

In Defense of the Year-day Principle

Gerhard Pfandl
Biblical Research Institute
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Until the 19th century, most students of the apocalyptic books Daniel and Revelation used the historicist method to interpret the prophecies in these books. One of the main pillars of the historicist method is the year-day principle which says that a day in apocalyptic time prophecies represents a year. During the 19th century, the historicist method was slowly replaced by the preterist and futurist systems of interpretation; both of which deny the year-day principle. Preterists place most of the prophecies into the past up to the time of the Roman Empire; futurists place most of them into the future, specifically into the last seven years between the secret rapture and the Second Advent.

Kai Arasola

In 1990, Kai Arasola, a Finish Seventh-day Adventist scholar, published his dissertation *The End of Historicism* which he had written at the University of Uppsala in Sweden. Contrary to the claims of Desmond Ford, Arasola did not say that “the scholarly world of biblical interpreters gave up the year-day principle at the time of the Millerite debacle—the disappointment of 1844.”¹ What Arasola does say is that when the Millerite movement came to an end “historicism gradually ceased to be the only popular method of interpretation. It was largely replaced by futurism and preterism. Yet one must acknowledge that in fact historicism did not die

¹ Desmond Ford, *Daniel & The Coming King* (Newcastle, CA: Desmond Ford Publications, 1996), 298.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

with Miller. It still lives in a modified form and partly renewed form within the groups that have some roots in Millerism.”²

Arasola refers to Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses; others are the Advent Christian Church which also came out of the Millerite movement and the various Church of God congregations. However, apart from the Seventh-day Adventist Church very few Daniel or Revelation commentaries have been written by these smaller churches.

Historicism did not die with the demise of the Millerite Movement. In fact, many historicist commentaries appeared after 1844,³ among them the well-known commentaries on the books of Daniel and Revelation by Albert Barnes.⁴ Even in the first half of the 20th century we find a number of scholarly volumes written by historicists,⁵ but by the end of the 20th

² Kai Arasola, *The End of Historicism* (Sigtuna, Sweden: Datem Publishing, 1990), 171.

³ James H. Frere, *A Combined View of the Prophecies of Daniel, Esdras, and St. John, Shewing That All the Prophetic Writings Are Formed upon One Plan* (London: John Hatchard and Son, 1850); J. Cumming, *Prophetic Studies: Or Lectures on the Book of Daniel* (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue and Co., 1850); Edward Bickersteth, *Practical Guide to the Prophecies, with Reference to Their Interpretation and Fulfillment, and to Personal Edification* (London: Seeley, Burnside and Seeley, 1852); William Ramsey, *An Exposition of the Book of Daniel: with Practical Observations* (Edinburgh: Th. Grant, 1853); Samuel Sparkes, *A Historical Commentary on the Eleventh Chapter of Daniel: Extending From the Days of Cyrus to the Crimean War* (Binghamton: Adam and Lawyer Printers, 1858); W. R. A. Boyle, *The Inspiration of the Book of Daniel* (London: Rivingtons, 1863); Samuel Tarver, *Course and Culmination of Empire According to Prophecy* (Louisville, KY: John P. Morton, 1866); William C. Thurman, *The Sealed Book of Daniel Opened; Or a Book of Reference for Those Who Wish to Examine the Sure Word of Prophecy* (Boston, MA: Office of the “World’s Crisis,” 1867); James W. Bosanquet, *Messiah the Prince or the Inspiration of the Prophecies of Daniel* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869); William H. Rule, *An Historical Exposition of the Book of Daniel the Prophet* (London: Seeley, Jackson and Halliday, 1869); W. Birchmore, *Prophecy Interpreted by History* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1871); Robert Nevin, *Studies in Prophecy* (Londonderry: James Montgomery, 1890); Joseph Tanner, *Daniel and the Revelation* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898).

⁴ Albert Barnes, *Daniel*, 2 vols. (1853, reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950).

⁵ Charles H. H. Wright, *Daniel and His Prophecies* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1906); Justus G. Lamson, *The Eleventh of Daniel* (Minneapolis, MN: J. G. Lamson, 1909); J. A. Battenfield and P. Y. Pendleton, *The Great Demonstration* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing, 1914); Charles Boutflower, *In and Around the Book of Daniel* (1923, reprint Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963); H. N. Sargent, *The Marvels of Bible*

PFANDL: IN DEFENSE OF THE YEAR-DAY PRINCIPLE

century, with few exceptions⁶ historicism was no longer used in the interpretation of Daniel and Revelation outside of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Seventh-day Adventists

Seventh-day Adventists continue to use the historicist method of interpretation because they believe that the year-day principle is not a paradigm imposed on the text, but that it is found in Scripture itself. In Daniel chapters seven, and eight, for example, the interpreting angel uses the historicist method to explain the various symbols as empires in history, one following the other.

It is ironic that one of the best summaries of the year-day principle, based on the works of T. R. Birks⁷ and H. G. Guinness,⁸ is found in Desmond Ford's first commentary on Daniel.⁹ In his second commentary on Daniel, eighteen years later, he no longer uses it because he now believes that the year-day principle cannot be justified biblically.¹⁰ Contrary to this position, most Seventh-day Adventist interpreters believe that the year-day principle is based on Scripture.

Prophecy (London: Covenant Publishing, 1939); F. G. Smith, *Prophetic Lectures on Daniel and Revelation* (Anderson, IN: Gospel Trumpet, 1941); Clarence H. Hewitt, *The Seer of Babylon* (Boston: Advent Christian Herald, 1948); Edmund Filmer, *Daniel's Predictions* (London: Regency Press, 1979).

⁶ For example, Fred P. Miller, *Revelation: Panorama of the Gospel Age* (Clermont, FL: Moellerhaus, 1991) and Robert Carolinga, *The Present Reign of Jesus Christ: A Historical Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Springfield, MO: Abundant Life Ministries Reformed Press, 1995) are contemporary historicists outside of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

⁷ Thomas R. Birks, *First Elements of Sacred Prophecy* (London: William E. Painter, 1843).

⁸ H. G. Guinness, *The Approaching End of the Age, Viewed in the Light of History, Prophecy, and Science*. 8th ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1882).

⁹ Desmond Ford, *Daniel* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Assoc., 1978), 300-305.

¹⁰ In his latest Daniel commentary he denies that the 70 weeks are cut off from the 2300 years of Daniel 8 and adds, "Neither do I consider that the year-day principle should be applied in the study of the prophecies of Daniel, though I recognize it as a providential aid over long centuries of Christ's delay." (Ford, *Daniel & The Coming King*, 1996, 298).

Biblical Evidence for the Year-day Principle¹¹

An inquiry into the biblical foundation of the year-day principle produces a number of arguments for the application of the year-day principle to the prophecies of the apocalyptic books Daniel and Revelation.

1. *Symbolism*

Since the visions in Daniel 7 and 8 are largely symbolic, with a number of different beasts representing important historical empires (7:37; 8:35, 2021), the time periods (7:25; 8:14) should also be seen as symbolic.

Daniel 7:3-7	Lion	Babylon (626-539 BC)
	Bear	Medo-Persia (539-331 BC)
	Leopard	Greece (331-168 BC)
	Beast	Rome (168 BC-AD 476)

The vision concludes with the Second Coming when the saints shall receive the kingdom: “Then the kingdom and dominion, And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him” (Dan 7:27). The time element of 3 ½ times or years in verse 25, during which the saints are given into the hands of the little horn, must, therefore, cover more than 3 ½ literal years. “He shall speak *pompous* words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then *the saints* shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time” (Dan 7:25).

In Daniel 8, we have again empires that lasted for hundreds of years:

Daniel 8:3-5, 20-21	Ram	Medo-Persia (539-331)
	Goat	Greece (331-168)

The vision goes to the “time of the end” (v. 17). The time element of “two thousand three hundred days” (Dan 8:14), therefore, should also be a longer time period than 6 years and 3 months.

¹¹ I am indebted to D. Ford, *Daniel*, 300-305 for some of the points in this section.

PFANDL: IN DEFENSE OF THE YEAR-DAY PRINCIPLE

2. Long Time Periods

The fact that the visions deal with the rise and fall of known empires in history which existed for hundreds of years indicates that the prophetic time periods also cover long time periods.

Babylon (626-539 BC)
Medo-Persia (539-331 BC)
Greece (331-168 BC)
Rome (168 BC-AD 476)

In Revelation 12-14 we have the history of the Christian church from the time of Jesus (12:5) to the Second Advent (14:14). The time elements of 1260 days, 3 ½ times, and 42 months (12:6, 14; 13:5), all referring to the same time period, only make sense if they represent 1260 years. There is no 3 ½ year time period in church history that would fit the description given in these chapters.

3. Peculiar Expression

The peculiar way in which the time periods are expressed indicates that they should not be taken literally. If the “time, times, and half a time” in Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 12:14 stands for three and a half literal years, we would expect God to say “three years and six months” as He does in Luke 4:25 and James 5:17. In these texts, where three and a half literal years are referred to, each time the phrase is “three years and six months.” Similarly, Paul remained in Corinth “a year and six months” (Acts 18:11), and David reigned in Hebron “seven years and six months” (2 Sam 2:11).

4. Salvation History

In Daniel 7 the four beasts which together account for a reign of at least one thousand years are followed by the little horn power. It is the focus of the vision since it is most directly in opposition to God.¹² Three and a half literal years for the struggle between the little horn and the Most High are out of proportion to the comprehensive scope of salvation history portrayed in this vision. The same applies to Revelation 12:6 and 14 where the one

¹² Seven out of 28 verses in Daniel 7 refer to the little horn.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

thousand and two hundred and sixty days or three and a half times cover a large part of the history between the first and second advent.

5. Time Terminology

He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, Shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a **time and times and half a time**. (Dan 7:25)

And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for **forty-two months**. (Rev 13:5)

Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there **one thousand two hundred and sixty days**. (Rev 12:6)

According to the context, the expressions “time, times, and half a time” (Dan 7:25; 12:7; Rev 12:14), “forty-two months” (Rev 11:2; 13:5), and “one thousand two hundred and sixty days” (Rev 11:3; 12:6) all apply to the same time period, but the natural expression “three years and six months” is not used once.

The Holy Spirit seems, in a manner, to exhaust all the phrases by which the interval could be expressed, excluding always that one form which would be used of course in ordinary writing, and is used invariably in Scripture on other occasions, to denote the literal period. This variation is most significant if we accept the year-day system, but quite inexplicable on the other view.¹³

The only commonly used measure of time not used in the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation is the year. Days, weeks, and months, are referred to, but not the time unit “year.” The most obvious explanation is that the “year” is the unit symbolized throughout these prophecies.

¹³ Birks, 352.

PFANDL: IN DEFENSE OF THE YEAR-DAY PRINCIPLE

6. *Time of the End*

At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm *them*, and pass through. (Dan 11:40)

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame *and* everlasting contempt. (Dan 12:2)

The prophecies in Daniel 7-8, and 10-12 lead up to the “time of the end” (8:17; 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9) which is followed by the resurrection (12:2) and the setting up of God’s everlasting kingdom (7:27).

In the sweep of history described in these prophecies that extend from the prophet in the sixth century B.C. to our time and beyond, literal time periods of only 3 ½ to 6 ½ years are not capable of reaching anywhere near this final end time. Therefore, these prophetic time periods should be seen as symbolic and standing for considerable longer periods of actual time extending to the end of time.¹⁴

7. *Old Testament Examples*

In Numbers 14:34 God deliberately used the day for a year principle as a teaching device:

According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know my rejection (Numbers 14:34).

And in an acted out parable the prophet Ezekiel was told to lie 390 days on his left side and 40 days on his right side, “I have laid on you a day for each year” (Ezekiel 4:6).

However, Numbers 14 and Ezekiel 4 are not apocalyptic texts. God, therefore, spells it out—one day stands for one year. In apocalyptic texts this is never stated, it is an underlying principle.

¹⁴ William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, Revised edition, DARCOM (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 73.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Characteristics of apocalyptic texts are:

- a. Visions and revelations
- b. Symbolism and imagery
- c. Cosmic dualism – Apocalyptic writings present two opposing personified forces in the universe, God and Satan.
- d. Contrast – There are two distinct and separate ages; the present evil age under the control of Satan, and the perfect future age which God will establish after his victory over Satan.
- e. Resurrection and judgment is presented as the goal of history
- f. Appearance of a Messiah
- g. Angelic interpreters

Daniel 7 is a classic apocalyptic chapter where we find all these characteristics present. Daniel 4, on the other hand, is not an apocalyptic but a historical chapter. The “seven times” in verse 16, therefore, are not to be interpreted with the year-day principle. The seven times are seven literal years in the life of Nebuchadnezzar, not 2520 prophetic years.

8. *Daniel 9: 24-27*

In Dan 9:24-27 the 70-week time prophecy met its fulfillment at the exact time, if we use the year-day principle to interpret it. Many interpreters, who in other apocalyptic texts do not use the year-day principle, recognize that the 70 weeks are in fact “weeks of years” reaching from the Persian period to the time of Christ. Thus the pragmatic test in Daniel 9 confirms the validity of the year-day principle.

Desmond Ford and others, including the revised *SDA Bible Commentary*,¹⁵ have argued that the year-day principle is not involved in Daniel 9. Ford says concerning the term “seventy weeks” in Daniel 9:24:

The word translated “weeks” in the King James Version and some other versions is literally “sevens” and, like the words “dozen” or “score,” can apply to a variety of things. The Hebrew word there used is never used for a seven-day period, although the singular term can be so used. In ninety out of ninety-four cases in which the OT uses the word *shabua* in the sense of seven days, there are added the explanatory and additional words “of

¹⁵ F. D. Nichol, ed., *Seventh Day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1976), 4:851.

PFANDL: IN DEFENSE OF THE YEAR-DAY PRINCIPLE

days,” for *shabua* on its own merely means a heptad (a group of series of seven). Here in Daniel 9:24, the Hebrew is masculine, whereas the plural form elsewhere is always feminine.¹⁶

This sounds pretty convincing but it really isn't. The Hebrew word שָׁבֻעִים (*šābū'îm*) for “weeks” is the masculine plural form of שָׁבֹעַ (*šabua'*) “week.” It is derived from the word שֶׁבַע (*šéba'*) “seven” “as a specialized term to be applied only to the unit of time consisting of seven days, that is, the ‘week.’”¹⁷

Šabua' occurs twenty (not ninety-four) times in the OT.¹⁸ An investigation of the twenty texts yields the following results:

a. Three times it occurs as a singular noun meaning “one week” (Gen 29:27, 28; Daniel 9:27). “Fulfill her week, and we will give you this one also for the service which you will serve with me still another seven years” (Gen 29:27).

b. Once it appears as a dual for “two weeks.” “But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks” (Lev 12:5).

c. Eight times it is found as a feminine plural (*šābū'ōt*). In five of these texts *šābū'ōt* appears with the word “feast” (*ḥag*) and refers to the Feast of Weeks (Exod 34:22; Deut 16:10, 16; 2 Chron 8:13; Ezek 45:21). “And you shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end” (Exod 34:22).

d. In Numbers 28:26 most versions translate the feminine plural *šābū'ōt* “Feast of Weeks” although the word “feast” does not appear in the text. Nevertheless, the context seems to indicate it. “Also on the day of the first fruits, when you present a new grain offering to the LORD in your *Feast of Weeks*, you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work” (Num 28:26 NAS).

e. In Deuteronomy 16:9 where the feminine plural is used it refers to the seven weeks between Passover and the Feast of Weeks. “You shall

¹⁶ Desmond and Gillian Ford, *For the Sake of the Gospel* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2008), 57.

¹⁷ Shea, 90.

¹⁸ R. Laird Harris, et al., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:899.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from *the time* you begin to put the sickle to the grain” (Deut 16:9).

f. In Jeremiah 5:24, the last text where the feminine plural is used, it refers to “the appointed weeks of the harvest” (Jer 5:24 NKJ).

g. Four times it appears as a masculine plural (Daniel (9:24, 25 (2x), 26; 10:2, 3). The fact that in Daniel it is masculine and not feminine as in other places is irrelevant because it is one of many Hebrew nouns with dual gender.¹⁹ As we have seen, Daniel consistently uses the masculine plural, and most versions translate the word as “weeks.”

Please note: In every text outside of the book of Daniel the meaning of *šabua*^c is always “week” or “weeks.” To claim that the word literally means “sevens” and “can apply to a variety of things”²⁰ is simply not true. As we have seen, it always applies to a week or in plural to weeks.

Neither is it true that “The Hebrew word there used is never used for a seven-day period.”²¹ In Daniel 10:2, 3 the same masculine plural *šābū‘im* is used for three weeks twice. “In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks [שָׁבָעִים יָמִים] I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks [שָׁבָעִים יָמִים] were fulfilled.” The NIV translates *šābū‘im* in Daniel 9:24 as “Seventy sevens” but in Daniel 10:2, 3 as “three weeks.”

Desmond Ford’s argument that only when *šabua* is followed by *yamim* “days,” as in Daniel 10:2, 3, does it indicate a week is not valid. He is misinterpreting a Hebrew idiom. As Bill Shea has explained, “When a time unit such as a week, month, or year is followed by the word for ‘days’ in the plural, the idiom is to be understood to signify ‘full’ or ‘complete’ units.”²² For example:

Then Laban said to him, “You are my own flesh and blood.” After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month [חֹדֶשׁ יָמִים], (Gen 29:14 NIV).

¹⁹ L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 5 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 4:1384; Mordechai Ben-Asher, “The Gender of Nouns in Biblical Hebrew,” *Semitics* 6 (Pretoria, 1978): 9.

²⁰ Ford, *For the Sake of the Gospel*, 57.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Shea, 91. See also E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius Hebrew Grammar*, 131d (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 424.

PFANDL: IN DEFENSE OF THE YEAR-DAY PRINCIPLE

You shall eat [quails], not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but *for* a whole month [ḥōdeš yāmîm], until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, (Num 11:19-20 NKJ).

Then it came to pass, at the end of two full years [šənāṭáyim yāmîm], that Pharaoh had a dream; and behold, he stood by the river (Gen 41:1 NKJ).

Now Absalom lived two full years [šənāṭáyim yāmîm] in Jerusalem, and did not see the king's face (2Sa 14:28 NAU).

Therefore, when it says in Daniel 10:2, 3 “In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three šābū‘îm yāmîm” (Dan 10:2), it does not mean “three weeks of days” but “three full weeks” (NKJV) or “three entire weeks” (NAS, NAU).²³

Unfortunately, because most Daniel interpreters no longer use the year-day principle of prophetic interpretation they argue, like Ford, that the šābū‘îm yāmîm in Daniel 10:2, 3 are “weeks of days” and the šābū‘îm šib‘îm in Daniel 9:24 are “seventy weeks of years.”²⁴ Stephen Miller, for example, writes:

Gabriel declared that the time involved was “seventy sevens” (šābū‘îm šib‘îm). “Sevens” (traditionally “weeks”) is a literal translation of the Hebrew and refers to periods of seven without specifying what the units are. These may be sevens of years, days, months, or indefinite periods of time.²⁵

He then opts for seventy weeks of years otherwise the prophecy would not fit the appearance of the Messiah 490 year later. However, as we have shown the word šābū‘îm in the Old Testament always refers to the week.

²³ See J. A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel, International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1927); 407. The Jewish interpreter Rabbi Hersh Goldwurm cites Rashi who translated the *sh^e loshah sabu‘im yamim* as “three weeks of days” and interpreted them as twenty-one years. (Rabbi Hersh Goldwurm, *Daniel* [New York: Mesorah Publications, LTD., 1979], 269).

²⁴ This is the translation found in the RSV.

²⁵ Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel, The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 257.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Therefore, the claim that šāḇūʿîm “refers to periods of seven without specifying what the units are” is not supported by Scripture.

The Year-day Principle in History

The earliest evidence for the year-day principle, though not by that name, can be found in *The Book of Jubilees*, a Jewish work from the intertestamental period.²⁶ *The Book of Jubilees*, dated to the second century BC,²⁷ uses the word “week” to refer to seven years. As O. S. Wintermute explains, “Each period of seven years is referred to as a ‘week of years’ or simply as a ‘week.’ Each period of seven weeks of years, i.e., forty-nine years, is designated a jubilee.”²⁸ Thus Noah’s age in *Jubilee* 10:16 is given in these words, “Nine hundred and fifty years he completed in his life, nineteen jubilees and two weeks and five years.”²⁹

19 jubilees	= 19 x 49 years	=	931 years
2 weeks	= 2 x 7 years	=	14 years
5 years	= 1 x 5	=	<u>5 years</u>
			950 years

According to Rabbi Hersh Goldwurm, the Jewish work *Seder Olam*³⁰ “and all the commentators, especially Ibn Ezra,³¹ interpret the expression (“seventy weeks” in Daniel 9:24) to mean 490 years: seventy weeks of years.”³² They count 70 years from the destruction of the first temple to the restoration of the temple under Darius (Haggai 1:1-8) and another 420

²⁶ See Shea, 106-110 for other examples.
²⁷ O. S. Wintermute, “Jubilees: A New Translation and Introduction,” *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed., James H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1985), 2: 43.
²⁸ Ibid., 2: 39.
²⁹ Ibid., 76.
³⁰ *Seder Olam Rabbah* (“The Long Order of the World”) is a 2nd century AD Hebrew language chronology detailing the dates of biblical events from the Creation to Alexander’s conquest of Persia.
³¹ Rabbi Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra (1089-1164) was born at Tudela, Spain. He was one of the most distinguished Jewish men of letters and writers of the Middle Ages.
³² Goldwurm, 259.

PFANDL: IN DEFENSE OF THE YEAR-DAY PRINCIPLE

years to the destruction of the Second Temple.³³ This adds up to 490 years, although these figures do not harmonize with the actual dates in history (586 BC to AD 70).

In the New Testament, the book of Daniel does not play a major role. In view of the statement in Daniel 12:4 “seal the book until the time of the end,” this is no surprise. Those Church Fathers who wrote a commentary on the book interpreted Daniel along historicist lines with Rome as the fourth power in Daniel 2 and 7. The seventy weeks in Daniel 9:24 were seen as 490 years, but the time prophecies in Daniel 7, 8, and 12 were placed as literal days either in the past in the time of the Roman emperors,³⁴ or in the future in the time of the final antichrist.³⁵

L. E. Froom notes, “We shall find in this period the seventy weeks of Daniel interpreted as 490 years, but there was no application of the year-day principle to the longer time periods by any Christian writer of this early era.”³⁶ And this is quite understandable. As Irenaeus (d. c. 195) already noted, “For every prophecy, before its fulfillment, is to men [full of] enigmas and ambiguities. But when the time has arrived, and the prediction has come to pass, then the prophecies have a clear and certain exposition.”³⁷ The year-day principle, therefore, did not play an important role in the early centuries, though it was not unknown. Julius Africanus in speaking about the 2300 evenings and mornings in Daniel 8:14 says, “For if we take the day as a month, just as elsewhere in prophecy days are taken as years . . . we shall find the period fully made out to the 20th year of the reign of Artaxerxes, from the capture of Jerusalem.”³⁸

The first Christian interpreter to apply the year-day principle outside of the seventy weeks, it seems, was Tichonius (late fourth century), an

³³ I. Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud* (London: Socino Press, 1938), Yoma 9a and ^cArakin 12b.

³⁴ Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata* 1. 21 (ANF 2:334).

³⁵ Hippolytus, *On Daniel* 12.7 (ANF 5:190); Gleason L. Archer, Jr. *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Co., 1958), 150, 151.

³⁶ Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1950-1954), 1:241, 242.

³⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.24.1 (ANF 1:496).

³⁸ *The Extant Writings of Julius Africanus* 3.18.4 (ANF 6:137).

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

African Donatist.³⁹ “He interpreted the three and a half days of the slaying of the witnesses (Revelation 11:11) to be three and a half years.”⁴⁰

Following Tichonius we find throughout church history a number of Jewish and Christian interpreters who used the year-day principle, e.g., Benjamin Ben Moses Nahawendi (8th, 9th century);⁴¹ Joachim of Floris (1130-1202);⁴² and the Reformer Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560).⁴³ But particularly towards the end of the 1260, 1290, 1335, and 2300 day prophecies, and following their fulfillment, the number of interpreters who used the year-day principle increased enormously.⁴⁴

Conclusion

Our study has shown that the historicist method of interpretation is not a Johnny-come-lately on the theological scene; rather it rests on a solid biblical and historical foundation. It was used by the angel interpreter in the book of Daniel, during the intertestamental period, and by Jewish and Christian writers throughout church history. Until the nineteenth century it was used by most interpreters of the Bible. And in spite of what some may claim, it is not an outdated method belonging to the past, but a valid principle of interpreting apocalyptic prophecies today.

³⁹ The Donatists were rigorists, holding that the church must be a church of saints, not sinners, and that sacraments, such as baptism, administered by *traditors* (Christians who surrendered the Scriptures to the authorities who outlawed possession of them) were invalid.

⁴⁰ Froom, 1:471.

⁴¹ Rabbi Hillel Silver, *A History of Messianic Speculations in Israel from the first through the Seventeenth Centuries* (New York: The McMillan Company, 1927), 55, 208.

⁴² Joachim, *Concordia*, fol. 118r; cited in Froom., 1:712, 713.

⁴³ Philipp Melanchthon, *In Danielem Prophetam Commentarius, in Opera*, vol. 13, col. 978, cited in Froom, 2:290.

⁴⁴ See Froom 4:394-397, 404, 405.

PFANDL: IN DEFENSE OF THE YEAR-DAY PRINCIPLE

Gerhard Pfandl, a retired associate Director of the Biblical Research Institute, is a native of Austria and holds an M.A. and Ph.D. in Old Testament from Andrews University. He has worked as a church pastor in Austria and in the Southern California Conference. From 1977-1989 he was a Professor of Religion at Bogenhofen Seminary in Austria. Prior to joining the Biblical Research Institute in 1999 he served for seven years as Field Secretary of the South Pacific Division in Sydney. He has published many articles for scholarly and popular journals in German and English and is the author of several books and study guides, e.g., *Daniel The Seer of Babylon* (Review and Herald, 2004) and *The Gift of Prophecy* (Pacific Press, 2008). pfandlg@gc.adventist.org