

‘SURPRISED BY JOY’

What I found behind sanctuary doors in Daniel’s Book

Ask any old-time Adventist to explain how Daniel’s 2300 days got to be 2300 years and you’ll likely be taken on a tour of Ezekiel 4:6 and Numbers 14:34. At these scriptural sites you’ll be introduced to the year-day principle, which will, in turn, propel you, via Daniel’s prophetic vision, to 1844.

Yes, I’ve preached it. But I always felt a little uncomfortable with supporting the year-day principle from only two texts, and outside of Daniel to boot. Without question, the stakes are considerable for Seventh-day Adventists, namely, nothing less than the historicist interpretation of the time prophecies.

Of course, that’s only one of the reasons to restudy Daniel. In the previous *Perspective Digest*, I spoke

of the ferment in Adventism that culminated in the Glacier View Conference of 1980, at which challenges were mounted to the historic interpretation of the sanctuary doctrine. I was only one of many who had to confess having no satisfactory answers to some of the questions raised. Subsequently, I determined to grapple honestly with the problems, my commitment being to follow truth wherever it would lead—even if out of the Adventist Church. In my case, as with many others, my study led to confidence that the Adventist sanctuary doctrine can stand the test

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of the closest investigation.

In my article in *PD*, “The Key That Unlocks Mysteries,” I shared fresh, rich insights into the investigative judgment as revealed by the prophet Ezekiel. I can still see God leaving the Most Holy Place in his chariot and pausing over the Mount of Olives, where he, as the Son of man, would stop six centuries later to weep. . . .

Daniel’s Rich “Excites”

But now we’re moving to Daniel and his visions. So many rich “excites” have recently emerged from this book that it’s difficult to decide what to mention here. We could pause in Daniel 7, which clearly points to the pre-Advent investigative judgment on behalf of the saints. We could examine the major schools of prophetic interpretation, and document that the early church and even the Reformers held the historicist view of prophecy. Today every major denomination except the Adventists has abandoned this position. I’m proud that my church is still holding aloft the torch of the Protestant prophetic heritage!

We could demonstrate that only the historicist view of prophecy is able to do justice to all the data in Daniel. Preterists must say that prophecy failed, and futurists must posit a gap where none exists in the prophecy. But historicists can be consistent with the whole sweep of the prophetic time prophecies.

So here we are back to the year-day principle. I’ve spoken of my past discomfort in having to go to two texts outside Daniel to support this view. But extensive study by Adventist scholars now shows 23 biblical reasons that validate application of the day-for-a-year principle to the time periods in the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

Especially exciting is the evidence within Daniel itself. In Daniel 8:14, for example, the 2300 evenings and mornings—which grammatically must refer to 2300 full days. Verse 13 asks: “For how long is the vision [the *haz’n*]?” The answer: 2300 full days. The first two verses in the chapter indicate that the *haz’n* includes the entire vision, not just part of it. That means it must stretch at least over the time of the Medo-Persian and Greek empires, which are specifically mentioned in the interpretation of the vision (vss. 20, 21). And thus the 2300 evenings-mornings cannot possibly be literal days. Years are the only unit of time that would allow the prophecy to span the period of the whole vision.

Daniel uses every conceivable way to alert us that the time prophecies are not referring to literal time. For one thing, he doesn’t use the normal Hebrew expressions for literal time; he uses symbolic time units. He says 2300 days instead of six years, three months, and 20 days, the way a Hebrew might describe the age of his

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child. He uses 1290 days instead of the normal three years, seven months; and "time, two times, and half a time" instead of three and one-half years. *Not one of the time periods in Daniel's symbolic prophecies is expressed the way it would have been were it used to express literal time, as the Hebrews usually did.* A Hebrew reader, confronted with Daniel's wording, would perk up and say: "This isn't referring to literal time!" Thus we don't have to go out of the Book of Daniel to seek support for the principle of a day for a year, which constitutes the prophetic key for our sanctuary doctrine. I think that's great news! Reason for joy!

I'm excited also by further confirmatory evidence concerning the beginning and ending dates of the great time prophecies that relate to the sanctuary. The question: Was the date of Artaxerxes' first decree 457 B.C., as Adventists have believed, or 458, as claimed by some? The discovery and translation of double-dated Elephantine papyri from the 5th century B.C. is a fascinating story! The bottom line is: confirmation of 457 B.C.!

The lines of biblical evidence showing why this decree, and not some other, is the one that marked the beginning of the 70 weeks and 2300 days appear in various Adventist sources. But one aspect of this evidence has recently come to light, and it fascinates me!

It has long been recognized that the 70-week prophecy is embedded in the framework of the Levitical Jubilee. The 490 years decreed upon Daniel's people constitute 10 Jubilee periods of 49 years each. If indeed this time period is counted with reference to the Jubilee, we would expect the beginning and ending dates to be Jubilee years. Fortunately, literary evidence has now made it possible to determine the precise sabbatical and Jubilee dates in biblical times; and, yes, the date of the decree of 457 B.C., and none other of the decrees, is a Jubilee year!

No less stirring is the confirmation of the ending date of the 2300 days, October 22, 1844. I have heard it said that our Adventist pioneers were simple, unlearned men; they had neither the intellect nor the sophistication to do responsible bib-

lical study, and thus we must question their conclusions. After reading more than 1,000 pages of pioneer articles on the sanctuary, I am amazed at the way God guided these humble and teachable men to such profound and reliable conclusions.

The date October 22, 1844, is a case in point. Scholarly critics of Adventist sanctuary theology like to point out that Adventist pioneers chose a date for Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) that was proposed by an obscure Jewish sect, the Karaites, rather than taking the date accepted by mainstream rabbinic tradition, which in 1844 came a month earlier than October 22. They did their homework, those pioneers of our faith! Rabbinic calculations intended to bring the lunar calendar in line with the solar calendar often resulted in setting the festival dates one month too early! In 1844, only the Karaites, who rejected rabbinic tradition and accepted *sola Scriptura*, still preserved the biblical method of reckoning festival dates. They were right in arriving at October 22 as the Day of Atonement!

Shortly after 1844 even the Karaites abandoned the biblical method of reckoning. I'm thankful that God kept them faithful through 1844! And that He led our pioneers to found our sanctuary theology upon Scripture rather than tradition. Today, study of Babylonian astronomical and mathematical data

has made it possible not only to arrive at the precise date for the Day of Atonement in 457 B.C., but also in 1844. Using these criteria, Adventist scholar William Shea has established, independent of the Karaite calendar, that October 22 is the correct date for the Day of Atonement in 1844. We have a sure and firm foundation for our faith!

Setting Things Right

Let's wrap up with a look at the key text on which our sanctuary doctrine is based: "And he said to me, "For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed" (NKJV).

As we've seen, Adventist interpretation of the date indicated by the text is solid, and so is the interpretation of its significance. That's good news. But there's great news in the meaning of the key word in the text: "cleansed." The Hebrew *nisdaq* comes from a root that has such a breadth of meaning that it cannot be captured by a single English word. It means (1) to "set right/restore" [see Deuteronomy 25:15], (2) to "cleanse" [Job 15:14; 4:17; and 17:5], and (3) to "vindicate" [Isaiah 50:8].

According to Hebrew thought patterns, it would not be unusual if all three of these English nuances were packaged in *nisdaq*. So it is in Daniel 8:14. In the preceding verse we are confronted with a question having three parts. We can literally

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translate it: “For how long is the vision: [1] the ‘continual’ [2] the transgression that causes horror, and [3] the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot?”

The question encompasses three problems:

First, the “continual” that is taken away. The Pentateuch uses the Hebrew word *tamid* to describe the various parts of the daily service in the sanctuary. Here it points to the daily mediation of Christ, for which the apostate power substituted an earthly priesthood and salvation by works.

Second, the “transgression that causes horror.” According to verse 12 (as recognized also by noted non-Adventist commentators) this refers to the transgression of the host, that is, the sins of the saints!

Third, the trampling underfoot of the sanctuary and host. Persecution and still more persecution of the saints. In ancient thought, when a host or army was trampled underfoot, the god of the host was shown to be weak and undependable. Thus when the sanctuary and the host are trampled, the true God and his system of worship are defamed.

What is the joyous news with which the prophet addresses these problems? It is contained in the three-fold range of the word *nisdaq*—set right, cleanse, vindicate.

First, Christ’s continual mediation in the heavenly sanctuary (the sanctuary truth that was taken away from the people) must be “set right,” “restored.” Second, the sanctuary must be cleansed from the sins of God’s people, which are causing horror in the heavenly. And third, the God who has been defamed by the trampling down of his sanctuary and his saints must be vindicated.

As we’ve noted (perhaps with surprise, certainly with excitement and joy, I hope!), separate Hebrew words exist for each of these ideas: “set right,” “cleanse,” “vindicate.” But only one Hebrew word can simultaneously encompass all of these solutions—*nisdaq*.

Here is the wholistic message of the investigative judgment encapsulated in a single word. *Nisdaq* in its threefold dimension reveals the rich meaning of the investigative judgment. Thank God for the restoring, cleansing, vindicating investigative judgment of Daniel 8! □