

THE HERMENEUTICS OF BIBLICAL APOCALYPTIC
by Jon Paulien
Biblical Research Institute Committee
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The Seventh-day Adventist Church, as I understand it, derives its unique witness to Jesus Christ from the conviction that the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation portray a relentless march of God-ordained history leading from the prophet's time up to a critical climax at the End. Adventist interpretation of Daniel and Revelation is at the heart of Adventist self-understanding and identity. The contribution I hope to make here is to briefly outline the exegetical basis for Adventist self-understanding in the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation.

The Definition of Apocalyptic

The definitions of the terms apocalypse and apocalyptic have been the object of a significant amount of scholarly attention in the last three decades. The leading figures during this period of study are John J. Collins and his mentor Paul D. Hanson.¹ Working with a team of

¹Although Collins and Hanson consider themselves historical-critical scholars, the significance of their work for conservative Christians is recognized by the choice of Collins to write the article "Apocalyptic Literature" in the recent evangelical reference work *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, edited by Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 40-45. Collins' debt to Hanson was acknowledged by Collins to me personally on November 19, 2000. 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

specialists under the auspices of the Society of Biblical Literature, Collins helped shape the definitions that are in working use today.²

The term “apocalypse” is drawn from the introductory phrase of Revelation (Rev 1:1) and means “revelation” or “disclosure.”³ From the second century AD onward it became increasingly used as a title or “genre label”⁴ for extra-biblical works of a character similar to Daniel and Revelation in the Bible. As modern scholars became aware 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

works are: (as editor) “Apocalypse: the Morphology of a Genre” *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); *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998).

²Other works of importance over the last half century on the subject of apocalyptic include John Collins’ wife, Adela Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (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); Klaus Koch, *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic* (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1970); Clark Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (NY: Crossroad, 1982).

³Walter 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.

⁴Michael Smith, “On the History of *Apokalypso* and *Apokalypsis*” in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, edited by David Hellholm (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), 9-20.

with Revelation.⁵

Paul Hanson seems to have been the first to distinguish between the terms apocalypse, apocalyptic eschatology, and apocalypticism.⁶ For him as for most others, “apocalypse” designates a literary genre, which has since been critically defined (see below).⁷ Hanson defines apocalyptic eschatology as the world view or conceptual framework out of which the apocalyptic writings emerged.⁸ Apocalyptic eschatology (or study of end-time events) was probably an outgrowth of prophetic eschatology.⁹ “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.¹⁰

There is a general consensus among the specialists that the genre apocalypse should be

⁵John J. Collins, “Apocalyptic Literature,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, edited by Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 41.

⁶John 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.”

⁷Paul D. Hanson, “Apocalypses and Apocalypticism,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by David Noel Freedman, 6 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 1: 279.

⁸Hanson, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:280.

⁹In another place I have outlined this development briefly (Jon Paulien, *What the Bible Says About the End-Time* [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1994], 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.

¹⁰My one-sentence summary of what Hanson is saying about this term, cf. Hanson, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:281.

defined as follows:¹¹

“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.”¹²

As I understand this definition, an apocalyptic work like Daniel or Revelation is revelatory literature, which means it claims to communicate information from God to humanity. This is accomplished in the form of a story, a “narrative framework.” 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 our five sense to apprehend, about the course of history leading up the God’s salvation at the End, and about the heavenly, “supernatural” world.¹³

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. Critical scholars agree that pseudonymity is not a necessary component of apocalyptic literature.¹⁴ This is an important

¹¹According 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.

¹²John J. Collins, “Introduction,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 14.

¹³According to Angel Manuel Rodriguez, (*Future Glory: The 8 Greatest End-time Prophecies in the Bible* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2002), 8-12. 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.

¹⁴Since most critical scholars do not believe in the possibility of predictive prophecy, Daniel’s startlingly accurate depiction of the Persian and Greek periods in Dan 11 suggests to them that the book was written after the events prophesied, around 165 BC. They, therefore,

distinction for Adventists, as our concept of a God-ordained prophetic history is dependent on the possibility of predictive prophecy.¹⁵ If Daniel was not the author of “Daniel”, but the book was written after the events prophesied, the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Daniel will not hold.

While not present in the above definition of apocalypse, scholars also distinguish between two types of apocalyptic literature, the historical and the mystical.¹⁶ The historical type, characteristic of Daniel, gives an overview of a large sweep of history, often divided into periods,¹⁷ and climaxing with a prediction about the end of history and the final judgment.¹⁸

consider the author of the book, “Daniel,” a pseudonym (false name) for the real writer, who lived not at the time of Nebuchadnezzar but at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes IV.

We should not be too quick to assume that pseudonymity implies 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 under similar motivations.

¹⁵For a short history of how mainstream scholars developed the conclusion that there is no predictive prophecy in the Bible, see 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), 291-296, 306.

¹⁶John J. Collins, *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 41.

¹⁷Hence the scholarly term for this has become “periodization of history.”

¹⁸*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 Collins, of course, the book of Daniel is thought to be 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.

The mystical type of apocalypse describes the ascent of the visionary through the heavens, which are often numbered.¹⁹ While one might be tempted to view these two types of apocalypses as distinct genres, several ancient writings, including the book of Revelation, mix elements of both types in one literary work.²⁰ For Adventists, the historical type is 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.²¹ It is more likely that the “dawn of apocalyptic” can be traced to the prophetic works of the Old Testament, like Isaiah 24-27, 65-66, Daniel, Joel and Zechariah.²² When the prophetic spirit ceased in the Persian

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.

¹⁹For a significant scholarly overview of this type of apocalypse see Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1993). Many readers may be familiar with this type of apocalypse through the work of Dante.

²⁰John J. Collins, *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 41.

²¹ Hanson, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:281; John J. Collins, *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 41-42; David E. Aune, “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 gathered in Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

²²Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*; see also Aune, *Dictionary of New Testament*

period (5th to 4th century BC),²³ 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 written had they been alive to see the apocalypticist's day.²⁴ How the book of Daniel fits into this whole historical picture will be taken up later in this paper.

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," in *Symposium on Revelation-- Book II*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6, edited by Frank Holbrook [Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992], 18). He argues that apocalyptic prophecy (at least for the historical variety) 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 scholarly attention.

²³See 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).

²⁴Ibid., 178-202.

The term “apocalypticism,” as noted earlier,²⁵ is a modern scholarly designation of the world view that is characteristic of early Jewish and Christian apocalypses, such as Daniel and Revelation.²⁶ The world view of apocalypticism is described as centering on the belief that the present world order is evil and oppressive, and under the control of Satan and his human accomplices. This present world order will 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.²⁷

The apocalyptic world view, therefore, tends to view 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.²⁸ Although this world view can be expressed through other genres of literature,²⁹ its fundamental shape is most clearly discerned in apocalypses.

While the same scholars who have created such helpful definitions may think of people

²⁵See page 3.

²⁶David E. Aune, *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 46.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 48-49.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 46. See also elaborated listing on page 48.

²⁹John 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 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.

who hold such beliefs today to be out of touch with contemporary reality, Seventh-day Adventists will recognize that their fundamental beliefs are decisively grounded in ancient apocalypticism. In other words, for Adventists the books of Daniel and Revelation are not marginal works appropriate to occasional Saturday night entertainment, they are foundational to the Adventist world view and its concept of God. Daniel and Revelation provide the basic hermeneutical grid from which Adventists read the rest of the Bible. For Adventists to reject this world view would be to inaugurate a fundamental shift in Adventist thinking.

Prophecy and Apocalypse

In reaction to the work of Desmond Ford, an earlier generation of Seventh-day Adventist scholars sought to distinguish the genres of prophetic and apocalyptic eschatology.³⁰

“Prophetic” literature was divided into two major types; 1) general prophecy, represented by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and others, and 2) apocalyptic prophecy, represented by Daniel.³¹

General prophecy, sometimes known as “classical prophecy,” was seen to focus primarily on

³⁰The 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, 16-19.

³¹*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.

the prophet's own time and place, but would occasionally offer a glimpse forward to a cosmic "Day of the Lord" leading to 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.³² General prophecy focuses on the short-range view, while apocalyptic prophecy includes the long-range view.³³

Because of its dual dimension, general prophecy may at times be susceptible to dual fulfillment or foci where local and contemporary perspectives may be mixed with a universal, future perspective.³⁴ 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.³⁵ While general prophecy describes the future in the context of the prophet's local situation, apocalyptic prophecy portrays a comprehensive historical continuum that is under God's control and leads from the prophet's time all the way down to the End.

General prophecies, which are written to affect human response, tend to be conditional upon the reactions of peoples and nations.³⁶ On the other hand, apocalyptic prophecies, particularly those of Daniel and Revelation, tend to be unconditional, reflecting God's

³²Johnsson, 269; Strand, "Foundational Principles of Interpretation," 16.

³³Shea, *Selected Studies*, 59.

³⁴Hasel, "Fulfillments of Prophecy," 306-307; Strand, "Foundational Principles of Interpretation," 16.

³⁵*Ministry* (1980), 28-29.

³⁶Hasel, "Fulfillments of Prophecy," 297.

foreknowledge of His ultimate victory and the establishment of His eternal kingdom.³⁷

Apocalyptic prophecy portrays the inevitability of God's sovereign purpose. No matter what

³⁷While not directly related to the surface discussion of this paper, I would like to comment on a concept that has had a large impact but whose implications may not have been clearly understood. In the editor's synopsis of Hasel's article on "Fulfillments of Prophecy" the following conclusion is drawn, "3. Every detail must be met in the fulfillment. It is not a genuine fulfillment if only some specifications are met, but not others; nor can it be a genuine fulfillment if it is such only in principle and not in detail. All aspects of an apocalyptic prophecy must be met in order to have a true fulfillment of the prophecy" (editorial synopsis of Hasel's article, 290). This statement was probably based on Hasel's statement on page 316, "Every point of identification and every detail must be met in the fulfillment, if it is to be genuine and valid. It will not do to have certain aspects fulfilled and other identifiers remain unfulfilled." This statement was designed as a polemic against Desmond Ford's apotelesmatic principle, which allows for multiple fulfillments in apocalyptic prophecies. It has, however, been widely used over the last fifteen years in support of Adventist "futurism" with regard to Daniel 8-12 and the seals and trumpets of Revelation. The argument goes that since every detail of those prophecies has not been fulfilled, the true fulfillment must yet be future.

It seems to me that while this assertion may work in parts of Daniel and in specific cases in Matthew, there are serious problems when you try to apply this statement to Revelation. Either Revelation is an apocalyptic prophecy that doesn't follow the rule (which would bring the rule into question), or Revelation is not a pure apocalyptic prophecy (my preference) or both. The latter has never been officially stated, so clarification of this point by BRICOM may be a highly significant step. A simplistic universalization of Hasel's observation is certainly contradicted by the evidence of Scripture (for example, compare Isa 11's prediction of the purpose for the drying of the Euphrates River at the return from Exile with the reality of Cyrus' historical act, also the subtle shifts from literal to spiritual in many NT fulfillments of OT prophecies).

Shea seems supportive of my point in his Bible Amplifier commentary (William H. Shea, *Daniel 7-12, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier*, edited by George R. Knight [Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1996], 134-137). He points out that one reason for the debilitating debates over the Huns versus and Alemanni as the tenth of the ten horns at the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference was the need for absolute exactness in fulfillment. He comments, "There is no need to split hairs that fine" (137), and "It is not necessary to be adamant about precisely what tribes were involved" (134). I believe there is a lot of wisdom in

the evil powers do, God will accomplish His purpose in history.³⁸ A key interpretive principle, then, is to determine which Biblical prophecies are general in nature and which are apocalyptic. When the genre has been determined, the appropriate approach can be taken.³⁹

The major hermeneutical implication of this determination has to do with the time and frequency of fulfillment. An apocalyptic time sequence, by its very nature,⁴⁰ is limited to a single fulfillment. Daniel 2 for example, whose meaning is fairly clear (as we will see below), covers the entire span from Daniel's time until the End. It is not, therefore, readily given dual or multiple fulfillments.⁴¹ A classical prophecy such as Joel 2:28-32 (or the Day of the Lord

this kind of humility.

³⁸*Ministry* (1980), 31.

³⁹Johnsson 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)

⁴⁰Single an apocalyptic sequence is a direct prediction of history that runs the entire period from the prophet's time until the end, there is no room for dual or multiple fulfillments. While aspects of the prophecy (such as the "stone" of Daniel 2) may be applied in various ways by later inspired writers, the meaning of the prophecy as a whole is complete in its single fulfillment.

⁴¹Because of its clarity, I have never read or met anyone who has seriously tried to see multiple fulfillments in Daniel 2. The closest to such an attempt would be Desmond Ford's recognition of a possible application of the stone to Jesus' first-century advent (Desmond Ford,

concept in general) may readily be applied to the original situation as well as similar situations in the future.⁴²

Recent scholarship outside the Adventist setting seems to be generally supportive of this distinction. Prophetic eschatology (the equivalent of “general prophecy”) is understood as an optimistic perspective. The destruction of evil and the restoration of paradise at the End is a natural outgrowth of God’s working through the natural, political processes of the present. History and geography remain in place after God’s intervention.

Apocalyptic eschatology, on the other hand, was more pessimistic about the present situation. The future promises of God could only be attained through a mighty inbreaking into history and geography that would destroy the old order and bring on a new one. In apocalyptic prophecy, therefore, there is a clear break between the prophet’s present situation and the final outcome of the End-time events.⁴³

The End of Historicism

A book that has engendered a great deal of discussion in recent years was written as a doctoral dissertation by Kai Arasola, a conference president in Sweden.⁴⁴ Before William Miller,

Daniel [Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1978], 99). Multiple applications of apocalyptic time sequences are only convincing when the original meaning is ambiguous, as is the case with the seals and the trumpets of Revelation, for example.

⁴²Acts 2:16-21 applies Joel 2 to the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost in AD 31. Revelation 6:12-14 also applies Joel 2 to events leading up to the End.

⁴³Aune, *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 47. For a broad overview of the development of prophetic and apocalyptic approaches to the End, see Jon Paulien, *What the Bible Says About the End-Time*, pp. 55-71.

⁴⁴Kai Arasola, *The End of Historicism: Millerite Hermeneutic of Time Prophecies in the Old*

nearly all protestant commentators on apocalyptic utilized the historicist method still found among SDAs. In this book Arasola discusses the excesses of Miller's historicist hermeneutic that caused historicism to be generally discredited among scholars. Within a few years of the Great Disappointment 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."⁴⁵ 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.

Historicism became generally discredited in large part because the Millerites shifted, in 1842 and 1843, from a general anticipation of the nearness of the Advent to an attempt to determine the exact time.⁴⁶ With the passing of the time set by the "seventh-month movement" under the leadership of Samuel Snow, the methods of Millerism and Miller himself became the object of ridicule,⁴⁷ a ridicule that continues in some scholarly circles to this day.⁴⁸

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

Testament, University of Uppsala Faculty of Theology (Sigtuna, Sweden: Datem Publishing, 1990).

⁴⁵Ibid., 1.

⁴⁶Ibid., 14-17.

⁴⁷Ibid., 17-19; 147-168. While 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.

⁴⁸I recall a scholarly session around 1990 in which all popular attempts at interpreting prophecy were ridiculed as "millerism." I doubt the leaders of the session were aware how

as a spiritual father by millions of Christians who have taken some parts of the millerite exegesis as their *raison d'être*.”⁴⁹ 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 his heritage. Yet as every Seventh-day Adventist evangelist knows, the “shame” of the Great Disappointment can still be a barrier to acceptance of the Adventist message among the more-educated classes.

God Meets People Where They Are

The special nature of apocalyptic prophecy raises a separate issue. A generally accepted principle of biblical interpretation is that God meets people where they are. In other words, Scripture was given in the time, place, language, and culture of specific human beings.⁵⁰ The knowledge, experience, and background of the Biblical writers was respected. Paul, with his "Ph.D.", expresses God's revelation to him in a different way than does Peter, the fisherman. John writes in simple, clear, almost childlike Greek. On the other hand, the author of Hebrews has the most complex and literary Greek in all the New Testament with the exception of the first four verses of Luke. In Matthew, you have someone who understands the Jewish mind.⁵¹

many theological descendants of Miller were in the audience on that occasion!

⁴⁹Ibid., 171-172.

⁵⁰No Author, *Problems in Bible Translation*, Committee on Problems in Bible Translation, General Conference of SDAs (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1954), 95-96.

⁵¹He continually shows how the life of Jesus fulfills the Old Testament Scriptures with which the Jews were familiar (see, for example, Matt 1:22,23; 2:5,6,15,17,18). He uses Jewish terms without explanation.

Mark, on the other hand, reaches out to the Gentile mind.⁵² So the revelations recorded in the Bible were given in a way comprehensible to each audience.

This point was driven home with great power a few decades ago. In the nineteenth century, New Testament Greek was thought to be unique. It was quite different from both the classical Greek of Plato and Aristotle and the Greek spoken today. Some scholars thought that the New Testament had been given in some special kind of Greek, perhaps a "heavenly language." Then someone stumbled across an ancient garbage dump in Egypt. It was filled with the remnants of love letters, bills, receipts, and other products of everyday life in the first century. To the shock of many, these papyrus fragments were written in the same language and style as the books of the New Testament!⁵³ The New Testament was not written in a heavenly language, nor in the cultured language of the traditional elite, but in the everyday language of everyday people. God meets people where they are! The Sacred Word was expressed through the cultural frailty of human beings.

This principle is clearly articulated in *Selected Messages, Volume 1*, 19-22:

The writers of the Bible had to express their ideas in human language. It was written by human men. These men were inspired of the Holy Spirit. . . .

The Scriptures were given to men, not in a continuous chain of unbroken utterances, but piece by piece through successive generations, as God in His providence saw a fitting opportunity to impress man at sundry times and divers places. . . .

The Bible, perfect as it is in its simplicity, does not answer to the great ideas of

⁵²Jewish terms are explained to his non-Jewish audience (compare, for example, Mark 14:12 with Matt 26:17).

⁵³W. White, Jr., "Greek Language," *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia*, 5 vols., edited by Merrill C. Tenney and Steven Barabas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 2:827-828; *Problems in Bible Translation*, 19.

God; for infinite ideas cannot be perfectly embodied in finite vehicles of thought.

In affirming this principle we do not fall into the trap of treating the Bible as if it were merely exalted human conceptions of God. The richness of the human elements in the Bible are not a liability, they are part of God's intentional design for His Word. God has chosen to reveal Himself in this way for our sakes. At some points in the Bible the human elements of expression reflect the personality and style of the human author, seeking to express God's revelation in the best possible human language. But at many points in the Scriptural narrative, it is God Himself who bends down and takes onto His own lips the limitations of human language and cultural patterns for our sakes.⁵⁴ Clearly this aspect of the nature of God's revelation has implications for hermeneutics.

The crucial question that causes me to raise this matter here is whether or not this general biblical principle is applicable to apocalyptic prophecies such as Daniel and, to a lesser degree, Revelation, and if so, how does it affect our interpretation of these prophecies. I believe it will be helpful to our purpose to notice that God at times even adjusted the form of apocalyptic visions in order to more effectively communicate to the inspired prophet. The most striking example is in the book of Daniel. There, visions of similar content were given to two people from completely different backgrounds.

Many Adventists have tended to distinguish between the visionary experiences of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel. They say that the pagan king had a dream in Daniel 2 but that

⁵⁴There is, perhaps, no clearer illustration of this than the ten commandments, which come directly from the mouth of God (Exod 20:1-19), yet include significant elements of the cultural milieu within which they were received (including slavery, idolatry, and neighbors who

Daniel himself had a vision in Daniel 7.⁵⁵ This distinction is not, however, warranted by the biblical text. Unusual wording in two passages, Dan 2:28 and 7:1, while often overlooked by commentators as of little interest,⁵⁶ reveals that the experience of the two “prophets” was the same.⁵⁷ In Dan 2:28 Nebuchadnezzar is told, “Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these” (NIV-- Aramaic: חֲלֻמְךָ וְחִזְוֵי רָאשְׁךָ עַל-מִשְׁכְּבְּךָ). In Dan 7:1 we are told, “Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying on his bed (NIV).” The underlying Aramaic is essentially identical with that of Dan 2:28 (חֲלֻמְךָ תְּזַה וְחִזְוֵי רָאשְׁךָ עַל-מִשְׁכְּבְּךָ).⁵⁸ In both cases, God chose to reveal Himself in visionary form, He was in full control of the revelation.⁵⁹

possess oxen and donkeys).

⁵⁵Leslie Hardinge, *Jesus Is My Judge: Meditations on the Book of Daniel* (Harrisburg, PA: American Cassette Ministries Book Division, 1996), 27-28, 134; Roy Allan Anderson, *Unfolding Daniel's Prophecies* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1975), 42, 87.

⁵⁶Note, for example, the minimal comments on these verses by Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation: The Response of History to the Voice of Prophecy, a Verse by Verse Study of These Important Books of the Bible* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Publishing Company, 1897), 40, 113.

⁵⁷While William Shea does not address this wording directly, he does comment, “The mode of revelation in these two cases was the same. The recipients, however, were quite different. The dream of chapter 2 was given to a pagan king initially for his own personal benefit; the dream of Daniel 7 was given directly to the prophet Daniel to communicate to God’s people.” William H. Shea, *Daniel 1-7*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier, edited by George R. Knight (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1996), 155.

⁵⁸Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *The Book of Daniel: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, The New Interpreter’s Bible, vol. 7, edited by Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 100. There is an interesting word play in the Aramaic of Dan 7:1. The word for “mind” (head— Hveare) in “visions passed through his mind” is identical to the word for “substance” (var) in “he wrote down the substance of his dream.”

⁵⁹John J. Collins notes that the “vision formula” is also found in Dan 4:13, regarding

Not only is the mode of revelation essentially the same, but the content of the two visions, when interpreted, is essentially the same. In Dan 2 the vision begins with the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar (Babylon), traces three kingdoms that will follow, and eventuates in the kingdom that the God of heaven will set up and which will never be destroyed (Dan 2:36-45). In Dan 7 we again have a series of four kingdoms, with the first representing Babylon (Dan 7:4,17), and again the interpretation eventuates in the everlasting kingdom of the Most High (Dan 7:26-27).

To Nebuchadnezzar, the heathen king, God portrays the future world empires by means of an idol (“statue” in NIV of Dan 2:31-32-- Aramaic: ܨܠܐܡ). The term translated “statue” or “image” is frequently used in connection with idolatry in the Old Testament (2 Kings 11:18; 2 Chron 23:17; Amos 5:26, etc.). That this meaning is to be understood here is clear from Daniel 3. There Nebuchadnezzar recognized exactly what to do with such an object (“image” throughout the NIV of Dan 3 is translated from the same Aramaic word: ܨܠܐܡ)! Nebuchadnezzar could appreciate God’s use of this cultural concept, since he saw the nations of the world as bright and shining counterparts of the gods that they worshiped.

God here chooses to use cultural expressions with which Nebuchadnezzar was familiar, and those concepts lent themselves to the point God was trying to make to him. God’s point in the vision was that He was the source of Nebuchadnezzar’s power and position (Dan 2:37-38), that He is in full control of all kingdoms of the earth (and their gods) and places them under the

Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the great tree. 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), 76.

control of whomever He wishes (Dan 4:17). But Nebuchadnezzar was not to understand this point until his second vision (4:5, 34-37). In chapter 2 Nebuchadnezzar accepts that God is a revealer of mysteries (Dan 2:47), but his reworking of the idol into one totally of gold shows his unwillingness to submit to God's control of history at this point in time.

For Daniel, on the other hand, the nations of the world were like vicious, ravenous beasts who were hurting his people (chapter 7). God again draws on the prophet's knowledge and setting as He shapes the vision He gives to Daniel. This time, instead of symbolism drawn from the Babylonian world, He shapes the vision as a *midrash* on the creation story of Genesis chapters 1 and 2.⁶⁰ God describes Daniel's future in terms of a new creation.

"Daniel said, 'In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea'" (Dan 7:2). The concept of winds (רוּחַי) stirring up the sea (תְּמָיִם) is reminiscent of Gen 1:2, where the wind/spirit (מְרַחֵף) moves upon the waters (לְיָמָא) of the great deep. As in the original creation, beasts then appear (Dan 7:3ff., cf. Gen 1:24-25; 2:19). In each story the appearance of the beasts is followed by the appearance of a "son of

⁶⁰Within mainstream scholarship, it is more common to see the background for Dan 7 in the Canaanite myths about Baal's struggle with Yamm (the sea). John J. Collins, *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, 76; idem, "Apocalyptic Genre and Mythic Allusions in Daniel," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 21 (1981) 83-100; idem, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 280-294. But these myths are already paralleled in the creation story of Genesis, which is a much more likely source of Daniel's thinking. See the arguments in Jacques B. Doukhan, *Daniel: The Vision of the End* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987), note 32, 122-123. See also Louis F. Hartmann and Alexander A. DiLella, *The Book of Daniel*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 23 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), 212.

man,”⁶¹ who is given dominion over the beasts (Gen 1:26-28; 2:19-20, cf. Dan 7:13-14). What we have in this vision is an early example of “second Adam” typology, in which an end-time Adam figure takes possession of God’s kingdom in behalf of His people (Dan 7:13-14, cf. 7:27).

What message was God seeking to communicate to Daniel and his fellow exiles in Babylon? I believe it was the same basic message that God sought to communicate to Nebuchadnezzar. God is the One who is in control of history and of all the affairs of nations. To Daniel and his fellow exiles, things seemed out of control. The Godless nations flaunted their dominion (see Dan 7:6,12, which use the same word for “dominion” as Dan 7:14, 26-27) like carnivorous beasts ravaging a flock. To Daniel in Babylon, the message of Dan 7 was a great comfort: just as Adam had dominion over the beasts in the Garden of Eden, so the Son of Man, when he comes, will have dominion over these nations that are hurting your people. God is in control even when things seem out of control. He is the one who sets up kings and removes them.⁶² There are a number of hermeneutical keys that are suggested by these texts.

1) God speaks to each of His human emissaries in the context of their own time, place, and circumstances. He speaks in language they can understand and appreciate, even when He

⁶¹Although the parallel with the Aramaic “son of man” (בֶּר אֲנָשׁ) is not exact, in the Hebrew of Genesis the name Adam is actually “man– human being” (אָדָם)! Compare Gen 1:26, 2:20; 3:20 and 4:1.

⁶²Which of the two visions reflects a perspective closest to the mind of God? I would suggest Daniel’s in chapter 7. To human perspective the nations of the world are glorious things worthy of the utmost in human devotion (idolatry). While there is no critique of idolatry in Dan 2, God meets Nebuchadnezzar at his point of view to help him understand who really controls history. From God’s perspective, the nations are ugly, mis-shapen , bizarre-looking beasts, who tear and destroy. His plans will never be fully accomplished through them. For the people of God devotion to country must always take second place to their devotion to God.

speaks in apocalyptic terms. He uses the language of the prophet's past to paint a picture of the prophet's future. God meets people where they are. This has hermeneutical implications. It means that in our study of apocalyptic literature, it is imperative that we seek to understand it in terms of the original time, place, language, and circumstances, as well as the content of the whole of Scripture. We should not expect to find God's meaning for the text in some context outside that of the original revelation. God's meaning for today will not contradict the message that He placed in the vision in the first place.

2) The purpose of apocalyptic visions is not simply to satisfy human curiosity about the future (although that may have played a role in the first instance, according to Dan 2:29). It is a message about the character and the workings of God. God is not only communicating something about the future course of history, He is revealing Himself as the One who is in control of that history. To study apocalyptic only as a key to unlock the future is to miss its message about a God who seeks to be known by His people. From a Christian perspective, apocalyptic is never rightly understood unless its central focus is on the "son of man," Jesus Christ.

3) Apocalyptic is people-oriented. In conforming to the principle of "God meets people where they are," it is evident that the purpose of apocalyptic is to comfort and instruct the people of God on earth. God offers a powerful message of both hope and warning to the original recipients of each message, and that message of hope and warning has a repeated application to every reader of these visions throughout history. Whether or not the forecast of history has always been rightly understood, God's appeal to the human recipients of His

revelation is ever fresh.

Safeguards for Apocalyptic Scholars

The interpretation of biblical apocalyptic, however, has proven to be problematic throughout history. The complexities of apocalyptic interpretation have caused apocalyptic to become a “safe-haven” for time-setters and speculators. The goal of any biblical hermeneutic is a whole-hearted openness to the Word of God wherever it may lead. But when it comes to apocalyptic literature, the meaning of the text often seems to resist our openness to it. It becomes very easy for us to read our own ideas, concepts, and needs into the symbolism. The resulting interpretation may look more like us than like God.

How can we safeguard our study of apocalyptic from speculation? The best way, as we have seen above, is careful attention to the original setting in which the passage was given, including the original languages in which the text was written. But most readers of the Bible will never have the opportunity to learn Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic, or to become specialists in the ancient time, place, and circumstances. Understanding of the Bible must never be limited to scholars and specialists. But can non-specialists approach the apocalyptic texts of the Bible without succumbing to speculation? I believe so. I’d like to suggest five approaches to Bible study that can keep us in the solid center of the Biblical message. These form what I sometimes call a “life hermeneutic,” a lifelong process of becoming conformed to the message of Scripture, rather than bending it to conform to our own needs and purposes.

1) Prayer and Self-Distrust

As we approach any biblical text, but especially apocalyptic texts, it is important to study them in the in the context of much prayer and an attitude of self-distrust. Our hearts are naturally deceitful (Jer 17:9). By nature we lack a teachable spirit. It doesn't matter how much Greek you know or how many Ph.D.s you accumulate, if you don't have a teachable spirit, your learning is worth nothing. True knowledge of God does not come from merely intellectual pursuit or academic study (John 7:17; 1 Cor 2:14; James 1:5). "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Corinthians 2:14 (NIV).

According to 2 Thess 2:10, the knowledge of God comes from a willingness to receive the truth from God no matter what it costs. The gifts of God are free but they can be costly in their own way. Knowledge of God can cost your life, your family, your friends, and your reputation. But if you are willing to follow the truth no matter what the cost to you, you will receive it.

The study of apocalyptic texts, therefore, needs to begin with authentic prayer. An example of authentic prayer might go something like this: "Lord, I want to know the truth about this text (or topic) no matter what that knowledge costs me." That's a hard prayer to pray. But if you pray that prayer, you will receive God's truth. And you will also pay the price. When we come to God's Word with this kind of personal dedication, there is reason to hope that the natural self-deception of our hearts can be turned aside by the Spirit of God and the Bible can truly become our teacher rather than our servant.

2) Use a Variety of Translations

A second safeguard against the misuse of apocalyptic texts is the use of a variety of translations in the course of our study. While some translations are better than others, it is still safer for those who have no access to the original languages to consult a variety of translations of the Bible when doing serious study. Every translation has its limitations and weaknesses and to some degree reflects the biases of the translator(s). These limitations can be minimized by comparing several translations against each other. Where most translators agree, the meaning of the underlying Greek or Hebrew text is probably fairly clear and the translation can be safely followed. The authority that you as an interpreter give to a particular reading of a text, will depend on how certain it is that the reading is founded on the clear meaning of the original. When most or all translators agree you can be reasonably confident that the meaning of the original is being fairly represented.

But what do you do when the translators disagree, and disagree widely? When there is wide disagreement among most or all of the translations available to you, the original and its meaning is probably difficult or ambiguous. This is not the kind of text that can be safely used as a basis of one's belief system. Apocalyptic texts often fall in this category. It is as dangerous to base one's theology on unclear biblical texts as it is to ignore the clear texts of the Bible. The work of David Koresh on the seals is an excellent example of that danger.

How can one become aware of the biases in a translation without a knowledge of the biblical languages? Compare four or give good translations on a particular text. What if three

or four of them all agree, but one of them is way off in some other direction? That is usually a reflection of the translator's bias. When you compare translations long enough by this method, you can gain a sense of each translations biases. This is a very important safeguard against misreading the Bible on the basis of mistranslation or translational bias. Where translation patterns indicate that the original text is clear, on the other hand, we can safely find authoritative meaning in the translated text.

3) Focus on the Clear Texts

A third major safeguard against the misinterpretation of apocalyptic texts is to spend the majority of one's study time in the clear texts of Scripture. If you want to really let the Scriptures speak for themselves, spend the majority of your time in the sections of Scripture that are reasonably clear. There are many parts of the Bible regarding which there is little disagreement among Christians, while other texts vex even the Greek and Hebrew scholars. So an extremely important safeguard in the study of Scripture is to spend the majority of your time in the sections that are reasonably clear. The clear texts of Scripture ground the reader in the great central themes of the biblical message, safeguarding the interpreter against the misuse of texts that are more ambiguous.

On the other hand, if you spend the majority of your time in texts like the seals and trumpets of Revelation or Daniel 11, you *will* go crazy. One of the major tactics of people who misuse the Bible is to take ambiguous texts, develop creative solutions to the problems they find there, and then use those solutions as the basis for their theology. Such interpreters often end up having to distort clear texts of Scripture because the message there doesn't fit the

theology that they have developed from the difficult texts.

An important safeguard for the study of books like Daniel and Revelation, then, is not to make them the sole or primary focus of one's study of the Bible. These books are very important to us as Seventh-day Adventists. They are at the heart of our self-identity, of what we believe about ourselves and about God. But apocalyptic texts can also be the breeding ground of dangerous speculations. They are best understood by interpreters who are thoroughly grounded in the clear, central teachings of the Bible. The clear texts of Scripture ground the reader in the big picture of the Bible and the great verities of its message. Such an interpreter will be much less prone to the speculative excesses that sometimes plague the interpretation of books like Daniel and Revelation.

4) Focus on General Reading

A fourth major safeguard to apocalyptic interpretation is to spend the majority of one's study time reading the Bible rather than searching through a concordance. An obsession with the various details of the Bible can lead one away from its central thrust. Without safeguards the use of a concordance may cause us to focus on texts apart from their contexts.

When you read biblical books from beginning to end the biblical author is in control of the order and flow of the material. The author leads you naturally from one idea to the next, so your exposure to the Bible is not controlled by any need arising from within yourself or from your background. Broad reading of the Bible, therefore, anchors the interpreter in the intentions of the original writers and helps the interpreter to get the "big picture" view that provides the best safeguard against bizarre interpretations of its isolated parts. General

reading naturally encourages a teachable spirit and helps you see the text as it was intended to be read. The Bible is not supposed to learn from us; we are supposed to learn from the Bible.

This aspect of a “life hermeneutic” is particularly important in the computer age. Computers have been a great blessing to Bible study. But there is a dark side to their use. Thanks to the computer it is possible to spend hundreds of hours in “Bible study” without ever actually reading the Bible itself. The meanings you can draw from such study may be extremely impressive, yet have nothing to do with the original writer’s intention. It can be like taking a pair of scissors and cutting fifty texts out of your Bible, tossing them like a salad in a bowl, and finally pulling them out one by one and saying, "This sequence is from the Lord." Whether the concordance is a print version or is computerized, the process puts the interpreter in control of how the Biblical text impacts on his or her understanding of truth.

The use of a concordance is an important piece in an overall hermeneutic for biblical study. But we need to keep in mind that when we use a concordance we are in control of what where we go and what we learn, whereas in broad reading the biblical writers are in control. In concordance study there is the danger of losing the forest in the midst of all the trees. Unless we spend the majority of our time in broad reading of the Bible, we will tend manipulate the text in service of our own agenda, even though we do not intend to do so.

5) The Criticism of Peers

Finally it is vital, in the study of apocalyptic as well as other biblical texts, to give careful attention to the criticism of peers (people who give similar attention to the Bible as you do), especially those who disagree with you or who are competent in the original languages and the

tools of exegesis. One of the biggest problems in Biblical understanding is that each of us has a natural bent to self-deception (Jer 17:9). That self-deception runs so deep that sometimes, even if you are using the original text, praying, and doing a lot of general reading in the clear texts of the Bible, it is still possible to end up in a completely bizarre place. The best antidote to self-deception is to constantly subject one's own understandings to the criticism of others who are making equally rigorous efforts to understand those texts.

It may be painful to listen to that kind of criticism. Nevertheless, such criticisms are particularly valuable when they come from people we naturally disagree with. People who disagree with us see things in the text that we would never see because of our particular blind spots and defense mechanisms. A sister in the church may be just as unteachable as I am, but if she has a different set of blind spots than I do, she will see things in the text that I would miss and I will see things that she would miss.

No one who studies the Bible with earnest prayer and self-distrust will want to ignore the apocalyptic parts of the Bible, just because they are difficult. On the contrary, those who saturate themselves in the big picture of the Bible that comes from broad reading of the clear texts, corrected by vigorous listening to others, will gain two great benefits as a result. They will stay out of the pit of sensationalism and date-setting. And they will enjoy the wonderful sense of assurance and identity that comes when one better understands the steady and reliable workings of God in human history.

From Exegesis to Application

The above study demonstrates the vital importance of understanding the original

context in which apocalyptic visions were given their setting. The divine and human intentions of the text's language must be respected. Nevertheless, if apocalyptic texts do reflect a predictive element, later readers of those texts are challenged to understand just how those predictions apply to the course of subsequent human history. There are three main approaches to this problem. We will look at each of these briefly.

⁶³***Preterism/Idealism***

Preterist scholars tend to limit the value of apocalyptic texts to the original time and place. In their view exegesis of apocalyptic texts helps us gain a better understanding of the world in which the texts came into existence. Books like Daniel and Revelation were written to their time and place and need to be understood within that context. The primary focus is not on prediction of future events, but on analysis of the situation in which and to which the apocalypse was written. Principles drawn from exegesis of the text in its original situation can be applied by believers to later situations (this application of principles in apocalyptic literature

⁶³While Adventists have traditionally treated idealism separately as a fourth approach, I believe that Strand's three-fold approach is more helpful (Strand, "Foundational Principles of Interpretation," 4-7). Idealism in the pure sense has been rarely applied to Daniel (Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel, An Introduction and Commentary* [Downer's Grove, IL: Illinois University Press, 1978]) and Revelation (William Milligan, *The Book of Revelation*, The Expositor's Bible [Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1889]; idem, *Lectures on the Apocalypse* [London: MacMilan and Co., 1892]). In most Adventist expositions on this subject, preterism and idealism are treated separately, as distinct categories. I use the term idealism here to express the way that preterist scholars seek to draw meaning for our time from texts whose immediate significance has been relegated to the ancient setting. Idealism is not a necessary "add-on" for the futurist and historicist methods, for in them the meaning of the text to later times is more directly determined by the method.

is often known as “idealism”).

On the positive side, preterism/idealism is the approach that most believing 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 inappropriate.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, in recognizing God’s purpose in including these letters in the Bible, we feel free to draw principles from Paul’s letters and apply them to our 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.⁶⁵ Certainly the seven letters of Revelation suggest that they should be addressed from a preterist/idealist perspective (Rev 1:11; 2:1,7,8,11, etc.).

The problem with preterism/idealism comes in when it is imposed on apocalyptic texts that cry out for other approaches. Biblical scholars are human beings. Whether or not the scholar is conscious of the fact, psychological and spiritual motivations may drive a person to

⁶⁴I 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.

⁶⁵I 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. Mervyn Maxwell states his 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. When I approached him once with the suggestion that his Daniel and Revelation commentaries were “historico-idealist” in approach, he responded with delighted affirmation. “Uncle Arthur,” of course, had pursued this approach years before with regard to the narratives of Daniel in his books for children.

reject the plain implications of the biblical text. Some scholars may limit interpretation to preterism because it does not require a belief in inspiration and predictive prophecy. Others may do so because their scientific training inclines them to reject the possibility of the supernatural in any form. Roman Catholic scholars at one point in history turned to radical preterism in order to deflect the pointed historicist interpretations of Dan 7 and Rev 13 made by Luther and other protestants.⁶⁶ While preterist interpretation has value in its proper place, Adventists rightly reject placing psychological or scientific limits on how the Word of God should be understood. Preterism/idealism alone is not an adequate approach to apocalyptic prophecy.

Futurism

The futurist approach to apocalyptic prophecy, particularly to Revelation, sees the fulfillment of most of Revelation being restricted to a short period of time still future to our own day.⁶⁷ In its dispensational form, this approach limits most of Revelation to the last seven years of earth's history, following a secret rapture of Christians. Even within the Adventist context, increasing numbers of Bible students are seeking end-time understandings in every corner of Daniel and Revelation.⁶⁸

⁶⁶Strand ("Foundational Principles of Interpretation," 5, note 4) offers a brief comment about the Catholic origins of preterism. Froom provides the classic Adventist resource on these historical developments: LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1948), 484-532. On the Catholic origins of preterism in apocalyptic see especially 506-509.

⁶⁷Strand, "Foundational Principles of Interpretation," 5.

⁶⁸A handful of selected examples include Robert W. Hauser, *Give Glory to Him: The*

On the positive side, there are clearly many aspects of Daniel and Revelation that were intended to portray the far future from the perspective of the prophets' time and place (Dan 2:44-45; 8:26; 11:40; 12:4,13; Rev 1:19; 6:15-17; 7:15-17; 19:11-21; 21:1-22:5). Most of what these passages portray has not occurred to this day. So an examination of Daniel and Revelation without an openness to understanding of future events 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. Dispensationalism trumpets a literal approach to the Bible, yet imposes a system upon biblical interpretation that forces texts into molds which resist sound exegesis of those same texts. Adventist forms of futurism tend toward an allegorism of dual or multiple applications that quickly lose touch with the original setting and context of the prophecies. A futurism that ignores the cues in the text in the name of relevance, ends up abandoning the text for a contemporary system. An appropriate search for unfulfilled prophecy will always ground itself in the original meaning of the prophecy.

Historicism

The historicist method understands the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation to meet their fulfillments in historical time through a sequence of events running from the prophet's

Sanctuary in the Book of Revelation (Angwin, CA: by the author, 1983); Harry Robinson, "Have the Seven Trumpets Sounded?" An Unpublished Manuscript, 1988; and Erwin Gane, *Heaven's Open Door: The Seven Seals of Revelation and Christ Our Heavenly High Priest* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1989).

time down to the establishment of God's kingdom at the end of the world. This appears to be the way that the ancients interpreted these prophecies.⁶⁹ The historicist method was fairly standard throughout the Protestant world from the time of the Reformation through the first half of the 19th Century.⁷⁰ This method was taken over by the Adventist pioneers⁷¹ and has continued to be the standard approach ever since,⁷² even though it has become increasingly rejected by biblical scholarship outside the denomination.⁷³

⁶⁹Doukhan, 8. Doukhan lists ancient Jewish sources in note 13 on page 120. Christian sources can be found in Froom, vol. 1.

⁷⁰Examples include Martin Luther (*passim*), Isaac Newton, *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John* (London: Printed by J. Darby and T. Browne, 1733); Albert Barnes, *Book of Revelation* (New York, Harper, 1872); E. B. Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticae: or, A Commentary on the Apocalypse, Critical and Historical; Including Also an Examination of the Chief Prophecies of Daniel* (London: Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley, 1847); and Alexander Keith, *The Harmony of Prophecy: or, Scriptural Illustrations of the Apocalypse* (New York: Harper, 1851). Note especially the detailed review of literature offered by Froom, *passim*.

⁷¹Examples include Uriah Smith; Stephen N. Haskell, *The Story of the Seer of Patmos* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1905); and James White, *Seven Trumpets*, reprint (Eatonville, WA: Hope International, 1994).

⁷²Examples include Roy Allan Anderson, *Studies in Revelation* (New York: Faith for Today, 196-?); Edwin R. Thiele, "Outline Studies in Revelation," Unpublished Class Syllabus (Berrien Springs, MI: Emmanuel Missionary College, 1949); Mervyn C. Maxwell, *God Cares: The Message of Daniel for You and Your Family*, vol. 1 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1981); and *idem*, *God Cares*, vol. 2.

⁷³In the last decade or so, critical scholarship has given increased attention to the work of William Miller as an example of speculative and failed rhetoric. "Miller's timetable involved an archaic historicist approach that would fade out almost entirely after 1844." Paul Boyer, *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), 82. See also Kenneth G. C. Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium: Studies in Biblical Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 150-171; Stephen D. O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 93-133; Timothy P.

On the negative side, historicist interpretation has often been plagued by a number of faults. There is a tendency to pay much more attention to history and to the newspapers than to the exegesis of the biblical text.⁷⁴ The desire to locate just where we are in the course of history has often led to unhealthy attempts at date-setting and manipulation of the text in service of theological agendas.⁷⁵ And the use of history, there has been a huge difference of opinion as to just what events in history are a fulfillment of just what symbolism.⁷⁶ It is

Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875-1982* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 15-16. O'Leary comes across as sympathetic and objective, but it is clear that to him Miller's work is no more worthy of serious attention today than the work of dispensational authors such as Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye. He notes dismissively of the latter pair, that as history moves on they continually shift their interpretive stances without ever acknowledging the errors of their previous positions (191). It should be noted that Newport comes out of a Seventh-day Adventist background.

⁷⁴For an easily verifiable example, see Uriah Smith on the trumpets (475-517). In the course of 42 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. 62% of the text is in quotation marks, being culled from earlier non-Adventist historicist writers. This leads to the suspicion the Brother Smith himself never did any serious work in the text. Even more interesting, the entire piece, quotations and all, was taken from an anonymous pamphlet published in 1859, probably from the pen of James White. While Maxwell's work is similarly focused on history, the attention to exegetical concerns is considerably improved.

⁷⁵The wording of Doukhan (p. 8) is well taken here: "Out of the concern to relate the prophecy to the event, (historicist writers) have often overlooked the reality of the biblical text. Instead of starting from the text, they have come to the text out of the historical or political event. Thus, the language of the prophet, his world of thought, his literary and historical settings have been ignored in most cases. Some have gone so far as to substitute themselves for the prophet and even guess the event to come—hence the numerous discrepancies and the strange applications which have discredited this approach."

⁷⁶Boyer, 46-86. Boyer is even more critical of dispensational interpretation on pages 86-339. Boyer's book demonstrates how easy it is for an evangelist or popular writer to

problems such as these, along with critical bias against the concept of predictive prophecy, that caused the general demise of historicism, to the point where in scholarly discussions today, the possibility never even comes up. Not only so, historicism has come increasingly into question within the Adventist context today.⁷⁷

Given the difficulties with historicism why bother with it any more? What difference does it make? Why would it be worth the trouble to defend in a world that is mainly concerned with the “now?” Well, for one thing, historicism remains the primary approach that is used in Adventist evangelism. The way our fundamental beliefs are presented to the public is intertwined with a historicist approach to Daniel and Revelation. To abandon the method out of convenience is to call into question the entire basis upon which millions have chosen to align themselves with the Adventist movement. For this reason alone, it would be unwise to relinquish the approach casually. If it must be put to rest, let it only be on the basis of overwhelming and compelling biblical evidence.

A second reason to hang on to historicism, if it is intellectually credible to do so, is that it provides a solid basis for confidence in the future work of God. Just as the historical reality that Jesus was raised from the dead gives us confidence that we too will one day be raised from the

manipulate the biblical text in service of some historical or political perspective. See my review of Boyer in “The End of Time,” *Liberty*, vol. 95, no. 1 (January/February, 2000), pp. 8-10.

⁷⁷While the following article overstates and somewhat misreads the significance of what occurred at the *Adventist Society for Religious Study* meeting in November, 1999, its viewpoint reflects the thinking of many intellectual Adventists. Doug Morgan and Bonnie Dwyer, “Fear Not: Apocalypse Now Means Something Very Different,” *Spectrum* 28 (1, 2000), 24-27; see also the general direction taken by Desmond Ford in *Crisis: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, vol. 1 (Newcastle, CA: By the author, 1982).

dead, so the recognition of prophetic fulfillments in the past offers confidence that the last events of this earth's history will also occur according to the plan of God. To move to a totally futurist approach in search of greater clarity regarding unfulfilled events is to abandon the basis for confidence that unfulfilled prophecy will in fact occur, as it has in the past.

A third reason to seek support for a continued use of historicist method is that it is also central to the whole concept of Adventist self-understanding and identity.⁷⁸ Adventists are not particularly kinder than other Christians, they are not more Christ-centered or gospel-oriented than other Christians, they are not less prone to sexual or physical abuse, nor are they less subject to addictions in the broadest sense of the term. The Adventist claim to a unique, end-time role in God's plan for the close of earth's history is grounded in careful attention to the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. To abandon these, and/or to abandon the method that brought us where we are, is, to a large degree, to abandon our self-understanding and identity. Few movements have every survived the loss of core identity.

The purpose of the rest of this paper, therefore, is to explore the books of Daniel and Revelation afresh, in the light of contemporary scholarship, to examine whether the generally rejected principle of historicism has sufficient exegetical basis in the Scriptures to remain at the heart of Adventist self-understanding.

Apocalyptic Symbolism

⁷⁸Jon Paulien, "Eschatology and Adventist Self-understanding," in *Lutherans and Adventists in Conversation: Report and Papers Presented, 1994-1998*, edited by Sven G. Oppegaard and B. B. Beach (Silver Springs, MD: General Conference of SDAs, and Geneva: The

Apocalyptic works in general, and the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation in particular, are characterized by the use of symbols to convey truth. In the books of Daniel and Revelation horns and eagles speak, iron can be mixed with clay, leopards can have four heads, and dragons can chase women through the sky! A symbol is any object or description that represents something other than its common meaning.⁷⁹ By their very nature, symbols express a double meaning.⁸⁰ There is a literal intention; the primary meaning the term has in everyday life. Then there is a second intention; the literal points beyond itself to a second meaning that is evident only in relation to the first meaning.⁸¹ These two meanings can even be opposite! In the book of Revelation the lion is a lamb, death is a victory, and the victim is the victor!

The very vagueness of symbols opens up the possibility of near infinite depth of expression. This makes apocalyptic books both difficult and rich in meaning at the same time. The same symbol can have different meanings in different contexts.⁸² Symbolism is a more

Lutheran World Federation, 2000), 237-253.

⁷⁹Kenneth A. Strand, *The Open Gates of Heaven*, 2nd edition (Ann Arbor, MI: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1972), 25. Note the definition of a symbol in the third edition of Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged: "Something that stands for or suggests something else by reason of relationship, association, convention or accidental but not intentional resemblance."

⁸⁰Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, Religious Perspectives, vol. 17 (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 14-16.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 15. Note the way this is expressed by Philip Wheelwright in *The Burning Fountain: A Study in the Language of Symbolism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954), 24: "In this more special sense a "symbol" is not just anything that has meaning, it is that which carries a hidden or less obvious or more transcendent meaning in addition to the surface one."

⁸²Wheelwright, 15-16; Strand, *Open Gates*, 28.

flexible tool for the portrayal of reality than is ordinary prose.⁸³ To interpret a given symbol in its context it is necessary to compare the possible meanings inherent in its double intentionality with the literary context in which it is used.⁸⁴

That symbolism is the main literary form of expression in the visions of Daniel is evident from the very first. In Dan 2:45 the strategy of Nebuchadnezzar's dream/vision is expressed as follows: "This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands— a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. The great God has shown (evsh,mane) the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy."⁸⁵ The vision of Dan 2 is a pictorial representation of events that were to occur in Nebuchadnezzar's present and future.⁸⁶ The Greek translator of Daniel (LXX) uses the word *semainw* to express that God "had symbolized" to the king what would take place in the future.⁸⁷

The Book of Revelation opens with a clear allusion to Daniel 2.⁸⁸ The language of Rev 1:1 picks up not only on Dan 2:45 and its use of *semainw* but also the language of "revelation. .

⁸³Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images*, (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1970), 19-20.

⁸⁴Strand, *Open Gates*, 25.

⁸⁵LXX of Dan 2:45: καθάπερ ἐώρακας ἐξ ὀρους τμηθῆναι λίθον ἄνευ χειρῶν καὶ συνηλόησε τὸ ὄστρακον τὸν σίδηρον καὶ τὸν χαλκὸν καὶ τὸν ἄργυρον καὶ τὸν χρυσόν ὁ θεὸς ὁ μέγας ἐσήμανε τῷ βασιλεῖ τὰ ἐσόμενα ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν καὶ ἀκριβὲς τὸ ὄραμα καὶ πιστὴ ἡ τοῦτου κρίσις.

⁸⁶Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 51.

⁸⁷Ibid. The Greek word *semainw* carries the primary meaning of communication with the added twist that the communication can be prophetic and symbolic. That fuller meaning is clearly what the term means in Dan 2:45. Cf. *ibid.*, 50-51.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 50.

. God showed. . . what must come to pass” found in Dan 2:28-30.⁸⁹ This allusion to Dan 2 makes it clear that the entire book of Revelation is couched in symbolism as a primary method of communication. Whereas in the rest of the New Testament the language is to be taken as literal unless careful investigation indicates that a symbol is intended, in Revelation the opposite is the case. The language of Revelation is to be taken as symbolic or figurative unless careful investigation indicates that the language must be understood in literal terms.⁹⁰ Recognizing that the Apocalypse of John uses symbols and their interpretation as the medium of the message is a fundamental aspect of correct interpretation of the book.

How does one go about interpreting symbols? The best outline of an answer to this questions is found in the introduction to G. K. Beale’s commentary on Revelation.⁹¹ First of all, it is important to recognize the way different types of symbolic expression function. A metaphor, for example, is “a deliberate transgression of a word’s boundaries of meaning.”⁹² If one were to say, as Jesus did, “Peter is a rock,” you are transgressing the boundary between a living thing and an inanimate object. You are applying a characteristic of the object, rock, to the man, Peter. While metaphor transgresses the boundaries of both Peter and rock, one’s

⁸⁹LXX of Dan 2:28-30: 28 ἀλλ’ ἔστι θεὸς ἐν οὐρανῷ ἀνακαλύπτων μυστήρια ὃς ἐδήλωσε τῷ βασιλεῖ Ναβουχοδονοσορ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν βασιλεῦ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ζῆθι τὸ ἐνύπνιον καὶ τὸ ὄραμα τῆς κεφαλῆς σου ἐπὶ τῆς κοίτης σου τοῦτό ἐστι 29 σύ βασιλεῦ κατακλιθεὶς ἐπὶ τῆς κοίτης σου ἐώρακας πάντα ὅσα δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν καὶ ὁ ἀνακαλύπτων μυστήρια ἐδήλωσέ σοι ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι 30 κἀμοὶ δὲ οὐ παρὰ τὴν σοφίαν τὴν οὖσαν ἐν ἐμοὶ ὑπὲρ πάντας τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τὸ μυστήριον τοῦτο ἐξεφάνθη ἀλλ’ ἕνεκεν τοῦ δηλωθῆναι τῷ βασιλεῖ ἐσημάνθη μοι ἃ ὑπέλαβες τῇ καρδίᾳ σου ἐν γνώσει.

⁹⁰Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 52.

⁹¹Ibid., 55-58.

⁹²Ibid., 55.

description of Peter is enriched by the comparison.

While the metaphor, Peter is a rock, is fairly straightforward, Beale points out that symbols are often multiple in meaning, resisting simplicity of comparison.⁹³ For example, the phrase, “George is a wolf,” may imply that a certain young man is a potentially dangerous sexual predator. But an author could also use that expression to say that George is a dangerous criminal who hurts people and should be feared. But comparison between a man and a wolf could equally focus on the cunning, quickness, and/or relentlessness of wolves in the wild. Such multiple meanings are very common in Revelation. The concept of water, for example, (implied as well as stated) can be a metaphor for washing (Rev 7:15-17), for nutrition (positive: Rev 22:10; negative: Rev 8:11), for power and destruction (Rev 9:14; 17:15) and for something that forms a barrier (Rev 16:12; perhaps 21:1). In such cases the context in which the symbol comes needs to inform the reader as to which of the many possible meanings is to be understood.

A related principle for interpreting symbols is that once a given meaning for a symbol is established in a given work, that same meaning normally carries on to repeated uses of that same symbol later on in the book, unless the context of a later usage points the way to some different understanding in that setting.⁹⁴ Where the meaning of a symbol is not provided in a work, it is important to survey the way that symbol was used elsewhere in the literature of the ancient world up to that time.⁹⁵ The symbols of Daniel, for example, should be examined

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid., 56.

⁹⁵Ibid.

where they appear in earlier and contemporary writings of the Old Testament. Valuable information can also be found in the evidence of extra-biblical literature and archaeological artifacts. For the book of Revelation potential backgrounds for a given symbol include the Old Testament in its entirety and the literature and archaeology of the entire ancient world, including Judaism and the Hellenistic culture of the Greco-Roman world. Lay scholars of Daniel and Revelation can access such information in critical commentaries and such resources as Bible dictionaries, scholarly lexicons, and concordances.

Another way to interpret symbols is examine the degree of correspondence between the picture evoked by the symbol and the limitations of the literal subject of the symbol.⁹⁶ In the comparison “George is a wolf” the humanity of subject of the comparison excludes such wolfly associations as fur, pointed ears, and large teeth. Unless George exhibited such characteristics to a considerably greater degree than most humans, it is likely that comparing him to a wolf is restricted to some aspect of the wolf’s behavior rather than its appearance.

How can one detect the presence of a symbol? Beale notes at least six ways.⁹⁷ (1) The formal linking of two words of totally different meaning, “the seven lampstands *are* the seven churches.” (2) The use of a key descriptive term to alert the reader to the presence of some unusual meaning, “the *mystery* of the seven stars.”⁹⁸ (3) The impossibility of a literal interpretation, “I ate the book.” (4) A statement that would be outrageously false or contradictory is taken literally, “my two witnesses are the two olive trees and the two

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Ibid., 57.

⁹⁸Note how the Great City is “*spiritually* called Sodom and Egypt.”

lampstands.” (5) Context that renders a literal interpretation probably. (6) Clear and repeated figurative use of the same word elsewhere in the book. Beale notes that the last of these is probably the most consistently helpful.

Another aspect of apocalyptic symbolism mentioned by Beale is the use of numbers, which are to be taken as symbols more often than not.⁹⁹ Beale notes that seven is the number of completeness, while four represents an extension of that concept to something universal or worldwide in scope. Twelve represents unity in diversity as in the one nation Israel that is composed of twelve tribes. Ten also represents completeness. In addition to obvious uses of numbers, the book of Revelation is often organized in patterns of fours and sevens. So in Revelation the interpreter needs to give attention not only to the numbers in the book, but to also count groupings of symbols, which may have an extended meaning as a result.¹⁰⁰

An area of numerical symbolism in apocalyptic that Beale does not address is the use of the year-day principle for interpreting time periods in Daniel and Revelation. While this principle has been articulated by biblical interpreters for many centuries, the best current treatment of the topic can be found in the writings of William Shea.¹⁰¹ When unusual time periods, such as 1260 days, 1335 days, and a time, times and half a time occur in biblical

⁹⁹Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 58-64.

¹⁰⁰Roy Naden (*The Lamb Among the Beasts* [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996], 38-44) also speaks to the symbolism of numbers in the Apocalypse.

¹⁰¹William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: General Conference of SDAs, 1982), 56-93; idem, *Daniel 7-12, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier*, edited by George R. Knight (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1996), 40-44.

apocalyptic, how are these periods to be interpreted, as literal days or as symbolic of an equal number of years?

The possibility of year-for-day symbolism is grounded in two aspects of the interpretation of Daniel. First, the possibility is grounded in one's belief in predictive prophecy. No uninspired human being, not even Nostradamus,¹⁰² has ever succeeded in accurately predicting events hundreds of years into the future. Second, the possibility of year for a day symbolism in Daniel is also grounded in a sixth century dating for the book. If Daniel was written in the sixth century B.C. and the little horn is identified with Rome rather than Antiochus Epiphanes, then the prophetic time periods of Daniel must last several centuries at least, as Rome was the major power in the world for at least five centuries. Taken in terms of literal time, the prophetic periods of Daniel would not span even a small portion of that history.¹⁰³

Within the text, as Shea points out, the first feature of these time periods which points to their symbolic nature is their symbolic context.¹⁰⁴ For example, the 2300 evenings and mornings of Daniel 8 are found in a setting containing various other symbols, such as a ram, a goat, four horns and a little horn (cf. Dan 7:21,25). A second special feature of these time

¹⁰²Nostradamus, a French physician of the 16th century, had a wide following in the secular community in the Nineties. His vague prophecies seemed to many to have predicted significant events in the twentieth century. His specific prediction of spectacular events in August of 1999, however, showcased his humanness. See Hillel Schwartz, *Century's End: A Cultural History of the Fin de Siècle from the 1990s through the 1990s* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 99-101.

¹⁰³Shea, *Daniel 7-12*, 41.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 41.

periods is the symbolic nature of the units in which they are given, “evenings and mornings” instead of days, “a time, times and half a time” rather than three and a half years.¹⁰⁵ Related to this is the fact that the time periods are expressed in quantities a Hebrew would not normally use to date some event in the future. A Hebrew would normally say an event is six years, four months and twenty days in the future (although such exact specificity is rare), not 2300 days. The year-day prophecies of Scripture are characterized by unusual numbers such as 1260 days, 70 weeks, and 42 months. These periods seem to represent periods of history during which God permits adverse circumstances or evils to prevail.¹⁰⁶

While in the book of Revelation it is not explicit that an interpreter should reckon a year for a day (the book’s use of Daniel in these sections is evidence for the possibility), there is a strong exegetical basis for doing so in Daniel. Dan 9:24-27 refers to a prophetic period of 70 weeks. Within these “weeks” Jerusalem and the temple would be rebuilt,¹⁰⁷ the Messiah would come, and he would be cut off or killed. All of these events could not have been expected to occur in a year and a half.¹⁰⁸ If the 70 weeks prophecy of Daniel 9 is a subset of the 2300 evenings and mornings,¹⁰⁹ they must represent an even longer period of time. If the events of Daniel 11 are a literal description of historical events that are symbolized in Dan 8:3-14 (as

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 41-42.

¹⁰⁶Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, 57-58.

¹⁰⁷The total construction time for Herod’s temple (in the time of Jesus) was 82 years. See John 2:20 for biblical verification of the beginning date (around 19/18 B.C.). Historical records indicate that construction was completed in 63 A. D.

¹⁰⁸Shea, *Daniel 7-12*, 42-43.

¹⁰⁹William H. Shea, “The Prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27,” in *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 3, edited by Frank B.

nearly all commentators agree),¹¹⁰ the 2300 days cannot be seen as literal time.¹¹¹ At the same time, if the book of Revelation was intended to speak to the entire period of Christian history, the passage of time implies that at least some of the unusual time periods in Revelation (Rev 11:2-3; 12:6,14; 13:5) be understood on a year for a day basis.¹¹²

Is there any biblical example of a relationship between days and years in prophetic or historical material? Or is the year-day principle (first explicitly articulated by Nahawendi in the 9th Century)¹¹³ just an accommodation to impact that the passage of time has had on the historicist method of interpretation? I believe that the year-day principle is clearly articulated in the Bible and in its ancient context. Biblically speaking the year-day principle is given explicit

Holbrook (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 104-108.

¹¹⁰Shea, *Selected Studies*, 83.

¹¹¹Ibid., 80-83.

¹¹²According to Shea, a preterist perspective essentially leaves out the whole Christian era and its history, with the exception of a small initial fraction. The Bible, in that case, offers no prophetic evaluation on that entire history. Such a perspective stands in marked contrast to the OT view of history, in which the mighty acts of God on behalf of His people are recited throughout from Adam to Ezra. The year-day principle of historicism helps us gain God's perspective on the last 2000 years as well as His instructions for the final period of earth's history. See *Selected Studies in Prophetic Interpretation*, 56-57.

¹¹³LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation*, 4 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1950-54), 1:713; 2:216-217. See also Arasola, 32-33. Application of the year-day principle to the time periods of Daniel began among Jewish expositors some three centuries before any Christian (Joachim of Floris was the first) is known to have applied it. Nahawendi, in the early 9th Century, was evidently the first to interpret the 1290 and the 2300 days as years. Over the next several centuries a number of other Jewish writers made similar applications, including such highly significant figures as Saadia and Rashi.

Interestingly, recent research suggests that the year-day principle may well pre-date Scripture. Evidence of year-day thinking can be found in Hammurabi's Code (1762 BC). Michael

statement in the classical prophecies of Num 14:34 and Ezek 4:6. In Num 14:34 the Lord tells Moses that the 40 days when the spies explored the promised land would be prophetic of the 40 years Israel was to wander in the wilderness. In Ezek 4:4-8, the prophet is to lie down for a total of 430 days to represent the 430 years that Israel had been disobedient to the will of God (the monarchy period). In each case a day clearly represents a year. This principle of reckoning can be traced all the way back to the Babylonian king Hammurabi, in the time of the patriarchs.¹¹⁴ Many other passages of the OT show a correlation between days and years.¹¹⁵ It is clear that Jewish expositors between the testaments were working with the year-day principle, even if no statement is quite as explicit as Num 14:34 or the action of Hammurabi.¹¹⁶

The Hebrew concept of a year for a day is grounded in the sabbatical year concept. The weekly Sabbath became the basis for a seven-year agricultural cycle (Exod 23:10-12). Six years Israelite farmers were allowed to work the soil, but on the seventh year the land was to lie unplowed and unused. In Leviticus 25:1-7 the analogy is drawn even closer. The seventh year would allow the land “to have a Sabbath of rest” (Lev 25:4-5). That Sabbath was to be a year of rest for the land. The sabbatical year is clearly modeled on the weekly Sabbath, a year for a day

Hudson, “The Economic Roots of the Jubilee,” *Bible Review* (February, 1999): 31.

¹¹⁴Michael Hudson, “Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land: The Economic Roots of the Jubilee,” *Bible Review*, February, 1999: 31. Hammurabi proclaimed a jubilee (a full cancellation of all debts) in 1762 BC to celebrate the thirtieth year of his rule, his completion of a “month of years.”

¹¹⁵Shea, *Selected Studies*, 66-72. See, with particular attention to the Hebrew in many cases, Gen 5:3-31; 47:9; Exod 13:10; Num 9:22; Deut 32:7; Jdg 11:40; 1 Sam 2:19; 27:7; 1 Kgs 1:1; Job 10:5; 32:7; Ps 90:9-10.

¹¹⁶See *Ibid.*, 89-93. Examples of year-day thinking in Early Judaism (NT times and before) include Jubilees 10:16; Testament of Levi 16:1 - 17:11; 11Q Melchizedek; 4Q 180-181; 4

in principle.¹¹⁷ Outside of this passage the Hebrew term for “sabbath” is never applied to more than one day at a time.¹¹⁸

In Leviticus 26:33-35, this sabbatical principle is applied to the Exile. If the Israelites were disobedient to God the land would be unable to rest until God would remove them from the land through exile. The seventy years of Babylonian exile, therefore, were sabbatical years. This equation is explicitly confirmed in 2 Chr 36:18-21. The seventy years of exile prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer 29:10-14) were sabbatical years of rest for the land. The seventy weeks of Daniel, therefore, are an extension of the sabbatical principle and need to be seen as 70 new sabbatical cycles, building on Israel’s failure to keep the mosaic covenant during the monarchy period (cf. Dan 9:2,24). The year-day principle in Daniel, therefore, is a natural outgrowth of fundamental principles embedded in the Hebrew economy by Moses himself.¹¹⁹

One final note about the symbolism in Daniel and Revelation. There is a major difference in the way that symbolism is used in the two books. In Daniel the symbols come together in reasonably coherent pictures. It is not difficult to picture in your mind a statue made up of a variety of metals that is shattered by a large stone. The vision is intended to be visualized.

The situation in Revelation is much different. Beginning with the vision of Christ in Rev

Ezra 7:43.

¹¹⁷See Ibid., 69-72.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 70.

¹¹⁹Shea (Ibid., 71-72, 77-79) shows that the concept of “weeks of years” as found in Dan 9:24-27 may well be grounded on the language of the jubilee in Lev 25:8, a concept closely related to the sabbatical year concept.

1:12-16, it is clear that the visions of Revelation are not to be taken as whole pictures of some reality. It is difficult, if not impossible to portray a figure with bronze feet glowing as if in a furnace, with a sword coming out of his mouth, with seven actual stars in his hands, and with a voice that sounds like a trumpet at one point and like a mighty cataract a moment later.

Artistic attempts to picture the scenes of Revelation (like the woodcuts of Albrecht Dürer) tend to be more comical than helpful. It is as if the images of Revelation were designed to be heard more than to be visualized, a feast for the ear more than the eye.¹²⁰ “The pictures are not to be mechanically harmonized into one big visual picture, but the interpretive ideas of each image are to be considered and related to one another.”¹²¹ Much more could be said about the interpretation of symbols in Daniel and Revelation, but these thoughts will need to suffice here.

The Uniqueness of Biblical Apocalyptic

As noted above, critical scholars approach the books of Daniel and Revelation with the assumption that they are similar in character to the non-biblical apocalypses. According to John J. Collins, for example, the burden of proof must fall on those who wish to argue that Daniel is different in character from other examples of the genre.¹²² While many critical scholars today argue that Revelation (unlike Daniel in their opinion) is a genuine prophecy,¹²³ they do not see in Revelation a window into the mind of a God who knows the end from the beginning.

¹²⁰The implication of Rev 1:3 may be relevant here.

¹²¹Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 57.

¹²²John J. Collins, *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, 34.

¹²³John J. Collins, “Pseudonymity, Historical Reviews and the Genre of the Revelation of John,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 39 (1977): 330, 339-340.

Adventists are in serious disagreement with this rejection of the special character of biblical apocalyptic and of the predictive nature of some of the utterances found in it. SDAs believe that God “knows the end from the beginning” and is well able to announce ahead of time “what is yet to come” through the Holy Spirit (Isa 46:10; John 16:13). While acknowledging the existence of pseudo-authorship and *ex eventu* prophecy in non-biblical apocalyptic,¹²⁴ Adventists believe that the inspired apocalyptic of the Bible is substantively different.

The setting of the book of Daniel is clearly in the courts of Babylon and Persia in the 6th Century BC. That was a time in history when the gift of prophecy was exhibited in the work of Jeremiah and Ezekiel among others. Since the sixth-century date of Daniel has been thoroughly argued elsewhere, that issue will not be taken up here, but is accepted as a working assumption.¹²⁵ The date when the book was written is, however, *the* crucial issue with regard

¹²⁴History 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.

¹²⁵Gerhard 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 the brief overview of William H. Shea, *Daniel 1-7*, 34-44.

Among the arguments for an early date for Daniel are: 1) The way Daniel handles months and year 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) A case can be made that some of the Daniel manuscripts at Qumran are older than the time of Antiochus. 4) Daniel’s awareness of Belshazzar’s existence and position, something unknown in

to Daniel, as few critical scholars question that Dan 11 includes a remarkably accurate portrayal of certain events in the fourth, third and second centuries before Christ.¹²⁶

Non-canonical apocalyptic, on the other hand, spoke to a time when people believed

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.

The sixth century date of Daniel is not just an Adventist idea, it has been supported by a large number of other scholars as well. Note the extensive listing in Hasel, 98-100.

¹²⁶According 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. Critical scholars point out that in ancient times already, 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 to all non-biblical apocalyptic. So critical 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 and us, obviously, is the authenticity of the predictions in Dan 7-12.

What critical scholars are not so quick to point out is 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. Christian readers of Daniel in Porphyry's time and before (Irenaeus, Hippolytus and possibly Barnabas-- see Froom, vol. 1, 210, 244-246, 272-273) actually had no difficulty seeing the prophecies of Daniel being accurately fulfilled in Rome, two centuries after the time when Porphyry (and the critical scholars with him) claimed that the book of Daniel was written. Collins' burden of proof claim has some validity and can be answered (cf. Hasel in previous footnote), but the primary reality driving the late date position for Daniel is disbelief in predictive prophecy. If one doesn't believe that divine revelations could result in genuine and accurate predictions, one must find some other explanation for the stunning accuracy of the predictions in Dan 11.

that the prophetic spirit had been silenced (Ps 74:9; 1 Macc 4:44-46; 14:41, cf. *mAbboth* 1:1).¹²⁷

Without the gift of prophecy it would be impossible for anyone to write history in advance.

Nevertheless, 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.¹²⁸

Since John, the author of Revelation, believed that through Christ the prophetic spirit had returned (Rev 1:3; 19:9-10; 22:6-10),¹²⁹ he would have every reason to believe that the cosmic Christ could reveal to him the general outline of events between the advents. The return of genuine prophets would signal the return of predictive prophecy. In the Book of Revelation the name John is not a pseudonym.¹³⁰ The Book of Revelation is genuine, not *ex eventu*, prophecy and needs to be addressed differently than non-canonical apocalyptic.¹³¹

¹²⁷Note the esteemed work of D. S. Russell, 73-103.

¹²⁸Lars Hartman, *Prophecy Interpreted*, translated by Neil Tomkinson, Coniectanea Biblica, NT series, no. 1 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1966), p. 25.

Russell commented on page 96 of his book *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*:

“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 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.”

¹²⁹John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 212; *ibid.*, “Pseudonymity,” 331.

¹³⁰Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 27-28. John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, p. 211; *ibid.*, “Pseudonymity,” p. 330-331.

¹³¹To 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*

Although written to the immediate time and place of the seven churches of Asia Minor (Rev 1:3,11), Revelation also spoke to their future, the things which would happen “after these things” (Rev 1:19). Adventists believe that most of the seven churches’ future is now history to us.

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.¹³²

Adventists, like them, see no indication in the text of Daniel and Revelation that its events were to be confined to the distant past. 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 time of the seven churches, to the events of the very end of history, and also to significant movements in the course of the history that runs between those two great standpoints.

In saying this about Revelation 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. Our Lord certainly could have come in the first century if He had wished to do so. In a real sense, the New Testament treats the first advent of Jesus as eschatology in the highest sense. There is a consistent tension in the NT, therefore, between the sense that the last days had already come, and that there was yet to be

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.

¹³²See Froom, *passim*.

a delay of some sort.¹³³ The passage of time since the first century has opened up new vistas in terms of the Lord's patience and purpose. Having foreseen the delay, would not God prepare His people to understand the major events by which He is bringing history to its climax?

Our lack of foresight should certainly introduce an element of caution into any interpretation of the "periods of history" that Adventists find in the books of Daniel and Revelation. Only from the perspective of the Parousia will history speak with perfect clarity. We will need to avoid the kind of historicizing interpretation which emphasizes minute details and "newspaper" exegesis, while ignoring the plain meaning of the symbols in their original context.¹³⁴ Adventists believe, however, that the broad sweep of Christian history was both known to God and revealed in principle through his servants the prophets (Amos 3:7).

The Adventist Approach to Daniel

Any exegetical defense of historicism must begin with the clearest biblical example, found in Daniel chapter 2.¹³⁵ While the text is quite familiar to Adventists, it bears another look, for it is foundational to an understanding of apocalyptic prophecy. The story of Daniel 2

¹³³I have addressed the issues in this paragraph at length in other places and do not have space to repeat those concepts here. Please see Jon Paulien, *What the Bible Says About the End-Time* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1994), 75-83; and idem, *The Millennium Bug: Is This the End of the World As We Know It?* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1999), 97-114.

¹³⁴For 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, 475-517.

¹³⁵The apocalyptic nature of this chapter is noted by Douglas Bennett, "The Stone Kingdom of Daniel 2," in *Symposium on Daniel: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 2, edited by Frank B. Holbrook (Washington, DC: Biblical

clearly fits the definition of apocalyptic literature generally accepted today, and is of the historical sub-category.¹³⁶ It contains a revelation delivered in a narrative framework, and that revelation is given directly by God (an otherworldly being) to Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar, the human recipients. The vision and its interpretation disclose a transcendent temporal reality regarding eschatological salvation, and reveal the spatial reality of God's will and purposes in the supernatural world.¹³⁷

Unless one approaches Daniel 2 with the assumption that it is outlining history after the fact, it seems clear that Nebuchadnezzar's vision portrays a chain of empires, beginning with the time of the prophet, and running the course of history all the way to its eschatological climax.

Daniel 2

The story of Daniel 2 begins with a sleepless night for King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:1). He was worried about the future and God gives him dreams which unpack that future (Dan 2:29). After futile attempts to get help from his closest advisors, Nebuchadnezzar turns to Daniel, the Hebrew prophet. Daniel testifies that the future is unknown to human beings, no matter how intelligent nor how connected to the occult (Dan 2:27-- these same wise men are

Research Institute, 1986), 346.

¹³⁶See above, page 4, and John J. Collins, "Introduction," *Semeia* 14 (1979): 14, for the definition of apocalyptic. The distinction between historical and mystical types of apocalypses is briefly discussed on pages 5-6 of this paper and in Collins, *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, 41.

¹³⁷Compare the previous two sentences with Collins' definition quoted on page 4.

forced to agree, 2:10-11). There is a God in heaven, however, who is fully able to reveal what will happen in days to come, including the final events of history (בְּאַחֲרֵית יוֹמֵיָא -- “at the end of days,” Dan 2:28).¹³⁸

The dream is about a large statue, an idol, made from a succession of metals, declining in value (from gold to iron) but increasing in strength as you move from the head to the foot of the image (2:31-33).¹³⁹ The feet of the statue are made of a mixture of iron and clay (2:33). At the end of the dream a supernatural rock smashes into the feet of the image, breaking the whole image to pieces (2:34). The pieces are then swept away by the wind, while the rock grows into a mountain that fills the whole earth (2:35).

While the vision of the statue carries Nebuchadnezzar to end of earth’s history, however, the explanation of the vision by Daniel is firmly grounded in the time and place of Nebuchadnezzar. All expressions are appropriate to a conversation being held in a king’s palace around 600 BC. The interpretation begins with a straightforward, unambiguous assertion, “You are that head of gold.”¹⁴⁰ The interpretation grounds the beginning of that prophecy in the situation of Nebuchadnezzar’s time and place. That the head of gold is not limited to Nebuchadnezzar personally, but represents his whole kingdom becomes clear in that all the succeeding metals represent whole kingdoms, not just a series of kings.¹⁴¹ Nebuchadnezzar is addressed as the representative of his kingdom. The comment that the fourth kingdom will be

¹³⁸Bennett, 347-351.

¹³⁹Shea, *Daniel 1-7*, 139.

¹⁴⁰2:38-- אַנְתְּ-הוּא הָאִשָּׁה דִּי נִהְבָּא

¹⁴¹Shea, *Daniel 1-7*, 139-140.

“strong as iron” suggests that the various metals were designed to portray specific characteristics of each of the kingdoms.¹⁴²

The next stage in the prophecy is also clear. “After you **בְּתֵרֶךְ**), another (**אַחֲרָי**) kingdom will arise, inferior to yours” (2:39). This second kingdom clearly comes on the stage after the time of Nebuchadnezzar. While the text does not explicitly state that this kingdom is represented by the silver of the statue, the inferior nature of the kingdom is appropriate to such a movement. The transition between Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom and the following one is marked by the story in Daniel 5. Babylon is followed by Medo-Persia.

“Next (**אַחֲרָי**— “another”), a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth” (2:39). Daniel’s explanation again uses an Aramaic term of sequencing, this time making it clear that the third kingdom corresponds to the third metal on the statue, bronze. In Daniel 8, the kingdom that replaces Medo-Persia is Greece.

“Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others” (2:40). The “finally” here is supplied by the translators of the NIV. The Aramaic term is the simple conjunctive. But “finally” is not an inappropriate translation, as the movement to the fourth and final kingdom in the series is explicit in the passage. The association of this fourth kingdom with iron also makes the correlation between the metals on the statue and the sequence of historical kingdoms clear.

The move to the fifth stage of iron and clay again lacks a sequencing term, but by this

¹⁴²Doukhan, 14.

stage in the vision the progression is clear enough without continual repetition. The vision portrays a series of historical stages beginning with the time of the “prophet” Nebuchadnezzar. “Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay” (2:41). Interestingly, the transition to the fifth stage differs from the others in that the fourth kingdom is not replaced by a more powerful one, but seems to disintegrate into a divided and weakened condition.

The mention of clay at this point in the vision is rather startling. Doukhan notes that clay is an unexpected material after the metals, indicating a power or powers of a different nature than those that came before. He sees the clay as pointing to a religious connotation in contrast to the political nature of the metallic kingdoms.¹⁴³ The clay here may reflect an allusion to Adam, the human creature who was made from clay (Gen 2:7; 3:19). Adam owed his existence to the divine potter (Isa 64:8; Jer 18:6ff.). Doukhan believes that this is foretaste of the appearance of the human-featured little horn in Dan 7:8 and 25.¹⁴⁴

The climax of the vision and its interpretation comes in Dan 2:44, “In the time of those kings (literally “in the days of those kings” (וּבְיָמֵיהֶן דִּי מְלָכֵיאָא אַנִּין), the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. . . .” “In the days of those kings” can be understood in two ways. Since the kingdom of iron and clay is referred to in the singular (2:41-42), the plural of verse 44 could be understood to refer to all four of the kingdoms together. This would imply that the course of history will continue unbroken until the coming of the divine kingdom

¹⁴³Ibid., 17.

represented by the stone. The spirit of the earlier kingdoms lives on in the later ones.¹⁴⁵ More likely the “kings” refer to pieces of the divided kingdom of iron and clay.¹⁴⁶ In this case, it would be clear that the coming of the stone kingdom is after the reign of the four major kingdoms and during the time of division between strong and weak. The coming of the stone kingdom is the final event of the vision, the one that brings the whole course of history to an end.

The vision of Daniel 2, then, is an apocalyptic prophecy with a clear historical sequence running from the time of the prophet down to the end of earth’s history, the establishment of the kingdom of God. The explanation, grounded in the language, time and place of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar, clearly marks out the sequence of events that moves the reader from the time when the prophecy was given to the time when history comes to its end. In Daniel 2, therefore, the basic characteristics of historical apocalyptic are firmly and exegetically set in place.

Daniel 7

Daniel 7 marks some important transitions within the book. It is tied to the narratives that precede by the use of the Aramaic language (Hebrew is used in chapters 8-12). It is tied to chapter 2 by the vision formula and other connections we will note below. At the same time,

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 18.

¹⁴⁵According to Dan 2:34-35 the rest of the image was still there when the stone strikes, so the influence of the earlier nations persists until the end. This idea also seems to be affirmed in Dan 7:12. Cf. also Rev 13, where the composite beast shows the influence of earlier empires.

¹⁴⁶Bennett, 351-352.

Daniel 7 is tied to the visions in the following chapters by its subject matter and by close parallels with chapter 8.¹⁴⁷ So Daniel 7 is in many ways the center point of the book of Daniel.¹⁴⁸

As was the case with Daniel 2, the apocalyptic prophecy of Dan 7 is divided into two parts; a description of the vision, in which the prophet can be transported through time and space (Dan 7:2-14), and an explanation of the vision, given in the language, time and place of the prophet (Dan 7:15-27). In Daniel 2 the prophet is Nebuchadnezzar and the explanation is given by Daniel himself. In Daniel 7, Daniel is the prophet and the explanation is given by an angelic attendant in the vision.

It may, at first, seem unfortunate that the vision of Daniel 7 and its interpretation fails to name any of the kingdoms symbolized in the chapter. This is in contrast to what happens in the visions of Daniel 2 (“You are the head of gold”-- 2:38) and Daniel 8 (The “ram represents the kings of Media and Persia, . . . the goat is the king of Greece”-- 8:20-21). The most natural explanation is that the reader is expected to see that the vision of Daniel 7 is simply restating and expanding on the earlier vision, but this time couched in the language of the Torah, rather than pagan symbolism.¹⁴⁹ The vision of Daniel 8, on the other hand, introduces new material and requires specific re-identification. This explanation is confirmed by the many parallels between Daniel’s vision in chapter 7 and the earlier one given to Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷John J. Collins, *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, 80.

¹⁴⁸Doukhan, 2-7.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 17; Angel Manuel Rodriguez, *Future Glory: The 8 Greatest End-time Prophecies in the Bible* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2002), 22.

¹⁵⁰Rodriguez, 22-24.

Both passages deal with four kingdoms (Dan 2:37-40; 7:17). The four animals in Dan 7 parallel the four metals of the great statue that Nebuchadnezzar saw (Dan 7:3-7, cf. 2:31-33). Both visions concern four items, many of which are numbered, "first," "fourth," etc. (Dan 2:39-40; 7:4,5,7)¹⁵¹ In both visions, special authority is given to the third kingdom.¹⁵² In both visions, the fourth element is numbered (2:40; 7:7), involves iron, and uses the language of crushing. In Dan 7:23 (NRSV), "There shall be a fourth kingdom on earth (מֶלֶךְ רְבִיעִי תְהוּא בְּאֶרֶץ)." ¹⁵³ In both visions, the figure of the fourth kingdom is followed by symbols of division (2:43; 7:24). It would seem pointless, therefore, to interpret the fourth kingdom of Daniel 7 as somehow different from the fourth kingdom of Daniel 2.¹⁵⁴ Both visions cover a period that leads to the final establishment of God's kingdom. The vision of Dan 7, therefore, concerns the same four kingdoms symbolized by metals in Dan 2. The God who gave these visions was apparently using the principle of recapitulation to convey His revelations more clearly.¹⁵⁵

On the other hand, a new element in this vision is the little horn power that plucks up three horns and speaks boastful things (Dan 7:8). An additional new element is the heavenly

¹⁵¹This sequencing language is further heightened in Daniel 7 by the use of "And behold" (וַיַּרְוֶה) at every time in the vision where there is chronological progression (Dan 7:5,6,7,8 (twice), and 13). See Doukhan, 21.

¹⁵²Dan 2:39: (NRSV) "Which shall rule over the whole earth," 7:6: (NRSV) "And dominion was given to it."

¹⁵³Shea points out that the fourth kingdom is never identified by name anywhere in the book of Daniel. He then offers significant evidence for the Adventist identification of the fourth kingdom with Rome (vol. 2, 132-137). This identification was also made by the early Church Fathers Irenaeus, Hippolytus and possibly Barnabas (See Froom, vol. 1, 210, 244-246, 272-273).

¹⁵⁴Maxwell, *God Cares*, vol. 1, 104.

¹⁵⁵Rodriguez, 23.

judgment scene (7:9-14), with its books, its Ancient of Days and its son of man. The vision of Daniel 2 is essentially repeated but with two additional elements. In comparing the two visions we are moving from the simple to the complex and from the clear to the somewhat less clear. So in interpreting Daniel 7 we must not forget the things we have learned from Daniel 2. The pattern of apocalyptic, historical sequences continues to be followed.¹⁵⁶ Note the following chart:

¹⁵⁶There are two sets of linguistic cues in the vision of Daniel 7 that mark off its different parts: The vision formula, “In my vision at night I looked” (חָזָה הָיִיתָ בְּחֻזִּי לַיְלָא), which occurs in verses 2, 7, and 13; and a formula that signals chronological progression (וְאַלּוֹ or וְאַרְבֵּי). Which is found in verses 5, 6, 7, 8 (twice) and 13. Combining these two linguistic cues leads to the following structure for the vision:

Scene 1: (7:2-6) Beasts from the Sea

V. 4: Lion

V. 5: Bear

V. 6: Leopard

Scene 2: (7:7-12) Fourth Beast and Judgment

V. 7: Nondescript Beast

V. 8: Ten horns

V. 8: Little horn

Judgment scene (9-10)

Judgment verdict (11-12)

Scene 3: (7:13-14) Son of Man

V. 13: Son of man approaches throne

Receives dominion (14)

Daniel 2	Daniel 7
Gold	Lion
Silver	Bear
Bronze	Leopard
Iron	Iron
feet and toes	horns
-	Little horn
-	Judgment
God's Kingdom	God's Kingdom

The little horn power of Daniel 7, however, is not separate from the fourth beast. It arises directly from among the ten horns that are part of the fourth beast (Dan 7:7: “It had ten horns”--¹⁵⁷ (וְקַרְנֵי עֶשֶׂר לָהּ). This point is underlined again in Dan 7:19-20, where Daniel¹⁵⁸ says, “Then I wanted to know the true meaning of the fourth beast, . . . I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up. . . .”¹⁵⁹ But while rooted in the fourth beast, the little horn comes up after the ten horns¹⁶⁰ which themselves come up after the fourth kingdom is established (Dan 7:24).¹⁶¹ So there is a sequencing taking place in relation to the imagery of the fourth beast. Since the little horn arises after the fourth kingdom and in the context of the ten horns it would seem to be operating in the time of the divided kingdom of Daniel 2. Just as the mixed kingdom of iron and clay was connected to the fourth by the image of iron (Dan 2:41-42), so the little horn is connected to the fourth kingdom, having grown from its symbolic head (Dan 7:8).

Doukhan brings out further parallels between the little horn of Daniel 7 and the clay of

¹⁵⁷Clifford Goldstein, *1844 Made Simple* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1988), 21. Dan 7:8 states, “While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them (!AhynEyBe tq'l.si). . .”

¹⁵⁸According to Maxwell, *God Cares*, vol.1, 103.

¹⁵⁹Note the Aramaic of verse 20: עֶשֶׂר קַרְנֵי עֶשֶׂר דִּי בְּרֵאשָׁה וְאַחֲרֵי דִי סִלְקַת -- literally: “And concerning the ten horns which (were) on its head and another which came up.”

¹⁶⁰Dan 7:24 NRSV (explaining the shift of attention in Dan 7:7-8 from the ten horns to the little horn): “And another shall arise after them. This one shall be different from the former ones. . . .” (וְאַחֲרָן יָקוּם אַחֲרֵיהֶון וְהוּא יִשְׁנָא מִן־קַרְמִיָּא). See Shea, vol. 2, 138.

¹⁶¹Dan 7:24 NRSV: “As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise. . . .” (וְקַרְנֵי עֶשֶׂר מִנָּה מַלְכוּתָהּ עֶשְׂרֵה מַלְכִין יִקְמוּן).

Daniel 2.¹⁶² Both are different from what has come before.¹⁶³ Both have human features. The little horn is singled out because it has human eyes and a talking mouth (7:8), the clay is an allusion to the creation of Adam. In Daniel reference to human nature can be understood to portray the religious character of a person or institution (compare 7:4 with 4:16,34,36).¹⁶⁴ The religious character of the little horn becomes explicit in the explanation (Dan 7: 21,25).¹⁶⁵ While both entities are religious in character, they are also able to adapt to the world of politics.¹⁶⁶ So the little horn would seem to be portraying the same ambiguous power that was represented by the clay in chapter 2.

The description of the little horn exhibits the following characteristics and actions. 1) It speaks boastfully (Dan 7:8, 20), 2) it wages war against the saints and defeats them (7:21), 3) it is different in character from the earlier kings, which were political in nature (7:24). 4) The boastful speaking is interpreted in verse 25 as speaking “against the Most High.” 5) The war against the saints is redefined as “oppressing the saints” (7:25). 6) He will “try to change the set times and the laws,” something only God is supposed to do (Dan 2:21), and 7) the period during which he will dominate the saints is said to last for “a time, times and half a time”

¹⁶²Doukhan, 19.

¹⁶³Clay is quite different from the series of metals (Dan 2:32), the little horn is explicitly different (Dan 7:24–~~נִשְׁבָּר~~) from the kingdoms that preceded it.

¹⁶⁴Cf. Norman W. Porteous, *Daniel*, second edition, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), 110. Roy Gane suggested to me in a personal letter (dated February 23, 2001) that the clay may represent humanity particularly in its mortality. He referred me to the Hebrew of Gen 3:19 and Ezek 28:2, 9 as support.

¹⁶⁵Shea, vol. 2, 137.

¹⁶⁶Doukhan, 19. The clay is mixed with the iron (Dan 2:41-43) and the little horn is a horn (symbol of political power) and grows out of the fourth kingdom (7:7-8).

(7:25).¹⁶⁷ There has been a long-standing consensus within Adventist scholarship that the four major kingdoms of Daniel 2 and 7 represent Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. There has been a similar consensus that the little horn power of Daniel represents the medieval papacy, which was different in character from the secular powers of the earth, persecuted the saints, made changes in the ten commandments, particularly the Sabbath, and dominated Western Europe for more than a thousand years.¹⁶⁸

The two new elements of the chapter are tied together in 7:8-11 and 21-22. It is interesting to note that the vision of 7:2-14 is divided into three parts by the stylistic expression, “In my vision at night I looked” (חָזָה חֲזוֹן בַּחֲזוֹן לַיְלָא), found in verses 2, 7 and 13.¹⁶⁹ Surprisingly, this arrangement ties the fourth kingdom more closely to the heavenly court scene than to the three kingdoms that precede it in verses 4-6. The immediate context of the seating of the heavenly judgment in 7:9-14 is the little horn’s boastful speaking in verse 8. The absence in verse 9 of the typical sequencing term (וְאֵרָא – “behold”) found seven times in the vision (Dan 7:5,6,7,8 [twice], 13) is further evidence that the judgment begins at precisely that point in history where the little horn is doing its human thing and speaking boastfully (elaborated in 7:21,25).

¹⁶⁷To use the language of John J. Collins, the offenses of the little horn are “blasphemy, violence, and religious innovation.” John J. Collins, *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, 81.

¹⁶⁸Anderson, *Unfolding Daniel’s Prophecies*, 92-95; Stephen N. Haskell, *The Story of Daniel the Prophet* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Publishing Co., 1901), 95-97; Maxwell, *God Cares*, vol. 1, 121-129; Uriah Smith, 119, 126-142.

¹⁶⁹The expression is slightly different in Dan 7:2 (חָזָה חֲזוֹן בַּחֲזוֹן עִם־לַיְלָא), but means

A portion of the vision formula of 2, 7 and 13 is also found at the conclusion of verse 11, further tying the descriptions of verses 7 and 8 with the opening of the judgment in 9 and 10.¹⁷⁰ The allusion to the destruction of the beast that carried the little horn in verse 11 implies that the judgment comes into session to deal with the actions of that beast, and of the ten horns and the little horn that followed it in the course of history. This implication is confirmed in Dan 7:21-22. The time, times and half a time in which the saints are oppressed lasts “until (עַד דַּי) the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High (7:22). So the judgment comes at the end of the little horn’s time of oppressing the saints. The end result of that judgment is “His power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His (the son of man of 7:13-14) kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him” (Dan 7:26-27).

So the vision of Daniel 7 is not so much adding new elements to the earlier vision as it is elaborating on the later stages of it, the times after the fourth kingdom and before the setting up of God’s eternal kingdom. During the time of the divided kingdom of iron and clay, an oppressive power, described as a little horn on the beast of the fourth kingdom, will arise and oppress the people of God, just as Babylon was doing in Daniel’s day. Daniel 7 also adds that ushering in the stone kingdom will be a heavenly tribunal in which the actions of all the

essentially the same thing.

¹⁷⁰John J. Collins, *Daniel with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, 76. Dan 7:7: literally: “I kept looking” -- תָּהָה תְּהִיָּית; Dan 7:11: “I kept looking” -- תָּהָה תְּהִיָּית.

oppressive powers of history will be brought to an end and the people of God will join God's representative, the son of man, in an everlasting kingdom where all obey the Most High God.¹⁷¹

In Daniel 2 and 7, therefore, we have a pair of apocalyptic prophecies which review the same basic historical sequence, running from the time of the respective prophets until the establishment of God's kingdom at the end of history. The exegesis is relatively straightforward, when the two visions are viewed together. The only reason to question elements of this scenario are if these prophecies were not written ahead of events, but were the result of pious history after the fact, written around 165 BC. So for Adventist scholarship, the decisive issue with regard to the hermeneutics of the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel is the time when the book was written. For those who believe that Daniel was a genuine prophecy of the sixth century BC, the process is straightforward. First, give careful attention to what the text is actually saying and what it is not saying. Second, give careful attention to the clear witness of history, and align the text with that history to the best of one's ability.

The Adventist Approach to Revelation

A problem that previous Adventist discussions have not adequately addressed is the relationship of Revelation to the larger genre of apocalyptic prophecy. It is been largely assumed that Revelation is of the same character as that of Daniel (apocalyptic prophecy) and that its visions are, therefore, to be uniformly interpreted as unconditional prophetic portrayals of the sequence of both Christian and general history from the time of Jesus to the end of the

¹⁷¹See the similar outline in Shea, vol. 2, 145.

world.¹⁷² This assumption has not, however, been found compelling by specialists in the field.¹⁷³

As was the case with historical versus mystical apocalypses, Revelation seems to smoothly blend characteristics of both general and apocalyptic prophecy. It is written to a

¹⁷²Johnsson, in his article on the nature of prophecy (DARCOM, vol. 3, 282) provides only two paragraphs on Revelation (282). He argues that Revelation concerns things which “shall be hereafter” rather than “may be” (Rev 1:19). The book portrays how God will bring an end to the world order, rescue His people and produce a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells. These observations suggest that at least parts of Revelation are certainly apocalyptic in nature.

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. Stand, “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 it’s conditionality to the prophetic forecasts of Revelation.

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 DARCOM was disbanded at a time when General Conference committees were being downsized, and was never able to complete its work. Strand’s opening articles were added later, being a compendium of his earlier work, but were never seriously discussed in the committee.

¹⁷³While most scholars of apocalyptic today generally ignore the historicist view of prophecy as unworthy of discussion, a number of scholars have recently spoken to the issue: Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Eschatology and Composition of the Apocalypse,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30 (1968): 537-569; Boyer, Newport; O’Leary, and Weber, 9-10, 14-16. Newport’s recent book (150-236) contains the following fascinating chapter titles, among others, “William Miller, the book of Daniel and the end of the world,” “‘A Lamb-like Beast’: Rev 13:11-18 in the Seventh-day Adventist tradition,” and “Waco Apocalypse: the book of

specific time and place and the audience is clearly local and contemporary (Rev 1:1-4, 10-11, 2:1 - 3:22).¹⁷⁴ Its message was intended to be understood by the original audience (Rev 1:3).¹⁷⁵ It is not, therefore, simply a replay of the genre of Daniel.¹⁷⁶ On the other hand, the break between the old order and the new is radical and complete, just like that of Jewish apocalyptic (Rev 20:11 - 21:5). Prophetic action along a continuum can also be seen in passages like Rev 12 and in 17:10.¹⁷⁷ So the genre of Revelation is not nearly as cut and dried as seems to be the case with Daniel.¹⁷⁸

While the early critical consensus was that the book of Revelation was primarily

Revelation in the Branch Davidian tradition.”

¹⁷⁴Lest anyone be tempted to limit the prophetic portion of the book to the seven letters at the beginning, Rev 22:16 clearly states that the entire book was intended as a message to the churches.

¹⁷⁵Rev 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.” When the Greek verb for hearing (in this text it is in the participial form οἱ ἀκούοντες) takes an object, the case of that object determines whether the hearer has understood or not. If the object is in the genitive case, the hearer has heard but has not understood. If the object is in the accusative case, the hearer has heard and understood. 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”).

¹⁷⁶In Daniel, by way of contrast, there are texts that seem to postpone understanding: Dan 8:27; 12:4, 13.

¹⁷⁷Strand, “Foundational Principles of Interpretation,” 17.

¹⁷⁸From the Early Christian Apocalypticism Seminar (Society of Biblical Literature) through the Uppsala Conference scholars wrestled with the issue of whether Revelation was to be understood as prophetic, apocalyptic or epistolary in nature (late 70s to mid-80s). See David Hellholm, editor, *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983). See also volumes 14 and 36 of the journal *Semeia*.

apocalyptic,¹⁷⁹ that consensus has been seriously challenged. Some scholarly discussions of Revelation's genre suggest that it is more prophetic than apocalyptic,¹⁸⁰ others suggests a "prophetic-apocalyptic" genre,¹⁸¹ still others highlight the epistolary aspect of the book.¹⁸² What is clear is that the genre of Revelation is a mixed genre whose character cannot be determined with exactness.¹⁸³ When it comes to the book of Daniel, historicism as a method is not at issue, it is simply a question of whether to interpret along the lines of predictive prophecy or *ex eventu* prophecy. With Revelation, on the other hand, the appropriateness of historicist method is much less obvious.

Most Seventh-day Adventists have not yet felt the force of this difficulty. We inherited a historicist approach to Revelation from our Protestant forebears in the middle of the 19th

¹⁷⁹John 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.

¹⁸⁰Frederick David Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-Critical Perspective* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989).

¹⁸¹George Eldon Ladd; "Why Not Prophetic-Apocalyptic?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76 (1957): 192-200; Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Apokalypsis and Propheteia. 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.

¹⁸²Ulrich 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), pp. 599-619.

¹⁸³Typical of more recent discussion is the eclectic approach of G. K. Beale, *Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).

Century.¹⁸⁴ We have assumed that approach to be the correct one, but have never demonstrated it from the text. This came clearly into focus for me in the context of the Adventist conversations with 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 committee decided that scholarly justification for a historicist method in Revelation was needed. But when I asked where in the Adventist literature such a justification could be found, few had any idea.

My own subsequent search turned up only one Adventist argument for a historicist approach to Revelation. It goes something like this. 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.¹⁸⁵ This argument by itself is not satisfactory.

In the Lutheran-Adventist joint publication I added a further argument from the evidence of Jewish apocalyptic. I suggested that the historical time periods of *ex eventu* prophecy reflected the conviction that a genuine prophet such as Enoch, Moses, or Ezra would be capable of outlining history in advance.¹⁸⁶ Since John, the author of Revelation, believed

¹⁸⁴The works of E. B. Elliott and Alexander Keith seem to have been particularly influential.

¹⁸⁵Roy C. Naden, *The Lamb Among the Beasts* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1996), 44-48.

¹⁸⁶Lars Hartman, 25.

Russell commented on page 96 of his book *The Method and Message of Jewish*

that the prophetic spirit had returned (Rev 1:3; 19:9-10; 22:6-10),¹⁸⁷ he would have every reason to believe that the cosmic Christ could reveal to him the general outline of events between the advents. The return of genuine prophets would signal the return of predictive prophecy.¹⁸⁸

Should John's prophecies be understood more in terms of the classical prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah or more like the apocalyptic prophet Daniel? Do the symbolic visions retain some of the epistolary nature of the early chapters? Given the mixed picture of Revelation's genre this should be evaluated on a case by case basis.¹⁸⁹ An example of such an evaluation is given in the following material on Revelation 12. No passage in Revelation is more critical to Adventist self-understanding than Rev 12-13. I will, therefore, examine one of these chapters for evidence of whether it reflects the historical sequencing of an apocalyptic series or exhibits the characteristics of classical prophecy. We will try to determine on the basis of exegetical

Apocalyptic:

"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 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." By Charles, Russell is referring to the influential commentator on Revelation, R. H. Charles, who wrote in 1920.

¹⁸⁷John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 212; *ibid.*, "Pseudonymity," 331.

¹⁸⁸Jon Paulien, *Lutheran Dialogue*, 239-240.

¹⁸⁹In 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. Careful analysis suggests 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) bear the character of classical prophecy, along the lines of Matt 24, and the seven trumpets (Rev 8-11) are the most

analysis whether the apocalyptic reading of traditional Adventism is appropriate to Rev 12.

Principles of Evaluation

Before we take up the analysis of chapter 12, I would like to lay out some further principles for detecting apocalyptic sequencing in the symbolic visions of the Apocalypse. It is not appropriate to force the chapter into the historicist mode if that was not the intention of the text. We must allow the characteristics and purposes of each text to emerge out of the text. Only then can we accurately determine whether the chapter is a historical apocalypse or not.

Textual Markers

A significant indicator of an apocalyptic historical sequence is the presence of terms and developments in a text that indicate the successive passage of time. A major reason that the Daniel and Revelation Committee, for example, saw the trumpets as more apocalyptic than the seals was the presence of significant textual markers that time was passing as you moved through the trumpets, while such textual markers are completely missing in the seals.¹⁹⁰

The seven trumpets (Rev 8:2-11:18), for one thing, contain a number of time periods. There is a period of five months (Rev 9:5,10), a period of forty-two months (Rev 11:2), a period of 1260 days (11:3) and a period of three and a half days (11:9,11).¹⁹¹ No such periods of time

apocalyptic in nature.

¹⁹⁰No author, "Issues in Revelation: DARCOM Report," in *Symposium on Revelation--Book I*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6, edited by Frank Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 178-181.

¹⁹¹While some commentators point to "the hour, day, month and year" (εἰς τὴν ὥραν

are found anywhere within the seven seals (Rev 4:1-8:1), with the exception of the half-hour at the close.¹⁹² The sequential nature of the trumpets is strongly confirmed by the woe series

καὶ ἡμέραν καὶ μῆνα καὶ ἐνιαυτόν) of Rev 9:15 as a further indication of the passage of time, the grammar in the Greek is not so decisive. The construction of the clause suggests a point in time rather than a sequence (R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols., International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1920], 1:252). While Tarsee Li (“Revelation 9:15 and the Limits of Greek Syntax,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 8 [1 & 2, 1997]: 100-105) has raised legitimate questions about the grammar of this series of time indicators, he has not addressed the major issue that leads scholars to see this as a point in time rather than a period. Elsewhere in the Greek Bible, whenever a series of time markers moves from the shortest to the longest, it always reflects a point in time (Num 1:1—ἐν μιᾷ τοῦ μηνὸς τοῦ δευτέρου ἔτους δευτέρου; Hag 1:15—τῇ τετράδι καὶ εἰκάδι τοῦ μηνὸς τοῦ ἔκτου τῷ δευτέρῳ ἔτει; Zech 1:7—τῇ τετράδι καὶ εἰκάδι τῷ ἐνδεκάτῳ μηνί οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ μὴν Σάββατ ἐν τῷ δευτέρῳ ἔτει.; cf. Num 1:1; 10:11; 2 Kgs 25:27; 2 Chr 2:3; Ezr 6:15; Jer 52:12, 31; Ezek 1:2; Hag 2:10).

A grammatical detail which may allow the time markers in Rev 9:15 to express a period of time is the fact that they are in the accusative case (εἰς τὴν ὥραν καὶ ἡμέραν καὶ μῆνα καὶ ἐνιαυτόν), which normally expresses duration, rather than the dative case, which always expresses a point in time. This fact is not decisive, however, for two reasons. First, if John intended a point in time but used the wrong case, this is exactly the kind of grammatical error that is so typical of the Greek in this book. Second, the accusative case can express a limitation on the duration of an action (accusative of extent). The time markers in accusative can answer the implied question, “how long?” When the time markers in accusative are combined with the preposition εἰς (as in this text) the “until then” force of the accusative is even stronger. So the best reading of the time expression in its context is something like, “the four angels were in preparation (bound) up until that particular hour, day, month, and year when they would be released” (Rev 9:14-15— the point in time is the moment of their release to do their appointed work). See A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 469-471; F. Blass and A. DeBrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 88-89, 112.

¹⁹²The sequence in which the seals are broken do indicate a certain sequence in time, but it does not seem to be a “one-after-the other” kind of sequence such as one finds in Daniel 2 and 7. There are indicators that some of the seals overlap, for example, the ongoing nature

after the fourth (Rev 8:13). The first woe (fifth trumpet) ends before the second begins (9:12) and the second (sixth trumpet) ends before the third (seventh trumpet) begins (11:14). Trumpets five, six, and seven, therefore, not only occur as a sequence of time, each is completed before the next begins. This is a strong parallel to the apocalyptic sequences of Daniel. One further marker of the passage of time in the trumpets is found in Rev 10:7. There the blowing of the seventh trumpet immediately follows the completion of God's mystery (ὅταν μέλλῃ σαλπίζειν, καὶ ἐτελέσθῃ τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ), which is defined as the preaching of the gospel through God's servants the prophets (εὐηγγέλισεν τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ δούλους τοὺς προφῆτας). The textual markers in the seventh trumpet, therefore, strongly suggest that the vision of the seven trumpets is to be interpreted as an apocalyptic sequence of historical events. Further research also indicates that the trumpets run from NT times (the time of the human author) to the end of time.¹⁹³

Character Introduction

Another significant indicator of the passage of time in Revelation is the literary strategy we could call character introduction. Consistently throughout the book, the author of

of the first seal (Rev 6:2—ἐξῆλθεν νικῶν καὶ ἵνα νικήσῃ) the accumulative martyrdom of the fifth seal (Rev 6:9-11-- ἐρρέθη αὐτοῖς ἵνα ἀναπαύσονται ἔτι χρόνον μικρόν, ἕως πληρωθῶσιν καὶ οἱ σύνδουλοι αὐτῶν καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτῶν οἱ μέλλοντες ἀποκτένεσθαι ὡς καὶ αὐτοί), and the sense that the work of the four angels in Rev 7:1-3 is somehow an extension of Rev 6:1-8. On the first two points see Jon Paulien, "The Seven Seals," in *Symposium on Revelation-- Book I*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6, edited by Frank Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 230, 234-236.

¹⁹³Jon Paulien, "Seals and Trumpets: Some Current Discussions," in *Symposium on Revelation-- Book I*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6, edited by Frank Holbrook

Revelation introduces characters in general terms before describing their actions at the time of the vision. In other words, when a character appears in the book for the first time, there is a general description of the character's appearance, and often a number of prior actions (and occasionally even future actions), followed by a description of the actions the character takes in the context of the vision's own time and place setting. These character introduction passages normally offer clear markers of sequence.

When Jesus is introduced to John in chapter 1, the historical setting is John's location on the Island of Patmos (Rev 1:9). John then goes into vision and sees one like a son of man. This is the first appearance of Jesus in the book, although He and His works are mentioned earlier (1:1,4-7). While this passage (Rev 1:9-3:22) has few other characteristics of an apocalyptic prophecy, there is a clear movement in time taking place as you work through the passage.¹⁹⁴ John first hears Jesus' voice sounding like a trumpet (1:9-11), then he sees and describes Him (1:12-16), then he experiences His comforting and explanatory words (1:17-20), finally he hears His messages to the seven churches (2:1-3:22).

A similar thing happens in chapter 11. The visionary setting of the two witnesses passage is Rev 10:8-11, where a voice out of heaven and the angel of the previous vision (Rev

(Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 192, 194-198.

¹⁹⁴On possible further indicator of time sequencing in the passage is the fact that the opening character identification scene (1:12-20) is in the aorist tense (Rev 1:12-- ἐπέστρεψά ἑπιστρέψας εἶδον; Rev 1:17-- Καὶ ὅτε εἶδον αὐτόν, ἔπεσά . . . καὶ ἔθηκεν), a Greek tense signifying action at a point of time in the past, while the messages of the seven churches are in the present indicative, a Greek tense signifying ongoing action in the present). While this observation is of little significance to these early chapters of Revelation, it has large significance for the interpretation of Rev 13. See Jon Paulien, *Lutheran Dialogue*, 243-244.

10:1-7) engage John in a prophetic action (10:8-10), followed by an explanation.¹⁹⁵ As we have seen from our study of Daniel 2 and 7, explanations come to the prophet in terms of his own time and place. Since John continues to be engaged (Rev 11:1-2) and addressed (11:3ff.) in Revelation 11, the standpoint from which John experiences chapter 11 is his own.¹⁹⁶ It is not surprising, therefore, that the major time markers of 42 months and 1260 days are expressed in the future tense (Rev 11:2-- τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν πατήσουσιν μῆνας τεσσεράκοντα [καὶ] δύο; Rev 11:3-- δώσω τοῖς δυσὶν μάρτυσίν μου καὶ προφητεύουσιν ἡμέρας χιλίας διακοσίας ἐξήκοντα). These periods of time were future from the perspective of John.

The two witnesses themselves are introduced with a description of their appearance and an overall description of their characteristics and their actions in the present (11:4-6)¹⁹⁷ and in the future tense (11:3). These present and future tenses are to be understood from the perspective of an explanation to John in terms of his own time and place. The entire character introduction passage (11:3-6), the elements in future tense (3) as well as those in present tense (4-6), occurs prior to the visionary description that follows (11:7-13).¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 556.

¹⁹⁶It should be noted that Aune treats the Rev 10 and 11 as if they were distinct and separate visions with little or no relationship with each other. But a close reading of the Greek text would seem to indicate otherwise. Cf. David Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 585.

¹⁹⁷Note the present indicative tenses in Rev 11:4-6: 4 οὗτοί *εἰσιν* αἱ δύο ἐλαῖαι καὶ αἱ δύο λυχνῖαι αἱ ἐνώπιον τοῦ κυρίου τῆς γῆς ἐστῶτες. 5 καὶ εἴ τις αὐτοὺς *θέλει* ἀδικῆσαι πῦρ *ἐκπορεύεται* ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτῶν καὶ *κατεσθίει* τοὺς ἐχθροὺς αὐτῶν· καὶ εἴ τις θελήσῃ αὐτοὺς ἀδικῆσαι, οὕτως *δεῖ* αὐτὸν ἀποκτανθῆναι. 6 οὗτοι *ἔχουσιν* τὴν ἐξουσίαν κλεῖσαι τὸν οὐρανόν, ἵνα μὴ ὑετὸς βρέχῃ τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς προφητείας αὐτῶν, καὶ ἐξουσίαν *ἔχουσιν* ἐπὶ τῶν ὑδάτων στρέφειν αὐτὰ εἰς αἷμα καὶ πατάξαι τὴν γῆν ἐν πάσῃ πληγῇ ὅσακις ἐὰν θελήσωσιν.

¹⁹⁸This is clear from Rev 11:7: καὶ ὅταν τελέσωσιν τὴν μαρτυρίαν αὐτῶν. The testimony

The following time sequence, therefore, is evident in Rev 10:8-11:12. John is engaged and addressed by a voice from heaven and a visionary angel in his time and place. He then measures the temple, which is to be trampled for 42 months in John's future, presumably the same period as the 1260 days of 11:3. Then the two witnesses are introduced. Whoever they are, they clearly exist in John's day (present tenses) and have an ongoing existence. At some future point from John's perspective, the two witnesses pass through a 1260 day period of testimony. It is only after that period of testimony that the martyrdom of these witnesses and their resurrection is to occur.¹⁹⁹ So the three step time sequence of this passage is as follows:

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) The Time of John (Rev 10:8-10)
 Witnesses have ongoing existence (11:4-6)
 John measures the temple (11:1-2)2) The 1260 Days of Testimony (11:3)
 The Gentiles trample the temple (11:2)3) The Death, Resurrection and Ascension of the Two Witnesses (11:7-12)
 At the same time an earthquake destroys a tenth of "The City" (11:13)
 As a result of both events a remnant glorifies God (11:13; cf. 14:7) |
|--|

Old Testament Roots

When reading the Book of Revelation one is plunged fully into the atmosphere of the

of the two witnesses (cf. verse 3-- also referred to as prophesying or prophecy in verses 3 and 6) is to occur for a period of 1260 days in John's future. That is all part of the introduction to the actions in verses 7-12. When the two witnesses have finished their testimony (the 1260 days are closed), the actions of verses 7ff. begin; cf. Aune, *Revelation* 6-16, 616.

¹⁹⁹Both the period of testimony and the ascension of these two witnesses seem to carry out the statement of the angel in 10:11 that John is to "prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and languages and kings."

Old Testament.²⁰⁰ No book of the New Testament is as saturated with the Old as this one is.²⁰¹

But while it is not difficult to recognize the central place of the Old Testament in the Book of Revelation, it is difficult to determine exactly how it is being used there. A reader acquainted with the Old Testament quickly notices that Revelation never directly quotes the Old Testament, rather it alludes to it with a word here, a phrase there, or a concept in another place.²⁰² Careful and consistent application of method is essential to recognizing the Old Testament subtext to the apocalyptic prophecies of Revelation. Such a method is laid out in the report from the Daniel and Revelation Committee in the early 90s.²⁰³

The importance of the Old Testament in Revelation can be seen by a second look at the character introduction passages examined above. The vision in which Jesus is physically introduced to the reader (Rev 1:12-16) is based on a variety of Old Testament texts. The golden lampstands are a reminder of the lampstand in the Old Testament sanctuary (Exod 25:31-40) and the vision of Zechariah (Zech 4:2,10). Jesus' dress recalls the dress of the High Priest in the same sanctuary (Exod 28:4,31). The voice like rushing waters reminds the reader of the appearance of Almighty God in the book of Ezekiel (Ezek 1:24; 43:2). The two-edged sword

²⁰⁰To borrow language from Henri Stierlin, *La vérité sur L'Apocalypse* (Paris: Editions Buchet/Chastel, 1972), 55.

²⁰¹Pierre Lestrinant (*Essai sur l'unité de la révélation biblique* [Paris: Editions "Je Sers," 1942], 148) suggests that one-seventh of the substance of the Apocalypse is drawn from the words of the OT.

²⁰²While a handful of scholars argue for anywhere from one to eleven "quotations" of the OT in the book of Revelation, (see, for example, Robert G. Bratcher, ed., *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1967), 74-76) the overwhelming majority of scholars conclude that there are none.

²⁰³Paulien, "Interpreting Revelation's Symbolism," especially 80-92.

coming from Jesus' mouth is reminiscent of Yahweh's judgments through His messianic Servant in Isaiah (Isa 11:4; 49:2). The reader's appreciation and understanding of Revelation's apocalyptic-style symbolism is greatly enhanced by following up a veritable mosaic of Old Testament allusions.²⁰⁴

But what ties all these Old Testament allusions together is a comprehensive utilization of the descriptions of two characters in the book of Daniel, the Son of Man of Dan 7:13-14 and Daniel's mysterious visitor in 10:5-6.²⁰⁵ Virtually every detail of the description in 1:12-16 is found in those two passages. The same Jesus who walked and talked with ordinary people here on earth is described in terms of the mighty acts of Yahweh and of His heavenly and earthly messengers in the Old Testament. The parallels to the Old Testament lend much meaning to what otherwise would be a bewildering and incomprehensible description. So Jesus is depicted in this introduction as a heavenly priest, cosmic ruler, and divine judge.²⁰⁶ In 1:17-18 he exercises his priesthood in his merciful gentleness to John, 1:19-20 makes clear that his royal rule will be exercised in judgment, both positive and negative, toward the churches.²⁰⁷ And this marvelous passage right at the beginning of the book of Revelation emphasizes its strong ties to the apocalyptic book of Daniel.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴William Milligan, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, (London: MacMillan and Co., 1892), 72.

²⁰⁵Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 208.

²⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 206.

²⁰⁷In this He is a model for the churches, who are a "kingdom of priests" (Rev 1:5-6).

²⁰⁸G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 154-177. Beale goes so far as to suggest that Rev 1 offers an intentional "midrash" on Daniel 7 (173-176). See the contrary viewpoint in David Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52, edited by David A.

The description of the two witnesses (Rev 11:3-6), on the other hand, is based on the lampstand passage of Zechariah (Zech 4:2-3,11-14), and also the exploits of Moses and Elijah in the Old Testament (cf. Exod 7:17-21; 1 Kings 17:1; 2 Kings 1:10-12).²⁰⁹ The two witnesses are prophets like the great prophets of the Old Testament; Moses, Elijah and Zechariah. But the prophets in Revelation all bear witness to Jesus (Rev 1:9; 2:13; 12:11,17; 17:6).²¹⁰ The richness of these background narratives is crucial to understanding what John was trying to say in writing the visions out as he did. So careful attention to the Old Testament becomes a crucial part of the process by which apocalyptic prophecies need to be understood.

Revelation 12

A good reason to choose Revelation 12 as a sample passage for study is that it is widely seen as a center and key to the entire book.²¹¹ In addition, Adventists understand Revelation 12 to offer an apocalyptic prophecy of three sequential stages of Christian history. The first stage is the Christ-event back in the first century (Rev 12:1-5). The third is the final battle between the dragon and the Remnant (12:17). The second is the vast middle period of 1260 years of papal supremacy in the Middle Ages and beyond.²¹² Let's take a careful look at the

Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, 3 vols. (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1997), 1: 93-94.

²⁰⁹Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 572, 577; Aune, *Revelation* 6-16, 585.

²¹⁰Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 572.

²¹¹Pierre Prigent, *Apocalypse 12: histoire de l'exegèse* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Karl Siebeck], 1959), 1. Angel Rodriguez considers it the finest summary of the cosmic conflict between God and the forces of evil in the entire Scriptures (Rodriguez, 90).

²¹²See, for example, Anderson, *Unfolding the Revelation*, 118-120; Mark A. Finley, *Predictions for a New Millennium* (Fallbrook, CA: HART Books, 2000), 398-400; Haskell, *The*

chapter in light of the previous work in this paper to see whether it best reflects the historicist sequences of apocalyptic prophecy, or whether it should be interpreted along the lines of classical prophecy.

First of all, chapter 12 does have a couple of the textual markers that indicate passage of time. In Rev 12:6 the woman is taken care of by God in the desert for 1260 days. In Rev 12:14 she is taken care of for a time, times and half a time, presumably the same period as 12:6.²¹³ So Revelation 12 is not describing a single event, but a considerable period of time. This alone inclines an interpreter to see Rev 12 in apocalyptic terms rather than those of classical prophecy.

This impression is enhanced when the reader realizes that the cryptic phrase “a time, times, and half a time” (Rev 12:14) is unquestionably based on a couple of the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel (Dan 7:25; 12:7).²¹⁴ Further study leads to the discovery that Rev 12 builds on Daniel throughout. The dragon of Rev 12:3-4 has a number of the characteristics of the beasts of Daniel 7 and of the little horn (Dan 7:7,24; 8:10).²¹⁵ The war in heaven of 12:7-9 makes several allusions to Daniel (Dan 2:35; 10:13,20-21; 12:1). This broad utilization of Daniel’s apocalyptic prophecies enhances the impression that Rev 12 should be interpreted along similar lines.

Story of the Seer of Patmos, 221-222; Naden, 190; Uriah Smith, 517-519.

²¹³Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 706; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 668-669.

²¹⁴Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 706; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 669.

²¹⁵Among other things, if you total up the number of heads and horns among the four beasts of Dan 7 you get seven heads and ten horns. This suggests that the heads of the dragon represent civil powers that Satan has used to oppress God’s people throughout history.

Finally, Revelation 12 contains a number of character identifications with their typical time sequences. First, a woman appears in heaven, clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head (12:1). 12:1-2 is based on the Old Testament image of a virtuous woman as a symbol of faithful Israel (Isa 26:16-27; 54:5; 66:7-14; Hos 2:14-20), anticipating the arrival of the messianic age.²¹⁶ So the woman of Rev 12 has a “pedigree” that carries back well into Old Testament prophecy. According to Isa 66:7, she is the faithful Israel that longed to give birth to the Lord’s salvation.²¹⁷ But in verse 5 she acts in the context of the vision, giving birth to a male child who is generally recognized to be a symbol of Jesus.²¹⁸ So her character and actions described in 12:1-2 are clearly prior to the actions in verses 5 and the actions of verse 5 are prior to the actions of verse 6. After she gives birth to the child (12:5) she is seen fleeing into the desert for a lengthy period (12:6). So the experience of the woman in Rev 12:1-6 is actually depicted in three stages; 1) the time of her appearance and pregnancy, 2) the time of giving birth, and 3) the time of fleeing into the desert.

²¹⁶Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, Proclamation Commentaries (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 80-81.

²¹⁷Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 682, 687; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 640-641.

²¹⁸Fiorenza (*Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 81) considers this identification “without question. See also Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 687-689; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 639; William G. Johnsson, “The Saints’ End-Time Victory Over the Forces of Evil,” *Symposium on Revelation—Book II*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7, edited by Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 18; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 17 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 238-239; Robert W. Wall, *Revelation*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 161; Charles H. Talbert, *The Apocalypse: A Reading of the Revelation of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 49; Frederick J. Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon: The Revelation to John*, The New Testament in

The second character to be introduced in this chapter is the dragon (Rev 12:3-4), who represents the devil, or Satan (Rev 12:9). The dragon's initial action in the context of the vision is described in 12:4, where he waits before the woman, seeking to devour her child as soon as it is born. Scholars widely recognize that the dragon's attack on the male child in Rev 12:5 represents Herod's attempt to destroy the Christ child by killing all the babies in Bethlehem (Matt 2:1-18).²¹⁹ But the description of the dragon, as it was with the woman, carries back to a time before the events of the vision.

The dragon's pedigree is seen in the heads and the horns of Daniel 7 (Rev 12:3), it is the embodiment of the kingdoms of the world in service of Satan.²²⁰ His pedigree, in fact, goes all the way back to Eden ("the old serpent" – Rev 12:9,15). And prior to his attack on the woman, his tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to earth (Rev 12:4).²²¹

But the dragon isn't finished when the male child gets away in verse 5. The dragon pursues the woman into the desert (12:13-16) and eventually makes war with the remnant of

Context (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 284.

²¹⁹Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 639; Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 331; Kendell H. Easley, *Revelation*, Holman New Testament Commentaries, edited by Max Anders (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 209; Maxwell, *God Cares*, vol. 2, 320; J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, edited by Grant R. Osborne (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 147; James Moffat, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, The Expositor's Greek Testament, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 5:425; J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation*, Westminster Pelican Commentaries (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979), 196-197.

²²⁰Rodriguez, 93. Rodriguez applies the succession of kingdoms represented by the seven heads in chapter 17 to the dragon in chapter 12.

²²¹An allusion to Dan 8:10, according to Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 635-636.

her seed. So the dragon in chapter 12 is actually described in terms of four successive stages,²²² 1) his attack on a third of the stars (12:4), 2) his attack on the male child (12:4-5), 3) his attack against the woman herself (12:13-16), and finally 4) his war against the remnant. The character and actions of both the woman and the dragon suggest the successive periods of a historical apocalypse.

The third character to be introduced in this chapter is the male child, the woman's son. The scene is reminiscent of Gen 3:15, where the seed of the woman is the one who will crush the serpent's head.²²³ This character introduction is unique in the sense that instead of describing a pedigree or prior action on the part of this male child, the introduction focuses instead on action beyond the time of the vision. Using the future tense, He is described as the one who "will rule (μέλλει ποιμαίνειν) all the nations with an iron scepter" (Rev 12:5). This allusion to Psalm 2:9 describes Jesus' judgment role at the end of time.²²⁴ The very next phrase reverts to the visionary past, "her child was snatched up to God and to his throne." In 12:5 reference is made, then, to the birth, the ascension, and the ultimate victory of Jesus Christ. The death of Christ on the cross is only brought into play in verses 10-12.

The Time of Jesus and John

The result of the dragon's attack in 12:4-5 is to split up the woman and the child. He is snatched up to heaven and she flees into the desert, under God's protection but still on earth (Rev 12:6). When the male child reaches heaven war breaks out there, with the result that the

²²²Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 603-604.

²²³Rodriguez, 94.

dragon and his angels lose their place in heaven and are hurled down (evblh,qh) to earth (12:7-9). When did this casting out take place? Verse 10 clearly addresses the same point in time as the war of 7-9.²²⁵ “Now (:Arti) have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers has been hurled down (evblh,qh).”²²⁶

The time of the war in heaven is the time when the kingdom of God and the authority of Christ were clearly established (12:10). In the book of Revelation, this took place at the enthronement of the Lamb in as a result of His overcoming at the cross (Rev 5:5-6, cf. 3:21).²²⁷ Throughout the New Testament the Kingdom of God was seen as a present reality in the person of Jesus (Matt 12:28; Luke 17:20-21, etc.) and was established in force at His ascension when He joined His Father on the heavenly throne (cf. Heb 8:1-2, etc.).²²⁸ “Accuser of our brothers” (12:10) is a play on the Hebrew meaning of the word Satan (12:9), which means “the one who accuses.”²²⁹ Apparently up until the cross, Satan and his accusations still had a certain credibility in heavenly places, but now this is all over.²³⁰ The accused can now overcome Satan

²²⁴See Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 688.

²²⁵Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 699-700; Rodriguez, 95.

²²⁶In Greek Rev 12:10 reads as follows: καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν μεγάλην ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ λέγουσαν, Ὁ ἄρτι ἐγένετο ἡ σωτηρία καὶ ἡ δύναμις καὶ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἐβλήθη ὁ κατήγωρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἡμῶν, ὁ κατηγορῶν αὐτοὺς ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός.

²²⁷Cf. Johnsson, “The Saints’ End-Time Victory,” 19; Rodriguez, 95.

²²⁸See my elaboration on these issues with regard to Rev 5 in “The Seven Seals,” 200-221.

²²⁹Victor P. Hamilton, “Satan,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols., edited by David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 5: 985.

²³⁰Rodriguez (95) notes that even after Satan was cast out of heaven in the beginning,

by “the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony” (verse 11). Beale addresses this matter in a fascinating way, “The emphasis on Satan’s accusatorial role in 12:10 reveals that the angelic battle of vv 7-9 was figurative for a courtroom battle between two opposing lawyers, with one losing the argument and being disbarred for employing illegal tactics.”²³¹

The language of 12:7-9, however, is also reminiscent of 12:4, where the dragon hurled (ε;balen) a third of the stars from heaven to earth. But that event occurred before the birth of Christ, and the war of 12:7-9 occurred after the ascension. So there are two separate events in this chapter in which a hurling down from heaven occurs, one is prior to the birth of Christ (12:4), and the other is after His ascension (12:7-10).

How long before the birth of Christ did the dragon sweep a third of the stars from heaven to earth? The traditional Adventist answer is “before creation.” The exact timing of that action is not addressed in this chapter, but a strong hint is found in Rev 13:8, where the Lamb is described as “slain from the creation of the world” (τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου). This comment finds no context in the entire book unless the dragon’s action in 12:4 represents that primeval attack on the Lamb. If that is the case, the war in heaven of 12:7-9, while clearly in the context of the cross in Revelation 12, nevertheless speaks in the language of that earlier conflict.²³²

he still had limited access to the heavenly courts, and his primary function was to accuse the servants of God (Job 1:6; Zech 3:1-2).

²³¹Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 661. Beale credits the idea behind this sentence to G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Harper’s/Black’s New Testament Commentaries (NY: Harper and Row, 1966), 154-156.

²³²Remarkable support for this comes from a leading Roman Catholic scholar: Adela

In His earthly life, therefore, Jesus was participating in a war that had begun in heaven before His arrival on earth (Rev 12:3-4,7-9). At His ascension, Jesus establishes His kingdom and casts the “accuser of the brothers” (Rev 12:10) out of heaven. Since the dragon had already been cast out of heaven physically, according to the symbolism of 12:4, the language of 12:7-12 implies that after the Christ-event, Satan has no more influence over heavenly deliberations.²³³ This casting out is, therefore, more spiritual than physical. It is interesting, that while the dragon appears in all four stages of the conflict in chapter 12, the actions of Jesus, expressed in the images of the male child, the Lamb, Christ, and probably Michael, are confined to the second stage, the time of Jesus’ birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and heavenly rule (Rev 12:5-10).

The Broad Sweep of Christian History

Rev 12:12 makes the transition between the experience of Jesus, in his various symbolic representations, and the vision’s renewed focus on the woman back on earth. Her exile into the desert was introduced in 12:6 and now becomes the focus of the devil/dragon, who was angered by his casting out and by the knowledge that “his time is short.” In apocalyptic language this verse tells us that after Jesus’ ascension to heaven, the church took the brunt of Satan’s wrath on earth (Rev 12:13-16). Having been cast out of heaven, the dragon pursues the woman into the desert (12:13). The language of 12:13-16 is reminiscent of several accounts in

Yarbro Collins, *The Apocalypse*, New Testament Message, vol. 22, edited by Wilfrid Harrington and Donald Senior (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1979), 86.

²³³The first two chapters of Job certainly suggest that Satan had some continuing influence in heavenly places during Old Testament times.

the Old Testament, the vision of Daniel 7, the Exodus from Egypt, and the temptation and fall in the Garden of Eden.

The language of “a time, times and half a time” recalls Dan 7:25,²³⁴ as do the seven heads and the ten horns of the dragon who pursues the woman. In Daniel 7 the breakup of Rome into ten parts was followed by a little horn power, which was to persecute and “oppress God’s saints for a time, times and half a time.” (Dan 7:25) The only time in history that comes even close to matching this description is the Middle Ages, when the Roman Papacy dominated the Western world and drove competing views of Christianity into obscurity.

“The mouth of the serpent” (Rev 12:15) reminds the reader of the deceptive words of the serpent in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3). The flooding waters that attack the woman in the desert (the faithful church), therefore, imply deceptive and persuasive words as much as persecuting force. In the Middle Ages, unbiblical teachings were fed to the people in the name of Christ.

The woman fleeing into the desert on the two wings of a great eagle (Rev 12:14) reminds the reader of the Exodus experience, where God carried the tribes of Israel “on eagle’s wings” out of Egypt (Exod 19:4).²³⁵ So the experience of the woman, who represents the people of God, is built on the language of Old Testament Israel, both before and after the time of Christ. The experiences of Old Testament Israel and those of the Church are closely entwined in the book of Revelation.

In Rev 12:16 the “earth” helped the woman. This is a further allusion to the Exodus and

²³⁴Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 706.

Israel's experience in the desert.²³⁶ The desert protected Israel from the "flooding waters" of both the Red Sea and the Egyptian army. If "sea" also represents the settled populations of the earth,²³⁷ "earth" here may represent more desolate places where the true people of God obtained refuge from deceptive and persecuting opponents; the Alps in Europe during the Middle Ages, and places like North America, South Africa, and Australia afterward. Toward the end of the 1260 years (the 16th through the 18th centuries) many forces came together to elevate the Bible and to end the persecution of God's people; the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the American Revolution, and the beginnings of the great missionary expansion of the 19th century. During that period of calm, the dragon prepares for his final attack (Rev 12:17).

The Final Attack on the Remnant

Rev 12:17 serves as a summary introduction to Revelation's portrayal of a great final crisis at the conclusion of earth's history. It indicates that there are two sides in the final conflict, represented by the dragon, on the one hand, and the remnant on the other. But the dragon does not immediately act on his anger. Instead he "went away" to make war.²³⁸ Why? Because he was frustrated by repeated failures in the course of apocalyptic history. He was not strong enough to last in heaven (Rev 12:8), he failed to destroy the man-child of the woman (Rev 12:3-5), and he failed to destroy the woman herself (Rev 12:16). Because of his repeated

²³⁵Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 705; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 673-675.

²³⁶Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 675-6.

²³⁷As Rev 17:15 may suggest.

²³⁸Rev 12:17: ἀπῆλθεν ποιῆσαι πόλεμον.

failures he realizes he doesn't have the strength to defeat God's purposes by himself, so he decides to enter the final conflict with allies, a beast from the sea and a beast from the earth (Rev 13:1-18). The remnant are ultimately, therefore, faced with three opponents: 1) the dragon; 2) the sea beast, and 3) the land beast.

In the book of Revelation, God is often spoken of in three's--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Rev 1:4-5). So the dragon, the sea beast and the land beast in Revelation 13 would seem to be a counterfeit of the holy three, an alternative to the true Godhead.²³⁹ These texts indicate that there is to be a great, final world-wide deception where a counterfeit "trinity" stands in the place of the true God. The purpose of the counterfeit is to deceive the world.

Rev 12:17 summarizes the final stage of earth's history in a nutshell, the rest of the book of Revelation elaborates on that summary introduction.²⁴⁰ Rev 13, for example, outlines in more detail the dragon's war against the remnant of the woman's seed (Rev 12:17).²⁴¹ Linguistically this occurs in two great stages signaled by the Greek tenses in relation to the final attack of Rev 12:17. Two beasts (from the sea and the earth) are each given "character introductions" in the aorist tense (Rev 13:1-7; 13:11).²⁴² These aorist portions begin with a visual description of each character followed by an account of that character's subsequent actions. Being in the aorist tense, these actions would seem to have occurred prior to the dragon's final war against the remnant.

²³⁹Paulien, *Lutheran Dialogue*, 248-250; Johnsson, "The Saints' End-Time Victory," 21-22.

²⁴⁰This next section is elaborated in more detail in Paulien, *End-Time*, 109-138.

²⁴¹Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 680.

²⁴²The account of the beast coming up out of the sea involves a creative reworking of Daniel 7; see *Ibid.*, 683.

In each scene the Greek of Rev 13 then moves from description in the aorist tense to a mixture of present and future tenses (Rev 13:8-10; 13:12-18), describing the actions of these two beasts in the context of the final attack of Rev 12:17. So two stages of history are clearly marked off by the Greek tenses signaling events prior to the dragon's war (aorist tense) and an elaboration of the events of the war itself (present and future tenses).²⁴³ Beale has noted that Rev 13 is parallel in time with 12:13-17, which coheres with the Adventist position described here.²⁴⁴

There is one further passage in Revelation which speaks to this end-time deception, Rev 16:13-16, the famous Battle of Armageddon passage. Here the counterfeit trinity of Rev 13 uses demonic spirits that look like frogs to gather the kings of earth for the final battle. Since frogs were the last plague that the magicians of ancient Egypt were able to counterfeit (see Exod 7:18-19 in context),²⁴⁵ the use of frogs as a symbol here signals that the message of Revelation 16 has to do with the last deception of earth's history.

The three frogs are the demonic counterparts of the three God-sent angels of Rev 14:6-12. Both groups of angels have a mission to the whole world (Rev 14:6; 16:14), one trio calling the world to worship God, and the other seeking to gather the people of the world into the service of the unholy trinity. The final showdown takes place at "Armageddon" (Rev 16:16).

²⁴³ Rev 13:1-7 = aorist tense
Rev 13:8-10 = present and future tenses
Rev 13:11 = aorist tense
Rev 13:12-18 = present and future tenses

²⁴⁴Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 680.

²⁴⁵Ibid., 832.

My work on the “Armageddon” article for the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*²⁴⁶ led me to the conclusion that the best way to understand the word Armageddon, in the light of the Biblical evidence, is as the Greek form of a couple of Hebrew words that mean "Mountain of Meggido."²⁴⁷ Meggido was a city on a small elevation at the edge of the Plain of Jezreel. Looming over the place where the city of Megiddo was, however, is a range of mountains called Carmel.

What counts for Revelation is that Mount Carmel was the place where the great Old Testament showdown between Elijah and the prophets of Baal took place (1 Kings 18:16-46).²⁴⁸ On that occasion God answered Elijah's prayer to bring fire down from heaven onto an altar in order to prove that Yahweh was the true God, not Baal.

According to Revelation, the Mount Carmel experience will be repeated at the End. Once again there will be a showdown between the true God and a devious counterfeit. But it will be different this time. At the End the fire that comes down falls from heaven will fall on the wrong altar. It will be the counterfeit Elijah and the counterfeit three angels who bring fire down from heaven to earth (Rev 13:13,14). On that day all the evidence of the five senses will suggest that the counterfeit trinity is the true God. Adventists see themselves as the “church of the remnant” whose recognition of the realities described in these prophecies enables them to help prepare their fellow Christians and others for the unique challenges of the last days.

²⁴⁶Jon Paulien, “Armageddon,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by David Noel Freedman (NY: Doubleday, 1992), 1:394-395; cf. also idem, *End-Time*, 114-115..

²⁴⁷Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 839-840.

²⁴⁸William H. Shea, “The Location and Significance of Armageddon in Rev 16:16,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 18 (1980): 157-162.

Revelation 12, therefore, clearly demonstrates the successive stages of prophetic history that are characteristic of the historical type of apocalyptic found in Daniel 2 and 7. Observing carefully the markers in the text, the author's use of character introductions and way the Old Testament is utilized, we have detected three stages of Christian history running from the time of Jesus and the John to the end of all things. When we note that at least two of the main characters in the chapter were active in the time before the birth of Jesus (which we will call below Stage Zero), there are a total of four successive stages of apocalyptic history.²⁴⁹ These can be summarized as follows:

²⁴⁹It is most interesting that Aune has also identified four total stages in this chapter, with the first being an "introduction of the dramatis personae." For Aune, stage one is the birth and escape of the child (4-6), stage two is the expulsion of the dragon from heaven (7-12) and stage three is the pursuit of the woman and her offspring (13-17). See Aune, *Revelation* 6-16, 603-604.

- 1) Stage Zero: Before the Time of the Vision (12:1-4)
 - The original war in heaven (4)
 - The dragon embodies the kingdoms of the earth (3)
 - The woman represents OT Israel (1-2)
- 2) Stage One: The Time of Jesus and John (12:5,7-12)
 - The woman gives birth to the male child (5)
 - He is snatched up to heaven (5)
 - War in heaven (7-9)
 - Enthronement and victory (10-11)
 - Transition (12)
- 3) Stage Two: The Serpent Attacks the Woman (12:6,13-16)
 - The dragon pursues the woman (13)
 - She flees into the desert and is protected 1260 days (6,14)
 - The serpent spews water to sweep her away (15)
 - The earth helps the woman (16)
- 4) Stage Three: The Dragon and the Remnant, (Rev 12:17, etc.)
 - The dragon is angry and goes away to make war (12:17)
 - He calls up allies for the conflict (13:1-7,11)
 - The unholy trinity deceives and persecutes (13:8-10,12-18)
 - The remnant responds (14:1-13)
 - The return of Jesus (14:14-20)

Conclusion

Even in apocalyptic prophecy God meets people where they are. Although He knows the end from the beginning, He does not choose to express Himself beyond the comprehension of the original writer and audience. Historicism, therefore, is built on passages where the time element is not explicit at the point of first reception. Events can be portrayed as a long time in the future (Dan 8:26-27; 12:11-13) or extremely near (Rev 1:3; 22:10). Whether the sequence of Daniel 2 would take a lifetime or thousands of years was not evident in the vision itself, but becomes evident with the passage of time.

So it is also with Revelation 12. The vision clearly begins with the generation of Jesus and John and moves to the final events of earth's history. But the great length of the intervening period is not obvious from markers in the text, being hidden in the use of days instead of years among other things. As history progresses and the time of fulfillment comes, the sequences and their historical fulfillment become more plain (John 13:19; 14:29).

It is probably true that none of the biblical writers foresaw the enormous length of the Christian era. The passage of time has opened up new vistas in terms of the Lord's patience and purpose. Having foreseen such a delay, would not God prepare His people to understand the great events by which He is bringing history to its climax? Historicism is grounded in the conviction that God knows the end from the beginning and cares enough for His people to share an outline of those events. While it is only from the perspective of the Parousia that history will speak with perfect clarity, each generation must make the attempt to understand biblical apocalyptic or risk being surprised by God's final acts (Rev 16:15 cf. 1 Thess 5:1-6).