

The Critical Importance of October 22

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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Delivered On October 22, 2011

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When I saw that October 22 was going to fall on a Sabbath, I knew what the subject must be that God would have us consider this morning. There won't be another October 22 on a Sabbath until 2016. We pray that we'll be in heaven by then. It's not October 22, 2011 that we're going to look at, though today may be important for other reasons. No, the October 22 we're going to study today is one which occurred 167 years ago, in 1844, a date which we, as Seventh-day Adventists believe is indeed of critical importance, not just to members of our church, but to the whole world and yes, even to the whole universe.

Go back with me those decades to the early part of the 19th century. America was just beginning to stretch her young adolescent muscles. The sixth census of the United States, conducted in 1840 showed the population to be 17,069,543. The number of presidents serving our country could be counted on the fingers of two hands, with William Henry Harrison, the 9th to be elected, taking office in 1841.

Life was conducted without telephone, telegraph or television, not to mention the multitude of gadgets we find in common use today. Electricity was not yet harnessed. Self-propelled automobiles were not yet born. The steam locomotive was only a few years old. Though a relatively short time ago, life back in the early 1800's seems to be of a different planet.

Into that world came a person named William Miller who would wear several hats during his life. He would become a farmer, sea captain, justice of the peace, and strangely enough, a preacher. He would have never dreamed the direction his life would take. After all, as a young man he chewed on the same philosophical fare as did many; a form of skepticism that undermined faith in the Bible and denied the existence of a personal God Who is involved with life on this earth. In the process of time, he became deeply troubled about his soul and his future. He became overwhelmed with a sense of his sin and guilt. But where could he turn to find peace?

Then he did something that changed his life. Do you know what that was? He opened his Bible and began to read it. He found in it a Savior that was perfectly matched to his need. He discovered a living Jesus Who loves and cares and forgives. He found that this Jesus, Who lived here long ago, promised to return someday in glory. This thought was not totally unfamiliar to him, but the concept of a soon coming Savior was not something being taught, much less emphasized by the churches of his day.

William began an intensive study of prophecy and came to the conclusion that Christ would be returning soon, about 25 years from that time. He based his belief on a text of the Bible found in Daniel 8:14, which says, "Unto 2,300 days, then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." What could this mean? He deduced that the sanctuary was this earth, that the cleansing would take place when Jesus came back in glory, that the 2300 days should be understood as representing literal years, that this prophecy began when the decree of Artaxerxes gave his command for the Jews to restore Jerusalem and that the date for that command was 457 B. C. Therefore, according to his analysis, this would be come to its termination in 1843. Sometime later this date was adjusted to 1844 when it was discovered that chronologists had omitted a "zero year" in going from B.C. to A.D., and therefore another year had to be added.

Miller was astounded. How could it be that he, a farmer, not a theologian, was the only one to discover this? He didn't know it at that time, but actually he was not the only one. In South America and in Europe there were others who were discovering these very same principles of prophecy. But Miller felt that he was alone. For 5 years he sat on the results of his study, reviewing the Bible passages over and over to detect any errors. He concluded that his analysis was correct, and that this message should be shared with everyone. But who would share it? Certainly not him! He was not trained in preaching and homiletics! He shared his views with a preacher that he knew, confident that he would become convinced as he was and take up the torch of this new light. But nothing happened, except that the conviction rested on Miller with even greater weight.

Finally he prayed a very dangerous prayer. He prayed that if someone would actually come to him and ask him to share his views on this subject, he would accept the invitation. Watch out what you pray for! At that very moment, walking toward his house was Miller's nephew, Irving. It seems that the pastor of their church in Dresden, about 16 miles away, had taken ill, and someone suggested that he take the pulpit the next Sunday, which was the very next day. When his nephew revealed the purpose of his visit, Miller was shocked. He asked for a brief amount of time before giving his answer. He went into a nearby woods to pray. As one author commented, "a farmer went into the woods; a preacher came out."

Sitting in an armchair in a house that was being used as a church, Miller shared his convictions and people responded. Hearts were changed. Lives were reformed. There was a passion and zeal, an earnestness in "Father Miller's" presentations that appealed to his audience. Hope for Christ's soon coming sprouted and blossomed. The tiny trickle of adherents swelled through the following exciting years and became a sizable stream. Tents would be planted on vacant lots with thousands, up to 5, 8 or even 10,000 people coming to hear "Advent preachers." A rough wooden platform supported the speakers and their visual aids; paper mache representations of biblical beasts.

As the time drew nearer, leaders of the movement settled on the date of October 22 as being the date for Christ's return, basing it on the fact that the "cleansing of the sanctuary" was done in the Jewish system on the 10th day of the 7th month, which among conservative Jews was held to be October 22 of the year 1844. Keen was their disappointment when that day came and went and

the skies were not split to reveal their dear Savior. There were no “ascension robes” as the critics sarcastically reported. These were earnest and sincere believers who loved Jesus and wanted to see Him in the sky.

What had happened? Where had they gone wrong? Of the roughly 100,000 that numbered within the Millerite movement before October 22, most thought that the whole thing had been a tragic mistake and for the most part gave up religion. There were some however, who thought that the error was in the math, and continued to set later dates for Jesus' return. A very small group, numbering at first less than 50, came to a totally different understanding.

Based in a new way of thinking pioneered by one Hiram Edson, in whose mind, as he walked through a cornfield the next day there flashed a picture of Jesus in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, it was now seen that there was nothing wrong with the math. The date was correct, but the event was not. Jesus was not coming to this earth on that date, but was beginning a critical phase of His ministry in heaven. He was indeed going to begin to “cleanse the sanctuary,” but the sanctuary was the one made without human hands, it was in fact the original sanctuary, of which the one Moses made was merely a copy. It came to be seen that this began the heavenly court session which the prophet Daniel had seen in vision.

“I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; a fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.” Daniel 7:9, 10.

Threads of thought were woven together rapidly. Suddenly it was as if light was shining on their path, the kind like Saul experienced on the Damascus road. It was as if the scales dropped from their eyes as they understood that the judgment, of which the Bible has much to say, would commence prior to His return, for He comes with His reward. That part of the judgment which involves the opening of the record books of heaven must begin before His glorious second advent. It was clear to them that the judgment scene reported by Daniel takes place in heaven, not on earth. It made sense to them that this must be the fulfillment of what Revelation 14 is speaking about, which declares that the “hour of His judgment has come” prior to His return. All throughout the Bible other prophets spoke of His judgment as something in the future, but the first “angel” of Revelation 14 declares with “a loud voice” that the hour of His judgment has come.

It was just a handful of people that made up the group accepting this new view, a group which would within about 5 or 6 years hammer out their religious beliefs, including the importance of the seventh day as God's holy Sabbath and the belief that the dead rest in their graves unconsciously. Within a few more years, in 1861, the group would organize and call themselves “Seventh-day Adventists.” Emphasis on healthful living and temperance, Christian education, literature ministry and world-wide evangelism would characterize the movement, which has now grown to some 17 million members, becoming the 12th largest religious group in the entire world.

There are others who keep the Sabbath, who believe that the dead rest unconsciously, who believe in healthful living and world evangelism. But there is no other group on earth declaring that “the hour of His judgment has come.” The doctrine of the investigative judgment sets Seventh-day Adventists apart from any other theological persuasion. It is distinct and unique. Some have rightly said that Seventh-day Adventism stands or falls on the credibility of this teaching. We accept that to be a true statement and boldly declare our confidence in this belief.

We find that the Bible alone is all that is necessary to arrive at this conclusion. When Gabriel told Daniel, “There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time, and at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book,” we believe that he meant exactly that. Daniel 12:1. What else could the angel have meant, but that there would be a review of the record book of heaven prior to the deliverance of God's people? The word “found” strongly suggests investigation. Our own earthly judicial systems are comprised of a trial as well as an executive phase. First the facts are ascertained through the testimony of witnesses and records. Then the law is applied to these facts and after that the sentence is implemented.

Knowing that it would be a foundation plank of God's remnant church, Satan has attacked this teaching from the very beginning. There were critics from the outside who challenged this new view, claiming that it was not biblical. One spokesman, noting how this view answered the question of “Why didn't Jesus come to earth in 1844?” claimed that this was the “greatest face-saving device in ecclesiastical history.” Lately there have been some from within our ranks who have either no confidence in the teaching and therefore never preach about it, or out-rightly reject the doctrine. How such can continue to claim to be a part of this movement, while not accepting one of its primary tenets, is unexplained.

We have utmost confidence in the worthiness of this teaching. We find that it is completely supported by the texts and stories of the Scriptures and that we have no need of being embarrassed about it whatsoever. What was the divine indictment on Babylon exhibited at Belshazzar's feast, inscribed by the bloodless hand on the plaster wall? It was “You have been numbered and God has finished your kingdom.” It was “You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting.” Did this expression of God's audit come before or after the sentence came into being? It was before. Though God knows all, and was not ignorant of Babylon's sins, He nevertheless expressed Himself in language that we could appreciate. He said “I've looked over the account, and you're bankrupt. You've been weighed in the balances of divine justice, and come up short.” This divine investigation was conducted prior to the fall of Babylon at the hand of His minister Cyrus. Would God deal any differently with apocalyptic Babylon than He did with ancient Babylon?

Today we want to study three different sets of verses in Daniel 7 that underscore the critical importance of this heavenly judgment. Notice in the text of this chapter the crucial function that God's judgment plays as the prophetic time-line is drawn. Three times in this chapter the judgment is presented as being the “hinge-point” of prophecy. It's what makes the difference. Analysts are always looking for that key element that brings change, whether it's a political race,

sporting event or economic trend. What was the catalyst that brought change? What was the critical play of the game? What was the hinge point in the candidacy of the politician? In the scheme of prophecy given in Daniel 7 the judgment is the hinge point, the pivot point. Three different times we see that wickedness is reigning and seems to be invincible, but then the judgment.

Here are the three times this matter of the critical aspect of God's investigative judgment are portrayed in Daniel 7. When God says something three times, it means we should sit up and take notice carefully! First, we are given the basic outline of world kingdoms, dressed in the garb of wild beasts. You know them; Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. An outgrowth of civil Rome was the little horn representing the historical papacy, revealed in verse 8. "But then, the judgment" is presented in verses 9 and 10. This is the hinge-point; this is what reverses the tide and changes everything. In consequence of this, the destruction of the beast and its mighty and blasphemous horn power, is portrayed in verse 11.

A second time this critical sequence is given in 21 and 22. Notice these two verses very carefully; they are huge! "I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom." What an important sequence this is! Do you see how the judgment plays a pivotal role in the transition from evil's being in control to God's ultimate victory?

There are three parts of God's judgment expressed in verse 22. This is a wonderful verse! Daniel said that he was watching as the horn was making war against the saints "until the Ancient of Days came." The word "until" describes a pivot point. The horn is prevailing "until the Ancient of Days came." Is that the coming of the Ancient of Days to this earth? No, it is coming of the Ancient of Days to the court session. It is referring back to verse 9 where it describes the coming and seating of the Ancient of Days as the judgment begins. Notice carefully that this first part of the verse describes the inception of the heavenly court. When did that happen? That was in October 22 of 1844. Where did it happen? It happened in heaven. The judgment was set and the books were opened. The "trial" phase, or "investigative judgment" commenced at that time.

Then another vital part of this judgment is described in the middle part of the 22nd verse. The "Ancient of Days came, and judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High." This part of the verse describes the conclusion of the investigative judgment, when the decisions are finalized. This correlates with Jesus' statement in Revelation 22:11 where He declares, "He who is unjust and filthy, let him be unjust and filthy still; he who is righteous and holy, let him be righteous and holy still." This refers to what we call the close of probation, when all decision-making will be finished and the door of God's ark of salvation will be shut. This has not happened yet, but soon will.

The third part of verse 22 describes the coming of Christ in glory. The angel states, "the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom." What a wonderful day that will be when we gain physical possession of the kingdom! That day will come, and if we are faithful we will be privileged to be a

part of it. We have then a closer view of the processes of divine judgment, separated into three easy to understand parts, in this one verse. The beginning of the court session, its termination at the close of probation and the return of Jesus in glory. But the convening of the heavenly court is the hinge-point in the prophecy. The horn power was wielding its destructive power "until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom."

A third time in this chapter the angel presents the sequence of events, highlighting the judgment as being the critical and pivotal point in the prophecy. Gabriel addresses the horrific and devastating activities of the horn power. Remember that this picture in Daniel 7 is only one of 7 pictures in the Bible picturing the damaging agenda of the horn power, which was Satan working through the human institution of the papacy. The angel speaks about this horn power subduing three of the ten kings. He goes on to say, "He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into this hand for a time and times and half a time (the 1260 period of the middle ages), but the court shall be seated and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy it forever." Daniel 7:25, 26.

These two verses are equally important, but there's a slight difference between these verses and the ones we just looked at. These verses reveal the role and effect of the judgment as it pertains to the enemies of God and His people. Remember that in the previous verses we looked at, verses 21 and 22, the focus is on the effect of the judgment as it pertains to the saints. The judgment affects the saints directly in that it pronounces the verdict in their favor and allows for them, ultimately, to possess the kingdom. Verses 21 and 22 speak to the judgment as it deals with God's people. Verses 25 and 26 deal with the judgment as it relates to the enemies of God and His people. The horn persecutes God's people. The horn blasphemes God's name. The horn attempts to change God's law. "But the court shall be seated and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy it forever."

It has been pointed out that the little one-syllable word "but" is one of the most important and powerful words in our language. It means, "Forget what you just heard because something new and different is coming." Notice the transition between verses 25 and 26. Verse 25 depicts the masterly reign of the horn power. It's in control. It's seemingly invincible. It fulfills the description given by the Revelator who said, "All the world marveled and followed the beast." Revelation 13:3.

Then you have that little one-syllable word that begins verse 26, "but." Here's something coming that's going to change everything! Forget about the supremacy of the horn power parading and strutting his mastery. It's not going to last forever! A change is coming! A dramatic turn of events is going to dethrone him! And what is it in the sequence of prophecy that accomplishes this turnaround? It is the judgment. It is when the court is seated and the process of the investigative judgment begins and then concludes at the close of probation that opens the door to Christ's triumphant coming, when the saints, persecuted and afflicted, will take possession of the kingdom

(verses 21 and 22), and earthly powers in opposition to God and His plan will be consumed (verses 25 and 26). *The judgment is the pivot point of prophecy.*

This is what began in October 22 of 1844. This critical phase of God's time-table started 167 years ago today. This is immense! God has begun a critical aspect of His work which must be finished before He comes back! An indispensable part of God's time-table has been plotted on the calendar and has now commenced. How few in the world were aware of it back then! How few will be aware of it when it concludes, and Jesus removes His priestly robes of intercession and dons the robe of vengeance and wrath. For most of the world the close of probation will come as a "thief in the night."

God has blessed this church with a unique and special message. It is that "the hour of His judgment has come," along with all of the other components of the three angels' messages. No, we don't claim perfection or say that we're any better than anyone else. But we do claim that the truths that God has given to this church are special and unlike anything being taught elsewhere. You can search if you want, but you won't find them anywhere else on the planet. It is a humbling fact that only the Seventh-day Adventist Church is proclaiming the truths of Revelation 14. For this we are neither apologetic nor embarrassed. We anticipate that the devil will attack these truths. We expect that critics will rise to challenge our beliefs. Let them show us from the Scriptures wherein these teachings are erroneous. Let them show us from the Bible where our errors are to be found.

Today is October 22. Let your mind go back those many decades and review the earnest longing on the faces of those who expected Jesus to come. Do we have the same expectancy these many years later? Go back to the history of our movement and witness the zeal and sacrifice that was given to spread this message across the planet. A burden has been laid on my heart that we should be more familiar with our church's heritage, our roots. With this in mind, from time to time we're going to highlight some of the personalities of our early movement. It's important that we don't forget. We need to know where we came from to know where we are going. Their example of faithfulness is inspiring. We need to pray that God will give us the same vision, the same urgency, the same expectancy that burned in their hearts.

In today's troubled and chaotic world, know that God is in control. Today know that we are living in the awesome time of His judgment. Today know that our salvation is nearer than we believed, and that it is high time to awaken from our sleep and trim our lamps and sow His field as we patiently wait for the harvest and the coming of the Master.