

Futurist Results and the Principle of Association

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The Principle of Association

By the "principle of association" I mean that if a prophecy which lacks symbols is closely associated with a chapter that uses symbols, both chapters may be interpreted in the same symbolic way. This concept is widely accepted when dealing with Dan 8 and Dan 9, but Dan 12 contains time periods which a growing number of Seventh-day Adventist interpreters wish to isolate from related passages.

Daniel 8 and 9

No agnostic, infidel, or atheist, has ever been able to disprove the prophecy recorded here in Daniel.¹

The reference here is to the seventy weeks prophecy of Dan 9, and I fully agree. It is too robust for any to gainsay.² But why is this statement true? On what basis can we make such assertions? None of its enemies have been able to disprove the seventy week prophecy. If the language of Dan 9 is literal (the chapter contains no symbols), and if the principle of isolation therefore demands that we apply any time periods in Dan 9 literally, would that not have the unintended effect of challenging the messianic import of the prophecy? Would this not accomplish what no agnostic, infidel, or atheist had been able to achieve?³ Once we set the principle of isolation in motion, the results that follow from it might be other than we had hoped.

So what's wrong with this picture? What is wrong is that Dan 9 can't be separated from Dan 8. There is a deep connection between the two chapters and even though Dan 9 does not use symbols, Dan 8 does. More than this, Dan 8 speaks of time and uses it symbolically. (The "2,300 evening-mornings" of Dan 8:14 is a symbolic use of time.)⁴ So yes, it would be entirely consistent to approach both chapters in the same way, even though on other counts they differ with respect to symbolism. It is not only appropriate but necessary to interpret the seventy weeks of Dan 9 symbolically, even though there is no symbolism in Dan 9 and despite the fact that "weeks" is not used

¹ Kenneth Cox, *Daniel: A Closer Look at the Book That Tells What Will Happen in the End Times* (Coldwater, MI: Remnant Publications, 2005), p. 111.

² In the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 97a) the rabbis pronounce a curse on those who study the time prophecies, but they make no effort to show that Christian exegesis of Dan 9 is chronologically incorrect.

³ In the third century a man named Porphyry did challenge the church's christocentric interpretation, claiming that the prophecy was not a prophecy but a history. Note that his challenge against the Christian position was predicated on the idea of using literal rather than symbolic time.

⁴ Of course Porphyry would challenge the use of symbolic time in Dan 8 as well, but we're not dealing with Porphyry here.

symbolically anywhere else in Scripture. What requires this interpretation is Dan 9's association with Dan 8.

The special genius of Seventh-day Adventism is that we have always insisted on taking Dan 8 and 9 together. What we learned about time in the one chapter, we applied to the other. Anyone who does this consistently, where "evening-mornings" combine to make days and where "weeks" are combinations that have days as their component parts, is a Seventh-day Adventist at heart. Our primary focus here, however, is not on Dan 8 and 9 but on Dan 10-12.

Daniel 10-12

Time in Bible prophecy can be either literal or figurative. Jeremiah prophesied the 70-year captivity of his people literally (See Jeremiah 25:12).

When a prophecy is figurative or symbolic, it will use beasts, horns, crowns, etc., to represent something else. The time represented will be figurative or symbolic also. Examples would be:

Daniel 7 – where nations and powers are depicted as beasts with wings and horns, etc.

Daniel 8 – also depicts nations and powers as beasts and horns and speaks of 2,300 days which represent 2,300 years.

Revelation 12:14 – pictures the church as a woman with eagle's wings flying into the wilderness for a time, times and a half time

Starting with chapter 10 there are no symbols or beasts.⁵

This is another valid observation and I would not want to minimize its significance, but merely point out that its implications could be misunderstood. The statement in itself is true and potentially useful. What it reminds me of, or makes me think of, however, is Dan 9 in relation to Dan 8. The seventy weeks bring us to Christ in the first century A.D. only if we interpret them symbolically, and yet there are no symbols in Dan 9. On what basis can we put forward a symbolic interpretation of the time references in Dan 9:24-27 that would bring us to Christ in the first century A.D.? It is the association of chap. 9 with chap. 8 that makes it possible to do this, bringing the two chapters together, so that we interpret the time references in both of them symbolically.

Does Dan 12 have any associations, or is it isolated from the rest of Daniel and from Revelation? Is the reference to "a time, times and half a time" in Dan 12 somehow different from "a time, times and half a time" in Dan 7? Some might wish to say so, but the language (in translation) is identical. Do "1,290 days" and "1,335 days" in Dan 12 follow a pattern similar to that of "1,260 days" in Rev 11 and 12? Do the chapters linked to Dan 12 on the basis of similar time expressions make any use of symbols? If so, would the principle of association not apply here as it obviously does in the case of Dan 8 and 9?

⁵ Cox, p. 142.

I submit that Dan 12:7 is closely parallel to Dan 7:25, where we find beasts with wings, multiple horns, and iron claws. In using identical terms it is *not* the angel's purpose to show that the contexts for these two passages are unrelated. That's not what such parallels are for. Correspondingly, Dan 12:11 and 12:12 use language closely similar to Rev 11:3, where God uses olive trees and lamps as His witnesses, and where both Sodom and Egypt are said to be cities – or rather one city. This is symbolism. They also use language similar to Rev 12:6, where a huge red dragon has seven heads and ten horns, and a woman wears a crown of twelve stars. We must bring these passages together, because if we do not bring them together we will never understand them separately. See table 1.

Table 1
Some Related Passages

| | |
|-----------|-------------------------------|
| | |
| Dan 7:25 | a time, times and half a time |
| Dan 12:7 | a time, times and half a time |
| Dan 12:11 | 1,290 days |
| Dan 12:12 | 1,335 days |
| Rev 11:2 | 42 months |
| Rev 11:3 | 1,260 days |
| Rev 11:9 | three and a half days |
| Rev 11:11 | three and a half days |
| Rev 12:6 | 1,260 days |
| Rev 12:14 | a time, times and half a time |
| Rev 13:5 | forty-two months |

These references do not all refer to the same period of time historically, but all use similar language. "1,260 days," taken literally, is three and a half years (on the assumption that a day consists of 360 days). "Three and a half days," taken symbolically, is also three and a half years. So there is a relationship between the "three and a half days" of Rev 11:3 and 9 and the "1,260 days" of Rev 11:3 and 12:6, although when applied, the lengths of time being referred to are different.

By contrast, the "time, times and half a time" of Dan 7:25; 12:7; and Rev 12:14 all do refer to the same period of time. The "42 months" of Rev 11:2 and "forty-two months" of Rev 13:5 are the same. The "1,260 days" of Rev 11:3 and 12:6 are also the same.

Table 2
Three Sets of Equivalent Terms

| Periods |
|---|
| A time, times and half a time (Dan 7:25) = A time, times and half a time (Dan 12:7) = A time, times and half a time (Rev 12:14) |
| 42 months (Rev 11:2) = Forty-two months (Rev 13:5) |
| 1,260 days (Rev 11:3) = 1,260 days (Rev 12:6) |

More is true. The "time, times and half a time," the "forty-two months," and the "1,260 days" are all the same as each other, as well as being the same as themselves when encountered in different passages. In each case the amount of symbolic time is three and a half symbolic years, or 1260 literal years.

Table 3
Three Terms Equivalent to Each Other

| Time Expression | Literal Application | Symbolic Application |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| A time, times and half a time | Three and a half years | 1,260 years |
| Forty-two (42) months | Three and a half years | 1,260 years |
| 1,260 days | Three and a half years | 1,260 years |

So far the only periods from table 1 that we have not mentioned are the "1,290 days" and "1,335 days." Everything else has been drawn into a unified series of time relationships. Turning now to Dan 12, the "1,290 days" (vs. 11) and the "1,335 days" (vs. 12) are *not* the same as each other. The number "1,290" is not the same as "1,335," but it is still appropriate to interpret these two periods by means of the same exegetical principles because the language they use is comparable. And no one challenges this. I make the above statement to establish a premise.

The important thing to notice is that the "1,260 days" of Rev 11:3 and 12:6 is not the same as the "1,290 days" of Dan 12:11 or the "1,335 days" of Dan 12:12, but that the three periods are stated comparably. Actually there are two important things to notice. The number "1,260" is not the same as either "1,290" or "1,335," but while "1,260" and "1,290" and "1,335" are different numbers, "days" and "days" and "days" are the same term merely repeated three times. (Actually the term is repeated four times, since "1,260" occurs twice.) The time expression used in each case is the same, even though the numbers accompanying it are different. And so these three time periods can legitimately instruct us about each other.

Since the expression "1,260 days" occurs multiple times let us start there. Having established what these multiple occurrences mean we can then reason from the known to the unknown and extend what we have learned from these other passages back to Dan 12. Occurring as it does in a chapter where God's witnesses are olive trees and lamps, and where both Sodom and Egypt are said to be one and the same city, we would expect to interpret "1,260 days" symbolically in Rev 11:3. And occurring as it does

in a chapter that speaks of a huge red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and of a woman wearing a crown of twelve stars, we would expect to interpret "1,260 days" symbolically in Rev 12:6. These are things we can know. So let us apply what we have learned in chapters where the meaning is unequivocal to the chapter where a question still remains.

I submit that it would be reasonable to interpret "1,290 days" symbolically in Dan 12:11 and "1,335 days" symbolically in Dan 12:12 on the basis of the above associations. The only way I know to claim that "1,290 days" and "1,335 days" in Dan 12 must be interpreted literally is to sever that chapter's connection with other chapters where similar time expressions are used symbolically.

Summarizing this part of the argument, it is true that Dan 12 contains no symbols of the sort found in all the chapters that are parallel to it (Dan 7, Rev 11-12), but this fact – while true in and of itself – could be misapplied, and has been. There is a trend among Adventist scholars to approach smaller and smaller bits of Scripture separately.⁶ I would take the opposite approach. We must cast our net wide and draw the parts and pieces of Scripture together in order to see the overarching symmetries they legitimately convey. This is especially true when relating the time periods of table 1 (above) to each other.

Taking a verse here or a verse there out of the consistent pattern of symbolic time usage in table 1 cannot be justified by any reasonable means. But let us say for argument that every point I have made so far may be set aside. What sorts of results does the futurist alternative lead to?

Futurist Results

There are different ways to do this, but one set of relationships among the three time periods of Dan 12 that has been published recently goes as follows.⁷ See table 4.

Table 4
Last Events

| Starting Event | Plus | Ending Event |
|---------------------|------------|--------------------|
| National Sunday law | 1,260 days | Close of probation |
| National Sunday law | 1,290 days | Death decree |
| National Sunday law | 1,335 days | Second coming |

⁶ "Second, the presence of both types of apocalyptic in a single work raises the question whether applying these distinctions to whole works like Daniel and Revelation is truly helpful. Assignments of genre may be more accurate and helpful if made on a passage-by-passage basis" (Jon Paulien, "The End of Historicism? Reflections on the Adventist Approach to Biblical Apocalyptic – Part Two," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 17/1 [Spring 2006]: 181). I don't deny that there is a time and a place for this level of scholarship. I'm not sure, though, that this should be our only methodological tool.

⁷ Cox, p. 155.

It is clear at the outset that no author can say he or she knows the day or the hour of Christ's second coming, because according to Matt 24:36 even Jesus does not have that information. So in fairness we point out that the author who proposes the above set of time relationships also makes the required disclaimer.

Since these events are still future, and we do not know when Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary will come to an end, ". . . Michael shall stand up" (12:1), we cannot know the day or the hour of the Lord's coming.⁸

And yet if the information in table 4 is correct, after the national Sunday law (not when Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary comes to an end) the church will know both the exact time for the close of probation and the exact time for the second coming – to within a day. We still won't know the hour, but the above model predicts that we will know the day. For more than one reason I have a problem with this.

Ellen White is very clear that the time when probation will close is not known and that we should not try to find out when this important event will occur.

God has not revealed to us the time when this message will close, or when probation will have an end. Those things that are revealed we shall accept for ourselves and for our children; but let us not seek to know that which has been kept secret in the councils of the Almighty. It is our duty to watch and work and wait, to labor every moment for the souls of men that are ready to perish. We are to keep walking continually in the footsteps of Jesus, working in His lines, dispensing His gifts as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Satan will be ready to give to anyone who is not learning every day of Jesus, a special message of his own creating, in order to make of no effect the wonderful truth for this time. {1SM 191.1}

According to table 4, God *has* revealed to us the time when probation will have an end. So which way shall we have it? He either has or has not. We can argue for either case, but we cannot have it both ways. Nor will it do to hide behind an assertion that, because we don't know when the national Sunday law will be enacted, we aren't setting dates and are not saying when probation will close. Table 4 does say when probation will close. It closes exactly 1,260 calendar days (three years and six months) following the national Sunday law. Ellen White doesn't say it that way.

There is another problem. We have mentioned Matt 24:36, where Jesus says, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Ellen White supports this in two ways. First, she says that no one knows when Christ will return.

But the day and the hour of His coming Christ has not revealed. He stated plainly to His disciples that He Himself could not make known the day or the hour of His second appearing. Had He been at liberty to reveal this, why need He have exhorted them to maintain an attitude of constant expectancy? There are those who claim to know the very day and hour of our Lord's appearing. Very earnest are they in mapping out [633] the

⁸ Idem, p. 154.

future. But the Lord has warned them off the ground they occupy. The exact time of the second coming of the Son of man is God's mystery. {DA 632.4}

In another place she says that this information will continue to be hidden until just before the actual event. Eventually the voice of God will announce the day and the hour of Christ's coming. But when does this occur? Here's her statement.

About four months since, I had a vision of events, all in the future. And I saw the time of trouble, such as never was,—Jesus told me it was the time of Jacob's trouble, and that we should be delivered out of it by the voice of God. Just before we entered it, we all received the seal of the living God. Then I saw the four Angels cease to hold the four winds. And I saw famine, pestilence and sword, nation rose against nation, and the whole world was in confusion. Then we cried to God for deliverance day and night till we began to hear the bells on Jesus' garment. And I saw Jesus rise up in the Holiest, and as he came out we heard the tinkling of bells, and knew our High Priest was coming out. Then we heard the voice of God which shook the heavens and earth, and gave the 144,000 the day and hour of Jesus' coming. Then the saints were free, united and full of the glory of God, for he had turned their captivity. And I saw a flaming cloud come where Jesus stood and he laid off his priestly garment and put on his kingly robe, took his place on the cloud which carried him to the east where it first appeared to the saints on earth, a small black cloud, which was the sign of the Son of Man. While the cloud was passing from the Holiest to the east which took a number of days, the Synagogue of Satan worshiped at the saints feet. Ellen G. Harmon {DS, March 14, 1846 par. 2}

The Father announces the day and hour of Jesus' coming when the work of the sanctuary is at an end. And we can say more specifically, when the work of the second apartment is at an end. This distinction between Christ's work in two apartments marks the birth of Adventism and it is still an important distinction today. But why would He need to announce the *day* of Christ's coming if He had already revealed it in Dan 12:12? Even in the futurist model under review the hour remains unknown, but the day is public knowledge once the national Sunday is enacted. What Ellen White (Ellen Harmon in this case) is telling us is that this knowledge will remain hidden and unavailable until the close of probation – not three and a half years before then.

People who assemble charts such as the one summarized in table 4 are not tracking with the spirit of prophecy. The two sources are telling us substantially different things. This makes me uncomfortable.

If the information in table 4 is right, the spirit of prophecy is wrong. If table 4 is off, then the futurist principles of literal interpretation following 1844 which lead to it are also off. If those principles are misguided, let us stop toying with them. Let us put the 1290 days and the 1335 days back in the middle ages where they belong. Doing this might seem deflating, since there is a new theory we would like to espouse, but the tradeoff is that we see an elegant symmetry among the various prophetic time periods that we as a church can present with confidence to a world that is more hungry for something real than for something new. See graphic in fig. 1 below.

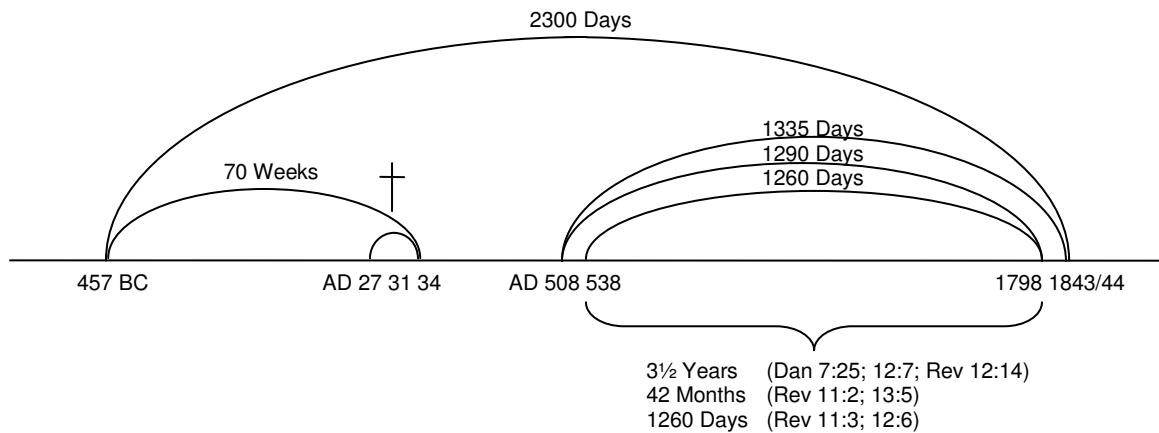


Fig. 1. Graphic showing the proposed relationships among the 2300 days, the seventy weeks, the 1335 days, the 1290 days, and the 1260 days.

Discussion

Only a historicist model, consistently applied, makes possible a result such as the one summarized in fig. 1. Note that the whole graphic can be drawn without lifting one's pencil, providing that we start at the cross. Such a model brings together all seven references to the important period of three and a half times (=years), or forty-two months, or 1260 days and puts the emphasis inherent in those repeated references back where Scripture places it – on the middle ages.

The middle ages might seem outdated. Why not talk about something more current, like the national Sunday law? The reason is quite simple. A futurist model fragments the evidence. Such a model requires us to put some of the pieces here and some there, dismantling the symmetry in the above set of relationships. It also requires us to join the rest of the Christian world in deflecting attention away from what the church was doing during the long period of time when it had unlimited power.

If I understand Scripture correctly, God does not want us to neglect this period of absolute control. This is an important part of history. One reason for not neglecting it is that the issues operative then are still with us today. The second and third angel's messages of Rev 14:8 and 9-12, and the repetition of those messages in Rev 18:1-3 and 4-24, call attention to the church's historic and present failings. Giving this sort of message is not particularly enjoyable, but who else can God call on to give it?

He can't use preterists to do this, because they don't apply any prophecy beyond the lifetime of the prophet. He can't use Evangelical futurists, because they feel that the church period doesn't count. It's merely an interruption separating two periods that focus on literal Jews. He can't use idealists, because they don't talk about history at all. So who can he call on to give these messages? Historicists? Then let us be historicists, with all that implies, and let us give the messages to others that God has given to us. Let us do this without turning to the right hand or the left and without being drawn off into the latest doctrinal distractions, however attractive they might appear to be at the time.