The Future Is Not Determined, Not Even For God

Description

The Future Is Not Determined, Not Even For God

A study related to the SDA
Sabbath School Lesson for 2021, 3rd Quarter
Rest In Christ
Week 13
by Mary Zebrowski
Edited by Trent Wilde

This weekâ€™s lesson is entitled, â€œThe Ultimate Rest,â€• and discusses the return of Christ and the prophecies relating to it. Tuesdayâ€™s lesson is entitled, â€œMarching Orders,â€• and highlights our role in spreading the three angelâ€™s messages to the world. In light of this, it reads,

> â€œThe prophetic big picture of history doesnâ€™t just allow us to sit back and do nothing as events unfold, events that we really canâ€™t control. So often the attitude can be â€˜Well, final events are going to happen as predicted, so what can we do about it other than just simply go along with them? After all, what can I alone do?â€™ But thatâ€™s not how Christians are to relate to the world around them and, especially, to final events.â€• Sabbath School Quarterly Lesson, Tuesday, September 21, 2021

The lesson rightly recognizes that we are not to just, â€œsit back and do nothing as events unfold, events that we really canâ€™t control.â€• But why is this? After all, if prophetic events are going to unfold in a set way which is beyond our control, arenâ€™t our efforts nothing more than pretense?

So, today, in order to address these questions, we are going to talk about how to understand â€œpredictive propheciesâ€• in light of the scriptures and the writings of Ellen White.

First of all, how people usually understand â€œpredictive prophecyâ€• tends to include the unwarranted idea that the future already exists, at least for God. But this idea is not supported in scripture. And prophecy, in scripture, is not an account of an already-existing future told ahead of time. In a minute, weâ€™ll explain what predictive prophecy in scripture is really all about.

But first â€“ to our main point â€“ there are many places in scripture that show that the future is indeed *not set.* Take, for example, Deuteronomy 11:26-28, in which we find that there were different possible futures for Israel based on their choices. It reads,

> **26** â€œBehold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: **27** the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you today; **28** and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I

command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known.

Consider also the possible futures presented in Jeremiah 18:7-10. It reads,

> 7 If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed,
> **8** and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster
> *I had planned.* **9** And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up
> and planted, **10** and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the
> good *I had intended* to do for it.

Here we can see that God has hopes and plans for the future just like we do. It is not that there is a future which is set in stone. If that were the case, that would mean that God was actually being disingenuous here by saying that there were real impacts to be made by human free will choices â€“ that our choices would actually impact what God was going to end up doing. In these verses, we can see that not only was Israelâ€™s future undetermined, but Godâ€™s was also.

Multiple stories in the Bible reveal God having hopes for the future, and things have not always turned out the way God had hoped.

Take for example Matthew 19:28, which indicates that Jesus believed that Judas, along with the rest of the 12 disciples, was going to sit on one of the 12 thrones and judge the 12 tribes of Israel.

Matthew 19:28 reads,

> **28** Jesus said to them, â€œTruly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits
> on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the
> twelve tribes of Israel.â€•

This is obviously before Judas made the decision to betray Jesus, and, since he sinned and didnâ€™t repent, Judas will not be on one of those twelve thrones â€“ but he could have been if he had remained faithful. Ellen says that Judas did not have to betray Jesus (See Desire of Ages, pages 654 and 716). But, in spite of Jesusâ€™ statement here Matthew 19, many think that Judasâ€™ future was set â€“ that Judas was born for this very purpose â€“ to betray the son of God. That is just a horrible thought, and I hope we can see that the idea of God hopelessly determining a future for any person really sullies the character of God, not unlike the idea of eternal torture.

Letâ€™s look at another example of things not turning out the way God had thought. Jeremiah 3:6-7 reads,

> **6** During the reign of King Josiah, the Lord said to me, â€œHave you seen what faithless Israel
> has done? She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed
> adultery there. **7** I thought that after she had done all this she would return to me but she did not,
> and her unfaithful sister Judah saw it.

So, here we see a case where God expected Israel to do one thing, but instead, she did another. Obviously, God is not presented here as having an exhaustive knowledge of future events. To say that God did have an exhaustive knowledge of future events, when the scripture here clearly says otherwise, is to just plainly

disagree with this passage in Jeremiah.

In addition to the ancient prophets, Ellen White also clearly viewed the future as not yet determined. Consider, for example, her statements that the kingdom could have been established in the time of Jesus. If it had been, the prophecies could have been fulfilled very differently. This is what Ellen said while describing Jesus overlooking Jerusalem before entering it the last time:

> â€œHere the Saviour paused and left unsaid what might have been the condition of Jerusalem had she accepted the help that God desired to give her,â€”the gift of His beloved Son. If Jerusalem had known what it was her privilege to know, and had heeded the light which Heaven had sent her, she might have stood forth in the pride of prosperity, the queen of kingdoms, free in the strength of her God-given power. There would have been no armed soldiers standing at her gates, no Roman banners waving from her walls. The glorious destiny that might have blessed Jerusalem had she accepted her Redeemer rose before the Son of God. He saw that she might through Him have been healed of her grievous malady, liberated from bondage, and established as the mighty metropolis of the earth. From her walls the dove of peace would have gone forth to all nations. She would have been the worldâ€™s diadem of glory.
> But the bright picture of what Jerusalem might have been fades from the Saviourâ€™s sightâ€¦.
> Christ came to save Jerusalem with her children; but Pharisaical pride, hypocrisy, jealousy, and malice had prevented Him from accomplishing His purposeâ€¦.
> â€¦While the procession was halting on the brow of Olivet, it was not yet too late for Jerusalem to repent. The angel of mercy was then folding her wings to step down from the golden throne to give place to justice and swift-coming judgment. But Christâ€™s great heart of love still pleaded for Jerusalem, that had scorned His mercies, despised His warnings, and was about to imbrue her hands in His blood. If Jerusalem would but repent, it was not yet too late. While the last rays of the setting sun were lingering on temple, tower, and pinnacle, would not some good angel lead her to the Saviourâ€™s love, and avert her doom? Beautiful and unholy city, that had stoned the prophets, that had rejected the Son of God, that was locking herself by her impenitence in fetters of bondage,â€”her day of mercy was almost spent!
> Yet again the Spirit of God speaks to Jerusalem. Before the day is done, another testimony is borne to Christ. The voice of witness is lifted up, responding to the call from a prophetic past. If Jerusalem will hear the call, if she will receive the Saviour who is entering her gates, she may yet be saved.â€• Ellen White, Desire of Ages, p. 576-578

So we can see that Jerusalemâ€™s fate was not set until the very last decision was made. She could have repented, and the kingdom could have come at that time. Was Jesus just wrong or was this a real possibility? Jesus had told them the kingdom was near (See Matthew 4:17); was it or wasnâ€™t it? If it was already determined that the Kingdom wasnâ€™t going to be established in Jesus day, then it wasnâ€™t near and Jesusâ€™ proclamation that the Kingdom was near was just factually wrong. But if his proclamation was true, then we have to acknowledge that it could have been set up in His day and the future was thus not yet determined and prophecy could have been fulfilled in a very different way.

We can see in 1 Thes. 4:13-17 that the prophet Paul also thought Jesus was going to return in his day. Was this hope futile from the start, or was it a real possibility that only eventually became unable to be realized?

According to Ellen White, Godâ€™s plans have gone unrealized many times. His designs did not always turn out as He desired.

Ellen paralleled the 40 year delay for the Israeliteâ€™s before entering the promised land to the delay we are experiencing for the coming of Christ. Ellen said,

> â€œHad Adventists after the great disappointment in 1844 held fast their faith and followed on unitedly in the opening providence of God, receiving the message of the third angel and in the power of the Holy Spirit proclaiming it to the world, they would have seen the salvation of God, the Lord would have wrought mightily with their efforts, the work would have been completed, and Christ would have come ere this to receive His people to their rewardâ€¦.It was not the will of God that the coming of Christ should be thus delayed. God did not design that His people, Israel, should wander forty years in the wilderness. He promised to lead them directly to the land of Canaan, and establish them there a holy, healthy, happy people. But those to whom it was first preached, went not in â€˜because of unbeliefâ€™ (Heb. 3:19). Their hearts were filled with murmuring, rebellion, and hatred, and He could not fulfill His covenant with them.
> For forty years did unbelief, murmuring, and rebellion shut out ancient Israel from the land of Canaan. The same sins have delayed the entrance of modern Israel into the heavenly Canaan. In neither case were the promises of God at fault. It is the unbelief, the worldliness, unconsecration, and strife among the Lordâ€™s professed people that have kept us in this world of sin and sorrow so many years.â€• Ellen White, Evangelism, p. 695-696

Ellen informed us of another time that the return of Christ had been delayed. She said,

> â€œIf the people of God had gone to work as they should have gone to work right after the Minneapolis meeting in 1888, the world could have been warned in two years and the Lord would have come.â€• Ellen White, General Conference Bulletin, 1892.

Wow, think of the implications of this statement. If the Seventh-day Adventists had gone to work as they should have after the 1888 General Conference session â€“ when Jones and Waggoner presented the message of Justification by Faith â€“ Jesus would have come over 131 years ago, and you and I would not even have been born. An additional implication here is that the remnant church still must not understand the message of â€œJustification by Faithâ€• â€“ which was the reason for the delay back in 1890.

> â€œSeveral have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angelâ€™s message, and I have answered, â€˜It is the third angelâ€™s message in verity.'â€• Ellen White, The Review and Herald, April 1, 1890.

Ellen also said that the message of justification by faith was always a part of her message from the beginning. Again, it is the third angelâ€™s message in verity. It had always been so. She said that Jones and Waggoner had presented it so clearly in 1888, and that the only other time it had been communicated with such clarity was in discussions between her and her husband. She said,

> â€œWhen Brother Waggoner brought out these ideas in Minneapolis, it was the first clear teaching on this subject from any human lips I had heard, excepting the conversations between myself and my husband. I have said to myself, It is because God has presented it to me in vision that I see it so clearly, and they cannot see it because they have never had it presented to them as I have. And when another presented it, every fiber of my heart said, Amen.â€• Ellen White, 1888

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If the Seventh-day Adventists of the 1800â€™s had understood the message of â€œjustification by faithâ€• â€“ the third angelsâ€™ message in verity, according to Ellen â€“ and applied it to their work, Jesus would have returned already. No wonder there is still a delay. But thankfully now, we are able to identify the problem which should prompt us to change our thoughts and behavior and actively seek God to know how we can hasten Christâ€™s coming!

We hope this is enough evidence for all to see that things do not always go according to Godâ€™s hopes or even His plans. We must be sure that we do not have a false sense of security about the future. Prophecies can be fulfilled in many different ways. And, out of necessity, God may have to work out things differently than He had hoped. Consider this vision related by Ellen White. She said,

> â€œSabbath afternoon one of our number was sick, and requested prayers that he might be healed. We all united in applying to the Physician who never lost a case, and while healing power came down, and the sick was healed, the Spirit fell upon me, and I was taken off in vision.
> I saw four angels who had a work to do on the earth, and were on their way to accomplish it. Jesus was clothed with priestly garments. He gazed in pity on the remnant, then raised His hands, and with a voice of deep pity cried, â€˜*My blood, Father, My blood, My blood, My blood* !â€™ Then I saw an exceeding bright light come from God, who sat upon the great white throne, and was shed all about Jesus. Then I saw an angel with a commission from Jesus, swiftly flying to the four angels who had a work to do on the earth, and waving something up and down in his hand, and crying with a loud voice, â€˜*Hold! Hold! Hold! Hold*! until the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads.â€™
> I asked my accompanying angel the meaning of what I heard, and what the four angels were about to do. He said to me that it was God that restrained the powers, and that He gave His angels charge over things on the earth; that the four angels had power from God to hold the four winds, and that they were about to let them go; but while their hands were loosening, and the four winds were about to blow, the merciful eye of Jesus gazed on the remnant that were not sealed, and He raised His hands to the Father and pleaded with Him that He had spilled His blood for them. Then another angel was commissioned to fly swiftly to the four angels and bid them hold, until the servants of God were sealed with the seal of the living God in their foreheads.â€• Ellen White, Early Writings, p. 37-38

Not only has the return of Christ been delayed, but the release of the four winds has been delayed also. From this we can see that there are real time decisions being made in heaven concerning our fate. The Great Controversy between God and Satan is a very real war. Satan can and has gained advantages in this war by our dereliction of duty. In 1909, Ellen White was taken off into vision in which she was shown two different maps of the world representing Godâ€™s vineyard. The first one was beaming with lights. It was taken away and replaced by a second map, shrouded in darkness, with only a few glimmers of light. The darkness was, quote, â€œthe result of menâ€™s following their own course.â€• Obviously, the second map was revealing to Ellen the state of Godâ€™s vineyard as it was in 1909. Ellen White lamented,

> â€œIf every soldier of Christ had done his duty, if every watchman on the walls of Zion had given the trumpet a certain sound, the world might ere this have heard the message of warning. But the work is years behind. While men have slept, Satan has stolen a march upon us.â€• Ellen

White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 29.

Do we think things are in a better state for the SDA church than it was in 1909? Obviously, back in 1909, the people were not trumpeting the correct sound. Do SDAs have reason to believe they are making the right trumpet sound now? Again, Ellen said that this wrong sound was the reason for the delay. The darkness was â€œthe result of menâ€™s following their own course.â€• Maybe something is seriously wrong.

Prophecy is not about God knowing an already-existing future, but about God communicating to His people through a living spokesperson. There are many things He communicates to us this way. Some things, like the 1888 message of justification by faith, are life changing truths that can save us. Other things include God telling us what His plans for the future are. It is not about God telling us what the future is, but about what He plans on doing and what we should do to co-operate with Him. He sets before us two paths and tells us where each leads, but leaves the choice with us. And as each generation and each person has a choice, Godâ€™s plans have many possible ways of being fulfilled.

The future is not yet set, but we can take heart in knowing that God does have a plan, and he is active in time and in the world and he is able to accomplish his plan â€“ to create order out of the chaos of this present world â€“ one way or another.

The choice is ours whether we will hold on to our own ways and our own plans â€“ as Ellen White said, â€œfollowing our own courseâ€• â€“ or whether we will be willing to learn and unlearn and follow God, to be a part of his plan in establishing his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.