"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17).

The quote above points to the time when judgement shall begin and that when that time comes, it will commence in the house of God. What is noteworthy in the Bible quotation above is that Apostle Peter gives us the process of this judgement.

THE HOUSE OF GOD

The first mention of the house of God is found in Genesis 28:17-19. Here Jacob names the place of Bethel as the house of God and stated further it (house of God) is the gate of heaven. This house is referred to by Apostle Matthew as the house of prayer.

"My house shall be called the house of prayer…" (Matthew 21:13). It is also referred to as the church. *"But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15).*

THE DEGREE OF SCRUTINY

According to King Solomon, every work whether it is good or evil shall be brought into judgement. Let us hear from King Solomon himself: *"Every work, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Eccl. 12:14) shall be brought into judgement."*

These works include all the acts of men. *"All your acts are recorded, whether they are good or bad." (1T 399.1; 1SM 217.1).* Therefore, all the acts of men are recorded in heaven because "He (God — my emphasis) keeps an account of every work, whether it is good or evil, and in the day of judgment every man will receive according to his work." (Te 143.3).

Apostle Peter furnishes the process of this judgement when he said that *"judgement must begin at the house of God." (1 Peter 4:17 — first part).* Here, we are told that in this judgement, the church is judged first. Therefore, "…in the great day of final atonement and investigative judgment the only cases considered are those of the professed people of God." (GC 480.1).

PROFESSORS OF RELIGION

Professors of religion are those who make open acknowledgement of the religion of Christ. It is a phrase that includes both the doers of the word and those who openly acknowledge Christ as their Saviour but do not obey His commandment. By word of mouth they acknowledge Christ, but by their works, they deny him. King Solomon states clearly the duty of a true Christian.

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." (Eccl. 12:13).

THEM THAT BELIEVE NOT

Apostle Peter was instructed to present the present truth relative to the church of God. It is stated that *"… and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17).* The phrase who obey not the gospel, refers to the unbelievers. Apostle Peter was shown that the house of God and the unbelievers are two distinct groups of people as the quote below also shows:

> *"The judgment of the wicked is a distinct and separate work, and takes place at a later period." (GC 480.1).*

This statement confirms that the believers in the Word of God are distinct and separate from the unbelievers and so too is their judgement. The phrase "who obey not the gospel" renders additional understanding as it points to the revelation of Apostle James who says: *"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." (James 1:22).*

THE PROCESS OF JUDGEMENT

Those who know the Word of God, even preach the gospel, but do not obey it, are counted as unbelievers. It would appear that if we correctly understand the text of 1 Peter 4:17 we would appreciate that God's judgement of the world is conducted in two parts, the judgement of the house of God and the judgement of those who believe not the gospel.

INVESTIGATIVE JUDGEMENT

Peter's statement conveys the truth that there is the first part of the judgement followed by the second part of it. The phrases used "must begin at the house of God" and "if it first begin at us" show that God's judgement of the world is conducted in two parts as was indicated earlier. There cannot be first without the second nor can there be the beginning without the end.

Therefore, the beginning (investigative judgement) is for the church of God only. *"…in the great day of final atonement and investigative judgment the only cases considered are those of the professed people of God. The judgment of the wicked is a distinct and separate work, and takes place at a later period." (GC 480).*

THE VENUE

We cannot conclude this study without some degree of understanding on where this judgement takes place. Prophet Daniel, who was shown where it takes place, answers this question and says: *"It is while men are still dwelling upon the earth that the work of investigative judgment takes place in the courts of heaven." (COL 310.2).*

"The work of the investigative judgment and the blotting out of sins is to be accomplished before the second advent of the Lord … When the investigative judgment closes, Christ will come, and His reward will be with Him to give to every man as his work shall be." (FLB 213.2). With adequate evidence from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, we can safely conclude that God's judgement of the earth takes place in heaven not on earth.

We also understand that since judgement takes place in heaven, when Christ returns for the second time, judgement would have been completed. Apostle John furnished further evidence that when Christ comes, He is not coming to judge but that He brings rewards; the reward of eternal life and a reward of eternal damnation.

"And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." (Revelation 22:12).

We may do well to consider the point further. A reward is something given or received in return for good work or achievement. It is also defined as a compensation for a worthy act or retribution for wrongdoing. It is given or received only when one has completed or achieved a certain good work or a retribution for having completed wrongdoing.

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"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God."

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