

6. Daniel 9

Biblical material: Dan. 9:1-23.

Quotes:

- The more mystery is encouraged, the more deceit can impose upon the human mind.
Lemuel K. Washburn
- True piety lies rather in the power to contemplate the universe with a quiet mind.
Lucretius
- 'Tis the temper of the hot and superstitious part of mankind in matters of religion ever to be fond of mysteries and for that reason to like best what they understand least. *Isaac Newton*

Questions

Why is it important to understand? Would we really be worse off if we had an unquestioning attitude? In the case of Daniel, what most upset him? Why is the message of Daniel 9 still important to us today? If you could talk to Daniel, what would you most like to ask him? How does Daniel reveal his concept of God?

Discussion

Much of the comment in this lesson on Daniel 9 is the need for understanding (see especially Wed. lesson). Why is this stress so important? Why not “simply believe and accept” without understanding?

Like Daniel, we too can be upset and sick when we do not understand, especially when it is something of great consequence. Daniel’s plea for understanding is met by God, who chooses to reveal the future, not as a means of satisfying the desire for special insight, but for comfort and consolation. In this way God reveals the way he prefers to work—by allowing us to ask questions, and helping us on the journey of discovery as the answers become clear.

How does this all fit into the great controversy? Let us get past all the dates and arguments and see how God continues to work his purposes out in way that teaches the whole universe. This is not just about a small nation returning home, or even how a prophecy comes true, but about God willing and working—not only for us but all the onlooking universe.

One verse (one of the very few!) from the Apocrypha that I particularly like is this. God says: “I shall light a candle of understanding in your heart.” 2 Esdras 14:25. That is what we most need, and what we should always strive for.

Comment

God’s objective is understanding, not mindless obedience. In fact he repeatedly asks for understanding, wanting his believers to see that he truly makes sense. For example:

- The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. Psalm 14:2 NIV.
- For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. Proverbs 2:6 NIV.
- The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple. Psalm 119:130 NIV.

- Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding. Proverbs 23:23 NIV.
- Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding. Proverbs 3:13 NIV.
- Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Proverbs 4:7 NIV.
- So too in the New Testament—the aim is understanding rather than ignorance, wisdom rather than foolishness:
- So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Ephesians 4:17 NIV.
- We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. 1 John 5:20 NIV.
- For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding... Colossians 1:9 NIV.

Consequently, the clearly stated desire is to seek for wisdom and understanding from God:

- How can men be wise? The only way to begin is by reverence for God. Psalms 111:10 Living Bible.
- May my cry come before you, O LORD; give me understanding according to your word. Psalm 119:169 NIV.
- My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. Jeremiah 4:22 NIV.

Even God made flesh, Jesus, did not demand or coerce belief, but appealed to the evidence: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” Luke 24:27 NIV.

God wants belief with understanding. The principle is established. The God of the Bible seeks belief based on understanding. He wishes to be accepted as the God who makes sense, and that such a belief is reasonable, consistent with the evidence.

Ellen White Comments

Through His chosen agencies God will graciously make known His purposes. Then the grand work of redemption will go forward. Men will learn of the reconciliation for iniquity and of the everlasting righteousness which the Messiah has brought in through His sacrifice. The cross of Calvary is the great center. This truth acted upon will make Christ’s sacrifice effectual. This is that which Gabriel revealed to Daniel in answer to fervent prayer. It was of this that Moses and Elijah and Christ talked at His transfiguration. By the humiliation of the cross He was to bring everlasting deliverance to all who would walk after Him, giving positive evidence that they are separated from the world (Letter 201, 1899). {4BC 1172-3}

7. 70 Weeks

Biblical material: Dan. 9:24-27; Ezra 4:7-16; 7:6, 7, 11-17.

Quotes:

- Before accepting any belief one ought first to follow reason as a guide, for credulity without enquiring is a sure way to deceive oneself. *Celsus*
- Theological thinking should not be abandoned to the masters of elusiveness. *Rik Torfs*.
- The good Christian should beware of mathematicians and all those who make empty prophecies. The danger already exists that mathematicians have made a covenant with the devil to darken the spirit and confine man in the bonds of Hell. *Augustine*

Questions

In the great scheme of things, is “doing the math” really important? How do we relate to “prophetic endorsement”? In a post-modern world, how do we appeal to those who see truth as more subjective than objective? Is prophecy “faith-confirming” or “faith-establishing”? How would you explain the 70 weeks to someone who had no previous knowledge of the Bible?

Discussion

“This week we continue with Daniel 9, focusing on the amazing 70-week prophecy, which provides powerful evidence not only for the inspiration of Scripture but for the Messiahship of Jesus, “the Messiah the Prince” (*Dan. 9:25*)...” (Sabbath pm lesson).

While indeed this prophecy does give time-support for the Messiah, we need to remember there were many other “Messiahs” at the time of Jesus. If we were basing our faith purely on prophetic aspects without any other corroboration, how might this seem?

Indeed not only were there many false Messiahs at the time of Jesus, one commentator observed that Jesus was one of the commonest names of the time. (Note: Jesus is often identified as “Jesus of Nazareth.”)

“To the degree, then, that we can have confidence in the messiahship of Jesus is the degree that we can trust the prophecy itself.” (Monday’s lesson).

While the 70 week prophecy gives an indication, Jesus never referred to it for support. Why not? Does this evidence from silence tell us something too?

The arguments in Tuesday’s lesson are a little surprising. It seems that since we know what the answer is (the time of Jesus) we then are trying to fit the actual decree around that—rather circular logic.

The final question in lesson 7—“Is it possible to put too much emphasis on prophecy?”—suggests it occurred to the writer/editor after such a detail investigation into “times and dates” that perhaps this had been a little excessive. While one can recognize the zeal to make sure all points are tied down to engender confidence, perhaps this is just a little misplaced...

Comment:

True conviction. On what is this based? How are we convinced of what is true and what is not? Clearly the appeal of the 70 weeks prophecy is that it confirms in terms of time the coming of Jesus. However, how does this convince those who are not already accepting of Scripture? We need to be aware that for many this concept of conviction has no meaning.

While some minds seem to appreciate more than others the mathematical aspects, and find satisfaction in that Jesus did come “on time,” others look for a more content-based approach that examines not the timing but the actual aspects of his ministry. Jesus own testimony makes this clear. He did not appeal to the time prophecy to confirm his mission, but rather to who he was and the nature of his mission. For example:

- “For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but to do the will of him who sent me.” Jn. 6:38
- “I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, but I know him because I am from him and he sent me.” Jn. 7:29.
- “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.” Jn. 8:23.
- “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here.” Jn. 8:42.
- “Believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.” Jn. 10:38.
- “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, who you have sent.” Jn. 17:3.
- “No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” Jn. 1:18
- “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” Jn. 14:9.

Ellen White Comments

It was well known that the seventy weeks of Daniel’s prophecy, covering the Messiah’s advent, were nearly ended; and all were eager to share in that era of national glory which was then expected. {DA 133}

The preaching of the disciples in regard to time was based on the seventy weeks of Daniel 9. {GC 351}

Heaven was bending low to hear the earnest supplication of the prophet. Even before he had finished his plea for pardon and restoration, the mighty Gabriel again appeared to him, and called his attention to the vision he had seen prior to the fall of Babylon and the death of Belshazzar. And then the angel outlined before him in detail the period of the seventy weeks, which was to begin at the time of “the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem.”{PK 556}

We must be baptized with the Holy Spirit, and then we shall not sit down, saying unconcernedly, “What is to be, will be; prophecy must be fulfilled.” O awake, I pray you, awake! for you bear the most sacred responsibilities. As faithful watchmen, you should see the sword coming, and give the warning, that men and women may not pursue a course through ignorance that they would avoid if they knew the truth. The Lord has enlightened us in regard to what is coming upon the earth, that we may enlighten others, and we shall not be held guiltless if we are content to sit at ease, with folded hands, and *quibble over matters of minor importance*. The *minds of many have been engrossed with contentions*, and they have rejected the light given through the Testimonies, because it did not agree with their own opinions. God does not force any man into his service. Every soul must decide for himself whether or not he will fall on the Rock and be broken. *Heaven has been amazed to see the spiritual stupidity that has prevailed*. {RH, December 24, 1889}Italics mine.

8. 1844 Made Simple

Biblical material: Lev. 7: 27; 17:10; Luke 3:1-22; Rom. 5:8; Gal. 3:13; 1 Thess. 5:9, 10; 1 Pet. 2:24.

Quotes:

- Nothing, therefore, can be more derogatory to the Bible than the assertion that its doctrines are contrary to reason....We can believe only what we know, i.e., what we intelligently apprehend. *Charles Hodge*
- When we exhort people to Faith as a virtue, to the settled intention of continuing to believe certain things, we are not exhorting them to fight against reason. *C.S. Lewis*
- I reject any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality. *Mohandas Gandhi*
- Faith... must be enforced by reason... when faith becomes blind it dies. *Mohandas Gandhi*
- What I conclude is that religion has nothing to do with experience or reason but with deep and irrational needs. *Richard Taylor*

Questions

Why is the subject such a volatile one? On what is it based? How does the doctrine contribute to our concept of God and our place in the great controversy? How do misunderstandings about God's actions in this regard negatively affect us? What are the dangers of over-preoccupation in this area?

Discussion

The title of this week's lesson immediately invites comment—why do we need to do this? While the date is certainly important, especially for the history and self-concept of the Adventist church, the more significant aspect is what this all fits into—the whole great controversy scheme. It is unfortunate that some have become perhaps over-preoccupied with this subject, and have missed the big picture.

That said, the 2300 prophecy has much greater meaning and validation since it has a common starting point with the 70 weeks. The strength of argument for the 70 weeks flows over into a supportive argument for 2300 days and 1844.

The strength of the argument is that it is entirely *reasonable*. In other words, we stress the importance of beliefs making sense. The usual attacks on the while 1844 subject is that it does not make sense. So it is essential to review how such beliefs do reflect reason and are based on evidence. Some have poked fun at the whole area with “thrones on wheels” and so on. But conceiving of different phases in the way in which God works surely is not unreasonable.

The lesson tries to move away at some points from the mechanistic aspects, and to apply this personally. For example:

“What does it mean that no matter what you have ever done, no matter how bad you have been, the penalty for those actions has been paid by the One who was “cut off,” not for himself—but for you?” (Monday's lesson).

This leads us into a whole other area of discussion. Recognizing that the sanctuary and investigative judgment is very much part of God's answers in the great controversy, then the real issues involved need to be understood.

Comment

I have a recurring dream. Well, more of a nightmare, really.

In a beautiful scene (I dream in Technicolor), I'm there with a group of fellow Adventists as Christ returns. The fulfillment of the blessed hope, the consummation of the divine promise, the completion of God's salvation. As the world ends in chaos, we look up to welcome our returning King.

Except my fellow Adventists are far from happy. "Can't be," says one. "Another counterfeit?" wonders another. "Doesn't fit my chart," mutters a third, looking down at an elaborate sheet of time-lines and dates and symbols. They confer for the longest time. As the world ends, they debate the relative merits of symbolic interpretations, calculate complex mathematical formulae, and extrapolate times and dates to the nth degree.

Ultimately they reach a conclusion. From their research, they are able to categorically and conclusively prove that this is NOT the second advent, because the King of the North has not attempted the defilement resulting in the abomination of desolation under the rule of Persia in which the armies of Armageddon overcome the hordes of the East under the sixth seal at the time of the multiplied myriads of trumpets that the 24 elders are to blow.

Or something like that that. As I said, this is just a dream. Adventists have always been known for their stress on the future and the importance of recognizing God's role as He breaks back in to human history. The final events are dramatic, the return of Christ all-embracing, the Earth-shattering conclusion to this world one that demands a decision now.

But could it be that another of the devil's delusions is to have us so focused on the end-time and its troubling events that we forget about the God who is going to see us through and is the one we are expecting at the end?

Ellen White Comments

1844... This was the happiest year of my life. My heart was full of glad expectation; but I felt great pity and anxiety for those who were in discouragement and had no hope in Jesus. We united, as a people, in earnest prayer for a true experience and the unmistakable evidence of our acceptance with God. {CET 51-2}

In 1844, when anything came to our attention that we did not understand, we kneeled down and asked God to help us take the right position; and then we were able to come to a right understanding and see eye to eye. There was no dissension, no enmity, no evil-surmising, no misjudging of our brethren. If we but knew the evil of the spirit of intolerance, how carefully would we shun it! {GW 302}

Then I was pointed back to the years 1843 and 1844. There was a spirit of consecration then that there is not now. What has come over the professed peculiar people of God? I saw the conformity to the world, the unwillingness to suffer for the truth's sake. I saw a great lack of submission to the will of God. I was pointed back to the children of Israel after they left Egypt... Their language was, "Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt." They lusted for the leeks and onions there. {CET 158}

As the disciples were mistaken in regard to the kingdom to be set up at the end of the seventy weeks, so Adventists were mistaken in regard to the event to take place at the expiration of the 2300 days. In both cases there was an acceptance of, or rather an adherence to, popular errors that blinded the mind to the truth. Both classes fulfilled the will of God in delivering the message which he desired to be given, and both, through their own misapprehension of their message, suffered disappointment. {GC88 352}

9. Day-Year Principle

Biblical material: Exod. 34:22; Lev. 12:5; Num. 14:34; Deut. 16:10; Ezek. 4:5, 6; Dan. 8:17, 19, 26; 10:2, 3.

Quotes:

- If a lunatic scribbles a jumble of mathematical symbols it does not follow that the writing means anything merely because to the inexperienced eye it is indistinguishable from higher mathematics.
E. T. Bell
- The guns and the bombs, the rockets and the warships, are all symbols of human failure.
Lyndon B. Johnson
- Language... is only the use of symbols. *George H. Lewes*
- We are symbols, and inhabit symbols. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Questions

While this principle is an important one, what more does it suggest? What are the positive and also the negative aspects of symbols? How do we interpret symbols, and determine their meaning? Especially in the religious arena, symbols and words are ephemeral and hard to pin down—so what do we do?

Discussion

Symbols. “Daniel 7 is a chapter filled with all sorts of symbols, images that are not to be taken literally. Thus, why should we take the prophetic time given in it as literal, when almost everything else is symbolic?” (Thursday’s lesson).

In the final analysis, word, letters, even our very ideas, are symbolic. They are ways of describing reality. We use words and images to describe something we see or hear or imagine. Symbols are essential for communication. Yet symbols are not necessarily solid and definite, they are frequently fluid and developmental. Symbols can mean different things to different people in different times and places.

The year-day principle is just an illustration of this. We can give all kind of arguments, as the lesson provides. In the end, whether it makes sense or not is our own decision. Certainly it has much support. But more than acceptance of a system is the whole question of what we conceive of and how we understand symbols within the religious sphere. Most of all, we want to understand what God is trying to communicate to us, whether it is prophecy or psalm or proverb.

Ultimately it is a question not of dry and abstruse theory, but how these ideas impact us and make a difference in our lives. As Tuesday’s lesson says, “As we look at all these time prophecies, great prophetic periods that have all come and gone, what should this tell us about how we use the few precious moments allotted to us in life? What changes might you need to make in your own use of time?”

Comment: The Problem with Symbols

I kicked through the dry dust. Hot and tired, I’d already seen enough holy places for one day. But here we were, trudging around in summer’s heat, on the top of Temple Mount, Jerusalem.

No one knows where the old Temple stood, exactly. Some think it parallels the Dome of the Rock. Others think it lines up with the Golden Gate. Maybe it is east or south. I don't know, I've heard so many theories. Perhaps the best was that the rock that's in the mosque is the site of the altar of sacrifice. Then that puts the most holy place due east. I think.

Anyway! The point is that no one now can be sure where this ultimate sacred place is. That's why observant Jews do not enter the Temple Mount area. They would not wish to walk on the most holy place, even if they were totally oblivious that they were doing so.

As I walk, I wonder. Maybe here. Maybe there. In the dry dust, one place looks just like the next. Are my impious feet trampling holy ground, unknowingly? If I rushed back to the time of the Temple, I would be dicing with instant death...

Then it hits me. *It doesn't matter any more!* For what was once the most sacred place on earth is now lost, unknown, and—strange to say—irrelevant.

And that fact inspires me. For the problem with symbols and holy places is that they are an attempt to confine the divine. To bring God down to us, and lock Him up somehow. To make the place important, when in reality the place has no importance at all.

Yes, it may help us to visualize, to give the spiritual some physical form. But all too often the place takes over, and the shrine becomes the focus, not the God behind it all.

That there is no 'most holy place' is truly better. For it forces us to look away from the confining aspect of place to the expanse of eternity. For what makes any place holy anyway? Is it not the presence of God Himself?

This truth is also true for you and me. The specialness of our life and witness is totally dependent on the presence of God in our lives, not in the unique nature we may possess, or the special place we may occupy.

Places and things pass away. All that's left of the Temple today are some of the retaining walls round the courtyard. The prophecy of Jesus rings loud through the dusty emptiness: "not one stone will be left on another." For the disciples who admired the splendor of the Temple with its magnificent stones, this was the symbol of permanence, and the presumptuous confidence in the continued presence of God, despite the people's evil.

Truly, there are no holy places today, nor should we want them. Most of all, we need God in the temple that is us, ourselves, built from living stones, looking for an eternal and spiritual 'place' far from this dusty and dying old world where God will ever be with us, and be our God.

Ellen White Comments

A day in prophecy stands for a year. See Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6. {PK 698}

God chose Israel to reveal His character to men.... Through the teachings of the sacrificial service, Christ was to be uplifted before all nations, and all who would look to Him should live. Christ was the foundation of the Jewish economy. *The whole system of types and symbols* was a compacted prophecy of the gospel, a presentation in which were bound up the promises of redemption. But the people of Israel lost sight of their high privileges as God's representatives. They forgot God and failed to fulfill their holy mission... Priests and rulers became fixed in a rut of ceremonialism. They were satisfied with a legal religion, and it was impossible for them to give to others the living truths of heaven. {AA 14-15} My emphasis.

In His [Jesus'] teaching He used the simplest terms and the plainest symbols. And it is said that "the common people heard Him gladly." Mark 12:37. Those who are seeking to do His work for this time need a deeper insight into the lessons He has given. {CT 381}

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