

Daniel's 2,300 Evenings and Mornings

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One of the passages in the prophecies of Daniel that has plagued interpreters is 8:14, wherein two angels, Gabriel and another, are discussing the vision of Daniel 8, specifically the little horn, the desolating sacrilege that he will carry out against the Jewish temple, and how long it will take for these things to be completed, until the temple is “properly restored”. The specific time frame designated is “2,300 evenings and mornings.” In this short article, I will explain my tentative opinion concerning this time period.

Let's consider the meaning of the 2,300 evenings and mornings. After seeing the vision of the ram, the goat and the small horn, Daniel then overhears one angel ask the other, “How long will the vision about the regular sacrifice apply, while the transgression causes horror, so as to allow both the holy place and the host to be trampled?” (v. 13). The answer, given by the second angel is: “For 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the holy place will be properly restored” (v. 14). A straight-forward reading of the text would inform us that from the time the small horn begins his acts of desolating and trampling both the temple and the holy people, until the temple is restored, there will be “2,300 evenings and mornings.” The question is, what exactly does this mean? Commentators are thoroughly divided. According to John Walvoord, determining the meaning of this riddle has sparked, “almost endless exegetical controversy.”¹ There are five primary opinions among interpreters. We will consider each view below.

The year-day interpretation: The first approach, what we can call the day-year interpretation, holds that the 2,300 “evenings and mornings” should be understood symbolically to refer to 2,300 literal years. This view has been espoused by Seventh Day Adventist interpreters such as Uriah Smith, Jacques B. Doukhan, and Desmond Ford.² This approach was also used by William Miller (d.1849), leading him to claim that Christ would return sometime between 1843 and 1844.³ Of course,

when Christ didn't return, the resulting disillusionment among students of Miller became infamously known as "The Great Disappointment."

Today, most evangelical commentators are divided between those who believe the 2,300 evenings and mornings simply refer to 2,300 actual days, and those who argue that "evenings and mornings" should be understood as separate units, thus leading them to divide the number 2,300 in half, pointing to only 1,150 days. Let's consider each view:

The 1,150 day interpretation (applied to Antiochus IV Epiphanes historically): As John Whitcomb states, the "1,150 day theory face[s] insuperable obstacles."⁴ Foremost among these obstacles is the timeframe of Antiochus' acts of desolating the temple. In December of 167 BC, Antiochus' men set up an altar to Zeus in the temple. Just over three years later, he died on December 14, 164 BC. This simply doesn't equate to exactly 1,150 days, falling short by around 60 days.

The 2,300 day interpretation (applied to Antiochus IV Epiphanes historically): For those who seek to connect the full 2,300 days to the historical career of Antiochus, the same problem persists. 2,300 days, which is roughly six years and four months, simply does not align with the period of time that Antiochus desolated the temple. Stephen R. Miller takes this view, placing the beginning point of the 2,300 days with the murder of Onias III, the former high priest, in 171 BC.⁵ But Gleason L. Archer Jr. rightfully highlights the problems with this view:

Moreover, there is not the slightest historical ground for a terminus a quo beginning in 171 B.C. While it is true that the interloper Menelaus murdered the legitimate high priest Onias III in that year, there was no abridgment of the temple services at that early date. It was not until the following year that Antiochus looted the temple of its treasure, and the abolition of the *taymîd* [the daily offering]... did not take place till 167.⁶

Even John Walvoord, who also holds this position, comes across as quite resigned to the fact that this view is far from precise:

Although the evidence available today does not offer fulfillment to the precise day, the twenty-three hundred days, obviously a round number, is relatively accurate in defining the period when the Jewish religion began to erode under the persecution of Antiochus, and the period as a whole concluded with his death.⁷

Needless to say, the best this view can offer is a vaguely close match to an ill-defined period of persecution. Worse yet, the text simply does not refer to a general persecution, but is quite specific in referring to the ceasing of the “regular sacrifice” and the trampling of the “holy place” both of which are clearly eschatological events. Ultimately, the inability of either number, 1,150 or 2,300, to align with the period of Antiochus’ persecution leads us to conclude that this portion of the vision is not ultimately pointing to Antiochus’ historical persecution of the Jewish people, but instead, it must apply to the Antichrist, and is yet to be fulfilled in the future. We are still left however, with the question as to which number is correct, a full 2,300 days or half that time, pointing to 1,150 days.

The 2,300 day interpretation (applied to Antichrist): I believe that any serious consideration of the arguments for both positions will lead one to acknowledge that a far more solid case stands for 2,300 days as opposed to half that number. C.F. Keil has set the bar in offering the best argument for this position, devoting nine pages to this one issue. His argument summarized is that the phrase “evenings and mornings” would have been clearly understood as referring to a single day and a “Hebrew reader could not possibly understand” it to mean anything other than 2,300 days.⁸ Keil points out that in Old Testament usage, an evening and morning specified a complete day. This is the usage throughout the entire first chapter of the Bible in fact, describing the first week of creation: “And there was evening and there was morning, one day” (Gen. 1:5). It is the same usage during the flood wherein we

have “forty days and forty nights” (Gen. 7:4,12). And so also is the phrase “three days and three nights” used to simply refer to three days as in Jonah 1:17 or by Jesus in Matthew 12:40. And finally, in Matthew 4:2, we read that after Jesus “fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.” Jesus fasted for forty days, not twenty, and certainly not eighty.

Conclusion:

What time period within the Antichrist’s career then does the 2,300 days point to? I believe there are two good options, depending on how one translates and understands verse 13. Both the KJV and the NIV for instance, read as if the angel is listing three or four things that fall within the 2,300 days:

“How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot?” (KJV)

“How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled—the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, the surrender of the sanctuary and the trampling underfoot of the LORD’s people?” (NIV)

The first view then, looking to such translations, sees the 2,300 days as applying entirely to the *tāmîd* (the daily sacrifice); its beginning, ceasing, and finally its restoration. This view then would start counting the 2,300 days when the regular offering is reinstated, early on in the first half of the final seven years before Jesus returns, and see its conclusion when the temple or sacrifices are restored, shortly after His return.

The second option, supported more by the NASB translation, sees the 2,300 days as revolving around the desolating acts of the Antichrist, particularly as they apply to the *tāmîd* daily sacrifice. This view then begins counting when the regular offerings cease, at the middle of the

week, when the Antichrist begins his work of desolation and concludes after Jesus returns and the temple is rebuilt and restored.

Because the time of the Antichrist's desolations within the temple lasts 3.5 years, this leaves approximately 1,040 days, or roughly two years and ten months after Jesus' return, until the temple is completely restored.

Regardless as to which view one takes, what is clear is that neither 1,150 or 2,300 days can be made to apply to Antiochus in a way that clearly satisfies the text.

¹ John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago, Moody, 1989) p. 188

² Uriah Smith, *The Sanctuary and the Twenty-three Hundred Days of Daniel 8:14* (Battle Creek, Michigan, Steam Press, 1877) pp. 21-23, 95-101; Doukhan, Jacques B., *Daniel: The Vision of the End*, (Berrien Springs, MI, Andrews University Press, 1987) pp. 23-36; Ford, Desmond, *Daniel* (Nashville, Southern Publishing Association, 1978) p. 189

³ See for example: K. Boa, *Cults, World Religions, and You* (Wheaton, Victor, 1977) p. 90

⁴ Whitcomb, John C. *Daniel* (Chicago, Moody Press, 1985) p. 113

⁵ Miller, Stephen R. *Daniel. Vol. 18. The New American Commentary.* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994) pp. 229-230

⁶ Archer Jr., Gleason L. *Daniel, Vol. 7. The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1985) p. 103

⁷ Walvoord, p 185

⁸ Keil, Carl Friedrich, and Franz Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament. Vol. 9.* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996) pp. 693-694