

Reapplications and Multiple Fulfillments and the Story Line

If the church divides nicely into the categories of “interested in prophecy” and “not interested in prophecy”, the “interested” class divides in a less friendly way over the issue of this chapter.

Generally, Adventists recognize that there is a historical application to the prophecies in Daniel 8, 11, 12 and in Revelation 6, 8, 9, 11 and in Matthew 24 (and its parallels in Mark 13 and Luke 21.)

Agreement unravels, however, when the question is asked, “will the portions of these prophecies that were fulfilled in the past be fulfilled again?”

The “daily” and an “abomination of desolation” are the subjects of Daniel 8, 11, 12 and of Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21. And it is in regard to these symbols and the story-line around them that most of questions exist today. Other questions regarding the seals and trumpets of Revelation are less common, but common nonetheless.

The writings of Ellen White figure largely into this discussion.

If there is one treasure to be gleaned from these discussions it is a thorough testing of our principle of prophetic interpretation and particularly in testing our ideas for regarding how to best understand Ellen White’s writings.

Tragedies that could befall us in these discussions include mutual animosity, public divisions, and a decreased confidence in the reliability of the *Testimonies*.

Even new students of Adventist History will recognize that just such disasters struck our denomination over several of these very same chapters. And so it seems that history is repeating itself.

And that brings us to a critical question that relates to these chapters and their various interpreters.

How Does History Repeat?

That history is repeated, especially in our day, is absolutely established by the prophets. (See Ec 1:9-10; 3:15; and 1 Cor 10 quoted below.) But the nature and cause of that repetition needs to be understood before that repetition is a helpful element in our interpretation of prophecy.

The work of God in the earth presents, from age to age, a striking similarity in every great reformation or religious movement. The principles of God’s dealing with men are ever the same. The important movements of the present have their parallel in those of the past, and the experience of the church in former ages has lessons of great value for our own time. {GC 343.1}

History repeats because God, and even men and demons, operate on basically the same principles from age to age.

There are timeless truths that God seeks to bring to the attention of man. And there are hoary lies that Satan counts as his wrenches and screwdrivers. He uses them whenever they fit. And these truths combine with the changeless facts of man’s selfishness and searchingness to make history déjà-vu-like.

God does not force evil men to repeat the history of their ancestors. In fact, God warns them against doing so. He does, however, encourage faithful persons to imitate the faithfulness of ancient worthies. In every age mercy pleads with both camps until hope for the former is lost through the hardness of their hearts.

Ps 78:8 And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God.

Eze 20:17 Nevertheless mine eye spared them from destroying them, neither did I make an end of them in the wilderness. 18 But I said unto their children in the wilderness, Walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols: "In every age there is given to men their day of light and privilege, a probationary time in which they may become reconciled to God. But there is a limit to this grace. Mercy may plead for years and be slighted and rejected; but there comes a time when mercy makes her last plea. The heart becomes so hardened that it ceases to respond to the Spirit of God. Then the sweet, winning voice entreats the sinner no longer, and reproofs and warnings cease." {DA 587.1}

The law of cause and effect doesn't change. So the type of behavior exhibited by Abel produced persecution by persons like Cain. Holy living by Jesus led to his persecution. In fact, all that live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. Revivals are collective growth in holy living. Therefore a great revival will be followed by a serious persecution. Thus history repeats itself.

The apostle Paul declares that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." 2 Timothy 3:12. Why is it, then, that persecution seems in a great degree to slumber? The only reason is that the church has conformed to the world's standard and therefore awakens no opposition. The religion which is current in our day is not of the pure and holy character that marked the Christian faith in the days of Christ and His apostles. It is only because of the spirit of compromise with sin, because the great truths of the word of God are so indifferently regarded, because there is so little vital godliness in the church, that Christianity is apparently so popular with the world. Let there be a revival of the faith and power of the early church, and the spirit of persecution will be revived, and the fires of persecution will be rekindled. {GC 48.3}

As an example of how history repeats we may consider the story of the Exodus. When Moses' followers rebelled against God, Moses was tested over his love for them by an invitation to separate from their company. This happened in Numbers 14. It happened twice again in Numbers 16. It happened also in Numbers 20. God used the rebellion of the rebellious to cultivate the faithful intercession of the faithful. And this happened repeatedly on the way to Canaan, a trip representing our journey at the end of the world.

So in our day I expect that there will be repeated tests of God's faithful where they will unconsciously choose between intercession for the unfaithful, or separation from the unfaithful.

What is Repeated in Daniel 11?

Ellen White makes an interesting statement that has, in the last decade, been sent to me by probably half a dozen persons:

Soon the scenes of trouble spoken of in the prophecies will take place. The prophecy in the eleventh of Daniel has nearly reached its complete fulfillment. Much of the history that has taken place in fulfillment of this prophecy will be repeated. In the thirtieth verse a power is spoken of that "shall be grieved, and return, and have indignation against the holy covenant: so shall he do; he shall even return, and have intelligence with them that forsake the holy covenant." [Verses 31-36, quoted.] {13MR 394.1}

Do other Bible passages throw light on this? Daniel 11:31-36 is a prophecy regarding the persecution of the middle ages. Will there ever be a persecution like that again? Yes, there will be. It is mentioned in Daniel 11:44-45 and in fifth seal of Revelation 6. There the saints who suffered in the middle-ages are

told to "rest" yet a while longer. They are vindicated in the investigative judgment (and so receive white robes in the 5th seal).

Yet before justice is executed in their favor there must be another end-time persecution that would, as a prophecy, "be fulfilled":

Re 6:11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

The angels in Revelation 16 recount how that final persecution has been one of the causes of the severity of the seven last plagues.

So what is repeated in Daniel 11:31-36? Just as the normal order of things was replaced by the papacy in the 6th century, so the normal order of things will be replaced by a church state in the end. And just as those who were willing to go along with a change in the Law of God initially were corrupted by flatteries, so it will be again. And just as the faithful were objects of a variety of persecutions that tested their faithfulness, so it will be again.

The characters of the participants being the same now as then, those that follow the lamb-like beast will behave very much like earlier generations that have followed the leopard-like beast.

The history that fulfilled Daniel 11:31-36 will be repeated.

But that is no excuse to confound the persecution of verse 35 with that of verse 44. If we were not careful we could end up with a never-ending loop. If the final persecution is a fulfillment of Daniel 11:35, then there is an even more final persecution that is a fulfillment of Daniel 11:44. And why should not that even more final persecution be made a third application of Daniel 11:35? And if we do that, then there must be an even more final final persecution.... and so on.

The Story Line

This brings me to an important point.

If I were to say:

"Heidi will go for a walk with Mary's dog, then she will return and take a shower. Then we will go together to supper, though neither of us will eat very much. Maybe for dessert we will have a couple chewable vitamin C's."

You would read the sentences as a story line with chronological information in it.

Heidi will walk.

 With Mary's dog.

Heidi will return.

Heidi will take a shower.

[Heidi will join me.]

We will go to supper.

 We will not eat much.

For dessert we will have vitamins.

Heidi walks every day. She often takes a dog. She always returns. She takes a daily shower. She is usually with me. We almost always eat meals together. And it is only mildly uncommon for us to treat each other to sweet chewable vitamins.

But it is a very rare thing indeed to have these common events happen in precisely this order.

So it is with history. It is not remarkable at all, for example, to predict that Babylon would eventually be overthrown by an empire that would, itself, eventually be overthrown.

But it is uncanny, incredible, miraculous, to be able to predict that the fourth world empire would be divided up into small kingdoms that would ever defy efforts to unite them into one sovereign power again.

It is the order of events, the story-line of history, that gives each epoch its uniqueness.

And it is the order of events, the story-line of prophecies, that allow us to match them to fulfillments. The relative timing of the fulfillment of one portion of the prophecy can be ascertained by noting where it is in the scheme of the entire prophecy.

In other words, the bear in Daniel 7, though we find few details in the prophecy to help us identify it, is rather easy to identify. It is the nation that follows Babylon. It is its relative timing that makes it easy enough for a fourth grader to locate on a time-line of world history.

A few years ago I had a dialogue with an ex-SDA futurist, Kathie, that illustrates this point. Kathie thought that the beasts in Daniel 8 represented modern nations that would some day soon fight each other. Let me let you in on a little of our e-mail discussion to illustrate what I am saying. Notice how the unique correlation between the various aspects of Daniel 8 to actual history proves that the prophecy was fulfilled in the past.

Eugene: ¹

Who is the Ram in Daniel 8?

Kathie:

WHO: Daniel 8:20 clearly says that "the ram...having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia.

WHEN: The time frame is given in verses 17, 19, 23, and 26. "At the time of the end shall be the vision."

WHERE: Today the area of the ancient Medes and Persians is modern Iraq and Iran.

The 2300 "evening/morning" did not start in the days of Daniel. It will happen "In the LAST END of the indignation...In the LATTER TIME of their kingdom WHEN THE TRANSGRESSORS ARE COME TO THE FULL...shut thou up the vision for it shall be for MANY DAYS." Dan 8:23,26

A few chapters later, Daniel is told to "shut up the words and seal the book, even to the TIME OF THE END...Go they way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the TIME OF THE END." Dan. 12:4,9

¹ I have highly edited these emails to increase clarity and remove distracting volumes of documentation.

Trying to understand the 2300 in an earlier time frame is an exercise in futility and frustration because things don't fit perfectly. The future will show that everything fits precisely!!!

Stay tuned! Ram and He-goat battle coming up soon!
Kathie

Eugene:

Hi Kathie,

I see. You are thorough-going futurist in regard to Daniel 8.

You see it as a coincidence, then, I suppose, that Greece follows Medo-Persia [as it does in Daniel 8] also in Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 and Daniel 11 and in history.

...

But it must be a coincidence that the goat of Daniel 8 comes from the West, as Alexander did, and does fly, as the winged leopard must have been able, and that it has a notable horn that breaks and gives place to four horns---as Daniel 11 describes the fall of Alexander and the break-up of his kingdom.

...

Gabriel passes by the activities of the Ram with hardly a word except to say that the Ram represents the dual kingdom of the Medes and the Persians. In the vision (v. 3-4) these kingdoms rose in order—the second kingdom becoming stronger. This did in fact happen in the case of Medo-Persia. But maybe (tongue in cheek) that is a coincidence.

...

The goat comes from the west and touches not the ground. He attacks the ram. Maybe it is just circumstantial evidence, but the same angel that said that this ram is Greece also said that the horn is the "*first king*" of that empire.

...

Unlike the two monarchies before his, when Alex died his empire was divided into four segments. Four horns came up as four heads were found on the leopard in Daniel 7. Daniel 11 says, interestingly:

And now will I shew thee the truth. Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia; and the fourth shall be far richer than they all: and by his strength through his riches he shall stir up all against the realm of Grecia. And a mighty king shall stand up, that shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. And when he shall stand up, his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided toward the four winds of heaven; and not to his posterity, nor according to his dominion which he ruled: for his kingdom shall be plucked up, even for others beside those. Dan 11:2-4.

But maybe these Daniel 7/Daniel 11 parallels to the four horns on the Grecian beast of Daniel 8 are not to be understood as being definitive?

That Greece had wings and was represented by a speedy animal in chapter 7 might not be related to the Goat neglecting to touch the ground while running full bore at the ram.

That Alexander became very great—greater than the Persians before him—is known by school boys. But perhaps that could be said of many men...

That his four generals formed nations N, E, S, and W of Palestine, and that from one of these directions (W) came the Roman power, parallels the prophecy of Daniel 8:8-9. I won't say more about coincidence.

That the Roman power became greater than the Grecians (v. 8) is manifest. That the Romans extended their empire into North Africa (S), Persia (E), and Canaan is apparent in history, and even in Acts 2.

That the little horn of Daniel 7 has many of the same characteristics as the little horn of Daniel 8, and that both are blasphemous persecutors of God's people—this is clear. And the Roman power can not be said to have failed to fulfill these predictions.

That the Roman power killed Jesus and proceeded in its papal form to supplant him—this is abundantly clear.

The angel's explanation in Daniel 8 shows that the kingdom of Persia will be followed by a Grecian empire with a *succession* of kings (v. 22) that will be weaker. In the "latter time of their kingdom" the king of fierce countenance will rise. In other words, if you put these verses in the future...the future is long indeed.

But what about your strongest argument? The fact that the vision of Daniel 8 is related to the "end"?

The parallel of Daniel 8 and 11 is remarkable, as noted already. Yet the latter chapter is such a clear explanation by the angel of events beginning in Daniel's day and extending to the end of the world that this can not be misunderstood.

8:19 "For at the time appointed the end shall be"

11:6 "for yet the end shall be at the time appointed"

11:35 "even to the time of the end: because it is yet for a time appointed."

...

But more than this, and notice this carefully, Kathie, there is another time that an angel comes to Daniel and tells him that he will show him what will befall his people in the "latter days."

And it is the preface to the historical prophecy of Daniel 11 that extends to the end:

Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days:
for yet the vision is for many days. Da 10:14

In other words, the one prophecy that is most obviously a description of events from Daniel's day to the end of time, that prophecy is described as relating to the end just as Daniel 8 is.

That is no coincidence.

Blessings to you,

Eugene

What is the point? The events in the story line of Daniel 8 make it so unique in history that there can be no confusing when it was fulfilled.

Ironically, that is where the two symbols, the “daily” and the “abomination of desolation” are introduced. Why, then, do Adventists try to find future applications of these two symbols?

Today it is because of what Ellen White said about Matthew 24. Famously, this chapter begins with the apostles asking Jesus about the timing and signs that would foreshadow the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. They had, of course, no idea that these events were separated by nearly 2,000 years.

The following sentences have been extracted from a representative collection of Ellen White’s statements about that fascinating prophecy.

Jesus did not answer His disciples by taking up separately the destruction of Jerusalem and the great day of His coming. He mingled the description of these two events. Had He opened to His disciples future events as He beheld them, they would have been unable to endure the sight. In mercy to them He blended the description of the two great crises, leaving the disciples to study out the meaning for themselves. When He referred to the destruction of Jerusalem, His prophetic words reached beyond that event to the final conflagration . . . {DA 628.1}

Christ presented before them an *outline of the prominent events* to take place before the close of time. His words were not then fully understood; but their meaning was to be unfolded as his people should need the instruction therein given. The prophecy which he uttered was twofold in its meaning: while foreshadowing the destruction of Jerusalem, it prefigured also the terrors of the last great day. {GC88 25.4}

While these prophecies received a partial fulfillment at the destruction of Jerusalem, they have a more direct application in the last days.--5T 753 (1899).

As the approach of the Roman armies was a sign to the disciples of the impending destruction of Jerusalem, so may this apostasy be a sign to us that the limit of God's forbearance is reached, that the measure of our nation's iniquity is full, and that the angel of mercy is about to take her flight, never to return. {Mar 199.4}

After speaking of the end of the world, Jesus comes back to Jerusalem, the city then sitting in pride and arrogance, and saying, "I sit a queen, and shall see no sorrow" (see Revelation 18:7). As His prophetic eye rests upon Jerusalem, He sees that as she was given up to destruction, the world will be given up to its doom. The scenes that transpired at the destruction of Jerusalem will be repeated at the great and terrible day of the Lord, but in a more fearful manner. . . . {3SM 417.1}

The disciples heard Christ's words; but they did not fully understand them. . . . But those who live in this age may understand the *general warning*, and should appropriate it, applying it to the period where it belongs. {ST, February 20, 1901 par. 14}

Could I have known, without the help of these Testimonies, that Matthew 24 addresses both the Destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world?

Yes, I could.

In fact, Matthew 24 is “an outline of the prominent events” given in a simple and straightforward manner.

After warning us not to be deceived Jesus gives what Ellen White calls a “general warning”, a warning of events that do not mark the “end.” After mentioning these Jesus said “but the end is not yet.” Mt. 24:6.

This general warning is continues in verses 7-8 where we are told that famines and the like are “the beginning of sorrows.”

And what, both then and in the future, follows the general disasters and deceptions?

Persecution. “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake.”

And what follows the period of persecution? A period of notable wickedness that causes the love of many to grow cold. And that test of man’s love brings us all the way to the end of time:

And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. 13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. Mt. 25:12-14.

So now what? Jesus has already traced the outline of the world from his own time to the very end. It would be ongoing disasters, deceptions, persecution, wickedness, gospel to the world.

Now Jesus goes back in time and makes an application of the book of Daniel that is the crux of all that we are discussing in this chapter:

When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) 16 Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Mt 24:15-16.

The next few verses are all about the flight from the doomed city. Its doom was pointed out in Daniel 9 as a punishment on the Jews for their murder of Jesus. Rome was the “abomination” that would desolate the city.

What happens after this destruction in the general outline of major events?

For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. 22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened. Matthew 24:21-22

This persecution, the one pointed out in many other passages as happening during the 1260 years of papal civil supremacy, would, according to Jesus, be “shortened” for the benefit of the chosen.

What would follow this period? There would be interest in Christ’s coming, false messages about a secret coming, and a period of seductive miracles (v. 23-26) that will test the chosen. And this would be followed by the real coming of Jesus. (v. 27-28.)

We have arrived at the end for the second time in Matthew 24. Where do we go from here? Back to that ending portion of the 1260 where the persecution has been cut short. Jesus specified that very point for the resuming of his narrative:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:
Mt. 24:29

And the signs are followed by the Coming.

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. {with...: or, with a trumpet, and a great voice}

The Two Meanings of Matthew 24

The outline that we have just considered doesn't require any dual application to apply it to both the destruction of Jerusalem and to the Second Coming. Jerusalem's fall didn't involve all the nations of earth morning. And Christ's coming doesn't specially involve persons on the roof-tops of Judea.

But the general elements of disasters, deceptive miracles, persecutions, false prophets and false messiahs, all of these are like those age-specific warnings of Revelation 2-3 that are followed by "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." They are dangers that have threatened the church at all ages, and especially at the two crisis highlighted in this chapter.

The timing of Matthew 24 is written into the text. Words like "then" and "immediately after" and "end" and "beginning" all help determine the relative timing of parts of the story line.

One of the Ellen White statements is particularly helpful in helping us develop a principle of interpretation. Look back at 3SM 417. Notice that Jerusalem of old is quoted as saying "I sit a queen and shall see no sorrow."

That chapter of Revelation was written about 22 years after Jerusalem was destroyed.

And maybe for that reason I have never had an Adventist paper come across my desk arguing that Revelation 18 is about the destruction of Jerusalem. (I have had non-Adventist Preterist papers argue that way). The obvious facts of the case make it apparent that Ellen was quoting a characteristic of mystic Babylon as being equally true of another power in another place at another time. She wasn't trying to explain Revelation 18 to us. She was trying to explain Jerusalem.

And she isn't the only prophet in history to use inspired sources that way. This is why her passing allusions to phrases from scripture can't be taken as being expository. That is why her "trumpet after trumpet" statement (some of you know what I am talking about) just can't be taken as an exposition on Revelation 8-9.

And here is the conclusion of the matter. One meaning of Matthew 24 is the historical fulfillment of the prophecy. The other is the parallel lessons that can be learned from that historical fulfillment. The first is like the prophecy that the world would be destroyed by water. The second is like the fact that we should

learn from that prophecy and its fulfillment that God's judgments will surely come at a time when men are not looking for them.

But it would never do to study the size of the ark, the type of wood, the fact that it was pitched ("atoned for" in Hebrew), or the fact that it took 120 years to build, and to look at these facts for details about how we ought to prepare for the final conflagration.

And just so with the prophecies at the end of this chapter. While the destruction of the world in Genesis and of Jerusalem in Matthew 24 and of Rome in Revelation 8-9 are all symbols of the final destruction of the world, we want to make sure we understand the nature of those symbols.

They are found in story-lines. Those story-lines help us understand them.

And pulled out of those story lines, they become just what Peter said they should never be, "of private interpretation."