

LESSON 4

If anything, this week our author covers even less ground than last week. Therefore, I will begin again by integrating his polemic with no more than the occasional, brief, convenient comment in transit, then close by offering my integrated critique.

Our Author's Polemic

Our author plans to return to Dan. 7 later. So this week he offers “a quick overview . . . , with an emphasis on its climactic scene: the heavenly judgment, which leads to the return of Christ and the fulfillment of our great hopes as believers in Jesus.”

This week's study builds on last week's in that the “key to understanding Daniel 7 is found in Daniel 2.” The former covers the same ground as the latter in that the four beasts of 7 depict the same four kingdoms as 2. Moreover, both prophecies terminate in the establishment of God's eternal Kingdom. The difference is that 7 provides a key element not explicitly expressed in Daniel 2: the great judgment in heaven that leads directly to the second coming of Jesus and the end of this world as we know it. In short, in Daniel 7 we are shown the pre-Advent judgment. [Introduction]

This again invites the adoption of the obvious principle of prophetic interpretation: [T]he foundation of the prophecies in Daniel is based on history. Daniel sweeps over world history from ancient times right through to ours and beyond. If that point wasn't made clear enough in Daniel 2, it's repeated in Daniel 7. [Monday]

It is not until Wednesday, though, that our author passingly opines this evidence: Daniel 7 is full of symbols: a lion with wings, a beast with iron teeth, a little horn that has eyes. Why would a time prophecy, imbedded among these symbols, be anything but symbolic itself? [Wednesday]

He now stresses yet another “important parallel between Daniel 2 and Daniel 7”: In Daniel 2, the iron, the fourth power, arises after Greece (*vss. 32, 33, 39-45*), and, though taking another form, it remains until the end. It was destroyed only when God set up His kingdom. In Daniel 7, with the fourth beast, the fourth power, the same thing happens. The fourth beast, which arose after Greece (*vss. 6, 7*), remains until the end of time (though taking another form), when it is destroyed at the establishment of God's eternal kingdom (*vss. 19-27*). [Monday]

Furthermore, God establishes his eternal Kingdom “*after the judgment in heaven*”.

Our author offers one final, salient, interpretive detail in answering the obvious query: Who is this little horn? The Protestant Reformers almost unanimously saw it as papal Rome. Indeed, even before the Reformation, some Jewish scholars also identified the little horn as the papal phase of the fourth beast. It's hard to see how it could be anything else. In fact, it can 't [*sic*] be anything else. You might need faith to believe in the Second Coming or the resurrection of the dead, but you don't need much faith to see papal Rome as the power depicted here. [Tuesday]

Nor does he merely assert his opinion that “(t)here's no question here regarding the identity of this little-horn power.” Rather, he briefly lists the four attributes of this Little Horn which “have been powerfully and graphically recorded in history.” It:

- arises from pagan Rome (Dan. 7:19, 20);
- makes war with the saints and prevails against them (Dan. 7:21, 25);
- thinks to change “times and laws” (Dan. 7:25);
- is blasphemous (Dan. 7:25). [Thursday]

Finally, our author searches his history books for the one interpretive detail of most interest in this entire series of lessons, the broad *timing* of the heavenly judgment:

If we date the beginning of papal Rome to the late fifth, early sixth century, 1,260 years later brings us to the late eighteenth, or early nineteenth, century. Again, history bears out that the long period of papal political dominion, which included massive persecution, petered out in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The crucial point here is that, according to this prophecy, the judgment in heaven comes *after* the 1,260-day prophetic period, sometime after that phase of persecution that ended in the late eighteenth, or early nineteenth, century yet before the Second Coming. [Wednesday]

Indeed, this simple, “crucial point” virtually serves our author as a broad summary: [W]hat's clear so far from Daniel 7 is that this massive judgment scene in heaven leads to the establishment of God's kingdom and occurs sometime after the 1,260 years of papal persecution, sometime after the late eighteenth, or early nineteenth, century but before the Second Coming. [Friday]

Evaluation

Interpreting the Sacred Word

By and large, I agree with our author that our prophet's initial vision, Dan. 7, closely parallels Nebuchadnezzar's first dream, Dan. 2. Certainly, the former's four prominent beasts depict precisely the same successive, "world" empires as the latter's metals. And of course, they both culminate in the establishment of God's eternal Kingdom.

However, our author goes too far in claiming that the "key to understanding Daniel 7 is found in Daniel 2." For the former may be readily interpreted quite *independently* of the latter merely by applying the same conservative hermeneutics of Bible study. In brief, we should sit humbly at Daniel's inspired feet and *permit him to teach us*.

Moreover, although I have emphatically rejected our author's appeal to *historicism* as crucial to interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's first dream, I am quite prepared to accept its prominent rôle as a hermeneutic for Daniel's initial vision *if he so intimates himself*.

As an example, our prophet does not even hint that his ""time, times and half a time"", 7:25, is symbolic, even though symbols punctuate his vision. For one thing, the Aramaic noun behind *time* is 'iddān, which he elsewhere employs *literally*, as in 4:16, 23, 25, 32. In fact, it wholly belies our author's polemic that the context of the "seven times" is *symbolic*! Moreover, those ""time, times and half a time"" are not even embedded *amongst* the symbols of 7! They surface in its largely literal *interpretation* alone. For another, the vision of Dan. 7 majors in many *literal* elements. For instance, neither the Ancient of Days, nor the Son of man, nor even the saints are portrayed in other than entirely *literal* terms. Likewise, neither the persecution which they suffer, nor the judgment that releases them, nor God's Kingdom which they receive is *symbolic*. Our author has no rational reason whatever, therefore, to impose symbolism upon the ""time, times and half a time"" of that persecution.

Again, I remain wholly unmoved by our author's opinion that, in Dan. 2, Rome remains until the Eschaton, albeit in another, papal form. It is simply absurd to ignore Daniel's *own* interpretation of the iron-clay legs as a *single* kingdom, partly strong and partly weak. I am equally unconvinced by our author's stance that, in Dan. 7, Rome remains until the Eschaton in the form of the papal Little Horn. Unless our prophet invites us to do so, we must never blur the bounds of his symbolic fourth beast and Little Horn! Indeed, if the former lives on within the latter, why does he portray the nemesis of the *latter*, 26, yet record the defeat of the *former* as well, 11b?

Searching the Secular History Books

Regardless, has our author persuasively established from his crucial history books that the identity of the Little Horn is beyond doubt? Scarcely! On one hand, even if Roman Catholicism arose from pagan Rome, blasphemous and persecuting, it is one of the weakest arguments on record to read into trying to ""change the set times and the laws"" any attack upon the seventh-day Sabbath in favour of Sunday sanctity. For one thing, back of *set times* is the Aramaic noun *zeman*. This denotes predetermined time, either a *period*, as in 2:16; 7:12, or an *instant*, as in 6:10, 13; 7:22. And this begs the question, Which *zeman* did Roman Catholicism strive to alter?

For another, behind *laws* is the Aramaic noun *dāt*. Apart from its sole application to a *divine* edict in 6:5, Daniel reserves it for *secular* use, as in 2:13, 15; 6:8, 12, 15. Rather than predicting any attack upon *God's* Decalogue, the Little Horn's intention to ""change the set times and the laws"" invites the simple reading of its determination to overthrow the official policies and practices of whichever *nation* it subdues.

On the other, although it is impossible, within the bounds of this review, to parade the historical evidence, the decisive fact remains that *Roman Catholicism scarcely revised the Decalogue!* Conservative Christians like Seventh-day Adventists would do very well to realise that *early Christians were faced with several options over the precise format of the Decalogue*. Virtually all that Roman Catholicism did was to *select amongst* those alternatives. They exercised little if any originality whatever.

A general comment is apropos, too, at this point. Seventh-day Adventists are not alone in shouting “**It Fits!!**” over certain *historical* details which appear to interpret *prophetic* details. For instance, the so-called Jehovah’s Witnesses parade the fact that the United Nations arose from the ruins of the League of Nations as fulfilling the first beast’s dramatic healing, Rev. 13:3. Of course, “**It Fits!!**” However, Seventh-day Adventists peruse John’s words, shouting “**It Fits!!**” just as loudly over what they deem the recent revival of papal Rome! Which simply underscores the crucial fact that the paramount principle for interpreting Bible prophecy is to *listen to God’s inspired envoy*. Only when we are quite certain about *what he teaches us* dare we search for confirmation – if there is any to be found – within the annals of history. Interested readers may observe further comments on historicism in my Addenda.

Seventh-day Adventism’s Temporal Logic in Dan. 7

Quite apart from the fact that our author edges towards 1844 with the substantial assistance of his dubious *historicism*, where, precisely, in Daniel’s *blueprint* does he glean that “the judgment in heaven comes after the 1,260-day prophetic period”? I will examine our prophet’s own temporal setting of that judgment in a moment. For now, it suffices to notice that *the Little Horn continues its characteristic boasting right through that judgment*, 8b-11a. Likewise, the persecution which it inflicts upon God’s saints continues unabated, 21, “*until* (Aramaic, ‘*ad dî*, as in 4:23, 25, 32, 33; 5:21; 7:4, 9, 11) the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favour of the saints”, 22. Compare Daniel’s transparent intimation of *continuity* of narrative in 25f.

In other words, although our prophet’s simple, inspired foresight was that *persecution would rage incessantly until the Eschaton*, our author rides roughshod over his words by forcing them into his vastly *ill-fitting* mold of historicism! This may not be ugly, intellectual dishonesty. But at very least, it is woeful, scholarly dereliction!

“But what about the fourth beast?”, I hear a host of devout Seventh-day Adventist historicists protest. “Its horns are ten kingdoms which it spawns!” Of course they are. There is no mistaking the inspired interpretation in 24. However, this is no hindrance at all to my polemic. For nothing in Daniel’s details intimates that any power reigns only through the extinction of its predecessor(s). On one hand, the detail which most invites such an interpretation is “[a]fter them”, 24b. Yet the Little Horn emerges among the ten, 8. So our prophet’s broad temporal interest is only in the *sequence* in which each character enters the scene. On the other, he actually clarifies that, *while the fourth beast is in power, all four of his predecessors live on*, albeit subserviently, 12, *precisely* as cogent exegesis of his interpretation of 2 concludes.

The ten horn kingdoms are mentioned merely to explain the Little Horn’s genesis, 7:8. Daniel seeks clarification, 15f. Yet, except for mention of the saints, he hears no more than he first gleaned from the statue, 17f. There will be four vast empires, but God’s Kingdom will prevail. Only through persisting, 19-22, he learns that the fourth kingdom will spawn ten more, three of which will be routed by an eleventh, 23f.

Whatever these horns signify, another major, temporal parallel with Daniel’s initial interpretation sheds great light on the overall message of his book. The temporal logic of 7:8-11 convinces loyal Seventh-day Adventists that its judgment is pre-Advent. Daniel first notices the Little Horn in 8. *As he watches*, 9a, the judgment convenes, 9f. *As he keeps watching*, 11a, the Little Horn regains his attention. This judgment certainly commences, then, *while this cruel tyrant is still active*. However, there is still more for Daniel, fully absorbed, to monitor! The great trouble is, Seventh-day Adventism has long been so totally absorbed in extracting its distinctive dogma from this portion of Sacred Scripture that it has scarcely perused its full message.

As he continues his close scrutiny with no interruption whatever, 7:11b, *it is not the Little Horn, but the fourth beast*, that is destroyed. The former perishes at the Eschaton, too. Yet Daniel hears of this only in 26. What counts is that, as in 2, so in 7, *the Eschaton fells the fourth empire*. This one detail refutes all claim that Daniel is deterministic! Pagan Rome is long gone, so neither 2 nor 7 can ever be fulfilled *in toto*.

Summary

Our author is certainly correct in observing close parallels between Daniel's two great forecasts in 2 and 7. Yet sadly, it is equally true that no building is sounder than its foundation. So, having defended his defective interpretation of the former beyond Rome, he erects a tottering edifice in also applying historicism to the latter. Moreover, if we humbly allow Daniel to tutor us, it soon clarifies that the parallels between 2 and 7 are much closer than our author realises. Above all, *in neither was the establishment of God's climactic Kingdom scheduled beyond **Christ's** day.*

Addendum A

Seventh-day Adventism deems itself virtually the sole practitioner of historicism, the **one** key that unlocks Daniel and the Revelation, which passed from John through the Protestant Reformers. Moreover, neither preterism nor futurism, the only other viable alternatives, bears fruit in persuasive interpretations. Worse, *both methodologies were devised by **Roman Catholics** as deliberate impediments to the progress of the Protestant Reformation.* Of course these tools of the devil must be repulsed!

The Actual Derivation of the Year-day Principle of Prophetic Interpretation

This cursory review would be rather inadequate without some attention to the 70 "weeks" of Dan. 9. For here, at very least, at first sight the year-day equation definitely appears to enjoy substantial credibility. It is best, though, to reserve comment in entirety until our author has been afforded the courtesy of defending his thesis.

Even then, although my readers would be very well advised thoroughly to check the *bona fides* of the facile, sectarian assertion that – whether or not they are credible *per se* – both preterism and futurism are pernicious offspring of Roman Catholicism, one cardinal rebuttal alone is possible within the strict bounds of this review.

If derivation really does matter, Seventh-day Adventists should realise that *historicism itself was also championed by a prominent **Roman Catholic** scholar!* No less an authority than Dr. Fromm himself, this Church's renowned historian, admits that, except for the 490 years, Dan. 9:24-27, "there was no application of the year-day principle... until we come to the twelfth century", *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers*, I (Washington: R&H, 1950), 241f. He also notes that Joachim of Floris, the twelfth-century **Catholic** abbot and scholar, "for the first time applied the year-day principle to the 1260-day prophecy" of the Book of Revelation, *ibid.*, 700. This is confirmed in his very helpful charts that survey centuries of interpretation of John's book since his day, *ibid.*, 458f., 896f. You search almost in vain here for even a *hint* of historicism before Joachim's striking innovation! Rather, the time forecasts of both Daniel and Revelation "were as yet restricted to literal time", *ibid.*, 459. In brief, if Seventh-day Adventism must cast the emotive shadow of Catholicism across both preterism and futurism, *the very same shadow falls heavily across all of historicism, too!*

Worse, the historical records reveal that *the Reformation inherited historicism from Joachim of Floris, not John of Patmos.* And we are deeply indebted once more to Dr. Fromm's extremely diligent research for the crucial details. On one hand, our historian details Joachim's direct influence on several of the Protestant Reformers:

"Joachimites"... Spiritual Franciscans... Dante, Wyclif, Cusa, Huss, and some of the Reformers were definitely molded by certain principles enunciated by Joachim. *Ibid.*, 685.

For such fine details see *ibid.*, II (1948), 58f., 91, 150f., 296, 302f., 342f., 396f., 411, 628.

On the other, Joachim's influence in general was quite astounding. For example: Joachim's... 1260-year period... paved the way for the application of the year-day principle to the longer time periods of prophecy. *Ibid.*, I, 700.

He is important not only contemporarily, for the new era that he introduced, but for his far-reaching influence upon exposition for centuries to come. *Ibid.*, 683.

In connection with the 1260 days of the symbolic woman—the church—of Revelation 12..., Joachim makes a remarkable application of the year-day principle, destined to reverberate through the centuries following... *Ibid.*, 713.

Interestingly, the same question has been faced squarely and honestly by Swedish C. O. Jonsson, in evaluating the sectarian dogma of Jehovah's Witness faith which he served enthusiastically for more than a quarter century before being hurled onto its scrap heap in callous circumstances. What counts here is his conclusion that Joachim of Floris, the renowned 12th-century Roman Catholic abbot and scholar initiated a new tradition of interpretation, a tradition in which the "year-day principle" was the very basis of prophetic interpretations... Most of the reformers believed in that principle, and it was largely accepted among Protestant scholars far into the nineteenth century. *The Gentile Times Reconsidered* (Atlanta: Commentary Press, 1986²), 16.

Moreover, nearly six centuries passed until such historical details as our author parades were generally accepted! Most Reformers saw a grossly corrupt papal system behind John's sea beast and Babylon alike. However, not until **1798** did Edward King conclude that the 1,260 days had just ended, *ibid.*, II, 765-770, IV (1954), 114f.!

Likewise, if the almost score of suggested dates of the broad era are diagrammed, (Reformation, *ibid.*, II, 528-531; post-Reformation, *ibid.*, 784-787) the striking fact that *they sweep clear across almost four centuries* between 1500 and 1900 scarcely engenders much confidence in historicism as a cogent principle of prophetic interpretation! At least one of a poorly aimed blunderbuss' pellets will normally still hit its "target"!

Although it is merely of secondary salience here, Froom also details the continuum of Jewish expositions of Daniel's prophecies for us, *ibid.*, II, 184-202, but especially 194. Compare Jonsson, *op. cit.*, 14f., who provides a convenient summary.

Finally, it is Dr. Froom as well who demonstrates quite conclusively that, in general, *Christian expositors between John and Joachim were preterists, not historicists.*

[T]he 1260-, 1290-, 1335, and 2300-day periods of Daniel 7, 8, 9, 11, and 12, and corresponding periods in the Apocalypse were not... regarded as years in the early church. They would not have thought such long periods possible, for time was fore-shortened to the gaze of the early churchmen, who expected the end of all things soon. The extension of the year-day principle to these other periods could not have occurred until such datings would seem to be within possibility, but eventually it was inevitably so extended by Joachim and his followers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. *Ibid.*, I, 889f.

"The interpretation of the three and a half times as literal years... was common to the early fathers", *ibid.*, 248. For instance, Froom specifically admits that Irenaeus, a prominent second-century Church Father, typifies his fellows in viewing Daniel's 3½ times as literal years, *ibid.*, 247f. Likewise, a century later Hippolytus read Daniel's 1,260 days literally, and expected the End in A.D. 500, *ibid.*, 276, 278. Clement of Alexandria, his contemporary, understood his 2,300 evenings-mornings as literal time, *ibid.*, 266. And in the fourth century, Jerome not only viewed his 3½ times as literal years but had quite an imminent perspective upon final events, *ibid.*, 447.

Such is the fabric of Seventh-day Adventism's actual inheritance, pending a review of the history of interpreting Dan. 9:24-27. What, though, of its historical evidence in supposed support of such prime historicist dates as 457 B.C. and A.D. 538, 1798?

Addendum B

1798 and all that...

by Eduardo Martínez Rancaño (slightly edited)

The dates 508, 538 and 1798 are reasonably familiar for many Seventh-day Adventists. Such dates and their presumed relevance have not been learnt in encyclopaedias or text books, but rather in so-called "Bible studies" and through reading Church literature. What most adherents ignore, though, is that these dates became prominent in the Seventh-day Adventist milieu since they were intermediate stepping stones in William Miller's efforts to prove 1843 was going to be this old world's last year.

Seventh-day Adventism has long forgotten most of Miller's fifteen so-called "prophetic proofs". In fact, its alleged chronological connection between the 2,300 evening-mornings of Dan. 8:14 and the 70 weeks of Dan. 9 is only a modified form of one of his "proofs". Miller actually started at the Cross, which he dated in A.D. 33. Since he assumed that the 70 weeks ended with the Cross, he merely subtracted 490 years from 33 and, voilà, he arrived at -457, which he assumed was the same as

457 B.C., irrespective of who was reigning in Persia at that time or to whom the purported decree to have Jerusalem rebuilt was granted. Add 1,810 “extra” years to A.D. 33 and we get to A.D. 1843.

The year 1798 was believed to be connected with 1843 by means of the 1335-day period of Dan. 12:12 and the 1290-day period of Dan. 12:11. The reasoning was that 1798 marked the end of the “time, times and half a time” of Dan. 12:7, an alleged period lasting 1,260 years and starting in A.D. 538. The 1,290 “years” were supposed to end at the same time as the 1,260 years, so they must have begun in A.D. 508. The 1,335 “years”, on the other hand, were supposed to have begun at the same time as the 1,290 years, so their close would take us 45 years beyond A.D. 1798, thereby “confirming” the validity of the 1843 date for the Second Coming.

When the “Seventh-Month Movement” took hold of Millerite fancy, they shifted the ending year to 1844, of course, and “discovered” that the crucifixion didn’t take place in A.D. 33, but in A.D. 31, “in the middle of the week”. The end of the prophecy of the 70 weeks was said to take us not to Christ’s Crucifixion, but to Stephen’s stoning, and Ezra was identified as the person who received Artaxerxes’ authorisation to have Jerusalem rebuilt. Curiously enough, though, the dates A.D. 508, 538 and 1798 were never moved by the Millerites, and Seventh-day Adventists have retained them, despite the fact that they no longer fit with the “corrected” year of 1844.

Leaving exegesis aside and ignoring the delusion behind the year-day ideology, what is the actual relevance of A.D. 508, 538 and 1798, and, most saliently, how did William Miller reach such dates?

Very briefly, Miller derived A.D. 508 from his conviction that:

- 666, the number of the beast, was a time period, measured in years, marking the duration of Roman Paganism;
- the beginning of Roman Paganism was to be computed from the first contact of the Roman Republic with Hasmonean Israel (contrary to Seventh-day Adventism belief today, Miller understood that the Maccabees were relevant for a correct understanding of Daniel 11 and 12);
- the treaty between the Maccabees and Rome took place in 158 B.C. – a self-deceiving reckoning.

Ignoring the non-existence of the year zero, he calculated the end of Paganism as follows: $-158 + 666 = 508$. There are several problems here, apart from exegesis:

- 1 If the year 0 had been taken into account, the “correct” year for the end of Paganism would have been A.D. 509, not 508;
- 2 According to the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, actual historical evidence requires that the peace treaty between Rome and Israel be dated in 161 B.C. Were this and the previous datum accepted, the “correct” year for the end of Paganism would have been A.D. 506, not 508 or 509.
- 3 Fatally, there’s no evidence that any sixth century year marked the end of Roman Paganism. As far as history is concerned, it was officially outlawed by a decree of Emperor Theodosius, and this took place in either A.D. 380 or 381, when Christianity was made the State religion.

Now, A.D. 538, based, as it is, on A.D. 508, has just lost all significance! In Millerite and Seventh-day Adventist literature, this year is supposed to mark the start of the abomination that causes desolation, that is, the launch of the Catholic Church! This would have been accomplished by the authorisation of the Eastern Emperor Justinian, whose troops eased the pope’s power by removing the Arian powers of the Ostrogoths and the Heruli from Italy! Of course, early Seventh-day Adventists fell easy prey to such nonsense because they were Arian sympathisers themselves. So they thought that the Arians were much better than the Catholics! According to actual historical sources, Arian barbarians continued to exist in Italy after A.D. 538, so there doesn’t seem to be an alibi that would justify the relevance of that date.

As for A.D. 1798, based as it is on groundless dates, it is equally groundless! In the parlance of both Seventh-day Adventism and Millerism, this year is important because the papacy received its “fatal wound” at that time, when Pius VI was taken captive on 20th February. If moving the pope from Rome was the wound, it must have healed when the pope returned to Rome, I guess. This took place in 1799: when Pius VI died in exile, a new Roman pope was chosen. The 1798 “captivity” is a non-event in Catholic history. The Avignon schism in the 14th and 15th centuries was much more serious. This is ample proof that the scenario whereby the Roman Catholic Church is presented as being crippled in the days of the Seventh-day Adventist pioneers as a result of this “fatal wound” 45 years earlier is severely distorted.