

# **The 1260 Days in the Book of Revelation**

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## ***Introduction***

From the beginning of the movement on, Seventh-day Adventists have grounded their identity in the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. Central to their interpretation has been the year-day principle in which the unusual time periods of Daniel and Revelation<sup>1</sup> are treated in terms of a day for a year.<sup>2</sup> One of those unusual time periods in Daniel and Revelation is the “1260 days,” a concept that occurs seven times in three different forms.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>1260 days; 42 months; time, times and half a time; 2300 evenings and mornings; and 70 weeks are all atypical ways of expressing the passage of time, signaling a symbolic usage of some sort. The typical way in which one would express such periods can be found in the “three and a half years” of Luke 4:25 and James 5:17 (both references to the length of the drought in Elijah’s day).

<sup>2</sup>A summary of the year-day principle with significant arguments in its favor can be found in William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, Daniel & Revelation Committee Series, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1982), 56-93.

<sup>3</sup>The phrase “1260 days” appears in Rev 11:3 and 12:6. The parallel phrase “42 months” occurs in Rev 11:2 and 13:5. “Time, times and half a time” (generally thought of as three and a half years—roughly equivalent to the first two periods) is found in Dan 7:25; 12:7, and Rev 12:14.

In recent years significant objections to the traditional Adventist understanding of apocalyptic time prophecies in general and the 1260-day texts in particular have been raised.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of this paper is to explore the exegetical significance of the 1260-day texts in Revelation. My exegesis of the five Revelation texts will be exploratory rather than definitive or apologetic. I hope that this paper can stimulate discussions that will strengthen the base of evidence for Adventist identity and belief.

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<sup>4</sup>While Desmond Ford did not focus on the 1260-day texts, he hinted in his Glacier View manuscript that there were problems with the traditional view, citing at length discussions among church leaders at the 1919 Bible Conference (Desmond Ford, *Daniel 8:14, The Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment* (Casselberry, FL: Euangelion Press, 1980), 209-215). More recently Samuele Bacchiocchi has raised issues with the 1260-day texts in more detail. See Samuele Bacchiocchi,, "ENDTIME ISSUES No. 86: Islam and the Papacy in Prophecy," an e-newsletter originating at [sbacchiocchi@qtm.net](mailto:sbacchiocchi@qtm.net); idem, "ENDTIME ISSUES No. 87: A Reply to Criticism: Part I," and ENDTIME ISSUES No. 90: "September 11 and God's Mysterious Mercy." He also shared with me and at least seven others a piece he chose not to publish widely.

## ***The 1260 Days and the Foreknowledge of God***

### **The Traditional Position**

The traditional Adventist position on the 1260-day time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation is expressed in works by Uriah Smith and C. Mervyn Maxwell.<sup>5</sup> According to Smith, the seven 1260-day passages in the Bible all refer to the same period and should be calculated symbolically in terms of a year for a day.<sup>6</sup> That period began in the year 538 AD when the Arian Ostrogoths were driven away from Rome, allowing the bishop of Rome to assert control of Christian churches according to the decree of Justinian in 533. The period ended in 1798 AD when the French general Berthier entered Rome, proclaimed a republic and took the pope prisoner.<sup>7</sup> The interpretation is largely asserted. He offers little in the way of exegetical argument and the accuracy of his historical account is assumed rather than argued.

Maxwell sought to strengthen the traditional position on both counts. He noted that the 1260-day period began to be seen as years around 1200 AD.<sup>8</sup> While a variety of dates were suggested for this period by prominent writers from Martin Luther to Jonathan Edwards, a

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<sup>5</sup>Uriah Smith, *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation*, revised and newly illustrated (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1944); C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares: The Message of Revelation for You and Your Family*, vol. 2 (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1985). Some might question the absence of Ellen White's writings here. It seems to me her work falls into a separate category and should be explored as a central issue in this discussion. My sense is that her work on the 1260-day texts is not original, but is largely based on the work of Smith and John Nevins Andrews.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, 533, 144-145.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 145.

<sup>8</sup>Maxwell, 276 (Joachim of Floris).

consensus regarding the dates 538 and 1798 began to develop in the wake of the French Revolution in the 1790s.<sup>9</sup> Maxwell argued that the massive importance of the French Revolution in European history made it the fitting conclusion to the period.<sup>10</sup>

In his Daniel commentary Maxwell further notes that the 1260 days do not represent a period of total papal dominance in Europe. Instead the period from 538-1798 AD is characterized by a “rising and then declining influence of Roman Catholicism over the minds of men.”<sup>11</sup> It was a period of great persecution for the people of God.<sup>12</sup> In spite of the great size of Smith’s and Maxwell’s works, the history is more asserted than argued and the exegetical base in Daniel and Revelation is hardly touched at all.

The work of the Daniel and Revelation Committee was intended to remedy the perceived defects in the Adventist prophetic positions. I will limit myself to a brief survey of the work on the five 1260-day texts in Revelation 11-13. The Committee was disbanded for financial reasons before it could examine Revelation 11 in any detail. Thus, there is no exegetical or historical insight on the references in Rev 11:2-3 to be found in the Committee’s published works.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 277.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 281-292.

<sup>11</sup>C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares: The Message of Daniel for You and Your Family*, vol. 1 (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1981), 124.

<sup>12</sup>Maxwell, *God Cares*, vol. 2, 304.

<sup>13</sup>In 1988, in a meeting at Newbold College, the Committee heard a paper on Revelation 11 but concluded that it was not a helpful starting point on the subject. The Committee was disbanded before another paper on the subject could be presented.

Several chapters in the Daniel and Revelation Committee Series do address Revelation, chapters 12 and 13.<sup>14</sup> William Shea asserts that the time periods of Rev 12:6, 14 are the same as that of Dan 12:7, offering the language of Rev 12:14 as evidence.<sup>15</sup> Literarily, Shea divides chapter 12 into three consecutive periods, with the two 1260-day texts both fitting into the middle period, which favors a historicist interpretation over the preterist or futurist options.<sup>16</sup>

For chapter 13 Shea argues that the 42 months of verse five is the same period as Rev 12:6, 14 on account of their identical length.<sup>17</sup> Since the beast from the sea is the successor of the dragon, the 42 months must come after the first period of Revelation 12.<sup>18</sup> Thus the time periods of Revelation 12 and 13 refer to the same period of history.

In the next volume of the DARCOM series William Johnsson notes that Rev 12:6, 14 describe the 1260 days from the perspective of the people of God, portrayed as a woman in the wilderness. Rev 13:5, on the other hand, portrays the same period from the perspective of the

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<sup>14</sup>William H. Shea, "Time Prophecies of Daniel 12 and Revelation 12-13," in *Symposium on Revelation – Book I*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6, edited by Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 329-360; William G. Johnsson, "The Saints' End-Time Victory Over the Forces of Evil," in *Symposium on Revelation – Book II*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7, edited by Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 4-40; and C. Mervyn Maxwell, "The Mark of the Beast," in *Symposium on Revelation – Book II*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7, edited by Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 42-132.

<sup>15</sup>Shea, "Time Prophecies," 342-343, 345.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 347-350.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 351.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 352-353.

sea beast, who embodies the dragon's persecution of the church.<sup>19</sup> He also notes that the double usage of Rev 12:6, 14 makes clear that three and a half times are the same as 1260 days.<sup>20</sup> Maxwell's chapter in the DARCOM volumes expands on the history behind the dates for 538 and 1798 as the commencement and the termination of the 1260-day prophecies.<sup>21</sup> He also addresses a number of popular objections to the traditional interpretation.<sup>22</sup>

The best attempt to provide an exegetical approach to the five 1260 texts in Revelation came more recently from Hans LaRondelle.<sup>23</sup> He argues that the three and half times of Daniel and Revelation all refer to the same period and are to be understood in terms of years, not literal days. In contrast to Maxwell and Smith, however, he suggests that it would be unwise to be overly dogmatic regarding the beginning and ending points of the period.<sup>24</sup>

### **Objections to the Traditional Position**

Objections to the traditional position were recently raised by Samuele Bacchiocchi.<sup>25</sup> He

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<sup>19</sup>Johnsson, "The Saints' End-Time Victory," 12.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>21</sup>Maxwell, "The Mark of the Beast," 72-77.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 121-132.

<sup>23</sup>Hans LaRondelle, *How to Understand The End-Time Prophecies of the Bible: The Biblical-Contextual Approach* (Sarasota, FL: First Impressions, 1997), 262.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 258.

<sup>25</sup>See the sources listed in note 4. Recognizing the traumatic nature of his observations, Bacchiocchi has chosen to suspend his efforts to explore these texts and hopes that our deliberations here will be open and rigorous.

began with a study of Islam in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks. Coming to the conclusion that Islam bears many of the marks of the Antichrist, he discovered that there was great resistance to that possibility among Adventists for two reasons, 1) the difficulty of fitting Islam into the interpretation of the 1260 days, and 2) explicit identifications of the papacy as the Antichrist by Ellen White.

In response, Bacchiocchi sought to demonstrate that the papacy fits the traditional dates of the 1260 days no better than Islam does. And while Ellen White does explicitly follow the traditional interpretation, he noted that she was quite willing to update and correct her historical statements during her lifetime (and, in his opinion, wasn't able to finish the job) and that she is not, in any case, to be the church's final word on biblical issues. Although raising questions about the traditional position, Bacchiocchi remains committed to seeking the most biblical approach to the exegesis of the 1260 texts and an appropriate use of history in relation to the period.<sup>26</sup>

Bacchiocchi is not alone in his concerns. Many Adventist scholars note that the historicist approach to apocalyptic has been increasingly marginalized in the scholarly world.<sup>27</sup> I have tried to address the larger situation in a forthcoming scholarly article.<sup>28</sup> In response to the dominance of preterism in secular scholarship, many Adventist scholars have either avoided the

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<sup>26</sup>Personal conversation on July 17, 2003 in Berrien Springs, MI.

<sup>27</sup>Well documented by Kai Arasola, *The End of Historicism: Millerite Hermeneutic of Time Prophecies in the Old Testament*, University of Uppsala Faculty of Theology (Sigtuna, Sweden: Datem Publishing, 1990).

<sup>28</sup>"The End of Historicism? Reflections on the Adventist Approach to Biblical

study of Revelation or taken up literary or sociological approaches to the book.<sup>29</sup> Such approaches either *ignore the 1260-day texts or treat them as somehow symbolic of the gospel and its opponents*.<sup>30</sup>

A more widespread alternative to the traditional position sees most of Revelation as concerned primarily with a short period of time still future from our own day. While rejecting the dispensational form of futurism popularized by the *Left Behind* series, such SDA Bible students nevertheless see the 1260-day texts as referring to *literal periods of time in the last few years of earth's history*.

Perhaps of even graver concern for those who hold to the traditional view of the 1260-day texts is the philosophical shift in our younger generation of Adventists toward post-modernism.<sup>31</sup> Post-modern youth question both the exegetical certainties and the historical

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Apocalyptic– Part One,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 33 (2, 2003).

<sup>29</sup>Some examples from one Adventist source: Kendra Haloviak, “Singing New Songs: Traditions in Conflict,” *Spectrum* 31 (Winter 2003: 5-12); Douglas Morgan, “Fear Not: Apocalypse Now Means Something Very Different,” *Spectrum* 28 (Winter 2000): 24-27; Charles Scriven, “Freedom Songs: The Apocalypse of John the Revelator and the Atonement of Christ,” *Spectrum* 28 (Winter 2000): 28-33.

<sup>30</sup>A scholarly example of such an interpretation is that of Adela Yarbro Collins. She argues that “The problems which arise when one tries to coordinate these periods of time and to relate them to an absolute chronology show that they were not intended to be interpreted in a literal, chronological way. They do not indicate an interest in precise calculation on the part of the author of Revelation.” Cf. her piece in *Aufstieg und Niedergang*, 1233.

<sup>31</sup>Some outstanding analyses of post-modernism from a Christian perspective include Bruce McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000); idem, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001); and J. Richard Middleton, and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

confidence of their elders. The apocalyptic idea that there could be a detailed and orderly sweep to history seems hard to grasp and even more difficult to believe. While post-modernists are more likely to believe in God than their baby boomer elders, *they tend to view God, and therefore prophecy, as open-ended with regard to the future.*<sup>32</sup> The confidence Adventist pioneers had about their place in history seems to them out of step with the times.

In response to these challenges I will attempt to do the following in this paper:

1) Examine the way fulfilled prophecy works within Scripture as a model for prophecies that extend beyond the New Testament era. 2) In light of that examination, explore the open- and closed-endedness of biblical prophecy. 3) Do an exegesis of the five 1260-day texts in Revelation with an eye to various objections. 4) Review the arguments for the year-day principle in light of its widespread rejection among both preterists and futurists. Further issues which will not be addressed in this paper include exegesis of the relevant texts in Daniel and a careful examination of the history of the papacy with particular attention to the events surrounding its rise and apparent fall during the Christian era.

### ***Hermeneutical Explorations***

Adventist evangelists today are the strongest advocates of a traditional position on the 1260-days of Revelation.<sup>33</sup> They base their outlines of Scripture and history to a large degree on

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<sup>32</sup>Aspects of this issue are addressed below on pages 15-20.

<sup>33</sup>The strength of the traditional position lies in the way it provides order and meaning to history under the overarching watchcare of God. According to Adela Yarbro Collins, ordering history along numerical lines satisfies a basic human need for security. Cf. Adela Yarbro Collins,

the writings of Ellen White. While confidence in Ellen White is not an issue in this committee, it is recognized that Adventist use of Scripture and history may need some serious updating. The approaches of the past have tended to be theological and homiletic rather than exegetical. Some have even questioned whether an exegetical approach is appropriate to Bible prophecy.<sup>34</sup> For this reason I would like to begin with a brief justification of an exegetical approach to the 1260-day texts of Revelation.

### **God Meets People Where They Are**

Foundational to an exegetical approach to Scripture is the concept that God meets people where they are. In other words, *Scripture was given in the time, place, language, and culture of specific human beings*.<sup>35</sup> This point is powerfully illustrated by the discovery of Koine Greek about a century 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. Then papyrus remains of everyday life in the first century were found to exhibit

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“Numerical Symbolism in Jewish and Early Christian Apocalyptic Literature,” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, edited by Hildegaard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase, division 2 (Principat), vol. 21 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1984), 1224. The same article is also published in *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 55-138.

<sup>34</sup>Based on my experience in camp meetings, workers meetings and gatherings of SDA scholars.

<sup>35</sup>No Author, *Problems in Bible Translation*, Committee on Problems in Bible Translation, General Conference of SDAs (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1954), 95-96.

the same language and style as the books of the New Testament!<sup>36</sup> The New Testament was not written in some 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** (emphasis supplied) 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 God; for infinite ideas cannot be perfectly embodied in finite vehicles of thought.

Affirming this principle does not imply that the Bible contains 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.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>W. 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.

<sup>37</sup>There is, perhaps, no clearer illustration of this than the ten commandments, which come directly from the mouth and hand of God (Exod 20:1-19; 32:15-16) yet include significant

While this principle is true for the Bible in general, does it also apply to the sweeping historical sequences of apocalyptic? Did God consider the language, time and place of Daniel and John when He provided the visions they record in their books? Indeed He did. The book of Revelation is firmly grounded in the experience of seven churches in Asia Minor (Rev 1:11,19; 22:16). It was intended to make sense to those who hear (Rev 1:3).<sup>38</sup> The vision of Christ utilized the language of John's past, the Old Testament, as the primary source for its symbolism.

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elements of the cultural milieu within which they were received (including slavery, idolatry, and neighbors who possess oxen and donkeys).

<sup>38</sup>In Rev 1:3 the Greek behind the phrase "blessed are those who hear the words of this prophecy" (my translation) supports an immediate purpose for the prophecies in the book. In Greek the main verb for hearing (akouw), when combined with an object in the accusative case, means to "hear with understanding" (cf. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934], 448-449, 506). In other words, the book of Revelation is not "sealed up" like the book of Daniel, it is open to the understanding of its original readers and hearers.

God meets people where they are in Daniel as well. To Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2 God portrays the future world empires by means of an idol.<sup>39</sup> This makes sense in that time and place, because to the heathen king the nations of the world were bright and shining counterparts of the gods they worshiped. For Daniel the Hebrew prophet, on the other hand, the nations of the world were like vicious, ravenous beasts who were hurting his people. So in

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<sup>39</sup>I call the image an "idol" in part because of how the OT uses the term elsewhere: 2 Kings 11:18; 2 Chron 23:17; Amos 5:26, etc. But Nebuchadnezzar's own reaction is instructive. In chapter 3 he knows exactly what to do with the "image," set it up so people can worship it!

the vision of Daniel 7 God again draws on the prophet's knowledge and setting. This time, instead of symbolism drawn from the Babylonian world, He shapes the vision in terms of the creation story of Genesis chapters 1 and 2.<sup>40</sup> God describes Daniel's future in terms of a new creation. The sequence of history in both visions is roughly the same (Dan 2:45; 7:17). The primary message of both visions is the same, God is in control of history (Dan 2:37-38; 7:26-27). But in his choice of imagery, God meets apocalyptic writers where they are!

The principle "God meets people where they are" 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 in relation to the whole of Scripture. God's meaning for today will not contradict the message that He placed in the vision in the first place. The applications we make from our standpoint in history will be a natural extension of what the text meant.

### **Vision and Interpretation**

If God meets people where they are in Scripture, exegetical distinction must be made between how time is used in apocalyptic visions and how it is used in the interpretation of those visions. In a vision, the prophet can travel anyplace and anytime (from earth to heaven and from time past to the end of time). While the vision is mediated to the prophet in familiar forms, the vision is not limited to the time and place of the prophet. But when the vision is

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<sup>40</sup>In both Genesis and Daniel things begin with a stormy sea (Gen 1:2; Dan 7:2). In both cases a "son of man" is given dominion over the animals.

explained to the prophet afterward, *the explanation is always given in terms of the time, place and circumstances of the visionary.*

We can clearly see this principle in Daniel 2. While the vision of the statue carries Nebuchadnezzar to end of earth's history, the explanation of the vision by Daniel is firmly grounded in the time and place of Nebuchadnezzar. In the vision the whole chain of history appears before Nebuchadnezzar's eyes, as if he were present, including the end of history. But when Daniel brings the interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar is firmly rooted in the reality of the living moment. Daniel begins with the assertion (Dan 2:38), "You **are** that head of gold" (Not "you **were** the head of gold"). Nebuchadnezzar is then told that the series of kingdoms that follow are "after you" (2:39) in point of time. In other words, the explanation is grounded in Nebuchadnezzar's location in time and place. Present things are described as present, and future things are described as future.

As was the case with Daniel 2, the apocalyptic prophecy of Dan 7 is divided into two parts; the vision, in which the prophet is 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).<sup>41</sup> The explanation comes for the benefit of Daniel and, therefore, naturally comes in the context of his location in the world and history, in terms he can understand.<sup>42</sup> The same pattern

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<sup>41</sup>Susan Niditch suggests a four-part pattern to Daniel 7; "indication of vision" (7:1-2), "description" (7:2-14), "request for interpretation" (7:16, 19-22), and "interpretation" (7:17-18, 23-27). Susan Niditch, *The Symbolic Vision in Biblical Tradition* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 184. For our purposes here, her first category is irrelevant; the third and fourth categories are both part of what I am calling the interpretation or explanation part of the chapter.

<sup>42</sup>It could be argued that in the midst of the explanation of Dan 7:15-27 comes an

can be seen in Daniel 8.<sup>43</sup>

Another Old Testament example of vision followed by interpretation is found in Zechariah 4, which has a similar general pattern to Daniel 7.<sup>44</sup> In Zechariah 4, however, the vision is extremely brief (Zech 4:2b-3), and is introduced by the interpreting angel (Zech 4:1-2a). The interpretation of the vision involves a lengthy back and forth dialogue between the prophet and the angel (Zech 4:1-2a, 4-14).<sup>45</sup>

A common pattern among all these examples is that prophets don't usually seem to understand the revelation from visions alone. The explanation is necessary for the revelation to be understood.<sup>46</sup> Sometimes the visionary asks for further clarification, at other times the

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addition to the vision. Dan 7:21-22 affirms, "As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom." This seems to be a visionary extension of verse 8 and of the judgment interlude in Dan 7:9-14. Daniel goes on to record the answer to his request for further information on the fourth beast and the Little Horn. "He gave me this explanation: 'The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different. . . .'" Thus vision and interpretation are not rigidly separated, but the two sub-genres can be intermingled. This seems also to be the case in Revelation 17, where the chapter begins with a short explanatory introduction (following up on the vision of the bowl-plagues– Rev 17:1-2), followed by a short vision (17:3-6a), followed by a lengthy explanation of elements of the vision (17:6b-18).

<sup>43</sup>Klaus Koch divides Daniel 8 into "vision" (*Schauung*– 2-14) and "meaning" (*Deutung*– 15-26). Klaus Koch, "Vom Prophetischen zum apokalyptischen Visionsbericht," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979, David Hellholm, editor, (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), 415-421.

<sup>44</sup>Niditch, 97, 184.

<sup>45</sup>The format of Zechariah 4 is strikingly similar to Revelation 17. See note 39.

<sup>46</sup>Niditch, 185.

clarification comes without request. Since the visionary's need for understanding is at stake, it makes sense that the interpretation would come to the prophet in his or her time and place, as is clearly the case with the interpretations of Daniel 2 and 7.

So whenever vision moves to interpretation, the interpretation is given for the benefit of the visionary and, therefore, comes to him or her in the time, place and circumstances in which the seer lives. Present, past and future are not to be seen in terms of visionary time, but in terms of the prophet's actual physical location in time. This principle has profound implications for the interpretation of difficult apocalyptic texts like Revelation 10-11 and 17:7-11.

### **The Open-Endedness of Divine Prediction**

A basic assumption of the Adventist pioneers and current evangelists is that God knows the end from the beginning (Isa 46:9-10; John 16:13). He is capable of specifying, therefore, the exact day or year when certain events will take place, hundreds and even thousands of years in advance. From my humble standpoint in the universe I have no interest in questioning what God can and cannot do. But I do not believe we have adequately explored the way in which God actually fulfills His own predictions.

Is it in fact "Biblical" to expect point by point correspondence between prediction and fulfillment in the actions of God? If predictive prophecies were given in the language, time, place and circumstances of the prophet's day, it may be reasonable to expect some flexibility with regard to fulfillment. To demand absolute precision in prophetic fulfillment is to become a

futurist, since the fulfillments of the past are rarely so precise.<sup>47</sup>

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The best way to test any assumption with regard to unfulfilled prophecies (or prophecies like the 1260 days, whose fulfillment lies beyond the time frame of Scripture) is to study carefully the fulfillments that are already validated within Scripture itself. In other words, *the key to interpreting unfulfilled prophecy is to observe the way God fulfilled prophecies already within Scripture*. Fulfilled prophecy provides a solid foundation for understanding the prophetic ways of God. In fulfilled prophecy there is often considerable flexibility in the way God carries out the prediction.

A good example of such imprecision in fulfillment can be found in Isa 11:10-16. The prophecy states that Israel would be delivered from Assyria when God uses a scorching wind to break up the Euphrates River so the remnant of God's people could escape across it in sandals (Isa 11:15). The basis for this language is clearly the Exodus experience in Israel's past.<sup>48</sup> But did Israel actually return from Assyria? No. By the time of the Exile, only Judah was left and Babylon had replaced Assyria as the superpower that took the people of God captive. Did the remnant of God's people actually pass through the Euphrates River in sandals? No, they crossed the river

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<sup>47</sup>This is why Adventist "futurists" see the seals, the trumpets and the bulk of Daniel 8-12 as focused on the final events only, rather than on the sweep of history from Daniel's day on.

<sup>48</sup>In Isa 11:11 God speaks about gathering the exiles of Israel "a second time." Verse 16 asserts that the language of the "second time" is grounded in the original Exodus, when Israel came up out of Egypt. For a detailed study of how the Exodus set the pattern for the Exile and Return see Jon Paulien, *Meet God Again for the First Time* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2003), 45-54.

on the bridges right in the city of Babylon itself. Did a scorching wind dry up the river? No, Cyrus used engineers to divert the water. In the fulfillment the river did not dry up in order for the people of God to walk across, but in order for Persian soldiers to enter the city and free the people of God by official decree.

I believe it is ridiculous to demand that since this prophecy was not fulfilled in detail, the real fulfillment is in some future Middle-Eastern war. The prophecy was given in the context of the time, place and circumstances of Isaiah's day, and was therefore open-ended. At the time Isaiah was written, Israel had not yet been destroyed and Assyria still ruled the territory of Babylon. The prophecy was not, therefore, fulfilled in detail, but in principle. Cyrus conquered Babylon by drying up the River Euphrates and allowing God's people to return to Jerusalem. When the fulfillment came, circumstances altered the details of the case. This example makes it clear that *Biblical predictions are often open-ended enough to allow God freedom of action in the fulfillment.*

The interesting result of this "imprecision" on God's part was considerable disappointment on the part of the returning exiles themselves.<sup>49</sup> Haggai 2:1-9 is a clear expression of this disappointment. A similar "imprecision" can be observed in the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies.<sup>50</sup> The outline of the Messiah's career was difficult to discern in advance, but the reality of the fulfillment became plain after the fact (John 13:19; 14:29).

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 52-54.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 55-75.

There are at least two reasons I can discern for the open-endedness of predictive

prophecy. 1) *The prophetic future is predicted in the language of the past.*<sup>51</sup> For example, as already mentioned, throughout the Old Testament prophets the future exile to Babylon is addressed in the language of the Exodus, God's mighty act at the founding of the Israelite nation.<sup>52</sup> 2) *Aspects of most predictions include conditional elements.*<sup>53</sup> The classic statement of this biblical principle is found in Jer 18:7-10. The classic illustration is the book of Jonah.

There is, then, considerable evidence in the Bible that predictive prophecy is more open-ended than the typical evangelistic presentation would let on. This open-endedness is not necessarily due to any limitations of knowledge on God's part (such as are asserted in process philosophy); rather it may well reflect the limitations of the prophetic recipient, who can only understand the future in terms of what God has already done in the past. God couches the language of prediction in the time, place and circumstances of the prophet.

### **The Closed-Endedness of Biblical Prophecy**

The open-endedness of fulfilled prophecy raises legitimate questions regarding whether or not prophecies like the 1260 days ought to be fulfilled with dated precision. Is looking for exact dates like 538 and 1798 AD appropriate to what we know of God's ways when it comes to prediction? Should we think more in terms of a general period with a fluid beginning and

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<sup>51</sup>This statement summarizes an extensive study in *ibid.*, 22-36.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 45-54.

<sup>53</sup>An excellent overview of this issue and its implications can be found in William G. Johnsson, "Conditionality in Biblical Prophecy with Particular Reference to Apocalyptic," in *70 Weeks, Leviticus, Nature of Prophecy*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 3, edited by Frank B. Holbrook (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 259-287.

ending as LaRondelle seems to suggest?<sup>54</sup> Are there any examples of biblical predictions where the timing of the fulfillment was exact?

There are a number of biblical possibilities that should be explored further in the future.<sup>55</sup> The first that comes to mind is the 400 (or 430) years of Israel's sojourn in Egypt (Gen 15:13; Exod 12:40-41; Gal 4:17). Exodus 12 clearly states that the Israelites left Egypt 430 years "to the very day" (Exod 12:41 NIV) after they entered it. So this seems like a promising indication of closed-endedness in Bible prophecy. There are clearly some problems with this period, however.<sup>56</sup> The prophecy to Abraham speaks of 400 years rather than 430 (Gen 15:13), as in Exodus and Galatians. And neither the Exodus text nor the one in Galatians specifically indicates that the period was a fulfillment of the prophecy to Abraham, although the similarity in numbers and events is striking.

A better example may be the seventy years of Israel's captivity in Babylon. The period was specifically predicted by Jeremiah in 25:11-12 and 29:10. Although Daniel does not announce the fulfillment of that period in Dan 9:2, he clearly believes in the prophecy and is unclear as to why it is not in the process of fulfillment. A clear statement of fulfillment *is* found

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<sup>54</sup>LaRondelle, 262.

<sup>55</sup>While Gerhard Hasel's DARCOM article on fulfillments of prophecy addresses the closed-endedness of predictive prophecy, but he does not address the time prophecies directly, thus, further work is necessary. See Gerhard F. Hasel, "Fulfillments of Prophecy," in *70 Weeks, Leviticus, Nature of Prophecy*, edited by Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, volume 3 (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 288-322.

<sup>56</sup>Francis D. Nichol, editor, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1953-1960), 1: 314, 557.

in 1 Chr 36:21 (NIV): "The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it

rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah.” Not only does this text indicate that the period was fulfilled to the year, it even cites the original prophecy of Jeremiah in connection with the fulfillment. So while predictive prophecy often leaves room for God’s creativity in fulfillment, the prophecy of Jeremiah indicates that there are times when God determines a period of time in advance and carries it out to the year.

Unfortunately for our purpose, scholars do not seem completely unified on just how to calculate the seventy years. Some point calculate the period from 605-536 BC, the time when at least a portion of the people were in exile to Babylon. Other prefer to calculate the period from 586-516 BC, when the temple was in ruins. Daniel would appear to be calculating on the basis of the former in chapter 9, the period when he personally was in exile.

The best analogy to the 1260 days prophecy, however, would be the seventy-weeks prophecy of Daniel 9.<sup>57</sup> As Adventists understand this text, it offers a prediction, not only of the year, but of the exact time of year when the Messiah would be “cut off” (Dan 9:25-27). Is there a scriptural confirmation that this prophecy was fulfilled so exactly? Not that I am aware of. A number of New Testament texts indicate that Jesus and the apostles believed that the onset of the Christ event occurred at a specified time. (Mark 1:15; Gal 4:2-4, cf. Acts 17:26; Rom 5:6) Not one of these passages, however, seems to make a direct allusion to Daniel 9, although Daniel 9

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<sup>57</sup>Adela Yarbro Collins argues that this passage is the only place in ancient apocalyptic that attempts a precise and accurate time calculation, she feels that the time periods of Revelation are “less precise than Daniel’s.” Cf. *Aufstieg und Niedergang*, 1230.

was clearly familiar to Jesus (Matt 18:21-23; 24:15).<sup>58</sup> Further work on Daniel 9 and its potential NT fulfillment texts is indicated.

Is the idea that God specifies long and exact periods of time in advance ruled out by the increasingly popular view sometimes called the “openness of God?”<sup>59</sup> I don’t think so. I would argue that the time periods of the Bible come under the rubric of “limited determinism.” God allows much of the future to be opaque to human awareness ahead of time (John 13:19; 14:29), but *there are times when He makes clear what He intends to do and when He intends to do it*. At such times prophecy is much more closed-ended than at others. In an open view of God, exactness would reflect limited determinism rather than detailed foreknowledge.

### **The Year-Day Principle**

One other hermeneutical issue that needs to be addressed is the year-day principle. 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.<sup>60</sup> When unusual

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<sup>58</sup>According to a major index of OT passages that are quoted or alluded to in the NT (Eberhard Nestle et al, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27<sup>th</sup> revised edition [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2000], 797), other possible allusions to Dan 9:24-27 include Matt 4:5; 11:3; Mark 13:14 and Heb 9:12. A superficial reading of these did not seem promising to me.

<sup>59</sup>I distinguish between the “openness of God” as an ontological question and the open-endedness of predictive prophecy as a more-practical question. Even if God proves to be timeless, He might still choose to leave the predictive future somewhat open because of conditionality and the limitations of the human beings receiving the predictions. In the end, God will be God, and we have to do our best to respect that.

<sup>60</sup>William 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.

time periods, such as 1260 days, 1335 days, and a time, times and half a time, occur in biblical apocalyptic, how are these periods to be interpreted, as literal days or as symbolic of an equal number of years? While in the book of Revelation it is not explicit that an interpreter should reckon a year for a day,<sup>61</sup> there is a strong exegetical basis for doing so in Daniel. Within the seventy weeks of Daniel 9 Jerusalem and the temple would be rebuilt,<sup>62</sup> 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.<sup>63</sup>

The possibility of year for day symbolism in Daniel is grounded in two aspects of the interpretation of Daniel. 1) *Belief in divine predictive prophecy of a fairly closed-ended nature.* No uninspired human being has ever succeeded in accurately predicting events hundreds of years into the future. 2) *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, the prophetic time periods of Daniel must last several centuries at least. Taken in terms of literal time, the prophetic periods of Daniel would not span even a small portion of that history.

Within the text, as Shea points out, the *first* feature of these time periods which points to their symbolic nature is their symbolic context. For example, the 2300 evenings and mornings of Daniel 8 are found in a setting containing various other symbols, such as a ram, a

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<sup>61</sup>The book's use of Daniel in Revelation 11-13 is evidence for the possibility.

<sup>62</sup>The 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.

<sup>63</sup>Shea, *Daniel 7-12*, 42-43.

goat, four horns and a little horn (cf. Dan 7:21,25). A *second* special feature of these time 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. *Third*, the time periods are expressed in quantities not normally used to date some event in the future, unusual numbers such as 1260 days, 70 weeks, and 42 months.

Are there any clear examples of a relationship between days and years in ancient times? Biblically speaking the year-day principle is given explicit 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 and Judah have 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.<sup>64</sup> 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.”

The Hebrew concept of a year for a day is grounded in the sabbatical year concept.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Michael Hudson, “Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land: The Economic Roots of the Jubilee,” *Bible Review*, February, 1999: 31. There is also an interesting reference to this principle in ancient Chinese thought, referred to me by Florin Laiu of the Romanian Adventist Seminary. In *The West Journey of Wu Cheng* there is a reply of The Monkey, saying: “A heavenly day is as worth as an earthly year.” Victor Kernbach, *Dictionar de mitologie generală: Editura Țiințifică și enciclopedică* (București, 1989), page 589.

<sup>65</sup>George Wesley Buchanan, *The Consequences of the Covenant*, Supplements to *Novum Testamentum*, edited by W. C. Van Unnik, vol. 20 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), 9-18.

The weekly Sabbath became the basis for a seven-year agricultural cycle (Exod 23:10-12). The seventh year the land was to lie fallow, so as “to have a Sabbath of rest” (Lev 25:4-5). The sabbatical year is clearly modeled on the weekly Sabbath, a year for a day in principle.<sup>66</sup> So in apocalyptic sequences, the presence of an unusual form of numbering (like “2300 evenings and mornings” or “time, times and the dividing of time”) should normally be understood in light of the year-day principle.

It seems to me that recent challenges to Adventist belief about the 1260 days of Daniel and Revelation have enough substance to warrant a fresh exegetical approach to the issue. Each of the seven 1260-day texts needs to be carefully assessed in its context and the traditional referents in history need critical re-assessment. I am glad that BRICOM has initiated such a study.

We need to recognize, however, that elements of mainstream biblical scholarship operate within a worldview that is diametrically opposed to the way Adventists have traditionally read Daniel and Revelation. We should not expect to encounter evidence that will convince all comers. Having said this, there is much in recent scholarship that can be helpful to us. And our arguments should be grounded in sufficient evidence so as to have reasonable credibility with those who are not hostile to an Adventist view of the world.

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<sup>66</sup>LaRondelle makes a similar point on page 256 of his book *The End-Time Prophecies of the Bible*.

## **The Possibility of a Traditional Reading**

I believe that neither the critics of the Adventist position nor its proponents have yet done comprehensive and serious exegesis on the 1260-day texts. Neither has the history been fully and critically re-assessed in the light of today's explosion of knowledge in all fields. My initial assessment is that the Adventist position has not been ruled out in scholarly terms, but new directions are necessary to develop a line of argument that can carry weight in today's world. I offer suggestions toward one of those new directions in the material that follows.

### **Exegesis of the Five 1260-day Texts in Revelation**

As mentioned earlier, there are five 1260-day texts in the book of Revelation. Two of them utilize the phrase "1260 days," Rev 11:3 and 12:6. Two utilized the phrase "42 months," Rev 11:2 and 13:5. One takes up the enigmatic "time, times and half a time" of Daniel, Rev 12:14. Both of the "1260-day" passages occur in contexts where positive images of God's people are found, the two witnesses of 11:3-6 and the woman in the desert in 12:6. Conversely, both of the "42 months" passages occur in the context of powers in opposition to the work of God, the Gentiles who trample the outer court of God's temple (11:2) and the sea beast who looks like the dragon, blasphemes God and makes war against the saints (13:5). The "time, times and half a time" allusion to Daniel (12:14) comes in the context of a series of OT allusions, including references to the Exodus<sup>67</sup> and the Garden of Eden.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Escape in to the desert on wings of eagles. Exod 19:4.

<sup>68</sup>"The mouth of the serpent." Gen 3:1-7.

Since there are strong allusions to Daniel 7 in both Rev 12:14 and 13:5, it seems clear the origin of the time period in Revelation is Dan 7:25 and 12:7 rather than Elijah's drought<sup>69</sup> or the length of Jesus' ministry.<sup>70</sup> The extremely strong allusions to Daniel 12 in Revelation 10 also provide a context for understanding John's intention for the time period.<sup>71</sup> The Adventist tendency, therefore, to lump the 1260-day periods of Daniel and Revelation together has a strong foundation in the exegesis of Revelation.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>There is a strong allusion to Elijah's drought in Rev 11:6, but this single allusion cannot be as central to the author's purpose as the three major allusions to Daniel 7 and 12 referenced in the main text. A drought of three and half years is not found in the OT context anyway, it is a NT concept (cf. Luke 4:25; James 5:17). In any case, the book of Daniel is much more central for the whole book of Revelation than is 1 Kings. Cf. G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984); idem, *The Book of Revelation*, 76-99, 152-161.

<sup>70</sup>LaRondelle, 239. Other possibilities for the origin of the time period include the 42 encampments of Israel's wandering in the wilderness (Num 33:5-49) and the possible reading of the Exodus as 42 years (2 years of progress toward Canaan before the 40-year punishment for disobedience). Cf. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, edited by I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 565. Beale suggests that the 1260-day periods recall the Exodus and Elijah backgrounds of Revelation, seen through the lens of Daniel.

<sup>71</sup>Compare Rev 10:5-6 with Dan 12:4-7.

<sup>72</sup>Adela Yarbro Collins considers all five 1260-day texts in Revelation "variants of Daniel's time, times and half a time." Cf. *Aufstieg und Niedergang*, 1232.

## Revelation 11

The first two occurrences of the 1260 days are found in Revelation 11. Along with chapter 10, Revelation 11:1-14 is part of an “interlude” between the sixth and seventh trumpets. The association of the sixth trumpet with the second woe makes it clear that this “interlude” is an integral part of the sixth trumpet (Rev 9:12; 11:14). My understanding of the trumpets<sup>73</sup> is that they portray a series of judgments against the enemies of God’s people running from the time of John<sup>74</sup> to the second coming of Jesus.<sup>75</sup> Rev 10:1 - 11:14, however, focuses in on the people of God, although the actions of the wicked are also in view (11:2, 7-13). The sixth trumpet is the period of earth’s history that comes just before the close of human probation, as a careful study of Rev 10:7 indicates.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>A paper on the trumpets delivered to the Daniel and Revelation Committee in Berrien Springs, MI in 1986 argues and details a view of the trumpets that I still hold in essence. This paper can be viewed on my web site, <http://www.andrews.edu/~jonp/inter7t.htm>.

<sup>74</sup>The first trumpet (Rev 8:7) is widely understood by Adventist scholars as a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. See Edwin R. Thiele, *Outline Studies in Revelation*, syllabus (Angwin, CA: Pacific Union College, no date), 163-165; C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares*, vol. 2 (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1985), 237-238; Jon Paulien, “Interpreting the Seven Trumpets,” <http://www.andrews.edu/~jonp/inter7t.htm>.

<sup>75</sup>The seventh trumpet (Rev 11:15-18) encapsulates events after the close of probation (Rev 10:7), including the seven bowls of Revelation 16.

<sup>76</sup>In Rev 10:7 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*). So the event on earth that signals the opening of the seventh trumpet is the close of human probation just before the end of history.

Since the vision of Rev 10:1-7 focuses on the time of the sixth trumpet, some might be inclined to locate the 1260-day periods of 11:2-3 in the last stages of Christian history (futurist

view). These periods, however, occur in the immediate context of Rev 10:8-11. A voice out of heaven and the angel of the previous vision (Rev 10:1-7) engage John in an interactive explanation (Rev 10:8 - 11:13ff.).<sup>77</sup> As we have seen previously, explanations come to the prophet in terms of his own time and place. While John's actions are mentioned in Rev 10:10 and 11:1, the bulk of the passage is the scroll angel's direct explanation of certain events in John's future, building on the vision of 10:1-7 (Rev 10:9,11; 11:1-13). The entire two witnesses passage seems to be an elaboration of the angel's prediction, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings" (Rev 10:11).<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 556.

<sup>78</sup>δεῖ σε πάλιν προφητεῦσαι ἐπὶ λαοῖς καὶ ἔθνεσιν καὶ γλώσσαις καὶ βασιλεῦσιν πολλοῖς. The present tense of δεῖ indicates a standpoint in John's day looking forward to a time when John (or his writings) would "prophesy again." The aorist infinite προφητεῦσαι suggests a point in time when John, presumably through his writings, will fulfill the purpose of the revelations he had received. The infinitive is often used to express purpose or result, something not yet carried out. So John's sour stomach in Rev 10:10 may well illustrate his personal disappointment at not seeing the end of all that has been revealed to him. Like Daniel, the final conclusion of all things lay in John's future, as expressed in chapter 11. Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 556-557.

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.<sup>79</sup> Since the 42 months and 1260 days are expressed in the future tense,<sup>80</sup> these periods of time were future from the

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<sup>79</sup>It should be noted that in one place Aune treats the Rev 10 and 11 as if they were distinct and separate visions with little or no relationship with each other. But in another place he suggests that the abrupt beginning of 11:1 implies a connection to 10:8-11. Cf. David Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 585, 603.

<sup>80</sup>Rev 11:2-- τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν *πατήσουσιν* μῆνας τεσσαράκοντα [καὶ] δύο; Rev 11:3--

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)<sup>81</sup> and in the future tense (11:3). The description of the two witnesses (Rev 11:3-6) 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).<sup>82</sup>

The present and future tenses of the passage are to be understood from the perspective of an explanation to John in terms of his own time and place. Whatever interpretation we place on the two witnesses, they had some role already in the first century context. At some later point in history, they would “prophesy” for 1260 days, clothed in sackcloth. But that would not be the end of their experience. 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 of their death, resurrection and ascension that follows (11:7-13).<sup>83</sup>

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*δώσω τοῖς δυσὶν μάρτυσίν μου καὶ προφητεύουσιν ἡμέρας χιλίας διακοσίας ἐξήκοντὰ*

<sup>81</sup>Note 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 ἀποκταίνεσθαι. **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.

<sup>82</sup>Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 572, 577; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 585.

<sup>83</sup>This is clear from Rev 11:7: καὶ ὅταν τελέσωσιν τὴν μαρτυρίαν αὐτῶν. The testimony 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.

The following time sequence, therefore, is evident in Rev 10:8-11:12. John is 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.<sup>84</sup> 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.<sup>85</sup> So the three step time sequence of this passage is as follows:

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<sup>84</sup>David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52b (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 586; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Aufstieg und Niedergang*, 1232. Collins believes that if one takes the position that John intended the two witnesses as literal future individuals, the two time periods would probably be different.

<sup>85</sup>Both 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."

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