

[Note: The following is quoted, with permission, from a book by Gerhard Pfandl, Ph.D., of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The book, *Daniel: Seer of Babylon* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2004), was published in connection with Pfandl's fourth quarter 2004 Sabbath School lesson quarterly on the book of Daniel.]

CHAPTER 12

WHEN KINGS GO TO WAR

The last vision in the book of Daniel has three sections: (1) The prologue in chapter 10; (2) the vision proper in 11:2-12:4, and (3) the epilogue in 12:5-13 that concludes not only the chapter but the whole book of Daniel. In this vision, given about two years after the return of the Jews from Babylon, God lifted the veil of history and showed Daniel some of the background to the conflict going on between the forces of good and evil. In Revelation 12:7-9 we find a similar picture, Michael and his angels fighting with Satan, the dragon, and his angels. Yet the outcome is never in doubt -- Michael, i.e., Christ overcomes Satan and delivers his people.

This scenario has been and is being played out many times here on earth. During the unrest in Rwanda in 1994, Phodidas, a Tutsi Seventh-day Adventist, was fleeing from Hutu militiamen. At the main junction in Kigali he was identified as a Tutsi and ordered to lie down next to a man they had recently killed. He refused and began to pray, "Lord, the time has come for you to show your protection. Show them that I am your servant and that you are my God." When one of the militiamen came with raised machete toward him to kill him, Phodidas with eyes wide open prayed, "Lord stop him in Jesus' name." As soon as he said it, the militiaman, who was now only about three feet from Phodidas, suddenly made a U-turn and walked back where he had come from. He seemed confused. Two other militiamen tried to kill him, but each time an unseen power stopped them. Phodidas knows that God had sent his angel to protect him. Some time later he was miraculously sent on his way.¹

INFORMATION

In Daniel 11:2 Gabriel tells Daniel, "Behold three more kings will arise in Persia, and the fourth shall be far richer than them all." At the time of the vision, Cyrus (559-530) was the ruling monarch. The next four kings were: Cambyses (530-522), Gaumata or false the Smerdis (522), Darius I (522-486), and Xerxes (486-465). The last one was the king who married Esther. When his fleet was destroyed at Salamis (480 BC), and his army was defeated at Plataea (479 BC), the Persians gave up the idea of conquering Greece. 150 years later the Greeks under Alexander conquered Persia instead.

After Alexander's death the kingdom was eventually divided among four of his generals (see Dan 7:6). Out of the divided Grecian Empire arose two dynasties, the Seleucids and the Ptolemies who became the kings of the North (the Seleucids in Asia Minor) and of the South (the Ptolemies in Egypt). These are the kings mentioned in Daniel 11:5-16. They remained in power until the Romans took over their territories in the second and first centuries BC.

The Abomination of Desolation - "The Hebrew *šiqqûš*, 'abomination,' is a common OT term describing an 'idol deity' (e.g., Deut. 29:17; 2 Kings 23:24; 2 Chron. 15:8; Eze. 37:23). Such idol

'abominations' set up in the Temple at Jerusalem in OT times were said to defile, or pollute it (Jer. 7:30; Eze. 5:11). The word *šōmēm*, a form of which is translated 'desolation' (more literally, 'something that makes desolate'), is used of the devastation caused by an invading army (Jer. 12:11), a scene that creates a sense of horror in a person beholding it (Jer. 18:16). The term, 'transgression,' in the parallel expression 'transgression of desolation' in Dan. 8:13, is used of acts of apostasy and rebellion against God (see Amos 2:4, 6; Micah 1:5)."ⁱⁱ

The phrase "abomination of desolation found in Matthew 24:15 is borrowed from the book of Daniel where this phrase, or variants of it, appears three times, namely 9:27; 11:31; and 12:11. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX) these three passages are almost word for word the same. However, Jesus in Matthew 24:15 is referring back to Daniel 9:27, for it alone is in a context which speaks of the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. The Romans in AD 70 destroyed Jerusalem, burned the temple, and in AD 130 erected a temple to Jupiter in its place.

Martin Luther identified the abomination of desolation in Daniel 11 with the papacy and its doctrines and practices.ⁱⁱⁱ In view of the parallelism between Daniel 8:11 where, as we saw, the little horn takes away the daily and 11:31 where again the daily is taken away but in addition the abomination of desolation is set up, it seems logical to conclude that the power that takes away the daily is also the power that sets up the abomination of desolation. Hence, Seventh-day Adventists, like Luther and many other Protestant commentators, believe that the papacy and its unscriptural teachings constitute the fulfillment of these prophecies in history.

EXPLANATION

The last vision in the book of Daniel contains the most detailed prophecy of future events in the Old Testament. We do well to remember, therefore, that the great prophecies in Daniel are given according to the principle of repetition and enlargement. These prophecies begin either in the days of Babylon (Daniel 2 and 7) or Medo-Persia (Daniel 8 and 12), but they each climax in the establishment of the kingdom of God. Daniel 2, 7, and 8 all deal with the same powers, chapter 7 enlarges the outline of Daniel 2, and Daniel 8 enlarges the outline of Daniel 7. We can expect therefore that the vision of Daniel 10-12 will enlarge the outline of Daniel 8.^{iv}

The Prologue in Chapter 10 – The introduction to this chapter records that the events described took place in the third year of King Cyrus. His third year as king of Babylon would have been 535 BC. Daniel, we are told, has been mourning and fasting for three weeks. The reason for this is not given, though from verse 14 we can infer that the future of his people must have been of concern to him. At the end of the three weeks, Daniel, at the river Tigris, received a vision in which he is shown the great controversy between the spiritual forces in the universe.

Daniel 10, probably more than any other text in Scriptures, reveals the invisible powers which rule and influence nations. In Scripture we read that spiritual beings carry out God's purpose in the natural world (Ex 12:23; 2 Sam 24:16), in the moral world (Lk 15:10), as well as in the political world. In this chapter, however, we learn not only that Israel had a spiritual champion to protect her as a nation, and to watch over her interests (Dan 10:21), but also that the nations opposed to Israel had their princes which were antagonistic towards those which watched over Israel. According to Ephesians 6:12 the "princes" of the heathen powers are "the rulers of the darkness of this age."

“In the annals of human history the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as dependent on the will and prowess of man. The shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, behind, above, and through all the play and counterplay of human interests and power and passions, the agencies of the all-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will.”^v

The Vision (11:2-12:4) – Modern critical scholarship views this chapter as a description of the wars between the Seleucid (King of the North) and Ptolemaic (King of the South) kings, culminating in the career of the Syrian king Antiochus IV Epiphanes who is seen as the main actor in verses 21-45. Evangelical scholarship, generally, follows this outline, except that from verse 35 on some see the career of Antiochus Epiphanes foreshadowing the activities of the last day Antichrist, others postulated a gap of many centuries between verses 35 and 36 and interpret the last ten verses as applying only to a future Antichrist.

Within the Seventh-day Adventist Church this chapter has received a variety of interpretations. The differences between the various authors concern primarily the question, “At what points in the story do the Romans and the papacy enter the picture?” F. D. Nichol and M. Maxwell see the Roman entry in verse 14; R. A. Anderson, G. M. Price and W. H. Shea believe the Romans come on the scene in verse 16. J. B. Doukhan believes that the Romans appear briefly only in verse 4, from verse 5 he has the papacy as the King of the North until the end of the chapter. Maxwell applies verses 21-45 to the papacy; Shea has the papacy enter the story in verse 23; Price in verse 30; and Nichol and Anderson believe that not until verse 31 can we discern the activities of the papacy. The interpretations of the individual verses differ accordingly.

Rather than attempting to decide which of the interpretations seems to be the right one, we will focus on those points in the story that are fairly clear and straightforward and that can be supported by using the principle “scripture interprets scripture, one passage being the key to other passages.”^{vi}

First, at the beginning of Daniel 11 the angel refers to Persian and Greek kings. The “mighty king” in verse 3, whose kingdom shall be broken up toward the four winds (v. 4), is clearly Alexander the Great. This is supported by the parallelism with Daniel 8:8 where Alexander is the large horn that was broken and in whose place “four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven.” The four horns symbolizing the Hellenistic kingdoms which emerged after the breakup of Alexander’s empire.

The next clearly identifiable event is the death of the Messiah in verse 22. The word for “prince” in this verse is *nāgîd*. It is used only in one other place in the book of Daniel, namely in Daniel 9:25 and 26. In other places in the book Daniel uses the word *śar* for “prince” (8:11; 10:13; 20,21, etc.). On linguistic grounds, therefore, the “Prince of the covenant” in 11:22 is the same as “Messiah the Prince” who would “confirm a covenant with many for one week” (9:25-27). Since Daniel 9:26, 27 and 11:22 obviously refer to the crucifixion of Christ through the Romans, the Roman Empire must enter the stage of history sometime prior to 11:22.

The third event which can be interpreted by comparing Scripture with Scripture is the taking away of the daily and the setting up of the abomination of desolation in verse 31. The

“taking away of the daily” is exactly the same expression that is used in 8:11, where we found that it referred to the taking away of the intercessory ministrations of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary through the papal priesthood. And the “abomination of desolation” refers to the vast system of beliefs and practices of the papacy which for more than a thousand years led people away from the priestly ministry of Jesus. Thus, the papacy appears in this chapter either with verse 31 or shortly before.

The fourth expression which provides a chronological marker in the story is the expression “time of the end” in verse 40. This phrase is found only in the book of Daniel, once in the vision of Daniel 8 (v. 17) and four times in connection with Daniel’s last vision (11:35, 40; 12:4, 9). The visions of Daniel 8 and 11 both reach to “the time of the end,” at which, according to Daniel 12:2, a resurrection takes place. Daniel 12:4 indicates that just prior to the end of history, people will study and search out the Danielic visions just as Daniel himself searched out the 70 year prophecy (9:2). And in the epilogue to the book of Daniel (12:5-13) Daniel is told that “the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end.” At that time knowledge of these visions will increase and their meaning will be understood (vs. 4, 10). From history we know that in the 19th century, after the end of the 1260 years of Daniel 7:25, knowledge of the Danielic prophecies increased dramatically. “The prophetic days of Daniel had been understood as calendar years by only seven writers in the 16th century, and by only twelve in the 17th, but they were correctly understood by twenty-one of the twenty-two who wrote in the 18th, and by over one hundred of the one hundred and nine who wrote on Daniel between 1800 and 1850.”^{vii} It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude that the time of the end began with the fall of the papacy in 1798. This means, the events from Daniel 11:40 onwards must be sought in the time between the fall of the papacy in 1798 and the resurrection at the end of time.

The fifth point that is easily understood is the resurrection at the end of the vision (12:2). The text says, “Many of those who sleep. . . shall awake,” i.e., they shall be resurrected, some to eternal life and some to everlasting damnation. This indicates that this cannot be the general resurrection at the Second Advent when only the righteous will be resurrected (1 Thess 4:16-17), nor the resurrection of the wicked a thousand years later (Rev 20:4-6). It must, therefore, be a special resurrection of some righteous and some wicked at the time of the seventh plague (Rev 16:17-18). In this special resurrection all those who have died in the faith of the third angel’s message will be raised. They “come forth from the tomb glorified, to hear God’s covenant of peace with those who have kept His law. ‘They also which pierced Him’ (Revelation 1:7), those that mocked and derided Christ’s dying agonies, and the most violent opposers of His truth and His people, are raised to behold Him in His glory, and to see the honour placed upon the loyal and obedient.”^{viii}

These five points provide the basic outline for Daniel 11. All the other historical events mentioned in the chapter must fit into this chronological framework. That this is by no means an easy task is indicated by the wide variety of interpretations among Seventh-day Adventists commentators.

APPLICATION

In Daniel 10 we are taught that man has the freedom to oppose God. Although Satan and Christ were moving upon the mind of the king, neither could force the king. What condescension on the part of God to allow Himself to be “withstood”! But the same applies to each one of us. God decided to create human beings who could love him of their own free will,

and included in this free will was the possibility of disobedience and resistance to His will. This does not mean that God is responsible for sin in this world, Satan, Adam, and Eve are, but as part of the free will God had to create the possibility of sin, otherwise there would not have been any free will. A father may give his son the key to the car and the son may drive the car into the next tree and kill himself. The father most certainly did not intend this, but by giving the son the car key he also gave him the possibility to use the car as a deadly weapon.

This chapter also teaches us that the great controversy is a real battle between the forces of good and evil, that angels are real, that there are unfallen and fallen ones, and that they can influence the affairs of mankind. "While Satan was striving to influence the highest powers in the kingdom of Medo-Persia to show disfavour to God's people, angels worked in behalf of the exiles. The controversy was one in which all heaven was interested. Through the prophet Daniel we are given a glimpse of this mighty struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil."^{ix} Are we always aware of the presence of angels in our life, and how does this influence our words and actions?

Endnotes:

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- i. Phodidas Ndamyumugabe, *Rwanda: Beyond Wildest Imagination* (Berrien Springs: Lesley Books, 2000), 48, 49.
 - ii. Don F. Neufeld, *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, Revised edition (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1976), 1, 2.
 - iii. See LeRoy E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1948), 2:277, 280.
 - iv. The prophecy in Daniel 9 is part of the explanation of the vision in Daniel 8.
 - v. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952), 173.
 - vi. Idem, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1946), 581.
 - vii. Ernest Marter, *Daniel's Philosophy of History* (Bracknell, England: Newbold College, 1967), 115; see also Froom, 2: 528, 784; 3:270.
 - viii. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1950), 637.
 - ix. Idem, *Prophets and Kings* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1917), 571.