

# WHAT THE SANCTUARY MEANS TO ME

**Yom Kippur calls us to repentance and joy.**



Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary. There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle which the Lord set up and not man. In it Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross.

He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and began His intercessory ministry at the time of His ascension. In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry.

It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. In that typical service the sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things are purified with the perfect sacrifice of the blood of Jesus.

The investigative judgment reveals to heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ and therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to have part in the first resurrection. It also makes manifest who among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping

the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and in Him, therefore, are ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom.

This judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus. It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom. The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent. (Heb. 8:1-5; 4:14-16; 9:11-28; 10:19-22; 1:3; 2:16, 17; Dan. 7:9-27; 8:13, 14; 9:24-27; Num. 14:34; Eze. 4:6; Lev. 16; Rev. 14:6, 7; 20:12; 14:12; 22:12.)

**T**he blowing of the shofar! Beginning with that first piercing blast blown by a heavenly being on Mount Sinai, it has heralded major events in the religious calendar of the children of Israel from ancient times.

The shofar (a ram's or ibex's horn) sounded every week to announce the approach of the Sabbath, every month to signal the arrival of the new moon, every year in connection with each of the religious festivals, and in particular the High Holy Days of the seventh month, and every half century at the commencement of the great jubilee. Today the shofar continues to sound

in every synagogue of the world on the High Holy Days of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement—an audible testimony to the centrality of the sanctuary and its services of old.

The sound of the shofar perhaps best symbolized what the sanctuary doctrine means to me. Let me explain.

In academy and college I had learned the key texts on the sanctuary by rote and could perfunctorily draw the appropriate floor plans and charts and diagrams. In my early years of pastoral ministry I gave Bible studies and preached evangelistic sermons on the sanctuary.

It was stimulating to publicly calculate the 2300 days and expound on the various articles of furniture, but the sanctuary doctrine as a whole had never gripped me as a living reality. The thought of the investigative judgment brought me little joy or peace.

No doubt one reason the sanctuary message did not grip me was that I had not yet understood the beauty and simplicity of the gospel. I preached for more than two years before I learned experientially the truth of justification by faith. But finally I saw that I could really have the joy of Christian assurance, that I could really know that I was accepted by the Beloved.

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As the beauty of justification, sanctification, and glorification dawned upon my consciousness, I hungered to learn more. My attention turned to the Old Testament, and especially to the typology of the sanctuary service. There I discovered profound insights into the gospel.

Shortly afterward, the sanctuary doctrine became a storm center within the church. In the aftermath of the momentous Glacier View conference (Summer 1980), questions were raised that I had never considered before—questions that struck at the heart of the historic Adventist understanding of the sanctuary, the 2300 days, and the investigative judgment. Because of these questions, several of my colleagues left the ministry and the church. And they encouraged me to do the same.

At that point I determined to study the sanctuary doctrine for myself, to get to the bottom of the issues.

### Wrestling and Agonizing

And so began long months of wrestling with Scripture, agonizing in prayer. My testimony concerning the results of my study is straightforward: I have become overjoyed as I have seen ever more clearly that the Adventist doctrine of the sanctuary can stand the test of the closest investigation.

The study of these past years has yielded not only better reasons for believing but deeper insights into the old truths. The sanctuary doctrine, once dry and irrelevant to me, has now come alive! I'm excited about the sanctuary, and yes, about the investigative judgment! Deeper study has not caused me to remove any pin or pillar of the old landmarks. Rather, close investigation has made the sanctuary truth shine even more brilliantly and revealed in it greater beauty and richness than I ever imagined I would find.

Let me share an example. One of the points most central to Adventism and most widely rejected in critiques of Adventist sanctuary teachings is the idea of a pre-Advent investigative judgment of God's people.

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vision beyond the traditional texts we have usually cited, bringing to light dozens of biblical passages supporting Adventism's unique emphasis. Perhaps the most dramatic and illuminating of the biblical precedents for an investigative judgment are found in the first 10 chapters of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel was a contemporary of Daniel, writing in the last days of Judah's history before the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the monarchy. His task was to give God's last warning message to the professed people of God before the close of their probation as a monarchy. The book of Revelation is heavily indebted to Ezekiel, following the basic descriptions of Ezekiel even more than that of Daniel.

In particular I note the portrayal of the seal of God and the close of probation in Revelation 14 and 15. This portrayal builds on the picture in Ezekiel 9, with the mark on the forehead of those sighing and crying for the abominations in Jerusalem. John the revelator's extended use of Ezekiel 1 to 10 gives us a clue that the events surrounding the end of probation for Judah as a monarchy may be seen as a microcosm of God's procedure of dealing with His professed people before the final close of probation.

And what was God's procedure in Ezekiel's day, in the closing years of Judah's history before executive judgment was meted out? It was an investigative judgment, conducted over an extended period of time, from the Most Holy Place of the earthly sanctuary.

### A Movable Throne

Let's look a little more closely. In the vision beginning in Ezekiel 1, dated July 592 B.C., God comes riding upon His celestial chariot—sitting on

His *movable throne* (does that remind you of the movable throne in Daniel 7?).

The description of the wheels and wings show movement—God is going somewhere! Ezekiel 9 and 10, a vision viewed by the prophet some 14 months later, shows us the direction of God's movement. God leaves the Most Holy Place of the Jerusalem Temple, where He had taken up residence.

Why had God come to the Most Holy Place of the earthly sanctuary in the first place? Chapters 3 to 8 give the answer. Israel is arraigned before the divine tribunal—there is a covenant lawsuit, an investigative judgment, not of the world at large, but of the professed people of God. In chapter 8 the list of charges proceeds from lesser to greater until verse 16.

Here we find the climactic issue, the sign of rebellion, that causes God to close probation for Judah with the words "I . . . will not spare" (verse 18, RSV). "And he brought me into the inner court of the house of the Lord; and behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men, with their backs to the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east, worshiping the sun toward the east" (Eze. 8:16, RSV). The worship of the sun—false worship.

In Ezekiel 9 the investigative judgment is over. The result is a separation of the professed people of God into two classes: those who really serve Him, who sigh and cry over the abominations done in the city, and those who profess but do not really serve Him. The former receive the mark on their foreheads, the mark of the *taw*, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. They are the faithful remnant. The latter are in line for the execution of the sentence.

What then is God's procedure? Before the executive judgment comes an investigative judgment of God's professed people in which a distinction is revealed between the true and false worshippers of God.

And God is no vengeful judge, waiting to condemn all whom He can. To the contrary, over and over in Ezekiel God cries out, "Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the Lord God; so turn, and live" (Eze. 18:31, 32, RSV).

### A Cleansed Temple

Ezekiel adds more brushstrokes that further enrich the picture of the investigative judgment. The final chapters of Ezekiel (40-48) give a vision of a cleansed and restored temple. Note the dateline for this vision, given in 40:1—the tenth day of the new year—that's the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), the day of the cleansing of the sanctuary. How crucial that the vision of the cleansed and restored temple is given on the day of the sanctuary's cleansing, the Day of Atonement. Certainly God wants us to see the connection.

Then comes the emphasis of the book of Ezekiel upon the cleansing of the people. Glorious promises are given not only for a cleansed sanctuary but a cleansed people as well (e.g., Eze. 36:25-27).

And finally, Ezekiel reveals the larger issue at stake in the investigative judgment. In Ezekiel 36:22, 23 and again in 39:27, 28, God points out the ultimate result of this whole procedure: "Through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes" (Eze. 36:23, RSV)—the eyes of the onlooking nations. It is for their sake, to vindicate God's character before onlooking intelligences, that God acts.

In a word, the message of Ezekiel is the message of the Day of Atonement: God is active to set things right in His sanctuary; God is active in cleansing a people; God is active in vindicating His holy name, or character.

This is the message of the Adventist doctrine of the sanctuary. Its depth and riches have not yet been plumbed. And perhaps even more important, a

# The shofar signals judgment and atonement—full and free.

deeper experience awaits us in the time of the antitypical day of atonement.

### The Yom Kippur Experience

So come with me to old Jerusalem. It is the Day of Atonement, the most sacred day of all the year. For 10 days people have heard the blowing of the shofar, which calls them to repentance in preparation for Yom Kippur.

Now the great day has arrived. There is fasting all day; no food, no water. We join the fast.

Throughout the day not a car can be seen, even on what are usually the busiest streets. Driving is forbidden. Scarcely a person can be seen. All are in the synagogue or at the Western (Wailing) Wall. We make our way, walking down the middle of the deserted streets, to the Great Synagogue.

As we slip into the synagogue, we are each immediately gripped to the very core of our being. The cantor sings movingly, plaintively, of repentance, accompanied by the choir's solemn strains. His voice quavers and cracks as he sings with deep emotion, and yes, choking tears.

Now the rabbi reads Scripture, but not the way we normally read. As he voices the prayers of the repentance of David, we hear deep, earnest sobs—sobs wrung out of a heart conscious of sin, crying out for forgiveness, pleading in repentance. Individuals offer prayers of confession with affliction of soul, not only for their personal sins but also for the sins of the whole people. Worshipers slip out of their seats, go to a brother and ask for forgiveness, and seal the reconciliation with an embrace.

Worshipers spend the day in prayer, earnest, heartrending pleading for forgiveness and cleansing. Yet there is no fear in the praying, no despairing uncertainty, but rather a solemn assurance and hope of God's

hearing and granting their petitions.

About sunset we slip to the Western Wall. There the last prayer is said, and a hush falls over the people. Then comes the great climax—a mighty sustained blast of the shofar, reminding us of the 10 days of repentance. In addition, according to Old Testament tradition, the shofar also reminds us of the ram provided as a substitute for Isaac on Mount Moriah. Now it signals the atonement—full and free. Repentance, substitution, joy!

The shofar blast is followed by spontaneous shouts of triumph and joy: "A good judgment!" "A good judgment!" Young and old break out into singing and dancing. God has judged, cleansed, made atonement, made free. The jubilee shofar is blown!

### Capturing the Fervor

I long for us as a people to capture the fervor symbolized by the shofar in this, the antitypical day of atonement: the fervor of *repentance*, affliction of soul, putting away of sin; the fervor of assurance in the substitutionary death of Christ; the fervor of joy over a "good judgment" in Christ.

The Jerusalem shofar still resounds in my memory. May I invite you to hear the shofar echoing through the corridors of your imagination. The sound calls you to judgment, to repentance, to affliction of the soul, but also to assurance in the God of the sanctuary. And it calls you to anticipate expectantly the last jubilee. □



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