

BOOK NOTES

Matthias Dorn Daniel Staunend Begegnen

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The author of this theological essay on the book of Daniel is a German geologist and part-time professor at Friedensau University. According to the back cover, his goal in writing this book on Daniel was to find a new approach to the book divorced from the church's traditional understanding of Daniel's prophecies.

In contrast to the historical-critical view of the book of Daniel, Dorn accepts the unity of the book, that its author lived in the sixth century BC in Babylon, and that the book is historically trustworthy. His method of interpretation: any interpretation of the text must proceed from the text of Daniel and its historical context itself, not from theological presupposition or other books of the Bible, such as the book of Revelation. While the historical context is important as a starter and this may seem to be similar to the Protestant principle *sola scriptura*, to restrict the interpretation to only the historical context does not do justice to the *sola scriptura* principle. In *sola scriptura* all of Scripture is carefully consulted in the interpretation of a specific passage, not just the book in which the text appears.

The interpretation of the first six chapters is fairly traditional and has some valuable discussions on such subjects as religion and politics, despotism, and the Christian and his or her place of work.

Serious differences from our beliefs of the biblical interpretation of Daniel begin with his explanation of the four beasts in Daniel 7. Conservative Christian interpreters throughout church history, including Seventh-day Adventists over the last 150 years, have identified the four beasts, parallel to Daniel 2, with Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. Beginning in the nineteenth century, historical-critical scholars generally identify the four beasts with Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. Because the vision in Daniel 7 was given in 548 BC, only nine years before the end of the Babylonian Empire, Dorn believes that the lion cannot represent Babylon. For him the four kingdoms are Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and the nations following the Roman Empire, represented by the ten horns of the fourth beast.

The little horn, says the author, is the principle of the Antichrist as expressed in the histories of the papacy and Islam. Today's persecution of Christians in Islamic

countries he sees in Daniel 7:21 where the little horn makes war against the saints. The identification of the three horns that were plucked out by the little horn (Dan 7:8) present a problem for Dorn. He takes the number three as a symbol and applies it to Greece, Asia Minor, Syria, Africa, and Spain—areas where Christians were forcibly converted to Islam. He rejects the interpretation of the time element in 7:25—"a time and times and half a time"—as 1,260 years of papal dominion. The Daniel text, he says, does not justify the equation of the "time and times and half a time" with 1,260 days. His interpretation of this time prophecy is dealt with in connection with the same time element in Daniel 12:7.

The judgment in 7:9–12, Dorn claims, refers only to the activities of the little horn and the fourth beast. It has nothing to do with a judgment concerning God's people, although the text clearly says "a judgment was made *in favor* of the saints of the Most High" (Dan 7:22). The fact that the little horn persecutes the "saints of the Most High" (Dan 7:25), he says, indicates that God has already decided that these people belong to Him. Therefore, a judgment involving the saints is superfluous. Unfortunately, nowhere does he explain what 7:22 means. When it comes to the "Son of Man" in 7:13, Dorn says, a reference to the New Testament is unavoidable, because Jesus uses this term eighty times in reference to Himself. He is the fourth person in the fiery furnace, the angel in the lion's den, the person who receives "dominion and glory and a kingdom" (Dan 7:14) and who establishes the eternal kingdom in Daniel 2. While agreeing fully with this interpretation, we wonder why in this case he violates his own principle that any interpretation of the text must proceed from the text of Daniel and its historical context itself, not from other books of the Bible. He makes an exception with Daniel 7:13 but he refuses to do the same in the case of the time element "a time and times and half a time" (Dan 7:25), which is also found and explained as 1,260 days in Revelation 12:6, 14.

Daniel 8 is the second chapter where Dorn differs substantially from the Adventist interpretation. Daniel 8:21–22 clearly identifies the ram and the goat as Medo-Persia and Greece. The author accepts the identification of the "large horn" (Dan

8:21) with Alexander the Great. However, the little horn, which he sees coming out of one of the four horns and not out of one of the four winds (Dan 8:8, 9), he believes, finds its first fulfillment in King Antiochus Epiphanes and his persecution of God's people, the Jews, that culminated in the defiling of the temple in Jerusalem. The second and final fulfillment of the little horn, according to the geologist Dorn, is evolution. He reaches this conclusion because he correctly identifies the "2,300 evenings and mornings" in Daniel 8:14 as days (cf. Gen 1), and because Daniel 8:17 says that the vision refers to the time of the end. By using the year-day principle, Dorn argues that the 2,300 years must extend to the time of the end. Then he identifies the breaking of the little horn "without human agency" (Dan 8:25, NAS) with the second coming of Christ (cf. Dan 2:34). Thus, he concludes, the end of the 2,300 years, when the little horn (evolution) will be destroyed, is still in the future. Therefore, no beginning date for the 2,300 years is given, but the activities of the little horn in Daniel 8:11, he believes, are all accomplished through the teaching of evolution. In this interpretation the sanctuary is the heart of the people and the daily (*sacrifices*) are their prayers.

The author's interpretation of Daniel 9 is fairly traditional again, except that he believes Christ was crucified in the year AD 30 instead of 31. The six infinitives in Daniel 9:24 are all seen as the work of the Messiah, but in addition, they are understood as counterpoints to the six activities of the little horn in 8:9–14. Thus, "to finish the transgression" (cf. Dan 8:12) refers to the demise of evolution at the Second Coming, etc. At the end of the chapter Dorn distances himself from the Adventist sanctuary teaching and that the seventy weeks and the 2,300 years begin at the same time (457 BC). He correctly concludes that if the beginning date of the 2,300 years were known his interpretation of Daniel 8 would collapse. He argues that if Daniel had the intention to connect the two time elements, he would have used the same units of time. This, of course, is an unproven assumption. The fact that Daniel uses weeks, days, and times militates against his position.

Chapters 10–12 are the most difficult chapters of the book. Dorn correctly identifies the supernatural forces behind the conflict between Medo-Persia and Greece in chapter 10 as God's angels and Satan's

demons, with the Son of Man appearing in verse 5. In Daniel 11:5–29 he sees the activities of the kings of the north (Seleucids) and the south (Ptolemies), with Antiochus Epiphanes as the main actor in 21–29. The taking away of the daily *sacrifices* in 11:31 the author identifies as the crucifixion; most Adventist interpreters see the crucifixion in verse 22 where "the prince of the covenant" is broken. In the last part of the vision, Dorn finds the activities of the little horn of Daniel 7 in verses 32–39, the time of the end in 40–45, and the Second Coming in 12:1–3.

In the last ten verses of the book we find three time elements: "a time, times, and half a time" (Dan 12:7), 1290 days (Dan 12:11), and "1335 days" (Dan 12:12). Dorn rejects the year-day principle, except for the 2,300 evenings and mornings, and he does not believe that these time periods are connected. He takes the "time, times, and half a time" as a symbol for the period of suffering of the Jewish nation that came to an end—as he believes, in 1917 with the Balfour Declaration that promised the Jews a homeland in Palestine. This is quite an extraordinary statement, considering that the suffering of the Jews in the Holocaust took place more than two decades later. As far as the 1,290 and 1,335 days are concerned, he follows preterist interpreters who understand these days as literal days during the Roman siege of Jerusalem.

In conclusion, Matthias Dorn is to be commended for investing much time and energy in the study of the book of Daniel. As a creationist he sees many references and allusions to creation throughout the book, which Adventists generally do not notice. He also has a number of good discussions on topics dear to Adventists, such as creation, the Sabbath, and prayer. His understanding of the prophetic chapters 7–12, however, differs significantly from the Adventist interpretation of Daniel. In brief, Dorn's interpretation is a hodgepodge of creationism, historicism, Adventism, preterism, evangelicalism, and his own unique interpretations. There is no consistency in the interpretation of the time prophecies. The "time, times, and half a time" are taken as a symbol of persecution and the "2,300 evenings and mornings" have no beginning date, but end at the Second Coming, whereas the 1,260 and 1,335 days are seen as literal days that found a fulfillment in the first century AD.

Despite some positive aspects, the overall effect of this book on the Adventist

Church may be rather severe. Its interpretation undermines the sanctuary truth and the historicist interpretation of Daniel's prophecies as taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. His double fulfillment of the little horn as the papacy and Islam does not do justice to the biblical context of Daniel 2 and Revelation 12–14, where “apocalyptic prophecies have neither dual nor multiple fulfillments. On the contrary each symbol has but one fulfillment.”¹ Thus, the book has the potential

to confuse many members and to unsettle our prophetic message.

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¹ Frank B. Holbrook, ed., *Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, Vol. 3* (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, 1986), 290,