

# ADVENTISTS AFFIRM

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## Editor's Corner - How Should We Interpret Bible Prophecy?

S. Lawrence Maxwell  
Editor

I was eleven going on 12. I was wearing short woolen pants and a blue shirt and tie, and my mother was shepherding me and my twin brother, C. Mervyn Maxwell (ten minutes older) toward our first day at the Adventist elementary school in Mountain View, California. We were dressed the way we were because at the last school we had attended, that was the school uniform, worn by nearly 700 boys with nary a girl in the entire school. It was December, 1936, just a month since we had disembarked from the brand new *Queen Mary*, which had brought us to the United States so dad could edit *Signs of the Times*.

What would this new school be like? What form would they put us in? We hadn't learned yet that Americans call forms "grades." I looked at the younger children and hoped we wouldn't be put with them.

What I am leading up to is that either that day or one soon after, Mr. Paul Meeth, the 7th-and-8th grade teacher, asked Mervyn and me to remain after the other students went home. Then he said he'd like to see how we would do on a history test he had given his students that day. We both liked history. We knew all about William the Conqueror and 1066 and Francis Drake and the Spanish Armada. Every English school boy knew that. But what in the world was this test asking for? I don't remember any of the questions now, except two, and both of them fit perfectly into this issue of ADVENTISTS AFFIRM. They were, "True or false, Prophecy is history before it happens" and "History is prophecy fulfilled." I don't know how I answered. I'd never been asked questions like these on a history test, ever. Mr. Meeth let Mervyn and me watch him check the papers and we complained to mother when we got home, "He gave us both F and he didn't give anybody an E." But he must have seen something promising about us because though we were not quite 12 he put us in the seventh grade.

Think back over those two questions. They wrap up Adventism's *historicist* interpretation of biblical prophecy. Fulfilling prophecies stretch over history from the prophet's day to the coming of the Lord. Unfortunately a few Adventists, in the last couple of decades, have suggested that we should abandon the historicist approach and adopt *preterism* or *futurism*. What are those, you say?

To Learn. They are three words you will learn in this issue, which is all about interpreting Bible prophecy. The first word, as we've seen, is *historicist*. The "outline prophecies," including the image of Daniel 2, the four beasts of Daniel 7, the 2300 days of Daniel 8, the 70 weeks of Daniel 9, and the 1260 days of persecution in Revelation 12, are fulfilled over many centuries of history.

The second word is *preterist*. It is easier if you think "P for preterist, P for past." Under this scheme, the major prophecies of Daniel are interpreted as reports of events that happened in the past. They had already taken place around 165 B.C. when the author wrote about them. The major prophecies of Revelation also happened in the past (remember preterist for past), only this time around A.D. 65, in the reign of Nero.

The third word is *futurist*, which is easy to remember. Futurist interpretations put the fulfillment of many key biblical prophecies into the future, within a few years of the Second Coming.

Don't worry if you have trouble remembering them. You will run into them

several times in this issue, and you will know them like the experts by the time you have read the last article.

And let me assure you, they are all good articles. Dane Griffin gets us started with a look at the value of prophecy for the Adventist Christian. You may be surprised at some of the ways prophecy contributes to our faith, and you will gain a new appreciation for it.

Maybe, after studying our cover, you are wondering why anyone would expect God to defend Jerusalem in the battle of Armageddon. Don't dismiss the idea so quickly! Steven Wohlberg has made a continuing study of the Middle East. You may be surprised to learn that many Christians in the United States favor giving Israel billions of dollars to suppress the Palestinians because they believe that God will bless any nation that blesses Israel. If you don't know what's going on between Washington and Jerusalem, this article may be an eye opener. It reveals what can happen when prophecy is misinterpreted.

William Shea is a scholar's scholar, and he analyzes historicism, preterism and futurism in a scholarly manner. You will feel yourself enlightened and better-armed to meet critics who want our church to adopt alternate interpretations.

Just where do the 1290 and 1335 days of Daniel 12:11, 12 fit in? Adventist authors have not said much about them over the years, and today a few Seventh-day Adventists interpreters are suggesting that they are literal days to be fulfilled sometime in the future. You will find Gary Gibbs's article helpful.

Let's look at another prophecy. Revelation 16 warns about the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. Adventists for many years have identified the false prophet as apostate Protestantism, thinking principally of the mainline denominations. But what about the folk who run Christian radio stations and have so much to say about the love of Jesus? Could some of them be included in apostate Protestantism? Be sure to read what Ethel Nelson has to say.

What is the role of America in Bible prophecy? Many people deny that it has one at all, but David Asscherick carefully examines a key Bible prophecy and shares with us its remarkable application.

Gerard Damsteegt looks at the suggestion, very popular among the Reformers of 500 years ago and which is being revived today, that the little horn of Daniel 7 refers to Islam instead of the papacy as Adventists believe.

"Beware of Earthquakes" joins other articles in supporting our time-honored way of interpreting biblical prophecies and adds a warning about a very common mistake frequently made by the best of us.

It is our prayer that this issue will AFFIRM your confidence in the way ADVENTISTS interpret the great prophecies God has given us.

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## The Preserving Power of Prophecy

Dane J. Griffin  
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TAROT CARDS. FORTUNETELLERS. THE zodiac. Psychics.

People today will try almost anything to glimpse the future. The troubles, perplexities, and uncertainties of today's world drive its harried inhabitants to search whether tomorrow holds love, riches, glamour or even a little rest!

But they're looking in all the wrong places, for God clearly says: "Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them" (Isa 42:9). To know the future we should study God's prophecies in the Bible.

Nothing takes God by surprise. God doesn't need a crystal ball. Through His omniscience, He can tell us tomorrow's headlines today. There's no need for us to fear the future. God lives there. We see the past with clear vision. God sees the future with perfect vision. Because of that, we can safely entrust all our needs and wants to Him. His promises are as true and accurate and believable as His prophecies. He prophesies. It happens. He promises. He fulfills.

To Encourage Us. Prophecy. How few in the world, unfortunately, even in the church today understand the importance and power of it! How few study it! How few let its certainty preserve them in troublous, uncertain times! Let us remember that God lives in the future. In His great love He gave us prophecy to help us believe in the God of prophecy. Notice these two passages:

"When Asa heard the prophecy of Oded, he took courage, and put away the abominable idols out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and renewed the altar of the Lord" (2 Chron 15:8).

"I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe" (Jn 14:29).

These passages clearly reveal the power of a proper understanding of prophecy—whether predictive or proclaiming—and the reasons God gave it to us. This understanding can preserve our faith, filling us with courage when, like Asa, we face difficult tasks of reform. How? Prophecy shows that God's standards do not morph to mirror society and that He is in perfect control of events surrounding us. Prophecy helps us to restore and foster a vibrant, living religion in our lives, in our homes, and in our churches, because it establishes beyond doubt that God is our Creator and Owner and deserves our total worship and praise—not in the way we choose, but in the way *He* specifies. Prophecy helps us to discern between false worship and true—God's style of worship. How? Because, as we will see, prophecy is centered in the sanctuary above and in Christ's work of atonement going forward there.

And for the doubters, John 14:29 says fulfilled prophecy can lead hard, unbelieving hearts to believe in prophecy, and in the God of prophecy and His perfect plan for people's lives and for the world.

Opening Act or Omnipotent Acts? Now, some may be saying to themselves at this point, "Many of the people in the church today came into the church through a prophecy seminar. If prophecy directs us and refines us, why are we having the very troubles prophecy is supposed to prevent?"

Fair questions. Consider this answer. For too long, as Adventists we've seen prophecy merely as God's "drawing card," His opening night act to help us "pack the house" at the Revelation Seminar. Many honestly see prophecy as God's crystal ball, an extra-terrestrial magic show in which God flexes His "mystic muscles." For them, God is lowered to the realm of a psychic seeking to wow busy, distracted earthlings with His prophetic prowess. A kind of sanctified psychic.

Prop? Used as a stand-alone prop, prophecy can, indeed, "wow" a crowd. We Adventists have learned to use the "prop" well, perhaps too well. Daniel 2, 7, 8, Revelation 2, 3, 11, and other power-packed passages have riveted the attention of millions and have won scores to the truth. As the baptismal tank is draining, we stack those "prop passages" neatly beside it to await the need for drawing a future audience. Hence, prophecy's real purpose and power sit unused, untapped and unknown. We've let the witnesses tell only half their story, and as a result, their whole testimony has lost much of its God-designed power and purpose.

Simply put, a proper understanding of prophecy helps us preserve our faith in three distinct areas: 1) It gives us confidence in the reliability of God's Word. 2) It guards us against accepting false teaching. 3) It keeps our minds focused on the gospel. On Jesus and redemption and the sanctuary.

### 1. Confidence in the Word

In God's plan, prophecy prepares our hearts to receive God. Prophecy is *not* simply God predicting the future to impress us. Instead, prophecy is God showing in verity what will happen to prepare us not merely for the events themselves, but also to prepare us to trust the God who said those very events were coming; to believe implicitly in the veracity, validity, and relevancy of the entire Word of which the prophecies are a part! Fulfilled prophecy empowers us to believe that His counsels are important, and powerful, and appropriate, and timely, and true. "Every word of God [including prophecy] is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him" (Prov 30:5). While this text isn't claiming verbal inspiration for the very words of Scripture, it does mean that every prophetic theme and doctrinal reality certainly, purely *is* inspired! If we don't believe that, then our shield is faulty. Full of holes. And we have little, if any, defense from Satan's errors and sophistries.

This truth is clearly elucidated in Jesus' words to the Jews: "Had ye believed Moses [the prophet], ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me" (Jn 5:46). You see, once we begin to doubt *any* prophecy as God gave it, or to ignore its importance, our shield is damaged and Satan's deceptions can begin to assail us. A carelessness in interpreting and teaching prophecy will eventually lead to a carelessness in interpreting and teaching other Bible truths as well. It's not a matter of if, but when!

Prophecy Misapplied. That's precisely what happened to the Jews in Jesus' day. They were very focused on Messianic prophecies. They taught those prophecies ardently. They would compass land and sea to make one convert. But because they carelessly misapplied prophecy, wrongly applying the prophecies of Jesus' glorious, powerful *second coming* to His first coming, the result was disastrous. The very prophecies God designed should help them lead people to Jesus and prepare them for His first coming became a roadblock to accepting the truth for their time. Simply put: Because its leaders misinterpreted prophecy, the Jewish nation rejected the Lamb of prophecy. He didn't fit in their prophetic pasture.

What happened to them can and will happen to us if we repeat their mistakes (1 Cor 10:11, 12). The truth is, a misapplication of prophecy can color and kill even the plainest, most impressive signals of God's plan and will in our lives. That's why

Jesus warns us about having an "evil heart of unbelief," a lack of faith in the truth of His inspired word (Heb 3:7B4:2). (See also 2 Tim 4:1-4; Ps 119:89; Ac 20:28-30; 2 Pet 3:16.)

## 2. Prophecy Prevents False Teaching

In the four lists of the spiritual gifts God gave to help His church (Rom 12:4-8; 1 Cor 12:4-11, 28-31; Eph 4:11-16), only one gift appears in all four lists: prophecy!

Why would God consider prophecy so important? Perhaps because prophecy edifies the church, as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 14:22: "Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe." What is prophecy a sign of to believers? That God is who He says He is (Heb 11:6); that He is in control of world affairs; that He and His Word can be fully, completely trusted.

Clear Focus. Solomon penned the same principle a thousand years before: "Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he" (Prov 29:18). Prophecy helps the church and its members maintain a clear focus and, as Solomon wrote, it helps them remember the importance of obedience to God's law. That divine truth is reemphasized in 2 Chronicles 20:20: "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper." Without a clear understanding of the importance of prophecy and what it does for the church, spiritual prosperity dwindles and the focal point of God's law begins to blur.

And that's precisely why Paul wrote these words to a young, "green" ministerial intern named Timothy: "This charge I commit unto you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare"(1 Tim 1:18).

Fight, with prophecy? What can you fight with that? Prophecy is one side of God's "sharp, two-edged sword"! Prophecy is God-ordained to help us quench the fires of doubt kindled by the sparks of higher criticism; to untwist the tight tornadoes of relativism; to melt the chilling ice of skepticism; to evaporate the flash floods of secularism; to give the water of life to parched souls who've wandered too long in the dry, dreary deserts of formalism. Prophecy is Jesus' voice ringing powerfully, clearly over the troubled waves of a doubting, tempest-tossed church: "Peace, be still!"

To us as truly as to Israel of old, God speaks the words today: "I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I shewed them; I did them suddenly, and they came to pass. Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass; I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I shewed it thee" (Isa 48:3-6).

Massage for Stiff Necks. The skepticism and stubbornness of stiff necks and hard hearts are penetrating and paralyzing the church today. You've probably noticed the stiffness. "God's Word just isn't relevant to the issues of today." "How can a God of love destroy sinners?" "Why can't women be ordained as pastors?" "We can't really be certain if there's a sanctuary in heaven." "The Bible is an inspiring book, not necessarily an inspired one." "Practicing homosexuals shouldn't be excluded from membership, they're God's children, too."

Can prophecy massage such cricks out of necks and soften such hard hearts today? Of course! If those necks will lean and those hearts turn toward an open study of God's word. A God who knows the future so perfectly and can describe yet-undone deeds so precisely can be perfectly and precisely trusted! And His counsel must be valid, *all* of it. That knowledge will drive genuine truth seekers to seriously search for all His revealed will in every area of their lives. How can they doubt the counsel of a God who has proved Himself to be all-knowing and in perfect control of earth's events? The Knower of the future can be perfectly trusted as a

Guide for the present.

Still Relevant. The thoughtless, shallow claim that parts of the Bible are not relevant today falls powerless before the accuracy of fulfilled prophecy. What Daniel wrote hundreds of years before Christ was very relevant to an event that occurred more than 2,000 years later when the papacy fell from supremacy in A.D. 1798. If prophecy happens just as God said it will, then all His other words and counsels and reproofs must be seen as just as sure and just as true, for "all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16).

When it comes to inspiration, all texts are created equal. There's no difference of inspiration between prophecy or parable; between beast or baptism; between dates or doctrines. In reality, the truth of the gospel is validated in that it agrees fully with prophecy. And as such, no one part of the Bible is less important, less inspired, less relevant than another. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:2, prophecy helps us to understand the Bible's mysteries and its knowledge. It's the key that unlocks the purposes and secrets of God (Amos 3:7).

Examples. But exactly how does a proper understanding of prophecy prevent false teachings? Here's one example from many that we could cite.

*Question: Is there a sanctuary in heaven?* Fulfilled prophecy's answer: Did the Saracens scourge the world for 150 years (Rev 9:1-12)? Did the early Muslims ravage the Roman Empire for 391 years and 15 days (Rev 9:13-21)? Did the Ottoman Empire fall on August 11, 1840 (Rev 9:15)? Did Rome persecute the church for 1,260 years (Dan 7:25-27 and others)? Then there *is* a sanctuary in heaven and there *is* a cleansing there that began on October 22, 1844, for the same prophetic lines foretold *all* these events! In light of these prophecies, to say there is no sanctuary *Cor* even to question its existence *Cis* like questioning whether there was ever an Ottoman Empire or a Catholic church!

*Does God destroy sinners?* Prophecy clearly answers the question. *Is the Bible inspired?* *Can we overcome sin through God's power?* Prophecy answers these and many other questions perplexing some in our church today!

But history reveals that prophecy has always fought error!

Nebuchadnezzar's dazzling display on the plain of Dura showed his erroneous belief that the door of Babylon's world rule would always be open in spite of God's prophecy to the contrary. God shut Nebuchadnezzar's "door" by keeping the "leaved gates" open! (See Isa 45:1.)

Alexander thought he had built an empire his seed would control forever. God plucked up his seed by the roots.

The papacy thought it would sit a "queen forever." Then 1798 interrupted its eternity.

The Ottoman Empire fall? The world scoffed. On August 11, 1840, the world gasped!

"I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him" (Eccl 3:14). Fulfilled prophecy should drive us to fear tampering with God's inspired Word *Can* any part of His Word and in any manner!

Never Out of Date. You see, we can't improve on God, nor must we try to. We can't second-guess His principles, "inclusify" His counsels, or soften His perceived "harshness." Prophecy proves that all the truths of God's Word are relevant today, even though written thousands of years ago. His Word will never be out of date, because prophecy proves that God lives in the future *CHe* is as undatable as He is unchangeable! And if He lives in the future, then He saw our day in Daniel's day, knew what we would face, and inspired His prophets and other Bible writers to write relevant words for us. And just to prove to us that He knew this whole relevancy issue would arise, He inspired Paul to write: "All these things happened unto them [Israel] for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom *the ends of the world are come*. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:11-12).

That's why God's purposes know no haste nor delay, because God knows precisely where He is going, what He will see along the way, what He will face once He gets there, and just how He will solve any problem after He arrives! Now, *that's relevant*.

### 3. Prophecy Keeps Our Gospel Focus Clear

Many hundreds of years before Jesus' birth, prophets foretold His coming. Between then and Jesus' first advent, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome in turn revolutionized the world. Jesus fulfilled those ancient prophecies in His birth, life, and death on the cross. Yet don't miss this point when Jesus met the two travelers to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) who were devastated by His death, He gave them, and us, a relevant lesson we should never forget.

When He sought to free their minds from their prophetic paralysis, He could have said: "Look, folks, it's Me, Jesus! I've risen from the dead!" Talk about relevant! Instead, the relevant, risen Savior pointed them back to the ancient writings, some written over a thousand years before: "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in *all* the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Lk 24:27).

Prophecy Points to Jesus. Jesus taught us all, right then and there, that in the struggle of societal evolution, God's Word survives because it *is* the fittest! Not a single word is on an endangered species list (see Heb 13:8; Jer 6:16). Why did Jesus point those two sorrowing friends back to Moses and the prophets? Because prophecy points to Jesus. Because prophecy points to the sanctuary. Because prophecy points to the gospel, and to justification and sanctification and salvation. And if those themes are not relevant at every time, in every age, in every society, for every people, then we are, of all men, most miserable.

Indeed, prophecy, then and now, points to Jesus and to His work of redemption: to Phase 1 at the cross (Dan 9:24-27), to Phase 2 in the sanctuary in heaven (Dan 8:14; Rev 11:18-19, etc.), and to Phase 3 during and after the millennium at His third coming (Rev 20). Prophecy shows us how God worked for man's salvation from the first war in heaven (Rev 12) to the final peace on earth (Rev 21, 22). Sounds pretty relevant, doesn't it?

Jesus Learned through Prophecy. Consider this: When just 12 years old, Jesus began to see that He was the antitypical lamb. In other words, He started to understand that on Nisan 14, at 3:00 in the afternoon, in A.D. 31, He would die as a ransom for the sins of the world. How could He begin to understand all that when He was only 12 years old? Because He was a student of prophecy, including the 70 weeks of Daniel 9:24-27. And He was a student of the sanctuary and its feasts and sacrifices, all of which pointed to His lifework and mission. (See *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 80-82; Lk 2:49.)

And here's the point: A study of the sanctuary and of prophecy must always exist together. One cannot be rightly understood without the other. A perversion or manipulation of one will repaint the picture of the other. It's no accident that before many major prophecies unfold in Revelation (the 7 seals, 7 trumpets, and 7 plagues), something precedes them in the heavenly sanctuary (Rev 1; 5; 8:1-5; 15:5-8).

Every time prophecy--the 1,260, the 1,290, and the 1,335 days; the 150 years of Revelation 9:5; the 391 years and 15 days of Revelation 9:15; the 62 weeks, the 7 weeks, the divided week; the 42 months--every time prophecy was given by God for one major purpose: to validate and focus attention on the longest time prophecy of the Bible, the 2,300 days and the beginning of Jesus' work in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary. God said that in "the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound [October 22, 1844], . . . there should be time no longer," or no more prophecies based on time (Rev 10:6, 7). With the opening of the door that no man can shut in heaven, time prophecies met their purpose, they had done their job.



Bad Prophecies, Bad Fruit. Yet some in our church teach that there will be another, *literal* 1,335, 1,260, 1,290, and 2,300 days before Jesus comes, and totally ignore--or try to rewrite--God's clear declaration in Revelation 10:6 that "there should be time no longer." Still others ignore God's definitive statement that the four beasts of Daniel 7:17 "are four kings, which shall arise out of the earth," and say that there will be yet another bear or lion or leopard. But, if that's true, then there wouldn't be four world kingdoms, as God pronounced, but five or six or eight. No! "Let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom 3:4) must be our motto when approaching such themes. (See Isa 14:26, 27.)

In reality, there can no more be two correct interpretations of prophecy than there can be two correct gospels! According to Ephesians 2:20, the "apostles [their gospel teaching] and prophets" are the very foundation of the church, with Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." So, if we try to alter any part of the foundation, we are, in essence, attempting to change Christ Himself, for His name is "the word of God" (Rev 19:13).

Yet, in accepting such prophetic perversions today without question, or merely with a curious, careless indifference, we allow our prophetic "roots" to be tampered with and our gospel "tree" to gradually, almost imperceptibly fade and bear mixed doctrinal fruit!

The gospel and prophecy alike come from God (2 Pet 1:21). Neither can be tampered with without eternal consequences. That's why Paul wrote: "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal 1:8). In like manner, the stongest warning against "truth tampering" in the entire Bible is found in Revelation 22:18, 19, where God warns that if anyone dares to "take away" anything from His prophecies or "add unto" them, He will take that person's name from the book of life and add the seven last plagues to him.

Despite God's strong warnings, some Adventists began tinkering with prophetic truth, and now many are rewriting the truths of justification and sanctification, the sanctuary, God's final destruction of sin and sinners, proper Sabbath observance, worship styles, leadership issues, and much more.

Blessing Promised. Revelation 1:3 promises a blessing for all who: a) read prophecy (study it for themselves); b) hear prophecy (listen to others teach it); and c) keep the things that are written therein (make prophecy's truths a part of their lives). The same promise is given again in Revelation 22:7. What "things" are written in prophecy?

Consider this partial list of "things" written in prophecy:

1. The Sabbath (Rev 1:9; 14:12; 22:14)
2. Health message (Dan 1: Rev 14:7 in light of 1 Cor 6:19, 20)
3. The heavenly sanctuary (Dan 8:14; Rev 4:1-5; 8:1-6; 11:19; 15:5, 6;

etc.)

4. State of the dead (Rev 20:5, 13; Dan 12:13)
5. Investigative judgment (Dan 8:14; 7:9, 10; Rev 11:18, 19; 10:7-11:2;

etc.)

6. Victorious living (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 14:4, 5; etc.)

7. God's mercy and judgment (Dan 4:25-27; Dan 5; Rev 6:16, 17; 2:4, 5, 23; 3:18, 19; 14:9, 10, 19, 20; 19:13 tied with Isa 63:3; etc.)

8. Infallibility of Scripture (Dan 2:45; 7:17; 12:9; Rev 1:1, 3, 7; 11:3-11; 19:13; 22:6; etc.)

9. Current validity of God's chain of command (Rev 1:1 tied with 1 Cor 11:3 shows clearly God's chain of command on earth and His desires for church leadership).

You see, just as a clear perception of prophecy and the sanctuary showed Jesus His God-ordained mission, they will also show His church and its members their mission for today--to preach and teach the nine truths outlined above, and many more. If we lose our vision of prophecy ("Where there is no vision, the people perish," Prov 29:18), we will lose our clear vision of the distinctive message for these last days. Why were we the only church preaching all of these messages for so many years? Because we were the only church that correctly understood

prophecy--indeed we *are* the prophesied "remnant" that would "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus," "which is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev 12:17; 19:10).

"More Sure" Word. Through divine inspiration, Peter called it "the more sure word of prophecy" in his day (2 Pet 1:19). Why did he make such a declaration? For one, because Jesus, in His death in the midst of the week of Dan 9:24-26, validated the entire 2,300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14, from which the 70 weeks were "cut off." Simply put, the whole plan of salvation, the entire gospel, was guaranteed in that one event. But also, Peter was making another profound pronouncement.

Notice that in 2 Peter 1:16-18, Peter refers to being an "eyewitness" to Jesus' majesty on the mount of transfiguration, and an "earwitness" to the very voice of God announcing that Jesus was His "beloved Son." Then Peter says "we have a more sure word. . . ."

In the commentary, *William Burkitt's Notes on the New Testament*, Burkitt wrote these insightful words about this passage: "Observe here, that the Scriptures, or written word of God, are a more sure word to us than any voice from heaven, or revelation whatsoever; not that there was any uncertainty in the Lord's voice uttered from heaven at Christ's transfiguration, but because that transient voice was heard only by three, and might be mistaken or forgotten; whereas the Holy Scriptures are a standing and authentic record, and a most sure ground for faith to build upon. . . ."


"Learn hence, that the written word of God is a surer word, more to be depended and relied upon than any voice from heaven, though attested by the greatest and most eminent apostle, and consequently to be more heeded and regarded by us . . . for the testimony of an angel, at the highest, is but the testimony of a creature; but the testimony of the sanctifying Spirit is the testimony of God himself; it is therefore the sure word that we are to attend unto; and that revelation of God's will, being final, is and ought to be attended to, before any pretended or real revelations whatsoever."

In short: If we question the authority of God's written word in any sphere, we would question that same word if spoken by His own voice in His very presence.

May God help us to "take heed" to the "more sure word of prophecy" as it shines in the "dark place" of today's "gross darkness" (Isa 60:1). May prophecy may no longer be a "prop" simply to draw a crowd, but a powerful preserving tool to help us prepare a people for the great events that prophecy has predicted will soon be upon us. May God's church truly believe that prophecy "came not in old time by the will of man" but by the infallible utterance of the Holy Ghost giving timeless, trusted truths relevant for God's last church upon the earth.

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## Islam and the Little Horn or Daniel 7

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EVER SINCE THE TERRORIST attacks on the World Trade Center by Islamic militants, the attention of some Christians has been directed to Bible prophecy, looking to see whether the Bible projects any role for this world religion in our time.

A review of the history of prophetic interpretation shows that some leaders of the Protestant Reformation like Luther and Calvin pointed to Islam as a possible fulfillment of the little horn of Daniel 7. Recently this view has been revived; some are suggesting that we should take Islam seriously today as a fulfillment of Daniel 7.<sup>[1]</sup>

From a historical point of view it is not surprising that the Reformers looked at Islam as a fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy. When Islam arose in the 7th century and for some time after, Catholics also identified Islam as the Antichrist. During the 16th century Islam was a very great threat to Christianity because of its military successes in Eastern Europe.

Against this background Luther interpreted the little horn of Daniel 7 as *both* Islam and the papacy. So did some other Reformers. We should, however, be careful what we accept of the Reformers' interpretations of Daniel, because much of this prophetic book was to be sealed until the time of the end (Daniel 12:4). Obviously the time of the Reformation was not the time of the end.

The events of the 18th and 19th centuries, such as the French Revolution, the "deadly wound" to the papal government and the decline of the Islamic Ottoman empire, led prophetic expositors to conclude that Islam did not fit the profile of the little horn. However, in the light of recent political developments focusing on Islam it will be helpful to see whether there is anything to the notion that Islam can be identified as the little horn of Daniel 7.

The Four Kingdoms. The prophecy of Daniel 7 presents the familiar picture of four beasts coming out of a great sea. First appeared a lion, which interpreters have identified as representing Babylon. The second beast was a bear, representing Medo-Persia. The third was a leopard, representing Greece, and the fourth, a "dreadful and terrible" beast, representing Rome. Ten horns emerged out of the fourth kingdom, followed by a little horn which would attempt to annihilate God's people.

Although experience has shown that most prophecies can be understood only after they have been fulfilled, the early Christians interpreted the four beasts as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome, and they expected ten kingdoms to arise out of Rome. History reveals that they were right! Between A.D. 351 and 476 barbarian invasions broke the Roman Empire into ten kingdoms. The early Christians also believed that after the division of the empire the little horn power would arise and oppose Christ and His church, bringing great affliction upon God's people.

Daniel 7:8, 11, 20, 21, 24 and 25 present the little horn's characteristics. In

trying to identify the little horn power we need to be sure each aspect of the biblical description fits the power we apply it to. We will now compare each of these distinctive features with Islam to see whether Islam fits historically.

#### Origin of the Little Horn

##### 1. It arose out of the fourth beast (Dan 7:7, 8)

The prophecy shows that the little horn was to arise out of the fourth beast, which is the Roman Empire. This is certainly not the case with Islam. Islam originated outside the Roman Empire. It began its conquests from its base at Medina in today's Saudi Arabia. It is therefore incorrect to identify the little horn as Islam on the basis of the geography of its origin.<sup>[2]</sup>

##### 2. It arose among the ten horns (Dan 7:8)

History shows that ten barbarian tribes (the ten horns) established themselves within the Roman Empire as kingdoms during the 4th and 5th centuries. The little horn was to develop among these kingdoms, or ten horns. This was not the case with Islam, which, as we have seen, developed outside the divided empire. So this characteristic of the little horn does not fit Islam.<sup>[3]</sup>

##### 3. It arose during the time of the ten horns (Dan 7:24)

The little horn arose while the ten barbarian kingdoms were in place. But by the time Islam arose, three of the ten had already disappeared. Therefore, there is no relation between the rise of Islam and the ten kingdoms of the Roman Empire. Again, this *time* characteristic of the little horn does not fit Islam.<sup>[4]</sup>

##### 4. It subdued and uprooted three kingdoms (Dan 7:8, 20, 24)

During its rise the little horn subdued and uprooted three of the horn kingdoms. Some have suggested that Islam fulfilled this characteristic because it subdued Egypt, Palestine and Syria, three major centers of primitive Christianity and of the Eastern Roman Empire.

But this view is problematic. The prophecy does not speak about centers of Christianity. It refers to kingdoms that totally disappeared. The early Islamic conquest of Egypt, Palestine and Syria refers to regions within the Eastern Roman Empire. These regions were not kingdoms at all. Furthermore, the three uprooted horns have to be kingdoms that were part of the ten kingdoms that derived from the Roman Empire. Islam fails to meet this characteristic of the little horn.

In addition, Islam did not confine itself to these three regions. Note the conquests of Islam. Between A.D. 635 and 649, a period of about 15 years, it conquered Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, Babylon, Egypt, the island of Cyprus, and the areas of North Africa that included Pentapolis, Carthage, and Tripoli. Some of these regions were part of the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire (Syria, Palestine, Egypt, North Africa, and Cyprus). Others were under Persian control (Mesopotamia and Babylon). Designating only some regions of the Byzantine Empire (Egypt, Palestine, and Syria) as the three horns that the little horn uprooted and not mentioning other regions of its early conquest is completely arbitrary. Again Islam does not fit this characteristic of the little horn.<sup>[5]</sup>

#### Appearance of the Little Horn

##### 5. It had eyes like the eyes of a man (Dan 7:8, 20)

The little horn had eyes like human eyes, a feature representing evidence of intelligence. This aspect could apply to Islam.

##### 6. It had a mouth speaking great things (Dan 7:8, 20)

The little horn had a mouth speaking great things. This has been interpreted as speaking blasphemously. Here Islam could qualify, because throughout its history it has spoken blasphemous things against the Christian faith.

##### 7. It looked more stout than its fellows (Dan 7:20)

The little horn is stouter in comparison to the ten kings. In the literal sense of the word, we cannot say that Islam was more stout or greater than its fellow kingdoms.

Granted that Islam grew until it was much more powerful than the barbarian kingdoms. However, these kingdoms cannot be considered as fellow kingdoms of Islam, because Islam did not arise among them.

8. It was different from the other horns (Dan 7:24)

It is true that Islam has been different from the other kingdoms. These other horns or kingdoms were primarily political powers, while Islam has always been a strongly religio-political power. Here Islam would qualify.

#### Behavior of the Little Horn

9. It spoke great words against the most High (Dan 7:25)

This could certainly apply to Islam, a religio-political power that has frequently spoken blasphemous words against the God of Christianity.

10. It made war with the saints and prevailed against them (Dan 7:21); it wore out the saints of the most High (Dan 7:25)

The long-continued conflict between Islam and Christianity appears at first glance to reflect the persecuting nature of the little horn. Islamic nations have fought many wars against Christians. However, in the time prior to the Crusades (11th to the 13th century), Islamic powers made a distinction in their treatment of the followers of the various Christian churches. For example, they showed no mercy toward Roman Catholics, who venerated Mary and the saints and used images, which Muslims considered idolatry.<sup>[6]</sup>

**Nestorian or Syrian Christians, however, who professed to follow the Scriptures and opposed image worship, were allowed great freedom; at times they were even employed and respected at the courts of the caliphs.**<sup>[7]</sup>

This means that the most faithful Christians, or "saints," were respected, while the apostate Christians were persecuted. The prophecy stated that God's *true* followers, not the apostates, would be the ones persecuted. By persecuting the apostates instead of the "saints," Islam proved it was not the little horn.

11. It thought to change times and laws (Dan 7:25)

Some suggest that Mohamed's decision to make Friday the Islamic day of worship fulfils the little horn's characteristic of changing times and laws. However, nothing in Islam's past indicates that any Muslim has publicly claimed to have changed God's law from the Saturday Sabbath to Friday.

The prophecy said that the little horn would make a deliberate attempt to change God's times and laws. Here the focus is on a religious power that claims to have the authority to alter God's law.

Islam does not consider Friday a weekly day of rest! True, there is a Friday noon service with prayer and a sermon, but rest and abstinence from any secular work on Friday is not a part of the Muslim religion.

The following passage in the Koran gives an insight into the nature of the Friday "Day of Congregation." "O you who believe! When the call is made for prayer on Friday, then hasten to the remembrance of Allah and leave off traffic; that is better for you, if you know. But when the prayer is ended, then disperse abroad in the land and seek of Allah his grace, and remember Allah much, that you may be successful."

A Muslim commentator has explained these verses this way: "Ordinary business may be carried on by a Muslim on Friday before or after the *Jumu'iah* prayer. Hence, unlike the Jewish and the Christian Sabbaths, it is not necessarily a day of rest. But attendance at the *Jumu'iah* prayers is obligatory, and as soon as the call to prayer is given, every Muslim is bound to leave business of every kind and immediately to hasten to the mosque."<sup>[8]</sup>

Clearly, the weekly Muslim holy day is nothing like the weekly biblical Sabbath of

rest.

Why did Muslims select Friday? We read, "Muhammad claims in the Traditions to have established Friday as a day of worship by divine command. He says, >Friday was ordered as a divine day of worship both for the Jew and Christian, but they have acted contrary to the command. The Jew fixed Saturday and the Christian fixed Sunday.' According to the same traditions, Friday is >the best day on which the sun rises, the day on which Adam was taken into Paradise and turned out of it, the day on which he repented and on which he died. It will also be the Day of Resurrection."<sup>[9]</sup>

When we compare these reasons for observing the Muslim Friday with the text of Daniel 7:25, we discover that none of them fit the characteristic of the little horn who *thinks--or intends--*"to change times and laws." We notice that Islam has never claimed to change God's law but states that originally God appointed Friday as the divine day of worship. Thus from an Islamic perspective, those who changed God's law are the Jews and Christians. The position of Islam on the weekly day of worship clears it from being a fulfillment of the little horn.

#### Its Duration

#### 12. It reigned for a time, times, and the dividing of time (Dan 7:25)

The little horn's three-and-a-half-year time period does not find any historical fulfillment in the history of Islam. To reconcile this problem, proponents suggest that the period is half of seven, God's number of perfection. The "half of seven" time period then becomes a symbol of incompleteness and limitation. During this period the forces of the Antichrist are limited and do not reach the scope of the complete destruction of God's people.

Interpreting the three and a half years as an indefinite time is a complete departure from the continuous historical or *historicist* school of prophetic interpretation that the Reformers taught and Adventists maintain. It comes from a different school of prophetic interpretation, called *idealism*, that is careful to avoid seeing specific historical events as fulfillments of prophecy. Idealism leaves the identity of the little horn blurred and subject to speculation, leading to the view that the prophecy can have multiple fulfillments.

#### Conclusion

After reviewing these 12 identifying characteristics of the little horn given in Daniel, we conclude that only four can apply to Islam. The majority of characteristics, 8 out of 12, do not fit Islam. We can conclude, therefore, that Islam is not a viable fulfillment of the little horn. Without a better proposal, we have no grounds for moving away from the interpretation of the little horn that Adventists embraced in the 19th century and have taught ever since.

Let us beware of muddying the interpretive waters, casting doubt on clear historical fulfillments, and getting excited over speculative interpretations, when the long-established views are just now reaching their most complete fulfillment.

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#### NOTES

1 See Samuele Bacchiocchi's newsletter, *Endtime Issues* No. 86: *Islam and the Papacy in Prophecy*, July 6, 2002.

2 Harry W. Hazard, comp., *Atlas of Islamic History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951); R. Roolvink, comp., *Historical Atlas of the Muslim Peoples* (Amsterdam: Djambatan, 1957); William C. Brice, ed., *An Historical Atlas of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981).

**3 Ibid.**

**4 Ibid.**

**5 See, e.g., Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), xiv; P. M. Holt, et al., eds., *Cambridge History of Islam* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 1:62, 63; G. B. von Grunebaum, *Classical Islam: A History 600-1258* (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co., [1970]), 54, 202; Bernard Lewis, ed. and tr., *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 1:xxxv.**

**6 See, e.g., Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 2:51.**

**7 See, e.g., John Stewart, *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise, the Story of a Church on Fire* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1928), 214, 215; Aziz S. Atiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity* (London: Methuen, 1968), 193, 194.**

**8 Maulvi M. Ali, *The Holy Qur-án Containing the Arabic Text with English Translation and Commentary* (Woking, Surrey, England: Islamic Review Office, 1917) 1077.**

**9 Thomas P. Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam: Being a Cyclopaedia of the Doctrines, Rites, Ceremonies, and Customs, Together with the Technical and Theological Terms of the Muhammadan Religion* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1885) 132. See also H. Lammens, *Islam: Beliefs and Institutions* (New York: Dutton, [1926]), 59, 60.**

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