

biblical
RESEARCH

Biblical Research Institute Release – 5

Time Prophecies in Daniel 12

Gerhard Pfandl
May 2005

Time Prophecies in Daniel 12

Gerhard Pfandl
Biblical Research Institute
May 2005

Time Prophecies in Daniel 12

Introduction

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 3 2 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. According to one interpretation, the 1335 days begin with the national Sunday law in America, and the 3 ½ times or 1260 days and the 1290 days with the universal Sunday law.²

Evaluation

This new proposal contains a number of problems which make this interpretation unacceptable:

1. The 3 ½ 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; namely, “scripture interprets scripture, one passage being the key to other passages.”³ If this principle is discarded, prophecy becomes a wax nose which can be bent in any direction the interpreter wants it to go.
2. 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 which all begin in the time of the author and end with the Second Advent:

¹ Marian G. Berry, *Warning!* (Brushton, NY: Teach Services, 1990), 154. Ronald Gary Stickney, *The Prophecy of Daniel 11 and Revelation* (Grand Junction, MI: Proclaim the Prophecy “Now” Seminar, n.d.). Robert N. Smith, Jr., *Sunday vs Rapture* (Ft. Worth, TX: Roheka Books, 2002).

² Berry, 154.

³ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, 581.

- a. Daniel 2 Babylon – 2nd Advent (stone kingdom)
- b. Daniel 7 Babylon – 2nd Advent (kingdom given
to the saints)
- c. Daniel 8 and 9 Medo-Persia – 2nd Advent (little horn
is broken)
- d. Daniel 10-12 Medo-Persia – 2nd Advent (resurrection)

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 historical outline; Daniel 7 introduces the little horn and emphasizes its political activities in history; and Daniel 8 building on Daniel 7 emphasizes the religious activities of the little horn. This underlines the fact that Daniel's prophecies must be interpreted in harmony with the "Scripture interprets Scripture" principle. Thus, common elements in different chapters of the book must refer to the same things or events. For example, the little horn in Daniel 7 and 8 must refer to the same historical power, not to two different powers. 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; and if the 3 ½ times in Daniel 7:25 refer to the past, so must the 3 ½ times in Daniel 12:7. To do otherwise makes a mockery of the "Scripture interprets Scripture" principle and leads to utter confusion.

- 3. The passage in Daniel 12:5-13 is seen as a new vision which contains time prophecies for the future. This view ignores the basic structure of Daniel's visions where visions are always followed by explanations.
 - a. Daniel 2 - vision (31-35), explanation (36-46).
 - b. Daniel 7 - vision (1-14), explanation (15-27).
 - c. Daniel 8-9 - vision (1-12), explanation (13-26;
9:24-27).
 - d. Daniel 10-12 - vision (11:2-12:4), explanation (12:5-
13).

While it is true that the vision in Daniel 11:2-12:4 is itself an explanation of the vision in Daniel 8, we must not overlook the fact that in Daniel 7, 8, and 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.

4. 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.” 12:5-13 is an epilogue to the preceding vision, and 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 be the fulfillment of *these wonders*?” The Hebrew word *pala*’ for “wonders” can be translated as “awesome events”⁴ or “wonderful events.”⁵ Since verse 5 does not refer to any events, “these wonders” can only refer to events seen in the vision in Daniel 11. The word *pala*’ is in fact used in 11:36 where it refers to the blasphemies spoken by the King of the North. It is also used in 8:24 where the little horn destroys “fearfully [*pala*].” Furthermore, in 12:7, 8 Daniel hears the words, “and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered *these things* shall be finished.” Because he does not understand what he heard, Daniel asks, “what shall be the end of *these things*?” Thus three times in 12:6-8 we have references to “these things/wonders.” Each

⁴ Ernest C. Lucas, *Daniel*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 296.

⁵ L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 928.

time they refer to the events of the vision in chapter 11. This clearly indicates that Daniel 12:5-13 is part of the vision of Daniel 11:2 -12:4, and not a new vision.

Furthermore, there is also a strong thematic and linguistic connection between the texts in 7:25 and 12:7.

7:25 [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.

12:7 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

The shattering of the power of the holy people in 12:7 lasts for 3 ½ times and is the same as the persecution of the saints in 7:25 which also lasts for 3 ½ times. This is further evidence that the times in Daniel 12 do not refer to the future but to the past.

5. M. Berry, one of the main proponents of this new view, begins both the 1260 and 1290 days in Daniel 12 with the universal Sunday law. The 1260 days, she believes, end with the universal death decree, the 1290 days continue for another 30 days. She explains the extra 30 days as two 15-day time periods. The first 15 days are the “one hour” in Revelation 17:12 (360 divided by 24 is 15), and the second 15 days are the “one hour” referred to in Revelation 18:10. What we have here is an amazing mix of literal and prophetic time. While the 1290 days are counted as literal days, the last thirty days of the 1290 are two prophetic hours which she interprets according to the year-day principle. This mixing of literal and prophetic time is an indication of the confusion in this new view.
6. Finally, this new interpretation of the times in Daniel 12 is also against 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 this great period marked in prophecy, were deceiving and being deceived."⁶ Now it is true that Ellen White here speaks about date setting for the Second Advent which the new view does not, nevertheless, 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 believed 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."⁷ Some believe that in this statement she places the 1335 days in the future. However, the sentence 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] numerous errors of his." Otherwise we must ask, why Ellen White reprimand brother Hewit and not her husband and all the other pioneers who taught that the 1335 years were ended? James White in an article in the *Review and Herald* in 1857 wrote, "Evidences are conclusive that the 1335 days ended with the 2300, with the Midnight Cry in 1844. Then the angel [Rev. x, 1-6] swore that time should be no longer."⁸ In the same paper Uriah Smith in 1863 stated, "Now it is manifestly wrong to date the 1290 days from the setting up of the papacy, when the prophecy says they are to date from the taking away of paganism,⁹ which was thirty years previous. We therefore date the 1290 days from the year 508; and as the 1335 days are spoken of in connection with these, no possible reason can be

⁶ Ellen White, *Life Sketches of James and Ellen White*, 221.

⁷ Idem, *Manuscript Release*, 6:251.

⁸ James White, "The Judgment," *Review and Herald*, January 29, 1857, 100

⁹ Uriah Smith saw the daily as a symbol for paganism rather than for the ministry of Jesus.

given why they do not commence at the same point. The 1290 and 1260 end together in 1798.”¹⁰ The fact that Ellen White nowhere argued against these statements supports the reading of her sentence as generally understood. At the same time this indicates that she herself placed the 1335 days in the past.

The Adventist Interpretation

In Daniel 12:5-13 the prophet is still by the river Tigris, where he was in 10:4. Now he overhears a conversation between two heavenly figures and eventually joins in. This passage parallels Daniel 8:13, 14 in several ways. Both take place besides a river, both involve two anonymous heavenly beings, and both involve the question “How long?”

“How long shall be the fulfillment of these wonders?” (12:6) – as indicated above, this refers back to the vision in chapter 11. Gabriel had given Daniel this long explanation to help him understand what will happen to God’s people (10:14). Now two other heavenly beings appear, and one of them, for Daniel’s information, asks Michael, the man clothed in linen, a question. The answer in verse 7 defines the time of the end as that which follows the 1260 years of papal supremacy and persecution. “In this answer Daniel was actually given the other half of the answer to the question asked by these same celestial attendants in 8:13. That question concerned the trampling under foot by the papal power of both sanctuary and host. In 8:14 the answer given was that the sanctuary would be trampled down till 1844. Now the answer is given that the host will be trampled down till 1798. And in the ensuing enquiry by Daniel and answer by Michael will be given the relationship between these two periods.”¹¹

1. 1290 days (12:11) – “And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away and the abomination of desolation is set

¹⁰ Uriah Smith, “Short Interviews with Correspondents,” *Review and Herald*, February 24. 1863.

¹¹ Ernest W. Marter, *Daniel’s Philosophy of History* (Bracknell, England: Newbold College, 1967), 115.

up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days.” The taking away of the *tamid* (the daily) is mentioned three times in the book of Daniel:

Daniel 8:11	No specific time is connected with it.
Daniel 11:31	Again, no specific time or date is given.
Daniel 12:11	“From the time . . . 1290 days.”

It is important to note the parallelism between Daniel 11:31 and 12:11

11:31 Forces shall be mustered by him [king of the North] and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress: then they shall *take away the daily sacrifices*, and *place there the abomination of desolation*.

12:11 And from the time that the *daily sacrifice is taken away*, and the *abomination of desolation is set up*, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days.

The two texts are clearly parallel and refer to the same events in history. Now if 11:31 refers to the past so must 12:11, because “Scripture interprets Scripture.” If the two events in 11:31 and 12:11 are not the same, this principle becomes irrelevant.

In Daniel 8:11 “the daily” refers to Christ’s intercessory ministry which was usurped by the work of the priests through the mass and the confessional. By sacrificing Christ anew in every mass, the papacy has removed Christ’s heavenly ministry in the thinking of the people. How long has this been going on?

In May 1998, Pope John Paul II issued his pastoral letter *Dies Domini* in which he challenged Christians “to ensure that civil legislation respects their duty to keep Sunday holy.”¹² In

¹² Pope John Paul II, “Dies Domini”(May 31, 1998), section 67. For the text of this Apostolic Letter see the Vatican website: www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii. *Dies Domini* can be found under his Apostolic Letters. Retrieved 5/15/03.

the same letter he speaks about the attendance at Sunday mass. Early in the history of the Christianity, he says, people had to be reminded to attend mass. Sometimes the Church had to resort to specific canonical precepts: “This was the case in a number of local Councils from the fourth century onwards (as at the Council of Elvira of 300, which speaks not of an obligation but of penalties after three absences) and most especially from the sixth century onwards (as at the Council of Agde in 506). These decrees of local Councils led to a universal practice, the obligatory character of which was taken as something quite normal.”¹³

Here the pope says that particularly from the beginning of the sixth century on there were universal statutes which made it obligatory for people to attend mass. As Seventh-day Adventists we say that in the sixth century the daily was taken away and the abomination of desolation was established. We begin the 1290 years with 508. Why? Primarily, because deducting 1290 from 1798, which is understood to be the end of the 1260 and 1290 years, brings us to 508.

What happened in 508? In 496, Clovis, king of the Franks, became a Roman Catholic. All the other Germanic tribes who had dismantled the Roman Empire were Arians and therefore in opposition to the pope in Rome. Clovis defeated the Visigoths and became the first civil power to join up with the rising Church of Rome. France, therefore, is called the oldest daughter of the Roman Catholic Church.

“After his great victory over the Goths in 507 . . . together with his Burgundian allies, Clovis came to Tours, probably in the middle of 508, to hold a victory celebration. There he met Byzantine envoys who presented to him the decree naming him an honorary consul [of Rome].”¹⁴ The joining of the civil and the religious powers (Franks and papacy) at that time was an important step in “setting up the abomination of desolation,” which refers to the unscriptural teachings of the papacy and their

¹³ Ibid., section 47.

¹⁴ Herwig Wolfram, *The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Peoples* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 222.

enforcement through the union of church and state. It is one of the ironies of history that France, the power that helped the papacy at the beginning of the 1290 years, was the power that brought about its demise at the end of this time period, when Napoleon in 1798 had Pope Pius VI taken prisoner.

2. The 1335 days (12:12) – “Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days.” No specific event is mentioned for the beginning of the 1335 days. The context however seems to imply that it began at the same time as the 1290 days. If this is correct, the 1335 days ended in 1843-44 at the time when the first angel’s message was being preached. (This is also the last year of the 2300 year prophecy which runs from the fall of 1843 to the fall of 1844).

The 1335-day prophecy is not mentioned in connection with the activity of the little horn power. Rather it is related to a special blessing for those who live at the end of that time period. Another blessing for the time of the end is found in Rev 14:13, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”

Blessed indeed were those who lived at the time of the Advent expectancy when the first angel’s message was preached in England and America. And blessed are those who die in the faith of the third angel’s message in the time of the end, for they will take part in the special resurrection which will precede the Second Advent and the first resurrection.

Conclusion

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.



Biblical Research Institute
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

12501 Old Columbia Pike

Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600

<http://biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org>

E-mail: biblicalresearch@gc.adventist.org

Phone: 301-680-6790

Fax: 301-680-6788

biblical
RESEARCH