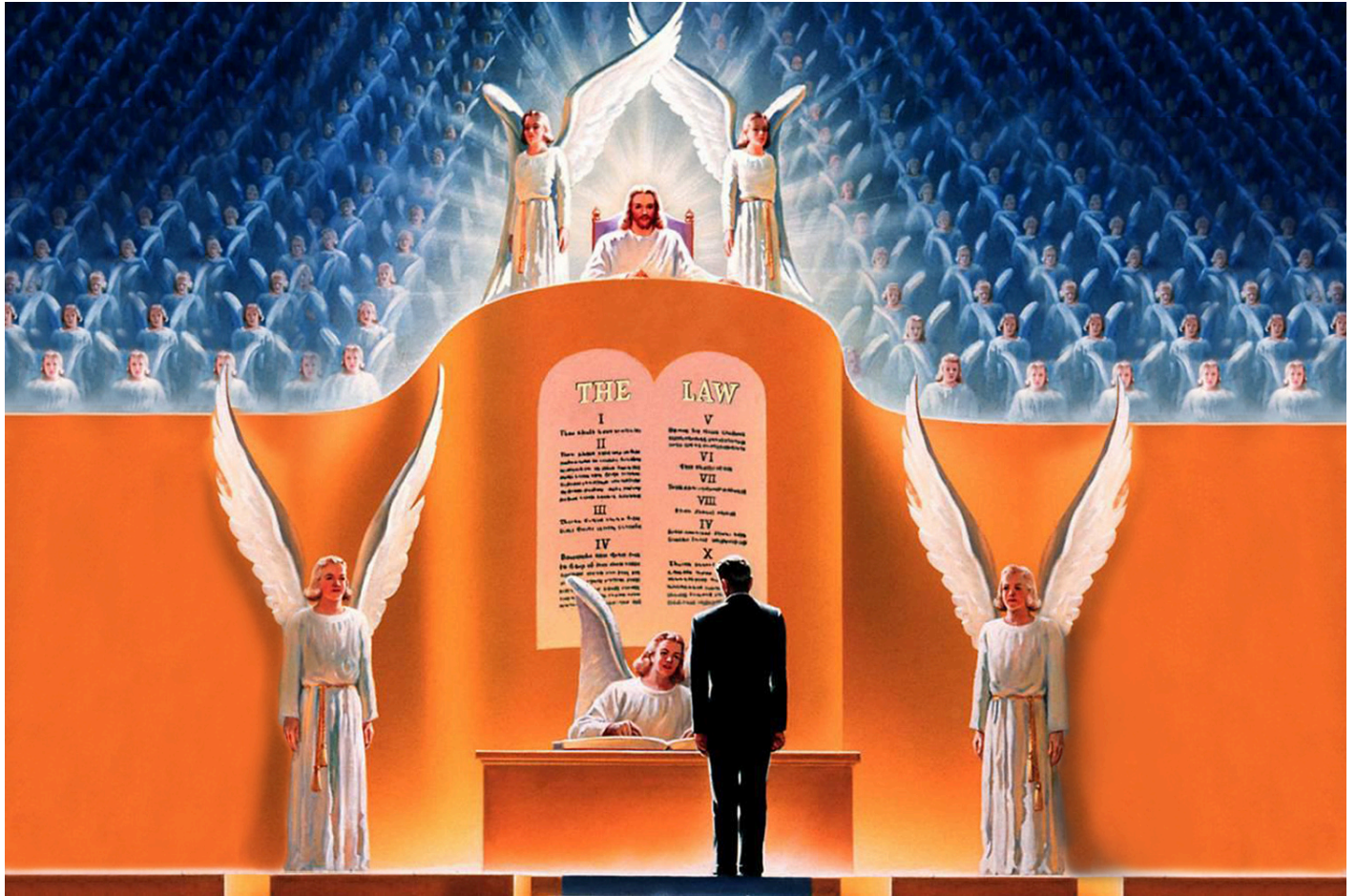


# [“Safe to Save,” Judgment, and Angels in Heaven](#)

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | March 31, 2022



Have you ever heard the term “safe to save” referring to the idea that the angels in heaven need to know which of us sinners are “safe” to bring to heaven? It is suggested that the loyal angels have concerns as to whether we would make safe neighbors and, therefore, they need a “pre-advent judgment” to inform them, reassure them, and give them confidence that we humans will be safe to live around when we get there.

When I first heard this idea, it appealed to me because I came out of a view of salvation in which our records in heaven are for the purpose of a legal accounting, determining guilt and punishment in a court venue, and applying the legal merits of Christ’s sacrifice in order to propitiate (satisfy) the Father’s wrath so that He could legally pardon us and not be required to kill us for our sins.

The “safe to save” view allowed me to reframe the various teachings about records and a heavenly pre-advent judgment into a new setting that was no longer penal/legal and made God look much better to me. I liked that very much. But is this view the most accurate way to describe the biblical revelation? Is it most consistent with what Scripture teaches?

## What Does It Mean to Be Saved?

If we hold to the legal view, being saved means to have our sins “paid for” by the blood payment of Jesus and to be accounted as legally pardoned. In that view, perhaps the idea of angels examining records in heaven to determine who is “safe” has merit. After all, that view teaches that sinners are “declared to be righteous even though they are not.” I imagine if a human governor were to pardon some serial killer and you discovered the murderer were moving into your neighborhood, you would absolutely want some reassurance that it was safe for that person to live next door to you.

To teach that angels in heaven need reassurance via a review of the records gives support to the false penal/legal paradigm. It supports the belief that there is a legal court in heaven where Satan accuses, Jesus defends, and the angels review the records to decide who is telling the truth and who is safe to save.

This theory appears to be supported with stories like the one found in the first chapter of Job, where we find Satan accusing Job; or in Zechariah chapter 3, where Satan accuses Joshua the high priest and the angel of the Lord defends him.

But this entire legal explanation and need for a record review to provide reassurance is based on a falsehood—which some would describe as FOTAP, the fallacy of the assumed premise—that God’s law functions like human law. If God’s law is like human law, then this explanation would hold some merit. But if God’s law is not like human law, then the conclusions drawn based on the false assumption are also false.

God is the Creator who builds reality, and His laws are the protocols upon which life is built to operate (laws of physics, gravity, health, and the moral laws, etc.). God’s laws are not like human laws—imposed rules that require judicial oversight, a record review, a determination of guilt and innocence, and the infliction of penalties. Instead, deviation from God’s law *automatically* result in pain, suffering, and death—unless the Creator intervenes to heal and restore.

Seen through this lens, Job is a beautiful revelation of the stark differences between imposed rules and reality itself. The book opens with a meeting of the intelligences of God’s universe; Satan intrudes on the meeting, claiming a right to be there as the representative from earth. Yet God immediately challenges Satan’s claim: “You don’t represent the human race. Job doesn’t follow you. He is loyal to me.” Satan disputes God’s counterclaim, and what follows in the book of Job is not a legal review of records but an outworking of reality in real-time. The narrative in Job is not about whether Job was safe to save but whether God could be trusted, whether God could read hearts and minds. Satan was still hoping to continue to deceive the angels, who cannot read hearts and minds. If the evil one could get Job to curse God, then he could look back to the angels in heaven and says, “See, I told you. God is wrong about Job, and He is wrong about me. You can’t trust what God says.”

The book of Job does not support the idea of a legal examination of records by angels to determine who is safe to save.

Likewise, Zechariah chapter 3 is not a legal record review but a revelation of how reality works. Satan accuses because Satan is a legalist who focuses on behavior, but what does the angel of the Lord do? There is no record review, no legal accounting, no angelic jury trial. Instead, there is the rebuking of the accuser and the healing of the sinner! The angel of the Lord removes Joshua’s sinfulness (the dirty robes) and clothes him in righteousness (pure robes). The story of Joshua the high priest is not one of

angels reviewing records to determine who is safe to save. It is about rebirth, renewal, receiving a new heart and right spirit, about God writing His law of love into the heart and mind (Hebrews 8:10).

There is another reason why the Job and Zechariah accounts do not apply to the question of the pre-advent judgment: Those stories occurred prior to the cross, whereas the pre-advent judgment occurs after the cross. Prior to the cross, angels did have questions about God's trustworthiness and Satan continued to press his lies about God. Job and Zechariah highlight this battle for the hearts and minds of the heavenly beings and how God conducts His side of the war. But the evidences God gave throughout human history could only partially answer the allegations of Satan. The full truth of God's character required God Himself to demonstrate it. Thus, it wasn't until the cross that Satan's lies were fully refuted and that all the loyal beings in heaven were settled beyond any further temptation or deceit. Jesus said,

Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* to myself" (John 12:31-33 NIV84, my emphasis).

The word *men* in John 12:33 is not in the Greek; it was added by the translators. Jesus was making it clear that at His crucifixion, He would reveal to *all* beings, not just men, the truth about Himself and the Father and expose Satan as the liar and murderer that he is. This evidence would be sufficient for the angels in heaven to make a right judgment about God, Satan, and sin and to be solidified fully in their loyalty. Satan would be cast out of their affections, and his work would be restricted to earth because no sinless beings in heaven had any remaining doubts about God.

The apostle Paul confirms this in Colossians, where he writes that "God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or **things in heaven**, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (1:19, 20 NIV84).

Prior to Christ's crucifixion, the angels did have many unanswered questions regarding who was telling the truth, but this was not so after the cross. They were settled, and Satan's work was restricted to earth. Thus, these stories in Job and Zechariah do not teach a legal pre-advent judgment in which records are reviewed and angels are reassured. These Old Testament stories teach reality: our Creator God's trustworthiness in dealing with the sin problem.

## How God Saves

And this takes us to the heart of the "safe to save" question: What does it mean to "save"? Does it mean legal pardon, as the imposed-law view teaches? Or does it mean restoration to righteousness, to transform a sinner to sinless perfection, loyalty, love, and holiness?

In the worldview concocted by Satan, sin is a legal problem; it is breaking laws that require the infliction of punishment. He is the one who came up with the idea that God's law functions no differently than the type of laws created beings make up—rules that require enforcement. The book *The Desire of Ages* supports this point:

**In the opening of the great controversy**, Satan had declared that the law of God could

not be obeyed, that justice was inconsistent with mercy, and that, should the law be broken, it would be impossible for the sinner to be pardoned. **Every sin must meet its punishment, urged Satan;** and if God should remit the punishment of sin, He would not be a God of truth and justice (p. 761).

Satan teaches that God's law is imposed rules (like human law) that require inflicted punishment, because this teaching makes God to be functionally no different than any other created being. In this legal model, any of us, if we are in a position of authority where we can impose rules over others and enforce those rules with inflicted punishment, can be "like god." This is Satan's goal: to be like God. And since Satan, as a created being, cannot actually create reality and cannot sustain the laws upon which reality exists, he instead promulgates the lie that God's law is the kind of law that created beings can make up; Satan then assumes the mantle of this law-enforcing god and garners our worship.

Satan's lies about God in heaven were rooted in his lies about God's law, and these same lies infest Christianity today. Sadly, the majority of humans throughout history have preferred Satan's god to our loving Creator.

God is the God of reality, not judicial legality, and saving sinners is about healing and restoring them to righteousness. Understanding this fact, the term "safe to save" is rendered meaningless. Who is safe to save? Every single person because to save someone means to remove sin, remove rebellion, remove selfishness, and restore God's law of love into the inmost being so that the sinner becomes a loving, trustworthy friend of God. Who is safe to do this in? Everyone. In other words, "safe to save" means "safe to heal"—those healed from sin are the ones who are safe to live next door to.

But, one might ask, how will the angels in heaven know whom God has healed, whom God has restored to harmony with His living law of love? Don't they need a record review beforehand to be able to tell?

Angels do not possess the ability in themselves to read hearts and minds, for if they could, then none of the angels would have been deceived by Lucifer when he began his rebellion in heaven. However, God grants the loyal angels the ability to read our thoughts and look into our hearts, while not permitting Satan and his fallen host to do so.

The Bible tells us that the angels in heaven have been watching and studying these things throughout human history. They haven't waited until these last days to begin to investigate them; we are a theater, a spectacle, to angels who long to look into these things (1 Corinthians 4:9; 1 Peter 1:12).

Ellen White, one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, understood it this way:

Satan has his evil angels around us; and though **they cannot read men's thoughts**, they closely watch their words and actions (*Gospel Workers*, 417).

The adversary of souls is **not permitted to read the thoughts of men**; but he is a keen observer, and he marks the words (*Review and Herald*, March 22, 1887, par. 5).

Did you forget that **angels of God** were in attendance, and that their pure eyes **were reading your thoughts, the intents and purposes of the heart**, and taking cognizance of every act, and delineating your true, frivolous character? (*Testimonies*, Vol. 2, 180).

While the angels in heaven don't possess the innate ability to read our thoughts, God **permits** them to do so. Given the fact that the angels in heaven can already read our thoughts, the purpose of the pre-advent judgment is **not** to reveal things to them about us that they don't already know. It is not to reassure them who would be a safe neighbor.

But there are even more important reasons and evidences that the pre-advent judgment is not necessary to reassure the angels who will be safe to bring there. And that is the reality of what sin does to sinners in the presence of God's unveiled glory.

When God unveils His full life-giving glory, when the fires and infinite truth and love come out from Him like rivers, even as the righteous by the millions stand in this fire (Daniel 7:10; Isaiah 33:14, 15), the wicked can no longer hide from their unremedied sinfulness, guilt, shame, selfishness, fear, and corruption. The pain of unremedied sin torments their hearts and minds, and they flee from the one who sits on the throne, begging the mountains to fall on them and hide them from Him (Revelation 6:16). They won't enter heaven not because God keeps them out, but because their own condition is incompatible with life in God's sinless universe. Thus, it becomes self-evident who is safe to be in heaven, and the sin condition is self-limiting—unhealed hearts limit themselves from entering heaven.

We have seen two reasons why a pre-advent record review by angels is unnecessary for them to know who is safe to live next door to.

- First, the loyal angels already know the condition of our hearts and minds and don't need a record review to discover it.
- Second, only those healed from sin are able to live in God's unveiled glory. When God returns in the fullness of His life-giving glory, the unsafe "sin condition" becomes both self-evident and self-limiting.

No bad neighbors will ever be in heaven because none will be able to enter there. Thus, there is no need whatsoever for a pre-advent record review to reassure the angels who is safe to be admitted to God's kingdom. But there is a real reason and purpose for the pre-advent judgment. We have described that reason in our [\*Heavenly Sanctuary and Investigative Judgment for the Modern World\* magazine](#). If you haven't read it, we encourage you to do so.

The cross was where Christ saved the species human in His own humanity and procured the remedy that heals and restores individual sinners to righteousness. The sanctuary illustration teaches how Jesus administers that remedy to the individual lives of the saved to heal and restore them from sin, eliminate sin from His universe, and restore His creation to at-one-ment with Him.