

# **The Apocalyptic View of History: Extra-Biblical Apocalypses and Implications for the Interpretation of Revelation**

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## **Abstract**

This study examines select extra-biblical Jewish and Christian apocalypses in order to clarify how the apocalyptic genre conceptualized the relationship between prophecy and history, and how this comparative perspective can inform the interpretation of the book of Revelation. After surveying ten representative historical apocalypses, the article highlights four defining features shared across the corpus: (1) a pronounced interest in the flow of history from the vantage point of the assumed author to the consummation of the age; (2) the pervasive use of *ex eventu* prophecy, rooted in pseudepigraphy, both to bridge chronological gaps and to confer authority on the work; (3) the fundamentally predictive orientation of apocalyptic literature, in which portrayals of the past function as narrative scaffolding for future expectations; and (4) the presence of both short-term and long-term eschatological predictions. These characteristics reveal a consistent genre logic that bears directly on the hermeneutical debates surrounding Revelation. The analysis argues that neither idealism, full preterism, nor futurism coheres with the historical-apocalyptic framework exemplified in extra-biblical texts. Instead, the study contends that a historicist reading—understood as the expectation of unfolding divine action across the span of post-apostolic history—best aligns with the genre's assumptions and with John's self-presentation as a prophet of the future.

**Keywords:** apocalyptic literature, *ex eventu* prophecy, historicism, Revelation, jewish pseudepigrapha

## **Resumen**

Este estudio examina una selección de apocalipsis judíos y cristianos extrabíblicos con el fin de esclarecer cómo el género apocalíptico concibió la relación entre profecía e historia, y cómo esta perspectiva comparativa puede iluminar la interpretación del libro de Apocalipsis. Tras revisar diez apocalipsis históricos representativos, el artículo destaca cuatro rasgos definitorios

compartidos en todo el corpus: (1) un marcado interés por el desarrollo histórico desde la perspectiva del autor supuesto hasta la consumación final; (2) el uso generalizado de profecías *ex eventu*, derivado de la pseudepigrafía, tanto para llenar vacíos cronológicos como para conferir autoridad a la obra; (3) la orientación fundamentalmente predictiva de la literatura apocalíptica, en la que las referencias al pasado funcionan como andamiaje narrativo para las expectativas futuras; y (4) la presencia de predicciones escatológicas de corto y largo alcance. Estos elementos revelan una lógica genérica coherente que incide directamente en los debates hermenéuticos en torno al Apocalipsis. El análisis sostiene que ni el idealismo, ni el preterismo pleno, ni el futurismo se ajustan al marco histórico-apocalíptico de los textos extrabíblicos. En contraste, se argumenta que una lectura historicista—entendida como la expectativa de una acción divina que se despliega a lo largo de la historia posapostólica—corresponde mejor a los supuestos del género y a la autocomprensión profética de Juan como profeta del futuro.

**Palabras clave:** literatura apocalíptica, profecía *ex eventu*, historicismo, Apocalipsis, pseudepigrafía.

## Introduction

The book of Revelation has been central to the theology and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Adventists believe Revelation's prophecies cover the span of history, beginning with apostolic times and ending with the promised new heavens and new earth.<sup>1</sup> This hermeneutical approach is called historicism, because the prophecies cover large spans of human history. Historicism was for centuries the dominant Christian hermeneutic for Revelation. Not anymore. The last two centuries have witnessed the growth of alternative approaches.

Preterism understands all or most of the prophecies of Revelation to have been fulfilled in the 1st century AD, in the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> They believe that Revelation tells history in the guise of prophecy, a technique called *ex eventu* prophesies, “prophesies” written after the event. Truly predictive elements, if present, are minimal. Futurism, by contrast, posits that Revelation's prophecies pertain to the time immediately before the Second Coming, i.e., to the distant future from the perspective of the author. Hence the term, futurism.<sup>3</sup> Lastly, idealism detaches Revelation from any historical events and assumes the

<sup>1</sup> Richard Sabuin, “Historicism: the Adventist approach? a response to the challenges to historicism”, *JAAS* 11, no. 2 (2008): 159-174.

<sup>2</sup> C. M. Pate, Stanley N. Gundry, Kenneth L. Gentry, and Robert L. Thomas, *Four Views on Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 22, 37.

<sup>3</sup> G. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 9-14.

prophetic descriptions have a purely symbolic function to describe in vivid terms the spiritual battle between good and evil.<sup>4</sup>

Which hermeneutic is most valid in interpreting Revelation? Exegesis is the best tool to judge the validity of each hermeneutic. But other tools can also help. One of these is a comparative approach. Revelation was not written in a vacuum. It belongs to a genre, the apocalyptic genre. Beginning around the turn of the era (much earlier in the case of the book of Daniel), numerous writings appeared, mainly Jewish but eventually Christian as well, that belong to the apocalyptic genre.<sup>5</sup> We call them apocalypses. Some cover whole books, as is the case with Revelation. Others appear as sections within books. They differ from Revelation in two ways. First, they are not in the Biblical canon. Second, nearly all are pseudepigraphical; they claim to have been written by one person when in fact they were written by another, an unknown person. Pseudepigraphy was a common Jewish practice. Ascribing a work to a prominent figure from the OT helped infuse writings with appeal and credibility. Pseudepigraphy is one of the reasons these works are not in the Bible. How can a work that contains a lie in its very title be inspired? But it is not the only one. Neither the rabbis nor the early church were tempted to include them in the Hebrew and Christian canons respectively. Nonetheless they were popular, as their survival testifies.

Apocalypses could be diverse in subject matter but for ease of reference can be divided into two categories. Those that entail otherworldly journeys and contain revelations about heavenly realities; and those that deal with God's workings in history and focus on the consummation of the age. Both types can appear within the same book. Those belonging to the latter category are referred to as historical apocalypses and will be the focus of this study because they have closer parallels to the outlook of Revelation.

Over the last two centuries these writings have received considerable attention, though not so much in Adventist circles. But they are useful windows through which to gain insights into the milieu in which Christianity grew and John wrote the Revelation. Perhaps a better understanding of extra-biblical apocalypses can inform and nuance our understanding of Revelation. Indeed, if we see how they related to prophecy and history we might get a better understanding of how the genre approached prophecy and history, and therefore gauge which of the Revelation hermeneutics fits better.

To that aim, this study has reviewed the following eight Jewish and two Christian apocalypses: the Animal Apocalypse (1 En. 83:1-90:42); the Apocalypse of Weeks (1 En. 93:1-14; 91:12-17); the Eagle Vision (4 Ezra 11:1-12:39); the Apocalypse of the Forest (2 Bar. 35:1-43:3); the Apocalypse of the 12 Clouds (2 Bar. 53:1-74:4); the Apocalypse of Abraham; the Apocalypse

<sup>4</sup> Pate, *et al.*, *Four Views*, 129.

<sup>5</sup> John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 1-52.

of Elijah; Sibylline Oracles Books 1 & 2; the Shepherd of Hermas; and the Apocalypse of Thomas. The list is by no means exhaustive of historical apocalypses, but it is representative.

What are some of the major tenets of these apocalypses? A good introduction to apocalyptic literature (and there are multiple) highlights these.<sup>6</sup> So, there is no need for repetition here. Rather, I have chosen to focus on areas which I believe are of more interest to an Adventist outlook, and to our desire to better understand Biblical apocalyptic, especially Revelation.

I will note four such areas. First, and in some ways most important, historical apocalypses take a strong interest in the flow of history, starting from the point in time of the assumed writer (or earlier) and ending with the consummation of the age and beyond. Second, pseudepigraphic apocalypses are characterized by *ex eventu* prophecies. Understandable if we consider that there is a large time gap between the assumed and the actual writer. Third, all apocalypses are predictive. The writers present their understanding of how history will come to its conclusion. Fourth, such predictions can be short, or long-term.

The paper will be divided into four sections where I will develop these thoughts further, and then in the conclusion I will endeavour to draw some implications for the study of Revelation.

### **A strong interest in history**

A prominent trend in historical apocalypses is an overview of history. This stretches at least from the time of the assumed author to the consummation of the age. On some occasions, the apocalypse may look back to events before the time of the assumed author. This is the case, for example, with the Animal Apocalypse, and the Sibylline Oracles 1 and 2, which begin with Adam, though the assumed authors are Enoch and the mythical Hebrew Sibyl respectively. In the Apocalypse of the 12 Clouds, written supposedly by Jeremiah's helper, Baruch, in the 6th century BC, history is divided into twelve periods symbolized by twelve clouds. Eleven of the clouds refer to events either contemporary with Baruch or older, indicating that writers were not only interested in the future, but in the flow of history in general.

The interest in history can take three forms. When referring to periods before the time of the assumed author, it is told as a story. When referring to periods between the time of the assumed author and the actual author, it is presented in the form of prophecy, *ex eventu*. When it refers to beyond the time

<sup>6</sup> E.g., David Syme Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (London: Westminster Press, 1964), and *Divine Disclosure - An Introduction To Jewish Apocalyptic* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992); Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*; Cecilia Wassen and Sidnie White Crawford, eds., *Apocalyptic Thinking in Early Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Mitchell G. Reddish, ed., *Apocalyptic Literature: a Reader* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990).

of the actual author, then it is prediction —an expression of the expectations of the author about what would happen in the near or distant future.

Apocalypses sometimes describe history as a series of events. This is the case with the Apocalypses of the Forest, Abraham, Elijah, and Thomas. At other times they divide history past and future into segments, a practice that has been termed, periodization of history. The number of segments can be three, four, seven, ten, or twelve, since in the Jewish mindset, these numbers carried symbolic significance.<sup>7</sup> From the apocalypses reviewed, the Apocalypse of Weeks and the Apocalypse of the 12 Clouds divide history into twelve segments; the Sibylline Oracles books 1 and 2 into ten; the Shepherd of Hermas and the Eagle Vision into four; and the Animal Apocalypse into three.

This interest in the flow of history is not present only in apocalyptic. It was an important tenet of ancient peoples in general and the Jewish people in particular. In Deuteronomy, Moses exhorted Israel to faithfulness by recounting their past. And both Stephen (Acts 7:1-60) and Paul (Acts 13:16-41), to name two well-known examples, presented Jesus as the culmination and fulfilment of expectations of the history of Israel. Retelling their past provided an assurance of Divine guidance. Just as God had looked after His people in the past, so would He continue to do so in the future.

Summarizing, the interest in the flow of history is integral to historical apocalypses. And not only in apocalypses, but in the Jewish mindset in general.

### ***Ex eventu* prophecies**

A second characteristic of extra-biblical apocalypses is *ex eventu* prophecies. As noted earlier, extra-biblical apocalypses are pseudepigraphical, the real author is not the one who is named. Among assumed authors are Enoch (3rd millennium BC), the mythical Hebrew Sibyl (3rd millennium BC), Abraham (2nd millennium BC), Elijah (9th century BC), Baruch (6th century BC), Ezra (5th century BC), and Thomas (1st century AD). Since the assumed author lived centuries before the actual, any historical descriptions relating to the intervening centuries could not be presented as history but only as prophecy; *ex eventu* prophecy, i.e., prophecy written after the described events have transpired.

In the apocalyptic context *ex eventu* prophecies functioned in two ways. First, they provided a foundation of credibility. If, for example, the Hebrew Sibyl had provided an accurate prediction of the flow of history from her time in the 3rd millennium BC, to the first century AD (the time of actual composition), this would mean that whatever else is predicted about the future would also be accurate. Apocalyptic writers could point to supposed predictions about past events to beef up their predictions about the future. *Ex eventu*

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<sup>7</sup> E.g., Adela Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism*, JSJSup 50 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 55-138.

prophecies, therefore, where the proof that what apocalyptic writers were predicting about the future was valid.

But this was not their primary goal. Many *ex eventu* prophecies are general or brief, and some totally confusing. Take the Eagle Vision (4 Ezra 11:1-12:39) for example, which I will discuss in more detail below. The eagle, we are told (4 Ez 12:11), is the fourth beast of the four seen by Daniel (Dan 7). Daniel names the first three, a lion, a bear, and a leopard, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece. But he does not name the fourth. He only calls it “terrifying and dreadful” (Dan 7:7). The Eagle Vision picks up where Daniel left off, and names the fourth beast as an eagle, obviously to identify it with Rome. Had the actual author of the Eagle Vision wanted to establish his prophetic credentials, he could have given a detailed description of the first three beasts as *ex eventu* prophecy, since the assumed author is Ezra, only slightly later than Daniel. But he does not. He goes straight to the fourth beast. He describes the eagle in considerable detail, but in such an obscure way, that he has left modern commentators baffled as to which Roman emperors and which events he is describing. Not very credibility enhancing! While, therefore, *ex eventu* prophecy certainly functioned as a modicum to establish credibility, this was not the only, sometimes not even the primary goal.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, *ex eventu* prophecies were needed to fill the time gap between the assumed and the actual author. Why would Enoch, for example, the assumed author of 1 Enoch writing supposedly in the 3rd millennium BC, predict events relating to the first century AD and beyond, but not events before that? Why leave a gap of three millennia? *Ex eventu* prophecies ensured that there was no gap in the flow of history from the time of the assumed author (or earlier) to the consummation of the age. It fitted with the idea of God as a sovereign throughout history.

The one extra-biblical apocalypse examined for this study that is not pseudoecclesiastical, The Shepherd of Hermas, does not contain *ex eventu* prophecies. This Christian apocalypse was ascribed by early Christians to Hermas, a brother of the Bishop of Rome, Pius I (c. 81-155 AD). Since there was no assumed author and therefore no time gap between an assumed and the real author, there was no need for *ex eventu* prophecy.

Summarizing, *ex eventu* prophecy functioned to (a) establish credibility, and (b) more importantly, to ensure that the flow of history had no gaps.

### **The predictive dimension of apocalyptic**

There is an assumption that apocalypses are predominantly history in the form of *ex eventu* prophecies and that predictive elements are minor. This is a misconception. As important as past history was, apocalyptic writers were not primarily interested in that. If so, they would have written as historians. Their interest was rather to encourage their readers in times of national crisis by pointing out that God’s will would ultimately triumph in the near or not so near

future. And for them to point this out, it meant that they had certain anticipations about the future. It is these anticipations that they put forth to their readers. Apocalypse mean to reveal something. Historical apocalypses endeavoured to reveal the future not the past. Any references to the past either as history or as *ex eventu* prophecies were only props. The primary focus of apocalyptic was predictive.

To demonstrate this, we can look at two examples:

### **Sibylline Oracles 1 & 2**

The first example is *Sibylline Oracles* books 1 and 2 that form a single unit, with book 2 being a continuation of book 1. The work is composite in nature with the main framework consisting of a Jewish composition dated to the turn of the era, to which a Christian redactor added interpolations, no later than the first half of the second century AD.<sup>8</sup> The assumed writer is the mythical Hebrew Sybil who in Jewish tradition was a daughter-in-law of Noah.<sup>9</sup> So the assumed writer lived in the 3rd millennium BC.

The book begins with a brief description of creation and the fall and then divides history into ten periods, or ten generations. The first five generations take the reader from the fall to Noah, in which case, even from the assumed vantage point of the Sibyl, they are history. More emphasis is given to generation five since this is the supposed time of the Sibyl.

Generations six and seven are harder to decipher. Generation six seems to refer to the Davidic monarchy as indicated by its reference to “three great-spirited kings” (1:293), possibly Saul, David, Solomon, who would bring prosperity and peace. Interestingly, generation six is placed when “time will be at its midpoint” (1:292). It makes sense, since six is just past the midpoint on the way to ten.

Generation seven mentions the titans, a loan from Greek mythology, where the titans were the enemies of the Greek pantheon.<sup>10</sup> In the Sibylline Oracles they probably represent the enemies of Israel and, by extension of the one true God, from the exile onwards. This is supported by their description. They are earth-born (1:308), namely carnal; they are similar in appearance, nature, and of one language (1:309-10), probably a reference to the Greeks and Romans, and to the Greek language that was the lingua franca of the area from the time of Alexander the Great onward; they will have a proud heart (1:312);

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<sup>8</sup> John J. Collins, “Sibylline Oracles” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha vol 1: Apocalyptic Literature & Testaments*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 331-2.

<sup>9</sup> *Sib. Or* 1:289-290; 3:827; cf., John J. Collins, *Seers, Sibyls, and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism*, JSJSup 54 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 184.

<sup>10</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony* 617-720.

and will oppose the starry heaven (1:314). But God will defeat them, just like the Olympians defeated the titans of Greek mythology.

It is at generation seven that a Christian editor interpolates a prolonged description about the incarnation and life of Christ, as well as a brief statement about the dispersion of the Jews; probably a reference to their dispersion after AD 70 or, possibly, AD 135. As such, generations one to five are told as history, whereas generations six and seven as prophecy from the viewpoint of the Sibyl, but as *ex eventu* prophecy from the viewpoint of the actual author. This would imply that generations eight to ten would be purely predictive from the viewpoint of the actual author. Unfortunately, the description of generations eight and nine are missing. But generation ten is extant and very descriptive.

Numbers are indicative. Generations one to seven, the history and *ex eventu* parts of the vision, take up a total of 335 lines of text. Of these, 262 refer to Noah and the flood and could be considered an autobiography by the Sibyl, and 76 lines consist of the Christian interpolation about the life of Christ and the dispersion of the Jews. By contrast, generation ten on its own, the truly predictive part, covers 333 lines. It takes as much space as the first seven generations. And that, without counting the missing generations eight and nine, which would also have been predictive. Summarizing, the point to note is that the primary purpose of this composition was to predict the future, not recount the past.

## The Eagle Vision

Another example, perhaps not typical but nonetheless important, is 4 Ezra's Eagle Vision (4 Ezra 11:1-12:39), one of the better known extra-biblical apocalyptic visions. 4 Ezra is a compilation of a Jewish work (chapters 3-14) composed towards the end of the 1st century AD, with a Christian introduction (chs 1-2) and conclusion (ch 15-16).<sup>11</sup> The main body consists of seven independent visions which do not deal with history and will not concern us here. The one that will concern us is vision five, the Eagle Vision.

The vision is about an eagle with three heads and twelve wings. Just to complicate matters, another eight small wings appear. The eagle represents the Roman Empire, and the heads and wings represent rulers; twenty-three in total. The eagle represents the fourth beast of the four mentioned by the prophet Daniel (4 Ez 12:11). The vision concludes with a lion, the Messiah, destroying the eagle and establishing a righteous rule.

Timewise, the vision can be divided into three parts. The first part is the rule of the first three beasts of Daniel 7, the lion, the bear and the leopard. The vision does not describe them but assumes them by calling the eagle, “the fourth kingdom which appeared in a vision to your brother Daniel” (4 Ezra 12:11-12). The point to note here is that the author bypasses the opportunity to flout his

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<sup>11</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, “The fourth Book of Ezra” *OTP* 1:517-559.

supposed predictive skills by failing to describe the three first kingdoms through *ex eventu* prophecy.

The second part is the description of the eagle, his three heads, and twenty wings. Scholars assume the whole Eagle Vision to be *ex eventu* prophecy and that the heads and wings represent Roman Emperors that had already reigned. The problem is that the descriptions are vague, and commentators cannot agree who the emperors in view are. Some have even tried to redate the book to fit who they think the heads and wings represent.<sup>12</sup>

The suggestion that the twenty-three heads/wings represent past rulers of the Roman Empire is problematic. It would assume that the author was living at the time of the 23rd ruler and expected the imminent collapse of the Roman Empire. But why risk failure if the anticipated did not materialize? Rather than endeavor to identify the twenty-three heads/wings with specific rulers of the Roman Empire, past from the perspective of the author, it is safer to assume that the author was being vague on the identity of the heads/wings with some symbolizing past rulers, and some anticipated future ones. In which case, the vision becomes predictive.

The third part of the vision is the appearance of the Messiah in the form of a lion. Even if the heads and wings of the eagle are all *ex eventu*, the appearance of the Messiah is clearly still future from the point of view of the author, and therefore predictive. The Messiah will be from the line of David (4 Ezra 12:32), i.e., an earthly king. He will destroy the power of Rome and deliver the faithful (12:33). Then he will reign for an unspecified time until the end of human history (12:34).

Summing up, apocalyptic writings were not about telling past history in the form of prophecy. The primary focus was the future. Apocalyptic writings were written in times of distress and looked forward to a direct Divine intervention in history that would restore God's people and bring an era of peace and prosperity. Apocalyptic writings were primarily predictive.

### Long and short-term predictions

It is often assumed that apocalypticism concerned the past (*ex eventu* prophecies) and any prophecies concerning the future related only to the immediate future. This may be true of some visions but is by no means a rule. Sometimes short-term and long-term are closely intertwined. We will review three examples.

### The Animal Apocalypse

The Animal Apocalypse is part of 1 Enoch, the earliest and most influential of extra-biblical apocalypses. 1 Enoch is composite with portions

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<sup>12</sup> Lorenzo Di Tommaso, "Dating the Eagle Vision of 4 Ezra: a New Look at an Old Theory" *JSP* 20 (1999): 3-38.

dating to as early as the 2nd century BC, while most of the book was composed in the late 1st and early 2nd century AD.<sup>13</sup>

The Animal Apocalypse is a good example of short-term predictions. It depicts the flow of history through animals. White bulls represent mighty spiritual leaders; white sheep represent Israel. Wild animals represent the Gentiles. The writer divides history into three periods, each marked by the appearance of white bulls.<sup>14</sup> The first white bull represents Adam and marks the beginning of the first period (1 En 85:3). Then a set of bulls, four of them appear. Two are white, one is red and one black (1 En. 89:1, 9). The two white bulls represent Noah and Shem and the other two, Japeth and Ham. The period of this second set of bulls lasts until the time of the Maccabees, when the sheep (Israel) are attacked and eaten by wild animals (Gentiles) (1 En. 90:2-4). Then one horn, probably Judas Maccabeus, resists the attacks of the animals. Enraged they turn against him in greater force, and he calls out to the Shepherd of the sheep (God) (1 En. 90:13). The Shepherd intervenes and saves the sheep from the wild animals (90:13-19). There is a judgment where bad animals and fallen angels are punished. And all wild animals are made subject to the sheep.

This is an example of a short-term prediction. The Animal Apocalypse, as noted earlier, is part of 1 Enoch, and was composed probably in the 2nd century BC. The author expected Divine intervention in the immediate future. Yet, even within this short-term prediction, there is a long-term element. Once the Shepherd intervenes, a period of peace and prosperity ensues, probably long, to be followed by a third period that would begin when another white bull would appear, and all animals would be transformed into white bulls (1 En. 90:37-39):<sup>15</sup> a return to the Edenic ideal.

To summarize, in the Animal Apocalypse we have history (the first period until the flood), *ex eventu* prophecy (the second period until the Maccabees), a short-term prediction about the future which envisages the soon emergence of a messianic figure followed by a judgment and a restoration of Israel, followed by distant-future return to the Edenic ideal. The focus, however, is the short-term prediction of the messianic figure.

## Sibylline Oracles 1 & 2

Sibylline Oracles 1 and 2, by contrast, look much further into the future. I already discussed this apocalypse in the previous section to highlight the fact that predictive prophecy is the primary concern of apocalyptic. Now we will

<sup>13</sup> J. T. Milik, “Problèmes de la Littérature Hénochique à la Lumière des Fragments Araméens de Qumrân” *HTR* 64, no. 2-3 (1971): 333-78. Cf., J. T. Milik (ed), *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments Qumran Cave 4. With the collaboration of Matthew Black* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 4-135.

<sup>14</sup> Patrick A. Tiller, *A Commentary on the Animal Apocalypse* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1993), 15.

<sup>15</sup> Tiller, *A Commentary on the Animal Apocalypse*, 17.

return to this vision to see that such predictive prophecy can reach not only to the immediate future, but to the distant one as well.

In the previous section I noted that at the sixth generation (out of ten), “time will be at its midpoint” (1:292). It was also noted that the sixth generation refers to the Israelite monarchy. Since the prophecy begins with Creation and the sixth generation, the midpoint, refers to the Davidic monarchy, 3000 years later, it follows that the writer expected time to last about 3000 years more from the time of David.

Moreover, it was noted that generation seven reaches to the time of Rome, at which point a Christian editor introduced the section about Jesus. Which raises the question, how much further would the three remaining generations reach? Certainly, well beyond any immediate future. The tenth generation alone involves a sequence of events that would be well beyond any immediate fulfilment. Summarizing, Sibylline Oracles 1 and 2 not only retell the past, but prophesy and look forward to the distant future.

### **Apocalypse of Weeks**

Another example of long-term prediction is the Apocalypse of Weeks. The Apocalypse of Weeks is another vision within the broader framework of 1 Enoch. It is called so because it divides world history into periods represented by weeks, a total of ten. The first week focuses on Enoch the supposed author (1 En. 93:3); the second on Noah (1 En. 93:4); the third on Abraham and Moses (1 En 93:5); the fourth on the giving of the Law (1 En. 93:6); the fifth on the Davidic monarchy (1 En. 93:7); the sixth on the exile (1 En. 93:8); the seventh on the Maccabees and/or the Hasmoneans (1 En. 93:9-10). Up to here, the writer is retelling history in the form of prophecy.

But three other weeks follow, which go beyond the time of the actual writer. The eighth week includes among others, the construction of a new temple, the triumph of the righteous and the submission of sinners to the righteous, the gradual accumulation of great wealth (1 En. 91:12-13). What is depicted appears to be a return to the Davidic/Solomonic days of greatness and certainly is anticipated to take place within historic time. In the ninth week sinners will be eradicated (1 En. 91:14). And in the tenth the new heavens and the new earth will be established (1 En. 91:15-16). After the tenth week, many weeks would follow (1 En 91:17), an anticipation of eternity.

Summarizing, after noting that the predictive element is foundation in apocalyptic writings, we looked at three examples of apocalyptic predictions. While the Animal Apocalypse looked to the immediate future for the fulfilment of apocalyptic expectations, books 1 and 2 of the Sibylline Oracles and the Apocalypse of Weeks looked to a more distant future for the fulfilment of their expectations.

## Synopsis and synthesis

The study explored four prominent characteristics of extra-biblical apocalyptic writings. First, there is a strong interest in history, usually from the time of the assumed author (or earlier) until the consummation of the age. Second, due to pseudepigraphy, *ex eventu* prophecies are used to fill the gap between the time of the assumed author and that of the actual, while they also function to add credibility. Third, interest in history notwithstanding, the primary focus of apocalyptic is predictions about the future. Fourth, predictions can be short or long-term.

How would the above affect our understanding of Revelation? As Adventists who take a high view of inspiration, we might be hesitant to connect Revelation to extra-Biblical apocalypses. Nonetheless, if we assume that they all belong to the same genre, which they do, we could draw the following conclusions.

The futurist hermeneutic so popular in dispensationalist circles, would seem out of place. It implies a massive gap from the time of John to the eschaton for which Revelation has nothing to say. Extra-biblical apocalyptic writers invented *ex eventu* prophecies to fill the gap from assumed to real author. And their depictions of the future followed a clear sequence. Why would John consciously leave empty such a gap? It would be a very unusual practice for an apocalypticist without clear precedents. The futurist hermeneutic does not fit in with the nature of apocalyptic writings.

Neither does idealism. No doubt, idealism can offer beautiful spiritual lessons from the text of Revelation. But the very fact that it detaches Revelation from history, also leaves it wanting. Historical apocalypses are all about the workings of history, while idealism is not.

Full preterism which sees all of Revelation's prophecies as referring to the past, also fails. Apocalypticists were not historians. They saw themselves as prophets. Revelation should be acknowledged as being predictive in nature rather than recapitulating past events. Moreover, the fact that Revelation is not pseudepigraphical and does not assume to have been written centuries or millennia earlier, means that there is no need to fill any gap between assumed and actual composition. The author does not need to look to the past like others did; he can just look to the future.

It would seem to me that the best way to understand John, in the light of what has been discussed, would be as a person, who believed he had a message about the future, not the past; that this message spans the history of the future from John to the end of time, not just parts of it; and that this future could be short or long.

Adopting such an outlook does not necessarily imply that John predicted the future accurately. Prediction and accuracy of prediction are two totally different things. Nostradamus claimed the ability to predict the future accurately. But we know he failed to do so. But that does not remove the fact

that he claimed to be able to and endeavoured to do so. Outcome does not negate intend.

As a person who takes a high view of inspiration, I believe that he did prophecy accurately about future events. I am happy to accept that his timed prophecies are accurate. I am happy to accept that he predicted ongoing history for 2000 years. For me then, John predicted accurately the flow of history from his time until the end. This is historicism. Once a person takes a high view of inspiration, historicism is the hermeneutic model that fits best the apocalyptic outlook.

By contrast, a person who takes a lower view of inspiration may not believe in predictive prophecy. This is fine. They can still admit that John was predicting the future, even if they believe that his predictions proved wrong. But to limit his predictions to *ex eventu* prophecy, or simply as spiritual depictions, or to project it as only pertaining to the distant future, detached from the flow of history would be to cheat him of the very thing that makes historical apocalyptic, apocalyptic; prophecy that covers the span of history to the very end.