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Adventists and Daniel 12 (The Associate Editor's Desk)

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Gerhard Pfandl

In recent years, a number of Seventh-day Adventists have begun to apply the time prophecies in Daniel 12:5-13 to the future.¹ Rejecting the traditional Adventist understanding, which places the 3½ times, the 1290, and 1335 days as prophetic times in the past, they claim these time periods are to be understood as literal days still to come. This new proposal, however, contains a number of problems that make this interpretation unacceptable.

The 3½ times or 1260 days in Daniel 7:25 and 12:7 are seen as two different time periods in history, one in the past and one in the future. This interpretation violates one of the fundamental principles of biblical hermeneutics, which says: “Scrip-

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ture interprets scripture, one passage being the key to other passages.”² If this principle is discarded, prophecy becomes a wax nose that can be bent in any direction the interpreter wants it to go.

The prophecies of Daniel are given according to the principle of repetition and enlargement. This can be clearly seen by looking at the four major prophecies in the book that all begin in the time of the author and end with the Second Advent (See table below):

These parallel prophecies cover essentially the same sweep of time from Daniel’s days to the Second Advent. Each prophecy emphasizes different aspects of this time period. Daniel 2 provides the overall histori-

- Daniel 2 Babylon B Second Advent (the stone kingdom)
- Daniel 7 Babylon B Second Advent (the kingdom given to the saints)
- Daniel 8; 9 Medo-Persia B Second Advent (the little horn is broken)
- Daniel 10–12 Medo-Persia B Second Advent (the resurrection)

cal outline; Daniel 7 introduces the little horn and emphasizes its political activities in history; Daniel 8, building on Daniel 7, emphasizes the religious activities of the little horn; and Daniel 10–12 is a further explanation of the vision in Daniel 8.

This means that common elements in different chapters of the book must refer to the same things or events. For example, the little horn in Daniel 7; 8 must refer to the same historical power, not to two different powers. And if the “taking away of the daily” in Daniel 8:11 refers to events in the past, so must “the taking away of the daily” in Daniel 12:11. Similarly, if the $3\frac{1}{2}$ times in Daniel 7:25 refer to the past, so must the $3\frac{1}{2}$ times in Daniel 12:7. To do otherwise makes mockery of the Scripture-interprets-Scripture principle and leads to utter confusion.

The passage in Daniel 12:5-13 is seen as a new vision that contains time prophecies for the future. This view ignores the basic structure of Daniel’s visions, in which visions are always followed by explanations (See table below).

We must not overlook the fact that in Daniel 7; 8; 10–12, the time prophecies are always situated within the explanation section not in the visions themselves. In Daniel 7, the vision ends in verse 14, and the time prophecy is given in verse 25. In Daniel 8, the vision concludes in verse 12, and the time prophecy is given in verse 14. In Daniel 10–12, the vision ends in 12:4, and the time prophecies are given in 12:5-13. This structure is destroyed if 12:5-13 is interpreted as a new vision.

This new view completely ignores the linguistic and grammatical connections between the vision in Daniel 11 and the explanation in Daniel 12. First, it needs to be emphasized that the vision concludes in 12:4 with the command to Daniel to “seal the book.” And 12:5-13 is an epilogue to the preceding vision—in a sense to the whole book. It is not a new vision with a different topic, but an explanation of certain elements in the vision of chapter 11. This is evident from the question in 12:6, “How long shall the fulfillment of *these wonders be?*” The Hebrew word for “wonders” can be

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- Daniel 2 B vision (31-35), explanation (36-46).
 - Daniel 7 B vision (1-14), explanation (15-27).
 - Daniel 8; 9 B vision (1-12), explanation (13-26; 9:24-27)
 - Daniel 10–12 B vision (11:2-12:4), explanation (12:5-13)

translated as “awesome events” or “wonderful events,” and since 12:5 does not refer to any events, “these wonders” can refer to events seen only in the vision in Daniel 11. The same word is in fact used in 11:36, where it refers to the blasphemies spoken by the King of the North. This clearly indicates that Daniel 12:5-13 is part of the vision of Daniel 11:2-12:4, and not a new vision.

There is also a strong thematic and linguistic connection between Daniel 7:25 and 12:7—

““He shall . . . persecute the saints of the Most High, . . . the saints shall be given into his hand For a time and times and half a time”” (Dan. 7:25).³

“He . . . swore . . . that *it shall be* for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these *things* shall be finished” (Dan. 12:7).

The shattering of the power of the holy people in 12:7 lasts for 3½ times and is the same as the persecution of the saints in 7:25, which also lasts for 3½ times.

One of the main interpretations of this new view begins both the 1260 and 1290 days in Daniel 12 with the universal Sunday law.⁴ The 1260 days are seen to end with the universal death decree, and the 1290 days that continue for another 30 days are explained as two further 15-

day time periods. The first 15 days are the “one hour” in Revelation 17:12 interpreted according to the year-day principle ($360 \div 24 = 15$); the second 15 days are the “one hour” referred to in Revelation 18:10.

What we have here is an inappropriate mix of literal and prophetic time. While the 1260 days are counted as literal days, the last 30 days of the 1290 are seen as two prophetic hours (interpreted with the year-day principle). This mixing of literal and prophetic time indicates the confusion in this new view.

Finally, this new interpretation of the times in Daniel 12 also controverts clear statements of Ellen White. In 1880 she wrote, “I have borne the testimony since the passing of the time in 1844, that there should be no definite time set by which to test God’s people. The great test on time was in 1843 and 1844; and all who have set time since these great periods marked in prophecy were deceiving and being deceived.”⁵ Though it is true that Ellen White here speaks about date setting for the Second Advent, which the new view does not, there is no indication in her writings that any kind of prophetic time would play a role in the future.

In fact, in a letter from 1850 Ellen White mentions a Brother Hewit from Dead River who be-

lieved that the destruction of the wicked and the sleep of the dead was an abomination and that Ellen White was Jezebel. She then writes, "We told him of some of his errors in the past, that the 1335 days were ended and numerous errors of his. It had but little effect. His darkness was felt upon the meeting and it dragged."⁶ Some believe that in this statement she considers the phrase "the 1335 days were ended" to be one of the errors of Brother Hewit. The sentence, however, is generally understood to mean, "We told him of some of his errors in the past, [we told him] that the 1335 days were ended, and [we told him] many of his errors."

Otherwise we must ask, Why would Ellen White reprimand brother Hewit and not her husband and all the other pioneers who taught that the 1335 years were ended? In an article in *The Review and Herald* in 1857, James White wrote, "Evidences are conclusive that the 1335 days ended with the 2300, with the Midnight Cry in 1844."⁷ In the same paper, Uriah Smith in 1863 stated, "The 1290 and 1260 [years] end together in 1798."⁸ The fact that Ellen White nowhere argued against these statements supports the read-

ing of her sentence as generally understood. At the same time, this indicates that she herself placed the 1335 days in the past.

The evidence from Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy does not support the concept that the time prophecies in Daniel 12 are still in the future. The Adventist interpretation which, in harmony with the historicist principles of interpretation, places these time prophecies in the past is still the best solution to the difficult texts in Daniel 12:5-13.

REFERENCES

¹ See, for example, Marian G. Berry, *Warning!* (Brushton, N.Y.: Teach Services, 1990), p. 154; Kenneth Cox, *Daniel* (Coldwater, Mich.: Remnant Publications, 2005), p. 150; Robert N. Smith, Jr., *Sunday vs. Rapture* (Ft. Worth, Tex.: Roheka Books, 2002).

² *Evangelism*, p. 581.

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this article are quoted from *The New King James Version*.

⁴ Marian G. Berry, *Warning!*, op cit., p. 150.

⁵ *Life Sketches of James and Ellen White*, p. 221.

⁶ *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 6, p. 251.

⁷ James White, "The Judgment," *Review and Herald*, January 29, 1857, p. 100.

⁸ Uriah Smith, "Short Interviews With Correspondents," *Review and Herald* (February 24, 1863).

