

## **“The End of Historicism? Reflections on the Adventist Approach to Biblical Apocalyptic– Part One”**

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The Seventh-day Adventist Church derives its unique witness to Jesus Christ from a historicist reading of the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. Historicism understands these prophecies to portray a relentless march of God-ordained history leading from the prophet’s time up to a critical climax at the end of earth’s history.<sup>1</sup> The interpretation of biblical apocalyptic was at the center of Adventist theological development in the formative years of the Adventist Church and its theology.<sup>2</sup>

There were many reasons for this emphasis on apocalyptic. 1) Daniel and Revelation provided much of the content that makes Adventist theology unique in the Christian world. 2) These apocalyptic books furnished the core of Adventist identity and mission, leading to the conviction that the Advent movement was to play a critical role in preparing the world for the

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<sup>1</sup>The Adventist definition of “historicism” does not bear the usual literary and historical meaning common in scholarship today, but goes back to a more traditional usage, in relation to the way biblical prophecy is applied in today’s world. See Reimar Vetne, “A Definition and Short History of Historicism as a Method for Interpreting Daniel and Revelation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11 (Fall, 2003), 1-14.

<sup>2</sup>By “formative years” I am thinking of the mid-1840s through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

soon return of Jesus. 3) The apocalyptic sense that God was in control of history supplied confidence to go on even when the movement was small and difficulties were large. 4) The sense of an approaching End fostered by the study of Daniel and Revelation supplied the motivation to take the Adventist message to the world in a relatively short period of time. While many Christians, including some Adventists,<sup>3</sup> disagreed with the conclusions that the Adventist pioneers drew from Daniel and Revelation, few in the early years challenged the historicist pre-suppositions<sup>4</sup> behind those conclusions, as they were widely held within Protestant scholarship in North America through at least the mid-1800s.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, however, the historicist approach to apocalyptic has been increasingly marginalized in the scholarly world. A book that charts that marginalization was written as a doctoral dissertation by Kai Arasola, an Adventist church administrator in Sweden.<sup>5</sup> Arasola points out that before the time of William Miller (1782-1849), the founder of the movement that spawned the Seventh-day Adventist Church among others, nearly all protestant commentators on apocalyptic utilized the historicist method of interpreting prophecy. In his book Arasola discusses the excesses of Miller's historicist hermeneutic that caused historicism to be

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<sup>3</sup>These included the "first-day" remnants of the Millerite movement as well as individuals who separated from the Seventh-day Adventist pioneers over these issues, such as D. M. Canright.

<sup>4</sup>Reimar Vetne, "A Definition and Short History of Historicism as a Method of Interpreting Daniel and Revelation," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14/2 (Fall 2003): 1-14. Vetne offers the following definition of historicism as a method for interpreting biblical apocalyptic: "Historicism reads the literature of biblical apocalyptic as prophecy intended by its ancient author to reveal information about some real, in-history events in the time span between his day and the eschaton."

generally discredited among scholars. Within a few years of the Great Disappointment<sup>6</sup> the “centuries-old, well-established historical method of prophetic exposition lost dominance, and gave way to both dispensationalist futurism and to the more scholarly preterism.”<sup>7</sup> Extremely well-written and carefully nuanced, the book is not a diatribe against historicism, as some have suggested from its title, it is rather a historical documentation of the process by which historicism became sidelined within the scholarly debate on apocalyptic.

According to Arasola, historicism as an interpretive method became generally discredited in large part because the followers of Miller shifted, in 1842 and 1843, from a general anticipation of the nearness of the Advent to an attempt to determine the exact time.<sup>8</sup> With the passing of the time set by the “seventh-month movement” under the leadership of Samuel Snow,

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<sup>5</sup>Kai Arasola, *The End of Historicism: Millerite Hermeneutic of Time Prophecies in the Old Testament*, University of Uppsala Faculty of Theology (Sigtuna, Sweden: Datem Publishing, 1990).

<sup>6</sup>The “Great Disappointment” is the term given by Adventists to the Millerite experience in the year 1844. The Millerites came to believe, on the basis of their understanding of Daniel 8 and 9 combined with calculations based on the Karaite Jewish calendar, that the return of Jesus would occur on October 22, 1844. The failure of this calculation was devastating to the movement. For a detailed and sympathetic review of Millerite prophetic interpretation see LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1954), 4:429-851. Briefer, more critical reviews can be found in Stephen D. O’Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 93-133; and Kenneth G. C. Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium: Studies in Biblical Eisegesis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 150-171.

<sup>7</sup>Arasola, 1.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 14-17.

the methods of Millerism and Miller himself became the object of ridicule,<sup>9</sup> a ridicule that continues in some scholarly circles to this day.<sup>10</sup>

In conclusion, Arasola soberly suggests that Miller's heritage is two-fold. "On the one hand, he contributed to the end of a dominant system of exegesis, on the other he is regarded as a spiritual father by millions of Christians who have taken some parts of the millerite exegesis as their *raison d'être*."<sup>11</sup> While historicism has been replaced in the popular consciousness by preterism and futurism, it is not, in fact, dead. It lives on in a modified and partly renewed form in the churches that built their faith on Miller's heritage.

The purpose of this article is to take a candid look at the current scholarly debate over apocalyptic and its implications for Seventh-day Adventist study of Daniel and Revelation. The particular focus is the degree to which the historicist approach is still appropriate to the biblical apocalypses of Daniel and Revelation. I begin with a brief look at how the process Arasola described is beginning to erode confidence in historicism among the "millions" of Miller's spiritual descendants. I will then review the current state of the scholarly debate over apocalyptic and how that impacts the Seventh-day Adventist (hereafter SDA) perspective. After suggesting some guidelines for appropriate interpretation of biblical apocalyptic, I will argue that a

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 17-19; 147-168. While most Adventists today still find an appreciation for Miller and Snow's outline of the 2300 days leading to 1844, most are not aware that Miller had fifteen different methods for arriving at the date of 1843-1844, most of which no SDA would find credible today. See Ibid., 90-146.

<sup>10</sup>I recall a scholarly panel discussion around 1990 in which all popular attempts at interpreting prophecy were ridiculed as "millerism." I doubt the leaders of the session were aware how many theological descendants of Miller were in the audience on that occasion!

<sup>11</sup>Arasola, 171-172.

historicist approach, in spite of the scholarly consensus against it, is in fact the most appropriate approach to certain passages within biblical apocalyptic.

## **Recent Developments Within the Seventh-day Adventist Church**

### **Speculation**

Within the last generation, a number of challenges have damaged the SDA consensus that the historicist understandings of Daniel and Revelation offer a solid foundation for Adventist faith. One source of damage, ironically, arises from among those who are most committed to the method. As various interpretations put forth by the SDA pioneers fail to connect with today's generation, some supporters of historicism have tried to update the relevance of historical apocalyptic to connect various prophecies with recent history or even the current world scene.<sup>12</sup> An example of the kind of interpretation I have in mind here is where some SDA evangelists have tried to see the fifth trumpet of Revelation as a prophecy of the Gulf War, with the locusts of 9:7-10 corresponding to the Marine helicopters with their gold-tinted windshields! Others, usually on the fringes of the SDA Church, have sought to use apocalyptic as a basis for determining the date of Jesus' Coming or of other end time events, mistakenly focusing on dates such as 1964, 1987, 1994 and the year 2000.<sup>13</sup> Even the SDA pioneers were not always attentive

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<sup>12</sup>SDAs are not alone in this tendency as Paul Boyer points out at length in *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*, Studies in Cultural History (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>13</sup>I have described some of these date-setting speculations in *What the Bible Says About the End-Time* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994), 19-24, and *The Millennium Bug* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1999), 39-40.

to the biblical text in making applications to history.<sup>14</sup> Awareness of these speculative tendencies has caused many thoughtful SDAs to question the entire validity of historicist interpretation of apocalyptic. Such SDAs have found two other interpretive options increasingly attractive.<sup>15</sup>

### **Alternative Approaches**

*Preterism.* A number of SDA thinkers, particularly those educated in religion and history, have seen increasing light in the preterist approach to biblical apocalyptic. This approach, the primary one among professional biblical scholars, treats books like Daniel and Revelation as messages to their original time and place, not as divinely-ordained chains of future historical events. According to this approach, believers can benefit from these books, not by seeing where they stand in the course of history, but by applying spiritual principles drawn from the text to later situations.

This approach should not be automatically treated as an abandonment of faith. It is, in fact, the approach that believing Jews and Christians (including Adventists) take to the bulk of the biblical materials. The letters of Paul, for example, must be understood as the products of a human writer's intention reflecting a specific purpose and aimed at a particular audience. To read such letters as if they were philosophical treatises with a universal purpose is clearly

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<sup>14</sup>For an easily verifiable example, see the work of Uriah Smith on the seven trumpets of Revelation (*Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Daniel and the Revelation*: [Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1883], 596-636). In the course of 40 pages of interpretation there is but one single exegetical statement. Verses are printed according to the King James Version followed by pages of historical detail without a single reference back to the text or its background in the Old Testament.

inappropriate.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, in recognizing God's purpose in including these letters in the Bible, believers feel free to draw principles from Paul's letters and apply them to their own time and place as the Word of God. When done with sensitivity to the original context, this is entirely appropriate for Paul's letters and also for parts of Daniel and Revelation.<sup>17</sup>

What preterism as an approach to apocalyptic does is treat all of Daniel and Revelation as if these books were little different than Matthew or Romans. While such an approach is certainly appropriate to the narratives of Daniel and the seven letters of Revelation 2 and 3 (Rev 1:11; 2:1,7,8,11, etc.), I will argue below that preterism alone is not an adequate approach to the symbolic visions of Daniel and Revelation. I will offer evidence in a future article that certain texts in Daniel and Revelation belong to the genre of historical apocalyptic and should, therefore, be interpreted in terms of historical sequence. I believe that to ignore this evidence on philosophical or other grounds is to impose an external system on the exegesis of the text.

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<sup>15</sup>See the helpful discussion in Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 9-12.

<sup>16</sup>I am aware of no evidence that Paul ever thought that he was writing Scripture when he caused these letters to be written. His purpose was very much concerned with the time and place of writing.

<sup>17</sup>I think here of the many preterist/idealist uses of the seven letters of Revelation and of the narratives of Daniel 2-6 in Adventist preaching and writing. For example, Mervyn Maxwell sees value in a preterist/idealist approach to the seven letters of Rev 2-3 in *God Cares: The Message of Revelation for You and Your Family*, vol. 2 (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1985), 90-91. The very title of Maxwell's commentaries shows his desire to draw timeless applications from all of the passages in Daniel and Revelation. His father, "Uncle Arthur," had already pursued this approach years before with regard to the narratives of Daniel in his books for children.

*Futurism.* A very different alternative to historicism sees apocalyptic as concerned primarily with a short period of time still future from our own day. In my experience this alternative has attracted a larger number of SDAs than the preterist one, particularly those educated in law and various branches of medicine, or those who have not had the opportunity of higher education. While rejecting the dispensational form of futurism popularized by the *Left Behind* series, such SDA Bible students are seeking end-time understandings in every corner of Daniel and Revelation.

A major motivation toward a futurist approach is “relevance.” Many SDAs feel that both the preterist and historicist approaches confine interpretation to the dusty past. They are seeking cues in the text that would enable them to speak more directly to current issues in the world than traditional SDA applications or scholarly exegesis appear to do. And it seems clear that many aspects of Daniel and Revelation were intended to portray events that the biblical authors perceived as distant from their time (Dan 8:26; 12:13) or directly concerned with the final events of earth’s history and beyond. (Dan 2:44-45; 7:26-27; 11:40; 12:4; Rev 6:15-17; 7:15-17; 19:11-21; 21:1-22:5). So an examination of Daniel and Revelation without an openness to a future understanding would be an inappropriate limitation on the divine supervision of these books.

Approaches to Daniel and Revelation that limit the meaning of most of the text to end-time events, however, have consistently proven to claim more than they can deliver. In my experience Adventist forms of futurism tend toward an allegorism of dual or multiple applications that loses touch with the original meaning and context of these apocalyptic works. The futurist applications are of such a nature that they tend to be convincing only to a limited number who share the same presuppositions as the interpreter.



## Post-Modernism

Another challenge to historicist understandings of Daniel and Revelation arises from a major philosophical shift in Western experience, sometimes called post-modernism.<sup>18</sup> Beginning with “Generation X” most younger people have had a tendency to reject sweeping solutions to the world’s problems. They question both the religious certainties and the scientific confidence of their elders. The apocalyptic idea that there could be a detailed and orderly sweep to history seems hard to grasp and even more difficult to believe. While post-modernists are more likely to believe in God than their baby boomer elders, they have a hard time imagining that anyone has a detailed hold on what God is actually like. While everyone, to them, has some handle on “truth,” no one has a full grasp of the big picture. The confidence Adventist pioneers had about their place in history seems, therefore, out of step with the times.

Post-modernism raises some valid concerns about the “modernistic” confidence with which SDA evangelists and teachers have trumpeted questionable interpretations of prophecy in the past. Many have been all too quick to promote personal viewpoints as absolute truth. But while it is healthy to acknowledge that everyone, including SDAs, are ignorant about aspects of the “big picture” there is no reason to deny that a big picture exists. While we may never grasp truth in the absolute sense, the Bible teaches that absolute truth was embodied in Jesus Christ and

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<sup>18</sup>Some outstanding analyses of post-modernism from a Christian perspective include Bruce McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000); idem, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001); and J. Richard Middleton, and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

revealed sufficiently in His Word that we can have a meaningful relationship with Him. I will argue below that one aspect of that revelation is apocalyptic of a historical variety.

## **Conclusion**

As a result of these and other challenges SDAs today are paying less and less attention to the historic Adventist approach to apocalyptic. Liberal, conservative, old and young alike are experimenting with alternative approaches and questioning traditional ones. But this lack of attention is not a neutral matter. It is creating a radical, if unintentional, shift in the core message of the Adventist Church. Prophetic preaching and interpretation is increasingly left to the evangelists, while weekly sermons focus more on social scientific insights and story telling. The result is, in my opinion, a crisis in Adventist identity.

Biblical interpretation is often subject to pendulum swings. The excesses or mistakes of those who follow one approach may cause the next generation of interpreters to swing to the opposite extreme, albeit for good reason. But balanced biblical interpretation draws its impetus from the biblical text rather than fashion or external assumptions. Historicism *has* been prone to excesses. It *has* been applied to texts where it probably doesn't belong (like the seven churches of Revelation). But I will nevertheless argue that it offers the best way to read many texts in Daniel and Revelation, texts supportive of the historic Adventist identity. Totally abandoning the method would cause us to misinterpret these portions of the biblical message.

In the next section of this article I will examine some recent trends in apocalyptic scholarship, in general first, and then with particular focus on Adventist concerns and issues. I conclude the section with a proposal for re-invigorating Adventist interpretation of Daniel and Revelation.

## Recent Developments in Apocalyptic Scholarship

### The Definition and Genre of Apocalyptic

Over the last three decades apocalyptic scholarship has focused intently on issues of genre and on the definitions of terms like apocalypse and apocalyptic.<sup>19</sup> The leading figures during this period of study are John J. Collins and his mentor Paul Hanson.<sup>20</sup> Working with a

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<sup>19</sup>While the last thirty years have been formative for the current discussion, apocalyptic study prior to 1970 is helpfully reviewed in Paul D. Hanson, “Prolegomena to the Study of Jewish Apocalyptic,” in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God*, essays on the Bible and Archaeology in memory of G. Ernest Wright, edited by Frank Moore Cross, Werner E. Lemke, and Patrick D. Miller, Jr. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 389-413.

<sup>20</sup>Interest in the topic was awakened by Klaus Koch, who wrote *Ratlos vor der Apokalyptik* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1970— translated by Margaret Kohl as *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic* [Naperville, IL: Allenson, no date, but probably 1972]) in 1970. The significance of the work of Collins and Hanson for evangelical scholars is recognized by the choice of Collins to write the article “Apocalyptic Literature” in the *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, edited by Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 40-45. While Collins has had the most prominent role in the scholarly discussion over the last thirty years, he affirmed his debt to Hanson in a personal conversation on November 19, 2000 in Nashville, Tennessee.

The book that more than any other launched the current debate was Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975). See also Hanson’s *Old Testament Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987). The contributions of John J. Collins are too numerous to list here, some of the most significant works are: (as editor) *Semeia* 14 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), entire issue; (along with Bernard McGinn and Stephen J. Stein) *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, 3 volumes (NY: Continuum Press, 1998); (as author) *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Routledge Press, 1997); and *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998).

team of specialists under the auspices of the Society of Biblical Literature, Collins helped shape the definitions that are in working use today.<sup>21</sup>

The term “apocalypse” is drawn from the introductory phrase of the Book of Revelation (Rev 1:1) and means “revelation” or “disclosure.”<sup>22</sup> From the second Christian century onward it became increasingly used as a title or “genre label”<sup>23</sup> for extra-biblical works of a character similar to Daniel and Revelation in the Bible. As modern scholars took note that a whole collection of similar works existed in ancient Judaism, they applied this later label also to books like Daniel, Ethiopic Enoch, 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch and other works produced before and contemporary with Revelation.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Other works of importance over the last half century on the subject of apocalyptic include Adela Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism*, Supplements to the *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, vol. 50 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996); idem, “The Early Christian Apocalypses,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 61-121 and the following: David Aune, “The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre,” *Semeia* 36 (1986): 65-96; Johann Christian Beker, *Paul’s Apocalyptic Gospel: The Coming Triumph of God* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982); David Hellholm, editor, *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983); Clark Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (NY: Crossroad, 1982).

<sup>22</sup>Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, second edition, translated, revised and adapted by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker from Bauer’s fifth German edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 92.

<sup>23</sup>Michael Smith, “On the History of *Apokalypso* and *Apokalypsis*” in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, edited by David Hellholm (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), 9-20.

<sup>24</sup>John J. Collins, in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 41.

Paul Hanson was among the first to distinguish between the terms apocalypse, apocalyptic eschatology, and apocalypticism.<sup>25</sup> For him as for most others, “apocalypse” designates a literary genre, which has since been given a scholarly definition (see below).<sup>26</sup> Hanson defines apocalyptic eschatology, on the other hand, as the world view or conceptual framework out of which the apocalyptic writings emerged.<sup>27</sup> Apocalyptic eschatology was probably an outgrowth of prophetic eschatology.<sup>28</sup> “Apocalypticism” occurs when a group of people adopt the world view of apocalyptic eschatology, using it to inform their interpretation of Scripture, to govern their lives, and to develop a sense of their place in history.<sup>29</sup>

There is a general consensus among the specialists that the genre apocalypse should be defined as follows:<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>John J. Collins, on the other hand, (“Early Jewish Apocalypticism,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by David Noel Freedman, 6 vols. [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992], 1: 283) does not seem to distinguish between apocalyptic eschatology and apocalypticism, using the later term in the same way Hanson uses the former, as an expression of world view or, to use Collins’ terms, a “symbolic universe.”

<sup>26</sup>Paul D. Hanson, “Apocalypses and Apocalypticism,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by David Noel Freedman, 6 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 1: 279.

<sup>27</sup>Hanson, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:280.

<sup>28</sup>In another place I have outlined this development briefly (*What the Bible Says About the End-Time*, 55-71). There I point out that the prophetic view of the end involved an inbreaking of God into the present system of history, without overturning it. The apocalyptic view of the end contains a more radical break between the present age and the age to come, usually including the destruction of the old order before the creation of the new.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. Hanson, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:281; John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 2-14.

<sup>30</sup>According to Hanson (*ibid.*, 1:279), Collins’ team of scholars analyzed all the texts classifiable as apocalypses from 250 BC to 250 AD, and based the definition on the common characteristics. There are occasional voices of protest, however. J. Ramsey Michaels, for example, writes that “Definitions of this kind are almost inevitably circular. Scholars assemble a

“An apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.”<sup>31</sup>

As I understand this definition, an apocalyptic work like Daniel or Revelation is revelatory literature, which means it claims to directly communicate information from God to humanity. This is accomplished in the form of a story, a “narrative framework,” rather than poetry or some other form. The revelation is communicated to a human being by “otherworldly beings” such as angels or the 24 elders of Revelation. The revelation discloses “transcendent reality,” that which is beyond the ability of the five senses to apprehend, about the course of history leading up the God’s salvation at the End, and about the heavenly, “supernatural” world.<sup>32</sup>

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group of documents suspected of belonging to a genre called *apocalypse* and list the common features of these documents to define the genre. For example, the definition quoted above appears to be tailored to fit the Book of Revelation, or at least to make sure of its inclusion.” J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, Guides to New Testament Exegesis, Scot McKnight, general editor (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 26. Below I note a number of ways in which Revelation does not quite fit the genre apocalypse as defined above.

<sup>31</sup>John J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 14. While this definition is widely disseminated to this day, an expansion of the definition was suggested a few years later: “. . . intended to interpret present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority.” Cf. Adela Yarbro Collins, “Introduction: Early Christian Apocalypticism,” *Semeia* 36 (1986): 7. Interestingly, John J. Collins, Yarbro Collins’ husband, ignores her suggested addition in his summary article in *Dictionary of New Testament Backgrounds*, 41, published in 2000 and in the second edition of his *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 5, published in 1998.

<sup>32</sup>According to Angel Manuel Rodriguez (*Future Glory: The 8 Greatest End-time Prophecies in the Bible* [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2002], 9-14), further distinguishing characteristics of apocalyptic include the use of visions and dreams, the abundant use of symbolic language and images, and a focus on the centrality of the cosmic conflict.

While this definition is general enough to seem a fair description of books like Daniel and Revelation, I find what it does not say extremely interesting. For one thing, it does not insist that pseudonymity is a necessary component of apocalyptic literature.<sup>33</sup> This is significant for Adventists, whose view of God-ordained prophetic history is dependent on the possibility of predictive prophecy.<sup>34</sup>

While not present in the above definition of “apocalypse,” scholars also distinguish between two types of apocalyptic literature, the historical and the mystical.<sup>35</sup> The historical type,

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<sup>33</sup>If one does not believe in the possibility of predictive prophecy, Daniel’s startlingly accurate depiction of the Persian and Greek periods in Dan 11 suggests that the book was written after the events prophesied, around 165 BC. The implied author of the book, “Daniel,” would then be a pseudonym (false name) for the real writer, who lived not at the time of Nebuchadnezzar but at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes IV.

Pseudonymity does not necessarily imply a conscious or even unconscious deception. A later uninspired writer believes that he or she has genuinely understood and expressed what the earlier inspired writer would have said to the later writer’s situation. An analogy within Adventist thought today is the genre of compiling selections from Ellen White writings with the intent of expressing what she would have said to today’s situation. Compilers are often unconscious of the degree to which their selection and placement of her statements reflect their own theological opinions. There is no intent to deceive but rather to put together what Ellen White might have said in response to the later situation. I suspect that ancient apocalyptic writers who used pseudonyms were operating with similar motivations.

<sup>34</sup>More on this later. A vigorous expression of this view can be found in Gerhard F. Hasel, “Fulfillments of Prophecy,” in *70 Weeks, Leviticus, Nature of Prophecy*, edited by Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 291-316.

<sup>35</sup>John J. Collins, *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 41. As examples of historical apocalyptic Collins lists Daniel 7-12, the Animal Apocalypse (1 Enoch 83-90), the Apocalypse of Weeks (1 Enoch 93 and 91), Jubilees 23, 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch (cf. “Introduction,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 14). As examples of mystical apocalyptic he lists 1 Enoch 1-36, the Similitudes of Enoch (1 Enoch 37-71), the Apocalypse of Esdras, the Ascension of Isaiah 6-11, 3 Baruch, the Testament of Abraham, and the Apocalypse of Zephaniah (*ibid.*, 15). In what may be a slip-up, Collins later includes Revelation along with Daniel in the category “historical

characteristic of Daniel, gives an overview of a large sweep of history, often divided into periods,<sup>36</sup> and climaxing with a prediction about the end of history and the final judgment.<sup>37</sup>

Historical apocalyptic visions tend to be highly symbolic; the images themselves are not intended to be literally true, but they refer to heavenly and earthly beings and events.<sup>38</sup> While the prophetic visionary views this symbolic sweep of history, he does not usually play a role in the visionary narrative itself.<sup>39</sup>

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apocalypse.” John J. Collins, “Genre, Ideology and Social Movements in Jewish Apocalypticism,” in *Mysteries and Revelations: Apocalyptic Studies since the Uppsala Colloquium*, Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha, Supplement Series 9, edited by John J. Collins and James H. Charlesworth (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 16.

Martha Himmelfarb has argued unsuccessfully that the two types reflect distinct genres. See *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia, 1983) 61. The original distinction of each into three sub-types (in *Semeia* 14) has not proven as useful. See John J. Collins, *idem*, 14.

<sup>36</sup>Hence the scholarly term for this has become “periodization of history.”

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.* This kind of apocalypticism is often called millenarianism, from the expectation of a thousand-year reign of God at the end of time. For John J. Collins, the book of Daniel is a review of the history of the Persian and Greek periods after the fact, with the (failed) prediction of the last events being the only genuine part of that prophecy.

Within the Adventist context, the historical type of apocalyptic is addressed by Kenneth Strand in terms of “horizontal continuity.” He states that “Apocalyptic prophecy projects into the future a continuation of the Bible’s historical record. . . . apocalyptic prophecy’s *horizontal continuity* (my emphasis) is a characteristic that stands in sharp contrast to the approach to history given in classical prophecy.” See Kenneth A. Strand, “Foundational Principles of Interpretation,” in *Symposium on Revelation-- Book I*, edited by Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 19.

<sup>38</sup>Adela Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 11. Collins notes the visions of Daniel 2 and 7 as examples.

<sup>39</sup>In passages like Daniel 2, of course, the visionary is part of the narrative that includes a description of the vision.



The mystical type of apocalypse, on the other hand, describes the ascent of the visionary through the heavens, which are often numbered.<sup>40</sup> This journey through the heavens is usually a sustained and straightforward narrative involving the author or the implied author of the apocalypse.<sup>41</sup> While symbolism may be used in mystical apocalyptic, there is more of a sense of reality in the description, the visionary ascends into a real place where actions take place that affect the readers' lives on earth.<sup>42</sup>

There is some debate among scholars whether these two types of apocalypses should be viewed as distinct genres. Both types, however, can clearly occur in a single literary work.<sup>43</sup> Both types, the historical and the heavenly, convey a revealed interpretation of history, whether that history is past, present (heavenly journey) or future.<sup>44</sup> For SDAs, as we have seen, the historical type of apocalypse has traditionally been of primary interest.

Some scholars believe that the historical type of apocalyptic thinking began with Zoroaster, a pagan priest of Persia, but the relevant Persian documents are quite late and may be dependant on Jewish works rather than the other way around.<sup>45</sup> It is more likely that the “dawn of

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<sup>40</sup>For a significant overview of this type of apocalypse see Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1993). A more recent example of this type of apocalypse can be found in the work of Dante.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>42</sup>Adela Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 12.

<sup>43</sup>John J. Collins, *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 41. An example Collins mentions is the Jewish Apocalypse of Abraham (cf. “Introduction,” *Semeia* [1979]: 14). While Collins seems to disagree, I think Revelation is another example, as I will attempt to demonstrate in a future article.

<sup>44</sup>Adela Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 15.

<sup>45</sup> Hanson, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:281; John J. Collins, *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 41-42; *idem*, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 29-33; David E. Aune,

apocalyptic” can be traced to the prophetic works of the Old Testament, like Isaiah 24-27, 65-66, Daniel, Joel and Zechariah.<sup>46</sup> When the prophetic spirit ceased among Jews during the Persian period (6<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century BC),<sup>47</sup> pseudonymity became a way that uninspired writers sought to recapture the spirit of the ancient prophets and write out what those ancient prophets might have

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“Apocalypticism” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, edited by Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 46. The evidence for a Persian origin of apocalyptic is presented in Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

<sup>46</sup>Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*; see also Aune, *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 47. Hanson, of course, would not include Daniel in this list, but is responsible for convincing Collins and others that the prophetic background to Jewish apocalyptic is primary.

Although Hanson’s view (originally stated by Luecke, according to Aune, 46), that apocalyptic is a natural outgrowth of OT prophecy, seems to be a general consensus among scholars today, other views of the origin of apocalyptic are worthy of mention here. Gerhard von Rad sees the “clear-cut dualism, radical transcendence, esotericism, and gnosticism” of apocalyptic mirrored in the wisdom literature of the OT (Aune, 47; cf. Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 volumes [NY: Harper and Row, 1962-1965], 301-308). While these links are considered undeniable, von Rad’s proposal has garnered little support among scholars (Aune, 47-48).

Kenneth Strand has made the intriguing proposal that the origin of apocalyptic should instead be traced to the historical narratives of the OT; Samuel, Kings and Chronicles (Kenneth A. Strand, “Foundational Principles of Interpretation,” 18). As mentioned earlier, he argues that apocalyptic prophecy projects into the future a continuation of the Bible’s historical record. “God’s sovereignty and constant care for His people are always in the forefront of the Bible’s portrayal of the historical continuum, whether it is depicted in past events (historical books) or in events to come (apocalyptic prophecy). Both Daniel and Revelation reveal a divine overlordship and mastery regarding the onward movement of history beyond the prophet’s own time—a future history that will culminate when the God of heaven establishes His own eternal kingdom that will fill the whole earth and stand forever (Dan 3:25, 44-45; Rev 21-22).” Ibid. Since Strand never went beyond this brief suggestion and since this view of origin does not cover all forms of apocalyptic (such as the mystical), the view has not attracted much scholarly attention.

<sup>47</sup>See D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 73-82, for a review of the ancient evidence regarding the decline of prophecy in the Persian and Greek periods (539 to 63 BC in Palestine).

written had they been alive to see the apocalypticist's day.<sup>48</sup> How the book of Daniel fits into this larger historical picture will be taken up below.

### **The Apocalyptic World View**

The term “apocalypticism,” as noted earlier,<sup>49</sup> designates the world view that is characteristic of early Jewish and Christian apocalypses, such as Daniel and Revelation.<sup>50</sup> The world view of apocalypticism centered on the belief that the present world order is evil and oppressive, and under the control of Satan and his human accomplices. The present world order would shortly be destroyed by God and replaced with a new and perfect order corresponding to Eden. The final events of the old order involve severe conflict between the old order and the people of God, but the final outcome is never in question. Through a mighty act of judgment God condemns the wicked, rewards the righteous and re-creates the universe.<sup>51</sup>

The apocalyptic world view, therefore, sees reality from the perspective of God's overarching control of history, which is divided into a series of segments or eras. It expresses these beliefs in terms of the themes and images of ancient apocalyptic literature.<sup>52</sup> Although this world view can be expressed through other genres of literature,<sup>53</sup> its fundamental shape is most clearly discerned in apocalypses.

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 178-202.

<sup>49</sup>See pages 13-14.

<sup>50</sup>David E. Aune, *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 46.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 46. See also elaborated listing on page 48.

<sup>53</sup>John J. Collins, *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 43. Collins notes the apocalyptic world view in such non-apocalypses as the Community Rule found among the Dead

While many consider the apocalyptic world view inappropriate for a post-scientific world, many fundamental SDA beliefs are grounded in biblical apocalyptic. In other words, for Adventists the books of Daniel and Revelation are not marginal works, they are foundational to the Adventist world view and its concept of God. Rejecting the apocalyptic world view would inaugurate a fundamental shift in Adventist thinking. The purpose of this article is not to settle whether such a shift would be a good thing, but to examine whether careful biblical scholarship is capable of sustaining the biblical basis for the Adventist world view.

### **Recent SDA Scholarship on Apocalyptic**

In reaction to the work of Desmond Ford,<sup>54</sup> an earlier generation of Seventh-day Adventist scholars sought to distinguish the genres of prophetic and apocalyptic eschatology.<sup>55</sup> “Prophetic” literature was divided into two major types; 1) general prophecy, represented by

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Sea Scrolls at Qumran. Collins goes on to note that the apocalyptic world view is widespread throughout the New Testament and can be clearly seen in such non-apocalypses as Matthew (chapter 24 and parallels in Mark and Luke), 1 Corinthians (chapter 15), the Thessalonian letters (1 Thess 4 and 5, 2 Thess 1 and 2) and Jude.

<sup>54</sup>Desmond Ford, *Daniel 8:14, The Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment* (Casselberry, FL: Euangelion Press, 1980).

<sup>55</sup>The anonymous document “The Nature of Prophecy” in *Ministry*, October, 1980, pp. 28-33 seems to be a summary of discussions on the topic at the Glacier View Conference in August of 1980, where the views of Desmond Ford were examined by a large committee of church leaders, pastors and scholars. The Daniel and Revelation Committee subsequently (1982-1985) took up the issue and dealt with it at greater length in the third volume of the Daniel and Revelation Committee Series. See particularly William G. Johnsson, “Conditionality in Biblical Prophecy With Particular Reference to Apocalyptic,” in *70 Weeks, Leviticus, Nature of Prophecy*, edited by Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 259-287 and Strand, “Foundational Principles of Interpretation,” 16-19.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and others, and 2) apocalyptic prophecy, represented by Daniel and Revelation.<sup>56</sup> General prophecy, sometimes called “classical prophecy,” was seen to focus primarily on the prophet’s own time and place, but with glimpses forward to a cosmic “Day of the Lord” culminating in a new heaven and a new earth. Apocalyptic prophecy, on the other hand, was seen to focus on history as a divinely-guided continuum leading up to and including the final events of earth’s history.<sup>57</sup> William Shea, for example, felt that general prophecy focuses on the short-range view, while apocalyptic prophecy includes the long-range view.<sup>58</sup>

It was argued that general prophecy, because of its dual dimension, may at times be susceptible to dual fulfillments or foci where local and contemporary perspectives are mixed with a universal, future perspective.<sup>59</sup> Apocalyptic prophecy, on the other hand, does not deal so much with the local, contemporary situation as it does with the universal scope of the whole span of human history, including the major saving acts of God within that history. The greater focus of general prophecy is on contemporary events, the greater focus of apocalyptic prophecy is on end-time events.<sup>60</sup> While general prophecy describes the future in the context of the prophet’s

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<sup>56</sup>*Ministry* (1980), p. 28. While not utilizing this exact terminology, Gerhard Hasel seems to have been working with a similar distinction in mind in his DARCOM article, “Fulfillments of Prophecy,” 291-322.

<sup>57</sup>Johnsson, 269; Strand, “Foundational Principles of Interpretation,” 16. SDA scholarship has not until now dealt with the distinction between historical and mystical apocalypses addressed above.

<sup>58</sup>William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, Daniel & Revelation Committee Series, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1982), 59.

<sup>59</sup>Hasel, “Fulfillments of Prophecy,” 306-307; Strand, “Foundational Principles of Interpretation,” 16.

<sup>60</sup>*Ministry* (1980), 28-29.

local situation, apocalyptic prophecy portrays a comprehensive historical continuum that is under God's control and leads in sequence from the prophet's time to the End.

General prophecies, which are written to affect human response, tend to be conditional upon the reactions of peoples and nations.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, apocalyptic prophecies, particularly those of Daniel and Revelation, tend to be unconditional, reflecting God's foreknowledge of His ultimate victory and the establishment of His eternal kingdom.<sup>62</sup>

Apocalyptic prophecy portrays the inevitability of God's sovereign purpose. No matter what the evil powers do, God will accomplish His purpose in history.<sup>63</sup>

I believe that insights from both general and SDA scholarship can be combined in a useful way. When dealing with Daniel and Revelation, therefore, it is vital to determine the genre of a given passage before deciding how that passage should be interpreted. SDAs have had a tendency to see historical sequences in nearly every part of Daniel and Revelation, even in the

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<sup>61</sup>Hasel, "Fulfillments of Prophecy," 297.

<sup>62</sup>Johnsson surveys the field on pages 278-282 of his DARCOM article on the subject. After considerable attention to the evidence of Daniel he concludes, "We search in vain for the element of conditionality." (278-279) Daniel is thoroughly apocalyptic and thoroughly unconditional. Zechariah, on the other hand, is apocalyptic in form but covenantal in approach, its prophecies are, therefore, conditional on human response (280-281). Interestingly, while Matt 24 and its parallels are more general than apocalyptic in form, Johnsson argues (his brief comments of eight lines are more of an assertion) that they are thoroughly unconditional (282). The same is said for Revelation (282). Johnsson concludes that, "Except in those passages where the covenant with Israel is the leading concern, apocalyptic predictions, whether OT or NT, do not hinge on conditionality." (282) Conditional prophecies highlight the concept of human freedom. Unconditional prophecies emphasize divine sovereignty and foreknowledge (282-285).

<sup>63</sup>*Ministry* (1980), 31.

epistolary<sup>64</sup> and narrative<sup>65</sup> portions at times. I believe that Adventist interpreters need to pay much closer attention to the genre of a given text before making judgments regarding how to interpret the passage. A historicist approach is appropriate wherever the genre of a passage is clearly historical apocalyptic. Other genres call for other approaches. When the genre has been determined, the appropriate approach can be taken.

While the distinction between general prophecy and apocalyptic is helpful, apocalyptic as a genre is not limited to the historical variety, as the Adventist discussion seems to assume.<sup>66</sup> It may be more helpful to think of a prophetic continuum<sup>67</sup> with general prophecy and historical apocalyptic at the two ends (characterized in the above box), and a variety of apocalyptic expressions in between including mystical apocalyptic and types that focus on personal eschatology or include elements of both historical and mystical apocalyptic.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>SDAs commonly interpret the seven letters of Revelation 2-3 as a prophecy of seven eras of church history, an approach one would not naturally take to the letters of Paul, for example. In discussions regarding the letters to the churches, the Daniel and Revelation Committee failed to find convincing evidence for a historicist reading of the seven letters, but its work was closed before work on that topic could be published.

<sup>65</sup>The Millerites saw the “seven times” of Daniel 4 as a year-for-day prophecy running from 677 BC to 1843 AD.

<sup>66</sup>Collins actually identifies six different subcategories of apocalyptic, three of which are found in early Jewish apocalyptic. John J. Collins, “The Jewish Apocalypses,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 21-59.

<sup>67</sup>Collins notes that a sharp distinction between apocalypses of the historical and mystical varieties is hard to maintain, particularly from the first century AD on. Collins, “Morphology,” *Semeia* 14 (1979), 16.

<sup>68</sup>Rather than historical reviews, some apocalypses “envisage cosmic and/or political eschatology,” which I find much like what Adventists have called “general prophecy.” Cf. *Ibid.*, 13.

## The Distinctiveness of Biblical Apocalyptic

While there is much common ground in the above developments, Adventists tend to differ from most scholarship on apocalyptic on account of their view of predictive prophecy. Biblical scholarship today generally approaches the books of Daniel and Revelation with the assumption that they are similar in character to the non-biblical apocalypses.<sup>69</sup> Adventists, on the other hand, see a distinction between canonical and non-canonical apocalyptic. For them, canonical apocalyptic (mainly Daniel and Revelation) is inspired, non-canonical apocalyptic is not. For Adventists Daniel and Revelation offer windows into the mind of God and His ability to “know the end from the beginning” and announce ahead of time “what is yet to come” (Isa 46:10; John 16:13). While acknowledging the existence of pseudo-authorship and *ex eventu* prophecy in non-biblical apocalyptic,<sup>70</sup> Adventists have understood the inspired apocalyptic of the Bible to be substantively different.

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<sup>69</sup>John J. Collins, *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature, vol. 20, edited by Rolf Knierim and Gene M. Tucker (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 34. In his Hermeneia commentary on Daniel (*Daniel* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993], 25-26) Collins rejects the conservative notion that positions like his rest on a “dogmatic, rationalistic denial of the possibility of predictive prophecy” (26). He goes on, “For the critical scholar, however, the issue is one of probability.” Collins argues that since the prophecies of Daniel 11, in particular, were early recognized (by Josephus and Jerome, as well as Porphyry, to apply to Antiochus Epiphanes, the issue becomes: Why would a prophet of the sixth century focus minute attention on the events of the second century? And why would the Hellenistic period be prophesied in greater detail than the Persian or Babylonian period? In his opinion, the burden of proof must fall on those who wish to argue that Daniel is different in character from other examples of the genre.

<sup>70</sup>History is divided into twelve periods, for example, in 4 Ezra 14:11-12; 2 Apoc Bar 53-76; and the Apocalypse of Abraham 29. There is a ten-fold division of history in 1 Enoch 93:1-10 and 91:12-17, Sib Or 1:7-323 and Sib Or 4:47-192. History is divided into seven periods in 2 Enoch 33:1-2 and bSanhedrin 97. I know of no one who argues that any of these books were written by the original Enoch, Abraham, Ezra or Baruch.



In light of this, the date of Daniel becomes a crucial issue of interpretation for Adventists. The book of Daniel's stated setting is in the courts of Babylon and Persia in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC. During that period of history the gift of prophecy was exhibited in the work of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and perhaps others. Thus Daniel would be counted among the inspired works of Scripture written around that time. On the other hand, few scholars of Daniel would question that chapter 11 includes a remarkably accurate portrayal of certain events in the fourth, third and second centuries before Christ.<sup>71</sup> Most scholars would argue that a second-century BC date makes the most sense of that reality.

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<sup>71</sup>According to John J. Collins (*Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, 34), any discussion of apocalyptic must distinguish between the ostensible setting which is given in the text and the actual settings in which it was composed and used. The ostensible setting of Daniel is clearly the courts of Babylon and Persia in the sixth century BC. Already in ancient times, however, Porphyry pointed out that the predictions in Daniel 11 are correct down to (but not including) the death of Antiochus Epiphanes (mid-second-century BC), but are thereafter incorrect or unfulfilled (ibid., 36). This phenomenon of partial accuracy is common in all non-biblical apocalypses. So scholars like Collins suggest that the burden of proof must fall on those who wish to argue that Daniel is different from other examples of the genre (ibid., 34). Collins, for one, is open to the possibility that the court narratives of Dan 1-6 are earlier than the second-century, the crucial issue for him as it is for SDAs, is the authenticity of the predictions in Dan 7-12.

Scholars who date Daniel in the second century before Christ do not always point out that Porphyry was a pagan opponent of Christianity who was seeking to demonstrate its inauthenticity. Since predictive prophecy is a powerful evidence for the validity of the Bible, Christianity's sacred text, Porphyry interpreted Daniel as a hostile witness, seeking to demonstrate that the crucial historical sequences of Daniel were all written after the fact. Before Porphyry's time (*circa* 230-300 AD), however, Christian readers of Daniel had no difficulty seeing the prophecies of Daniel being accurately fulfilled in Rome, two centuries after the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. See the writings by Irenaeus (*Against Heresies*, 25.3-5; 26.1-2-- A. Cleveland Coxe, editor, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989], 553-556), Hippolytus (*Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, 28-- A. Cleveland Coxe, editor, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, *Fathers of the Third Century* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990], 210), and possibly Barnabas (*Epistle of Barnabas*, 4.1-6-- J. B.

If one places Daniel in the second century BC, it would clearly speak to a time when people believed that the prophetic spirit had been silenced (Ps 74:9; 1 Macc 4:44-46; 14:41, cf. *mAboth* 1:1).<sup>72</sup> Without the gift of prophecy it would be impossible for anyone to write history in advance. Having said this, however, the historical time periods of *ex eventu* prophecy reflected the conviction that a true prophet such as Enoch, Moses, or Ezra would be capable of outlining history in advance.<sup>73</sup> So if Daniel was actually written in the sixth century, it stands as a remarkable evidence of predictive prophecy.<sup>74</sup> Since evidence for a sixth-century date for Daniel has been given elsewhere, that issue will not be taken up here.<sup>75</sup>

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Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, editors, *The Apostolic Fathers*, second edition [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992], 278-281). See discussion in Froom, vol. 1, 210, 244-246, 273.

It should be noted that at least one major evangelical commentary (John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary, 30 [Dallas: Word Books, 1988], xxxvi-xl) leans toward the second century position. While Lucas is sympathetic to the second century position, it is not clear which of the two positions he prefers. See Lucas, 306-312.

<sup>72</sup>Russell, 73-103.

<sup>73</sup>Lars Hartman, *Prophecy Interpreted*, translated by Neil Tomkinson, *Coniectanea Biblica*, NT series, no. 1 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1966), p. 25; Russell, 96.

<sup>74</sup>While Adventist scholars have tended to see this as a “life and death” issue, Lucas, arguing from an evangelical perspective, disagrees (*Daniel*, 308-309). Those who support a second-century date for Daniel do not necessarily deny that the visions are genuine, but argue that the significance of the prophecies of Daniel lies not in their *prediction* of history, but rather in their *interpretation* of it. Interpretation of past history is as much a part of the prophetic legacy as prediction is. Lucas argues that the use of pseudonymity, which is seen as problematic today, should not be judged by modern standards of literary appropriateness, but by ancient practices, in which pseudonymity was quite common.

I grant that Adventists may have been inclined to damn all who promote a second-century date for Daniel as skeptics (which would be unfair), but they rightly take issue with these points on two grounds. 1) The issue of integrity in Scripture. Does divine revelation portray that which is clearly false, and intentionally so? 2) The fulfillment of divine prediction is a tremendous source of encouragement that unfulfilled predictions (such as the reality of the Jesus’ return, cf. 1

## A New Approach to Apocalyptic Genre

### Revisiting the Genre of Daniel

While Daniel and Revelation are often thought of as quintessential apocalyptic books,<sup>76</sup> neither is a consistent example of the genre definition offered above. Daniel has a number of

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Cor 15:12-24) will take place and will do so in a way that substantially resembles that which was predicted. Rightly or wrongly, Adventists have not been comfortable with the fuzzy uncertainty regarding the future that eventuates from much preterist scholarship. On the other hand, Adventists have often been too confident that God's plans for the future can be mastered in detail.

<sup>75</sup>Gerhard F. Hasel, "Establishing a Date For the Book of Daniel," in *Symposium on Daniel: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 2, edited by Frank B. Holbrook (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 84-164. See also Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel Tyndale OT Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 35-46; Charles Boutflower, *In and Around the Book of Daniel* (London: SPCK, 1923), 1-12 and *passim*; Arthur J. Ferch, "The Book of Daniel and the 'Maccabean Thesis,'" *AUSS* 21 (1983): 129-141; Kenneth A. Kitchen, "The Aramaic of Daniel," in *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel* (London: Tyndale Press, 1965), 31-79; William H. Shea, *Daniel 1-7: Prophecy as History*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1996), 34-44; D. J. Wiseman, "Some Historical Problems in the Book of Daniel," in *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel* (London: Tyndale Press, 1965), 9-18; Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 23-26.

Among the arguments for an early date for Daniel: 1) The way Daniel handles months and years is almost unknown in the writings of the second century, but quite common in the sixth. 2) The Aramaic of Daniel is much more like the Aramaic of the Persian period (Daniel's time) than that of the Qumran scrolls (shortly after the time of Antiochus). 3) Some of the Daniel manuscripts at Qumran would probably be dated before the time of Antiochus were such a result considered possible. 4) Daniel's awareness of Belshazzar's existence and position, something unknown in the second century. 5) Recent evidence from the field of archaeology is much more supportive of a sixth-century date than a second-century one.

<sup>76</sup>Collins is unequivocal with regard to Daniel, "Taken as a whole, Daniel is an APOCALYPSE, by the definition given in the discussion of that genre above. More specifically, it belongs to the subgenre known as "HISTORICAL APOCALYPSE, . . ." Collins, *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, 33. In its title (Rev 1:1), the Book of Revelation supplies the word "apocalypse" which has been used to cover the entire genre.

characteristics that do not fit the definition of apocalypse cited above. With the exception of Nebuchadnezzar's dream/vision in 2:31-45, the first six chapters of Daniel are of a largely narrative character. While a "narrative framework" is a defining characteristic of apocalyptic, the stories of Daniel 1-6 have few of the other characteristics of apocalyptic. Within the larger genre of narrative, these stories instead fall into a category often called "court tales," which is fairly rare in the extant literature of the ancient world.<sup>77</sup>

Furthermore, at significant points in the book (Dan 2:20-23; 9:4-19), prayers occur. The first of these is in poetry, the second in prose! Other elements of Daniel are also written in verse, prominent among these is the heavenly judgment scene of Dan 7:9-10, 13-14.<sup>78</sup> There are aspects of the book that also fit very well into the Old Testament wisdom tradition.<sup>79</sup> Even the visions of Daniel don't always precisely fit the definition of apocalyptic. The closest fit is in chapters 11 and 12, which are clearly historical apocalyptic.<sup>80</sup> Questions have been raised, on the other hand, whether the visions of Daniel 7 and 8 truly fit the genre.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>The book of Esther and the court stories of Joseph (Genesis 41-50) are the only true parallels in the Old Testament. From ancient Mesopotamia comes the story of Ahikar, along with several others from ancient Egypt, Sinuhe being the best known.

<sup>78</sup>For a summary of the scholarly debate over the existence and extent of poetry in Daniel 7 see Susan Niditch, *The Symbolic Vision in Biblical Tradition* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 190-191.

<sup>79</sup>Gerhard von Rad was the first to see a strong wisdom background to apocalyptic in general (*Old Testament Theology*, 2: 301-308). He was supported by comparative work in mantic wisdom traditions (H. -P. Müller, "Mantische Weisheit und Apokalyptic," *Studia in Veteris Testamenti* 22 [1972]: 268-293, cited in Lucas, 311).

<sup>80</sup>Lucas, 272-273, 310.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 311; Niditch, 177-233. Collins speaks of the visions of Daniel 7 and 8 as "Symbolic Dream Visions" in *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, 78, 86.

It is probably not helpful, therefore, to state that Daniel as a whole is historical apocalyptic without a certain amount of qualification. With careful attention to markers in the text, however, it is not difficult to determine what parts of the book do exhibit the historical brand of apocalyptic. In a future article I will argue from the text that the visions of Daniel 2 and 7, for example, are rightly understood in terms of historical apocalyptic.

While assessing the genre of whole apocalyptic books is a most interesting pursuit, therefore, it may not be as helpful to the interpretation of Daniel as a more nuanced approach. Daniel clearly exhibits a mixed genre, with elements of narrative, poetry and prayers sprinkled among the apocalyptic visions. Whether one wishes to describe these elements as “genres,” “sub-genres” or “forms,” careful attention to needs to be given on a text by text basis before it can be determined that a given passage should or should not be interpreted as historical apocalyptic.<sup>82</sup>

The importance of careful attention to genre is powerfully argued by Lucas, in his recent commentary on Daniel.<sup>83</sup> Lucas points out that all readers have some sense of the different genres of literature that exist in their culture. Because of this, readers approach a given text with certain expectations based on the kind of literature they perceive it to be. If an author wishes to connect with an implied audience that author needs to adopt a genre that will communicate to readers within that audience’s culture. Not to do so would be to risk great misunderstanding.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>John J. Collins is clearly moving in that direction with his interpretive distinction between the court tales of Daniel and the historical apocalyptic passages in *Daniel*, (Hermeneia), 38-61. Collins discusses the genre of the court tales on pages 38-52, and the genre of the visions on pages 52-61. He anticipated this approach already in this short commentary in the Forms of the Old Testament Literature series (Eerdmans, 1984).

<sup>83</sup>Lucas, 22-24.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

Later readers who wish to understand a text, therefore, need to identify the place any given text has within the generic options available to the original audience. While the original audience will make such identifications unconsciously, the later interpreter will need to carefully observe the text under review, noting literary markers that indicate genre within the culture and world view of the original audience. There is great potential for misunderstanding, of course, when later generations read a text. To treat a court tale or a classical prophecy as if it were historical apocalyptic would be to draw false conclusions. On the other hand, to treat historical apocalyptic as if it were something else would also lead to inappropriate and misleading acts of interpretation.

Seventh-day Adventist interpreters have had the tendency to treat most or all of Daniel and Revelation as historical apocalyptic, without specific attention to the textual markers that would indicate such interpretation. As a result texts like the seven letters of Revelation 2 and 3 or the “seven times” of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream were interpreted in a historicist fashion even though there was no specific textual evidence for doing so.<sup>85</sup> This approach was plausible when Daniel and Revelation were thought of as completely apocalyptic. But a more nuanced approach is now called for by the evidence.

When it comes to Daniel, the interpreter must decide whether the genre of a given passage is narrative (court tales), poetry, prayer, or apocalyptic. If the passage is apocalyptic it needs to be determined whether the evidence of the passage points to mystical or historical

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<sup>85</sup>It might be appropriate at this point to note that Adventist “futurists” seem equally oblivious to genre when they treat most or all the passages of Revelation as End-time regardless of the kind of textual evidence that might or might not have led the original audience to draw such a conclusion.

apocalyptic.<sup>86</sup> In a forthcoming article I will argue that the visions and explanations of Daniel 2 and 7 exhibit the marks of historical apocalyptic. I believe that most scholars would agree with me in that designation. As we have seen, the primary point of difference between Adventist understanding of Daniel and the scholarly majority has to do with the date of the book, whether the visions are predictive or interpretations of history after the fact.

### **Revisiting the Genre of Revelation**

A problem that previous Adventist discussions have not adequately addressed is the relationship of Revelation to the larger genre of apocalyptic prophecy. It has been largely assumed that Revelation is of the same character as Daniel (which Adventists generally treat as an apocalyptic prophecy).<sup>87</sup> Its visions, therefore, are usually interpreted as unconditional prophetic portrayals of the sequence of both Christian and general history from the time of Jesus to the end of the world.<sup>88</sup> This assumption, as we have seen, has not been found compelling by specialists in the field.

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<sup>86</sup>As we have seen, the consensus of scholarship seems to be that the apocalyptic visions of Daniel are normally of the historical variety.

<sup>87</sup>Christopher Rowland, on the other hand, shows that the two books are significantly different. See *The Open Heaven*, 12-14.

<sup>88</sup>William Johnsson, in his article on the nature of prophecy (DARCOM, vol. 3, 282) provides only two paragraphs on Revelation. Kenneth Strand goes much further. He states without argument that Revelation, along with Daniel, is generally classified as apocalyptic prophecy in contrast to “classical prophecy.” He then goes on to list the characteristics of apocalyptic prophecy. Kenneth A. Strand, “Foundational Principles of Interpretation,” 11-19. Strand does soften this assertion somewhat on page 22, however. He notes the epistolary nature of the seven letters to the churches in chapters 2 and 3, giving Revelation “a certain flavor of exhortation,” an element of conditionality. He limits this exhortatory character of Revelation, however, to appeals and does not apply its conditionality to the prophetic forecasts of Revelation.

Rather than exhibiting a consistent use of historical apocalyptic, as many Adventists assume, Revelation seems to smoothly blend characteristics of general prophecy,<sup>89</sup> mystical apocalyptic<sup>90</sup> and historical apocalyptic,<sup>91</sup> not to mention the genres of epistle,<sup>92</sup> and perhaps

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My own work in the same volume states that Revelation is both prophetic and apocalyptic, but I don't address the implications of that distinction. Jon Paulien, "Interpreting Revelation's Symbolism," in *Symposium on Revelation-- Book I*, edited by Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6 (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 78-79. One reason for this mild contradiction is that the Daniel and Revelation Committee was disbanded before finishing its work. Strand's opening articles were added later, being a compendium of his earlier work, but were never seriously discussed in the committee.

<sup>89</sup>I find the prophetic genre exhibited in the seven seals of Rev 6:1 - 8:1.

<sup>90</sup>I see the mystical apocalyptic genre of heavenly ascents exhibited in Rev 4-5, mingled perhaps with elements of the prophetic genre. See David Aune, *Revelation*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52A (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1997), 276-279.

<sup>91</sup>In this sentence I go against the grain of some leading scholar's opinions. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, for example, asserts that "strictly speaking" Revelation does not belong to either the historical or the heavenly journey type of apocalypse ("The Phenomenon of Early Christian Apocalyptic," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979, David Hellholm, editor, (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), 298). She argues that the book contains no reviews of history, is not pseudonymous, and has no developed heavenly journey. The argument regarding pseudonymity does not seem to apply to the genre question (see page 42), the other two arguments are observational and intuitive. I question the former in this series of articles. A point in Fiorenza's favor is that the systematic review of history so dominant in some of the Jewish Apocalypses is entirely absent in Christian "apocalypses" such as the *The Apocalypse of Peter*, *Hermas*, the *Book of Elchasai*, and *5 Ezra* (ibid., 298-299, 310). The latter two are fragmentary, so the evidence is incomplete. She does, however, note the affinity between Revelation and the Synoptic Apocalypse in the prophetic-apocalyptic combination of eschatological events and *paraenesis* (exhortation). Ibid., 300. Cf. John J. Collins, "Introduction," *Semeia* 14, 14-16.

<sup>92</sup>Most scholars would agree that Rev 2-3 best fits the epistolary genre.



even narrative.<sup>93</sup> Like general prophecy, it is written to a specific time and place and the audience is local and contemporary (Rev 1:1-4, 10-11, 2:1 - 3:22).<sup>94</sup> Its message was intended to be understood by the original audience (Rev 1:3).<sup>95</sup> It describes its author as a prophet and his work as a prophecy (1:3,10-11; 10:8-11; 19:10; 22:6-10, 16, 18-19). It is not, therefore, simply a replay of the visions of Daniel.<sup>96</sup>

At the same time, much of the language and style of Revelation is clearly apocalyptic. Unlike classical prophecy, Revelation exhibits a radical and complete break between the old order and the new, just like Second Temple apocalyptic.<sup>97</sup> Like mystical apocalyptic, Revelation includes reports of the writers forays into heavenly places (Rev 4-5; 7:9-17; 12:1-4; 14:1-5; 19:1-10). Like historical apocalyptic, there are clear traces of historical sequence in Revelation (Rev 12:1-17 and 17:10).<sup>98</sup> So the genre of Revelation as a whole seems mixed.

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<sup>93</sup>While Rev 1:9-20 has prophetic-apocalyptic features, one could argue that this represents narrative genre.

<sup>94</sup>The prophetic portion of the book cannot be arbitrarily limited to the seven letters at the beginning, Rev 22:16 clearly states that the entire book was intended as a message to the churches.

<sup>95</sup>Rev 1:3 states, “Blessed is the one who reads and *those who hear the words of this prophecy* (οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας), and keep the things written in it, for the time is near.” The accusative form of τοὺς λόγους indicates that the author of Revelation intended his original readers not only to hear the book, but to understand and obey it (“keep the things written in it”).

<sup>96</sup>In Daniel, by way of contrast, there are texts that seem to postpone understanding: Dan 8:27; 12:4, 13.

<sup>97</sup>See Paulien, *What the Bible Says About the End-Time*, 55-71, concerning this shift from the historical and geographical continuity of Old Testament prophecy to the radical break between the ages of Jewish apocalyptic.

<sup>98</sup>Strand, “Foundational Principles of Interpretation,” 17. In the article to follow, I examine these traces in some detail for chapter 12.

The early scholarly consensus was that the book of Revelation as a whole was primarily apocalyptic.<sup>99</sup> But that early consensus has needed qualification. The similarity between portions of Revelation and other apocalyptic writings does not negate the prophetic character of the book.<sup>100</sup> Not only so, some scholars feel the difference between prophetic and apocalyptic genre is not always clear cut.<sup>101</sup> The apocalyptic War Scroll found at Qumran, for example, is saturated with Old Testament prophetic language.<sup>102</sup> On the other hand, the prophetic books of the Old Testament, even the “classical” ones, contain many features common to apocalyptic, such as the eschatological upheavals preceding the End (Joel 2:30-31; Isa 24:3),<sup>103</sup> and the inbreaking of the

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<sup>99</sup>John J. Collins, “The Genre Apocalypse in Hellenistic Judaism,” in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, edited by David Hellholm (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), pp. 531-548; idem, *Semeia* 14:1-20. Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, Harvard Dissertation Series, no. 9 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 2; Jan Lambrecht, “The Book of Revelation and Apocalyptic in the New Testament: Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense XXX (August 28-30, 1979),” *Ephemerides théologique Lovaniensis* 55 (1979): 392.

<sup>100</sup>Graeme Goldsworthy, *The Lion and the Lamb: The Gospel in Revelation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 88; Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 135; Frederick David Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-Critical Perspective* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989).

<sup>101</sup>David Hill, “Prophecy and Prophets in the Revelation of St. John,” *New Testament Studies* 18 (1971-1972): 401; Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 168; G. K. Beale, *Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 37; D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 478-479.

<sup>102</sup>Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Composition and Structure of the Book of Revelation,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (1977): 355. 358.

<sup>103</sup>John J. Collins, *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, 12.

End-time itself (Amos 8:8-9; 9:5-6).<sup>104</sup> So to completely distinguish between prophetic and apocalyptic books is extremely difficult if not impossible.<sup>105</sup>

It is perhaps safest to say that the Apocalypse is a unique literary work, one that utilizes the expressions of apocalyptic literature, but also reflects the conviction that the spirit of prophecy had been revived (Rev 19:10).<sup>106</sup> George Eldon Ladd, therefore, proposed a hybrid categorization.<sup>107</sup> In between prophetic literature and apocalyptic literature<sup>108</sup> Ladd places a new category which he calls “prophetic-apocalyptic.” Here he would place literature such as Revelation.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>George Eldon Ladd, “Why Not Prophetic-Apocalyptic?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76 (1957): 197.

<sup>105</sup>Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 168.

<sup>106</sup>Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Apocalypse* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1976), 26; David Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), 75; idem, “Prophecy and Prophets,” 406; Donatien Mollat, *Une lecture pour aujourd’hui: L’Apocalypse*, second edition (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1984), 30. Jeffrey Marshall Vogelgesang (“The Interpretation of Ezekiel in the Book of Revelation,” [PhD Dissertation, Harvard University, 1985], 2), following Dieter Georgi, contends that Revelation is an “anti-apocalyptic book:” though written in the genre of an apocalypse, it offers a message contrary to that of contemporary apocalyptic literature. According to Vogelgesang, these differences were due to the Revelator’s belief in Jesus and his particular understanding of the implications of that belief.

<sup>107</sup>Ladd, 192-200. Cf. the position of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Apokalypsis and Propheiteia. The Book of Revelation in the Context of Early Christian Prophecy,” in *L’Apocalypse johannique et l’Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament*, edited by J. Lambrecht, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologaricum Lovaniensium, vol. 53 (Gembloux: Leuven University Press, 1980), pp. 105-128.

<sup>108</sup>Which Ladd calls “non-canonical apocalyptic.”

<sup>109</sup>Fiorenza (*The Book of Revelation*, 138, 168) agrees with Ladd that there is no either/or solution to the complexity of Revelation.

Some would go a step further than Ladd. They would argue that while there are elements of Revelation that hark back to both OT prophecy and Jewish apocalyptic, the entire book is portrayed as a letter to the seven churches of Asia Minor (Rev 22:16).<sup>110</sup> Ulrich B. Müller points out that although there is a definite tension in character between the seven letters and the apocalyptic portions of Revelation,<sup>111</sup> the fundamental prophetic content is the same.<sup>112</sup> The apocalyptic war is not only played out in heaven, it is also played out in the everyday life of the churches. While the epistolary character of the seven letters is clear, categorizing the whole book of Revelation as an “epistle” does not seem to make sense.<sup>113</sup> Ladd’s designation “Prophetic-Apocalyptic” or the Adventist phrase “Apocalyptic Prophecy” seem more appropriate designations for the genre of Revelation as a whole.

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<sup>110</sup>Carson, Moo, and Morris, 479; David E. Aune, *Revelation*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52A, David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, general editors (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1997): 1:lxxii-lxxv; Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 51, 170. Fiorenza (p. 4) would add that in addition to OT prophetic and Jewish apocalyptic traditions, Revelation also reflects the influence of Pauline, Johannine, and other NT-era prophetic traditions. I don’t doubt that this is the case, but as a practical matter, I take these backgrounds to be more speculative than helpful since it is far from clear what NT books John would have been familiar with, if any. These difficulties are illustrated in the work of Louis Arthur Vos, *The Synoptic Traditions in the Apocalypse*, (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1965).

<sup>111</sup>Ulrich B. Müller, “Literarische und formgeschichtliche Bestimmung der Apokalypse des Johannes als einem Zeugnis frühchristlicher Apokalyptik,” in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, edited by David Hellholm (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), 602.

<sup>112</sup>Müller, 606; Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 121.

<sup>113</sup>Adela Yarbro Collins, *Semeia* 14: 70-71. She notes that the epistolary parts of the book are in service of its revelatory character, not the other way around. Also the book begins, not with the prescript of a letter, but with the apocalyptic introduction that characterizes the book, not as letter, but as apocalypse and prophecy (Rev 1:1-3). John J. Collins (*The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 270) notes that even determined that Revelation was primarily an epistle, that designation would not be helpful in understanding the content of the book.

## Adventists and the Genre Debate

What is clear from the scholarly debate is that the genre of Revelation as a whole is a mixed one whose character cannot be determined with exactness.<sup>114</sup> The appropriateness of historicist method for Revelation, therefore, is much less obvious than is the case with the visions of Daniel. Most Seventh-day Adventists have not yet felt the force of this difficulty. Having inherited the historicist approach from Protestant forebears in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century,<sup>115</sup> Adventist interpreters have assumed that approach to be the correct one for Revelation, but have never demonstrated it from the text.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>Typical of more recent discussion is the eclectic approach of G. K. Beale, *Revelation*, especially 37-43. He quotes Ramsey Michaels with relish: "If a letter, it is like no other Christian letter we possess. If an apocalypse, it is like no other apocalypse. If a prophecy, it is unique among prophecies." J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 31-32.

<sup>115</sup>The works of E. B. Elliott and Alexander Keith seem to have been particularly influential.

<sup>116</sup>This came into focus in the context of recent Adventist conversations with representatives of the Lutheran World Federation. It was clear that the Lutherans had a hard time understanding the Adventist approach to Daniel and Revelation. When it came time to write the Adventist response, the Adventist representatives decided that exegetical justification for a historicist approach to Revelation was needed. But no one was able to suggest Adventist literature where such a justification could be found.

My own subsequent search turned up only one Adventist argument for a historicist approach to Revelation. It goes something like this (an example of this approach is Roy C. Naden, *The Lamb Among the Beasts* [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1996], 44-48): The book of Daniel clearly exhibits a series of historical events running from the prophet's time to the end. The Book of Revelation quotes Daniel and is similar in style to Daniel, therefore, the seven-fold series of Revelation are also to be understood as historical series running from the time of the prophet until the end. This argument by itself is not satisfactory.

It should be evident for our purpose that there are significant differences in the conclusions of scholarly research with regard to Daniel and Revelation. While, for example, the visions and explanations of Daniel are generally understood to bear the marks of historical apocalyptic, as most Adventists have thought, there is disagreement regarding the time of the visions and the genuineness of the book's stated historical context.

Unlike Daniel, there is little dispute over the date of Revelation. Nearly all scholars would agree that the book was written somewhere within a 30-year span.<sup>117</sup> But also in contrast with Daniel, it is far less obvious whether any given passage of Revelation should be interpreted as historical apocalyptic. But if a historicist approach to Revelation is to have any validity, it must be demonstrated from the text, not assumed from long tradition.

While the focus of scholarship until now has been on classifying Revelation as a whole, there is increasing interest in the genre of its parts.<sup>118</sup> I sense that precision regarding the genre of

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<sup>117</sup>A recent summary of the issues regarding the date of Revelation is found in G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 4-27. Two other summaries of research on the issue are found in John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 224-225 and J. Christian Wilson, "The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation," *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993): 587-597. Aside from Robinson and Wilson, scholars who have held to an early date for at least part of Revelation (usually in the reign of Nero and in the mid to late 60s) include J. B. Lightfoot, *Biblical Essays* (London: MacMillan, 1893), 52; idem, *Essays on the Work Entitled Supernatural Religion* (London: MacMillan, 1889), 132; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, The Anchor Bible, 38 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1975), 3-4; A. A. Bell, "The Date of John's Apocalypse: The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Reconsidered," *New Testament Studies* 25 (1979): 93-102; Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 403-413; and K. L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Tyler: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). While the difference between a Neronic and a Domitianic date for Revelation obviously makes a big difference in interpretation for preterist scholars, the difference is not significant for our purpose in this article.

<sup>118</sup>Note the following two examples, which focus on the songs of Revelation. Robert Emerson Coleman, *Songs of Heaven* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1980); and

Revelation as a whole has not made a huge difference in the interpretation of the book's parts.<sup>119</sup>

I therefore agree with J. Ramsey Michaels that for Revelation it will be more useful to pay attention to the genre of the parts than of the whole.<sup>120</sup> One could say that Michaels and I are thinking of "genre" more in the expanded German sense of *Gattung*, which can be used for smaller literary units within a work as well as for the work as a whole.<sup>121</sup> One would call work in the smaller literary units an analysis of "forms," but this might result in confusion with the

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Klaus-Peter Jörns, *Das Hymnische Evangelium*, Studien zum NT, vol. 5 (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1971).

Michael Stone early noted that large parts of "apocalyptic" books are not really apocalyptic in content, style or ideology, therefore, genre studies of whole "apocalyptic" books would be doomed to a certain amount of frustration right from the start. See Michael Stone, "Revealed Things in Apocalyptic Literature," in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God*, essays on the Bible and Archaeology in memory of G. Ernest Wright, edited by Frank Moore Cross, Werner E. Lemke, and Patrick D. Miller, Jr. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 439-444. John Collins acknowledges that it is more appropriate to speak of the "dominant genre" of works as a whole rather than insisting on an umbrella designation for works that are often composite anyway. John J. Collins, in *Mysteries and Revelations*, 14.

<sup>119</sup>Beale forcefully agrees in his commentary, page 24. He says that genre studies are yielding "diminishing returns."

<sup>120</sup>Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 32, cf. overall discussion in pages 29-33. Adela Yarbro Collins seems to hint at such an approach to Revelation in *Semeia* 14: 70. She says, "To determine the literary form of the book of Revelation as a whole, one must ask what the dominant literary form is or how all these smaller forms are integrated into a coherent whole."

<sup>121</sup>For a brief summary of how "genre," "form" and "*Gattung*" are used within biblical scholarship see Lars Hartman, "Survey of the Problem of Apocalyptic Genre" in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979, David Hellholm, editor, (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), 330; in the same book see also E. P. Sanders, "The Genre of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypses," 450-454. Sanders seems to have raised some of the same issues I am addressing here.

methods of Form Criticism as applied to the gospels.<sup>122</sup> So for now I will speak of the respective genres of the various parts of Daniel and Revelation.

If Adventists wish to revive the historicist approach to Revelation, therefore, they will need to pursue a thorough-going examination of the genre of Revelation's visionary passages on a case by case basis.<sup>123</sup> One way to do this is to demonstrate that portions of Revelation fit the genre of historical apocalyptic better than other options. I attempt such an evaluation of Revelation 12 in a future article. If there is historical apocalyptic in the Book of Revelation, it will be discerned in the genre of the particular text, as is the case with Daniel.

### **Historical Apocalyptic in Revelation**

Unlike the case with Daniel, few scholars argue that the Book of Revelation is pseudonymous.<sup>124</sup> Most understand that John is the name of the actual author, and that his

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<sup>122</sup>Cf. Sanders, 450, especially note 18.

<sup>123</sup>In the Daniel and Revelation Committee session that was held at Newbold College in England in 1988, considerable discussion was given to this issue. A developing consensus seemed to be that the churches, seals and trumpets of Rev 1-11 respectively exhibited the characteristics of the three main genre types found in the book of Revelation. It was felt that the seven letters portion of the book (Rev 2-3) reads most naturally along the lines of the New Testament epistles, the seven seals (Rev 6-7) bore the character of classical prophecy, along the lines of Matt 24, and the seven trumpets (Rev 8-11) were the most apocalyptic in nature. Upon further reflection in light of recent scholarship I would today classify the letters as epistles, with some elements of classical prophecy, the seals as mystical apocalyptic with elements of classical prophecy, and the trumpets as essentially historical apocalyptic. Further refinement of these categories and further examination of the evidence is needed.

<sup>124</sup>Major examples of the majority view are Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 27-28; idem, "The Early Christian Apocalypses," *Semeia* 14 (1979): 71; John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, p. 211; idem, "Pseudonymity," p. 330-331; Horst R. Balz, "Anonymität und



prophecies are genuine attempts to outline future events.<sup>125</sup> My question is, what is the nature of that outline? Is it the more general and immediate perspective of a classical prophet, or does it project a historical sequence like the apocalyptic visions of Daniel? While the time frame of John's understanding is certainly short (Rev 1:1, 3; 22:10), the latter option needs to be considered possible. Why?

The historical time periods of *ex eventu* prophecy (in Jewish apocalyptic) reflected the conviction that a genuine prophet such as Enoch, Moses, or Ezra would be capable of outlining history in advance.<sup>126</sup> In other words, the literary strategy of *ex eventu* prophecy would have no credibility with its audience unless that audience believed in the general concept of sequential predictive prophecy. Note the language of D. S. Russell:

“The predictive element in prophecy had a fascination for the apocalyptists and it is to this aspect of the prophetic message that they devote so much of their interest and

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Pseudepigraphie im Urchristentum,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 66 (1969): 416-417-427-428; Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 61-70. For examples of the minority view that Revelation is pseudonymous, see P. Joachim Becker, “Erwägungen zu Fragen der neutestamentlichen Exegese: 3. Pseudonymität der Johannesapokalypse und Verfasserfrage,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 13 (1, 1969): 101-102; Roderic Dunkerley, “The Five Johns,” *London Quarterly and Holburn Review* 30 (1961):298; Georg Strecker, “Chiliasmus und Dokerismus in der Johanneischen Schriften,” *Kerygma and Dogma* 38 (1992): 33, especially note 11; Ugo Vanni, “L’Apocalypse johannique: État de la question,” in *L’Apocalypse johannique et L’Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Thèologicarum Lovaniensium, vol. 53, edited by J. Lambrecht (Gembloux: Leuven University Press, 1980), 33.

<sup>125</sup>Note the powerful affirmations of John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 212; *ibid.*, “Pseudonymity,” 330-331, 339-340.

<sup>126</sup>Lars Hartman, *Prophecy Interpreted*, 25.

ingenuity. . . . The predictive element in prophecy is not simply accidental, as Charles would have us believe. It belongs to the very nature of prophecy itself.”<sup>127</sup>

Since John, the author of Revelation, believed that the prophetic spirit had returned (Rev 1:3; 19:9-10; 22:6-10),<sup>128</sup> he would have every reason to believe that the cosmic Christ could reveal to him the general outline of events between his day and the consummation. The return of genuine prophets would signal the return of predictive prophecy.<sup>129</sup> If the Book of Revelation is genuine, not *ex eventu*, prophecy, it needs to be addressed differently than non-canonical apocalyptic.<sup>130</sup>

The question to examine then becomes: In his outline of future events (Rev 1:1) did John the Revelator understand any of his visions to be in the genre of historical apocalyptic?<sup>131</sup> Did he

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<sup>127</sup>Russell, 96. The “Charles” mentioned in the quote is the influential commentator on Revelation, R. H. Charles, who wrote in 1920.

<sup>128</sup>John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 212; *ibid.*, “Pseudonymity,” 331.

<sup>129</sup>Jon Paulien, “Eschatology and Adventist Self-understanding,” in *Lutherans and Adventists in Conversation: Report and Papers Presented, 1994-1998*, edited by B. B. Beach and Sven G. Oppegaard (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and Geneva, Switzerland: The Lutheran World Federation, 2000), 239-240.

<sup>130</sup>To borrow a phrase from John J. Collins, the author of Revelation applied “the logic of periodization” to his genuine prophecy. See Collins’ “Pseudonymity,” pp. 339-340 where he argues for genuine prophecy in Rev 17 as an example; see also page 330 where Collins is explicit on the absence of pseudonymity and *ex eventu* prophecy in Revelation.

For further study see Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets: Literary Allusions and the Interpretation of Revelation 8:7-12*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 11 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1988), pp. 357-362.

<sup>131</sup>John J. Collins specifically denies (although without argument) that Revelation contains any example of historical apocalyptic (*Semeia* 14, page 16). He categorizes it among “Apocalypses with Cosmic and/or Political Eschatology,” which for him have neither historical review nor otherworldly journeys. On the other hand, he later makes a puzzling off-hand comment including Revelation with Daniel in the category of “historical apocalyptic.” John J.

see himself in the heritage of Daniel and the apocalyptic writers as a portrayer of historical sequence? And if he did, what passages in Revelation need to be interpreted along the lines of historical apocalyptic?

### **Conclusion**

Since the concept of predictive prophecy is grounded in the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, it should not surprise anyone that the vast majority of Biblical interpreters throughout Christian history believed in predictive prophecy and felt that Daniel and Revelation in some way offered an outline of Christian history leading to the end of the world.<sup>132</sup> Most Adventists, like them, see no indication in the text of Daniel and Revelation that the events symbolized in the visions were to be confined to the distant past or the far future. They understand Daniel to address the entire course of history from his time until the end. They understand that the Book of Revelation speaks to the entire Christian era from the cross to the second coming of Christ.

If portions of Daniel and Revelation bear the character of historical apocalyptic, they were intended to portray the chain of events leading from the visionary's time to the end of all things. Whatever time frame Daniel had in mind for this chain of events (assuming a sixth century perspective), it involved a sequence of kingdoms in control of God's people before the end. While Daniel's personal time frame was short at first, the visions suggest that Daniel

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Collins, "Genre, Ideology and Social Movements in Jewish Apocalypticism," 16. John M. Court agrees with the latter assessment in *Revelation* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994), 81.

<sup>132</sup>See Fromm, *passim*.

experienced a stressful lengthening of that time perspective through the visions (7:28; 8:27; 9:24-27; 12:11-13).

In applying a historicist approach to Revelation, on the other hand, it is not necessary to claim that John himself, or any of the other writers of the New Testament, foresaw the enormous length of the Christian era, the time between the first and second advents of Jesus. If the Parousia had occurred in the first century, no one would have been troubled on account of any statement in the New Testament. The finality of the Christ event is such that looking beyond the first century was not conceivable, even for the apostles.

But regardless of the John's own perception of time, the question here is whether or not John saw the future in terms of a sequence of events or purely in the immediate terms typical of the OT Day of the Lord prophecies. Time has continued far past John's expectation. If John's Apocalypse is a genuine revelation the question becomes whether or not God used the immediate intention of a human writer, who thought he was close to the End, to say anything substantive about the events that lay beyond his time.

Given the immediate perspective of Revelation, historicism must draw meaning from an extended significance (*sensus plenior?*) that unfolds only with the passage of time. A valid historicism will build on the natural meaning of John's intention, but come to see a deeper divine purpose through the confirmation of history and/or later revelation.<sup>133</sup> There is an analogy for

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<sup>133</sup>For a clearer picture of my view on the interaction between the divine and the human in John's visionary experience see Jon Paulien, "Interpreting Revelation's Symbolism," in *Symposium on Revelation—Book I*, edited by Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 77-78. I have used the expression "John's intention" in this article for the sake of convenience and ease of expression. I do not intend to imply that the book is merely a human product.

this in the NT itself. The NT writers viewed the OT with the wisdom of time passed and saw God's hand in those texts in ways the human authors of those texts did not fully perceive. Should we not be prepared for a similar expansion of meaning from our own perspective of time passed? The passage of more than 1900 years means that Revelation's attempts at periodization have been stretched far beyond John's recognition. I would argue that such a "divine reading" is valid if based on exegesis and proper attention to genre, but invalid if it loses touch with text and context.

As Paul has said, "We see through a glass darkly" and "we prophesy in part" (1 Cor 13:9, 12). Only from the perspective of the Parousia will history speak with perfect clarity. Any rebirth of historicist interpretation among scholars of faith, therefore, will need to avoid the minute details and "newspaper" exegesis of previous interpretation, while taking seriously the plain meaning of the symbols in their original context.<sup>134</sup>

In a follow-up article I intend to examine two of Daniel's visions, in chapters 2 and 7, to lay out the kinds of markers in the text that indicate the presence of historical apocalyptic. I will then attempt to outline a strategy for detecting similar passages in the Book of Revelation, using chapter 12 as a test case. I believe the evidence will show that historicist interpretation should not be *a priori* excluded from the study of Revelation on account of the excesses of the past. As Arasola concluded in his seminal work, declarations of the "end of historicism" may prove to have been premature.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup>For examples of the above fallacy see the voluminous historicist interpretation of Edward B. Elliott, and the material on the seven trumpets of Revelation by Uriah Smith, 596-636.

<sup>135</sup>Arasola, 171-172.