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SANCTUARY THE CONTEXT OF INTERPRETATION

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Daniel's context. The eighth chapter of Daniel quite clearly presents a scene of a violated and destroyed sanctuary (temple). The violation and destruction is physical. It prophecies that 'cleansing' will take place. There will be restoration. That restoration will be a physical reality. The reader may be encouraged in times of pain, violence and destruction that there will come a restoration of the structures of the temple and after that the restoration of the temple services and worship.

For the sake of clarity we may separate two restorations: restoration of the physical structures and restoration of the rituals that the existence of the physical structures makes possible.

How shall the prediction 'then shall the 'sanctuary be cleansed' (Daniel 8:14) be interpreted? Consider two non-exclusive interpretations. (1) In the first case the defilement of the sanctuary and its destruction will be eradicated and with its restoration it will assume its role as a place of worship and sacrifice. The defilement and destruction imposed by the oppressors will be a thing of the past, with the rebuilding of the temple completed. (2) We come now to a second interpretation. This has to do with activity within the sanctuary, the ritual of the daily and the annual ceremonies. Here, the 'cleansing' means the restoration of these activities after the defiling and destruction. The future is not empty of consolation. In the meantime there can be hope. In considering these two options we have the possibility of a satisfactory understanding of the text, according to the intentions of its source.

What happens when the passage is set by its interpreter in a different context from its original one? Let us take examples.

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William Miller's context is the deeply and emotionally held expectation of the end of the age at the Second Advent. The sanctuary is the earth. Its cleansing is its destruction. Beyond that destruction there is restoration for the righteous.

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Hiram Edson's context is the failure of the deliverance from the destruction and judgment which Miller had proposed. This interpretation is to provide some explanation for the failure of the Advent hopes of Miller. The 'sanctuary' is now, rather surprisingly, located in the heavens and the attention of the interpreters is now given to what takes place in the celestial sphere. That celestial activity takes time. The end will come after this priestly activity has taken place. So there is a period of time before the end. The contrast between Miller's definition of sanctuary and Edson's could not have been greater. But there is a common theme. It is concerned with the Advent and in particular with the anticipation of the unknowable time of its occurrence.

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Context of the Adventist community in 2015, which is still expecting the Advent. This later Adventist interpretation places the prediction in the context of continued hope after decades of waiting without the fulfilment of that hope. Its purpose is to provide some explanation of the failure of the Advent to materialise.

The interpretation focuses on the detail of the ancient ceremony of the Day of Atonement (Leviticus, 16). It introduces new elements: Jesus as High Priest, his activity as judgment, first as investigation,

then as execution. This complete, then comes the end, deliverance and destruction according to the result of the process of investigation, deliverance for the good, destruction for the bad.

Adventist interpretation insists that we cannot know the time of the 'end'. It asserts that we cannot know when the Advent will take place. This is accompanied by an emphatic insistence that the Advent will take place 'soon' and, with the same breath, insisting that the heavenly sanctuary process continues. The length of this period of priestly activity cannot be given. When it ends cannot be known.

This imaginative construction of detail and vocabulary, with ad hoc reference to selected passages of scriptural texts from Hebrews, Revelation, Daniel, Leviticus has produced an elaborate doctrine.

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Elaborations: Imminence and Delay

Like the earliest Christians the early Adventists expected the Advent 'soon'. The waiting had become extended. Decades passed far beyond what the community had anticipated. Some idea of the appropriate length of time for waiting is essential for the emergence of a sense of growing disappointment at the non-event. This must be assumed even if this is not openly admitted at first. . For Adventists deny that it possible to cite specific lengths of time. They have said repeatedly and emphatically that they do not know specific times or length of time, but still continue to speak, inconsistently of imminence and delay!

This is misleading and unfortunate since it assumes giving an impossible meaning to the terms. Delay means that time has passed since an assumed given point and the expected event has not happened. It assumes that the length of the waiting time can be specified.

The idea of a delay entails the anticipation of a particular time for an expected event. If I expect an event to occur after the passing of a particular length of time, and it does not, then I may logically speak of delay. So when Mr Brown goes off to town, he expects that his train will arrive at a specified time, 8.21 a.m. If it does not, he will count from that moment and so reckon the length of the delay. At 8.31 he can speak of a delay of ten minutes. He can do this because he has knowledge of a definite starting point and also of the length of time that has passed since then. So also if you tell me the task will be finished in two hours and it takes three. Then I may speak of an hour's delay, since I have a known starting point.

Delays may be of various lengths of time. They may be reckoned in minutes or hours or weeks or months or years or decades or centuries or millennia. For the train it may be minutes, or hours. For the mail, it may be days. For a crop, it may be weeks. For due recognition it may be years, and so on. But whatever the case, if no time for the event is specified, there can be no logical talk of delay. So if you have no idea of when he would be coming, and so no idea of when you may expect him, you cannot logically speak of delay, since you are in ignorance of the starting point. It is obvious that I cannot measure a period of time from a point of which I know nothing. Since I have no point from which to measure the length of time to the expected event all I can say is that if he should have been here at a particular time, there has been a delay of such and such a length. But that would be pure speculation.

Of course I may have my idea of when the event expected should have taken place So since time has passed since that time of my subjective expectation, I may talk of 'delay'. But that is not delay of the event expected, but of an hypothetical length of time in my mind, since I have surmised the time the expected event which did not happen should have taken place.

So when Macarthur made his celebrated statement of promise after the retreat from the Philippines, 'I will return', no one knew how long it would be before the promise would find fulfilment. He himself did not know. He could have speculated of course. But such speculation often turns out to be wrong. So we can state a logical principle: If you cannot state in specific temporal terms when you expect the event and give the evidence for that date you therefore cannot speak of a delay.

The contradiction can be easily stated as follows. You have no idea when he might come or when the event might happen, but you go on saying that there has been a delay, since he has not yet come. But if you do not know when to expect an event, you cannot speak of a delay, since you have no reference point to give your claim its starting point and so you cannot anchor its reference. In that case your proffered 'statement' has not secure content! Should you then attempt to speak of delay you would be either making an empty and so a meaningless claim, or you would be indicating something about your own subjective idea. The claim would be hypothetical. 'If you assume that the event was to have taken place at such and such a time, then there has been a delay of so and so many hours, years decades or whatever.' You surmise a starting point. To surmise a specific time point for the event does not provide a firm basis for speculation about delay, let alone length of delay. A surmise is not sufficient for a secure conclusion about delay.

What you can say reasonably is that it is taking longer than you expected. But then you are speaking of your expectation, a personal and subjective matter. That may not mean however that the event has in fact been delayed. You should not speak of an extended expectation as a 'delay'. We have all had unfulfilled hopes. When we analyse the situation after the non-event, we may wonder why we hoped! Our problem was that we could not anchor our reference to a particular time. Nor could we specify a specific length of time before fulfilment could take place. What we may say is that we expected the event to have already taken place and may even specify how much time has passed since that time of our expectation. So we may say, 'I expected him five hours ago!' 'We anticipated finding a cure fifty years ago'. 'We waited six months for the co-operation that was promised earlier.'

So how does all this relate to our capacity to make predictions? What we are prepared to predict with some degree of confidence will happen will depend on a number of factors, for example, our predispositions: I want to believe with some degree of confidence, I do not want to believe. I want to impress, our reliance on social pressure, our openness to the influence of the group whether of family, peers, institution, whatever we consider or have considered relevant evidence.

When an expected event does not happen at the times expected there are two alternatives. One can go on hoping for it to take place. One can give up the expectation realising that it will not happen. These are the options of *continued anticipation* and *abandonment*. Due consideration of the appropriate evidence will determine whether one or the other is the rational thing to do. Psychological motivations may well play a crucial role in framing the decision to continue to anticipate or to abandon the expectation. If it is a rational decision we shall be able to refer to good evidence and reason for it.

The Question that remains

Since the Advent as a catastrophic world event the Christian has waited for has not taken place, does the believer go on anticipating it as an event in the near future or rather, modify the anticipation and extend the time for fulfilment of the expectation, perhaps indefinitely and then find grounds for the modification. Is an alternative to abandon the hope of Advent? Or is the reasonable alternative to reinterpret the hope and find a present fulfilment of that hope. The experience of the early church may

provide some guidance in that it provided several examples of alternative responses to the failure of the anticipated parousia.

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