

Institute for Christian Teaching
Education Department of Seventh-day Adventist

**LEARNING TO LOVE THE JUDGE:
BUILDING A REDEMPTIVE ADVENTIST ETHIC
BASED ON THE PARADOXICAL GRACE FOUND IN THE
BIBLICAL TEACHING OF DIVINE JUDGMENT**

By

Duane Covrig

**669-09 Institute for Christian Teaching
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904 USA**

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Abstract

Biblical teachings about divine judgment present challenging and even apparently contradictory understandings about God’s activity of justice and mercy toward humans. Nevertheless, it is precisely these paradoxical teachings that show His Judgment as an everlasting gospel situated in around the promise of His Son. It is our inability to make the promise happen that makes it a promise we receive. And in receiving we relax our works orientation that actually starts ethical life flowing. This has profound implications for ethics but only for those who are on the right side of God’s judgment. Those who miss the judgment theme show they don’t understand His grace as the ethic.

This paper reviews select passages from the Old and New Testament on Divine judgment. It attempts to show how God works in judgment to do two things: keep His promise and address the pleas of humans and the whole of creation for intervention. In the process, God’s judgment preserves the rule and role of law, correctly labels wickedness, and oddly, in the process does not condemn the repentant sinner. Only a creative judge could create a judgment that could merge such paradoxes. It is precisely His ability to merge such paradoxes into His character that calls forth praise from those who worship Him. A deep understanding of God’s judgment of us eliminates self-praise but does while removing any condemnation. These paradoxes pile up in the judgment process but are also remove by the God who speaks His judgment. Those who experience His judgment are freed to worship Him through a deeper rest from their own righteousness. Far from being impersonal, divine judgment is the ultimate intimate work of God to win each person’s decision. Thus God’s judgment silences Satanic accusations and draws us closer to Him. Not only is the Savior the friend of sinners, so is the Judge, which is great news.

This sober but redemptive understanding of divine judgment has profound implications for ethics and for the way Adventist grasp their identity and fulfill their mission. Understanding judgment preserves the ethical core of our prophetic identity but soaks that prophetic voice in mercy. Mercy is Judgment. Judgment is Mercy. He corrects us precisely because He operates redemptively and we do not. That is the ethical challenge. It alone creates the symmetry, the trifecta, of divine ethics—justice, mercy and humility—the only ethical framework anchored to the character and work of Christ as a delivering judge.

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Introduction

An 11 year old girl was gang raped by several soldiers in eastern Congo. After her rape two soldiers beat her pelvis with the butt of their rifles until blood and urine flowed from her uterus. In a similar attack, a father is killed and a mother and her two daughters were also raped and their vaginas burned with fire. Hundreds of young girls and even grandmothers in their 70s continue to get raped and violated in this way in the Congo. These atrocities play out daily and call out, not only for medical intervention but for judgment, police protection and political reform (Brown, 2008). But alas, justice is absent, the protectors are themselves part of the problem and innocent lives get hurt. Cries for judgment go unheard and ultimately those who watch such cries themselves cry out for God to act and His apparent inaction raises more cries.

Several thousands miles away, the United States of America, a nation with a history of protecting the world from bullies and arguably the most religious nation of the world acts as a foreign invader. This nation that gives more per capita to support worthy causes than any another nation is spending billions to occupy Iraq and repeatedly bombed cities, killing innocent civilians as well as resistance soldiers. It runs a detention center in Cuba where it incarcerates foreigners, some argue without cause and under great abuse. The U.S. claims to be on a mission of good, waging a morally justified war, cleaning Iraq of dictators and terrorists. Other nations see the U.S. as instigators trying to control a country that has a lot of oil. Who will decide this case? Who will investigate and determine the truth. Once again, calls for justice led to questions about God's decision and His vindication.

These are just a few cases out of millions that wreck havoc on the earth and bring accusations that are hot on the ears of God. If the world ever needed judgment, divine judgment, is sure does need it now. But what is divine judgment? How does it operate? Why doesn't it show itself more often? or does it? And what should we say about the common Christian claim that Christ did all His judging at the Cross and that there is no more judgment? If there is no more judgment than what is our hope for all these millions of unresolved issues? The whole cry of nature seems to merge into one grand cacophony of deep pleading, "how long?" How long will sin continue? How long till God acts? How long till the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord?

To this cry, comes a simple but profound teaching, the biblical teaching about divine judgment. It is that teaching that brings a deep perspective to these questions. It not only brings justice to these cases but mercy and humility. It is the message of divine judgment that has driven Adventist to go into all the world and make disciples for Jesus. It is a teaching that has also gotten Adventist into deep trouble, not only because others have disliked that message and called it anti-Christian and even anti-cross, but also because Adventist have so easily warped the message into a message of judgmentalism. We correctly testified to the existence of special investigative judgment started in 1844. We correctly believed that Christ engaged in this preparatory work before His Second Coming. We correctly linked judgment to the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. But, sadly, we have not always clarified the nature of the judge and the full characteristics of the process of judgment in all this message. Sadly, we ourselves have missed the everlasting gospel of judgment (not just *in* judgment but *of* judgment).

I hope to rectify some of that missing emphasis here. I admit when I have read and listened to presentations on the judgment, both inside and outside of Adventism, much of this teaching has been more vindictive than a teaching of vindication. And too often God's judgment is merely adapted to our dislikes rather than to His. And Adventist have company in this confusion as the Bible writers themselves wrestled with God's Judgment. If you could resolve all these tension and confusion you wouldn't need a judge. That is precisely why we need the judgment teaching. It leads us to the judge who alone can make beauty of paradoxes.

So we come to this study with a reverence and an assumption that whatever God does, He not well, not only in a sense of thoroughness, but also He does it well, redemptively. In fact, since judgment takes up so much of His time and the bible writers give it such broad coverage, I am inclined to believe that this is one of His most redemptive studies possible. In fact, although I get ahead of my argument, I am inclined to believe there is great news. As we come to learn about God in his judgments, we will be humbled by what we do not know but equally amazed by what we will learn.

I started a close study of divine judgment first out of a deep desire to better understand my own deep experience of God's profound discipline in my life. I realized His hand was "on me" and at first I was overwhelmed by this act of loving confrontation. But later I came to see it as redemptive, profoundly redemptive. In fact, I came to see just how righteous not only in discipline but in judgment in a whole new light. Out of this, I saw a different righteousness not tied to human systems of ethics and quid pro quo operations. In His judgment, I saw the utter futility and selfish and self-righteousness of much of my actions and worldview. As I studied, I saw first hand how judgment with Jesus was designed to draw me closer to Him and make plain the futility of other routes of ethics and human righteousness to save. Seeing, both experientially and imaginatively, judgment in Scripture against the deepest fears and enemies of His chosen, I became re-convinced that the message of God's judgment hour was the message for our time.

I came to believe that God so loved the world that He was judging it, that whosoever would receive His judgment and receive Him as Judge would pass from death into life. But whosoever would not receive His judgment but turn from Him would face the condemnation.

So in this essay, I seek to reclaim the biblical beauty of God as judge and the His judgment as redemptive. I have introduced here the passages from Scripture that have helped me most. I have a book length manuscript that will connect these passages to more historical and theological teachings. I have tried to see the specific processes and protocols and purposes of His judgment as well as the character He manifests in this process. While some of these texts have been mentioned by Adventists, some have been underutilized. I have not taken time to focus on texts that talk about the timing (1844, 2300 days, etc.) nor the reality and inevitability of judgment but focused more on the experience of that judgment.

In writing, I hope to meet the deep needs of two groups. First, I want to help Adventists who have either become apathetic to this teaching or embarrassed by its historical centrality to Adventist identity. These Adventist may appreciate enough about Adventism to stick with the church but don't really believe this judgment stuff has much redemptive value. I want them to see how central the teaching of judgment is to God's work of human reconciliation and to see why this teaching is a gift Adventists need to share with the world. We have been given the privilege to ease dropping on the work and mind of God in judgment and share how that teaching can build a deep faith in Jesus.

The second audience I hope eventually learns about this teaching those who have built up a deep resentment to Adventist for their judgmental understanding of judgment. I seriously fear they will miss out on a very redemptive understanding of God and out of their dislike for Adventist carry into their relationship with God a dislike for His character as judge. One can reject Jesus as Judge just as easily as one can reject Jesus as Sacrifice. Either one is a rejection of His character. His character in judgment is no different than His character in Sacrifice. When the Angels said, "this same Jesus which is taken up from you will so come in like manner" both the "same" and the "like manner" are primarily character references more than spatial and logistics issues. Understanding that is a crucial step toward embracing and worshipping the Judge.

Learning about God's Judgment from the Bible

The Bible is full of judgment language, so full that we can only cover the highlights here. Ford (1976, 1980), Hasel (1984) and Gane (2006) detail the many passages of scripture involved in the theme of God's judgment. Hasel's article, available on line, will be especially useful to readers for its brevity and availability. Ford's material will be most useful for the detailed scholar, especially if they are inclined to disagree with my arguments. Gane will be most useful for most Adventist contemporary readers. Capon (2002) has also helped me see this theme of judgment in Jesus' parables. He has d my thinking too see Jesus' passion for overturning the ruthlessness of human judgment with the paradoxical grace of Divine judgment. But I have also learned much from Capon by how and when I disagree with him. I have also relied on colleagues at Andrews University to give me feedback on these ideas. Out of these resources, I have created my own list of key passages, in Appendix A.

Pentateuch

The Bible's first writer, Moses, sets the stage for understanding the preliminary meaning of God's work of judgment. He does this through his choice of words in the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy), through several key stories, and through the subtle telling of his own personal experience as a judge himself.

Schubert (2006) does a good job of analyzing the words Moses used that make up the later English equivalent of judgment. She noted in her study that the English "judgment" itself dropped precipitously out of use in contemporary English versions of the Bible. The KJV used "judgment" many times more often than modern English translations or paraphrases. This peeked her interest. Schubert studied the Pentateuch to determine the meaning Moses gave to three words typically translated in older English versions as judgment. Based on her study of three words used 120 times all together, she found a proactive and positive meaning to the word than modern hearers can often relate. "Out of 120 times (in 113 verses) where those words are found...the meaning of punishment is found only 3 times." More typically judgment "is a decision followed by an action, based on informed reasoning.

As she outlines, the main purpose in Moses use of these words was to show God's work to vindicate, help and defend the innocent and downcast (p. 84). As such, judgment corresponds more to vindication, defending the poor and needy, establishing and giving legal rights, showing mercy to those who have been maligned or abused. It includes the idea of fostering discernment of right and wrong, protection of the innocent, maintained order and the use of ordinance, regulation and only in a few minor circumstances with the unavoidable need to administer severe punishment. This discovery does much to set us on a better path to thinking about judgment. However, it also suggests our modern penchant to move away from the word judgment may be based on its own faulty appreciation for this act of God.

In addition to understanding the textual uses of the word judgment in the Pentateuch, there are several key stories in Moses that present a powerful contextual understanding of God's work of and processes related to judgment. I believe one of the most important and central passages of all of Scripture to understand divine judgment is in Genesis 18 and 19. It is not only the first use of the word judgment in the KJV but it frames the whole experience judgment within many obvious themes. That is the section that tells the story of Abraham's willingness to entertain strangers (Genesis 18) and face to face dialogue with Jehovah about judgment of Sodom. It concludes with the miraculous deliverance of Lot and his daughters and the destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19). The whole story is solemnly final but laced with phenomenal promises. Because it can be appreciated by Jewish and Muslims as well as Christians, I believe this passage should be the most used passage in explaining Adventist teaching about investigative and executive judgment.

The story starts out on a hot, hot day. Abraham is sitting. He rarely is ever pictured sitting, but alas old age and heat will slow down the most active pilgrim. It was hot and he was old and resting seemed essential in this portrait. While sitting or better yet, in that sitting, he sees strangers. He runs to greet them and he then rallies them into his care. He then rallies His family to serve these strangers. These strangers end up being the Lord and His angels, but it is unclear when Abraham comes to realize that. After their meal (it is unclear if Abraham even ate with them) the strangers turn the conversation to one of blessing. They renewed the specificity of the time for the fulfilment of coming son. The promise of old is not just repeated but it is given a time frame. It is situated in an immanent time. There is a new urgency for this aged couple.

However, the promise only provokes laughter on the part of Sarah. And for all outward appearances her laughter is understandable. But for the visitors it is action worth discussing and even agitating about. Sarah who is ease-dropping tries to hide her heart but the heavenly visitors read it well. This is her judgment. Abraham was already judged in His reception of them as strangers. And through judgment, and because of this judgment, they receive a renewed promise which eventually opens his loins and her womb.

Just as the strangers are leaving after their meal and the renewed promise, the Lord is introduced more directly. He lets His dialogue about judgment with the angels be overheard by Abraham. It appears that this is an indirect informing of Abraham. Nevertheless, Abraham learns of their plans to go to Sodom to investigate its trouble. The simple conversation, "should I tell Abraham what I am going to do?" becomes a revelation of His plans. And the concept of an investigating God is shown vividly. In the context of the coming promised son, we hear the plans of God's judgment. This is no simple truth that must be seen throughout passages on judgment. The promise of a son is repeated to the faithful as tied with the soberness judgment of the wicked. But it is also tied to investigation. And as the Lord seems to send the angels ahead, He lingers with Abraham about the details of this judgment. The whole conversation is the teaching of the investigative judgment in a story. And it involves Abraham in the outcome.

¹⁶And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way. ¹⁷And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; ¹⁸Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? ¹⁹For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him. ²⁰And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; ²¹I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know. ²²And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the LORD.

²³And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?... ²⁵That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

We then hear the intense negotiation that follows as Abraham discusses God's judgment plans and himself suggests options to God. God seems ready to negotiate with the chosen over the future of the righteous in Sodom and at times over Sodom itself. The one who has fully received the promise seems eager to negotiate about this solemn plan of God. The promise of a coming son is in the background of all this talk. There is a hope in Abraham that finds a view of grace in God's eyes just as Noah had found grace in the eyes of God. But neither Abraham nor Noah would, could stop the coming judgment. But they could frame the options. What a weird

suggestion about the remnants' connection to judgment. Abraham seems to be working the situation like a haggler works a deal in the marketplace. Abraham is feeling deeply for his relatives in Sodom, for the people he once rescued years before (see Genesis 14). Abraham continues negotiating for the city and his relatives, then finally concludes: "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy *it* for ten's sake. And the LORD went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place." Thus abruptly ends the divine stooping to dialogue about judgment with the one who has just gone through his own judgment.

Several early findings about God's judgment can be made from this passage. First, judgment relates to God's ability to answer Abraham's fundamental question. Will God destroy the righteous with the wicked? Or even more fundamental, can God distinguish the wicked from the righteous. With Abraham that may be possible, but with Lot, Abraham seems a bit concerned. But oddly, the same test passed by Abraham is passed by Lot and all those who were sold out to aspects of sin but never sucked into the violence of the "sinful place?" Ultimately the answer is yes, God can and does differentiate between the wicked and righteous.

Second, a basic to that discernment is divine investigation. The Lord who knows all things, still comes down, to discern and differentiate and the way Lot, Abraham and the Sodomites respond to the divine visitors determine their outcome. There is a deliberate exaggeration of the process of discerning the righteous from the wicked. It seems that God is making a not to show the thoroughness of His discernment. He really knows, first hand and by intimate interaction, those who are His and those who are not. All get "searched" from Abraham, to Lot and the cries that arouse from Sodom that started the investigation in the first place. Why would God need to "see for Himself" and investigate these cries? Whatever His need, which is probably more related to our need to see His due process, the text is clear: investigation takes place. And the investigation takes place before the execution. So, those who question why Adventists believe God needs to investigate in our time need only answer why He investigated here in Genesis 18 and 19 to find *their* answer.

Third, judgment is in the rich context of a specific renewal of the promise of a SOON coming son. Here, that context is God's redemptive visit to Abraham, the restatement of the promised son and the giving of a promise to those whose only hope now is in His power.

Fourth, as alluded to in point one, judgment occurs within the rich context of "entertaining angels unaware." This is yet another strong statement that mercy is central to the judgment theme getting played out. A human and divine tenderness frames this experience of judgment. God speaks of judgment only after restating in clear and unequivocal language that the promise of the coming son is true and is finally not based on Abraham and Sarah ability to conceive, but God's ability to act on them with a fragrance of an entertaining meal. Without a promise of the impossible and without the graciousness of human and divine encounters, judgment becomes only cruel and arbitrary. But in the context of mercy, judgment is required and needed.

Fifth, God lets Abraham ease-drop on the plans of judgment precisely because Abraham needs to be a remnant person involved in judgment to the world. God had chosen Him and keeps faithful to Abraham's role as steward of that blessing by revealing to him God's plans of blessing the world through judgment. This divine stooping to reveal His plans is partly due to Abraham's close relationship to the inhabitants of the city and partly merely because Abraham is to be the father of many nations. Word about Divine Judgment of comes through His chosen. We know the reasons for Sodom and Gomorrah's decline precisely because of Abraham's relationship and conversation with God. We would not know judgment apart from those He has called, feeble and defective as they may be. Why? It appears that God believes Abraham was prepared to bear this responsibility in an understanding and even a pleading way. Blessing and ease dropping on

God's judgment plans are forever linked, suggesting judgment is more tied up with blessing than we have fathomed.

Sixth, and crucially, judgment is initiated by "cries." God is coming to investigate the cries coming up from the city. Abraham may have been crying also, but it is clear that the cries originate from the city itself. Questions about "would God heard?" "why God hears cries from 'them?'" and "why He needs to investigate?" all raise a level of interest in this judgement discussion. Isn't it all obvious to an omniscient God? But cries of alarm and injustice seem essential in God's investigative judgment.

Kugel (2003) has helped me understand the cry as essential in God's calculus of justice and intervention. In his wonderful little book *The God of the Old*, in chapter five, "The Cry of the Victim," showcases the role of victims in initiating judgment. Exodus 22 warns Israel not to "wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers" and not to afflict the "widow or orphan" because they will "cry out to me. I will surely hear his cry; and my anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword" (vs 21-24). "And it shall come about that when he cries out to Me, I will hear him, for I am gracious" (vs 27). Kugel especially notices how Moses focuses on the cry, especially of strangers. "Strangers (that is, resident aliens) were particularly easy to cheat and expropriate, since they lacked the usual entrenched network of clans and families that ordinary Israelites had" (p. 109). God seemed a third party in these cries but directly warned Israel that He had to act on that role. When they cried, He had to act and His action would be sobering. I can't stress enough this important point of judgment! Kugel is convinced something crucial exists in relationship to the cry of the oppressed and that is a subtle subtext throughout the Bible. "The victim's cry might well have been omitted entirely from the Bible... Why mention it at all? Yet it is mentioned, here and elsewhere." That suggests "the text is telling us something about its own world, something more than the actual subject that it is discussing" (p 114). Oddly His commands are "directly to the oppressor about the victim's cry" as if "the Bible makes Him seem almost like a well-disposed but powerless bureaucrat, shrugging His shoulders as He talks to the victimizer; 'Normally, I'd be able to help you out, pal, but there's this matter of the oppressed person's cry, When that's there, there is nothing I can do but react'" (p. 113-4). Kugel end's his whole book back on this theme noting that "ancient Israel somehow came to believe that it is simply God's nature to hear the victim's cry, that despite all the evidence to the contrary and despite all common sense, this was, in Israel's view, a realistic portrayal of God's essential nature" (p. 200).

We linger on this last point further. The centrality of the cry, because it plays such a crucial role in understanding what initiates divine judgment and just why investigation on God's part is so essential in his liberating work. Judgment is great news for victims. The cry of victims does not go unheard in God's kingdom. As we will see later in Psalms, this explains David's continual cries to God for the beauty of judgment. Judgment is great news for those crying and groaning for divine resolution.

Seventh, moving beyond the cry of the victim, we see further in this judgment process, some negotiation on the part of Abraham before the final investigation and execution is complete. It testifies to the notion that God's judgment is not done without human discourse. This aspect is a mystery to me at this point. I just report it here to be faithful to the text. I don't fully understand why a sinful human can negotiate so boldly and openly with a God in judgment except that such negotiation fundamentally believes that God is willing to save as many as possible. God seems never to be angry at those willing to negotiate grace out of the worst case. God is approachable, even in, or we should correctly say, precisely because and especially in, judgment. That is weird good news. But even while Abraham is talking with the Lord, the angels

are already moving forward with their work of investigation and the Lord ends the negotiation abruptly remind us solemnly that all this talk of judgment one day ends as execution takes place.

The ending of the negotiation ends Abraham's direct involvement in the process, but not the judgment itself. The judgment continues in chapter 19, this time with Lot and the Sodomites. The Angels visits Sodom. These Angel-strangers are received with graciousness by Lot just as they were received by Abraham. The theme of taking care of strangers again gets linked to the seriousness of judgment. Although Lot is gracious, the Sodomites are not. They go out of their way to track down and seek to abuse these foreign visitors. Lot condemns the men's wicked desires. That condemnation is not only toward their sexual desires but also toward their treatment of strangers. Both are sinful, deeply sinful. Their response to Lots claim shows their fate is sealed by their refusal to receive counsel: "This one came in as an alien, and already he is acting like a judge" (Genesis 19:9). The Sodomites reject Lot's role to state God's standards and thus seal their own fate by both their words and actions. They are embolden by their rejection of a standard and by a rejection of Lot. The angels intervened to rescue Lot, and then Lot is told to flee and take whomever he could. His daughters and wife make it out of the city but only his daughters and he make it all the way out. The angels do not swoop them up to deliver them. They must run out of the city. Fire from heaven seals the destruction of the city.

This encounter of judgment in Genesis sets out the components of judgment that will be replayed throughout scripture. God's promise of a son as a symbol of deliverance frames the whole discussion of judgment, especially in Daniel 7. Mercy's works always in close proximity to the coming of judgment. That mercy is not only evident in God's attitude but is evident in His promises and the offers of escape evident throughout the process. Judgment is linked to entertaining strangers and requires for those who are caught in the city under judgment a coming out, a running from, and rescuing from fire by running. This passage also shows that investigation precedes just before execution, in this case moments before. And it is not ones relationship with Lot that delivers, but the willingness to act on the delivering Angels clear instructions.

While there are many other stories related to judgment in the Pentateuch (like Leviticus 16 the Exodus itself) we conclude our focus here with a more subtle story. It concerned Moses' own work as judge. The people's first experience of Moses leadership is "who made you a judge over us" (Exodus 2:14). This was both a rejection of God as judge but also a statement of Moses lack of understanding of judgement and ability to judge in His Egyptian mindset. Forty years later, after seeing the role of the shepherd more clearly, Moses' was better prepared to judge. Plus, the increased oppression of slavery lead the people to be more receptive to the need for judgment. So there is a coming to judgment, a growing into appreciation of God's work of judgment, both on the part of the leader and on the lead. In fact, the appeals for judgment were so intense Jethro advised Moses to train others to judge, which he did (Exodus 18: 13-27). Thus God's people of Exodus moved from slaves to judges, a people groomed for better judgment. This subtle story raises a persistent question: "What does it take for you to finally want divine judgment and what does it take for you to share that judgment with others in a way acceptable to God AND Man?"

Psalms

We fast forward past Joshua and the period of the judges (which add deliverance to our understanding of judgment) to David. Moses and David both see the beauty of God's judgment but convey it in different ways. Moses details judgment in story and sanctuary explanations, but David chooses to sing about it. His prose reaches a level of ecstasy about God's judgment that is far too hard to avoid. David longed for and wrote poetry about God's judgment. He seemed "in love" with God's ways, commands, warnings and judgment in a way that is profoundly foreign

to our thinking today. David stood convinced God would take care of his enemies and would in the same action defend the weak. The theme saturates Psalms.

“O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth. Say among the heathen *that* the LORD reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: he shall judge the people righteously. Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that *is* therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth” (Psalms 96:9-13, KJV, underline added)

Again, “The LORD reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad.... righteousness and judgment *are* the habitation of his throne. “Psalms 97:1- 2, KJV). “Zion heard, and was glad; and the daughters of Judah rejoiced because of thy judgments, O LORD” (Psalms 97:8, KJV).

The writers of Psalms connect more singing to issues of God’s government and judgment than all other Bible writers combined. This singing about God’s government seems at times to rise from the experience of God’s deliverance of His people from their enemies and sin (Ps 40) as well as from deep sins of jealousy that almost killed a psalmist (Psalms 73). So deliverance from sin becomes prominent in Psalms framing of judgment. David’s own bitter experience of the distorted judgment leveled against him by Saul made his passion for judgment stronger. Having enemies makes one seek judgment. Distrust of even close relatives and friends seemed to operate in David’s mind to lead him to desire God’s pure judgment.

David’s pity for the oppressed grew out of his own experience of God’s judgment on David’s oppression. Though full of impulsivity and sexual distortion, David nevertheless saw and acted on God’s laws and justice and had compassion on others as a result of the lack of compassion shown him by Saul. His willingness to defend the outcast was evident in both his willingness and ability to defend Israel against her enemies and also protect the weak within Israel from abusive Israelites. David understood the link between oppression, deliverance from oppression and enemies, and joyful worship of the judge. While many books, especially the prophets make these connections, only the book of Revelation matches Psalms level of ecstasy in connecting worship to God’s acts of judgments. “Let the earth rejoice...Let the sea roar...Let the field exult ... the trees...sing for joy...For he cometh to judge the earth” (1 Chronicles 16:31-33, ASV). Even more, he tells all “Make a joyful noise unto Jehovah, all the earth: Break forth and sing for...joy together before Jehovah; for he cometh to judge the earth: He will judge the world with righteousness, And the peoples with equity” (Psalms 98:4-9, ASV) Again, “I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O LORD, will I sing” (Psalms 101:1, KJV). Given David’s daily responsibility to render judgments and provide leadership over a complex system of government, this constant reference to joyful judgment must have sustained his work. For 40 years, deep in the daily tasks of running a kingdom David continues to reconnect with the cries of victims.

In Psalms 82, Asaph brings God’s work of judgment into direct contrast to the misapplied judgment of the rulers of the world. God is metaphorically seen as calling the judges of the world to be judged by THE JUDGE. And the judge is upset that the judges let the oppressors go on oppressing the poor, the orphaned, the widowed, etc. And what is that judgment. It is a judgment that is concerned about the fate of those who need vindication and the psalmist blends his voice with those of the oppressed: “Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations” (v8). Kugel notes how (2003) God fires all the judges of the world because they don’t respond to the cries of victims. With only God remaining, “there is now no other force in heaven to oppose God, and all peoples are under His power...therefore, the psalmist says, You ought to take up

our cause,” (p. 124). Both Moses and David noted “that hearing the victim’s cry is a god’s duty, and God’s duty. It says that if that job is not properly performed, the very foundation of the earth will shake” (p. 124). God likes to clearly set Himself as ultimately responsible for judgment. (See Buber’s analysis of this Psalm in his complicated little book *Good and Evil*).

The Psalms’ emphasis on God’s judgment reinforce several aspects covered before on Moses as well adds several new emphases. Mainly, what is added, is a new level of worshipful experience linked directly to God’s judgment. The majestic levels reached in association with God’s judgment leaves no question that this is a wonderful experience for the righteous. And those righteous are not sinless people but people who depend on God for deliverance. Second, what is repeated is that the cry of the victim is central in initiating judgment. David himself often seems the one crying for it and then praising God in advance for His intervening judgment. And at other times He acts out of an understanding that God brought judgment when He most needed it.

Given the cry of the victim, third, Psalms adds a new level of responsibility to those who are rulers and judges accountable to act within a framework of His judgment. He investigates these judges (Psalms 82) and will remove them from office for not taking care of those who cry for judgment. Fourth, the righteous get vindicated and the wicked get punished in Psalms. Fifth, throughout discussions of judgment, mercy is evident. Mercy makes judgment beautiful. God’s law and mercy are linked and regularly listed in parallels. Finally, judgment is not just for humans but somehow the whole nature gets in on this process. Psalms gets blamed for making judgment too metaphorical but I believe God’s final judgment is desired by the whole created order. Psalms makes that clear (Psalms 96, 98).

Prophets and Daniel

After David and then several decades of good rule on the part of Solomon, the kingdom started to come unwound because of poor judgment on the part of the rulers. The divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah mostly show cased what poor judgment looked like. It was only the prophets who were to significantly recover a since of God’s work of redemptive judgment. Unfortunately, at that point, all seems so bleak that judgment itself seems at the tourniquet level of operation: drastic times needed drastic intervention. Many prophets stand out on judgment. We think of Isaiah and Ezekiel who see God high and lifted up, with purifying fire and whirling cherubim. We think of the practical calls for justice (Amos, Micah) and love (Hosea and Malachi). We see views of God’s heavenly ministry (Zechariah) and warnings of God’s use of heathen nations to bring judgment upon his people (Jeremiah). Over and over and over the prophets keep alive a vision of a God who is holy, in contrast to the earthly kings and one whose judgment can not be bought by the rich to abuse the poor. The greater the earthly distortion of God’s plans and ways the stronger He brings prophets to the forefront. Prophecy is moral interpretation, plan and simple. And it is interpretation that is precisely the outgrowth of Divine work of judgment.

Too often we settle in to a rut to view prophecy as about predicting the future. That is an aspect of it. However, the main purpose of the prophet is to explain the present and give interpretation of the past and of history to clarify God’s will and His judgments. In the process moral commentary and lexicon creates clearer moral reasoning and resistance to rampant unrighteousness evident in both our religious and non-religious world. The moral rage the prophets is part of the experience of divine judgment the prophets at to our study. They ignite in anger in a way that shows God’s judgment, justice, and mercy. There outrage is not only understandable but justified given the abuse they detect in their world.

Ellen White frames this prophetic period well when she speaks of Israel’s eventual fall:

The closing years of the ill-fated kingdom of Israel were marked with violence and bloodshed such as had never been witnessed even in the worst periods of strife and unrest under the house of Ahab. For two centuries and more the rulers of the ten tribes had been sowing the wind; now they were reaping the whirlwind. King after king was assassinated to make way for others ambitious to rule. "They have set up kings," the Lord declared of these godless usurpers, "but not by Me: they have made princes, and I knew it not." Hosea 8:4. Every principle of justice was set aside; those who should have stood before the nations of earth as the depositaries of divine grace, "dealt treacherously against the Lord" and with one another. Hosea 5:7. With the severest reproofs, God sought to arouse the impenitent nation to a realization of its imminent danger of utter destruction (White, 1917, p. 279).

We see the principle that judgment is inevitable against those who victimize. Victims cry to heaven and God will respond, even against His chosen. However, when the chosen are unable to receive the truth because they themselves are too corrupt, He raises up a remnant, the prophets, to keep alive divine understanding preserved in a teaching about God's judgment.

God's judgment is portrayed as vivid and solemn and reaches its highest levels of agitated concern in the "last section of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the minor prophets" (Ford, 1976, p. 20). We will focus specifically on the minor prophet Daniel because no single book of the bible and no single prophet more involved in God's judgment than Daniel. His very name means, God is my judge. The book is full of divine and earthly conflicts and wars, news of assault on divine and earthly sanctuaries, interpersonal conflict and disagreements, clashing worldviews and political regimes, claims and counter claims of authority and power, and finally incremental judgments as well promises of a final judgments. Throughout the stories and visions move the reader to see God as the one's whose kingdom alone endures. We only sketch out the main ideas of judgment evident in this book. Others have done extensive work on this book. See the most recent commentary by Stefanovic (2007)

Because of space, I will only highlight key aspects concerning judgment from each book of Daniel. Chapter 1 starts with Daniel's bitter predicament of being in captivity and forced to live against His God's clear counsel. He requested and won an opportunity for a mini-judgment, a quasi-experiment concerning the right and wrong way to eat. Daniel and his friends ate simple food (not even valuable enough to offer to idols) and the others ate as planned. After 10 short days, the unbiased but skeptical evaluator determined Daniel's team won. A mini-judgment is made in favor of Daniel and His friends. Daniel's win and really God's win. The rest of the book merely plays out that basic theme but in other political and even cosmic levels.

Daniel 2. God gives Daniel's boss, King Nebuchadnezzar a dream of a statue of a man with many parts and many types of metals. Daniel and his friends pray for interpretative power (which is really the main attribute of prophecy) and receive it. The interpretation is that King Nebuchadnezzar's part is that of the head of gold, but after him will follow other kings and kingdoms. God sets up and takes down kings and kingdoms throughout time (acts of judgment) and will eventually shatter all these systems (a final but unique act of judgment) when He will rule by Himself. Daniel gets advanced further in the King's court because of the gift of discernment given to him by the ultimate Judge of all things human, including especially kings and kingdoms.

Chapter 3. King Nebuchadnezzar decides to take the future into his own hands. He makes an identical statute to the one given in the dream, except this time he keeps the whole thing gold to show that he, as king, can determine what the future will be. Daniel's friends stand up to such a moral interpretation and the call to worship even the best earthly kingdom and are thrown into the fire. God intervenes and saves them. They are advanced further into the King's courts. God

judges even against good kings turned evil. God judges over and over again in Daniel. Do you see that theme!

In Daniel 4, King Nebuchadnezzar shares how God converted him from a stubborn king to one who operated under the authority of God. This is beautiful reminder of the main purpose of God's judgments, to bring understanding and repentance. To bring us to fall on the rock and be broken least the rock fall on us and we are reduced to powder.

In Daniel 5, King Nebuchadnezzar's grandson's judgment is reported. Unlike his grandfather, Belshazzar refuses to repent and even mocked the God of Judah by using the cups and utensils from Solomon's temple to drink wine and as part of his propos in sexual orgies. God writes His judgment in clear language on the wall. But because of the desperate drunkenness Daniel is called in to give the interpretation (prophecy). Sadly, the revelation to the kings have gotten clearer and clearer, less mystically and less hard to discover but even so the darkness of their thinking has gotten worse and worse such that moral interpretation is still needed by the "people of judgment." The news is given: it is too late: Belshazzar and his rulers are weighed and found wanting and the judgment is for that VERY night.

In Daniel 6, we start another sequence of judgment. Once again, it starts with another personal story of Daniel's in the midst of his own personal judgment. A new king and new kingdom must also be trained in the ways of God. Daniel must showcase again that God delivers. Darius, king of the Medes and Persians, and Daniel's boss, is tricked into signing a decree that outlaws prayer to anyone other than Darius. Daniel, as his custom was, continues to pray to God. The poorly crafted public law that required Persian law to be unbendable and unbreakable forces Darius judgment to be faulty and against Daniel. So he has to, under his pagan system, throw Daniel into the lion's den. But God delivers and Daniel, his people and his God, are vindicated.

Then from Daniel 7-12, we move again over the plans of God for the kingdoms of this earth but we also move past the earthly to the heavenly. The interpretations given to these visions make up prophecy and prophecy becomes again, a statement of moral understanding about history. It is beyond the purpose of this paper to unpack these visionary chapters. Many scholars, specifically Adventists, have done so well. My point here is to simply highlight seven of my learning points from this section.

My first learning point: God is in charge, ultimately and in the particular. Bad people and kings and kingdoms will be allowed to wreck havoc, against others and you and me. They may kill faithful individuals, "wear out the saints" but God lets this go on for now. He is in charge and takes seriously His leadership of this planet. Second learning point: Prophetic understanding about God's final judgment and about judgment in general takes time to unfold. Many of Daniel's visions were years apart because even Daniel could not absorb these revelations, let alone the full interpretations. God's judgments can't fully make sense to us. Time is needed to let an understanding of these grow. In fact, it appears that Daniel recorded ideas that would not be known until the end of time. So understanding is not only a long process for individuals but also for groups and for the whole world. Prophecy is a learning process as more and more understanding is granted as the final days come closer (2 Peter 1:19-21). This progressive revelation is evident in Daniel, not only in its syntax but structure.

Some understanding about God's judgment was and will remain hidden until needed. Furthermore, some understanding of judgment emerges because of variation in human response. Nebuchadnezzar eventually responded and the kingdom was lengthened. Belshazzar refuses to repent and the kingdom is given to another. Respect for free will necessitates even prophecies about the future to be conditional (read carefully Ezekiel 18; Jeremiah 18). Once again, the power of prophecy, is not in predicting the future but in explain and giving meaning for how things unfold. Daniel wrestles with understanding and so can we. And in that we, like Abraham, are invited to be prophetic people who learn about God's judgment.

We end our journey through Daniel with the final emphasis on the unfolding nature of God's revelation about His judgment. The fact that Daniel was written primarily for the end time is thoroughly evident in two prophecies made later by Jesus. The first is when he reviews the end times in Matthew 24 and 25. In verse 15 of chapter 24 he encourages those who will later read Daniel to relate it to God's sanctuary and the end time operations of Jesus on behalf of His people. Furthermore, Daniel's importance for our time was prophesied in Revelation 10:8-11 (KJV). "Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel...And I took the little book...and ate it: and it was in my mouth sweet as honey; and soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter. And he said unto me, thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings." I believe this passage applies to Millerite and Adventist reading of Daniel and the need to reinterpret Daniel's application after the great disappointment of 1844. Knight (2008) does excellent job of explaining this claim.

So I believe, the whole little book of Daniel is one big knock down, drag out experience of judgment. And Daniel is not just a by-stander in all this. His whole life is involved in judgment and out of that involvement, his own understanding of judgment grows. Judgment is done to him, through him, around him, and by him. It permeates not only his thinking but that of his friends. His going into captivity and his exile among "foreign nations" sets up the whole process of judgment. As we pointed out earlier, conflict and tensions bring people or groups to the need for ethics and the need for judgment. Moses standing up to Egypt, David running from Saul, Daniel forced into captivity all set up the need to enter into judgment. Our coming to bitter experiences, also brings us to the need for judgment. (Appendix A offers my version of just how Daniel's coming to judgment may have operated.)

As such, Daniel makes the most useful complete explanation of judgment in two ways: "the narratives [of Daniel] convey the same message as the visions—the message of vindication for the faithful and destruction for the wicked" of judgment and God's work (Ford, 1976, p. 18). This little book becomes a quick avenue into the character, personal values, governmental resistance, and the human resistance to God's judgment. Adventist have championed the book of Daniel more than any other group because they have found in it a necessary understanding of the God's cosmic work of judgment and with Job, a foundation for their teaching that there is a Great Controversy between Christ and Satan that must frame all our understanding of God's work (Jemison, 1990).

Jesus, the New Testament and His Disciples

We fast forward past over the rest of minor prophets and other books (like Esther) that contain much about judgment to get to the New Testament. The New Testament—or more specifically Jesus and eventually His true followers—did not erase Old Testament concepts of judgment but radically reframed them, restoring more vividly the connection of judgment to God's wholistic work of redemption. Capan (2002) has done the most to help me understand Jesus' parables of judgment. In my proposed book length manuscript, I plan to devote more time to Jesus' use of judgment words (or lack of use as we will note here), several key parables of judgment and the whole contrast of the way He judged with the way the world judged Him. I refer you to Capan and to my future book for more detail. I merely highlight three items here. First, Jesus purposeful exclusion of vengeance from His stated earthly ministry at the time of His live and death.. Second, the centrality of the "woman caught in adultery" as a judgment scene with great implications for our own experiences of judgment. And finally a table for your to see and think about the contrast of Jesus' prosecution in contrast with God's way God's judgment works.

Throughout Jesus' use of judgment wording, He seems to purposely distance himself, as did Moses, from a penchant to fixate on the vengeance part of God's judgment. This is clearly

evident when He uses Isaiah 61 to recount His mission on earth. He cites the preaching of good news and the acceptance of the poor but stops reading this passage and closes the book before recounting “the day of vengeance of our God” (see Isaiah 61:1-4 and Luke 4:17-21). It is Jesus had a different understanding of God’s final work of judgment. I believe this caused Him to distance himself from this misconception of the Old Testament. I also believe He knew that role of vengeance would have a far different future application.

Beyond this work focus, I believe the parables of Jesus made the strongest teaching on judgment. The strongest in my estimate is the action of Jesus in John 8 in his dealing with the women caught in adultery. In the religious leaders we see contrasted judgmentalism, the main counterfeit to God’s redemptive judgment. (Oh Lord, forgive us all, who have acted like these leaders in so many situations). We now take on John 8.

To build up momentum to get through John 8, we need to start in John 7. John 7 sets in motion a deep conflict about authority. As we noted earlier, conflict is always an invitation to for God to judge and for a new understanding of ethics to emerge. Here is the precursor to judgment. And the conflict is about Jesus character. The people are debating if Jesus was good or bad, the messiah or a lunatic. They also debate this in reference to the law. Jesus is trying to challenge their view of the Sabbath and their resistance to His teachings. Then he talks directly about judgment. “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment” (7:24, NASB). Jesus connects himself directly to God, “I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent me.” (7:28, NASB). Right then, “many of the multitude believed in Him” but religious leaders were upset at this bald claim and sent officers to seize him. The officers not only came back empty handed, but noted how well Jesus spoke and with such great authority. The religious leaders were upset that these officers were duped by Jesus. But in reality, they are responding to the voice of authority. That authority is in Him, but it is also in His words in that He decisions and His thinking about issues is so wonderfully redemptive people are spell bound by His ability to show respect for them despite their low estate.

Then, while religious leaders hurl condemnations and make plans to falsely trap and condemn Jesus, they articulate their Satanic form of judgment to execute judgment without a trial. Nicodemus raises the question that pushes this whole scene directly into the a judgment scene. “Our law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it? That really shocked and irritated these false judges who slap Nicodemus with a mocking statement, “You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee.” They point to false evidence. They focused on context while true judgment focuses on character. All this sets up the judgment scene of John 8.

The next day, a judgment occurs. It is the most creative evil yet planned by the religious leaders against Jesus. Ostensibly, they bring a women caught in adultery for his judgment. In reality, they want to trap him. He is damned either way, if he avoids judgment or if he condemns her. The ultimate test is not directly about the woman but about Him. What is His true character. It is the “test” of Jesus. And this is not just the religious leaders testing. This whole event depicts the very mind of Satan in His accusations against Christ, His law, His authority and His character. All this is veiled. The religious leaders have a subtle sounding support for God’s law, apparent honor for Moses and provide a ruse of supporting religious and civil authority. They even sound teachable as they ask Jesus what should be done, right then and there, to a woman caught in adultery. After all, isn’t that what judgment is all about, finding answers to questions.

But in reality, they ask, not to learn, but to condemn. And the woman they throw at His feet is really just a pawn in their chess game against Jesus. They seek to catch Jesus in judgment, precisely to use that judgment as evidence against him. They don’t think like Jesus, and they are fundamentally unable to calculate grace and law in one act. But Jesus can and does:

“Their pretended reverence veiled a deep-laid plot for His ruin...*whatever* decision He might make they would find occasion to accuse Him. Should He acquit the woman, He might be charged with despising the law of Moses. Should He declare her worthy of death, He could be accused to the Romans as one who was assuming authority that belonged only to them” (White, DA, 460, italics provided).

Jesus was on trial not primarily the woman. But what was to be the religious leaders tour de force became the illustration of Jesus authority. Like Solomon who resolved the cases of the two prostitutes (1 Kings 3:16-28), Jesus also gained His great creditability from this case. What was said of Solomon was 100 times more said of Jesus: “And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to render justice.” That day, justice and mercy kissed in a new way, and the Kings fame spread our time. Truly, one greater than Solomon had spoken with handwriting in the sand and a few small words of “no condemnation.” In that scene He most eloquently states His Father’s judgment and show His marvelous spirit of respect for human dignity.

We are told from the start, that Jesus was sitting and now we are informed that He stooped, the great posture of a judgment. This is significant. That role for a judge was that He would be from among the people, an equal. But here He stoops even lower to take on a better perspective as judge. He writes from below. He write in the sand, so no permanent record is seen of even the accusers. His very position, as one low in the sand, on the ground with the accused suggests a far more humble role of the Judge of the whole earth. He wrote in the sand in a way that would not only silence the accusers but eventually emptied the court room of accusers and even jurists. And in the process, He preserves the law, the hideousness of sin, but also His right to let the repentant sinner go. “He had not set aside the law given through Moses, nor infringed upon the authority of Rome. The accusers had been defeated.” (page 461 in the book version of *Desire of Ages*, or read it electronically (White, 1999)).

The whole process took only minutes. Then He personally addresses the woman and reiterates His love for her and the respect He has for her, “Neither do I condemn, go and sin no more.”

Judging is here using legitimate authority to apply the law to a given situation or case to secure the greatest redemption for all involved, accusers as well as the accused and those hurt by all human action. He says to us “You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me.” (8:15-18

This is, in a story, the whole point of the judgment teaching. The Pharisees trap of Jesus, is precisely the approach of Satan to judgment. I believe this is the exact scene unfolding now in the great controversy. It is less about the victim and more about the judge, but it nonetheless involves all of us “caught” in the very act of sin, in our mouths, in our sexual actions, in our jealousy, in our pride. And Satan hopes to condemn us in this process. But even as evil pushes toward judgment, God uses it to more than show His love. It is an over-the-top powerful act of God’s claim on our soul. And those who stick around through the judgment process can be assured, as the woman was, that there is no condemnation. I walk away from this scene, not worrying so much who brings me to judgment and why, but that I have an advocate in my Judge who will come down to my level and make sure I hear the words, neither do I condemn you. This scene so epitomizes God’s work of judgment that we end with a significant passage:

“In His act of pardoning this woman and encouraging her to live a better life, the character of Jesus shines forth in the beauty of perfect righteousness. While He does not palliate sin, nor lessen the sense of guilt, He seeks not to condemn, but to save. The world

had for this erring woman only contempt and scorn; but Jesus speaks words of comfort and hope. The Sinless One pities the weakness of the sinner, and reaches to her a helping hand. While the hypocritical Pharisees denounce, Jesus bids her, 'Go and sin no more.' It is not Christ's follower that, with averted eyes, turns from the erring, leaving them unhindered to pursue their downward course. Those who are forward in accusing others, and zealous in bringing them to justice, are often in their own lives more guilty than they. Men hate the sinner, while they love the sin. Christ hates the sin, but loves the sinner. This will be the spirit of all who follow Him. Christian love is slow to censure, quick to discern penitence, ready to forgive, to encourage, to set the wanderer in the path of holiness, and to stay his feet therein." (462)

We would be remiss by not concluding our look at Jesus' teaching of judgment apart from the way He was judged by the world. See Appendix B for a tool to meditate about how what we learned about His way of judgment is different than the way the former prince of this world, the prince of darkness judges. We rejected Christ, but later on, we like those Moses served, now clamor for His. By contrasting His judgment by the hands of men, we can better understand His true method of judgment. I do not have space to unpack this chart but encourage you to spend several hours meditating on the last trial and execution of Jesus and use that to deliver you from you false concepts of judgment. Suffice it to say, God investigates, but Satan does not!!!

The Bible theme of Judgment and link to other themes

We have sketched out the main themes related to God's judgment in scripture. We have seen the role of victim's cries in the initiation of judgment, the place of entertaining strangers unaware as a test that shows we have passed from death to life, and the final inevitability of God's destruction of those wicked enough to reject His mercy. We have see how beautiful judgment was to the Psalmists. This was not because they were guiltless, but because, like David, the knew His judgment could differentiate between the true righteous and the wicked. We see judgment played out in daily and political life in Daniel and the prophets. And then we come directly to the Judge and see in Jesus' teaching a more redemptive experience of human-divine relationships. Jesus preserves the role of differentiating between the good and the bad through a better emphasis on non-condemnation. Much more could be written about Paul, James, Peter and Revelations emphasis on judgment. We save that for a future book. For now, we see in all this the centrality of judgment in the work of God to redeem. Judgment is good news if you are, like Mary, caught in sin, but desirous of forgiveness. It is not good news if want to cling to your rocks. Finally, we end with a subtle but powerful summation of this teaching of judgment. From Abraham to Mary we see the centrality of forgiveness and receiving the other as the way through divine judgment. That is why Jesus succinctly noted: "Make friends quickly with your accuser, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prisons; truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny" (Matthew 5:25-26).

Pulling it all together into Adventist Judgment Ethic

Summing up Judgment with God as Ethics

We have journeyed through biblical understandings of God's judgment. To link this teaching to ethics, it should be sufficient to merely recap the key themes of God's work of judgment.

First, God reveals His plans and activity of judgment to His chosen. Oddly, He also makes known His will to not so faithful ones (like Lot) and directly to those who resist His will by

violence (Lot's accusers) or debauchery (Daniel chapter 5). Unfortunately, their callousness misses the impending judgment. However, that callousness is not only because of profligate living but also seen in self-sufficient living, as demonstrated by the rejection of Jesus by the religious leaders of His day. As such, one can be either too hateful or too drunk or too self-righteous to catch the appeal to repent in time to be saved. (If that doesn't create a sense of sober submission to God, I don't know what will. Guilt has to be created and dealt with and only God's creative maneuvering can do so (as well shall point out in few more pages).

Closely linked to this believe God reveals, is the challenge to receive His messengers. I share the Millerite belief that God started a special phase of judgment in 1844 and that He did some revealing to those Millerites that we need to take seriously. And I believe that message of judgment was taken up by Adventist and spread to the world. While I think we have missed the redemptive portion, I am hopeful that as Adventist receive a deeper understanding of grace, they will clarify again, prophecy again, go back and tell the world again, that His of judgment is in FAVOR of the sinners who repent. That it is not self-righteousness but self-unrighteousness clearly accepted and let go of that will bring them through judgment. These people let God speak for them and know they deserve to be ripped to shreds by the judge and have figured out how to settle things out of court in God's redemptive process.

Third, His revealing of His plans of judgment occurred in the context a renewed emphasis on the covenant of promise and mercy. The ethical tone is best created with a clear statement of the immanent coming son. He is coming really son. Receive His promise and you will be ethically able to stand

Fourth, there is a significant differentiation between the wicked and the righteous that only decisive judgment can reveal. But oddly, that decisive judgment is subtly conveyed to the hearer. Those who want to receive. Those who don't are given a little time. And those who won't finally face destruction. It is that simple. All else is only moral nit-picking.

Fifth, the investigative judgment seems to have both a preliminary and formative purpose for those who would be saved and a final proof of being lost purpose for those who reject mercy. It separates the goats from the sheep. Those who reject His mercy and forgiveness end up lost. Those who have received it manifest it in love to others in a natural, almost seamless way.

Thus, experience and understanding the very process of divine judgment and seeing the character of the judge in the process stirs a new understanding of ethics. Those who would condemn find out that is not needed when the violation is obvious. However, they do discover that wickedness must be named, as in the case of Lot's enemies. Thus paradoxes resolved in God's judgment become the paradoxes that guide ethical sentiment. The judgment is a far more productive place for ethics than either the legalistic listing out do's and don'ts on one end or the powerless tendencies to relativize on the other. It forces us to behold our Judge keep with His dealing with evil as invitation for our own souls.

For some that won't be enough ethical specifics. But for those who have passed from death to life, that is all that is needed. The rest is worked out while watching for strangers to entertain. And by beholding we are changed from a condemnatory spirit to one that both confronts the wickedness of our day even as it offers grace who want and need it most.

This is no easy ethic. It is as paradoxical as it can be. That is way it requires a resting in God's will. Such rest silences the "moral chatter" that is either too relativistic on one hand or too judgmental on the other by inviting us into the needs of others. Divine judgment alone restores the centrality of relationships. No one need be left out in the cold moral rigidity of modern ethics or abandon themselves instead into licentiousness.

The final link from this divine judgment to ethics is both simple and profound. It is not about abstract and legalistic requirements but fundamentally rooted in relationships. I wish I had space

here to more fully development this idea. Once again, I refer you to the site that is scheduled to be released in 2009 as www.adventistethics.org. However, I end here by using Isaiah 58 and its relationship to the Sabbath as a message of relationships primarily and foremost in the Yom Kippur Day of Atonement.

The Sabbath Test as Freely Receiving and Freely Giving

Yom Kippur created its OWN Sabbath, beyond just the issue of a weekly Sabbath. I believe this Yom Kippur Sabbath blends with the Saturday Sabbath to be seen as the final test of those who will follow God and those who will not. In simplicity, the experience of God's removal of our condemnation creates in us a spirit of generosity and active love to the other. We rest from our moral actions to receive more of the gift of God. This reception concerns the reception of the Son which was promised which is made an immanent hope in the last judgment hour message. It is not a promise based on our works, or for which we work, but a promise from which we rest and through that find a new work that is gracious to others.

Christians correctly label this rest as new birth which along brings a new righteousness which is based on gracious love. Without that birth our actions can not be good. We are merely working and not believing. However, that need not be narrowly viewed as only those who claim Christ will be saved. No, as Matthew 25 and the separation of the sheep and the goats clarifies, all who make it are amazed they did any good. That is the mystery of God's judgments. Those who count their morality and works are actually engaged in a detrimental ethic that will finally spiral down into violence or debauchery.

No, those who are born of the judgment don't recount any obedience to Him because they haven't been counting their obedience. They don't see the need to because they have been given so freely, why not also freely give. It seems that those who have the true judgment experience will bear ethical fruit automatically.

So the work is to believe and to enter His judgment as one "caught in sin" and let Him work His magic of redemption. And out of that, head off and give to others what was received.

For those who must be puzzled not, this is my conclusion of the whole story. We evidenced in our lives the work of God in our free reception of the Son we could not have produced on our own and that initiates the final judgment of those who receive such free gift. Those who freely give to others have already freely received. That alone takes them off the treadmill of moral obligations that seem to create more anger and jealousy and guilt than redemption.

We are delivered, in short, from a God who is only or mainly "ethical" without being redemptive to a God who is ethical precisely because He is redemptive. His redemptive work is the NEW ETHIC. And it is not really a new ethic, but really an old ethic, love. Those born from such love, know they are loved, not for any goodness they have, but because they are loved. That frees them to love the other, not because of any obligation (do strangers really have a claim on us) but precisely because love needs no claims. Such love works to restore, rebuild and entertain angels unaware.

While I wish I had more space to develop I must conclude here with a insightful comment by UC Berkeley sociologist Ann Swindler (Swindler, 2002). After reviewing the demise of social institutional structure that nurture and support families and people, she goes back to the prophet Isaiah to find in the judgment a rally cry for ethical actions. Isaiah 58, the passage read on Yom Kippur, the day of atonement and judgment was primarily about human relations. That day made its own automatic Sabbath and Isaiah had much to teach the people of God about the morality required of them. It was the fundamental use of judgment to call us to ethical living.

"It is particularly appropriate here because it deals with guilt, that most debilitating if urgent prod to moral action. It argues that there are more and less worthy sacrifices, and that those that create a more just society are the sacrifices God requires. But what is most fascinating

about the passage is the link it draws between justice, nurture, and the rebuilding of common structures on which our lives depend. Isaiah promises that those who reach out to help others will themselves be sustained and filled—The Lord “will refresh you in dry places, renewing your strength”—followed by the mysterious promise that as you are replenished you will yourself be a restorer or builder of ruins.

Swindler than recaps Isaiah 58, which is nothing less than an invitation to get rid of all our outdated and wrong constructs of divine judgment (“the yoke of oppression, the finger of scorn and the tongue of malice”). Judgment is salvific. The judge delivers and so should you. Drop the finger and the accusatory spirit, receive the other, not because of their works, but precisely because they are strangers. Then you will experience a judgment that will knock your socks off.

That is essentially why the judgment teaching should be integrated as the foundation of Adventist ethics. It is the best foundation for ethics because it places God, and not ethics, redemption and not moral calculus, at the center of the relational axis. We are reconciled, not by morality or even by good works, but precisely because of grace and that grace starts in us a redemptive stance towards ourselves that is ethics. Now, if we could only really believe that

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Appendices:

A: Key Texts influencing the Paper's Presentation of God's Divine Judgment

| Passage | Content | Comment |
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| Gen 18 and 19 | Abraham entertains strangers and in the process the promise of a son is renewed. He receives dates about the promise of having a son in his old age. He overhears the plans of God for investigating and judging Sodom. He wonders, "will God destroy the righteous with the wicked." He then negotiates for the city's salvation. In Gen 19, Lot and his daughters also respond to the strangers and are spared. However, the angels do not find the needed 10 to preserve the city but Lot's family is given a way of escape. Lot's wife starts to chose that way out but she looks back to her own death. | The main themes and processes of judgment are here revealed: the resting of works, the receiving and practice of mercy, the promise of a son despite the frailty of the body, the divine disclosure of coming judgment on Sodom, an investigative exploration by God's team, the testing of Lot that Abraham received, Lot's judgment on "his" nation, and God's executive judgment. |
| Exodus 28, 39 Lev 8:8; Is 59:16-18; Eph 6:14; 1 Thes 5:8 | Description of Breastplate of Judgment. It was perfectly square, colorful, well woven with the 12 stones representing and naming the 12 tribes of Israel. It showed the inclusive and tender nature of the High Priest within His role of judging. "Shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel on his heart before the Lord continually" Ex 28:30 Later Paul connects directly to issues of faith and love. | Divine judgment, as symbolized by the high priest, operated out of a drawing of God's people to His heart. This is how judgment works. He is touched with the feelings of infirmity and judges accordingly. God is not a judge who mindlessly applies law without a thorough knowledge of contest. He operates fully aware of our temptations and infirmities. |
| Daniel | The whole book is about judgment. From judgment on Judah to judgment between diet and worship to discernment of times and seasons, to heavenly juxtaposition of true wisdom and false wisdom and true judgment and false judgment | In addition to constrasting the best in worldly judgment from divine processes, Daniel makes bold statements about the times of God's judgment upon the world. The prophecy of 2300 days is so specific it is hid until the appropriate time (2300 days). |
| John 7-9 | Jesus' authority is challenged and his identity questioned and the evil plots of the religious leaders grow to a level of hate. The religious leaders use a woman caught in adultery to challenge his judgment of the | Jesus forgiveness of "the woman caught in adultery" and "gentle exposure" of men who accused her teach us about the purpose and process of Christ in judgment |
| 1 Cor 4:1-5 | A challenging passage about judging between each other and even self-judgment. This is contrasted to God's ultimate ability to judge in respect to motives and desires. Paul encourages us to wait for a time of judgment and God's role of rewarding. | Praise from other Christians and even self-judgment are not reliable forms of judgment. They are easily distorted by outward issues. |
| 2 Cor 5:10; 2 Thes 1:4-10 Heb 10:26-30 James 5:1-6 2 Peter 2 | Paul, James and Peter give direct and vivid language of the reality of a future judgment that will give different rewards for those who accept and those who reject the gospel. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" and God will be righteous in his dealing with all, especially those who are causing trouble for His children, "seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you." It is plain that those who don't share their riches will "howl and weep" and that evil doers with the evil angels are "reserved for judgment" and "black darkness" in their final judgment | Although Jesus returns law and judgment under the wild mercy of God, it is clear judgment still will come. Paul, James and Peter give vivid and sober reminders of the reality of judgment. These passages reassert the reality of a judgment experience for "every one." |
| Revelation | The Tribe of Dan is missing from the final list of the children of Israel in revelation (Rev 7) just as God alone is shown to be the judget of the whole earth. | |

B: Jesus' Judgment in Contrast to the Way He does Judgment

It is my belief that one of the subtlest lessons about God's way of judgment is realized in careful consideration on the way Jesus was judged while on earth. The following table captures the main themes of contrast and I hope are useful here.

Contrasted Judgments

Christ's judgment by the World contrasted with God's Systematic Judgment of the World

| The World Judged Christ Done in Darkness —Matt 27, Luke 22-23, Mark 14-5, John 18,9 | Judgment Components | Christ Judges the World Completed in Fullness & Light Daniel & Revelation |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Good Works: Jesus' teaching and healing service condemns the religious and political systems. False rulers decide to kill Jesus but through false judgment disguise evil by preempting judgment | Cause of Judgment | Evil works multiply, cries of the oppressed accumulate, righteous get condemned, accusations of Satan against God's people raise doubts. (Pentateuch, Psalms, Job) |
| "Darkness is your hour" "the power of darkness" is the only way to arrest and render "fake" judgment (Lk 22:53) | Context of Judgment and Arrest | In Full Day: In the fullness of time and in the accumulation of information, the books are open. Dan 7 |
| Power Monging: Hidden arrests and trial; lying witnesses, abuse before any convictions; no appeal processes; repeated evidence against accusations; divine messenger sent to warn false judges; weak leadership; impatient processes | Policies and Practices of Judgment | Patience and accumulation of evidence; Nations allowed to rise by God (Dan 2, 7) but when cup of iniquity full they are warned, told to repent (Dan 5, Rev 12-7) but if no repentance they are weighed (Dan 6), found deserving of judgment (Rev 17) |
| Duplicity Leaders and systems decide to kill Jesus first and perform a trial after their decision. The trial is a scam with no real deliberation | Processes of Judgment Nature of Trial | Due Process: Repeated warnings prior to arrests clearly point out violations ('sending the prophets before hand'); deliberation with books and witnesses, lead to a mix of probation and decisiveness against abuse (Daniel 7:9-14) |
| False: a manipulated crowd shout for justice without specific claims of wrong being corroborated; no chance to call counter witnesses; Jesus' statements taken out of context; Pilate admits innocence but still proceeds to condemn | Evidence and Witnesses | Consistent and Constant: A steady flow of condemned saints get abused (Dan 7, 8; Rev 12-14) and their accumulated witness is consistent against the false religion and systems of the world; prophets delineate specific sins of nations before judgment initiated or finalized (Rev 11); |
| Abusive: Beat before, during judgment; punishment (crucifixion) does not match the crime; | Treatment | Patient: Evil nations given time to repent and blaspheme God (Dan 2, 7; Mt 27, Rev 17); blessings are misused; final judgment is slow but not because sins were light but because God was slow to anger (Dan 6) |
| Weak: Pilate acquiesces to crowd; uses "lottery mentality" of mercy to release a prisoner at crowds arbitrary wish; this custom at the religious Passover shows a scam religio-political process that is not leading to judgment; a total shame | Leadership during Judgment | Thorough and Decisive: God is patient but not weak; God will bring all to judgment and bring all evidence even every idle word to bear (Romans 14:10; Mt12:36); the final decisions will mean the just will remain just; evil will remain evil; and our own destinies will be self-chosen |
| Blind: They blindfolded Him and after hitting Him said "Prophecy, who is it that hit your" Luke 22:64. False idea of | The role of prophecy | Rich in data and meaning: Prophecy is a revealing (Rev 1), an educating process (1 Cor 14:4) an accumulation of evidence and |

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| prophecy is that it predicts blindly. It also accumulates false views. | | meaning, a light shining in dark place (2 Pet 1:17-21). Prophets reveal don't hide. |
| Arbitrary and Temporary: Made by rulers before justice is crafted; | Decisions | Informed and Permanent: Those who corrupt God's world will be finally eradicated (Rev 18-20) |
| Christ is resurrected by God as final vindication | Final outcome | Complete and permanent annihilation of sin and those who cling to it |

Conclusion: Christ doesn't judge the way He was judged. His judgments are so far better that He must allow time and revelation and the fullness of wickedness to reveal to others what He already knows.

C: A Prayer for Divine Judgment

Psalms 9

I will praise *thee*, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will show forth all thy marvelous works. I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High. When mine enemies are turned back, they shall fall and perish at thy presence. For thou hast maintained my right and my cause; thou seatest in the throne judging right. Thou hast rebuked the heathen, thou hast destroyed the wicked, thou hast put out their name for ever and ever.

O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end: and thou hast destroyed cities; their memorial is perished with them. But the LORD shall endure for ever: he hath prepared his throne for judgment. And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness.

The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.

Sing praises to the LORD, which dwelleth in Zion: declare among the people his doings. When he maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them: he forgetteth not the cry of the humble.

Have mercy upon me, O LORD; consider my trouble *which I suffer* of them that hate me, thou that liftest me up from the gates of death: That I may show forth all thy praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion: I will rejoice in thy salvation.

The heathen are sunk down in the pit *that* they made: in the net which they hid is their own foot taken.

The LORD is known *by* the judgment *which* he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.

Higgaion Selah

The wicked shall be turned into hell, *and* all the nations that forget God. For the needy shall not alway be forgotten: the expectation of the poor shall *not* perish for ever. Arise, O LORD; let not man prevail: let the heathen be judged in thy sight. Put them in fear, O LORD: *that* the nations may know themselves *to be but* men.

Selah