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JACK IN THE PULPIT
– LITERALLY ?

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EndTime Issues... Magazine

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Literalism – A Prophetic Problem

[IS A LITERAL JACK CONFINED TO A LITERAL PULPIT?]

In the beautiful interlude of Revelation 7 John saw four angels standing on the “four corners” of the “earth.” The obvious conclusion is that the world is flat. That’s *literalism*. To those, however, who see great metaphors in prophecy, the “earth” represents wickedness and the “four corners” characterize the four main directions of the compass.¹ Biblical descriptions can represent real objects and events, even existing in time and space. But the rendering of a typological message should lead into a spiritual purpose that God has in mind.

Daniel saw a “terrible beast” with seven heads and ten horns. Another “little horn” arose and uprooted three. That wild little horn had eyes like a man and a mouth that could speak. They are surreal and do not exist in reality. What could such a beast and horn mean? Daniel gave us a clue: “The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon the earth” (Daniel. 7:23). So the beast represents a kingdom. That’s symbolic.

In Revelation 21 the city New Jerusalem is called the “bride” and “wife” of the Lamb. They represent real names but are surreal in their imagery. How can that be literal?

Many Bible students rely on the counsel of expositor E. G. White from the 1800’s who said: “The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed.”²

But – what is *obvious* in the examples given?

Based on that quotation, it is often concluded incorrectly, for instance, that Medo-Persia and Greece of Daniel 8 play into the current events of that part of the world. There is more, however, to her

counsel within the context of that thought – but rarely analyzed. How do we tell what is figurative, symbolic or literal?

There are excellent principles that can help us grasp the meaning of prophecy. If these are understood, less speculation and sensationalism would enter our study. Here are a few areas that extend a helping hand.

1. Prophecy is not an end in itself. It is event-driven history, in advance, of how God will work to reconcile us to Himself. At the same time it portrays how Satan seeks to thwart those designs. Some call this the Great Controversy.

2. Prophecy is spiritually discerned. The Holy Spirit’s guidance is necessary to correctly understand the message (John 16:13, I Corinthians 2:9-14). More about that later.

3. A true understanding of prophetic truth always leads to Jesus. That in turn invites us to prepare for His coming.

4. If the prophecy has objects that cannot be real, like the lion with eagle’s wings (Daniel 7:4), especially when associated with other surreal images, it cannot be literal. It *represents* something important that God wants us to grasp.



Jack in the Pulpit

5. If the portrait is related to real objects, people or activities, then it is vital for the expositor to evaluate not only the meaning of a word or phrase but its context. Are there related clues as to what it represents in nearby verses?

Then a most important step comes: The Biblical record must be consulted as to how the imagery is used elsewhere. If symbolic associations are in evidence, it should not be seen primarily as literal.

One significant example, again, is Medo-Persia in Daniel 8:20. That imagery is often interpreted literally. But contextually we find in verses 17 and 19 that it distinctly says it is for the "time of the end," at the "appointed time," when God's wrath comes.

Babylon has fallen in that vision (it begins with Medo-Persia). Who was the conquering general? Cyrus. Elsewhere in Isaiah we find that Cyrus represents Jesus (Isaiah 44–46). Now a very crucial picture comes into focus. Medo-Persia is represented by the ram. Jesus is also. Cyrus delivered God's people from Babylon – "the deliverer." So will Jesus (Luke 4:16). Cyrus comes from the east, so will Jesus (Matthew 24:27). There are many more parallels. The theme is deliverance and atonement.

With this approach we see that literalism not only detracts from a great spiritual message, but it robs the student of one of prophecy's great covenant fulfillment messages.

Only after a deep careful and prayerful study of Scripture can one in confidence be assured of its meaning. One must tie linguistic, theological and historical information together. That often takes considerable time. But its end result is a beautiful picture.

6. All prophecy is placed within a timing framework. To deny this is to underestimate its relevance and relegate it to nothingness. God was specific regarding the first advent in many timing predictions. The second advent is also related to numerous timing periods. They range from the timing of the Jewish Fall Feasts to specific periods like we see in Daniel 12. The day and hour is not known, but it is clear that we can tell when He will be at the door knocking!

"It is the first and highest duty of every rational being to learn from the Scriptures what is truth, and then to walk in the light and encourage others to follow his example. *We should day by day study the Bible diligently, weighing every thought and comparing scripture with scripture. With divine help we are to form our opinions for ourselves as we are to answer for ourselves before God.*

"The truths most plainly revealed in the Bible have been involved in doubt and darkness by learned men, who, with a pretense of great wisdom, teach that the Scriptures have a mystical, a secret, spiritual meaning not apparent in the language employed. These men are false teachers. It was to such a class that Jesus declared: 'Ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God.' Mark 12:24. The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed. Christ has given the promise: 'If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.' John 7:17. If men would but take the Bible as it reads, if there were no false teachers to mislead and confuse their minds, a work would be accomplished that would make angels glad and that would bring into the fold of Christ thousands upon thousands who are now wandering in error.

"We should exert all the powers of the mind in the study of the Scriptures and should task the understanding to comprehend, as far as mortals can, the deep things of God; yet we must not forget that the docility and submission of a child is the true spirit of the learner. Scriptural difficulties can never be mastered by the same methods that are employed in grappling with philosophical problems. We should not engage in the study of the Bible with that self-reliance with which so many enter the domains of science, but with a prayerful dependence upon God and a sincere desire to learn His will. We must come with a humble and teachable spirit to obtain knowledge from the great I AM. Otherwise, evil angels will so blind our minds and harden our hearts that we shall not be impressed by the truth.

"Many a portion of Scripture which learned men pronounce a mystery, or pass over as unimportant, is full of comfort and instruction to him who has been taught in the school of Christ. One reason why many theologians have no clearer understanding of God's word is, they close their eyes to truths which they do not wish to practice. *As understanding of Bible truth depends not so much on the power of intellect brought to the search as on the singleness of purpose, the earnest longing after righteousness.*

"The Bible should never be studied without prayer. *The Holy Spirit alone can cause us to feel the importance of those things easy to be understood, or prevent us from wresting truths difficult of comprehension.* It is the office of heavenly angels to prepare the heart so to comprehend God's word that we shall be charmed with its beauty, admonished by its warnings, or animated and strengthened by its promises. We should make the psalmist's petition our own: 'Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law.' Psalm 119:18."³

Jesus, in that beautiful discourse that preceded the cross, talked about the promise of the Holy Spirit. That divine Being transcends and rises above all human exposition of Scripture. He is *the* inspiration of Scripture! Jesus promised and declared regarding that Comforter:

1. He would dwell and abide in us for ever (John 14:16-17).

2. He is the Spirit of truth (John 16:13).
3. He would teach us all things (John 14:26).
4. He would guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

What promises! But study must be done with great effort to let the Bible explain itself. Careless inattention to context and ties elsewhere will void divine impressions. The heart must also be submissive to every clue within the Bible that God provides. Above all, the student must submit to heaven's influences, personally.

Though it is tempting to decide before the covers of the Bible are opened how its content will be interpreted, God's plan is to carefully let the Scriptures unfold its own meaning. Literalism is too often a quick sensational escape from a deeper study of truth.

Though prophecy is event-driven, its rich meaning comes only when a systematic approach to study is undertaken. Then, the final conclusions emerge as His Spirit graces our understanding.

References:

¹www.beliefnet.com/story/52/story_5280_1.html

²*The Great Controversy*, p. 598.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 598-600.

SEVENTY WEEKS – A DUAL PROPHECY?

DANIEL 9

Years of Apostasy

Through Jeremiah God confronted the leaders of Israel with divine warnings:

“Hear ye the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel: ... Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, *and* hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.... They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the LORD.” Jeremiah 2:4, 12-13; 3:1.

In graphic language, through proverbs, metaphors and symbols He raised their awareness equal to the depth their rebellion had gone. In the passionate language of a lover, God pled, “Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion.” Jeremiah 3:14. In beautiful prose He imagines His people – Jerusalem – restored. “Thou shalt call me, my father; and shalt not turn away from me.” Jeremiah 3:19. Isaiah had also acknowledged God as “Father” and “Redeemer” (Isaiah 63:16).

With endearing language Jeremiah appeals to the princes of Israel to repent. God warned of specific judgments predicated on Israel's response. But they remained in shameless rebellion. Then God began a transition response to His people (Jeremiah 4:5-31). He started to prepare them for an inevitable time of persecution and captivity.

1. I will bring evil from the north
2. With great destruction
3. Your land will become desolate
4. Cities will be laid to waste without inhabitants
5. This will happen by a military campaign from a far country

God said that this would occur because of His “fierce anger” (4:8) towards Judah. Then, finally, He declared that this would come because “I have spoken it, I have purposed it, and will not repent, neither will I turn back from it” (4:28). (All these prophecies have a secondary application towards apostate Christianity at the end of time.)

Several years passed by. God again used Jeremiah to remind Judah of His covenant.

“Hear ye the words of this covenant, and speak unto the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” Jeremiah 11:2. He was still reluctant to bring this terrible curse on His chosen.

“And say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel; Cursed *be* the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant, Which I commanded your fathers in the day *that* I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Obey my voice, and do them, according to all which I command you: so shall ye be my people, and I will be your God: That I may perform the oath which I have sworn unto your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as *it is* this day. Then answered I, and said, So be it, O LORD.” Jeremiah 11:3-5.

The covenant promise, given in various segments over time, portrayed a final restored people to an Edenic type land, experiencing everlasting

holiness and righteousness. God longed to see that great covenant plan fulfilled. Israel prohibited its execution. So it will be for most of spiritual Israel at the end of time when the final period of probation comes. But then, there will be some who unswervingly commit themselves to God in full compliance to His covenant. They are called the 144,000.

Judgement Coming

For fifteen years Jeremiah brought warnings. Then finally he prophesied that the land would become desolate and they would serve the king of Babylon for 70 years (25:11). Over three military campaigns Nebuchadnezzar took hostages and destroyed many lives. The third occurred in 587 B.C. when Jerusalem and the temple were ravaged to a point of utter desolation.

Even with this event God still had compassion on His people:

1. He promised that a covenant restoration would occur *after* the captivity.
2. He re-explained why they were in captivity.
3. God finally promised that Babylon, the conquering nation, would eventually be destroyed.

Though meeting literal fulfillment, each of these issues again became a prophetic metaphor for what would happen at the end of the world. God's people will experience an eternal covenant restoration. They will go, after captivity, to the promised land. The meaning of sin and why there is divine abhorrence will become explicitly clear. Babylon, representing apostate Christianity, would finally fall, preceded by a final call to all sincere Christians to "come out of her my people" (Revelation 18:4).

Though couched in a literal Jewish (God's people) setting, the messages became a prophetic symbol of the righteous who will stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion (Revelation 14:1) and the great multitude with the Lamb standing before the throne having just come out of a "great tribulation" (Revelation 7:9, 14), known by Jeremiah as Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7).

This is amazing information! The sins and rebellion that provoked God to punish Israel are the same that scourges the apostate church just before Jesus returns. Jeremiah's discourses are end-time messages. For the righteous, their theological framework is restoration, the completion of the everlasting covenant, the development of a group of people God calls "My people" (31:31-40). For those unwilling to repent and obey, desolation, ruin and death come.

Daniel and Jeremiah are linked closely in characterizing restitution issues for God's church. Jeremiah unfolds deep spiritual matters that will affect man's future relationship with God. Daniel picks up on these themes and, in symbols and short illustrations, introduces the major players and time periods in the "restoration warfare." A final segment of time is described when Satan wars against God's people. But in that probationary time a holy people emerges (Daniel 8:14). John picks up the same theme in a beautiful story that culminates in their marriage to Jesus – the Lamb.

God's Dream

Time periods are often discounted and even depreciated by expositors. Yet, every redemptive theme, each aspect of the ancient Hebrew theocracy and every divine agenda to rescue man has profound dates, periods or symbolic numbers attached to them. God is constantly answering the "when" or "how long" questions that are of interest to everyone. Within every timeframe is a message of hope and some type of ending. "Eternity" is only referenced when it relates to unending joy with God or in promise that sin is forever gone. What an amazing plan! Redemption unfolds within our timing framework, and God frequently tells us what time it is!

Jeremiah addresses one major timing issue. He prophesied that Israel would not only be conquered by a power from the north but how long they would be in captivity – seventy years – one life span.

"Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle. And this whole land shall be a desolation, *and* an aston-

ishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years." Jeremiah 25:10-11.

"For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place." Jeremiah 29:10.

When released from bondage, what were God's dreams?

"Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.... for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Jeremiah 31:32-34.

What is being described? The fulfillment of the everlasting covenant. In the release from captivity God anticipates a peaceful kingdom devoid of evil. Gabriel described that era to Daniel when he said that transgression would be finished, there would be an end to sins and reconciliation for all iniquity would have occurred. Wonder of wonders, other things would exist: everlasting righteousness would have come and God's people would be holy. In addition, the warfare instigated by Satan and his minions would be over.

That culminating prophecy, unveiling God's covenant dream, was 490 years of probation given to Israel in Daniel 9. More on that later. We must first visit more deeply why Israel was in captivity for seventy years. That will help us grasp what Daniel 9's probation means.

That Amazing Sabbath

Jeremiah outlined in many discourses what has made God unhappy. It can be all summarized in the metaphor of an unfaithful spouse. God imagines being married to His people. They are unfaithful – have "played the harlot with many lovers" (Jeremiah 2:1). How does one recognize their lover, their God? How is loyalty measured in the heavenly courts?

God is recognized as the Creator (Exodus 20:8-10) by keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, which was established at earth's beginning. God recognizes us as His family by our loyalty to His sacred day. The Sabbath is the seal of the marriage contract.

"I *am* the LORD your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; And hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I *am* the LORD your God." Ezekiel 20:19-20.

Provocative and fundamental in comprehending Bible truth is the Sabbath issue. Restoration, in turn, is the Biblical theme. The Sabbath recognizes that creative process. It anticipates holiness and sanctification of God's people. When we enter into that "rest," it extols God. It pays Him deference over all other gods, including the god of self. And – it esteems the re-creative process in man. That respects the everlasting covenant whereby His character is written in our hearts and minds. Paul expresses this in another way: "To whom God would make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Colossians 1:27.

Daniel was very interested to ascertain every nuance of truth as to why he and his people had been conquered and placed in captivity. This intensified in 538 B.C. when only one to two years remained of that seventy years. He studied the "books" (plural), which included Jeremiah (Daniel 9:1). Daniel had been acquainted with many of the communiqués that Jeremiah had written. – *The Review and Herald*, 03/21/1907.

It is most interesting that this prophet continued to write to the Jewish leaders in Babylon from somewhere to bring them courage and reiterate that God would "cause you to return to the place" (Jeremiah 29:10).

Jeremiah included a wonderful promise in those letters:

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you." Jeremiah 29:11-12.

Daniel was so moved by these messages that he said, "And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications" (Daniel 9:3) how to re-establish the covenant relationship with Him.

While he prayed he had God's promises to claim. "I will hearken unto you," and "you will find me" once again!

The Sabbath issue was part of Israel's rebellion. The great record of Israel's experiences were recorded in the two Chronicles. These act as beautiful adjuncts to other Scriptural records. There were no additional writings like them after Israel was taken into Babylonian captivity. Near the end of those scribes' records comes this most important verse.

"To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: [for] as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years." II Chronicles 36:21.

In ancient Israel God set up special "sevenths" to rivet in their minds the true Sabbath rest and its great sanctifying theme. It also was another divine mechanism to remind them of His sovereign position as Creator.

"The seventh year after they [Israel] settled in Canaan was to be a Sabbath year. All agricultural business was to stop. There was to be no planting or sowing. For one year the people were to depend wholly on the Lord, having faith in His arrangements as the householder. The land needed a rest in order to renew the forces necessary for growth. That which grew of itself was the common property of the poor and the stranger, the cattle and the herds. Thus the land was to receive rest, and the poor and the cattle a feast.

"This was to show that nature was not God, that God controlled nature. God designed that from nature His church should constantly learn important lessons. They were to cherish a vivid sense that God was the manager, the householder. They were to know the reality of His presence and His providential care over all the earth. They were to realize that all nature was under His supervision, all the productions of the ground under His ministration. This was to give them faith in His providence. He could withhold His blessings or bestow them. – Ms 121, 1899." – *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 3, p. 347.

For every Sabbath year the Jewish people disgraced, they spent a year in Babylonian captivity

– 70 years. Since the Sabbatical year was every seventh year, they had been in rebellion 490 years. The story now takes on special meaning. We have Daniel praying for his people. He recognizes Israel's sin. He pleads for restoration of their relationship with God, the temple and Jerusalem.

For the first time in Daniel's writings, he addressed God in his prayer in His great covenant name – *Adonay* (a very personal "My Lord"). This was interspersed with *Yaweh* (the proper name of God in the Old Testament). The imagery is being choreographed to elevate our thinking to the holiness mankind might achieve when united with God in the highest sense.

Thus far we have seen:

Apostasy of God's people

↓
Warnings from God – then loss and captivity

↓
Remnant appeals Daniel's prayer on behalf of his people

↓
Awaiting restoration [Deliverance]

Who are Daniel's people – God's people?

When Gabriel came to Daniel in response to his passionate prayer he noted that seventy weeks of years were given to "thy people" and "thy holy city" to achieve six holy objectives. This made the answer to his prayer conditional for his people and the holy city (9:24).

Two vital questions must then be addressed:

1. What do "thy people" and "holy city" mean?
2. Why are the six goals eschatologically timed elsewhere in Scripture?

Daniel has just been praying for "my people Israel." With Gabriel coming and stating that the seventy weeks were for "thy [your] people," it suggests that the application is for those ready to be released from Babylonian captivity (Daniel's era). But there are problems that need to be addressed.

Daniel was informed approximately five years previously that a people would not be vindicated or become holy until after 2300 years. Additionally, in 12:1, related to the *time* of Michael standing up and the great tribulation and deliverance of God's people, Gabriel informs Daniel that "at that time" *your people* are "all those written in the book" [of life]. This places Daniel's people in an end-time context and includes the saved of all ages.

The structural unity of Daniel recognizes in chapters 2, 7–8 and 11–12 that the "end" is marked by God's kingdom restored and a resurrection or *parousia*. In each, an eschatological tyrant comes to its end at the hands of the Messiah. This also appears to be the great interest in Jeremiah's prophetic appeals and Daniel's prayerful pleas.

Daniel 2 represents ten toes crushed by the arrival of the Messianic Kingdom. Chapter 7 shows the reign of a tyrant followed by a kingdom administered by the Son of Man and the saints. Daniel 8 describes a tyrannical king who opposes the Prince of princes that is finally brought to its ruin. Daniel 11:45–12:2 sees the same king destroyed at the time of the deliverance of God's people and the resurrection.

Chapter 9 actually follows a similar pattern. There is a probationary time, the Messiah is then cut off, with the sacrifices and oblations ceasing. Then it notes that it has already been prophesied or decreed that the war, which was associated with this Messianic death, would come to its end *when* the abomination leads to desolation at the consummation (9:26-27). That appeals to and occurs in an eschatological setting.

In addition, there is another profound issue that is too often fertile ground for speculation. The six goals Gabriel challenges "Daniel's people" with are a compendium of the uniqueness of the coming kingdom. All the above prophecies move towards an *end*. Daniel uses the Hebrew word *sedeq* in his prayer (9:7, 14, 16), characterizing and honoring God's justice and righteousness coming to His people. In Gabriel's response the first three items use *sedeq* to describe that Israel must become just and righteous. In 8:14 a variant of that root word is *nisdaq*, which again clearly states that these objectives will not be achieved until after 2300

years – not in Daniel's day! Then holiness will be adjudicated.

Furthermore, Gabriel said that the seventy-week period would end when everlasting righteousness comes in. That is a unique depiction as to when the Messianic Kingdom is to be set up immediately prior to Jesus' second coming, after His priestly ministry is completed.

You may protest that Jesus received His kingdom at His ascension. He did. He sat on the right hand of God on His throne (Revelation 3:21). But He did not accept the crown at that time. This is why God gave in brilliant unmistakable imagery a unique Christ in Daniel and Revelation (Daniel 10:5-6, Revelation 1:13-16). In very important forward-moving prophecy the crown is not seen until Revelation 19:12, describing His second coming and wearing a crown (*diadema*) as king. In fact, we are firmly reminded not to get this confused by the white horse portrayal of the first Seal (Revelation 6:1-2). Jesus is the rider and has a crown (*stephanos*), portraying the final move towards victory. This concept was understood by expositor E. G. White:

"And, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away." Daniel 7:13, 14. The coming of Christ here described is not His second coming to the earth. He comes to the Ancient of Days in heaven to receive dominion and glory and a kingdom, ***which will be given Him at the close of His work as a mediator***. It is this coming, and not His second advent to the earth, that was foretold in prophecy to take place at the termination of the 2300 days in 1844. Attended by heavenly angels, our great High Priest enters the holy of holies and there appears in the presence of God to engage in the last acts of His ministrations in behalf of man – to perform the work of investigative judgment and to make an atonement for all who are shown to be entitled to its benefits." – *The Great Controversy*, p 479.

Daniel 9:24 refers to the accomplishment of God's purpose in history. It is the fulfillment of

God's covenant dream. It coincides with the end of the present course of earth's history. If it ends only in 34 A.D., then 35 A.D. would be one of the most glorious years in history. If it all was finished at the cross, the 490 years would have been incomplete.

As we noticed ever so briefly in Jeremiah, those warnings and prophecies, written specifically for apostate Israel, had a greater and more complete fulfillment at the very end of time. So here in Daniel the seventy-week prophecy has not only specific counsel for ancient Israel, its greater meaning comes at the time Jesus will return the second time.

Dividing the Message

It is now essential that we move into evaluating what part was apropos to Daniel and what truth is applicable to the end of time. Since prophecy usually has a minor fulfillment related to near the time it was written and a complete fulfillment at the end of time, this recognition can help us begin.

This document is not written to evaluate all the rich issues in Daniel 9. The goal is to unfold as to why there must be an important end-time application within its structure.

The decree of Artaxerxes Longimanus of 457 B.C. fulfilled the details of Gabriel's prophecy. It was *not* a decree to restore and build the city. If it were, 457 B.C. would not fit. The decree was to reestablish a theocracy. For those who may resist this, we urge you to study that decree in Ezra. Also, most helpful is the book *Endtime Secrets of Daniel 8-12* (see end of this appendix for resource). This is why the great appeal comes to see Daniel 8-12 through the eyes of covenant fulfillment (as Daniel does). That resolves a thousand debates. Jerusalem can then be seen as Christ's kingdom and bride and the temple as His people and church. They were to be restored.

Artaxerxes was very interested in having the Jewish people return to Jerusalem and begin worshiping the true God. They were to be restored – by a decree – back to the promised land. God added to that great theme that it would be fulfilled when everlasting righteousness came in. That would be when Christ's kingdom, the *New Jerusalem*, would be reestablished.

We get an amazing clue as to what time period covered ancient Israel in this prophecy. Daniel 11 is divided into four parts: Verse 1 is administration – a calendar; verses 2-20 present the important kings that would arise during the 490-year period, beginning with Medo-Persia. They were reminders to Israel that the time of their probation was marching forward; verses 21-28 represent the first rise of the papacy; verses 29-45, the second rise of the papacy.

In Daniel 11:2-20 there is an incredible message. Those kings stopped with the "raiser of taxes" (vs 20). From the sequence portrayed, he is clearly Augustus Caesar. The weight of evidence tells us that the prophecy for those ancient Jews would end at the time of Christ. In addition, the basic message of Daniel 9:26 and 27 ends with the death of Christ. The phrases that include "abomination," "desolation" and "consummation" refer us to other areas in Daniel 8-12 related to the he-goat, little horn and king of the north. Jesus explicitly said that those things would occur after His era and related to either the fall of Jerusalem (70 A.D.) or His second coming. Interestingly – both are well after 34 A.D.

It is apparent that the last week of seven years is broken into two time segments. One relates to the three and a half years of Christ's ministry, which ended at the cross – the "Messiah the Prince" (vs 25) who was "cut off" (vs 26), causing the "sacrifice and oblation to cease" (vs 27). The next three and a half years, by context, relates to the "abomination," "desolation" and "consummation."

Was there a three and a half years associated with the literal fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.? The siege of this city under Vespasian and then his son Titus lasted three and a half years. Many of the prophetic events related to Christ and Daniel's prophecies were fulfilled at that time – which was not in direct succession after the cross.

Was there to be another three and a half years right at the very end of time? That's why we have Daniel 12, Revelation 11, 12 and 13 to mature our grasp of the 70-week prophecy. Those collectively tell us when and how the warfare will end and God's people will be delivered during a final three and a half years.

E. G. White and 34 A.D.

Since the 490 years represent a probationary time for restoration and holiness, it was first given to the ancient Jewish nation in mercy after their captivity. It came as "another chance." That chance would go to 34 A.D., at least that was the duration calculated from the prophecy.

But there is a question. What happens to the prophecy if mercy ceases early? The probation was given to the Jewish people as a *nation*.

"In the time of Abraham, mercy ceased to plead with the guilty inhabitants of Sodom, and all but Lot with his wife and two daughters were consumed by the fire sent down from heaven. So in the days of Christ. The Son of God declared to the unbelieving Jews of that generation, "Your house is left unto you desolate." Looking down to the last days, the same infinite power declares, concerning those who "received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved," "For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." As they reject the teachings of His Word, God withdraws His Spirit, and leaves them to the deceptions which they love.'" – *Early Writings*, p. 45.

"The hour of hope and pardon was fast passing; the cup of God's long-deferred wrath was almost full. The cloud that had been gathering through ages of apostasy and rebellion, now black with woe, was about to burst upon a guilty people; and He who alone could save them from their impending fate had been slighted, abused, rejected, and was soon to be crucified. When Christ should hang upon the cross of Calvary, Israel's day as a nation favored and blessed of God would be ended. The loss of even one soul is a calamity infinitely outweighing the gains and treasures of a world; but as Christ looked upon Jerusalem, the doom of a whole city, a whole nation, was before Him – that city, that nation, which had once been the chosen of God, His peculiar treasure." – *The Great Controversy*, pp. 20-21.

Then what happened to the last three and a half years as a prophecy for the Jewish nation? In fact, the evening of the triumphal ride, which would

have been Nissan 10 – the day the Passover lamb was to be chosen, we are told:

"The sheep gate was before Christ, and the path which led to the temple, and for centuries the victims had been conducted thither for sacrifice. The lambs that had been slain had been a representation of the great anti-typical sacrifice that in a few hours would be made for those who rejected his grace and compassion, the refusers of his offers of mercy. The only-begotten Son of the Infinite God would be led through the sheep gate as a lamb to the slaughter, while through the priests and rulers and through the common people would be manifested satanic attributes. For a few moments the Son of God stands upon Mount Olivet, expressing the intense yearning of his soul that Jerusalem might repent in the last few moments before the westering sun shall sink behind the hill. *That day* the Jews as a nation would end their probation. Mercy, that had long been appointed as their guardian angel, had been insulted, despised, and rejected, and was already stepping down from the golden throne, ready to depart. But, O, that the rejecters of God's mercy, full of zeal to sustain themselves in their own way, might yet turn from their man-made inventions, repent, and seek reconciliation with God! The shadows of twilight are beginning to gather, and, O, that Jerusalem might know the things that belong unto her peace! But now the irrevocable sentence is spoken, because 'she knew not the time of her visitation.'" – *The Signs of the Times*, 02/27/1896 (emphasis added).

But E. G. White said:

"The seventy weeks, or 490 years, were to pertain especially to the Jews. At the expiration of this period the nation sealed its rejection of Christ by the persecution of His disciples, and the apostles turned to the Gentiles, A.D. 34. The first 490 years of the 2300 having then ended, 1810 years would remain. From A.D. 34, 1810 years extend to 1844. 'Then,' said the angel, 'shall the sanctuary be cleansed.' All the preceding specifications of the prophecy had been unquestionably fulfilled at the time appointed." – *The Great Controversy*, p. 410.

"The seventy weeks, or 490 years, *especially* allotted to the Jews, ended, as we have seen, in A.D. 34. At that time, through the action of the

Jewish Sanhedrin, the nation sealed its rejection of the gospel by the martyrdom of Stephen and the persecution of the followers of Christ. Then the message of salvation, no longer restricted to the chosen people, was given to the world. The disciples, forced by persecution to flee from Jerusalem, 'went everywhere preaching the word.' 'Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.' Peter, divinely guided, opened the gospel to the centurion of Caesarea, the God-fearing Cornelius; and the ardent Paul, won to the faith of Christ, was commissioned to carry the glad tidings 'far hence unto the Gentiles.' Acts 8:4, 5; 22:21." – *The Great Controversy*, p. 328 (emphasis added).

There appears to be a conflict. As with Scripture, it is important to compare the writings of an expositor to obtain a complete picture. She also noted:

"Mercy was extended to them, and their probation was lengthened, until three years and a half after the death of Christ, when the apostles declared: 'It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing you put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.'" – The Review and Herald, 03/10/1896.

What is this all saying? A probation, which was cut off, was then lengthened by special decree. A special dispensation of time was given to the Jewish people until 34 A.D.

God, through Gabriel, gave a prophecy in Daniel 9 that would extend right up to the end of

the world. The conditions and setting has not yet been completed. Another three and a half years remains to be completed right at the end of time to fulfill all righteousness. Did E. G. White know that? Absolutely. That is not part of this discussion, but before her life ended, she made it clear in writing that timing issues from Daniel would be completed at the very end (not 1798 nor 1844).

God's pleas through Jeremiah were forward-looking to complete restoration. The ram and he-goat messages with the terrible little horn anticipated the time when holiness would come to God's people. Daniel 11 and 12 describe amazing details regarding the end of the warfare – the great controversy. Daniel 9 is no exception. It spans the time from 457 B.C. to the deliverance of God's people at the resurrection. Is there a time gap? Absolutely. The Bible calls it "the tarrying time." And that is another exciting saga in God's wonderful redemption plan.

Resource for *End-Time Secrets of Daniel 8-12*:

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Prophecy Unfolds

The Seven Trumpets of Revelation

CHAPTER 8

When Satan Turns on His Own

"And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit." Revelation 9:1.

Many translations, including the King James Version quoted here, say: "I saw a star fall." "Fall" (*peptokota*), however, is in the past perfect tense, which really says: "I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth" (NIV). That little change redirects the meaning. If John saw the star fall, the timing and sequence of the Trumpet events would be impossible to understand. The seer sees a star that had fallen in the past.

Stars are often symbols of angels (Judges 5:20, Job 38:7). Since this star is personified, it is an intelligent being. This star or angel had fallen from heaven to the earth. There is a wonderful link to this with Revelation 12:7-9 where it notes the "dragon and his angels" were cast out of heaven "to the earth." Jesus had noted: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:17 – NIV). John is seeing Satan, who was previously cast out of heaven, suddenly on the stage of Trumpet five.

Before the curtains are drawn back, it might be helpful to look at two very special references:

The king of Tyre is a metaphor for Satan. God noted: "I have destroyed you, O covering cherub ... I cast you to the ground" (Ezekiel 28:12-19).

"How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! [how] art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! ... Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit." Isaiah 14:12, 15.

This star is Satan and, amazingly, he is still associated with the "pit" where Isaiah saw him more than 800 years before.

We will look later at verse 11 where the star's name is after what he stands for, "destruction." This terrible being is in command of other evil angels. It is unquestionably Satan.

Long ago Satan was cast to the earth. God restricted his power and that of the massive host under his command. How do we know? Repeatedly, the term "was given" (*endothe*) is used in Revelation as it is here (a few examples, 6:2, 4, 8; 7:2; 8:2-3; 13:5, 7). Satan was not permitted to have this key until it "was given" to him. He couldn't release what was in the pit until he had that key. "Was given" is a common phrase in Judaism. They felt "God's name

¹ Stefanovic, Revelation of Jesus Christ....., p. 300.

was too sacred to be uttered except in rare circumstances." So they used phrases as a "divine passive" such as here, which when used, refers to God.¹ God gave Satan the key.

We are given a picture of Satan in imagery God wants us to remember – *He* cast him out of heaven and *He* gave him the key. So what we discover in the rest of this Trumpet must be put in the context that it is in God's plan! He is working through it all. Something good will come out of this incredible message.

What lock does that key fit into? The "bottomless pit." Sound scary? It is! We're going to discover that it is filled with evil angels. And when they are released, terrible is their mission – but only against the wicked. And that's good.

But what is that "pit?" It really means in Greek "shaft of the abyss" – a great well, a corridor or tunnel to a prison. "Abyss" was the word used for this earth before creation (Genesis 1:2). It was used to describe Palestine when the Jews were in Babylon captivity (Jeremiah 4:23-30). It is also the place where evil beings are confined awaiting punishment (Isaiah 24:21-22). It represents the deepest waters of the sea (Palm 42:7, Isaiah 51:10), also the place of the dead, "depth of the earth" (Psalm 63:9, 71:20).

This abode is synonymous with the idea of Hades (Job 38:16, Ezekiel 31:15, Jonah 2:6). God restricts angels and imprisons them in the abyss to await judgment (II Peter 2:4; Luke 8:31; Jude 6; Revelation 20:1, 3).

Trumpet five refers to the place where evil angels are confined. Remember that startling encounter Jesus had with two demon possessed men in the region of Gerasenes? That legion of demons inhabiting their beings begged Jesus not to release them to the abyss. When inside of men they were not confined and were content. But they even preferred to be inside of pigs rather than the abyss (Luke 8:31-32). That must be an awful place, even for evil angels. And isn't it incredible – Satan has no control over those prison-house gates unless God hands him the key.

It is fascinating – very, very intriguing – that the prophetic beast of Revelation (who teams up with Satan and the false prophet) is in that abyss also (Revelation 11:7, 17:8).

We must not yield to fantasy thinking, such as this abode is inside the earth or at some specific geographic place. We know that it is earth-related/ associated because this is where Satan was cast to. Paul wrote that the principalities of the rulers of darkness "of this world" was a spiritual realm in "high places" (Ephesians 6:12). That simply means that they are in a spirit world but have access to all men.

E. G. White recognized this accelerating freedom of Satan: "As we near the close of time, there will be greater and still greater external parade of heathen power; heathen deities will manifest their signal power, and will exhibit themselves before the cities of the world."²

We are about to witness what occurs when Satan has almost unbridled freedom over mankind. The demoniacs were one amazing illustration.

"The encounter with the demoniacs of Gergesa had a lesson for the disciples. It showed the depths of degradation to which Satan is seeking to drag the whole human race, and the mission of Christ to set men free from his power. Those wretched beings, dwelling in the place of graves, possessed by demons, in bondage to uncontrolled passions and loathsome lusts, represent what humanity would become if given up to satanic jurisdiction. Satan's influence is constantly exerted upon men to distract the senses, control the mind for evil, and incite to violence and crime. He weakens the body, darkens the intellect, and debases the soul. Whenever men reject the Saviour's invitation, they are yielding themselves to Satan. Multitudes in every department in life, in the home, in business, and even in the church, are doing this today. It is because of this that violence and crime have overspread the earth, and moral darkness, like the pall of death, enshrouds the habitations of men. Through his specious temptations Satan leads men

² *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 118.

to worse and worse evils, till utter depravity and ruin are the result.”³

“And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.” Revelation 9:2.

Satan opens the prison-house of hell, releasing his minions. As we noted above, this simply means that they have been given freedom to work in new ways. What could this mean? Knowing this is his last chance to deceive the world, what might their tactics be? Possessing the mind and will of individuals such as the demoniacs is certainly one. That doesn’t mean the individual has to be naked, cutting themselves and frothing at the mouth. There are a thousand ways that satanic beings might entice.

What behavior has God severely restricted since the beginning of time? The visible appearance of evil angels. Now is Satan’s chance to not only “impress” the sensory heart of man but confront his senses in ways most of the world will submit to.

“Little by little he has prepared the way for his masterpiece of deception in the development of spiritualism. He has not yet reached the full accomplishment of his designs; but it will be reached in the last remnant of time. Says the prophet: “I saw three unclean spirits like frogs; ... they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.” Revelation 16:13, 14. Except those who are kept by the power of God, through faith in His word, the whole world will be swept into the ranks of this delusion.”⁴

“It is foretold in the Scriptures, which declare that ‘in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.’ 1 Timothy 4:1. Paul, in his second letter to the Thessalonians, points to the special working of Satan in spiritualism as an event to take place immediately before the second advent of Christ. Speaking of Christ’s second coming, he declares that it is ‘after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.’ 2 Thessalonians 2:9.

When these fallen angels have greater access to mankind, it may come with supernatural signs and miracles. That in itself would be coercive and persuasive! Yet, there are two other techniques by which the deceiver will entrap all but the prepared. They are very personal. When there are *individual encounters* with those beings, the world will be put to the greatest test, including the saints.

“Evil angels in the form of men will talk with those who know the truth. They will misinterpret and misconstrue the statements of the messengers of God.”⁵

“I saw that the saints must have a thorough understanding of present truth, which they will be obliged to maintain from the Scriptures. They must understand the state of the dead; for the spirits of devils will yet appear to them, professing to be beloved relatives or friends, who will declare to them unscriptural doctrines. They will do all in their power to excite sympathy and will work miracles before them to confirm what they declare. The people of God must be prepared to withstand these spirits with the Bible truth that the dead know not anything, and that they who thus appear are the spirits of devils.”⁶

The Pit, Smoke and Darkness

The smoke rises out of the pit. An inferno must be within that deep well. The imagery suggests a key opened a sealed lid, followed by a massive “swoosh.” Instantly billows of smoke rise and darkens the sky as the smoke from a great furnace. This graphically describes something dramatic.

“Smoke rising from a furnace” is also an expression for God’s terrifying power and presence (Exodus 19:18; cf. Psalms 104:32, 144:5). The description of God’s destructive power on Sodom and Gomorrah uses similar language: As “dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace” (Genesis 19:28 – NIV). Power, control or judgment is associated with this imagery. But, we already know that it is Satan that opened the “lid.” He is about to begin a dreadful work.

Peter said: “God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast *them* down to hell, and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.” II

³ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 341.

⁴ *The Great Controversy*, pp. 561-562.

⁵ *Last Day Events*, p. 160.

⁶ *Early Writings*, p. 262.

Peter 2:4. That characterizes some of the “pit” attributes. The “key” broke those chains. Darkness from the smoke of hell represents great spiritual darkness that now actively covers the earth (cf. Genesis 19:27-28, II Corinthians 6:14, Ephesians 2:2). This is synonymous to the black horse of Revelation 6:5. There, the cost of wheat and barley was high, symbolizing how difficult it was to obtain truth. Darkness covered the land. That horse represents people waiting to be called out of darkness.

This plague, the fifth Trumpet or first woe, is Satan’s last opportunity to deceive and promote falsehood. It is the time described later when a loud voice spoke to John: “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.” Revelation 12:12.

The Greek word for “time” is *kairos* – the last opportunity. This means that a fateful, decisive short period of time has come to planet earth.

This is the most solemn period ever to come to mankind this side of the flood. The drama doesn’t stop there. Out of the smoke into the darkness comes Satan’s cohorts – demons.

“And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.” Revelation 9:3.

Out of the darkness of Satanic deception comes this host of locust. No, they are not real locust, helicopters or some vast military machinery. Yes, they are symbolic of a warfare about to reach its zenith of intensity.

There are nine different words in Hebrew for locust. Figuratively, they usually represent swarming hordes or powerful hosts (cf. Judges 6:5, 7:12; Joel 2:4). They can call forth an emotion of distain and fear (cf. Isaiah 33:4, Naham 3:17). The destruction that locust can cause is so extensive (Deuteronomy 28:38, II Chronicles 7:13, Joel 2:25) that Jewish tradition permitted the blowing of the shophar (ram’s horn trumpet) on the Sabbath as an alarm at the threat of such a plague.⁷

These locust are not even ordinary insects. They have the ability to hurt because of scorpion-like tails. Perhaps most important, it once again says that their

power “was given” (*endothe*) to them. God again is in control, permitting the demons to exercise harm over parts of the earth.

Why is this permitted? The time has arrived for the universe to see the consequences of raw demonic power contrasted with the loving ministry of God’s saints. There is an exciting informational tie to Joel’s writings. He presents a locust visitation as a harbinger or part of the Day of the Lord. Making this message more end-time compelling is his intimation that these locust represent invading Babylonian armies out to destroy Judah or God’s people (chapter 2).

That is exactly the imagery we find in Revelation. Babylon is used to represent the apostate powers (Satan being a part of them) that war against those who keep the commandments of God and have the testamony of Jesus. Notice a few of these amazing comparisons:

Joel:

1. “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion” (2:1)
2. ‘A day of clouds and blackness’ (2:2)
3. ‘They have the appearance of horses’ (2:4)
4. ‘It [the nation that invades Israel] teeth of a lion’ (1:6)
5. ‘With a noise like that of chariots they leap over the mountaintops, ... like a mighty army drawn up for battle’ (2:5)

Revelation:

1. “And the fifth angel sounded” (9:1)
2. ‘The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss’ (9:2)
3. ‘The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle’ (9:7)
4. ‘Their teeth were like lions’ has the teeth’ (9:8)
5. ‘The sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle’ (9:9)⁸

⁷ Ford, J. Massingberde; *The Anchor Bible* (Doubleday, New York), 1975, p. 148.

⁸ Moore, Marvin; *The Seven Trumpets of Revelation. A crisis about to happen? A study of Revelation 8-11*, pp. 22-23 (published by Marvin Moore, 1990, Revised 1993).

Joel sees the army as disciplined and ruthless with lion's teeth. What a fitting symbol for God to use again with John. Since they both represent prophecies of the final spiritual battle before Jesus comes, information can be shared, unfolding an incredible scene we will all be engaged in!

Joel says that the invasion was permitted to bring people to repentance. John's message comes at earth's last-chance time. Joel calls this invasion "the northern army" (2:20). Isn't that interesting? That is where Satan is represented as wanting to set up his throne (Isaiah 14:13) and where smoke arises from (Isaiah 14:31). That is the direction the "little horn" of Daniel 8 waxed exceedingly great from.

Scorpions are noted only eleven times in the Bible. They always represent powers of evil. All of these support the idea (including Isaiah 9:8-19) that they symbolize Satan and his evil angels presenting falsehoods. Revelation 12:4 states that one third of the stars of heaven were swept away by the dragon's tail. Like a scorpion, the evil is done from behind.

There are other incredible parallels. The beast that "ascendeth" out of the bottomless pit that overcomes and destroys truth (Revelation 11:7, 17:8) relates to the locust imagery. The "power" and "authority" given to the locust relate to the authority given to the beast to "make war against the saints" (Revelation 13:7). Who gave the beast its power and authority? The dragon (Revelation 13:2).

The locust represent first Satan's wicked angels. Then ties noted to the beast and Babylon reveal that their work is carried forward by the papacy and apostate Protestantism. From Joel to Revelation that imagery is end-time.

"And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads." Revelation 9:4.

This is the third report within Trumpet five where evil forces are subject to divine authority. That is wonderful to know. Through all the hate and harm that that satanic kingdom exudes, it is always tempered by a sovereign God. Those agencies were given power to harm the earth-dwellers. But now we are told that those operations are restricted even further.

The "locusts" have been blocked from devouring their usual food sources – grass, any green thing or

trees. But they could inflict great pain on humans with their scorpion tails. What is this story telling us? Elsewhere, vegetation is the focus of the locust plagues (Exodus 10:15, Joel 2:3). Recall that literal vegetation was destroyed over one third of the world under Trumpet one.

Trumpets five and six are given in symbolic language (in contrast to the first four). They are about people, not nature. The grass, green things and trees cannot be harmed. Why? They represent good people. They are contrasted with those who do not have the seal of God in their foreheads.

"Grass" is symbolic for people (Isaiah 40:3-8). "Trees" also represent people, especially leaders – some good (Psalms 52:8, 92:12-14; Jeremiah 11:16, 17:7-8), some bad (Psalm 37:35, Micah 7:4, Nahum 1:10). "Green things" is a general figure for mankind.

Under Trumpets one to four many people were destroyed. They were individuals who resisted the final appeal and refused to repent. Mercy and grace no longer pled for their salvation. Two thirds remained. Two thirds still could submit to God's final call.

Now Satan is permitted to inflict pain and distress on the remaining two thirds – except those who are sealed. Might some of the non-sealed still come into the fold? It would appear that way. There is a hiatus of information during the several months of this Trumpet.

The weight of evidence suggests that the Loud Cry is still moving forward and penetrating the remotest hovels of earth. The imagery also suggests that humanity will suffer keenly – like the sting of a scorpion – during this time. Does the grief and pain come from the devastation of the first four Trumpets? That likely contributes. But there is another issue.

This is Satan's final chance to turn the world against God's people. E. G. White seems to have penetrated this period of time with these words:

"While appearing to the children of men as a great physician who can heal all their maladies, he will bring disease and disaster, until populous cities are reduced to ruin and desolation.... And then the great deceiver will persuade men that those who serve God are causing these evils. The class that have provoked the displeasure of Heaven will charge all their troubles upon those whose obedience to God's commandments is a perpetual reproof to transgressors.... As the wrath of the people shall be excited by false charges, they will

pursue a course toward God's ambassadors very similar to that which apostate Israel pursued toward Elijah."⁹

“Satanic agencies have been moved from beneath, and they have inspired men to unite in a confederacy of evil, that they may perplex, harass, and cause of the people of God great distress. The whole world is to be stirred with enmity against Seventh-day Adventists, because they will not yield homage to the papacy, by honoring Sunday, the institution of this antichristian power. It is the purpose of Satan to cause them to be blotted from the earth, in order that his supremacy of the world may not be disputed.”¹⁰

This appears to be Satan’s strongest hour. He will hurt his own followers and then cause them to blame God’s people for their loss and distress. It is easy to see how a death decree would soon follow against those who are sealed. The picture is one especially of spiritual and mental torment that the wicked are experiencing. They are helpless in face of disaster and loss. We will see this unfold more in the next two verses.

This Trumpet represents the “hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon this earth” (Revelation 3:10) given to the Philadelphia church.

What is the “seal of God?” This is a special mark from God whereby He recognizes individuals as his own (II Timothy 2:19). This reminds us of a wonderful promise given to the twelve disciples – but it is also for us: “I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.” (Luke 10:19). John talks about a fascinating series of notes God wants to write on presumably the forehead of the overcomers: Name of God, name of the city of God (New Jerusalem) and Christ’s new name. These names vest the great family names of heaven to those who have victory over sin.

“As the people of God afflict their souls before Him, pleading for purity of heart, the command is given, ‘Take away the filthy garments’ from them, and the encouraging words are spoken, ‘Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment’ (Zech. 3:4). The spotless robe of Christ’s righteousness is placed upon the tried,

tempted, yet faithful children of God. The despised remnant are clothed in glorious apparel, nevermore to be defiled by the corruptions of the world. Their names are retained in the Lamb's book of life, enrolled among the faithful of all ages. They have resisted the wiles of the deceiver; they have not been turned from their loyalty by the dragon’s roar. Now they are eternally secure from the tempter's devices. Their sins are transferred to the originator of sin. And the remnant are not only pardoned and accepted, but honored. "A fair miter" is set upon their heads. They are to be as kings and priests unto God. While Satan was urging his accusations and seeking to destroy this company, holy angels, unseen, were passing to and fro, placing upon them the seal of the living God. These are they that stand upon Mount Zion with the Lamb, having the Father’s name written in their foreheads. They sing the new song before the throne, that song which no man can learn save the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. ‘These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God’ (Rev. 14:4, 5).”¹¹

Isn’t that incredible? To receive a seal from God marks the most amazing transition in redemption’s plans. The remnant will no longer submit to the tempter’s devices. Jesus has not yet come. The time of the great tribulation has not yet begun. probation is still open – yet, this special group has received a high moral state that will never change! No wonder God is now getting protective of His own – “Stay away from that group, Satan!”

What an incredible time. There’s more on this Trumpet woe.

“*And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment [was] as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man.*” Revelation 9:5.

The way this verse unfolds, we see the mission of the locust is to hurt mankind. Their ultimate objective is to kill, which occurs in the next Trumpet. But here it is most interesting to observe that God mandates a period of time when the wicked are only tormented.

⁹ *The Great Controversy*, pp. 589-590.

¹⁰ *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 36.

¹¹ *Lift Him Up*, p. 377.

Why is this restriction given? Something in the great controversy scheme must be matured before probation closes. Satan and his evil angels would love to kill their own followers. But some issue must develop. Jesus predicted this setting: “And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.” Matthew 24:10. The torment (*basanismos*) referred to here has gone through many secular interpretations. Elsewhere in the Bible we have these uses:

1. Torture by disease (Matthew 3:6)
2. Torture in giving birth (Revelation 12:2)
3. Mental torment (II Peter 2:8; Matthew 8:29)
4. Retribution of God on the wicked (Ezekiel 32:24)

The torture here is mental. Since its use elsewhere in Revelation is primarily spiritual or psychological (11:10; 14:10-11; 18:7, 10, 15; 20:10). The words translated “weeping” and “mourning” are synonymous. The beings are in anguish. The word used for torment is one of the strongest terms that can be used.

The torment that doesn’t kill is similarly experienced by those who worship the beast and his image and receive its mark: “they have no rest day nor night” (Revelation 14:9-11). Though Satan and his angels are the immediate cause, God is permitting it to occur.

How should the five months be viewed? There are three possibilities:

1. “Prophetic time” of a day for a year. That would mean this process will last 150 years.
2. Symbolic for a “round number,” which is often used in the Bible (I Corinthians 14:19; Matthew 17:17-19; Luke 12:6, 52; Judges 18:2, 7, 14, 17)
3. Literal time

Some expositors note that this is the literal period of a locust life span. This is not entirely correct and reflects one scholar copying another. The five months echoes the period of time the flood covered the earth (Genesis 7:24, 8:3). Having that tie, literal time should be understood here. During the flood Noah and his family were under God’s protection. During the fifth

Trumpet, those who are sealed are likewise safeguarded.

God predicted that “in the latter days” Israel would suffer the plagues that befell Egypt because of apostasy (Deuteronomy 28; cf. 32:20, 4:30). That included locust and mental anguish. This woe is on the whole earth, but a focus on apostate Christianity – Babylon – is especially entertained.

“And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.” Revelation 9:6.

“And in those days” is a timing statement. It refers back to the five months in the previous verse.

Whatever Satan is doing (we will focus on that in greater detail in the next four verses), the anguish and despair is so intense that death seems to be the sweetest release. Job expressed a similar sentiment:

“Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter *in* soul; Which long for death, but it *cometh* not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures; Which rejoice exceedingly, *and* are glad, when they can find the grave?” Job 3:20-22 (cf. Jeremiah 8:3; I Kings 19:4; Jonah 4:3, 8; Luke 23:27-30).

But God does not permit that. The wicked “shall not find it” and “death shall flee from them.”

There is such irony here that these individuals have killed the martyrs (6:9-11), but God won’t let them die. Yet a closer look shows these individuals to be survivors of the first four Trumpets, awaiting their doom, either from the Vial Plagues (Revelation 16) *or* by being in that group who cry for the rocks and mountains to fall on them to escape the face and wrath of the Lamb when he comes (Revelation 6:16-17)! Those two groups represent the final divisions of the wicked. One is subject to Satan’s last gasp of wrath. The other succumbs to the light from Jesus face. The last group is permitted to see Jesus coming. They belong to a special group whom God wants to witness part of that rescue mission of the saints.

The greatest contrast to these demon followers are those saints. Can you imagine their attitude at this time? They “did not love their life even to death” (Revelation 12:11; cf. 1:9, 2:10; 6:9, 20:4). What is the difference? The wicked seek death to escape anguish. The righteous seek eternal life even if it costs earthly death. Those sealed have “the peace

of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7).

In the Exodus plagues the gods of Egypt were proven to be false and the God of Israel was shown to be the only true God. That brought psychological anguish. They realized that to worship those gods had been in vain. This opened the door for them to repent of their sins. But it didn't happen (Exodus 9:27-28, 10:16-17). As with the Egyptians and Pharaoh, so here, their hearts are hardened.

They did release Israel for awhile. That will be analogous to the final persecution of spiritual Israel. It wasn't long until the Egyptians despaired that God's people were with them in Egypt. So at the end, Satan goads the wicked to blame their guilt and plight on God's people. They will then pursue a course to kill them that they won't have to associate with them in "Egypt" (symbolic for this world).

"And the shapes of the locusts [were] like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads [were] as it were crowns like gold, and their faces [were] as the faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as [the teeth] of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings [was] as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power [was] to hurt men five months." Revelation 9:7-10.

What an awesome part of the Bible! It almost sounds like an ancient Star Wars drama. Can you imagine what John is going through as he writes these verses? This description is how he perceived the locust. How those satanic beings are shown tell us how they fight.

The first picture he paints is that the locust appear like horses prepared for battle. He uses the words "like" or "as" several times because he is unable to describe them in any other way for us to understand. It is fascinating to look at the ancient use of horses in battle. They were large and bred for battle, taught to bite and equipped with sharp hooves. Job seemed to know this.

"Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper? the glory of his nostrils [is] terrible. He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in [his] strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men. He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted; neither

turneth he back from the sword. The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield. He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage: neither believeth he that [it is] the sound of the trumpet. He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting." Job 39:19-25.

Immediately, John is telling us that war and conquest appear to be the objective of these creatures (they are "prepared for battle"). We can't help but recall Joel's description of a swarm of locust-like cavalry, covering the land just before the "day of the Lord" (Joel 2:2-4).

Horses in prophecy – as can be seen in the first four Seals – represent people or created beings, especially those *claiming* to be God's. Some are in apostasy but may *appear* as apologists for Jesus. He warned that in the time of the end that would be an issue (Matthew 24:4-5, 11, 23-24). Satan and his followers would misrepresent our precious Savior.

"For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, [which] go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." Revelation 16:14.

Then John turns to the details that describe their fierceness and how they are ready for war. Before we look at this terrible portrayal, let's remember a beautiful promise made by Solomon:

"The horse *is* prepared against the day of battle: but safety *is* of the LORD." Proverbs 21:31.

John starts at the head and works towards the tail. The next thing he notes is what appears as *crowns* of victory (*stephanos*), which looked like gold. That is astonishing! Jesus came forth riding a white horse with a crown of victory in the first Seal (Revelation 6:1-2). Here Satan is trying to make the world believe that he holds the key of conquest. This draws on another picture of deception that John sees later of the harlot holding in her hand a golden cup of evil (which the world drinks) (Revelation 17:4).

The *human face* tells us that they are intelligent beings. The *hair* is that of woman. In this context, it suggests that they are capable of being seductive.

Their *teeth* even looked like they were from a lion. This reveals that those creatures are ferocious and can savagely attack and hold their prey.

"Thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth,

and cry, Peace; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him." Micah 3:5.

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." I Peter 5:8.

"Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion." II Timothy 4:17.

The *breastplate of iron* covers their evil heart, protecting it and showing it will never change. They appear in their own eyes as invincible. This reminds us of the harlot once again who arrogantly said: "I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow" (Revelation 19:7).

John now graphically describes the sound of these wicked angels. He heard their wings as if they were a retinue of chariots going to war. Joel observed exactly the same thing (Joel 2:5). These wings meant that they were mobile and swift. The description suggests a fierce conflict is underway (cf. Jeremiah 4:13, 47:3; Daniel 11:40).

The final picture revisits the authority and power described in verses 3-5 – "they had tails like scorpions." Then John reminds us again that that means they can sting and hurt mankind. As noted previously, that power is limited to five months. The tail is related to the teaching of false ideas (Isaiah 9:14-15).

Now we know that behind their deceptive mission is harm and destruction. The word for "sting," *kenra*, is used elsewhere to denote a "sting of death" (I Corinthians 15:55) or the scourge of Roman torture. This satanic host is seen in their final act of evil.

"He is a transgressor of the moral law, and employs every device that he can master to blind men to its true character. We are warned that in the last days he will work with signs and lying wonders. And he will continue these wonders until the close of probation, that he may point to them as evidence that he is an angel of light and not of darkness."¹²

"And they had a king over them, [which is] the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue

[is] Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath [his] name Apollyon." Revelation 9:11.

Ever since the "star" was given a key to the abyss, we have assumed that it was Satan, the leader of all its host. Now it is declared that their king is that angel of the bottomless pit.

The resemblance of the locust as an advancing army demanded a mighty leader. He is an angel and has two names – Abaddon (Hebrew) and Apollyon (Greek). The use of bilingual characters is only found in John's writing in the New Testament (John 1:38; 42; 4:25; 6:1; 9:7; 11:16; 19:13, 17; 3:14; 12:9). How fitting are those names!

- Abaddon – destroyer
- Apollyon – "I destroy"

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*." Ephesians 6:12.

In Revelation 12:3-9 Satan is pictured as the dragon who attempted to kill the Christ child. In Revelation 12:7-9 he is called the "ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan" (NIV) in the context of the rebellion leader of angels in heaven. Every description of Satan is evil. They are not pretty names but define his character and purpose.

How does Satan and his angels operate?

"And evil angels in human form will appear to men, and present before them such glowing representations of what they will be able to do if they will only heed their suggestions, that often they change their penitence for defiance. I call upon those who would have eternal life to break every yoke. The enlightening of the understanding must become a part of the experience. Sin has darkened the reasoning powers, and hell is triumphing. O, will not men cease to trust in human beings? Can not they discern the excellency of the perfect rule of righteousness that God has given?"¹³

This king is "over them" and torments his followers as was seen in verses 5 and 10. This "is a characteristic of satanic methodology. An example is found in 1 Sam. 28:7-25 when king Saul, as a last resort, went to visit the witch of Endor and to inquire of an evil spirit. 'The demon's message to Saul

¹² *Maranatha*, p. 148.

¹³ *Testimonies for the Church Containing Messages of Warning and Instruction to Seventh-day Adventists*, pp. 21-22.

... was not meant to reform him, but to *goad him to despair and ruin*.... All through his course of rebellion Saul had been flattered and deceived by Satan.... But now, in his extremity, he turned upon him, presenting the enormity of his sin and the hopelessness of pardon, that he might *goad him to desperation*.' (PP 680).¹⁴

The spirit to hurt and destroy is the nature of those "powers" and "rulers of darkness." Fascinating are Paul's words that they operate in the realm of "spiritual wickedness in high places." This all prepares the world for Satan's last deception: "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." II Corinthians 11:14).

"Little by little he has prepared the way for his masterpiece of deception in the development of spiritualism. He has not yet reached the full accomplishment of his designs; but it will be reached in the last remnant of time. Says the prophet: 'I saw three unclean spirits like frogs; ... they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.' Revelation 16:13, 14. Except those who are kept by the power of God, through faith in His word, the whole world will be swept into the ranks of this delusion. The people are fast being lulled to a fatal security, to be awakened only by the outpouring of the wrath of God."¹⁵

It is foretold in the Scripture that "in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." I Timothy 4:1. Paul, in his second letter to the Thessalonians, points to the special working of Satan in spiritualism as an event to take place immediately before the second advent of Christ. Speaking of Christ's second coming, he declares that it is "*Even him* whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders." II Thessalonians 2:9.

Satan, the king named the destroyer, with his evil host, appearing like bizarre locust is contrasted with Jesus, the King of kings, named Faithful and True and the Word of God, accompanied by the armies of heaven, also on white horses, clothed with fine

linen, white and clean – the righteous of God (Revelation 19:11-16).

"*One woe is past; [and], behold, there come two woes more hereafter.*" Revelation 9:12.

At first, one might wonder why this verse is even included in the Bible. It seems to offer so little. But here there is a unique bit of information John gives to us. The Seven Trumpets are sequential because they are numbered. Lest there is any question, the woes are sequential as shown in this verse.

Is it possible that Satan could try to mix up the order of things at the last minute? Everything Satan does is tempered by God's will. In the Garden of Eden he had limited access from one tree. In the trials of Job parameters were placed around the devastation permitted. There are similar ground rules that God places on the demonic world at the end. Events follow a procession and come in a sequence, including the "woes."

"The prophecies which the great I AM has given in His word, uniting link after link in the chain of events, from eternity in the past to eternity in the future, tell us where we are today in the procession of the ages, and what may be expected in the time to come. All that prophecy has foretold as coming to pass, until the present time, has been traced on the pages of history, and we may be assured that all which is yet to come will be fulfilled in its order."¹⁶

No matter what those giant forces for evil try or man devises, God overrules all to accomplish His purpose (*Maranatha*, p. 58). It is important to have this knowledge and hope. It is equally significant to know how Satan and his angels deal with their people during this Trumpet. While appearing as the world's benefactor and healer of disease, they will be bringing ruin and desolation. The first four Trumpets have the world in dismay for its safety. "And then the great deceiver will persuade men that those who serve God are causing these evils."¹⁷ Without hesitation he brings woe to his own. In the end, he tries to injure his competitor, Jesus Christ, by bringing a death penalty on God's people. But he fails.

What's next in the devil's last scheme? The second woe – which is Armageddon.

¹⁴Wood, Robert, M.D.; *Revelation 9* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2003), p. 14.

¹⁵*The Great Controversy*, pp. 561-562.

¹⁶*Maranatha*, p. 68.

¹⁷*The Great Controversy*, p. 590.

The Garden Patch



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The Fig Tree

In a little departure from my usually gardening article I would like to discuss with you the incident of the fig tree.

Mark 11:20-21: "And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away."

Have you ever wondered about this story of the cursed fig tree? Why would Jesus curse a fig tree simply because it did not have fruit on it? And later in the passage it says that the time of figs was not yet! Lets take a close look at this story from the gospel of Mark (also found in Matt 12 and Luke 13).

Mark 11:12-14: "And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard *it*."



David Stottlemeyer

I have heard and read various sermons on this topic. The usual take is that, since the earth is the Lord's (Ps 24:1), Jesus can do whatever he wants to His creation to make a spiritual point about the condition of His people

Israel. Including the cursing of an "innocent" fig tree. But that leaves me with a question, should Christ have found figs on the tree? Let's take a closer look at this story and see what we can find.

Fig Trees

Figs are a widespread and diverse group found in tropical to subtropical climates. They do especially well in Mediterranean and dryer warm-temperature climates where they produce some of the best quality fruit. There are both wild, and



cultivated varieties found throughout the Middle East including the land of Israel. Most figs produce two crops per year, a first crop called the "breba crop" in the spring, and a second crop called the "main crop" later in the season. The breba crop forms on last season's growth and sets before the leaves form. In cold climates, the breba crop is

often destroyed by spring frosts. In the first picture you can see a breba crop on a fig tree that is just starting to leaf out. The small figs look like small bumps along the sides of the branches while the leaves are out at the branch tips. The second, or main crop, usually matures in the fall and is borne on the new growth. The second photo shows both a breba and main crop on the same branch – the breba crop being the large fig at the bottom of the photograph, and the main crop being the smaller figs above it.



Fruit

Jesus sees a fig tree in the distance, fully leafed out. From Matthew 24 we learn that fig trees in that area usually leaf out just before summer:

Matt. 24:32: “Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer *is* nigh.”

Here it is early in the year – just before Passover (probably early March) – yet this tree is in full foliage. In theory, since the tree had leaves, it should already have the first, or ‘breba’ crop. But, since it was so early in the year, it is likely the early crop would have been lost due to spring frosts. The question we must ask is, should Christ have expected to find figs on the tree? And why did He curse it when he found none? To answer the first question, we must take a look at the promises God made to Israel.

Promised Fruitfulness

It was Gods desire that Israel should be a witness to all the nations around them, and by them the knowledge of the True God would go to all the earth. The covenant promise to Abraham was that through him and his seed “...shall all families of the earth be blessed.” Gen. 12:3. The promised blessings of faithfulness were extensive

and even reached to the orchard and garden as seen in the following promises:

Lev. 25:18-19: “Wherefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety. And the land shall yield her fruit, and ye shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety.”

Lev. 26:3-4: “If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.”

Mal. 3:11: “And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.”

What a witness Israel might have been to all the surrounding nations. It would not have taken long before word of God’s blessings on Israel would have reached the farthest parts of the earth and many would have sought to learn of the true God – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

So, from these verses we see that, if the children of Israel had been faithful, there would have been fruit on the fig tree. It matters not that the tree was “early” and that “the time of figs was not yet.” The promises of God are sure.

Num. 23:19: “God *is* not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do *it*? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?”

Expecting Fruit

You might wonder, what if someone came and picked the figs prior to the arrival of Christ at the tree? If Israel had been faithful, there would have still been figs on the tree! I can say that for two reasons:

First of all, God had made provision for the poor and stranger in that the Children of Israel were not to harvest all the crop, or go back and pick that which they had missed:

“And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou

gather any gleanings of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the LORD your God." Lev. 23:22.

Again, if Israel had been faithful, they would have not stripped the tree of all its fruit, leaving some for the poor and stranger.

The second reason to expect fruit on the tree is that I believe the words of scripture when it says that a few loaves and fishes fed 5000 people, and a small flask could continue to produce oil for a widow of Zarepath. And God is fully able to do the same thing with a fig tree.

Ezek. 36:30: "And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen."

Either way, there would have been figs on the tree when Christ arrived. That leads to the second question, why did Christ curse the tree when he found no figs?

Consequences

If there are blessings associated with faithfulness, there are also consequences that come with unfaithfulness, consequences that reach beyond the individual to touch others and even the natural world.

Gen. 3:17: "And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life."

As a result of Adam's sin even the ground was cursed. Since the fig tree had no fruit, the conclusion must be that Israel had not fulfilled the conditions to receive the promise. And now a judgment (curse) is placed on the fig tree. In doing this, Christ was giving a warning to His people of judgment to come.

Conclusion

The reason there was no fruit on the fig tree was Israel's unfaithfulness, not that it was too early in the season. God's promises know no season. The judgment that fell upon the tree was a warning to Israel of judgment soon to come. But they still had time! There was still a little time left in the great 70 week prophecy of Daniel 9. Would Israel heed the symbolic warning and turn in humble repentance to Jesus Christ the Messiah? Unfortunately, 2000 years later we know the answer to that question. But we too face a judgment – not of Israel, but of the whole world. And in the recent disasters we should see a warning, a call to faithfulness for God's end time people. Now is the time for us to heed the warning of the fig tree. Note the following quotes by E. G. White (emphasis mine):

"Jesus looked upon the pretentious, fruitless fig tree, and with mournful reluctance pronounced the words of doom. And under the curse of an offended God, the fig tree withered away. ***God help His people to make an application of this lesson while there is still time.***" – *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 25, 1902.

"The judgment pronounced upon the barren fig tree not only symbolizes the sentence passed upon the Jews, but is also applicable to the professed Christians **of our time**, who have become formal, selfish, boasting and hypocritical." – *The Signs of the Times*, February 21, 1878.

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