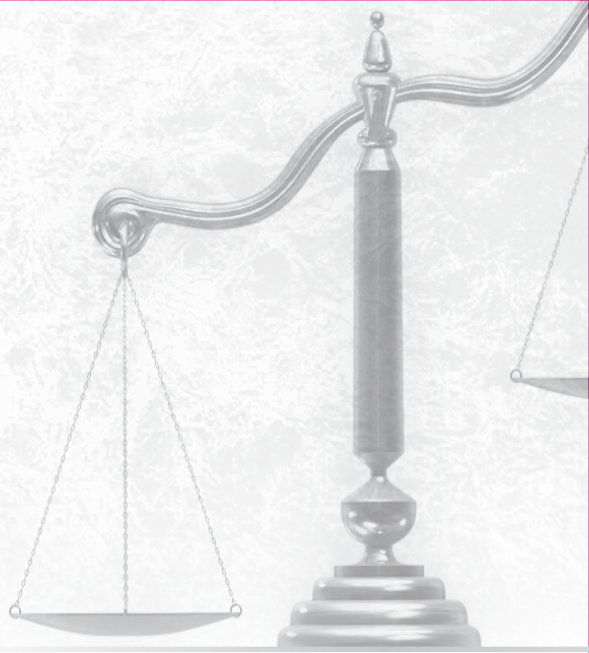


THE CASE
for the
INVESTIGATIVE
JUDGMENT

Chapter 1

Getting Started



Back about 1962, when I was a ministerial intern in the Southern California Conference, a friend brought to my attention a significant problem with our Seventh-day Adventist interpretation of Daniel 8:14 and the investigative judgment. He pointed out that in Daniel 8:9–12, it's the sins of the little horn that defile the sanctuary; therefore, the solution to the problem in Daniel 8:14 should address the sins of the little horn. However, according to the Adventist interpretation, it's the sins of God's people that are resolved in Daniel 8:14, not the sins of the wicked little horn. The criticism seemed reasonable to me then, and I've pondered it from time to time over the years. Since then, I've also become aware of other criticisms of our teaching about the investigative judgment.

Seventh-day Adventists bring together issues from several parts of the Bible to form this doctrine. There's the sanctuary in Leviticus, especially the Day of Atonement in chapter 16. In Daniel, there's the judgment scene in chapter 7; there's the desecrated sanctuary in chapter 8, with its cleansing after 2,300 days/years; and there's the seventy weeks in chapter 9, from which we calculate that the 2,300 years ended in 1844. Then there's the book of Hebrews, which features the sanctuary/temple in heaven and Christ's ministry there. And finally, there's the year-day principle by which we interpret the time prophecies in Daniel and Revelation.

A controversial teaching

The Seventh-day Adventist teaching that in 1844 God began an investigative judgment in heaven has been more controversial than the Sabbath, the state of the dead, and

hell. It unquestionably has been our most disputed doctrine. Throughout most of our history, people both from outside our church and from within have challenged this doctrine, and it has caused more defections from the church than have any of our other teachings. Even some people who remain in the church, are loyal Sabbath keepers, and maintain their belief in the Adventist understanding of the state of the dead and hell, nevertheless question our teaching about the investigative judgment. Two of the most prominent of these during the late twentieth century were Raymond F. Cottrell and Desmond Ford.*

The biggest challenge our critics have thrown at us is that the Bible doesn't support the Adventist teaching regarding the investigative judgment. Instead, they say, it's based on the writings of Ellen White and the erroneous biblical interpretations of our uneducated pioneers. On the other hand, Ellen White said that "the correct understanding of [Christ's] ministration in the heavenly sanctuary is the foundation of our faith."¹ By Christ's "ministration," she meant everything associated with His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, including an investigative judgment that began in 1844. And the church as a whole continues to insist that the investigative judgment doctrine *is* biblical. Our statement of Fun-

damental Beliefs affirms it,² and the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* includes at least two chapters that deal with the sanctuary and the investigative judgment.³

Why I wrote this book

When I completed the manuscript for my book *Could It Really Happen?*⁴ I decided that it was time to settle once and for all in my own mind the various questions that have been raised about our teaching on the investigative judgment. My chief interest has been to investigate whether the various aspects of this key doctrine can be defended from the Bible. Hence this book, the production of which has unquestionably been the most complex writing project I have ever attempted.

I decided that I should begin with the best and most recent Adventist thinking on the investigative judgment and related topics. In March 2007, I had a speaking engagement on the campus of Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, so I decided to spend two or three extra days visiting with professors at the Theological Seminary and doing research at the Center for Adventist Research in the James White Library. I came home with several books and doctoral dissertations by Adventist scholars, all of which had been writ-

*Because Desmond Ford has been the most challenging and most well-known critic of recent times, his name appears frequently in this book, as I've responded to his critiques.

ten in the previous twenty years, including several since the year 2000. I have also read the relevant parts of several other recent books on the investigative judgment and related issues, including the seven-volume Daniel and Revelation series published by the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference.* After spending more than a year of research and a year and a half writing, I have become thoroughly convinced that our historic teaching about an investigative judgment in the heavenly sanctuary that is the antitype of the earthly Day of Atonement is entirely biblical—which explains the title of this book: *The Case for the Investigative Judgment: Its Biblical Foundation*.

You may wonder what qualifies me to write on the various aspects of the investigative judgment since my training and professional experience are more in the line of writer and editor than of biblical scholar. My response is simple. The lay person often finds the technical language of scholars difficult to understand. My task as a writer is to become familiar enough with the work of the scholars that I can make it understandable to the average person. I want to bridge the gap between the scholar and the lay person. Also, most people, even

among those who can easily read and understand the technical language of biblical scholarship, don't have the time to pore through the literature dealing with the various aspects of the subject. That's why, in this book, I bring everything together in one place.

Growing in our understanding

In saying that I've found our historic teaching about the investigative judgment and related topics to be biblical, I don't mean that everything we've ever said about this doctrine is correct. We *have* changed some aspects of our teaching during the years since 1844. In the manuscript that Desmond Ford presented at Glacier View in 1980, he mentioned twenty-two aspects of our doctrine of the investigative judgment that we've modified over the years since 1844. Ford sees this as a problem. I don't. In fact, to the contrary, I believe we should expect such modifications. Ellen White herself said, "There is no excuse for anyone in taking the position . . . that all our expositions of Scripture are without an error."⁵ That's why chapters 8 to 31 of this book are almost exclusively an evaluation of the biblical evidence about the investigative judgment and related topics.

*The Daniel and Revelation Committee Series comprises William H. Shea, vol. 1: *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*; Frank B. Holbrook (editor of volumes 2–7), vol. 2: *Symposium on Daniel*; vol. 3: *Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, Nature of Prophecy*; vol. 4: *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*; vol. 5: *Doctrine of the Sanctuary: A Historical Survey*; vol. 6: *Symposium on Revelation—Book I*; and vol. 7: *Symposium on Revelation—Book II*.

I realize that some of those who hold differing interpretations of the biblical evidence will disagree with me. This is true of nearly every doctrine Christians have ever drawn from the Bible. Some people interpret what the Bible says about a particular topic in one way, while others understand the same biblical evidence in another way, yet all are thoroughly convinced that their biblical interpretation is correct. That's simply how it is and how it always will be, and it's as true of the doctrine of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment as it is of any other doctrine. I don't expect to persuade every reader—especially those who have been critical of our teaching on this topic—that my understanding of the biblical evidence is the correct one. However, I hope that even those who continue to differ with me after they've read this book will agree that I've presented a strong biblical case for our Adventist teaching about the investigative judgment. That's the reason for the subtitle *Its Biblical Foundation*.

I also hope that this book can help to resolve some of the questions that have been nagging some of our pastors and thoughtful lay persons. I hope it can help them to see that our traditional teaching about the sanctuary and the investigative judgment *does* have a firm biblical foundation. If, in addition, one or more critics are persuaded by what I say, I will feel amply rewarded.

And I do expect the critics to respond to what I've written. I'd be disappointed if they didn't, for criticism of each others' thinking is how we all grow in our understanding. We Adventists have refined our doctrine of the investigative judgment over the years largely because of the validity of some of the criticisms that were lodged against it. Therefore, I shall read what the critics have to say in response to this book with interest, and I hope to learn from them.

Getting technical

Now for a few technical details. First, you will discover as you get into the book that I use two kinds of references: footnotes and endnotes. Footnotes are always indicated with the symbols *, †, ‡, etc. Their purpose is to provide information that it seemed to me might be helpful to the reader but that would detract from the flow of thought in the main text. Footnotes always appear at the bottom of the page where the material they contain applies, so the reader can refer to them quickly and get back to the main text. Endnotes provide information about the sources and other information. They are always indicated by numbers, and they appear at the end of the chapter to which they apply, where I've presented them in abbreviated form. The bibliography at the back of this book contains the full bibliographical information—

author, publisher, etc.—about the sources that I refer to or quote from.

Second, in this book I use the New King James Version (NKJV) as the primary translation. While I generally prefer the New International Version, I find it to be a bit too interpretive. The King James Version is quite literal in its translation, but because of the archaic English, I have chosen the New King James Version. I identify by its abbreviation any Bible version other than the New King James Version that I cite in this book. (For the abbreviations, see the copyright page.)

Third, a word about transliteration—spelling the sounds of Greek and Hebrew words using the letters of the English alphabet. Scholars vary somewhat in how they transliterate words, especially from Hebrew to English. In order to maintain consistency, I generally adopt the transliterations of the scholars I quote. And on a related matter, where scholars I've quoted have used Hebrew or Greek script, I've transliterated the words to make them easier to read and pronounce.

Shouldn't it be simple?

One objection to the doctrine of the investigative judgment that I've heard numerous times over the years is that while the gospel should be simple enough for a child to understand, this doctrine is very complex. I agree that the gospel should

be—and is—simple enough for a child to understand and respond to. However, thousands of books that a child couldn't possibly understand have been written about the exegetical and theological intricacies having to do with the gospel: the atonement, righteousness by faith, conversion, justification, and sanctification. In fact, these concepts are far over the heads of many adults!

The gospel and the doctrines of the Trinity, eschatology, inspiration and revelation, and many other doctrines lend themselves to both simple explanation and profound reflection. The same is true of the investigative judgment. You'll find my simple explanation of this doctrine in chapters 2, 3, and 4. Children would no doubt need those chapters adapted to their age level, but I think they could grasp the basic concepts. Most of the rest of this book probes the deeper issues of the judgment and why it's biblical. Much of it is technical and will require you to concentrate, to think hard. It seems to me that complex objections justify complex responses.

I suggest that there are two ways to read what I have written. You can simply read the book through from beginning to end. Or you can read only the chapters that deal with the specific questions you have about the investigative judgment. I have titled the chapters so that readers who are familiar

with this doctrine can easily find my comments on the various issues. I believe, however, that even those who are interested primarily in specific issues will also find it helpful to read the book straight through.

Why read this book?

Many people have thanked me for the spiritual blessing they received from some of my previous books, such as *The Crisis of the End Time*, *Conquering the Dragon Within*, and *Forever His*. Unfortunately, I can't promise you the same with every chapter of this book. As I've already noted, much of it is of necessity quite technical, and it's difficult to make a highly technical discussion be also deeply spiritual. Why then should you even bother to read this book? I'll respond with the words of Ellen White:

The subject of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment should be clearly understood by the people of God. All need a knowledge for themselves of the position and work of their great High Priest. Otherwise it will be impossible for them to exercise the faith

which is essential at this time or to occupy the position which God designs them to fill. . . .

. . . It is of the utmost importance that all should thoroughly investigate these subjects and be able to give an answer to everyone that asketh them a reason of the hope that is in them.⁶

That's why this book is important

My purpose in writing this book has been to help you with your study of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment so that you understand it clearly. My prayer is that you will be blessed as you learn more about the biblical foundation for the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of this doctrine.

1. White, *Evangelism*, 221.

2. See the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 17th ed.

3. See Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, "The Sanctuary," and Gerhard F. Hasel, "Divine Judgment," in *Handbook*, 375–417, 815–856.

4. Moore, *Could It Really Happen?*

5. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 35.

6. White, *The Great Controversy*, 488, 489.