is based on the fact that God is sovereign. This means that whatever God decides will happen. And since the Bible clearly teaches that some will be lost, Calvin concluded that God could not have saved all mankind on the cross but only those whom He predetermined He would save. The rest of humanity, he said, are reprobates and will be lost.

But to those whom God has predetermined to save, He gives them the gift of faith. And when this gift of faith is exercised, the believer is guaranteed eternal security, or what we know as once saved, always saved. Because now, Calvinists say, you have become a child of God and this fact can never change, no matter what (the Prodigal Son is often given as an example).

This doctrine of eternal security, when carefully examined, is based primarily on human logic rather than “thus says the Lord.” Nowhere in the Bible do I read that Christ came to this earth to only save some. All the universal texts of the New Testament clearly show that in Christ the entire human race was saved. But because God created mankind with a free will, only those who have deliberately, persistently, and ultimately rejected God’s gift of salvation will be eternally lost [read Jn. 3:16-18, 36.]

Therefore, anyone who equates assurance of salvation with “once saved, always saved” have failed to see the distinction between the two. What the Bible teaches is, that as long as we stand on the platform of justification by faith we can have full assurance of salvation. However, the moment we turn our backs on Christ by unbelief we are at the same time saying good-bye to heaven. That is why the New Testament is full of admonition to believers, under no circumstances give up your faith in Christ [read Matt. 10:17-22; Heb. 10:35-

39.]

**Objection #3.** When E.G. White warns believers that they should never say “I am saved,” was she implying that Christians should not have or be given the assurance of salvation? Nothing could be further from the truth. Not only did E. G. White emphasize assurance of salvation, but her very last letter to a dying lady was to give her the assurance of salvation. This is only one sample from a list of 81 statements I have found.

How then are we to interpret her statement that “Christians should never say ‘I am saved’?” As with Scripture, E. G. White should never be read out of context. But this is unfortunately a common problem among God’s people. There are about four times E. G. White makes this statement and, when read in context, in each case she is condemning one of two heresies:

1. The heresy of the holy flesh movement that plagued the Indiana Conference towards the end of the nineteenth century.

2. The heresy of the Calvinist teaching of “once saved, always saved,” which some Adventists of her day were still holding on to.

In concluding this study on the assurance of salvation, how are we to look at this matter of our salvation? According to the clear teaching of the New Testament, Christians must consider their salvation in all three tenses: past, present, and future, i.e.: “I am saved,” “I am being saved,” and “I will be saved.”

When it comes to the subjective experience of salvation, believers are already saved from the guilt and punishment of sin [read Jn. 5:24; Rom. 8:1]. But, since we still possess sinful natures, we are being saved daily from the slavery and power of sin [read 2 Thes. 2:13.] Finally, at His coming we will be saved from the very nature and presence of sin [read Rom. 8:23-25; Phil. 3:20, 21.] But, in Christ, all three are already ours. This is why believers can have full assurance of salvation.

## Chapter 8

# The Two Atonements

## 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

### Introduction

As Seventh-day Adventists we have some unique doctrines. Among them is the doctrine of the Final Atonement, base on the Old Testament yearly ceremony of the Sanctuary Service, which we all know is Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement.

According to our fundamental beliefs, the anti-typical Day of Atonement began in 1844, when Christ our great High Priest, moved from the Holy Place of the heavenly Sanctuary to the Most Holy Place, to begin the work of judgment, bring sin to an end, and usher in everlasting righteousness.

The fact that we have designate this concluding work of Christ in the plan of redemption as the



Final Atonement has raised a big question regarding the atonement accomplished on the cross. WHY? Because the words Final Atonement, which we apply to the culminating work of Christ in the heavenly Sanctuary, has given the impression to many, without and within the church, that the atonement accomplished on the cross was incomplete.

The Christian church in general, and especially the evangelicals, teach that on the cross Christ's atonement for the sins of the world was full and complete. In other words, nothing can be added to this finished work that took place on Calvary some 2,000 years ago.

Therefore, for us to refer to the second phase of Christ's Priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary as the Final Atonement is tantamount to saying that what Christ accomplished on the cross was incomplete. This has therefore become a gospel issue in Adventism, especially among the so-called Evangelical Adventists.

The question I would like to address in this study is: are we right in defining this final phase of Christ's Priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary as the Final Atonement? And, if we are right, than what do we do with the fact that on the cross Christ cried out "it is finished," meaning the atonement?

### **Atonement Defined**

The first thing we have to do in addressing this issue is to define the word "Atonement." This word is really made up of three words joined together: AT-ONE-MENT. It is a word that we do not normally use today. Instead we prefer to use the words RECONCILE or RECONCILIATION, which basically mean the same thing [look for example at Rom. 5:11 in the KJV and the NIV, which, incidentally, is the same as the NKJV].

The word atonement means removing any barrier that has caused the separation of two people, thus bring them together once again. Hence, when this happens, they have been reconciled. When used theologically, the word

atonement refers to the expiating or removing of our sins which has separated us sinners from a holy God [read Isa. 59:2, 3].

Let us be absolutely clear, on the cross the sins of the entire human race was atoned for by the death of Jesus Christ. As a result sinful humanity was reconciled to God. This atonement or reconciliation was perfect, full, and complete. This is part and parcel of the good news of the gospel and the New Testament clearly teaches this [read Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18, 19 (S. rd.); Col. 1:19, 20].

However, does the fact that sinful humanity has already been reconciled to God mean that there is no final atonement? The answer is a big YES!!! There is going to be a final atonement. But how can there be a final atonement, to be accomplished sometime in the future, if the atonement on the cross was full and complete? Here is the Biblical answer.

As I mentioned in a previous study, the Bible is full of paradoxes. This is one of them. But once

you realize what we have already discovered in previous studies, that salvation in the Bible is presented as both an objective truth as well as a subjective experience, the problem is solved.

In dealing with the subject of assurance of salvation last study, we faced the same issue. As an objective truth, all Christians can claim I am already saved in Christ [Eph. 2:6]. This is what gives us assurance of salvation. But as a subjective experience, we Christians must also add I am being saved daily from the power and slavery to sin (i.e., I am being sanctified), as well as I will be saved at the second advent of Christ from the nature and presence of sin (i.e., I will be glorified).

The same truth or idea must be applied to the doctrine of atonement. As an objective truth the entire human race has already been reconciled to God. But as a subjective experience the atonement has more than one phase, of which the final atonement is the culminating one.

## **Atonement Experienced**

With this in mind, let me now show you from the Bible at least three phases of the subjective experience of the atonement or reconciliation:

1. The reconciliation between mankind and God. Please note: I did not say between God and mankind. That has already taken place on the cross. In other words, reconciliation or at-one-ment is a two-way affair. As far as God is concerned, He has already reconciled Himself to mankind by the death of His Son. What is left is for us humans to be reconciled to Him [2 Cor. 5:18-20.]

2. The Bible also speaks of atonement as an on going application through the high priestly ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. While Christ is the Saviour of all mankind, He is the priest or mediator of only the believers who have by faith been reconciled to God. We believers are still sinners, in and of ourselves, and Satan uses this to accuse us before God day and night [Rev. 12:10]. However, while Satan does this, Christ is daily or

continually applying His blood to defend our atonement or reconciliation [Heb. 2:17].

**3.** Lastly, the Bible speaks of a final atonement when sin will be eradicated and the whole universe will be at-one-ment with God. Even though we Christians stand perfect in Christ and have the full assurance of salvation we still have sinful flesh. Therefore, there is no at-one-ment or peace between the flesh and our converted minds [read Rom. 7:24, 25]. Hence, we long for the redemption of our bodies [read Rom. 8:22-25; Phil. 3:20, 21]. This is part of the final atonement.

Furthermore, until Christ comes we are living in a world which is, to a large degree, still under the control of Satan, the enemy of souls. As a result, we Christians may describe ourselves as citizens of heaven but living in enemy territory. That means Satan can make and does make life hell for us. So we look forward to the second and third coming of Christ so that we may live in heaven and the new earth at-one-ment [read Rev. 21:1-5].

This is what the doctrine of final atonement is all about. It is not adding to the finished atonement of the cross, but making real in experience what Christ has already obtained for mankind by His birth, life, death, and resurrection. The final atonement is the climax, the Halleluia Chorus of the plan of redemption. It is a glorious doctrine that we must not be ashamed of, because it points us forward to the reality of salvation, which at the moment is ours only by faith [read Heb. 11:1].

When the doctrine of the final atonement is understood in the context of legalism, it becomes a terrible doctrine which robs us of the joy of salvation. But correctly understood, the doctrine of the final atonement is of tremendous help to believers to hold on to our confidence in Christ [read Rev. 22:20, 21].

## Chapter 9

# The Sanctuary Message

**John 2:18-22**

## Introduction

One of the major doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the sanctuary message. This is how the main thrust of this fundamental doctrine is described:

There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle which the Lord set up and not man. In it, Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross. He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and began His intercessory ministry at the time of His ascension. In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2,300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry. It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition



of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. ...The investigative judgment reveals to heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ and, therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to have part in the first resurrection. It also makes manifest who among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and in Him, therefore, are ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom. This judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus.

Not only has this unique doctrine of our church made no positive impact on the Christian church at large, but it has come under fire, first from non-Adventist scholars and, more recently, from some of our own scholars. Does this mean we have been following cunningly devised fables?

My honest belief is that our pioneers who first formulated this doctrine from their study of the Bible, and which was later endorsed by Ellen G. White, were lead by God, in spite of their

limitations.

Therefore, what we are going to do in the next four studies, as part of this series on the gospel issues in Adventism, is to carefully and honestly examine this doctrine on the sanctuary. In this study, we will consider the sanctuary message itself and then, in the next three studies, examine [the events of] 1844 and the investigative judgment.

After the death of the apostles, the leadership of the church fell into the hands of the Gentile believers (Church Fathers). They saw very little value in the sanctuary doctrine; to them it belonged to the Jewish dispensation. Consequently, the sanctuary truth became obsolete until the mid-19th Century when the Seventh-day Adventist Church brought it to the forefront. It is our major theological contribution to Christendom.

Yet, as I already mentioned, its impact on has been both negative and controversial. Why is this so? Could it be that we have repeated the same

mistake as the Jewish nation did? [Read Acts 7:44-51.]

God's purpose through the Sanctuary was not to point to buildings and furniture, even though there is a literal sanctuary in heaven, but to reveal His plan of salvation in Christ. The Sanctuary is God's master model plan of redemption. Through it, He has revealed the whole plan of salvation from beginning to end — His earthly mission as well as His heavenly ministry. It is His visual aid to clearly show mankind the various stages of our redemption, in and through His Son Jesus Christ. It is His “show and tell.”

In the incarnation, God united the divinity of Christ to our corporate humanity that needed redeeming. This qualified Him to be our Substitute and Representative. Then, by His perfect life and sacrificial death, He fully redeemed mankind. In the resurrection, Christ raised our humanity cleansed and glorified, which He took to heaven to represent us in His priestly ministry.

He will continue this High Priestly ministry in the heavenly Sanctuary until the Great Controversy is brought to an end, when sin will be eradicated and everlasting righteousness will be ushered in. This, in a nutshell, is the whole purpose of the sanctuary message. It is to give us humans a clear picture of the whole plan of salvation so that our faith in God and our future hope becomes fully established.

## **1. The Sanctuary was God's Master Model Plan of Salvation**

- Compare Exodus 25:8 with John 1:14.
- Hebrews 9:1-5, 10 describes the earthly sanctuary and its ceremonies. This was the old or first covenant: salvation in type.
- Hebrews 10:5-10 describes the anti-type of the sanctuary message. This is the new covenant: salvation in reality.

Unfortunately, the Jewish nation failed to see

the real significance of the sanctuary model and, therefore, placed their emphasis on buildings and rituals rather than what these things pointed to. This is the whole point Stephen made and which led to his martyrdom. Christ tried to correct them [read Jn. 2:19-22.] We must not repeat their mistake.

## **2. Everything in the Sanctuary Pointed to Christ**

- Christ is the Lamb of God that took away the sins of the world [John 1:29].

- Christ is the light of the world that lightens every man [John 1:9-12; 8:12].

- Christ is the living bread who came down from heaven to give us eternal life [John 6:32-51].

- Christ is the mercy seat (propitiation), through whose redemption we have salvation full and complete [Romans 3:24, 25].

- Christ is our intercessor against the accusations of Satan [Hebrews 7:25].

- Christ is the veil that bore our sins in His flesh [Hebrews 10:19,20].

### **3. The Sanctuary Revealed the Fall and Restoration of Man**

- In Adam, humanity sinned, was defiled, and condemned to death.

- In Christ, the same humanity was reconciled to God, cleansed from all defilement, and justified to life [read Romans 5:18].

- Through faith in Christ, sinners experience salvation.

This is the good news of the gospel and the truth of righteousness by faith. All this was revealed in the Sanctuary model given to Moses:

**a.** The Sanctuary was where God met sinners

[read Ex. 25:22; 29:42, 43].

Today He meets us in Christ [read 2 Cor. 5:19].

**b.** The Sanctuary was where God revealed Himself to sinners [read Ex. 29:46].

Today He reveals Himself to us in Christ [read John 14:7-9].

**c.** The Sanctuary was where God dwelt with sinners [read Ex. 25:8; 29:45, 46].

Today He dwells with us in Christ [read Matthew 1:23; John 14:23].

**d.** The Sanctuary was where God spoke to sinners [read Ex. 29:42; Lev. 1:1].

Today He speaks to us in Christ [read Hebrews 1:2; John 8:43, 47].

**e.** The Sanctuary was where God accepted sinners [read Lev. 1:4].

Today He accepts us in Christ [read Ephesians 1:6].

**f.** The Sanctuary was where God forgave sinners [read Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35].

Today He forgives us in Christ [read Ephesians 1:7].

## **Conclusion**

Too often our emphasis on the sanctuary message is our own subjective experience, whereas its main purpose is to point to the truth as it is in Christ.

Because of the sanctuary message, we have a total picture of the plan of redemption, from beginning to end. Hence, we can be absolutely sure of the future. This, in turn, gives us everlasting hope.



## Chapter 10

# **The Significance of 1844 (Part 1)**

### **Daniel 8:9-14**

On page 409 of *The Great Controversy*, Ellen G. White makes this statement:

The scripture which above all others had been both the foundation and central pillar of the advent faith was the declaration: “Unto 2,300 days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed” [Dan. 8:14].

Turning to the 27 SDA Fundamental Doctrines, this is how this text is interpreted:

In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2,300 days, He (i.e., Christ) entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry. It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of

the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement.

According to this fundamental doctrine, the anti-typical Day of Atonement and the investigative judgment of the believers began in 1844. However, ever since the early 1950s, and even earlier, this doctrine has come under fire that it is unbiblical, first from non-Adventist scholars and, more recently, from our own scholars. The objection to this truth is threefold.

**1. The Linguistic Problem.** The word translated “cleansed” in Dan. 8:14 (KJV) is not the same original word for “cleansed” found in Lev. 16 for the Day of Atonement. In Dan. 8:14 the word is “tsadag,” while the word used in Lev. 16 is “taheer.” Therefore, linguistically, we cannot link the cleansing of the sanctuary of Dan. 8:14 with the cleansing of the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement.

**2. The Contextual Problem.** In Dan. 8:9-12, Daniel describes the little horn which casts the

truth of the sanctuary to the ground and prospers. Verse 13 raises the question: how long is God going to allow this? The answer is in verse 14: after 2,300 days, then the sanctuary will be “cleansed,” “restored,” “vindicated,” or “reconsecrated” (the original word could mean any of these). This answer has nothing to do with the investigative judgment of the saints.

**3. The Investigative Judgment Itself.** Our traditional explanation of the investigative judgment of the saints contradicts the gospel truth of justification by faith alone. Therefore this doctrine is also unbiblical.

These are all serious charges which we cannot ignore. Why? Because, as we noted, 1844 is the foundation and central pillar of our faith. To do away with 1844 is to do away with the very purpose God raised the advent movement. As one evangelical scholar stated: “If SDAs cannot prove 1844 from the Bible, they have no right to exist as a denomination.” The question we must therefore ask ourselves is, have we been following cunningly

devised fables or does 1844 have a Biblical significance for our existence?

As we tackle this subject, we shall discover that 1844 is vital to our global mission, which I believe is to restore and proclaim the everlasting gospel into all the world. Even though our pioneers did not use correct Biblical rules to interpret Dan. 8:14, I honestly believe that God was behind the advent movement. He raised out of the great disappointment of 1844. Therefore, what we are going to do in the next two studies is to re-examine Dan. 8:14 in its proper setting and examine its significance to us as a denomination.

Now we will examine Dan. 8:14 in the context of the entire book of Daniel, as well as in the context of chapter 8 itself. Once we do this we will be in a position to correctly interpreting Dan. 8:14, which will be our next study. Then, in our final study, we will turn to the investigative judgment and examine it in the light of the gospel truth of justification by faith alone. This is going to be heavy stuff, but I hope very profitable to our own

personal faith journey as well as our mission at [this church].

In examining the entire book of Daniel, you will notice that the book is divided into two distinct parts — historical and prophetic. Since Dan. 8:14 belongs to the prophetic part, this is the section of Daniel we will consider.

In studying the prophetic parts of Daniel, we discover that certain chapters are dealing with the same kingdoms and periods of time. This is especially true of chapters 2, 7, and 8. These are all parallel passages even though different symbols are used in each chapter. Therefore, using the hermeneutic principal of parallelism or recapitulation, a principal first used by the Christian church in the 3rd century A.D., I want you to notice a very important truth that is vital to a correct interpretation of Dan. 8:14.

The Great Stone event of Dan. 2:44, 45, the Judgment scene described in Dan. 7:9-28, and the cleansing of the sanctuary of Dan. 8:14 are all

parallel events that belong to the same kingdom and period of time — the establishment of the kingdom of God. This is the kingdom that will eventually replace all earthly kingdoms and will be an everlasting kingdom.

Turning to chapter 8 of Daniel, we discover that the prophet Daniel is shown four major events regarding the history of this world. Here is a brief outline of the four events he is shown and their interpretation:

**1.** The Ram with two horns [read Dan. 8:3, 4]. Turning to verse 20, this symbol is clearly shown to be the kingdom of Medo-Persia.

**2.** The male Goat with one horn [read Dan. 8:5-8]. According to verses 21, 22, this kingdom represents Greece.

**3.** The little horn [read Dan. 8:9-13]. When we consider the description of this little horn, as well as the interpretation in verses 23-25, we discover that it is not only a political kingdom but also a

ecclestial power that cast the truth of the sanctuary to the ground and prospers.

4. Finally, in answer to the question of verse 13, Daniel is shown what will take place after the 2,300 evenings and mornings, which is translated into days in the King James Version [read Dan. 8:13, 14]. Now please note carefully that while the first three events or kingdoms are explained, no explanation is given to Daniel when it comes to the 2,300 evenings and mornings. Instead, note what Daniel is told about this fourth event and his reaction to it [read verse 26, 27].

One thing clearly stands out as we consider this fourth item, the 2,300 evenings and mornings or days, of Daniel chapter 8. Daniel is clearly told that this fourth item will take place in the distant future. Note verses 18, 19 (“the appointed time of the end”) and look again at verse 26 (“but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future”).

This clearly agrees with what we discovered in looking at the 2,300 days prophecy in the light of

the entire prophetic section of the book of Daniel, that this prophecy is a last day event that belongs to the establishment of the kingdom of God. Hence, the interpretation that many commentaries give that this 2,300-day prophecy applies to Antiochus Epiphanes of the Greece period is incorrect, and if I may say so, the interpretation that is unbiblical.

How then are we to interpret Dan. 8:14? Did God leave Daniel in the dark regarding this prophecy? The answer is no. You will notice that in verse 27, Daniel fainted and was sick for days when the angel Gabriel told him that this prophecy was to be sealed because it had to do with the distant future. Plus, we also read in verse 27 that Daniel “was astonished or appalled by the vision, but no one understood it,” or as the NIV puts it, “it was beyond understanding.”

In our next study we will discover why Daniel fainted and was appalled at this 2,300 day prophecy and the interpretation God gave him, as a result of his sincere prayer recorded in chapter 9. What I want you to keep in mind is the fact that our



contextual study of Dan. 8:14 clearly established the 2,300 days prophesy as a last day event. Next study you will hear the rest of the story.

## Chapter 11

# **The Significance of 1844 (Part 2)**

### **Daniel 9:24-27**

“Unto 2,300 days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.”

This scripture, wrote Ellen G. White, was the foundation and central pillar of the advent faith (Great Controversy, page 409). In the last study, I touched on the linguistic and contextual problem created by our traditional interpretation of this text and which has caused many in our midst to reject 1844.

However, as I mentioned in that study, 1844 is significant to our global mission, including [our missions at individual churches]. I trust this will become crystal clear in today’s study. In the last study, I laid the foundation to what I believe is the

correct interpretation of Dan. 8:14. Today we will see why 1844 is significant to our global and local church mission.

But first a quick review to jog your memory. In order to come to a correct understanding of Dan. 8:14, we first looked at this verse in the context of the entire book of Daniel. In doing so, we discovered two things:

1. That chapter 8 of Daniel belongs to the prophet section of this book, and

2. That all the prophetic chapters of Daniel — especially chapters 2, 7, and 8 — use the principal of parallelism, i.e., they repeat or recapitulate world events.

Therefore, following the hermeneutic principal of parallelism or recapitulation, we discovered that the Great Stone of Dan. 2, the Judgment scene of Dan. 7, and the cleansing of the Sanctuary of Dan. 8 all belong to the Kingdom of God period. Each of these three symbols is introduced by the word “till”

(in the original), indicating the end of all human kingdoms and the ushering of God's everlasting kingdom.

Following this, we did an exegesis of chapter 8 itself. We discovered that, of the four symbols Daniel was shown in this vision, the first three were explained, but when it came to the fourth (i.e., Dan. 8:14), all that the prophet was told was that it is true but its meaning was to be sealed since it belonged to the distant future, confirming that the cleansing or vindication of the sanctuary is a last-day event, belonging to the kingdom of God [read Dan. 8:26].

However, this news was devastating to Daniel [look at verse 27]. Why did the prophet take this information so hard? The answer is found in chapter 9 of Daniel. After wrestling with Dan. 8:14 for some 13 years, Daniel finally decided to plead with God in prayer [read Dan. 9:1-3].

To appreciate Daniel's prayer and concern, keep in mind three facts:

1. At the time that Daniel was given the vision of chapter 8, the earthly sanctuary and the city of Jerusalem were lying in ruins.

2. In Daniel's day, nations fought in the name of their gods. Therefore, the god of the victorious nation was considered superior to the god of the defeated nation. Since Babylon had defeated Israel and destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the temple, this implied that the god of Babylon was greater than Israel's God. This was Daniel's main concern.

3. According to Jeremiah's prophecy, a contemporary of Daniel, the desolation of the temple and the city would last only 70 years. This period was about to expire at the time Daniel was given the vision of chapter 8.

So when Daniel was told by Gabriel that the cleansing of the sanctuary would be accomplished in the distant future, he immediately concluded that God had changed His mind and postponed the restoration of the earthly temple and the city of

Jerusalem. Note the plea of his prayer [read Dan. 9:17-19]. This created a problem for God. Why? Because, as we have already seen, the vision of Dan. 8:14 referred to the establishing of God's kingdom on earth in the last days and not the restoration of the earthly sanctuary.

But since God did not want to disappoint His beloved prophet Daniel, He did what Christ did to the disciples when they linked the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place in 70 A.D., with His second coming, which is still future [read Matt. 23:37-24:3].

Going back to Daniel 9, please notice how God responded to the plea of Daniel's prayer [read Dan. 9:20-23]. According to this statement, the angel Gabriel now comes to explain the unexplained part of the Dan. 8 vision, namely verse 14.

But when we read Gabriel's explanation of Dan. 8:14 in Dan. 9:24-27, we discover that all Daniel is told is about the final probation period

determined for his people Israel, i.e., 490 years [read verses 24-27]. Does this mean the real explanation of Dan. 8:14 was not really given? If so, then Gabriel lied, because he clearly stated in verse 22, “I have come to give you insight and understanding,” i.e., regarding Dan. 8:14.

However, God does not lie. Therefore, the only way we can resolve the problem is to give verses 24-27 of chapter 9 a dual application, just as we do with Matthew 24, the 490 years being the final probation period for the Jewish nation while the period following 2,300 days will be the final or last days for the Gentile world. According to Dan. 9:24-27, five events take place:

1. The 490 years begins with a command to restore the temple and the city of Jerusalem [read verse 25a].

2. For this command to be carried out, the Jews would have to come out of Babylon and return to Israel. This is implied.

**3.** Next comes the actual restoration of the temple and city. However, note that this would be a difficult task because of troublous times [read verse 25b].

**4.** Finally, during the last seven years of the 490-year period, the covenant promised through the sanctuary model would be confirmed: The Messiah would come. Keep in mind the sanctuary and its services were a visual aid of the plan of redemption in Christ [Ex. 25:8; Jn. 1:14; Jn. 2:18-22 (for context, read Jn. 2:12-16)]. Unfortunately, Israel would reject Him and this would bring the probation period for the Jewish nation to an end [read verse 26, 27].

**5.** When the Jewish nation rejected Christ, after the miracle of the resurrection, they had committed the abomination of desolation (their rejection of Christ was deliberate and final). The evidence of this was the stoning of Stephen in 34 A.D. [read Acts 7:44-52].

Now, taking these five points which sums up



Gabriel's explanation of Dan. 8:14, we will apply the same five points to 1844 and the cleansing or reconsecration of the sanctuary truth, the true gospel the little horn cast to the ground and prospered:

**1.** The command to re-proclaim the gospel truth was given in 1844. [Read Rev. 10:11 in context.] The only book of the Old Testament that was sealed till the time of the end was Daniel (Dan. 8:26; 12:4). For further support that 2,300 is equal to years, the "evening morning" is singular: the 2,300th Day of Atonement.

**2.** For the above command to be carried out, God's people will have to come out of spiritual Babylon [read Dan. 4:30].

**3.** The restoration of the everlasting gospel will be realized, but through troublous times. That is where we are today.

**4.** When the gospel is finally restored and proclaimed with a loud voice, Matt. 24:14 will be

fulfilled. Thus the gospel covenant will be confirmed to the Gentile world. But Christ will be deliberately and finally rejected. This will be the abomination that will make this world desolate.

**5.** The end of the world will come and God's kingdom will be established.

## Chapter 12

# The Investigative Judgment

### Daniel 7:26, 27

The court was seated, and the books were opened. – Dan. 7:10b

So far, in our study of the sanctuary doctrine, we have already seen that the sanctuary message is vitally linked to the everlasting gospel. It is God's visual aid of the entire plan of salvation, from beginning to end. Then we spent two whole studies on the significance of 1844. It is the date God raised the Advent Movement and commanded them to cleanse the gospel of all errors and proclaim to the world the pure everlasting gospel as God's final warning to the human race.

Now we will turn our attention to the investigative judgment. This is another major gospel issued in Adventism. In 1980, I was asked to defend the doctrines of our church before the

student and faculty body of the largest theological seminary in East Africa, Scot Theological Seminary. The first question they bombarded me with was: “Please defend the SDA investigative judgment doctrine in the light of justification by faith.” This same question is being raised today by many of our own scholars and pastors.

According to our traditional teaching, we have given the impression that the purpose of the investigative judgment is to find out who among the saints are good enough to go to heaven. This, they say, is a contradiction of the truth of justification by faith. According to 2 Tim. 2:19, “the Lord knows those who are His.” If that is true, why the need of an investigative judgment? Once again, we have to ask the question: have we been following cunningly devised fables? And my answer is a definite NO!

However, as with the other gospel issues, we must also present this doctrine in the context of the everlasting gospel and the truth of justification by faith. That is what we are going to do here

regarding this issue of the investigative judgment. To start with, the last day judgment, typified by the sanctuary's Day of Atonement service, is not only a key Biblical doctrine, mentioned in almost every book of the Bible, but this judgment also includes the judgment of the believers [read Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:9, 10; 1 Pet. 4:17].

But if God knows those who are His, why the need of judging the believers? The answer is not because God has to find out who among the saints are good enough to go to heaven. If that is true, then we are no longer saved by grace. The reason for the investigative judgment is because we are being accused day and night by the enemy of souls, i.e., Satan [read Rev. 12:10]. Before Christ can come to take us to heaven and establish His kingdom, He has to vindicate the saints. This is the whole purpose of the investigative or, more accurately, the pre-advent judgment described in Daniel chapter 7. There are three phases of judgment in Daniel 7:

- the trial (verses 9 & 10);

- the verdict (verses 21 & 22); and
- the execution of the verdict (verses 26 & 27).

While it is true that the cleansing of the sanctuary of Daniel 8:14 has to do with the cleansing of the gospel and, therefore, may not be linked with the cleansing of the sanctuary described in the book Leviticus, the judgment scene of Daniel 7 and the cleansing of the sanctuary of Leviticus are definitely connected. Why is this so? Because the cleansing of the sanctuary mentioned in Leviticus has to do with the Day of Atonement. Understood by the Jews as the solemn day of judgment [read Lev. 16:29-31; 23:26-31].

According to these texts, for Christ our High Priest to vindicate the saints in the judgment and cleanse us of all Satan's accusations, the saints are required to do two things:

1. They are to afflict their soul or deny self; and
2. They are to do no work on that day, it is a solemn day of Sabbath rest.

Failure to meet these requirements means Christ cannot vindicate us, i.e., we will be cut off ... or be lost.

Our part in the judgment is to stand firmly on the gospel platform of Not I, but Christ. This is what justification by faith is all about [read Phil. 3:9 (in the context of vs. 3-8)]. Christ's part in the judgment, as our High Priest, is to vindicate the saints and acquit them of Satan's accusations [read Zec. 3:1-4]. This is what the Day of Atonement service pointed to.

But how does Christ vindicate the saints, who are condemned by His own law as sinners, yet who are standing solidly on the platform of justification by faith or not I, but Christ? Before I can answer this question, I need to expose you to a Biblical paradox concerning the truth of justification by faith. The Bible, and especially the New Testament, contains two sets or groups of texts that on the surface seem to contradict each other.

On the one hand, you have statements that clearly indicated that we sinners are saved by grace alone, or justified by faith alone, apart from keeping the law or doing any good works. On the other hand, this same Bible, and especially the New Testament, also tells us that we Christians will be judged and rewarded according to our works. In case you think I am creating this problem, let me point you to a few of these paradoxical texts:

- Justified by faith alone: Rom. 3:28; 4:5; Eph. 2:8,9; Titus 3:5.
- Judged by works: Matt. 16:27; Jn. 5:28,29; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 22:12.

Because the human mind cannot easily handle contradictions or paradoxes in the Bible, the tendency has been to harp on one group of texts at the expense of the other. For example, the evangelical Seventh-day Adventists emphasize the “justification by faith” texts while the conservative SDAs emphasize the “judged by works” texts. But truth demands that we give both texts equal



consideration. Only then will we be able to solve the paradoxical problem as well as explain how Christ is able to vindicate the saints in the judgment.

To solve the paradoxical problem of these two groups of texts, we must look at a third group of texts that brings these two sets of texts together. This third group of texts point out that genuine justification by faith always produces works. These works do not have any merits or save us but they are clearly the evidence of justification by faith. The apostle James makes it very clear that faith without works is dead [read Ja. 2:14,17,20].

What James is saying here is that if justification by faith does not produce works of love, then really our faith is a sham and, therefore, nonexistent. Notice how he uses Abraham, the father of the Jews as well as justification by faith, as an example [read verse 21-24]. Incidentally, we must not confuse works of faith, which James is here upholding, with works of the law, which Paul condemns in his epistles-explain the difference [1

Thes. 1:2,3].

Having solved this paradoxical problem between faith and works, we are now in a position to see how Christ is able, in the investigative judgment, to vindicate believing sinners who put their faith in His righteousness. While Satan may be right in accusing us as sinners Christ, our advocate, brings up our works — not to prove our righteousness, for we have none, but to prove our faith in His righteousness, i.e., righteousness by faith.

Christians who by faith put their full confidence in the righteousness of Christ will manifest it by their works of faith. In the investigative judgment, these works will be used by Christ, our defense lawyer, to prove our faith is in His righteousness [read Rom. 10:4]. Once He does that, Satan will have to prove that Christ Himself is a sinner. This he cannot do [read Jn. 14:30].

As a result, Christ will win the case and rebuke

Satan (Is this not a brand plucked out of the fire?). That is why the doctrine of the investigative judgment is good news and must be proclaimed as part and parcel of the plan of salvation [read 1 Jn. 4:16-18].

There was a time the investigative judgment put fear into my life. But today I am anxious that my name comes up soon in the judgment.

## Chapter 13

# The Sabbath/Sunday Issue

### Exodus 31:13-17

My first introduction to Adventism was anything but good news. I was told quite emphatically that if I, a Roman Catholic, did not change my day of worship from Sunday to Saturday, I would receive the Mark of the Beast and be eternally lost. To me this made no sense. I could not see why a loving God would make such a big issue over which day I worshipped Him and condemn me, and millions others, just for worshipping Him on Sunday.

Even today, when the Sabbath/Sunday issue comes up we tend to make it an issue between Sabbath-keeping Christians, i.e., us, versus Sunday-keeping Christian, i.e., them. But is this the real issue? Let's be honest: the majority of believers who will make it to heaven will have probably been Sunday keeping Christians, since the

change took place about 200 A.D.

If salvation is through faith alone in Jesus Christ, what then is the real Sabbath/Sunday issue? It is only in the context of the gospel this issue makes sense. That is what I would like us to consider here. We are going to examine why Sabbath-keeping will become the seal of God when probation closes while the universal Sunday law will become the Mark of the Beast.

To understand this issue, in the light of the gospel, we begin with the Fall. At creation, God gave our first parents, Adam and Eve, dominion over all of creation [Gen. 1:26]. But, at the Fall, this dominion was snatched by Satan and he became lord or prince of this earth [Lk. 4:5,6; Jn. 14:30]. As a result of the Fall, the entire human race came under the dominion of Satan. And the great controversy between God and Satan was now transferred from heaven to this earth with the human race became the issue [Rev. 12:7-9].

In heaven, Lucifer, who became Satan, had

rebelled against God and His government over the issue of agape love which, according to Paul, “seeketh not its own” [1 Cor. 13:5]. Satan insisted that such selfless love, that leaves no room for self, deprives one of happiness [Isa. 14:12-14]. So, once Satan took over dominion of this earth, he used the human race to develop this world on the principle of self: politics, education, sports, commerce, etc.

All went well for him until Christ came to this world to redeem mankind and establish His own kingdom on earth [Lk. 11:21-23]. At the cross, Satan was totally defeated and the human race was bought back by the precious blood of Jesus Christ [Jn. 12:31-33; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19].

While this is the good news of the gospel, unfortunately, because mankind was created with the freedom of choice, the gospel has divided the human race into two camps: those who have accepted Christ as their Saviour and come under His banner, and those who have rejected Him and remained under the banner of Satan [Matt. 10:34-39 1 Jn. 5:19].

To the world still under Satan, Sunday represents rest in man's unfinished imperfect work. To believers, Sabbath represents God's finished and perfect work [Gen. 2:1-3]. Just as Christ finished creation on the sixth day and rested on the seventh, so also He finished redemption on the sixth day and rested on the seventh day (Sabbath) [Jn. 19:30].

Ever since the Fall, all religions have belonged to one of these two camps. True Christianity is built on the foundation of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone; while all other religions, including false-Christianity, is based on salvation by works. i.e., self-righteousness, the principle of Satan's government.

In the final showdown between Christ and Satan, Sabbath and Sunday will represent these two opposite systems of salvation. That is why, on the Day of Atonement, any who refuse to keep the Sabbath will be lost [Lev. 23:26-32].

Therefore, we must never make the Sabbath/Sunday issue an issue between Sabbath-keeping Christians (US) versus Sunday-keeping Christians (THEM). Today, we may disagree as to which day is the true Sabbath, but the fact is we both are believers in Christ and, therefore, belong to God's kingdom. Only when the Sabbath is vitally linked to salvation through faith alone in Jesus Christ and Sunday linked to salvation through human works will these two days become an issue. That is what will happen in the future.

Ever since the Fall, the real issue has been between these two methods of salvation: God's righteousness versus man's righteousness, or the Old Covenant versus the New Covenant (such as Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, etc.). This will be the final showdown between God's people, the Church, and Satan's people, the world, when Matt. 24:14 is fulfilled and probation closes.

To appreciate this, we must consider the true significance of the Sabbath (which means rest) and its connection to our salvation by grace alone



through faith alone in what Christ accomplished some 2,000 years ago by His birth, life, death, and resurrection, i.e., the everlasting gospel.

**Fact #1** – The Sabbath is God’s day of Rest, not Man’s

All through Scripture, both the Old and the New Testaments, the Sabbath is designated as God’s day of rest, not man’s. That is what the fourth commandment declares [Ex. 20:10]. While Jesus did state to the Jews that the Sabbath rest was made for mankind (not just them), He made it absolutely clear that He was the lord of it [Mk. 2:27, 28; Lk. 6:9].

And the reason why Christ could claim to be the lord of the Sabbath is because He was God’s spokesman. He was the one who by His Word brought into existence this world of ours. And when He had created a perfect and finished world (nothing could be improved or added), He rested on the seventh day from all His work [Jn. 1:3; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16; Rev. 3:14].

## **Fact #2 – The Sabbath is God’s Seventh Day but Man’s First Day**

When we look at the Sabbath from God’s point of view, since it is His day of rest, it is His seventh day [Gen. 2:1-3]. But when we look at the Sabbath day of rest from man’s point of view (since God did sanctify or set it aside for mankind) it is man’s first day of rest.



## **Fact #3 – The Sabbath is Vitally Linked to the Gospel**

Ever since the Fall, the Sabbath has been vitally linked to our salvation in Christ. Why is this so? Because sin has brought guilt, robbing mankind of mental and spiritual rest. When God restored the Sabbath rest to the Jewish nation, He gave it a

redemption significance [Ex. 31:13, 16, 17; Deut. 5:15 (1 Cor. 10:1-11); Isa. 58:13, 14].

The fulfillment of this rest is Jesus Christ [Matt. 11:28]. But the Jews had missed the whole point of the Sabbath rest and gave it a very legalistic application. Therefore, the writer of Hebrews had to correct them [Heb. 4:1-10].

When Matt. 24:14 will finally become a reality, the human race will be polarized into only two groups — believers and unbelievers. At that time, the Sabbath will become the seal of God just as circumcision was to Abraham [Rom. 4:11]. And Sunday will become the Mark of the Beast [Rev. 14:9,10 (12:9-12; 13:4)].

## Chapter 14

# The Time of Trouble

### Isaiah 54:5-8

When Jesus finished His earthly mission in redeeming mankind, He ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father to begin His heavenly ministry as our Great High priest. When this ministry is finished, He will stand up and, according to the prophet Daniel, the Christian church will be plunged into a time of trouble that has never been experienced by any previous generation [read Daniel 12:1].

According to Scripture, this time of distress is the last event to take place on earth before Christ comes the second time to take His people to heaven. It is referred to in Christian theology as “The Great Tribulation.” I would like to turn our attention now to this major event which the last generation of Christians will be plunged into, as there is much confusion and misunderstanding

regarding this subject.

In the first place, we must not confuse this time of trouble or great tribulation with the seven last plagues mentioned in the book of Revelation and which applies only to the unbelievers. I say this because there are many Christians today, especially those who believe in the secret rapture, who teach that believers will be exempt from the great tribulation. This is true of the seven last plagues but not the time of trouble [read Jer. 30:4-7.]

“Israel,” “Judah,” “Jacob” are terms, all of which refer to God’s people. The same idea was presented to Daniel in the text we read, chapter 12 and verse 1:

But at that time your people — everyone whose name is found written in the book — will be delivered.

The phrase “your people” is referring to the saints; and “the book” is referring to the book of life.

Secondly, this great time of trouble will take place only after the three angels of Revelation 14 have fulfilled their mission and the everlasting gospel has been proclaimed into the entire world: “to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.” In other words, the great tribulation will take place only after every human being who has reached the age of accountability will have made his or her ultimate choice either for Christ or against Him. This means that the entire human race will be polarized into only two camps [read Jn. 5:19].

But why must God’s people be plunged into such a time of trouble after probation has closed and their eternal destiny has already been sealed? The answer is that this event is the final showdown in the great controversy between Christ, the Saviour of mankind, and Satan, the enemy of souls. The issue is: can the gospel of Jesus Christ, which God claims is His power unto salvation, produce a people who will manifest total victory over the principle of self, the core of our sin problem?

In other words, can the everlasting gospel produce a people who can reproduce the faith of Jesus which He manifested on the cross? Keep in mind that, to the Jews of Christ's day, hanging on a cross was synonymous to hanging on a tree, which represented the curse of God. And that is exactly what Christ experienced for us on the cross [read Gal. 3:13].

When Jesus cried out in agony, as He hung on the cross, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani" [Matt. 27:46], i.e., "Father, Father, why have you forsaken me," He was experiencing the curse of the law: good-bye to life forever, for our sins. At that time, He could not see through the portals of the tomb; He felt sin was so offensive to God that this separation was to be eternal. Yet, by faith, He held to the promise of His Father that He would be raised the third day and by faith He was victorious: "Into thy hands," He said, "I commit by spirit."

The big question is: can such a faith be reproduced in the body of Christ, the church? The three angels' message claims it will and the time of

trouble will prove it. Thus the power of the gospel will be vindicated and the end can come [read Rev. 14:12-16].

This brings us to the big issue that is often discussed among Adventists. How do we prepare our people for this great event, especially in view of the fact that we do believe we are living in the last days? The answer depends on what we believe will be the issue in the great tribulation.

Some Adventists believe the issue will be physical (i.e., food, human hardship, deprivation, etc.). But the fact is, there is a limit to how much one can suffer physically and, let us be honest, there are many generations of Christians in the past that have already suffered these things to the limit (for example, the early Christians who were persecuted under Nero, the emperor of Rome; or modern Christians living under the rule of Communism, etc.).

Yet both the texts we read, in Daniel and Jeremiah, clearly indicate that this time of trouble



or distress will be so terrible that no previous generation has ever experienced such a thing. Therefore, we must rule out physical hardships as the real issue. Yes, the time of trouble will involve much physical hardship, but this will not be the real issue, just as the physical torture of the cross was not the real issue for Christ as He hung on the cross.

Then there are others who say that the issue in the time of trouble will be sinless living. They base this view on a misunderstanding of the statement made by Ellen G. White that during the time of trouble we will have to live without a mediator or intercessor. However, we must not confuse the role Christ plays as our mediator or intercessor with the fact He is also our Saviour. The two are related but not synonymous.

As the believers' High Priest, Christ is our mediator, but this ministry will cease when probation closes, since the saints will have already been vindicated in the investigative judgment. But Christ will never cease being our Saviour,

especially in the time of trouble. Yes, I believe the power of God is greater than all the power Satan can master through sinful flesh, so that the Holy Spirit can give us total victory over sin. But nowhere in the Bible do we find that the issue in the time of trouble will be sinless living.

What then will be the issue? There are two texts that give us a clue as to what will be the real issue. The first is found in Luke 18. Here, Jesus is relating a parable that has one purpose in mind, to develop a faith in His disciples that is unshakable, no matter what [read Luke 18:1]. But, having told the parable of the persistent widow, note how He applies this parable to the last generation of believers [read Luke 18:8]. Clearly, the issue is faith.

The second text I would like to bring to your attention is even more specific: Isa. 54:4-8. Just as Christ was robbed of the hope of resurrection when He hung on the cross and felt forsaken of God, so likewise, in the time of trouble, the saints will feel forsaken of God and, therefore, be robbed of the

hope of salvation. The real issue, therefore, will be between faith and feelings: our faith in Christ or the feelings of our sinful nature that is a slave to self. Under such conditions, to pass the test, our love for God and our fellow man must be greater than our love for self [for examples, read Ex. 32:31,32; Rom. 9:1-3].

Just as Satan tempted Christ to come down from the cross and save Himself, rather than depend on His Father [read Lk. 23:35-39], so also in the time of trouble Satan will tempt us to forsake our faith in Christ and save ourselves from impending death by joining the world under him. In our next study, the Remnant, we will consider how such a faith can be developed.

## Chapter 15

# The Remnant

### Revelation 12:13-17

When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring — those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. [Revelation 12:13-17]

Before God will bring this wicked world of

ours to an end, Jesus prophesied that “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached into all the world for a witness” [Matthew 24:14]. When this prophecy is fulfilled, every living person on this earth who has reached the age of accountability will have made up his or her ultimate choice, either for Christ or against Him.

At this time, the whole world will be polarized into only two distinct camps: believers and unbelievers [read 1 Jn. 5:19]. The Bible describes these two groups in many different ways – the sheep and the goats; those who have build their houses on the rock Jesus Christ and those who have build their houses on the sands of their own self-righteousness; those who are totally God-dependent and those who are totally self-dependent; those who have received the mark of the Beast and those who have been sealed with the seal of God.

As a result of this polarization, the closing events of this world’s history will culminate with the final showdown in the great controversy

between Christ and Satan. According to Revelation 12, this controversy began in heaven when Lucifer, referred to as the dragon, and one third of the angels rebelled against God. Following their defeat, Satan and his angels usurped dominion over this world at the Fall and, as a result, this controversy between Christ and Satan was transferred to this earth [read Rev. 12:7-9].

In this final showdown, which the book of Revelation describes as the war of Armageddon, the battle of that great day of God Almighty, the conflict will be between God's people, the last generation of Christians who are living under the banner of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and Satan's people, those who have deliberately and ultimately rejected Christ and have chosen to be under the banner of Satan, the enemy of the gospel [read Rev. 16:12-16].

At this time, the faith of these last generation of Christians will be tried and tested to the utmost, in a way that no other generation of believers has ever been tested. This final conflict is what we covered

in our last study, the great tribulation or the time of trouble. It will take place just before the second coming of Christ and the end of the world.

This final generation of believers, who will endure this great time of trouble and will triumph over the full force of Satan's attacks, are referred to in our Scripture reading, Rev. 12:17, as the Remnant in the King James Version. In verse 11 of this same chapter, they are described as those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and who love not their lives unto death. In other words, they are mature Christians and have experienced the full power of the everlasting gospel. This is how Paul describes them [read Eph. 4:14-16].

According to Bible prophecy and the signs of the times, we are presently living in the Day of Atonement — the closing events of the plan of salvation and this earth's history. Therefore, it is God's purpose that every believer living in these last days be part of that last generation of mature Christians who will vindicate Him and the power

of His gospel. This is what this final showdown between Christ and Satan is all about. This study and the next, which will conclude this series of studies on the gospel issued in Adventism, will center around this last generation of fully developed or mature Christian believers called the Remnant or referred to as the 144,000.

In this study, our attention will be on the Remnant and we will begin with the primary meaning of the word, especially as it is used in the New Testament. Two texts that clearly reveal what the Bible means by the word REMNANT are both found in my favorite book, Romans:

Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved....” [Rom. 9:27]

I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about



Elijah — how he appealed to God against Israel: “Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me”? And what was God’s answer to him? “I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. [Rom. 11:1-6]

These are those who remain faithful to God in spite of persecution.

When the Bible applies this word remnant to the last generation of Christians, it is talking about those who will endure the great tribulation or the time of trouble I spoke about in our last study: a people whose faith does not falter even though they feel forsaken by God as Christ did at the cross. In other words, these believers will manifest the faith of Jesus and, therefore, vindicate the power of the gospel, which is able to totally delivered us from the problem of self, the fundamental principle of

sin.

Having establish this fact, we must now consider how this word remnant is used in Revelation 12:17:

Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring [or “remnant,” in the King James Version] — those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. [Rev. 12:17]

Here we immediately face a problem. Normally, we have applied this word remnant to refer to the Seventh-day Adventist church. However, the Greek word John used does not refer to a church or a denomination, but rather a special people that are a part of the church, those who have reached maturity (which I believe are the 144,000, our next study).

Let me explain. The Greek word normally used in the New Testament to describe the remnant is either *leimma* or *hupoleimma*. These are the two

words Paul used in the two texts we read from Romans. But the word John used in Rev. 12:17 is *hoi loipoi*, which really means “the rest of her seed.” This is how the word is translated in most of the translations, except the King James Version. The Revised Standard Version, the New International Version, and the New American Standard Bible accurately translate this word as “the rest of the offspring.”

In Revelation 12:7-17 we have a overall description of the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

In verses 7-9, the war between Christ and Satan is described as it took place in heaven and how Satan and his angels were defeated and cast out of heaven:

And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down — that ancient

serpent called the devil, or Stan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. [Rev. 12:7-9]

Then in verses 10-16 we have a description of this controversy as it continues on earth between Satan and the church, especially after the cross when Christ redeemed the world from Satan's hands:

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short." When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the

woman who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.. [Revelation 12:10-16]

First Satan tried to destroy the church by persecution and then by infiltrating it and corrupting the gospel.

However, before the end comes, Jesus predicted that the gospel of His kingdom will be fully restored and proclaimed [Matt. 24:14]. As a result, God will produce a people who will experience the full power of the everlasting gospel and who will fully reflect Christ. This is the whole purpose of the three angels' message:

This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. [Rev. 14:12].

When this happens, Revelation 12:17 will become a reality:

Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring — those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. [Rev. 12:17]

In this final showdown, God's people will triumph and Christ and His gospel message will be vindicated. How then are we to apply this verse 17 to our church? I believe the statement found in the [SDA publication] Insight Magazine, 13 March 1979, represents a more accurate interpretation of this text than our traditional interpretation. Here is what it says:

“Technically, two movements must occur before God will have a remnant.... First, many

SDAs will decide to leave the church and will join Babylon (ref. Great Controversy, page 608).... Second, a great number of people who are not now SDAs will be convinced that God is truthfully perceived by this church, and will join (ref. Great Controversy, page 390). This blending of God's friends at the end time is what will make up the remnant.”

As I have expressed and demonstrated it many times from the pulpit, I believe God raised the Adventist Movement with the purpose of fully restoring the everlasting gospel, which the Reformation began, and proclaiming it to the whole world. When this happens, and the three angels' message will be proclaimed with a loud voice, this earth will be lightened with the glory of God by that fourth angel of Rev. 18:

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted: “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a

haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.” Then I heard another voice from heaven say: “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes....” [Rev. 18:1-5]

At this time those who have fully surrendered to the demands of the cross of Christ and whose minds have been fully settled into the truth of Christ our Righteousness, will have developed the faith of Jesus. This faith is what will carry them through the time of trouble because it is unshakable. This last generation of believers will be the remnant who will fully vindicate Christ and the power of the gospel.



## Chapter 16

# The 144,000

## Revelation 14:1-5

Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless. [Revelation 14:1-5]

Now for our final study: the 144,000, a topic that has produced more heat than light in our church, as well as in other denominations. It is amazing some of the conclusions and speculations you hear about these special brand of Christians who will live to see the second advent [of Jesus Christ].

Some believe this is a literal number, i.e., 144,000; others insist that they will only be Jews, because Revelation 7:4 describes them as being taken from all the tribes of Israel. There is also a third group who insist that they will be only single people because, as the Scripture reading indicated, they are described as virgins.

In actual fact, there are only two passages in all of Scripture that actually or explicitly describes the 144,000. Both are found in the apocalypse, the book of Revelation, which is a prophetic book whose primary purpose is to describes last day events. And what makes this book difficult or subject to speculations is that it presents truth in symbolic language.

The two passages that speak about the 144,000 are Revelation chapter 7 and the first five verses of chapter 14 (above). The first, chapter 7, describes the 144,000 in the context of the seven seals, and the second, chapter 14, in the context of the everlasting gospel of the three angels. If we are to come to a correct understanding of what these 144,000 are all about, we have to examine them in the context they are described. That is what we will attempt in this study. We will begin with chapter seven.

Beginning with chapter 6 of Revelation, we have a description of the book sealed with seven seals and which only Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, is worthy to open:

Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open

the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, “Do no weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.” [Rev. 5:1-5].

In examining these seven seals, we find Revelation 6:1-2 describes the first seal; verses 3-4 describe the second seal, verses 5-6 describe the third seal; verses 7-8 describe the fourth seal; and verses 9-11 describe the fifth seal.

However, when we come to the sixth seal, we find the description begins with verse 12 and goes on until the end of chapter 7. Finally, the seventh seal is described by only one verse, chapter 8:1:

When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. [Rev. 8:1]

What do we conclude from this brief description of the seven seals? Obviously, the sixth

seal, which takes up most of the room, must be the most important.

What is the context of the sixth seal? For it is in this context we must understand the 144,000. So before we can examine the 144,000, described in chapter 7 of Revelation, let us first examine the context of the sixth seal:

[12] I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, [13] and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. [14] The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. [15] Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. [16] They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! [17] For the great day of their wrath has come, and who

can stand?” [Rev. 6:12-17]

Several things are revealed in this passage which describes the events that take place under the sixth seal:

1. The sixth seal begins with the signs of the second coming of Christ [verses 12-14].

2. These signs are followed by the actual second coming of Christ along with the reaction of the men and women who have rejected Him [verses 15-16].

3. Judging from this description, the implication is that no one living in these last days will be able to stand the great day of the wrath of the Lamb. So the big concern and valid question asked is who will be able to stand [verse 17]. This question is similar to the question Jesus Himself asked when He was on this earth:

...However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth? [Lk. 18:8]

In chapter seven of Revelation is the answer to the important question of verse 17 of chapter 6. The 144,000 will be able to stand. But before they can do so, something must take place. Their faith must be sealed, just as Abraham's had to before he could pass the test of sacrificing his son Isaac [read Rom. 4:11; then Heb. 11:17-19, the chapter describing the Hall of faith].

As we saw in our last two studies, before Christ can come to take us to heaven, the last generation of Christians will have to face a time of trouble such as has never been experienced by any other generation before them. But before this can happen, their faith has to be sealed. The first three verses of Rev. 7 describe this sealing:

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice

to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.” [Rev. 7:1-3]

Then in verse 4, John hears the number sealed:

Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. [Rev. 7:4]

Note he does not see them but only hears the number sealed. The obvious reason for this is that they are scattered throughout the world. What about the fact that they are only from the twelve tribes of Israel, outlined in verses 5-8?

We must keep in mind that in the New Testament, and especially in the writings of the apostle Paul, who was a Jew himself, Israel is defined as all those who, like Abraham, have put their faith in Christ. Let me give you some examples: Rom. 2:28,29; Rom. 4:16-18; Rom. 9:6-8; Gal. 3:6-9.



So I believe the 144,000 does not refer to literal Israel but to spiritual Israel. And the twelve tribes represent Christians whose experience resembles the twelve tribes of literal Israel. Besides, the book of Revelation presents truth in symbolic language and, therefore, must not be taken literally.

But let us continue analyzing Revelation 7, which describes the 144,000 who will be able to stand the great tribulation and face the second coming of Christ in confidence. Look at verse 9:

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. [Rev. 7:9]

Who are these great multitude from all nations, kindred, tongues and people? I would like to suggest they are the 144,00. Here is my evidence.

1. The context of this chapter is the question raised in verse 17 of chapter 6: who will be able to stand the second coming of Christ? The answer chapter 7 gives is the 144,000.

2. In verse 4, John hears the number whose faith is sealed: 144,000. But in verse 9, after Christ has come and taken them to heaven, he sees the number. It is a vast multitude. Therefore, I believe the 144,000 is not a literal number but a figurative number that constitutes people from all over the world.

3. But you may argue that verse 9 refers to all of the saved who will make it to heaven. Let me show you why this is not so. Besides the context of chapter 7, note the question of verse 13:

Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes — who are they, and where did they come from?” [Rev. 7:13]

Clearly, verse 13 is a description of those mentioned in verse 9. Now look at the answer

given to the question in verse 13:

I answered, “Sir, you know.” And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” [Rev. 7:14-17]

Surely, these who have come out of great tribulation cannot refer to the experience of all the saved? The only conclusion I can come to, in examining chapter 7 in context is that the 144,000 is a vast multitude of believers who have experienced the full power of the gospel and who will vindicate God in the final showdown in the great controversy between God and Satan.

This brings us to chapter 14 of Revelation, the other passage that deals with the 144,000. The context of this chapter is the everlasting gospel of the three angels' message. Time does not permit us to look in detail at the three angels' message itself, which we have already studied. The conclusion we came to is that the three angels' message is the full restoration of the everlasting gospel which will be preached into all the world as God's final plea to mankind before the end comes. In other words, the three angels' message is the fulfillment of the prediction made by Christ in Matthew 24:14 as one of the last signs of His second coming

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. [Matt. 24:14]

Rev. 14:1-5 is a description of the 144,000 who will experience the full power of the gospel and the truth of justification by faith alone. These verses are not describing the 144,000 while on earth but rather as they stand before the throne of Christ in

heaven, after the second advent. Once again, these verses tell me that they represent a vast multitude. What makes them virgins? Not because they are unmarried but because they are loyal only to Christ [read 2 Cor. 11:2]. May you be one of them.