

Answers to Objections

by John Witcombe

Dear _____, let me see if I can answer some of the objections that you have made. I will indent what you have written:

It is essentially the same argument that you have been making about starting with the Spirit of Prophecy and making the Bible fit the Eastern Question that Smith and Daniells were preaching. I don't think that argument will go very far because of all the statements that say we need to get all of our doctrines from the Bible and not from the Spirit of Prophecy. People aren't going to take that position.

We did get all our doctrines from the Bible. But it was the Spirit of Prophecy that provided guidance when our pioneers were at an impasse and were not sure just how the text should be understood. So they were starting with the Bible and receiving assistance when needed.

There are other interpretations for Revelation 9 other than what Josiah Litch provided for us. God guided Litch into a correct view of this chapter. Elder Prescott thought Litch was wrong and it is the Spirit of Prophecy that confirms that Litch was right. So are we getting our interpretation of Revelation 9 from Ellen White or from the Bible? We are getting it from the Bible and we are confirmed that we have correctly interpreted the Bible by the Spirit of Prophecy.

On the interpretation of Daniel 11:30-45, Uriah Smith went to the Bible and saw light in the path of interpretation that Litch had taken. Through additional Bible study and historical research with a group of "able Bible students" Uriah Smith modified Litch's views to come up with what he has in his book. Did Smith take the right path of interpretation? I find in Ellen White's Eastern Question statements, confirmation that Smith was led by God to take the right path.

You start with those three statements, assume they mean that the view Smith and Daniells were preaching is "the truth," and come up with the best Bible application that you can of those verses to support what you believe Ellen White is saying. But if their view is the truth, you cannot limit it to verses 40-45. You must go back to verse 36 and believe that Smith and Daniells' view from verses 36-39 is "the truth," because you can't get to Smith and Daniells' view of verses 40-45 without embracing their view of verses 36-39. Their interpretation of verses 40-45 is predicated upon their understanding of verses 36-39. So Ellen White's endorsement of Smith and Daniells' view that, to your mind, is "the truth," must also include their interpretation of verses 36-39. I start from a different position from you in that I start with the Bible, see what it says, and then seek to understand the statements of Ellen White.

I too started with the Bible. Here is the history on this: In 2010 I did not have any statements from Ellen White that confirmed the interpretation of Daniel 11:30-45 as taught by Smith. I spent 5 years with the Bible text alone. I have written scores of pages showing the reasonableness of Smith's interpretation of these verses solely from the text. It was only after 5 years of reasoning from the text that we became aware of these three Eastern Question statements which simply confirmed that we were on the right path. I've written many pages on verses 36-39 because of their importance. They are foundational to a correct understanding of verses 40-45. And this was all done before July 16, 2015 when her three statements were released.

Now if Ellen White endorsed what they were actually preaching as “the truth,” then we must accept the specifics of what they were preaching as “the truth.” What they were preaching is embodied in the phrase the “Eastern Question;” therefore that must be what Ellen White endorsed. When Ellen White says that Brother Smith or Daniells is going to speak on the Eastern Question, she knows what that is, and you can’t separate the then understood meaning of the Eastern Question from that label; it’s a package. The Eastern Question is the label defining those very specific events. Her endorsement would have to embrace those events; otherwise she’s only endorsing a meaningless label.

Here’s a quotation that provides some direction: “That is how it is, and my mind has been greatly stirred in regard to the idea, “Why, Sister White has said so and so, and Sister White has said so and so; and therefore we are going right up to it.” God wants us all to have common sense, and He wants us to reason from common sense. Circumstances alter conditions. Circumstances change the relation of things.” {6MR 354}

If verse 45 had been fulfilled in the 1800s, the scenario they offered as a path for its fulfillment was reasonable. It was not fulfilled. However, their teaching that the king of the north will be planting the tabernacles of his palace in Jerusalem is still a valid interpretation. “Circumstances alter conditions. Circumstances change the relation of things.” How it will be fulfilled will be different because circumstances have changed in the Middle East.

Your current view minimizes the details of the events that made up the Eastern Question. However, those collective details are the Eastern Question. Your view is different from what Smith and Daniells were preaching and, therefore, from what Ellen White supposedly endorsed as “the truth.” One of my reasons for not understanding Sister White’s “Eastern Question” statements as you do is that the Eastern Question didn’t happen the way Smith and Daniells were preaching it would. If Ellen White endorsed what Smith and Daniells were preaching as “truth” and it didn’t happen, she was wrong.

I would say that my current view retains the line of interpretation that is found in Smith’s book but makes a different application because the circumstances in the Middle East have changed. The Eastern Question in Bible Prophecy included the recitation of the fulfilled prophecies of Daniel 40-44. It was this line of interpretation that provided an understanding of what the fulfillment of verse 45 might look like. But as Smith wrote: “Time will soon determine this matter” and we must wait for its fulfillment before we can identify the exact details of its fulfillment. Ellen White cannot be said to be wrong by her statement that the prophetic lecture on Daniel 11:40-12:1 was truth and delineated great events in the near future just because verses 45 and 12:1 were not fulfilled in her day. The king of the north (leader of Turkey) will still plant the tabernacles of his palace in Jerusalem. What will that look like? We can only speculate as did Smith. Our guess may be wrong as was his but that doesn’t make our interpretation wrong. We are not throwing out the identity of the king of the north as a civil ruler from the northern portion of Alexander’s former empire or the location of Jerusalem as the place for the planting of the tabernacles of his palace. We can’t even say for sure what this is. We can only speculate that it might be the Islamic Caliphate. This would fulfill the interpretive principles that Smith was following. However, we can provide the exact historical details for verses 40-44 because these verses have been fulfilled.

But after she returned to America, she did finally write about specific verses in Daniel 11, namely, Daniel 11:30-36. Her comments were penned in a 1904 letter to Hiram A. Crow.

The purpose of the letter was to solicit a loan from him for “one or two thousand dollars” at a low interest rate, to invest in the work. Her “we have no time to lose” appeal at the end of the letter quotes Daniel 11:30-36. It was the year after Uriah Smith died, so he didn’t have an opportunity to read what she wrote and question her on it. Daniells was still alive but had likely not seen it either, as it was a personal letter appealing for funds.

I don’t believe Smith would have had a problem with this statement. This power that is spoken of in the thirtieth verse is a power that will have intelligence with the papal power (them that forsake the holy covenant). So this power cannot be the papacy but rather it is the civil arm of the papacy – the Franks. And then verses 31-35 describe the persecuting power that the civil arm of the papacy brought against God’s church. These verses are all about a church/state union and this history will be repeated but this time, instead of France being used as a papal enforcer, it will be the United States united with apostate Protestantism. So verse 36 continues this same power that is spoken of in the preceding five verses – the civil arm of the papacy.

So when Ellen White finally does write about specific verses in Daniel 11 in 1904, it is in a personal letter asking for help in funding the work in Washington, though in a response to his letter responding to her original one, she encouraged him to read both her letters “to the believers within your reach, asking them to help in establishing the work in Washington.” (Letter 125-1904.14). Her words seem to contradict “the truth” that Smith and Daniells were preaching in 1877, 1884 and 1898, because she includes verse 36 in her explanation. And from all her other statements that refer to the time of persecution verses 32-35 speak of, it is the Papacy that she refers to. So a case can easily be made that “a power” is “the papal power” (GC 65.1).

I see no contradiction because the papacy cannot persecute without a civil power and this civil power that connects itself to the Roman Catholic Church creates the persecuting power that is spoken of in these verses. Remember, there is no persecution without a civil power. Only when a civil power is reunited to the Catholic Church will we see the history of these verses repeated.

She speaks of a prophecy in this chapter that had been fulfilled in the past and says that “Much of the history that has taken place in fulfilment of this prophecy will be repeated.” She says, “In the thirtieth verse a power is spoken of . . .” What power is this? It is not the Roman Catholic Church because she is unable to kill with the sword and with the flame. The power that alone had the authority to kill God’s saints was the state (France). France was influenced by the Roman Catholic Church to commit untold atrocities. This history cannot be repeated at the present time. There is no power presently that is willing to carry out the designs of the Roman Catholic Church. But there soon will be a power according to Revelation 13. That power will be the two-horned beast who speaks as a dragon, the United States of America. When church and state are once again united, the history of the past will be repeated.

All of our pioneers, and the expositors I referenced up to the present day, Uriah Smith and A.G. Daniells included, have seen the Papacy in verses 31-35. But verse 36 is the point of departure for the preaching of the “Eastern Question.”

Yes, they all saw this civil/religious union in these verses. And the emphasis in these verses is on the civil arm that is carrying out the persecuting thrust of the Roman Catholic Church. Verse 36 continues this same line of thought so there was no point of departure for the preaching of the “Eastern Question”.

Smith's view was challenged at that Bible Conference. Elder Daniells was the chair for those meetings. At no time when Smith's view was challenged did Elder Daniells say, "The question has already been settled by Ellen White, for when I was in Australia 20 years ago, Ellen White told me that Smith's view that I was preaching was the truth."

Even Willie White was not aware of these three statements on the Eastern Question that have come to light in the recent release of the Ellen White documents. They were unaware of the fact that Ellen White wrote such affirming words regarding the Eastern Question in Bible Prophecy lecture that they were presenting around the world.

The book of Daniel began to be unsealed in 1798. In 1881 Ellen White wrote: "By a thorough investigation of the prophecies we understand where we are in this world's history; and we know for a certainty that the second coming of Christ is near. The result of these investigations must be brought before the world through the press. . . . We are now living in the full blaze of the light of Bible truth." {4T 592}

Is it reasonable to believe that this thorough investigation would have left off one of the most significant lines of prophetic truth that specifically deals with events in the time of the end; events that are directly connected with the close of probation; a prophecy that Ellen White said had nearly reached its complete fulfillment?

If your neighbor wants to know the meaning of Daniel 11:45 because of its connection with Daniel 12:1—the close of probation, what are you going to tell him? Is not the book of Daniel unsealed? Are we not now living in the full blaze of the light of Bible truth?