

Re-establishing the Prophetic Foundations of Adventism

As we approach the final conflict in this earth's history, we hear many voices crying out about prophecy. It seems that each church and minister has his own take on what prophecy means and how it will be fulfilled. From the idea that the prophecies were all fulfilled in the past to the seven year tribulation and the rapture theories and the idea of resurrected pope ruling in Jerusalem, these theories can range from the absurd to the wildly fantastic. But what is the truth? Do we have anything on which to base a correct understanding of prophecy? Does prophecy even matter? Or is it a mysterious collection of irrelevant spiritual ideas that shouldn't bother us at all?

Coming at this problem from the viewpoint of Adventism, we have a very solid platform to start from. However Adventism today has changed a lot of its interpretations as well and it begins to feel that our solid platform isn't so solid anymore. Are we slipping? How do we come to a true understanding of what prophecy means?

There seem to be four primary methods of prophetic interpretation. The spiritual, the preterist, the futurist, and the historic. Most interpretation models use a combination of all four of these methods.

The spiritual method views all prophecy and, in fact, all the Bible as a mystical book with primarily spiritual meaning and little or no literal meaning. This school of thought was brought into the church by Origen in the third century. He attempted to blend pagan philosophy with Christian doctrine. He taught the idea that there were many levels of spiritual meaning in the scriptures that were of far greater importance than the literal surface meaning. In this way the scriptures could be made to teach the pagan philosophies and its literal reading was discouraged. See *Rome – The Great Apostasy pages 387-391* by *A.T. Jones*.

The second method of prophetic interpretation is the preterist method. This method was consolidated and developed by the Spanish Jesuit Alcazar and is based on the idea that all prophecy had its literal fulfillment in the early Christian church and that none of it remains to be fulfilled or concern us today. In this view even Christ's second coming is construed to have taken place during the first two or three centuries of the Christian church, which is a difficult position to prove from either history or the scriptures.

The third method is the futurist viewpoint. This one has also been linked to a Spanish Jesuit whose name was Francisco Ribera. According to this view most of the prophecy will take place in the future and from this view we get some interesting interpretations of a seven year tribulation, a three and half year reign of the anti-Christ, a secret rapture, and other ideas that are just as difficult to prove from scripture as the preterist idea.

Admittedly not all the current ideas derived from these three methods were presented by these three men. The work they did was to establish a prophetic interpretation framework that others have worked upon. They developed a set of what are called hermeneutic principles for Biblical interpretation. The word hermeneutics means to interpret a text and is derived from the name of the Pagan god Hermes. He was the god of travelers, shepherds, thieves, and literature. One of his exceptional traits was deception and falsehood. Once established and believed, these hermeneutic principles of interpretation lead to some very unlikely conclusions from the point of reason and conscience. However, theology students are taught to put complete trust in principles of this kind and are consequently left wandering

in a maze of darkness.

The Jesuit order was established for the purpose of destroying the reformation and returning all Christians to an allegiance to the Pope. To this end they brought in the counter reformation. The preterist and futurist methods were brought in as a means of derailing the protestant idea that the papacy was a fulfillment of prophecy. Some protestants liked the futurist idea very much and ran with it adding to and embellishing it as they went. Jesuits love to do this. They insert an idea and when the protestant preachers run with it, they sit back and laugh and point out to all that these are protestant ideas and not Jesuit at all. While the seven year tribulation and the secret rapture may not have been ideas that Ribera came up with, he laid down the framework from which these ideas have sprung.

But there is one more concept of prophetic interpretation in existence. It is called the historicist interpretation model. In this view prophecy is history written in advance. It is a revelation to the true believer of the events, both political and religious that are going to transpire literally in this world. The prophecy begins at the time of the prophet who receives it and covers history from that time forward to whichever point is the climax that God wishes us to know about. It seems that in both the prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation the climax of almost every prophecy is the second coming of Christ in glory to gather His people home. From this view point all we have to do is to look at the prophecy and compare it with history and see where we are in relation to this final climax. All we have to find out is how much is fulfilled? And we will see how much is left to be fulfilled. It is a simple and straight forward method, taking all things to be literal unless it is obviously symbolic. All the spiderweb of serpentine windings used by the other three methods of interpretation are not needed in the historicist method. There is no need of confusion or heated argument. All we need do is look and see. Was this not what was said to Nathanael under the fig tree when he asked "Can any good thing come from Nazareth?" Philip responded, "Come and see." *John 1:45,46*

The historicist method was the method of the reformers from Wycliff to Luther. It gave rise to the greatest revival and reformation in Christian history and is the method on which William Miller based his interpretation of prophecy. The Seventh-day Adventist church was built on a solid foundation of historicist prophecy interpretation. While the protestants were a people of the Bible, the Adventists were solidly a people of Bible Prophecy. To Adventists the books of Daniel and Revelation were no longer a mystery but were their own books. Their message was powerful and it demonstrated that we are at the very climax of prophecy and they proved it by saying "look and see." There was not any portion of these two books that were considered to be a mystery.

So, what happened? Why are so many Adventists today confused about what some of these prophecies mean? Why is Adventism now considered irrelevant by many, even Adventists themselves?

Today, Adventist interpretation of prophecy is a strange mix of the historic, the futurist, the preterist, and the spiritual. This change began when the message of 1888 was rejected by the Adventist leadership. The first attack on interpretation came in the 1890's with the "new view" of the daily. This was followed in the early 1900's with the "new view" of the king of the north and by the 1950's many in Adventist theology circles had repudiated the idea that Daniel 8:14 referred to the heavenly sanctuary and the entire Adventist concept of the investigative judgment was held in question. *Raymond Cottrell, taped Recollections on the Investigative Judgment.*

The "new view" of the daily, introduced by Conradi in the 1890's, was a spiritual interpretation.

According to this view the daily was the daily ministration of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. (As opposed to the old interpretation of Miller and the Adventist pioneers that it was paganism.) It was presented as a reasonable view in light of the Adventist understanding of the sanctuary message but followed to its logical conclusion it removed the Adventist understanding of Daniel 8:14. Without Daniel 8:14 the very reason for the existence of the Adventist church is removed. And Adventists wonder why their church's message is now irrelevant?

The “new view” of the king of north was finally removed from a vague interpretation that it must be the Papacy into a seemingly reasonable, detailed presentation by Luis Were in the late 40's and early 50's. To do this he used a spiritual application of the last 5 verses of Daniel 11. His presentation was immediately hailed as the correct view held by the Adventist pioneers, completely ignoring the fact that those pioneers who did hold the view that the king of the north was the Papacy were looking for a literal fulfillment in accordance with the historicist method, not a spiritual one.

Who was Luis Were? To date, I have found no information about him, except that he was an Australian Adventist evangelist who had some connection with the inner circle of Adventist leadership.

But what of those who call themselves Historic Adventists? Surely they must stick to the historic method. Unfortunately we find this not to be the case. The historic position on prophecy is itself a mix of spiritual and historicist interpretation. While rejecting the “new view” of the daily and resurrecting the 1843 and 1850 prophecy charts, reviving the 2520 time prophecy, the leading Historic Adventist prophecy expositors follow explicitly the “new view” of the king of the north and the spiritual application developed by Luis Were. They also follow Were in the presentation of Revelation 17. In his presentation of Revelation 17 Were uses a conglomeration of Spiritual, Preterist, Futurist, and historicist interpretations to prove his point that the Papacy will reach its zenith of power in the future and that the message of Revelation 18 is a warning against the unity of church and state. In light of this, we are forced to ask the question, how historic is Historic Adventism? It seems to be a strange mix of 1920's and 1950's doctrines that are sincerely believed to be what the pioneers themselves taught. We can sincerely believe error, but our sincerity does not make it truth.

An interesting note on the use of the 2520 is that James White himself repudiates the use of the seven times as a prophecy at all in an article in the Review in 1864. *Review and Herald, January 26, 1864*. Uriah Smith also tells us that the seven times of Leviticus 26 are not prophetic. *See Daniel and the Revelation pp. 784-785*. We are supposedly upholding James White's views on prophecy by presenting the spiritual application of the Papacy being the king of the north while at the same time presenting a pioneer position on the 2520 that James White spoke against.

Just what did the pioneers teach on prophecy? There are a multitude of voices proclaiming to teach the historic position. Who is right? Even Historic Adventists seem to be holding to a strange mix of Jesuit/pagan interpretation.

We want to uncover the true foundations of historicist Adventist interpretation by relying on what the pioneers actually wrote on the topic, instead of what others have said they believed. Let us come to our conclusions by using original sources instead of simply relying on what others have reported. After uncovering this platform of truth, the true prophetic foundations of Adventism, let us build on that platform using the same methods and historicist principles they used to understand the prophecies that are relevant to current events.

The historicist method is the only correct method of prophetic interpretation. Prophecy follows in an unbroken line from the time it was given to the time of Christ's second coming and beyond.

The current Adventist and historic Adventist presentations of prophecy leave out as insignificant most of the events of the 20th century. You are left with the impression that the last century was one of peace, when any historian will tell you the exact opposite. Historians tell us that the 20th century was a humanitarian disaster. The world wars were the worst wars in the history of this world. To interpret prophecy by the historicist method and include a gap that leaves out the worst century in the history of mankind is not reasonable. God always warns His people of what is going to happen and to think that He failed to tell us about the last century is an absurd notion.

The problem does not lie with the prophecy. It lies with the interpretation of the prophecy. If the historicist methods of the Adventist pioneers are followed to their logical conclusion the events of the 20th century are truly included in prophecy. They have not been left out at all. Any prophetic interpretation that leaves out the last 100 to 200 years of history is not reasonable. It simply does not make sense to use a historicist method to bring us to 1844 and then jump to a futuristic, spiritualist idea of an end time scenario beginning with a Sunday law more than 150 years later. History did not stop in 1844 to then resume at some future time, but rather moves on in a continuous line from then to now. Prophecy does the same. While the future Sunday law is definitely there in prophecy, it is not the beginning event that starts end time scenario that culminates in the second coming. It is the final act in the drama. *See Testimonies volume 7 page 141, and Review and Herald April 23, 1901.*

The Jews missed Christ's first advent because they misinterpreted prophecy. We do not wish to follow their example by misinterpreting prophecy and thus being unprepared for His second Advent.

“The Jews misinterpreted and misapplied the word of God, and they knew not the time of their visitation. The years of the ministry of Christ and His apostles,--the precious last years of grace to the chosen people,--they spent in plotting the destruction of the Lord's messengers. Earthly ambitions absorbed them, and the offer of the spiritual kingdom came to them in vain. So today the kingdom of this world absorbs men's thoughts, and they take no note of the rapidly fulfilling prophecies and the tokens of the swift-coming kingdom of God.” *Desire of Ages page 235.*