



An Evaluation To The Historical Objection of The Seventh-Day Adventist Doctrine of The Pre-Advent Investigative Judgment

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ABSTRACT

The Seventh-day Adventist doctrine of the pre-advent investigative judgment has been attacked by some former Adventist members. Desmond Ford, one of the opponents, doubted the historical basis of the doctrine. He argued that this Adventist's distinctive doctrine highly relies upon and can merely be proven from E. G. White's writings. He claimed that the Millerites and the early Sabbatarian Adventist did not teach this teaching. No references in their writings explained this doctrine. The purpose of this study is to present historical facts from the writings of Adventist pioneers as an evaluation to the objection. This study is a historical approach using documentary research method. From each development stage of the view, researcher uses primary resource. The researcher also employs the secondary resources only to see current opinion about the subject. From the historical facts, it is found that the teaching of the pre-advent investigative judgment has been taught before E. G. White wrote it. Some Millerites and early Sabbatarian Adventists employed several terms to express the concept, such as the typical Day of Atonement, breastplate of judgment, announcement of God's judgment hour, scene of God's, Christ's parable of the wedding ceremony, judgment of the "house of God", the term "Laodicea", and God's rewards either for salvation or punishment at the second coming of Christ. Thus, it is evident that before E. G. White wrote about the pre-advent investigative judgment, some Millerites and early Sabbatarian Adventists have already mentioned it in their writings. The terms used by Millerites and Sabbatarian Adventists to describe the teaching of the pre-advent investigative judgment are important to prove that the doctrine is not merely derived from E. G. White.

Keywords: Pre-Advent Investigative Judgment, Millerites, Sabbatarian Adventists.

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of the Investigative Judgment or Pre-Advent Investigative Judgment is one of the distinctive doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church (Adams, 1993). However, the validity of this doctrine has been criticized more than any other Adventist doctrine (Moore, 2010). Wallace D. Slattery equates the SDA Church with other cults or sects because it comes up with unique beliefs. He argues that the pre-Advent investigative

judgment is the only unique SDA doctrine. Since, for him, this is what makes Adventism a cult, he believes that it should be the major target for an effective attack against SDAs (Slattery, 1990, 18).

Furthermore, such criticisms against SDAs focused upon the pre-Advent investigative judgment are not new in SDA history. In 1932, Fletcher, an Adventist minister, insisted that this doctrine had, in fact, no biblical basis (1932). In 1969, Hoekema, an evangelical theologian, also claimed that the purpose of the appearance of this doctrine was at best a “face-saving device” because of the 1844 Great Disappointment (1969). At the end of the 20th century, Ratzlaff, a former Adventist pastor, argues that this doctrine is unbiblical (2009). Whether past or present, the doctrine of the pre-Advent investigative judgment has been a major focus of criticism by those who wish to attack SDA beliefs

Statement of the Problem

From the early 20th century up to the present, the doctrine of the Pre-Advent Investigative Judgment has been criticized. One of the objections is the invalidity of the historical basis of the doctrine. Critics argue that this doctrine highly relies upon and can merely be proven from E. G. White’s writings. In addition, the Millerites and the early Sabbatarian Adventist did not teach this teaching. No references in their writings explained this doctrine.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to present the major historical objections toward the doctrine of the Pre-Advent Investigative Judgment. It also to provide historical facts from the writings of Adventist pioneers as an evaluation to the objection.

Significance of the Study

This research is essential to enrich the insights of Adventist members regarding the issues of the major historical objections argued by critics to the doctrine of the Investigative Judgment. This is significant for the laymen and ministers to have a broader understanding regarding the apologetic responses to the objections presented by Adventist writers. In addition, it will help both the non-Adventist communities and the Adventist members to view this Adventist distinctive doctrine more clearly.

Delimitations of the Study

The objections to the doctrine of the Pre-Advent Investigative Judgment encompass a wide variety of issues: biblical, theological, and historical. This study focuses only on the major historical objections that are presented by the critic as discussed in this paper. In addition, there were many objectors to the Pre-Advent Investigative Judgment doctrine from the early

20th century up to the present. Accordingly, it is impossible to include in this study every critic who has objected to this Adventist belief. Hence, this study centered only on the objectors mentioned in Chapter 2.

Methodology

This study utilizes a descriptive methodology in comprehending the major historical objections to the doctrine of the Investigative Judgment. The same methodology is also used in

response to the major objections. Chapter 1 shows the introduction, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, delimitations of the study, and methodology.

Chapter 2 deals with the major theological objections by SDA defectors to the doctrine of the Investigative Judgment. Chapter 3 addresses the apologetic responses to the major historical objections of the Investigative Judgment by Adventist writers. Chapter 4 presents the summary and conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Historical Objection to the Seventh-day Adventist Doctrine of the Pre-Advent Investigative Judgment

One of the opponents who attacks the historical fact of the doctrine of the pre-Advent Investigative Judgment is Desmond Ford. He appeals to history in disproving the pre-Advent investigative judgment. Ford doubts the historical basis of the pre-Advent investigative judgment. Early Sabbatarian pioneers (i.e., Hiram Edson, O. R. L. Crosier, and the Whites) do not teach this doctrine. No references in their writings explain this doctrine. Ford claims that this doctrine was formulated in 1857. The six-historic Sabbath conferences held in 1848 do not include this teaching. On the basis of this historical argument, Ford suggests that this doctrine is not part of the Adventist landmarks. In addition, he asserts that it is difficult to biblically defend the beginning of the pre-Advent investigative judgment in 1844. For him, this doctrine highly relies upon and can merely be proven from E. G. White's writings. The books of Daniel, Hebrews, and Revelation do not provide evidence for 1844 as a starting point for the pre-Advent investigative judgment (Ford, 1980).

Another objectors who opposed the doctrine of the Pre-Advent Investigative Judgment is Ratzlaff. He argues that E. G. White endorses Miller's erroneous interpretation of October 22, 1844 as the fulfillment of Dan 8:14. She endorses not only Miller's method of interpretation but also his messages. She states that God led Miller in searching the Scriptures

and revealed to him the method of connecting one passage with other biblical passages. However, Ratzlaff asserts that Miller's calculation was erroneous in predicting Christ's coming on October 22, 1844. Christ did not come to earth on that date. White's endorsement of Miller's interpretation was, therefore, a mistake because she approved Miller's erroneous interpretation (Ratzlaff, 2009).

METHODS

An Evaluation of the Historical Objection to The Seventh-day Adventist Doctrine of The Pre-Advent Investigative Judgment

Adventists affirm that the concept of pre-advent investigative judgment appears among the early Sabbatarian Adventists beginning with 1841. A Millerite Adventist, Josiah Litch, initially proposed the view of the "trial" judgment of God prior to the second coming of Christ. This trial judgment takes place before the first resurrection. This phase will lead to the penal judgment. He based his concept of the trial judgment upon God's judgment hour in Rev 14:7 (1842). The "trial judgment" first deals with the dead and then proceeds to the living. The judgment is based upon what "were written in the books" (1841, 11). The books reveal the character of God's people and their destiny. Litch used Dan 7:9-10, 26, and Rev 20:12-13 as references to for that judgment. He said that every human deed will be brought to judgment. This judgment is different from the retributive judgment. The location of this judgment is "the invisible and spiritual world." (1842, 51.) Similar to Josiah Litch, in the early 1844, George Storrs stated that the purpose of this judgment is to decide who are eligible to be resurrected and to be left. This judgment will take place "before the first resurrection." (1844, 40).

After the Great Disappointment, several Millerite figures still held the view of the pre - advent investigative judgment for a short time (Timm, 2009). Enoch Jacobs, an editor of *The Western Midnight Cry*, applied the Day of Atonement in Lev 16 to the antitypical tenth day of the seventh month on October 22, 1844. Christ fulfilled Dan 7 on October 22, 1844 when He sat on the judgment seat. The event of the coming out of the high priest from the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement points to Christ's judgment (Burt, 2002) Jacobs insisted that the judgment does not indicate the second coming of Christ to the earth. Rather, it describes the cleansing of

the sins of His people before His coming to execute judgment on earth. The focus of the judgment deals with the cases of God's people. It first begins with the people of God based upon 1 Pet 4:17 and it takes place in the heavenly sanctuary (1844).

In January 1845, two editors from the Millerite Movement, Apollos Hale and Joseph Turner, related Christ's parable of the bridegroom to the 1844 event. They likened the coming of the bridegroom to the wedding ceremony (Matt 25:1-13) with the coming of the Son of Man to the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:9-13). They also equated the king's examination of his guests' garments (Luke 19) with God's judgment. They believed that "the judgment is here" on October 22 (Hale and Turner, 1845).

William Miller argued that the purpose of the hour of God's judgment is to decide the cases of the righteous. The objective is for God and His angels to know who will be elected when Christ comes. Miller equated God's judgment message from Rev 14:7 with the scene of God's judgment in Dan 7:9-14. This judgment begins in the heavenly sanctuary in 1844 and ends before Christ's Second Coming (1845).

Samuel S. Snow had a similar position. He states that the phase of the trial judgment must be "a process" which takes place prior to the executive judgment. He related Christ's wedding parable to God's judgment arguing that God has been examining His wedding guests since October 22, 1844.. The coming of Christ to the Father, who sits on the judgment seat, is to decide the cases of the dead and of the living (1845).

O. R. L. Crosier, one of the early Sabbatarian Adventists, conflated the concept of the pre-advent investigative judgment with the teaching of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary in 1846. He connected it with the expression "the breastplate of judgment" (Exod 28:15-30; 39:8- 21) and the scene of God's judgment (Dan 7:9-14). Crosier argued that at the end of the 2,300 days, Christ entered the Most Holy Place by wearing the breastplate of judgment. Crosier insisted that the cleansing of the sanctuary in Dan 8:14 indicates the heavenly sanctuary (Dick, 1994). The cleansing is the blotting out of the sins of God's people on the Day of Atonement. The cleansing of the sanctuary must be done before resurrection (Crosier, 1846). It began at the end of the 2,300 days, in 1844 (Crosier, 1845).

Jerome L. Clark mentions that Edson and Crosier believed that the Day of Atonement in Leviticus is a day of judgment. They considered that Christ began the work of judgment as He entered the Most Holy Place in the heavenly sanctuary on October 1844 (1849). That day was the preparation of the removal of sins that were placed on Satan as a scapegoat (Spalding, 1856). Similar to Crosier, in January 1849, Bates argues that Christ wore His

breastplate of judgment when He entered the Most Holy Place. He stood and pleaded before the Father to remove the sins of His people (1949). Likewise, Hiram Edson also proposed the concept of the breastplate of judgment (1850).

Joseph Bates used expressions such as “fiery trial” and “Daniel’s trouble” associating them with the Pre-Advent Trial Judgment (1846). In April 1847, Bates suggested that there is a time when God will decide the cases of His people so that their names will be written in the book of life and they will be worthy of eternal life (Rev 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 22:19) (1847). In January 1850, Bates related the idea of God’s judgment scene in Dan 7:9-14 with the message of God’s judgment hour in Rev 14:6-7. The expression of “the judgment is now set and the books open” proves that there is a judgment taking place in heaven. (1850, 8). He said that God began His judgment of Laodiceans, His people, since 1844 (1847). The purpose is to determine who are worthy or not to have eternal life. Christ is now pleading for those names that are written in His “breastplate of judgment.” After Christ’s ministry ends, a retributive judgment will commence. In addition, Bates notes that two significant things will happen before Christ returns. The first is that God will determine all the cases of the righteous in order to register them in the book of life. Another is the preparation to change the state of God’s righteous people from mortal to immortal (Bates, 1850).

Bates depicted the judgment as a “universal and peculiar trial.” It transpires between the wedding and the marriage supper. The judgment also describes a “dual experiential cleansing” (Bates, 1850, 106). Those people who are wearing wedding garment are ready for the marriage supper, the coming of Christ. Yet, those who lack the linen garment, they will be taken away from the wedding. Those people who are enduring patiently will have their sins blotted out, while the names of those who are unfaithful will be removed. Bates said that God’s living seal is only for the living believers. The dead believers in Christ are being judged (Rev 11:18; 22:12- 13). It includes all the righteous from Abel up to the time prior to Christ’s second coming (Bates, 1849). Influenced by a vision of E. G. White, Bates returned to the concept of the pre-advent investigative judgment offering a broader biblical support in his published pamphlet. In it he emphasized the beginning of the pre-advent investigative judgment. Bates’ revised concept of pre-advent investigative judgment became normative for the SDAs for a long time (Bates, 1850).

Elon Everts was the first person to use the term investigative judgment in January 1854 (Timm, 2002). He related this judgment to the typical Day of Atonement (Lev 16; 23:26-32) that began “on the 10th of the 7th month, at the end of the 2,300 days” in 1844 (Everts, 1854,

201). He insisted that God's people who lived since in 1844 are "Laodicians." The message of God's judgment hour is proclaimed by the first angel in Rev 14:6-7 (Everts, 1857). He also added that "the righteous dead have been under pre-advent investigative judgment since 1844" (Everts,

1857, 72). Those people who are in Christ will be resurrected first.

Similar to Elon Everts, J. N. Loughborough insisted that the typical Day of Atonement in Israelites' time constitutes a day of judgment. God required the Israelites "to gather around the sanctuary and afflict their souls" (Loughborough, 1854, 29-30). Loughborough said that God's judgment is coming as proclaimed in Rev 14:7. He also cited Martin Luther who believed that "the judgment is not far off . . . the Lord will not be absent above 300 years longer" (Loughborough, 1857, 9-11).

In 1857, James White asserted that the antitypical Day of Atonement describes a day of judgment for God's people. He describes God's people since the 1844 event as the "Laodicea" church, which means "the judgment of the people" (White, 1856, 189). This judgment is investigative in nature and that it deals with the believers. It first begins with the dead believers and proceeds with the living saints. The confessed sins of believers will come to judgment first and will be blotted out (1 Tim 5:24). Then follows God's judgment over the unconfessed sins of sinners after the millennium (Rev 20).

The fact that the true believers will judge the wicked during the millennium is an obvious proof that the righteous will be judged first before their resurrection at Christ's second coming. The judgment of the believers is based upon the heavenly records "of the acts of all accountable men" (Rev 20:12; Dan 7:10; Mal 3:16) (J. White, 1857, 100). J. White used some biblical passages as evidence: Dan 7 and 8; Mal 3; and 1 Pet 4:17. He adds that the typical Day of Atonement indicates the event of the cleansing of the sanctuary in Dan 8:14. He also refers to Peter's witness in Acts 3:19-21 (Ibid).

Similar to J. White, Uriah Smith insists that the event of the cleansing of the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement constitutes the work of judgment. It takes place when the high priest who wears the breastplate of judgment enters the Most Holy Place. On the breastplate, the high priest is "bearing the names of the twelve children of Israel" (Smith, 1858, 156) indicating that the character of God's people is investigated. It will result in a distinction between true and false believers. This investigative process determines whether they are genuine believers or not. Smith describes Christ's priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary as "the preliminary judgment" (Nunez, 1987). Both the reward of the righteous and the punishment

of the wicked do not come from “the working of God’s omniscience at the moment exercised.” Rather, it is a result of an investigation of the cases of the professed people of God in the heavenly books (Smith, 1888, 329).

Smith insists that the judicial scene in Dan 7:10 depicts a work of judgment. This judgment is based upon the heavenly records which contains the deeds of the believers (Smith, 1855). It examines the character of each individual among God’s people (Rev 20:12, 15; 21:27) (Smith, 1861). Smith also relates the concept of judgment with Jesus’s parable of the wedding banquet. In the parable, the king’s inspection of the guests of the ceremony describes a trial judgment on the professed people of God (Matt 22:11) (Smith, 1858). The inspection portrays the examination of God’s people (1 Pet 4:17) who will enter the great heavenly judgment. This judgment will determine those who are worthy of the first resurrection in order to attend “the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Smith, 1858). This first resurrection of the people who died in Christ (1 Cor 15:51, 52) demonstrates that there will be a pre-advent investigative judgment before Christ’s return. The resurrection is a reward for God’s faithful people (Loughborough, 1857). The first angel’s message proclaims the message of God’s judgment hour (Rev 14:6-7) (Smith, 1855).

Similar to Smith, J. N. Andrews says that the resurrection to immortality is a decisive proof that the saints have passed the test in God’s judgment. There is no investigation after the resurrection to determine whether or not they will have eternal life (Andrews, 1869). The cases of God’s people had been decided before the resurrection of the righteous people (Andrews, 1870). There will be a trial phase of the human cases before an execution is held. The cleansing of the sanctuary is finished after the examination of the heavenly records. This judgment ends before Christ’s return (Andrews, 1869).

E. G. White says that when Christ ascended to heaven, He entered the Most Holy Place in the heavenly sanctuary. He entered it at the end of the 2,300-day prophetic period in 1844 to begin the work of the pre-advent investigative judgment (1887). This judgment ends before the second coming of Christ. It deals with the professed people of God. It begins with the righteous dead and continues with the living saints. The result of this judgment is the acceptance of some names and the rejection of others. For those who are accepted, God blots out their sins. E. G. White insists that Rev 14:7 depicts the time of God’s judgment hour. The coming of Christ in Dan 7:9-13 is the coming to the Father, not the coming to the earth. This “judgment is presently going on in the heavenly sanctuary.” (1950) It will result in a reward either for the salvation of God’s true people or the punishment of false believers.

E. G. White continues stating that this judgment is based upon the heavenly records. These records are important to decide the verdict (1941). In this judgment, she argues that God is represented as the “Ancient of Days” who presides over the judgment, while Christ is represented as the “Son of Man” who becomes the Advocate. Satan is described as the accuser of God’s people and the heavenly angels are depicted as ministers and witnesses. The closing of the pre-advent investigative judgment marks the end of the probationary period. Ultimately, God will place upon Satan the sins that he tempted the righteous to commit (White, 1943).

The historical evidences mentioned above prove that the pre-advent investigative judgment is presented in the writings of some Millerites and of some early Sabbatarian Adventists before and after the 1844 disappointment. This teaching did not appear in 1857. Even though the term “investigative judgment” was first used in 1857, it does not mean that the concept was not present before 1857. Rather, the concept is evidenced by their writings. They employed several terms to express the idea of a pre-advent investigative judgment, such as the typical Day of Atonement, breastplate of judgment, announcement of God’s judgment hour (Rev 14:7), scene of God’s judgment (Dan 7:9-14), Christ’s parable of the wedding ceremony (Matt 22:1-14), judgment of the “house of God” (1 Pet 4:17), the term “Laodicea” (Rev 3:14-22), and God’s rewards either for salvation or punishment at the second coming of Christ. Therefore, the pre-advent investigative judgment before E. G. White wrote about it.

Furthermore, the existence of the six Sabbath conferences held in 1848 is not an official criterion to decide that the doctrine of the pre-advent investigative judgment is a separate part of the doctrine of the cleansing of the sanctuary. Similar to the cleansing of sanctuary doctrine, the pre-advent investigative judgment was doctrine was not fully developed at the time. Yet, this doctrine constitutes a landmark for the SDA Church even though it was not fully developed after 1844. The reason is that the existence of the six Sabbath conferences is not an absolute prerequisite for a doctrine to be a landmark doctrine. Neither is it required for a doctrine to derive from a fully matured concept. Regarding the teaching of the pre-advent investigative judgment, E. G. White asserted that it is “an inseparable part of the prophetic landmark of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary in progress since 1844” (Spangler, 1946, 30-31).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research surveys the major objections used by challengers from within of the SDA Church to the pre-Advent investigative judgment. It presents the main arguments used by opponents against this teaching. It also outlines the apologetic answers offered by various Adventist authors.

Chapter 1 presents the introduction, the statement of the problem, the purpose, the significance, the delimitations, the literature review, and the methodology. Chapter 2 details the major objections used by several former SDA members who opposed the doctrine of the pre-Advent investigative judgment. These individuals are Ford, and Ratzlaff. Chapter 3 describes the apologetic responses that SDA scholars gave to each challenger. Chapter 4 presents the summary and conclusions.

Challengers argue that early Sabbatarian Adventists did not teach the pre-Advent investigative judgment. They also argue that E. G. White endorsed Miller's erroneous interpretation in predicting Christ's second coming on October 22, 1844 as the fulfillment of Dan

8:14. By contrast, Adventists argue that the concept of the pre-Advent investigative judgment already existed among some Millerites and early Sabbatarian Adventists even before the 1844 Great Disappointment. They used several expressions to denote the concept of pre-Advent investigative judgment: the typical Day of Atonement, breastplate of judgment, announcement of God's judgment hour, scene of God's judgment, Christ's parable of the wedding ceremony, judgment of the "house of God," and Laodicea. These expressions indicate that the concept of

the pre-Advent investigative judgment had already existed before E. G. White wrote about it. In addition, She does not comprehensively endorse Miller's teachings. She only endorses Miller's basic teaching of the calculation of the prophetic period of 2,300 days in Dan 8:14.

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