

10. The Eschatological Day of Atonement (4Q 2013—The Sanctuary)

Biblical material: Daniel 8; Rev. 14:6, 7; Num. 14:34; Dan. 9:24–27.

Quotes

- The Day of Judgment is an important notion: but that Day is always with us. *Alfred North Whitehead*
- The last day is hidden so that every day may be regarded. *Augustine*
- At the Day of Judgment, we shall not be asked what we have read, but what we have done. *Thomas Kempis*
- Let the trumpet of the day of judgment sound when it will, I shall appear with this book in my hand before the Sovereign Judge, and cry with a loud voice, This is my work, there were my thoughts, and thus was I. I have freely told both the good and the bad, have hid nothing wicked, added nothing good. *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*
- God will indeed judge the world in righteousness; but it is by an evangelical, not a legal, righteousness, and by the intervention of the man Christ Jesus, who is the Saviour as well as the Judge of the world. *Francis Atterbury*
- As often as I think of the day of judgment, my heart quakes, and my whole frame trembles. If I am to indulge in any of the pleasures of the present life, I am resolved to do it in such a way that the solemn realities of the future judgment may never be banished from my recollection. *Jerome*

Questions

What is the essential message of the Sanctuary in Daniel 8? What are the dangers in making the sin-sacrifice system too objective? What of the concept of ceremonial defilement? How is this relevant today? How is “truth cast down to the ground”? In examining all this material, how can focus be kept on the real issues? What does this all say about God?

Bible summary

Daniel 8, especially the cleansing of the sanctuary, has had a major impact on our faith community. It takes the annual Day of Atonement and applies it to end-times events. This has been linked to the messages of the three angels in Rev. 14. Num. 14:34 is taken as a basis to read one prophetic day being equivalent to one literal year. Dan. 9:24-27 references the seventy year prophecy which looked forward to the first coming of Christ.

Comment

The Day of the Atonement was the yearly “cleansing” of the “defilement” of sin. So too the eschatological Day of Atonement when God comes to bring judgment and to cleanse. To the modern mind such concepts are somewhat alien, and do not translate well into our experience. Are there other spiritual ideas that provide better parallels to what is happening here? For the most significant aspect is not to gain an understanding of ancient rituals, but to see how all this impacts on the divine-human relationship. Is God seen to be a pedantic examiner, checking out whether all the prescribed processes have been

carried out, or is he trying to show through such symbols—picture language—what sin does and how only he can fix the damage done?

While we have much interest in Daniel 8:14, it's important not to lose sight of the wider context. The whole chapter is very much dealing with the conflict in the Great Controversy. The vision is identified as for the "distant future," and relates to the conclusion of the conflict. Verses 23-25 reveal much of the end result of this rebellion against God and his government. The rebel is identified as: completely wicked, stern-faced, a master of intrigue, very strong, causes astounding devastation, destroys mighty men and holy people, causes deceit to prosper etc. This is a very accurate description of Satan the rebel and those who follow his way.

Whatever, the whole revelation made Daniel quite sick! Evidently he understood that while there would be eventual vindication for God and his people, hard times were ahead. Even though the "Son of man" has explained the vision, Daniel does not understand it all. For this reason, Daniel 9 must be seen as a continuation of the vision in Daniel 8, given for Daniel's "insight and understanding" (9:23).

The most important aspects are: a) what sin does; b) how God fixes it; c) how this reflects on the nature and character of God; d) how this reveals the issues in the controversy; and e) how God eventually restores harmony to the universe.

In all this picture language, God is seeking to show that he can deal with the issues of the Great Controversy, that he still works for the good of all, and that he will save and heal all those who trust in him. The heart of the message here is over true and false beliefs, true and false worship, true and false concepts of God. The "little horn" seeks to set itself up to be as great as the Prince of the host—in other words, paralleling the descriptions of Satan in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. The essence of the Great Controversy is this—the self-seeking pride that desires personal power and prestige at any cost to others. This is in complete contrast to the way of God who though immensely powerful works to win not by force or compulsion, and whose might is not used in self-seeking—rather seeking the good for all others.

The message here is part of the atonement—the way in which God restores harmony to the universe through demonstrating the truth, the answers to the Great Controversy, the responses to the lies the Devil has made against God.

The historical perspective cannot be ignored, either. This has been very much part of our reason for existence, and rightly has a high place in our minds. But it is more than "movable thrones" or "explanations for the disappointment" or "an image for our self-understanding." As part of who we are, we need to better explain what these concepts mean, how they are relevant in today's society, and how they demonstrate the truth of God. Otherwise they become redundant theological arguments in an increasingly self-absorbed movement. We need to move!

Ellen White Comments

A careful study of the working out of God's purpose in the history of nations and in the revelation of things to come, will help us to estimate at their true value things seen and things unseen, and to learn what is the true aim of life. Thus, viewing the things of time in the light of eternity, we may, like Daniel and his fellows, live for that which is true and noble and enduring. {PK 547-8}