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THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

Caring for Brothers and Sisters: Matthew 18:15–20

By Ekkehardt Mueller

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst. (Matt 18:15–20, NASB)

In this famous passage from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus addresses the issue of church discipline in a way not reported in the other Gospels. This article is not so much interested in the precise procedure of how to progress when a church member sins. Instead, it only focuses on the first part of verse 15. However, here we encounter a problem that influences all further discussions on the passage.

The New American Standard Bible (NASB) reads, “If your brother sins, go . . .” and its translation is buttressed by the New International Version and the New English Translation. However, the English Stan-

dard Version (ESV) says, “If your brother sins *against you* [singular],¹ go . . .” and is supported by the King James Version, the New King James Version, the New Living Translation, and the New Revised Standard Version.

Three questions must be raised: (1) What is the real difference between “if your brother sins” and “if your brother sins against you?” (2) Why does such a difference exist? (3) Which reading is better aligned with Jesus’ thoughts and intention?

What is the Difference?

In Matthew 18 Jesus addresses His disciples. When He talks to the Twelve, all His followers are included in what He instructs them to do and to avoid. Whether “against you” is included in the text or not, it is generally acknowledged that these instructions have a wider application to the church.

The issue is whether a believer should confront a fellow believer involved in some kind of sin.² The reading “if he sins *against you*” could be understood in the sense that believers should talk to fellow believers, attempting to bring about a change of mind and possibly repentance, only if they are personally affected by the wrongdoing of the other—more precisely, if one believer is directly sinned against by the words and/or actions of another believer. In other words, if he or she is not personally hurt in one way or the other, he or she has no business meddling in the affairs of another believer, even if a third party has been seriously offended or wounded.

The shorter reading, “if your brother sins,” charges believers to get involved if they observe wrongdoing of fellow Christians, no matter against whom it is directed. They cannot just stand, watch, listen, and then look away when things go terribly wrong. It is the task and responsibility of each and every Christian to step in and try to resolve a bad situation, bringing about reconciliation, repentance, and restitution, where necessary, saving the offended and the offender.³

From this perspective the short reading is much more radical and much more demanding. It goes against the grain of individualistic Western societies, telling believers that they carry responsibility for each other and cannot just look away and be indifferent when life goes wrong. The church is indeed a family of brothers and sisters in the Lord, in which it becomes impossible for the individual member to respond as Cain, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4:9).

Why do Translations Widely Differ?

There is quite a difference in meaning between the two interpretations. This difference needs to be explained. At first glance, we may attribute the difference in wording to the different choices translators have made in rendering a biblical text. However, the matter is not a problem of translation. In this case, one cannot accuse translators of having words added to or omitted from the biblical text. The shorter reading (without the phrase “against you”) and the longer reading (including the phrase “against you”) are both found in biblical manuscripts, which complicates the matter.

The majority of manuscripts have the longer reading, but the shorter version has good early manuscript support. To use the majority of manuscripts as the only criterion to determine the better reading may not be useful. The majority can be right or wrong—even the majority of manuscripts. The majority of manuscripts are late manuscripts that were copied from each other. If copyists made mistakes, these mistakes were copied again and again. So the majority group may not necessarily have a more reliable Greek text than that found in other manuscripts. On the other hand, it cannot be assumed that the most common text is automatically wrong. Therefore, scholars look for not one but a number of criteria to determine which reading is most likely the better one.

But this case is especially tough. A member of the editorial committee of the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament project writes:

It is possible that the words εἰς σέ [“against you”] are an early interpolation into the original text, perhaps derived by copyists from the use of εἰς ἐμέ [“against me”] in ver. 21. On the other hand, it is also possible to regard their omission as either deliberate (in order to render the passage applicable to sin in general) or accidental.⁴

Another scholar suggests that a mishearing led to the difference in manuscripts.⁵ In any case, the committee of the United Bible Societies decided to leave “against him” (εἰς σέ) in square brackets in the text, indicating that it may or may not belong to the original text. So what is to be done? How do we determine the better option?

Which Reading is the Better Option?

This question is not easy to answer. The editors of the Greek Text of the New Testament have left the decision to individual scholars. So there are those who advocate the longer reading,⁶ those who favor the shorter version,⁷ and those who remain neutral or ambiguous.⁸ Because studying Greek manuscripts does not help much in this case, other venues must be explored. These are related to an in-depth study of Matthew 18:15 in its context. We may gain insights from the Old Testament background of the text, the context, the verse itself, and the New Testament as its writers understood the text.

Insight from the Old Testament Background

Jesus’ saying is quite likely based on Leviticus 19:17: “You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall reason frankly with your neighbor” (ESV). NASB translates, “you may surely reprove your neighbor.” The term *elechnō*, “to bring to light, to reprove, to convict,” of Matthew 18:15 also appears in Leviticus 19:17, in addition to the noun *elegnos*, “rebuke”. So there is a connection between the two texts. However, the Leviticus text does not indicate that a brother sins against a brother. It is general in nature, as seems to be the case with Matthew 18:15.

Insights from the Larger Context

The longer reading suggests a passive attitude. A person only gets involved with a Christian brother if personally offended. The shorter reading, however, expects an active attitude, intervening if one perceives that the spiritual life and eternal life of fellow believers are jeopardized. In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus typically stresses an active role for His followers. His disciples are not just peaceful citizens but peacemakers (Matt 5:9). They let their light shine before humans (Matt 5:16). They pray for their persecutors (Matt 5:44). They “seek His kingdom and His righteousness” (Matt 6:33), and they treat people the same way they would like to be treated (Matt 7:12)—which is more than not treating another as one would not want to be treated. The Golden Rule is about being proactive, not reactive. The Twelve are to go “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 10:7). They are sent out as sheep among the wolves (Matt 10:16), confessing Jesus (Matt 10:32). Jesus’ stress on active behavior supports the shorter reading. Yes, Christians also do something if they are personally affected. They seek reconciliation as soon as they are aware “that your brother has something against you” (Matt 5:23–24). But, as Jesus’ many

other sayings indicate, they do not limit themselves only to personal issues.

Insights from the Immediate Context

A look at the context reveals that in the beginning of chapter 18 the disciples ask the question, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (Matt 18:1). Jesus’ answer deals with a child as an example for the disciples (Matt 18:2–5); the little ones that may be despised, scandalized, and lost (Matt 18:6–7, 10, 14); the “fight” against sin (Matt 18:8–9);⁹ the joy of finding a lost sheep (Matt 18:12–14); and the sin of a brother (Matt 18:15–20). After His response Peter talks about a person who sins against him and asks Jesus how often he is supposed to forgive that person (Matt 18:21). Jesus replies with a short statement and the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:22–35), making it clear that forgiving is a Christian duty and attitude.

For the longer reading it could be argued that because Jesus talks about the little ones who possibly are offended by believers and because Peter considers it possible to be offended by believers, Matthew 18:15 should also deal with believers offending believers and what to do in such a case.

For the shorter reading it could be argued that Jesus begins with the offense against the little ones, proceeds to the problem of sin in one’s own life, and then reaches a certain climax with the parable of the sheep that went astray and the mission of the shepherd to rescue that sheep.¹⁰ The danger of church members being lost like sheep requires shepherds who save these people. As Jesus seeks the sheep that have been lost, so believers should care about the problem of sin in the life of others, even if wrongdoing does not directly affect them.¹¹ In this case Matthew 18:15–20 is a direct continuation of Matthew 18:12–14, and both passages deal with the general mission of believers to care for and be instrumental in the salvation of fellow believers who have sinned.¹²

So Jesus would then have set up a general and wider principle of care for each other, while Peter would later narrow it down again to believers being offended by believers. One scholar suggests that Matthew 18 has an ABB’A’ structure. “Sections A (18:5–9) and A’ (18:21–35) deal respectively with the issues of not causing another disciple to sin (A) and with forgiving a fellow disciple who sins against you (A’). Sections B (18:10–14) and B’ (18:15–20) treat the matter of the reclamation of straying believers.”¹³ If Matthew 18:15–20 is seen as a direct follow-up to the preceding passage on the lost sheep—and it should—then the longer reading does not make much sense.

Another author gets to the point by stating:

The addition of εἰς σέ, “against you,” at this point . . . changes an altruistic concern about a brother’s spiritual danger into a personal grievance. That personal concern will be appropriate, and is made explicit, in Peter’s question in v. 21 (εἰς ἐμέ), which leads into

the discussion of forgiveness for personal wrongs, but to introduce it here, where it is the brother’s welfare, not ‘your’ interest, which is in focus, is premature.¹⁴

Understanding verse 15 as referring “to sin in general” he states, “To speak of ‘grievance’ or of ‘conflict resolution’ here is inappropriate.”¹⁵ Peter’s question addressed to Jesus would then avoid the radicalness of Jesus and revert to the personal level. Instead of taking on the responsibility for church members, Peter is only concerned with people who hurt him personally. This would not be the first or the last time Peter would speak and/or behave counterproductively.¹⁶

Insight from Analysis of the Passage

Although Matthew 18:15 contains various vocabulary, one term may be especially significant for our discussion. The entirety of verse 15 reflects the pastoral concern and tact with which a person must take on the delicate task of addressing sin in a fellow believer’s life. The first, and hopefully last, step in the threefold process of dealing with open sin of believers attempts to keep the problem private and prevent publicity.

The goal is to “win” the brother. The verb *kerdainō*, “to win,” occurs only seventeen times in the New Testament, and only seven times it relates to persons: once to Christ—Paul wants to win Christ (Phil 3:8)—and six times to humans who need to be won. In 1 Corinthians 9:19–22 Paul talks about winning people (five times)—that is, Jews, those under the law, those without law, and the weak. These four groups probably represent Jews and Jewish Christians as well as Gentiles and Gentile Christians. And he concludes, “So that I may by all means save some” (1 Cor 9:22). For Paul, winning people has to do with mission and salvation. The only other text apart from Matthew 18:15 that refers to winning humans is 1 Peter 3:1. Peter hopes that through their lifestyle women may win their husbands for Christ. In other words, the word “winning” has to do with salvation of people, whether believers or unbelievers. In Matthew 18:15 believers are in the danger of going astray. “Win’ suggests that the person was in danger of being lost, and has now been regained; it reflects the preceding image of the shepherd’s delight in getting his sheep back.”¹⁷

So text and context seem to support the shorter reading.

Insights from Similar Passages in the New Testament

But there is an additional step to take. The question is how the community of believers received and understood Jesus’ statement in Matthew 18:15. Did they understand it as a broad statement that made it necessary for them to get interested and involved in the life of fellow believers, or was it only dealing with grievances among believers?

Although Jesus’ saying in Matthew 18:15–20 and His dialogue with Peter—including His parable (Matt

18:21–35)—are unique, there is a similar saying in Luke 17:3–4: “Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.” The two Lukan verses include the concept of the two Matthean passages previously mentioned.¹⁸ Luke 17:3 does not contain the phrase “against you” but verse 4, which reflects Peter’s proposal in Matthew 18:21, does. This echoes well what may be the case in Matthew 18. The care for the sinning brother or sister (Matt 18:15–20) is not limited to the offended church member approaching the offender but deals with brotherly sin in general.

Care for the sinning brother (general)	Forgiving the offender of the brother
Luke 17:3	Luke 17:4
Matthew 18:15–20	Matthew 18:21–35

Jesus’ saying about “church discipline” obviously also influenced Paul. Paul would not tolerate the immoral behavior of a believer in Corinth who had intimate relations with his father’s wife. Paul admonished the Christians in Corinth to do something about sin and the sinner (1 Cor 5:1–5). The issue was not that the man sinned against Paul, but that it was an open and tolerated sin in the Corinthian church.

In Galatians 6:1 Paul wrote, “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.” In 1 Thessalonians 5:14–15 he maintained, “We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.” Hebrews 10:24–25 urges, “And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

James, who loved to dwell on Jesus’ sayings, remarked in James 5:19–20: “My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”

And John wrote, “If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not *leading* to death, he shall ask and *God* will for him give life to those who commit sin not *leading* to death” (1 John 5:16).¹⁹

These are some samples of New Testament texts about caring for each other. Interestingly, none of them limit approaching brothers and sisters to personal grievances, misunderstandings, or offenses. Obviously, Jesus’ disciples did not understand Him to mean that approaching fellow believers is to be limited only to cases where one brother or sister sinned against another, or that the believer is to take the initiative to restore a relationship only when he or she is personally offended, grieved, or injured. While this is good

and should be done, the New Testament teaches that Christian responsibility for each other is much broader than this singular case.

Conclusion

This article dealt with the difficult question of whether Matthew 18:15 should include the phrase “against you.” While the manuscript evidence is mixed, the Old Testament background, the larger context, the immediate context and structure of Matthew 18 and verse 15 itself, the Lukan parallel, and the reception of Jesus’ sayings in the New Testament seem to indicate that Matthew 18:15 should not be understood primarily as a grievance of one church member by another church member, but rather as a general statement indicating that church members carry responsibility for each other because they are members of the family of God. While personal grievance is also included in the shorter reading, the text goes far beyond personal offenses and assaults.

Whether—against the suggested evidence—one would like to retain the reading “if your brother sins *against you*,” or prefers the shorter version “if your brother sins”—as proposed—the text cannot be used to circumvent personal care for erring brothers and sisters in Christ. If the sinner’s salvation is at stake, action on the part of those who observe the problem is required.



Ekkehardt Mueller is Associate Director of the Biblical Research Institute

¹ The English pronoun “you” is ambiguous. It can refer to one person (singular) or to more than one person or a group of persons. In Greek the text is not ambiguous, and the “you” in verse 15 is singular. Therefore, “you” must be understood by an English speaking audience as a singular pronoun.

² Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, Word Biblical Commentary 33B (Dallas, TX: Word, 1995), 531, notes: “Presumably . . . given the procedure that follows, the type of sin being considered is of a substantial rather than trivial or merely personal nature . . .” While all sin is unrighteousness, cf. 1 John 5:16–17 where sin (*hamartia*) can either be sin that does not lead to death or sin that leads to death.

³ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 690, notes that “it is the concerned individual, not an appointed leader or group, who is expected to act in the first instance; the wider community is involved only when that individual initiative proves inadequate, and then only to back up the individual’s concern.”

⁴ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 36.

⁵ France, 689.

⁶ E.g., David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Aca-

demic, 2008), 444; possibly Hagner, 531. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 451, speaks about church members offended by church members but adds, “Yet the ‘sin’ that one member of the church has committed against another is not a private matter about which the church is not concerned. It is a biblical, Jewish, and early Christian conviction that every sin affects the entire church.”

⁷ E.g., France, 689–693; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew, The New Century Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 275; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text, The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 745–746; Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew, Paideia Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 219–221.

⁸ E.g., Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 466–467; Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010),

⁹ In Matthew 18:8–9 Jesus talks about symbolic self-mutilation. Cutting of a hand and plucking out an eye in order to prevent being led astray is found almost identically in Matthew 5:29–30 with only the cutting off of a foot being added.

Since these verses in Matthew 5 are found in the context of adultery and fornication, the respective parallel verses in Matthew 18 may also include sexual sins.

¹⁰ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew, Vol. 2, VIII–XVIII, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 777, speak about “refraining from offending others,” “serious self-control,” and “loving concern for all fellow believers.”

¹¹ Cf. Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus, Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament 1* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1975), 418; Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006), 163.

¹² Cf. France, 690.

¹³ Talbert, 219.

¹⁴ France, 689.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 692.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Matt 16:22–23; 17:24; 26:40, 73–74.

¹⁷ France, 693.

¹⁸ See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53, Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 1382.

¹⁹ See Talbert, 220–221.

Ceremonial Uncleanness and Contemporary Application

By Elias Brasil de Souza

Introduction

God gave laws for His people to express and exemplify in their lives commitment to a relationship with Him. Thus, it should not be surprising that the interpretation and application of biblical laws are often a matter of discussion among believers. And to make the subject even more complex, the Bible contains a variety of laws—some of which may require careful study and thoughtful reflection in order to be properly understood and applied. The first explicit mention of laws in the Bible occurs in Genesis 26:5. There the LORD declared, “Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws” (Gen 26:5, NKJV). The array of terms used here indicates the diversity of laws contained in Scripture. Looking back to the Old Testament laws from the perspective of the cross, one can categorize—although in a very simplified manner—the laws revealed in the Old Testament as moral laws, civil laws, and ritual laws. The Ten Commandments represent a foundational expression of the moral law, which, by definition, conveys instructions that remain binding

upon believers throughout human history. Moral laws transcend the particularities of a specific people, culture, or phase in the history of salvation because they are grounded in the order of creation and reflect God’s character.¹ Civil laws were intended to help Israel function as a nation among other nations and were binding for the Israelites while that civil system remained in place. Ritual laws, in turn, dealt with sacrifices, impurities, and other ceremonial matters that concerned the worship system of the tabernacle/temple given to Israel as a prefiguration of Christ’s work on the cross and in the heavenly sanctuary.²

This short study does not delve into the complexities of the interpretation of the various types of Old Testament law. Rather, it addresses only some aspects of the ritual laws that are related to impurities contracted either through contact with a corpse or through involuntary emission of body fluids. Questions sent to BRI and our personal interactions with church members around the world show that this topic is a matter of concern in some areas of the world. Admittedly, many people may deem this issue irrelevant. However, some Pentateuchal texts dealing with certain kinds of impurity apparently pose a challenge

to sincere church members who endeavor to apply the biblical text to contemporary life in a rather straightforward manner.

We will briefly look at two main issues that have been raised. One relates to women who, during their menstrual period, are deemed unfit to participate on the platform during the worship service or are even denied participation in the Lord's Supper by some. Such a condition, it is claimed, makes women unclean for certain church activities.

The other issue relates to the custom of bringing a casket into the church for a funeral service. In countries strongly influenced by Roman Catholicism, this practice seems common and is taken for granted by most church members. However, some dissenting voices have questioned this custom on the basis of a few biblical passages about impurity—especially with regard to the biblical injunction against bringing impurity to the sanctuary/temple (e.g., Lev 5:2; 15:11; Num 5:1–4; 19:13; Isa 52:11–15). The passages that deal with contamination affected by touching a corpse show that such impurity was most serious and the contaminated individual who neglected to undergo the proper purification rites would be “cut off” from the congregation of Israel (Num 19:11–12). So at first glance those who object to bringing a corpse in a casket to the church for a funeral service appear to do so with the backing of some biblical verses.

Furthermore, the fact that we consider the dietary laws recorded in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 as still binding upon Christians today also raises the question as to why the laws about clean/unclean meat are to be obeyed whereas the laws about bodily impurities are to be disregarded. The following exposition offers some considerations that may help us understand and explain these issues from a biblical perspective.

Considerations

Consideration 1

We should bear in mind that the Bible should be studied with a proper hermeneutic—that is, a hermeneutic that emerges from the Bible itself. So in dealing with difficult passages the following important principles should be kept in mind: First, the Bible is its own interpreter. Second, unclear or difficult passages should be understood in light of clear ones. Third, as we read the Bible we should take into consideration the history of salvation and the fact that God spoke in different ways to different people. Of course, God does not change the way He saves us, which is by faith in His provision for our salvation.³ A biblically based hermeneutic will help us understand that God spoke the eternal truths of the gospel to ancient Israel through the typology of the sanctuary system, while after the cross God speaks to us through its fulfilled reality by what Christ accomplished on Calvary and His ongoing ministry for us in the heavenly sanctuary.

Consideration 2

The Hebrew ceremonial system provides the larger framework for defining bodily impurities and consequently excluding those affected by them from the tabernacle system. However, the ritual laws of the Levitical system have been fulfilled by Christ on the cross (cf. Heb 9:11–28). Such ritual laws are no longer binding upon us because they have been rendered obsolete by Christ's sacrifice. It is important to note that the presence of God's earthly dwelling in the tabernacle required that Israel abide by certain ritual protocols in order to honor and respect God's presence among them. Having said this we will now turn to some other considerations that will make things even clearer.

Consideration 3

It has been shown that the Levitical system deals with two kinds of impurity. One type consists of an “acquired” uncleanness. These impurities could be removed by a ritual action or simply by the passage of time. The other kind of impurity is understood to be “permanent”—that is, it could never be removed, because such impurity was grounded in the order of creation.⁴ This distinction is crucial for the issue under consideration and its implications will be shown below.

Consideration 4

The impurities derived from bodily discharges and corpses clearly belong to the category of acquired impurities. As the biblical text shows, impurities from bodily discharges were removed by the passage of time (cf. Lev 15:1–33; 12:1–8) or by means of some purification ritual. Even the impurity contracted by contact with a corpse could be removed by a ritual involving the ashes of a red heifer (Num 19). It seems clear, then, that these impurities were ceremonial or ritual in nature. That being the case, they have been cancelled by Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Indeed, the entire ritual system performed in connection with the tabernacle found its fulfillment in Christ and is no longer binding upon God's children (Eph 2:15; Col 2:13–14).⁵

Consideration 5

The unclean animals mentioned in Leviticus 11 as noted above belong to a different category of impurity. The latter has been appropriately designated “permanent” impurity. A permanent impurity is grounded in the order of creation.⁶ Consequently, unclean animals remain so perpetually and are therefore unfit for human consumption even after the cross. They are unclean because of the way they were created. It is important to note that no purification rites are prescribed to purify an unclean animal. It has been demonstrated that the terminology and conceptual framework of Leviticus 11 come from creation as indicated by a number of conceptual and verbal parallels with the Genesis creation account.⁷ Therefore, we conclude that this kind of impurity is not ceremonial but is grounded in the order of creation. Indeed, the distinction between clean and unclean animals was

already in place in the time of Noah (Gen 7:2–3). And this obviously was long before the establishment of the Hebrew ritual system centering on the tabernacle. In addition, unclean food legislation was not abrogated in the New Testament. Indeed, Acts 15 confirms the validity of the dietary laws through the prohibition of eating blood.⁸ The vision given to Peter in Acts 10 by no means indicates the abrogation of the dietary laws. Rather, the purpose of the vision was to teach Peter that association with Gentiles would not render him unclean (see Acts 10:28; 11:12).⁹

Consideration 6

We should not confuse the church building with the tabernacle (or temple, for that matter) of the Israelite worship system. The tabernacle was the locus of God's presence by means of the *Shekinah*, the glory of God. There God manifested His presence in a special way, and because of that fact, a number of ceremonial instructions were to be followed to keep the purity of the tabernacle.¹⁰ The church building, however, should not be placed in the same category. God's *Shekinah* is no longer restricted to a building, but manifests itself among the believers through the Holy Spirit (John 1:14; Eph 2:21).¹¹ The church does not function like the tabernacle, as a locus of sacrifices and other offerings. The church building is the place where God's people gather to worship Him and learn from Him. Church premises and church buildings, therefore, are not holy places in the same way the tabernacle/temple was. If it were, people with physical defects, for example, could not serve or worship in the church (see, e.g., Lev 21:16–24).

Conclusion

In light of the above considerations we can now address the issues mentioned at the beginning of this short essay. The first was related to the alleged unfitness of women during their menstruation to assist on the platform and during the Lord's Supper. The second was the objection to funerals on church premises on the basis of the concept of corpse contamination. Although on the surface both concerns appear to take the Bible seriously, they fail to understand that Christ has fulfilled the ritual system. They also do not adequately understand that church buildings do not function like the tabernacle, which was the locus of sacrifices and other rituals related to the old covenant.

The presence of a casket in the church does not contaminate the church building for two main reasons: First, the church premises do not function as the tabernacle did. Second, acquired impurities have been cancelled by Christ because the Hebrew ritual system found its fulfillment in the cross.¹² Therefore, the matter of bringing a casket to the church premises must be evaluated on other bases. If it were mandated by Scripture we should not follow such a practice. But, as we have seen, even though Jesus touched a dead person He did not become ceremonially unclean. Hence, in cultures where caskets are brought to church for the

funeral service, there is no biblical reason not to do so. In fact, refusal to have a funeral service in the church may offend the family members of the deceased person. On the other hand, a funeral service in the church can be an opportunity to reach people who otherwise would never attend a church service. On such an occasion the pastor or elder can present a message of hope and consolation about the blessed hope, pointing out that one day death will be no more. The main concern should not be whether or not caskets should be brought into the church, but rather how to utilize the occasion to better comfort the loved ones with the blessed hope that Jesus will soon return. In this matter it is instructive to learn that when Ellen G. White died her body was brought to the Battle Creek church for the funeral service. Although this does not make such a procedure normative, it shows that, at least to that generation of Seventh-day Adventists, this was not an issue.

In short, from a theological and a sound, balanced hermeneutical perspective, there should be no restriction against women taking an active part in church services during menstruation, nor against pastors or elders conducting funeral services on church premises. Presumed impurities deriving from these situations or conditions no longer apply because of the cross of Calvary. The dietary laws, however, remain binding. The reason is that the uncleanness of animals unsuitable for human consumption is not grounded in the ceremonial system but is based on creation.



Elias Brasil de Souza is
Director of the Biblical
Research Institute

¹ Mario Veloso, "The Law of God," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2001), 457–492.

² See Richard Averbeck, "Law," in *Cracking Old Testament Codes: A Guide to Interpreting Literary Genres of the Old Testament*, ed. Sandy D. Brent and Ronald L. Giese (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 113–138; Richard M. Davidson, "Biblical Interpretation," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2001), 85–86.

³ See Richard M. Davidson, "Biblical Interpretation," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2001), 58–104.

⁴ The definitive work on this is Jiří Moskala, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11: Their Nature, Theology, & Rationale*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series 4 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society), 1998.

⁵ At this point we should briefly note that the prohibition of sexual relations with a woman during menstruation seems to be moral rather than ceremonial in nature (Lev. 20:18; cf. 18:19, 29). As has been noted, Leviticus 18 and 20 place this prohibition among moral laws (cf. Ezek 18:5–6; 22:10). It has been aptly suggested that the rationale for the prohibition is found in Leviticus 20:18, which describes a menstruant as

dawah (“weak” or in a state of discomfort; see also Lev 12:2). This seems to indicate that “the law protects the woman from unwanted advances by her husband during her period of weakness” (Roy Gane, Leviticus, Numbers, *The NIV Application Commentary* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004], 325).

⁶ Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Distinction Between Clean and Unclean Animals in Lev 11: Is It Still Relevant?,” in *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 2 (1991): 91–125; Jiří Moskala, “Are the Laws Regarding Clean and Unclean Animals Still Relevant?,” in *Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers*, ed. Gerhard Pfandl, vol. 2 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2010), 157–161. See also Hasel, 91–121, esp. 93–96 and Jiří Moskala, “The Validity of the Levitical Food Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals: A Case Study of Biblical Hermeneutics” in *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, vol. 22/2 (2011): 3–31.

⁷ See Jiří Moskala, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11: Their Nature, Theology, & Rationale*, 228–233; idem., “The Validity of the Levitical Food Laws”, esp. 8–18.

⁸ Moskala, “Are the Laws Regarding Clean and Unclean Animals,” 159.

⁹ Clinton Wahlen, “Peter’s Vision and Conflicting

Definitions of Purity,” *New Testament Studies*, vol. 51 (2005): 503–18. See also Clinton Wahlen, “Mark 7:19. Did Jesus Make All Foods Clean?” in *Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers*, ed. Gerhard Pfandl, vol. 2 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2010), 301–304; Colin House, “Defilement by Association: Some Insights from the Usage of Koinós/Koinῶν in Acts 10 and 11,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 21, no. 2 (1983): 143–53.

¹⁰ See Roy E. Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 144–161.

¹¹ Russell P. Shedd, “Worship in the New Testament Church,” in *The Church in the Bible and the World: An International Study*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), 132–133.

¹² Jesus obviously had no difficulty touching a dead body or a woman suffering from a hemorrhage, although this would have made him unclean according to the ceremonial law (cf. Matt 9:20–26; Mark 5:22–42; Luke 8:40–56). This is another indicator that, with Jesus Christ, those laws are no longer applicable and have come to an end.

SCRIPTURE APPLIED

Lessons from Daniel 11–12

By Ekkehardt Mueller

Some people care only for themselves. They are not interested in the future of the human race, the future of the people of God, or even the future of their children or grandchildren. Others care deeply. Daniel belonged to the second category, and God revealed to him large portions of the plan of salvation and the destiny of the community of faith.

I. Overview of Daniel 11–12

1. The Broad Structure of the Vision in Daniel 10–12

Chapters 10–12 of the book of Daniel contain the following broad structure, which will later be broken down into smaller units:

- Prologue to the last vision of Daniel (Dan 10:1–11:1)
- The vision of the kingdoms (Dan 11:2–12:4)
- Epilogue to the last vision and of the entire book (Dan 12:5–13)

In our previous study the emphasis was on the introduction to the vision of the kingdoms (Dan 10). This time the focus will be on chapters 11 and 12, the vision proper, and the epilogue.

Daniel as a person appears five times in Daniel 10 and three times in Daniel 12. But other more important characters also appear in both chapters—the man in linen clothes and Michael. While in the beginning Michael is involved in a geographically limited situa-

tion (Dan 10), at the end He is involved in a drama of universal dimensions (Dan 12).

2. A Cosmic Scenario

The major visions in the preceding part of the book of Daniel all had some reference to the heavenly world. In Daniel 2 God’s kingdom was completely established on earth with the falling of the stone from heaven, which became an all-encompassing mountain. In chapter 7 a heavenly judgment was portrayed before the saints received participation in God’s kingdom at the end of time. In Daniel 8 the heavenly sanctuary was presented as it was attacked by the little horn. The last vision of Daniel differs insofar as a cosmic conflict appears right in the beginning (Dan 10) and climaxes in Daniel 12. This is important because we need to see the big picture apart from the details.

3. The Time Frame of the Vision

Which time elements appear in this vision?

- Daniel 11:2 clearly begins in Persian times and continues to the Greek empire.
- The vision informs us specifically about various time elements. It progresses from “the appointed time” (Dan 11:27, 29) to “the time of the end” (Dan 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9), “the time of trouble” (Dan 12:1), and to “the time” of deliverance (Dan 12:1) which is associated with resurrection (Dan 12:2–3) and in the epilogue is called “the end” (Dan 12:13).
- Specific time elements occur in the epilogue. These are long prophetic periods of three and a

half times (Dan 12:7), 1,290 prophetic days (Dan 12:11), and 1,335 prophetic days (Dan 12:12).

Why is this time frame extremely important?

- It helps us understand the vision as it progresses from about 535 BC to the establishment of God's kingdom of glory at Christ's second coming.
- It also encourages us to focus specifically on the end of this period.

4. Literal Elements and Symbolic Elements

Daniel 11 begins with a reference to kings, kingdoms, and politics in literal language. Persia is not a bear or a ram as in previous visions but is described as a kingdom with kings. Initially, the kings of the north represent the Seleucids and the kings of the south the Ptolemaic rulers. But later the king of the north and the king of the south become symbolic entities, as do Edom, Moab, and Ammon. This is not unusual, since a mixture of literal and symbolic descriptions is also found in other parts of Scripture (e.g., the seven churches in Revelation). Since the Seleucids and the Ptolemies vanished in history, the appearance of the king of the south and the king of the north in the time of the end must be understood symbolically, at a time when a global widening of the vision develops and a narrow geographical frame is being abandoned.

5. The Religious Dimension

Unlike the image of many metals in Daniel 2, which refers to political entities only, Daniel 11 also contains a religious dimension. The characters appearing in this vision are not only kings, but obviously also religious leaders, the Messiah, and the God of gods (Dan 11:36).

Where does such a dimension surface?

- In the introduction to the vision (Dan 10) and especially the struggle behind the scenes.

- In the epilogue of the book. For instance, the "holy people" occurs (Dan 12:7) and Daniel is promised resurrection (Dan 12:13).
- In the vision proper:
 - Their gods—paganism (Dan 11:8)
 - The beautiful land—Palestine and the people of God (Dan 11:16, 41)
 - The prince of the covenant—Jesus (Dan 11:22)
 - The sanctuary and the daily—Jesus' heavenly ministry (Dan 11:31)
 - Persecution of God's people (Dan 11:32–35)
 - The king's self-exaltation and blasphemy against God (Dan 11:36–37)
 - Reliance on the god of fortresses and a foreign god (Dan 11:38–39)
 - Holy mountain—attack against God and His people (Dan 11:45)
 - Rescue of those written in the book by Michael (Dan 12:1)
 - Resurrection from the dead (Dan 12:2–3)
 - Sealing of the book of Daniel and later understanding of its prophecies (Dan 12:4)

6. Connections to Other Visions in Daniel

Daniel 11 is the most difficult chapter in Daniel and has been interpreted differently. It is important to understand the big picture, even though we may not be able to explain all the details satisfactorily. However, parallels to clearer chapters help us interpret this chapter.

This table suggests that the same empires are found in chapter 11 that also occur in chapters 7 and 8, and also in Daniel 2, although the latter is not displayed here. In chapter 11 these empires are described with more details than in the other visions, but as soon as the next kingdom appears, the previous one is no longer considered. The italicized terms or phrases are either using the same vocabulary or the same concepts.

<i>Daniel 7</i>	<i>Daniel 8 and 9</i>	<i>Daniel 11–12</i>	<i>Period</i>
Bear (7:5)	Medo-Persia (ram, 8:3–4, 20)	Kings of Persia (11:2)	Persia
Leopard (7:6)	Greece (goat; 8:5–7, 21)	Greece (11:3)	Greece
• <i>Four wings and four heads</i> (7:6)	• <i>Large horn</i> (8:5, 21) • <i>Four horns</i> (8:8, 2)	• <i>Mighty king</i> (11:3) • <i>Four parts</i> (11:4)	
Terrible beast (7:7)	Little horn (first phase, 8:9)	Invader and other rulers (11:16–21)	Rome
	• <i>Beautiful land</i> (8:9) • <i>Messiah the Prince</i> (9:25)	• <i>Beautiful land</i> (11:16) • <i>Prince of covenant</i> (11:22)	
Little Horn (7:8)	Little horn (second phase, 8:9)	Ruler/King of north (11:29)	Papacy
<i>Changes of time and law</i> (7:25)	<i>The daily</i> (8:11)	<i>The daily</i> (11:31)	
<i>Persecution</i> (7:25)	<i>Abomination of desolation</i> (9:27)	<i>Abomination of desolation</i> (11:31)	
<i>Self-exaltation</i> (7:8, 25)	<i>Persecution</i> (8:10, 24)	<i>Persecution</i> (11:32–35)	
<i>three and a half times</i> (7:25)	<i>Self-exaltation</i> (8:10, 25)	<i>Self-exaltation</i> (11:36–39)	
	2,300 evenings & mornings (8:14)	<i>three and a half times</i> , 1,290 days, and 1,335 days (12:7, 11–12)	
The Son of Man (7:13)	<i>Time of the end</i> (8:17)	<i>Time of the end</i> (11:40)	Time of End
	Prince of princes (8:25)	Michael (12:1)	
God's Kingdom (7:14, 27)		Resurrection (12:2–3, 13)	The End

II. The Discussion of Daniel 11–12

1. The Persian Empire

11:2–3 When Daniel received the vision, the ruling monarch was Cyrus (Dan 10:1). The next three kings were Cambyses (530–522 BC), false Smerdis (522 BC), and Darius I (522–486 BC). The fourth king was Xerxes (486–465 BC). He is the Ahasuerus of the book of Esther. Despite his huge navy and army, he lost the battles of Salamis (480 BC) and Plataea (479 BC) against the Greek. The end of the Persian Empire came through the Greek under Alexander the Great, who conquered Persia about 150 years later.

2. The Greek Empire

11:4–15 The mighty king represents Alexander the Great. He died prematurely in 323 BC at about thirty-two years of age. His kingdom split into four parts, the Hellenistic kingdoms (see the parallel in Daniel 8:8). Two of those four are described in detail as the king of the north and the king of the south (Dan 8:5–15). The Jews were placed between these two powers, had to suffer the consequences of war, and had to deal with changing submission to the respective authority. The two kingdoms were those of the Seleucids in Syria and the Ptolemies in Egypt.

3. The Roman Empire

11:16ff A shift to the Roman Empire seems to come with the “invader” in verse 16. The beautiful land (see Dan 8:9) should be understood as Palestine here and later in verse 41 in a symbolic way as the people of God. Verses 17–19 may point to Julius Caesar and his relationship with Cleopatra. He died in 44 BC and was followed by Caesar Augustus who took an empire-wide census and levied a tax on the peoples. It was under Augustus that Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Luke 1:1–7) because the census affected Joseph and Mary. Augustus died AD 14 after more than forty years of reign. The “despicable person” must have been emperor Tiberius (AD 14–37), Augustus’ son by adoption. He is also mentioned in Luke 3:1. Under him Jesus, the prince of the covenant (*nagid*; Dan 11:22, see also 9:25–26), was crucified.

4. The Papacy

11:31–39 *What are the major issues dealt with in this section?*

- An attack on the ministry in the heavenly sanctuary (Dan 11:31)

- Persecution of the true people of God (Dan 11:32–35)
- Self-exaltation and blasphemy against God (Dan 11:36–39)

The daily has already been found in Daniel 8:11. It describes Christ’s priestly ministry in heaven, which is attacked by the little horn’s substitute priestly ministry. Persecution includes martyrdom but still has the effect of purifying God’s people. The abomination of desolation points to the desecration of the sanctuary through a false religious system, consisting of unbiblical doctrines and practices. The parallel in Daniel 7 contains the elements mentioned above but instead of speaking about the abomination of desolation mentions changes in time and law, obviously divine law (Dan 7:25).

5. The Time of the End

11:40–45 The time of the end is associated with the three and a half times in Daniel 12:4–10. The three and a half times already occurred in Daniel 7:25. It was the time of the dominance of the papacy, which came to a preliminary end in AD 1798 when the pope was taken prisoner and exiled. The time of the end would begin after AD 1798. The events described here are still in the making and are explained in greater detail in Revelation.

What does Daniel 11:40–45 describe?

- A battle between the king of the north and the king of the south. The two stand symbolically for the religious power of end-time Babylon—Babylon invaded Israel from the north—and atheism and secularism as symbolized by Egypt, the king of the south (Dan 11:40). Symbolic Egypt, an atheistic power, will be utterly defeated by Babylon, a religious power (Dan 11:42–43). In Revelation Babylon is an equivalent of the satanic trinity (Rev 12–13). This victory of Babylon mimics God’s victory over Pharaoh during the Exodus. However, Babylon is not a divine but an anti-Christian power, consisting of the papacy, fallen Protestantism, and spiritualism in various forms. Yet Babylon will now be unified.
- An attack on the beautiful land, persecution, and deception of God’s people (Dan 11:41). Yet some people will be rescued (see Isa 16:1–5).
- The arrival of threatening news for the king of the north from the east and the north (Dan 11:44). This is where God and the Messiah are coming from (e.g., Rev 16:12). The news may announce

the fall of Babylon (Rev 14:6–12; 18:1–2).

- The attempt to take over the beautiful Holy Mountain (Dan 11:45; see Ps 99:9), the dwelling place of God, is a direct fight against God. It will end with complete defeat of the king of the north (Dan 11:45).

6. The Intervention of Michael

12:1–4

In this extremely difficult time at the end of human history, the people of God experience the intervention of Michael (Dan 11:1), the great prince (*sar*, see Dan 8:11; 10:21). He stands up, which means that He assumes rulership. Jesus will rescue all those written in the book (Dan 11:1), obviously the book of life (Rev 21:27). Resurrection is promised in verses 2–3. *What do we know about the resurrection from the dead in Scripture?*

- Jesus was raised from the dead. He is the firstborn from the dead (Col 1:18). All resurrections, whether past or future, depend on Him.
- The first resurrection is the general resurrection of all believers at Christ's second coming (John 5:29; 1 Cor 15; Rev 20:4, 5b–6).
- The resurrection of the enemies of Christ takes place one thousand years later (Rev 20:5a).
- In Daniel 12:2–3 a special resurrection is mentioned that will take place prior to and yet in conjunction with the Second Coming. It comprises a limited group of believers and Christ's opponents—namely those who have crucified Jesus and were His worst enemies. This special resurrection is also alluded to in Revelation 1:7.
- Resurrection is also implied in Daniel 12:1.
- The Old Testament does not talk much about the resurrection from the dead, in contrast to the New Testament. But the book of Daniel clearly maintains the hope of a future resurrection at the very end of human history.

The sealing of parts of the book of Daniel (Dan 12:4, 9) and its later understanding (Dan 12:10) was fulfilled in the nineteenth century when the prophecies, especially the time prophecies of Daniel, were comprehended.

7. Epilogue

12:5–13

Here the question “How long?” is raised again (Dan 8:13). This question refers to the vision of Daniel 11 and requests

more information regarding the time spans involved. The man dressed in linen must be the same person who appeared in the introduction to the last vision (Dan 10:5–6). We have identified this person as Jesus (see also Rev 10:1–7). This request is granted. Three time periods are given:

- Three and a half times (see Dan 7:25; Rev 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5), lasting from AD 538 to 1798¹
- 1,290 days, lasting from AD 508 to 1798. They began with the conversion of Clovis, king of the Franks to Roman Catholicism, through which the religious power was joined to the civil power. Ironically, the Franks helped the papacy to progress as a persecuting and deceiving power, and it was France that in AD 1798 gave the papacy a decisive blow.
- 1,335 days, lasting from AD 508 to 1843. This brings us to the preaching of the first angel's message (Rev 14:7) and the Advent movement, as well as to the end of the prophecy of the 2,300 evenings and mornings. There is not only great distress related to the time of the end but also a great blessing for those who live in that time.

III. Application

Daniel 11 and 12 are rich in theology and encouraging messages:

- God knows the future. He knows all the details. He knows His people, and He knows us personally. He cares for us; we are precious to Him. Through Michael He rescues us from all tribulation and distress, from lion dens and fiery furnaces.
- The book of Daniel can be more completely understood only in the time of the end. Today, while we may not understand all details of Daniel 11, we do understand Daniel's time prophecies and the book as a whole. That means we live in the time of the end and are waiting for Jesus' second coming.
- Again we have encountered our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We met Him in the person of the man in linen clothes (Dan 10; 12). We met Him as Michael, the prince (*sar*) also in Daniel 10 and 12. We met Him as the prince (*nagid*) of the covenant, who was crucified under the Romans so that He could save us. Amazingly, the book of Daniel is full of Jesus, although it is an Old Testament document. He is victorious over all powers of darkness. He appears in:

- Daniel 2 as stone
- Daniel 3 as Son of God
- Daniel 7 as Son of Man
- Daniel 8 as the prince of the host and the Prince of Princes

- Daniel 9 as Messiah Prince
- Daniel 10 as the man with linen clothes and Michael our prince
- Daniel 11 as prince of the covenant
- Daniel 12 as Michael and as the man with linen clothes

In gratitude we acknowledge Him as our Lord and praise Him. Contemplating Jesus, we cannot but love Him.

- We have the wonderful hope of resurrection. Our life here and now is only a prelude to life eternal. God has an everlasting kingdom (Dan 4:3). The Most High has everlasting dominion (Dan 4:34; 7:27); so has Jesus (Dan 7:14). And the saints will participate in it (Dan 7:27). Jesus

has brought everlasting righteousness (Dan 9:24) and everlasting life (Dan 12:2–3). He has guaranteed resurrection. Therefore, we do not need to be afraid. Even if we die, the promise given to Daniel is also given to us—that we will rest until the resurrection. It is repeated in Revelation 14:13: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Blessed indeed, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!”

¹ See Heinz Schaidinger, *Historical Confirmation of Prophetic Periods*, Biblical Research Institute Releases 7 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2010).

BOOK NOTES

Matthias Dorn Daniel Staunend Begegnen

(Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2015), 260 pp.
US\$26.06



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.

Gerhard Pfandl
Associate Director (ret.)
Biblical Research Institute

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.

New Digital Technology Unlocks Biblical Scrolls

The Dead Sea scrolls were perhaps the most important discovery ever made in biblical archaeology. These ancient scrolls were hidden and preserved in the dry climate for millennia. But they were fragile and it took decades to publish them. Now a new technology has been developed that allows fragile artifacts like the Dead Sea scrolls to be virtually unrolled. Using digital imaging technologies, researchers at the University of Kentucky, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the Israel Antiquities Authority have pioneered the technique on a scroll found at En-Gedi, Israel in 1970.¹ The scroll dates to around AD 600 when an ancient synagogue was burned. Inside the ark of the synagogue were found rolled up biblical scrolls that were reverently taken out to be read each Sabbath almost 1,500 years ago. The scroll published is one of the oldest biblical books from the Pentateuch ever found—the book of Leviticus.

The process took an entire year to develop. The “virtual unwrapping” technique is a complex process involving several stages. The new technique uses CT scanning technology. The first stage begins by segmentation, which digitally recreates pages to hold the potential writing. This is done creating a triangulated

mesh in 3D volume that can be “filled” later with the content or text. The second stage is to texture the page by applying the written content of the scroll on the page. But a text on a 3D surface will be difficult to read. The third stage then is to flatten the image so the text can be read in 2D. The final merging extracts the text, placing it in the cylindrical wraps. The final product is a legible text that can be accessed by scholars from anywhere for research and study.

Emmanuel Tov, professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, states:

This provides a clear indication of continuity. The text from this scroll of the sixth century AD is identical with those of other scrolls that were used clear down to the invention of the printing press. The scroll from En-Gedi is evidence that this medieval text has deep roots. Nothing changed over 2000 years.²

What makes this system so helpful for further research and study is that it does not damage the scrolls themselves. Had this technology been available fifty or sixty years ago, scholars would have been able to read

the Dead Sea scrolls in a more efficient way that provided for both conservation and the sharing of data. This is an example of how technological advancements help unlock mysteries centuries old and bring new understanding to the development and preservation of the Bible through history.

Michael G. Hasel
Director, Institute of Archaeology,
Southern Adventist University

¹ The information of this article is summarized from William Brent Seales et al, "From Damage to Discovery via Virtual Unwrapping: Reading the Scroll from En-Gedi," in *Science Advances* 2/9 (21 Sept, 2016), <http://advances.sciencemag.org/content/2/9/e1601247.full> (accessed November 8, 2016).

² Volkhart Wildermuth, "Die En-Gedi-Schriftrolle: Rettung vor der Klippe des Verlustes" in http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/die-en-gedi-schriftrolle-rettung-vor-der-klippe-des.676.de.htm-?dram:article_id=366570 (accessed November 8, 2016).

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Index to *Reflections*

The first issue of *Reflections* was published in January 2003. Since then, we've published many articles.

While it's possible to use Acrobat to simultaneously search all past issues of *Reflections* for one word or phrase, some readers have asked for a formal index. From now on, you will find a pdf index at the end of each newsletter that you can download.

If you wish to search simultaneously all past issues of the newsletter for one word or phrase in

Acrobat, you must download from the BRI website <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/newsletters> all of the *Reflections* issues PDF's to one folder.

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Reflections seeks to share information concerning doctrinal and theological developments among Adventists and to foster doctrinal and theological unity in the world church. Its intended audience is church administrators, church leaders, pastors and teachers.

Editor: Frank M. Hasel
Production Manager: Marlene Bacchus
Editorial Committee:
Elias Brasil de Souza
Kwabena Donkor
Ekkehardt Mueller
Clinton Wahlen

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Biblical Research Institute
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists®
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904, USA
Phone: 301.680.6790
Fax: 301.680.6788
adventistbiblicalresearch.org