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ABSTRACT

ISAAC NEWTON AS A PROPHETIC INTERPRETER

by

Kenneth Jørgensen

Adviser: Jerry Moon

# ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: ISAAC NEWTON AS A PROPHETIC INTERPRETER

Name of researcher: Kenneth Jørgensen

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Date completed: March 2022

Throughout his life, Sir Isaac Newton was deeply dedicated to the science of decoding biblical apocalyptic writings. To understand and appreciate Newton's prophetic scheme, it will be advantageous to have a certain grasp of what sources and ideas might have influenced him. No comprehensive study before this one has helped us see Newton from that perspective. A survey of the development of canonical apocalyptic hermeneutic and interpretation, beginning before the time of Christ and ending with Newton, shows that four distinct systems of hermeneutics had developed by that time. Historicism was the earliest and the preferred system among Protestants until the mid-1800s. The idealist hermeneutic, introduced by Augustine hundreds of years after the beginning of historicism, was a non-historical Catholic alternative to historicism until preterism and

futurism were introduced by the Jesuits toward the end of the sixteenth century, about 50 years before the birth of Isaac Newton.

This dissertation views Newton as standing in a long succession of interpreters of biblical apocalyptic literature. Newton interpreted the Book of Daniel strictly according to the historicist canon. The Book of Revelation was different and a much bigger challenge for him.

This study shows that Newton's interpretation of biblical apocalyptic was thoroughly Protestant and completely legitimate in the Protestant context of his time. His interpretation was neither sensational nor unique. The study concludes with an analysis and evaluation of Newton's scientific and theological approach to apocalyptic and the exceptional breadth of the branches of knowledge that he employed to substantiate his prophetic system. The main contribution of this dissertation, the major thesis of the work, is a proposed comprehensive definition of historicism, verified from the survey of the development of canonical apocalyptic interpretation, and its match to a significant degree with Newton's own historicist system.

One major purpose of this dissertation is to synthesize and define Isaac Newton's hermeneutic of prophetic interpretation, showing that Newton owed at least as much to the ancient apocalyptic tradition as he owed to any contemporary expositors—an observation with significant implications, though rarely mentioned by Newtonian researchers.

The study concludes by showing that Newton followed a seven-step methodological approach. From Newton's methodology and his own stated rules of interpretation are synthesized nine characteristic principles of his hermeneutic.

Evaluating these nine principles and assessing Newton's overall contribution conclude this study.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

ISAAC NEWTON AS A PROPHETIC INTERPRETER

A Dissertation  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

by  
Kenneth Jørgensen

March 2022

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# ISAAC NEWTON AS A PROPHETIC INTERPRETER

A dissertation  
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Kenneth Jørgensen

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### Dedication

To my late father and brother Øyvind  
who both patiently waited to see this project completed.

And to my beloved mother-in-law, Aase,  
who, I'm thankful, is still living.

If they [the prophetic Scriptures] are never to be understood, to what end did God reveale them? Certainly he did it for the edification of the church; & if so, then it is as certain that the church shall at length attain to the understanding thereof. I mean not all that call themselves Christians, but a remnant, a few scattered persons which God hath chosen, such as without being led by interest, education, or humane authorities, can set themselves sincerely & earnestly to search after truth. For as Daniel hath said that the wise shall understand, so he hath said also that none of the wicked shall understand. Let me therefore beg of thee not to trust to the opinion of any man concerning these things, for so it is great odds but thou shalt be deceived. Much less oughtest thou to rely upon the judgment of the multitude, for so thou shalt certainly be deceived. But search the scriptures thy self & that by frequent reading & constant meditation upon what thou readest, & earnest prayer to God to enlighten thine understanding if thou desirest to find the truth.

Isaac Newton, *Yahuda* MS 1

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ACCSOT</i>	<i>Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture</i>
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
ASC	Advent Source Collection at Andrews University
ATSDS	Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series
AUSDDS	Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertations Series
<i>AUSS</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
<i>BJHS</i>	<i>The British Journal for the History of Science</i>
<i>BNS</i>	Force and Popkin, <i>The Books of Nature and Scripture: Recent Essays on Natural Philosophy, Theology, and Biblical Criticism in the Netherlands of Spinoza's Time and the British Isles of Newton's Time</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>CCN</i>	<i>The Cambridge Companion to Newton</i> , Cohen I. Bernard and George E. Smith, eds.
<i>CMP</i>	<i>A Catalogue of Manuscripts and Papers</i> , Peter Jones, ed.
<i>Corr</i>	<i>The Correspondence of Isaac Newton</i> , Turnbull, Scott, and Hall, eds.
DARCOM	Daniel and Revelation Study Committee Series, Holbrook, ed.
<i>EA</i>	<i>The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism</i> , 3 vols.
<i>EC</i>	<i>Essays on the Context, Nature, and Influence of Isaac Newton's Theology</i> , Force and Popkin, eds.
<i>EE</i>	<i>The Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment</i>
IAHI	International Archives of the History of Ideas

<i>JATS</i>	<i>Journal of Adventist Theological Society</i>
<i>Keynes MS</i>	<i>Newton, Manuscript in the Keynes Collection in the Library of King's College, Cambridge University</i>
<i>New College</i>	<i>Newton, Manuscript in the New College Collection in the Bodleian Library, Oxford University</i>
<i>NR</i>	Richard Westfall, <i>Never at Rest</i>
<i>NT</i>	The New Testament of the Holy Scriptures
<i>OCE</i>	Newton, <i>Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John</i> , Critical Edition
<i>OP</i>	Newton, <i>Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John</i>
<i>OT</i>	The Old Testament of the Holy Scriptures
<i>OTP 1</i>	James Charlesworth, ed., <i>The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments, vol.1</i>
<i>PEV</i>	Prophet-to-eschaton vision
<i>PFF</i>	LeRoy Edwin Froom, <i>Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i> , Migne, ed.
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> , Migne, ed.
<i>PO</i>	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i>
<i>RIN</i>	Frank E. Manuel, <i>The Religion of Isaac Newton</i>
<i>WBC</i>	Word Bible Commentary
<i>Yahuda MS</i>	Newton, Manuscript in the Yahuda Collection in the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background to the Problem**

Among both scholarly and popular writers today, there is a great diversity of opinion regarding prophetic interpretation. One explanation for this may be a corresponding diversity in hermeneutical principles. It is axiomatic that principles for interpreting Scripture must themselves be drawn from Scripture because the principles adopted pre-determine the scope of possible outcomes. Hermeneutical principles imposed on Scripture from outside of Scripture can effectively distort the intended meaning of Scripture. Thus, the study of a major expositor of biblical prophecy like Isaac Newton, who claimed to draw his hermeneutical principles directly from Scripture, may shed light on issues related to prophetic interpretation today.

Throughout church history, interpreters of biblical prophecies have clarified and developed the hermeneutics of biblical apocalyptic interpretation. In most cases, they were limited to *only* the use of traditional interpretative tools and methods endorsed by their church denomination or sponsoring institution. This could be one of the reasons that most pre-Napoleonic prophetic interpreters have only limited influence on a modern theological mindset.

Despite the good intentions of the Christian church since the earliest times to create guidelines and limitations to protect itself against heresies and divisions, one could

argue that a significant number of pre-modern (in a theological sense) interpreters who succeeded with valid and innovative interpretation did so because they liberated themselves from using merely ecclesiastically approved traditional tools and methods.

An example of such a “liberated” figure is Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727).

Newton has been ranked first on a list of the one hundred greatest minds of all time,<sup>1</sup> and Albert Einstein observed: “This brilliant genius ... determined the course of western thought, research, and practice like no one else before or since.... The figure of Newton has, however, an even greater importance than his genius warrants because destiny placed him at a turning point in the history of the human intellect.”<sup>2</sup>

Nearly a century before the rise of the historical critical method in theological studies, and more than a century before Protestant Christianity in general gave up on historicism as their preferred hermeneutic, Newton, on a typical historicist platform, was one of the earliest to apply in his theological studies the tools and scientific methods of modernism, in whose inventions he had a great share. Thus, his understanding of biblical apocalyptic merits investigation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

No comprehensive study to date has attempted to analyze and evaluate the hermeneutical foundations of Newton’s prophetic interpretation, nor the overall influence of earlier interpreters on Newton’s prophetic interpretation.

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<sup>1</sup>John Simmons, *The Giant Book of Scientists: The 100 Greatest Minds of All Time* (London: Book, 1997).

<sup>2</sup>Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions*, trans. and rev. Sonja Bargmann (New York: Wings Books, 1954), 253–4.

An important issue that remains undetermined is the extent to which Newton based his hermeneutics on Scripture, theological reasoning, the opinions of earlier expositors, or on other factors. Clarification of this issue is needed for evaluating Newton's contribution and the continuing relevance of his hermeneutics for contemporary prophetic interpretation.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this dissertation is to synthesize, define, analyze, and make an evaluation of Isaac Newton's hermeneutic of canonical apocalyptic. Analysis will involve investigating Newton's presuppositions, theological reasoning, and sources such as Scripture and tradition. Comparison of Newton's hermeneutical principles to those of earlier expositors (and some of his contemporaries) will provide a fair basis to evaluate Newton's contribution to the hermeneutics of prophetic interpretation.

### **Methodology and Delimitations**

The methodological strategy of this study will be to describe and analyze Newton's hermeneutical principles of prophetic interpretation in comparison to those of earlier and some contemporary expositors as a basis for evaluating Newton's contribution to the hermeneutics of prophetic interpretation. This survey may also help to determine the extent to which his hermeneutical principles were founded on direct biblical evidence, theological reasoning, the views of earlier expositors, or other factors.

Although Ezekiel, Isaiah, and some of the minor Prophets have significant sections of apocalyptic material, the Book of Daniel is perhaps the most fully developed apocalypse in the canon of the Old Testament, whereas the New Testament book of

Revelation has become the most well-known of all apocalypses.<sup>3</sup> The analysis and evaluation of Newton's thought will be limited to Newton's writings related to Daniel and Revelation. However, his other writings (scientific and metaphysical) have occasionally been referred to when they contain material relevant to his interpretation of canonical apocalyptic. This dissertation uses primary and secondary sources, both older<sup>4</sup> and more recent,<sup>5</sup> to provide an overview regarding the background and general history of prophetic interpretation.<sup>6</sup>

While Newton's autographic writings are scattered throughout the world, a microfilm collection has made most of these easily accessible to scholars.<sup>7</sup> *The Newton Project* has made nearly the entire corpus of Newton's theological manuscripts freely available on the Internet.<sup>8</sup> Although a few of his religious writings exist only in Latin,

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<sup>3</sup>Many prominent expositors date the Book of Daniel to the second century BCE, but there is also compelling evidence for dating it much earlier. See Josh McDowell, *Daniel in the Critics' Den: Historical Evidence for the Authenticity of the Book of Daniel* (San Bernadino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ International, 1979); R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press, 1969), 1110–27.

<sup>4</sup>E.g., E. B. Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticæ*, 4 vols. (London: Seeley, 1846) and Charles Maitland, *The Apostle's School of Prophetic Interpretation: With Its History Down to the Present Time* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1849).

<sup>5</sup>E.g., Christopher Hill, *Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Verso, 1990); Christopher Burdon, *The Apocalypse in England: Revelation Unravelling, 1700–1834* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Irena Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse: Geneva, Zurich, and Wittenberg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Kenneth G. C. Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium: Studies in Eisegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>6</sup>One of the world's largest historical collections of historicist writings is housed at the Center for Adventist Research (James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI). LeRoy Froom's collection of documents from his research on *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 4 vols. (Washington D.C: Review and Herald, 1946–54), is preserved in this collection and was consulted in the course of this research.

<sup>7</sup>Isaac Newton, *A Catalogue of Manuscripts and Papers*, ed. Peter Jones (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1991). See also Sarah Dry, *The Newton Papers: The Strange and True Odyssey of Isaac Newton's Manuscripts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>8</sup>This project is international in scope with several academic institutions participating; the official website address is [www.newtonproject.ox.ac.uk](http://www.newtonproject.ox.ac.uk).



Newton's most important work on prophetic interpretation can be found in his commentary, *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John*, which was published in English in 1733 shortly after his death,<sup>9</sup> and *Sir Isaac Newton: Theological Manuscripts*, which was also published in English.<sup>10</sup> Other pertinent primary sources of Newton on prophetic interpretation are listed in Peter Jones' edition of Sir Isaac Newton, *A Catalogue of Manuscripts and Papers*.<sup>11</sup> Newton's voluminous correspondence has also been published with complete translations of his Latin writings into English.<sup>12</sup>

### Prior Research

Over the past 300 years, many scholars have written works on Newton, but few of these investigate his prophetic interpretations.<sup>13</sup> Several biographical works on

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<sup>9</sup>Isaac Newton, *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John* (London: J. Darby and T. Browne, 1733).

<sup>10</sup>H. McLachlan, ed., *Sir Isaac Newton: Theological Manuscripts* (Liverpool: University Press, 1950).

<sup>11</sup>See Newton, *A Catalogue*, especially Reel 18 ([80. K.Ms.1—104. K.Ms.25], MSS preserved at King's College Library, Cambridge), 39–44; and Reel 34–41 ([241. YAH. Ms. Var 1 Newton MS1—283. MS Var.260], MSS preserved at the Jewish National and University Library), 115–26. Newton wrote "The Language of the Prophets," an unpublished work in English of 50,000 words (152 pp.), dealing with the hermeneutics of prophetic literature. The first section of this work has been printed in H. McLachlan, *The Religious Opinions of Milton, Locke and Newton* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1941), 119–26.

<sup>12</sup>Rubert Hall and Laura Tilling, eds., *The Correspondence of Isaac Newton*, 7 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

<sup>13</sup>The following works touch slightly, but do not explore, prophetic interpretation: Frank E. Manuel, *The Religion of Isaac Newton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 83–125; McLachlan, *Sir Isaac Newton*, 119–26; Sarah Hutton, "More, Newton, and the Language of Biblical Prophecy," in *The Books of Nature and Scripture: Recent Essays on Natural Philosophy, Theology, and Biblical Criticism in the Netherlands of Spinoza's Time and the British Isles of Newton's Time*, ed. James E. Force and Richard H. Popkin (Boston: Kluwer Academic, 1994) 39–53; Matania Z. Kochavi, "One Prophet Interprets Another: Sir Isaac Newton and Daniel," in *BNS*, 105–22.

Newton,<sup>14</sup> as well as works on Newton's religious writings,<sup>15</sup> have also appeared.

Articles pertinent to the theme of this dissertation will also be utilized in the following chapters.<sup>16</sup>

Isaac Newton's contributions to the development of prophetic interpretation have received little attention in recent theological scholarship.<sup>17</sup> Although some writers have noted Newton's indebtedness to Joseph Mede,<sup>18</sup> virtually all of them ignore the rich and long-lasting historicist tradition which undoubtedly influenced not only Newton, but Joseph Mede as well.

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<sup>14</sup>Richard Westfall, *Never at Rest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Michael White, *Isaac Newton: The Last Sorcerer*, London: Fourth Estate, 1998; John Fauvel, et al., eds., *Let Newton Be!* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); E. N. da C. Andrade, *Sir Isaac Newton* (New York: Anchor Books, 1954); Gale Christianson, *In the Presence of the Creator: Isaac Newton & His Times* (New York: Free Press, 1984); and William Stukeley, *Memoirs of Sir Isaac Newton's Life*, ed. A. Hastings White (London: Taylor & Francis, 1936, orig. publ. 1752).

<sup>15</sup>McLachlan, *Religious Opinions*; Manuel, *RIN*; Frank E. Manuel, *Isaac Newton Historian* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963).

<sup>16</sup>Some relevant articles are Scott Mandelbrote, "'A Duty of the Greatest Moment': Isaac Newton and the Writing of Biblical Criticism," *BJHS* 26 (1993): 281–302; Stephen D. Snobelen, "Isaac Newton, Heretic: The Strategies of a Nicodemite," *BJHS* 32 (1999): 381–419; Larry Stewart, "Seeing through the Scholium: Religion and Reading Newton in the Eighteenth Century," *HS* 34 (1996): 123–65.

<sup>17</sup>James E. Force and Richard H. Popkin, eds., *Essays on the Context, Nature, and Influence of Isaac Newton's Theology* (London: Kluwer, 1990), ix; Richard Westfall, *The Life of Isaac Newton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 317. Rob Iliffe's statement that "a number of studies have been made in the twentieth century on Newton's scriptural interests, and in particular, concerning his work on deciphering the meaning of the Apocalypse" is not convincing, judged not only from the lack of references he supplies in support of this claim, but from the generally accepted view (as supported by the above references) that there is a substantial lack in Newtonian literature on prophetic interpretation. Rob Iliffe, "'Making a Shew': Apocalyptic Hermeneutics and the Sociology of Christian Idolatry," in *BNS*, 63.

<sup>18</sup>See, e.g., Manuel, *RIN*, 90; and White, *Isaac Newton: The Last Sorcerer*, 156–7. For Newton's praise and criticism of Mede, see Sarah Hutton, "More," 41. According to Hutton, Newton is closer to Mede than to More on several issues including plain meaning of text, rigorous comparison of Scripture with Scripture, and comparison of translations (see Hutton, "More," 49–50. For Newton's use of Mede's temple typology, see Tessa Morrison, *Isaac Newton's Temple of Solomon and his Reconstruction of Sacred Architecture* (Newcastle, Australia: Birkhäuser, 2011), 29–32. Newton's dependence on Mede, however, was perhaps stretched too far when Kochavi stated that the former got the year-day principle from the latter, as though no-one before Mede had considered this principle (see Kochavi, "One Prophet Interprets Another," 115).

## Definition of Terms

In order to be more precise and to avoid misunderstandings, it will be helpful to define the key terms used in this dissertation. Apocalyptic literature, hermeneutics, and historicism are all concepts with a long and sometimes controversial history.

### Apocalyptic Literature

Apocalyptic literature, an adjective functioning as a noun, together with its related noun apocalypticism, is transliterated from the Greek adjective *αποκαλυπτικός*,<sup>19</sup> which is derived from the noun *αποκαλυψις* and means “revelation,” that is, the drawing aside of a curtain so that what was not visible is now revealed and open.<sup>20</sup> “Apocalyptic literature” as used in this study, refers to an ancient genre of literature; that is, writings of a spiritual and revelatory nature, where visions, dreams, predictions, heaven, and angels are present.

A vast body of Jewish intertestamental apocalyptic writings is collected in *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*.<sup>21</sup> Some significant works in this category are 1 Enoch (second century BCE to first century CE), Sibylline Oracles (second century BCE to seventh century CE), the Fourth Book of Ezra (late first century CE), 2 and 3 Baruch (first to third century CE). These pseudepigrapha, written between 200 BCE and 200 CE, have both similarities and differences with Daniel and Revelation. They were excluded

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<sup>19</sup>David E. Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity: Collected Essays* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 1.

<sup>20</sup>See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and adapt. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. “Apocalyptic.”

<sup>21</sup>James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (New York: Doubleday, 1983).

from the biblical canon due to their late date, speculative tone, and theological content, occasionally in conflict with the canonical Scriptures.

Christian interpreters view several sections of the Old Testament, besides the Book of Daniel, as apocalyptic. Some of these are found in Isaiah 24–27, several sections in Ezekiel, and in several Minor Prophets.<sup>22</sup> In the New Testament, there is general agreement among scholars that Matthew 24 and its parallel synoptic chapters (Mark 13 and Luke 21), together with 2 Thessalonians 2, display significant apocalyptic imagery.<sup>23</sup>

The celebrated definition of the apocalyptic genre formulated by John J. Collins, and the Society of Biblical Literature Genres Project, offers a broad perspective that serves as a helpful guide:<sup>24</sup> “Apocalypse,” the definition states, “is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both

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<sup>22</sup>Paul D. Hanson accepted Dan 7–12 as “the only example found in the Old Testament of full-blown apocalyptic, though Zechariah 12 and 14 come close to that category”; in addition Hanson mentioned Isa 56–66, the “Isaiah Apocalypse” in chapters 24–27, Joel 2:28–3:21, Ezek 38–39, and Zech 1–6 as close to the apocalyptic genre. See his *Old Testament Apocalyptic* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 35–38. Cf. Leon Morris, *Apocalyptic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 75–84. Scholars today generally believe the apocalyptic genre is to be found, in degrees from undeveloped and developed, in the mentioned cluster of texts.

<sup>23</sup>Paul S. Minear, *The New Testament Apocalyptic*, Interpreting Biblical Texts (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981) largely ignored Jesus’ “Little Apocalypse” in the synoptic gospels and Paul’s alleged interpretation of Daniel in the second chapter of his Second Letter to the Thessalonians. Cf. Morris, *Apocalyptic*, 85–101, who emphasized the “Little Apocalypse” in the NT apocalyptic corpus, but, like Minear, paid no attention to 2 Thess 2. For a recent cumulative study on Paul’s apocalyptic writings, see Martinus C. de Boer “Paul and Apocalyptic Eschatology,” in *The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. John J. Collins, vol. 1 of *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 345–83.

<sup>24</sup>John J. Collins, ed., *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, Semeia 14 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979). Another fine-tuned definition of apocalyptic is found in David E. Aune, “Apocalyptic,” in *The Westminster Dictionary of New Testament and Early Christian Literature and Rhetoric* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.”<sup>25</sup>

Keywords and concepts in Collins’s definition are: “revelatory,” “narrative framework,” “otherworldly beings,” “transcendence,” “supernatural world,” and “eschatological salvation.” Collins’s definition is designed as an overall general definition encompassing ancient, primarily Judaic, pseudepigraphical writings. However, this definition omits some distinctive characteristics of canonical apocalyptic literature such as the Christ/Antichrist dualism, cultic phraseology, and symbolic time elements, to mention a few.<sup>26</sup>

Some common characteristics of the apocalypses of Daniel and Revelation are indisputable: dualistic symbology (e.g., cities: Jerusalem vs. Babylon; women: virgin vs. whore, etc.), figurative language from the biblical world, heaven/earth relations, angels, predictions, climactic end of time, persecution and testing of God’s people, Old Testament cultic imagery, Christ/Antichrist dualism, and the exalted role of Christ vs. Satan’s deceptions.

### Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the science of interpreting texts (here, apocalyptic texts). What is the method of arriving (if possible) at a truthful interpretation of the text? Regarding the hermeneutic of canonical apocalyptic literature—a subsection of eschatological studies—

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<sup>25</sup>John J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” in *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, ed. John J. Collins, Semeia 14 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979): 9.

<sup>26</sup>See also Leon Morris, *Apocalyptic*, esp. 34–67. Cf. David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 108–9.

certain basic rules of interpretation have, since antiquity, been applied by interpreters in order to understand the apocalyptic text in a meaningful way.<sup>27</sup> Through most of Christian history, a significant number of recognized leaders in their respective areas of activity agreed on many of these hermeneutical laws. It will be seen that the most fundamental laws of interpretation are derived from the Bible and particularly from Daniel, with which apocalyptic interpretation started.

### Historicism

Historicism is a system of interpretation drawn from general principles of biblical interpretation, from Daniel particularly, and from principles discovered (or developed) by interpreters in the historicist tradition. This system views biblical apocalyptic as foretelling political and religious events accurately, and generally, chronologically. Perhaps the most conspicuous characteristic of historicism is that it sees major apocalyptic prophecies as beginning at the time and place of the prophet and progressing chronologically through history without significant interruptions and reaching a climax at the end of time. The term “historicist” refers to the fact that historicism views prophecy

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<sup>27</sup>For an analysis of hermeneutic as it relates to prophecy, see historicists Gerhard F. Hasel, *Understanding the Living Word of God* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1980); Gerhard F. Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1985); Gerhard F. Hasel, “Fulfillments of Prophecy,” in *70 Weeks, Leviticus, Nature of Prophecy*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Study Committee, DARCOM 3 (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 288–322, esp. 312–22; Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible* (Sarasota, FL: First Impressions, 1997); David Merling, ed., *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea* (Berrien Springs, MI: Institute of Archaeology, 1997); and George W. Reid, ed., *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2005). A small sample of non-historicist works on biblical apocalyptic hermeneutics would include Millard J. Erickson, *Contemporary Options in Eschatology: A Study of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977); Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1970); Kent E. Brower and Mark W. Elliott, eds., *Eschatology in Bible and Theology: Evangelical Essays at the Dawn of the New Millennium* (Downers Grove, IN: InterVarsity Press, 1997); Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *The Last Things: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002); David W. Baker, ed., *Looking Into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001).

as “history in advance,” so that correct interpretations of prophecy are confirmed and validated by actual history.<sup>28</sup>

The leading alternatives to historicism (idealism, preterism, and futurism) were introduced at major transition points in the history of apocalyptic interpretation, from the classical period until the French Revolution.<sup>29</sup> The first was initiated by Augustine (354–430), who introduced the “spiritual,” or *idealist* hermeneutic of biblical apocalyptic, as opposed to a literal plain reading generally found in the ancient interpreters.<sup>30</sup> Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1132–1202), seven centuries later, reintroduced the ancient *historicist* school of prophetic interpretation.<sup>31</sup> The counter-reformation in the late sixteenth century, spearheaded by the Jesuits, introduced two almost entirely new apocalyptic schemes:

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<sup>28</sup>See, e.g., some of the most prolific of historicist writers, William H. Shea, “Historicism, the Best Way to Interpret Prophecy,” *Adventists Affirm* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 22–34, and Kenneth Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation: Hermeneutical Guidelines, with Brief Introduction to Literary Analysis* (Worthington, OH: Ann Arbor, 1976, rev. enl. from *The Open Gates of Heaven*, 1970, 1972); see also the writings of Hans K. LaRondelle, including, “Interpretations of Prophetic and Apocalyptic Eschatology,” in *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Gordon M. Hyde (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1974), 225–49 and “The Heart of Historicism,” *Ministry Magazine*, Sept. 2005, 22–27; Jon Paulien, “The End of Historicism? Reflections on the Adventist Approach to Biblical Apocalyptic—Part One,” *JATS* 14, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 15–43; Jon Paulien, “The End of Historicism? Reflections on the Adventist Approach to Biblical Apocalyptic—Part Two,” *JATS* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 108–208; and Reimar Vetne, “A Definition and Short History of Historicism as a Method for Interpreting Daniel and Revelation,” *JATS* 14, no. 2 (Autumn 2003): 1–14.

<sup>29</sup>The classic study on the history of historicism is LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*. Several helpful surveys of the history of apocalyptic interpretation are available, although they do not focus on the particular characteristics of historicism, as does Froom’s study. Despite the fact that “historicism” as a term is rarely used in many other surveys, historicism fills a large part in them, simply because historicism was, in one shape or another, the overwhelmingly preferred hermeneutic of canonical apocalyptic through the ages until the nineteenth century. In Froom’s 4000-page study, the last representative historicist from traditional Evangelical Christianity was Henry Grattan Guinness (1835–1910) (4:1194). See also Kai Arasola, *The End of Historicism: Millerite Hermeneutic of Time Prophecies in the Old Testament*. (Uppsala, Sweden: Self-published, 1990).

<sup>30</sup>Paula Fredriksen, “Apocalypticism,” in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 52.

<sup>31</sup>Delno C. West and Sandra Zimdars-Swartz, *Joachim of Fiore: A Study in Spiritual Perception and History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983), 10–40.

preterism and futurism, which today form, with historicism and idealism, the four most common schools of canonical apocalyptic interpretation.<sup>32</sup>

### **Design of the Study**

Chapter 2 will provide a background study of Newton's life in order to identify social, political, theological, and other historical factors that may have influenced the development of his interpretations of biblical apocalyptic prophecies. In order to indicate the extent of Newton's originality, chapter 3 will survey the history of prophetic interpretation before Newton with particular emphasis on the backgrounds of historicism, the approach Newton adopted. Chapter 4 will describe and analyze Newton's interpretations of the canonical books of Daniel and Revelation and briefly compare his views with those of some of his contemporaries. Chapter 5 will analyze the reasoning by which Newton arrived at his interpretations, investigate his methodology, and synthesize the foundational principles of his hermeneutical approach. Chapter 6 will provide a summary, conclusions, and suggest some areas for further study.

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<sup>32</sup>Among other surveys of the history of apocalyptic interpretation, the most recent and comprehensive work is that of John J. Collins, Bernard McGinn, and Stephen J. Stein, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 1: *The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. John J. Collins, vol. 2: *Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture*, ed. Bernard McGinn, vol. 3: *Apocalypticism in the Modern Period and the Contemporary Age*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (New York: Continuum, 1998). See also Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), and Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994).



## CHAPTER 2

### ISAAC NEWTON: THE MAN AND HIS WORK

#### **Historical Background**

This chapter will situate Isaac Newton (1642–1727) in his historical and intellectual context as a background for identifying and assessing potential influences on the development of his thought.

#### **An Emerging New Worldview**

Newton was born the year Galileo Galilei died (1642) near the beginning of an age when knowledge of the world and cosmos moved forward at an unprecedentedly rapid pace. In England and on the Continent, scores of scientific illuminates were breaking new ground by reshaping man's view of the macro- and micro-cosmos. The two eyes—the telescope and microscope—had been invented, evidence for a heliocentric worldview was undeniable, and accurate methods of measuring time and space were reaching new heights. Newton would become an icon of this new era.

Prior to the Renaissance, religious, philosophical, and scientific thought had progressed, but slowly. Therefore, men of the Renaissance who desired change and progress reverted to the ancients for inspiration. The establishment of universities (since the eleventh century) set the stage for the Renaissance (fourteenth to sixteenth centuries), the Protestant Reformation (sixteenth century), and the Enlightenment (eighteenth

century)—the beginning of the modern era. Newton spent more than half his adult life in a university environment, as did Luther. Universities provided libraries, a constellation of specialists in human knowledge, and an atmosphere of research and discovery—pillars of *academia*.

These times, beginning in the late Middle Ages, exhibited a growing distrust of contemporary authorities. A century before the birth of Newton, Martin Luther had successfully opposed the most powerful religious institution in history and ignited the Protestant Reformation. A chain of natural philosophers from the time of Luther to the birth of Newton had challenged—but less successfully—the unscientific traditions of the same institution.

Consequently, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries became a time of intellectual and scientific progress in Europe. Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543), Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), and Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), among the most influential, had all sown seeds of the Enlightenment—although, the fundamental comprehensive scientific principle on how the universe operated was yet to be formulated. This created an ideal environment for emerging scholars like Isaac Newton.

Before Newton, England had already begun fostering a climate of scientific inquiry. Francis Bacon (1561–1626) had laid the foundation on how to think and reason scientifically. The universities in Cambridge and Oxford were the kingdom's two centers of natural philosophy, and for 35 years, Newton made Cambridge his home. Thus he was born at the right time and in the right place to participate in this acceleration of scientific inquiry.

## Social and Political Setting

Most people in seventeenth-century England lived in rural areas. London, with its 400,000 inhabitants, was by far the biggest city.<sup>1</sup> In 1649, following the end of the Thirty Year War, Charles I was executed and England was declared a Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell's theocracy lasted until Charles II assumed the throne in 1660. The devastating plague of 1665–66 and “the Great Fire of London” in 1666 caused ruin to many people. All these changes occurred during Isaac Newton's first twenty-five years.

## Religious and Theological Environment

Although England became Protestant, at least vis-à-vis Rome, in 1529, when Henry VIII rejected papal power, it might be more correct to call the changed status of the English church Catholicism without a pope.<sup>2</sup> Thereafter, except for short-lived Catholic resurgences, England remained predominantly Protestant. Sectarian Christianity had existed in England before, and during, the Age of Newton. Arminians, Arians, Socinians, Unitarians, and different varieties of Anabaptists were all noticeable, but the most formidable group were the Puritan non-conformists. Thousands joined these various sects. Some sects held doctrines perceived as a threat to the established state-church and the monarchy. Thus bishops, kings, and queens all attempted to restrain this perceived

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<sup>1</sup>C. G. A. Clay, *Economic Expansion and Social Change: England 1500–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1:20.

<sup>2</sup>Henry VIII himself, although then the head of the English church, remained Roman Catholic in faith and doctrine throughout his life.

threat. However, if believers were careful and kept deviant doctrines to themselves, uncomfortable consequences were rare.<sup>3</sup>

Traditional orthodox Christianity still had a substantial influence on English society, though questioned by new scholarship. One fruit of the Renaissance was the recovery of ancient manuscripts, including writings of the Early Church. In addition to several critical volumes of the Church Fathers, Erasmus of Rotterdam (1469–1536) published the first critical text of the Greek New Testament (1516). In addition to emerging scientific inquiry, Greek and Hebrew were understood by a growing number of scholars in England and on the Continent. Descartes' axiom, "I think therefore I am," shifted the locus of authority from external powers, like the Church or the monarchy, to individuals (people could discover truth on their own).<sup>4</sup> The intellectual context of Newton's time was essential to his discoveries and intellectual contributions. Thus, he applied the methodology of empirical and inductive thinking to apocalyptic texts. All these factors prepared the ground for Newton's development and contributions.

## **Biographical Sketch**

### **Youth**

Isaac Newton was born on Christmas Day, 1642, in Woolsthorpe Mansion near

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<sup>3</sup>For a useful overview of legal measures executed against heretics during Newton's time, see Snobelen, "Isaac Newton, Heretic," 393–96.

<sup>4</sup>James M. Byrne, *Religion and the Enlightenment* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).

the village of Colsterworth, seven miles south of Grantham in Lincolnshire.<sup>5</sup> Born prematurely, he was so tiny he could fit in a quart saucepan and no one expected him to survive.<sup>6</sup>

His father, also Isaac Newton, died in October less than three months before his son's birth.<sup>7</sup> Of the families living in and around the nearby village, the Newton family's social status was among the best, although they were not regarded as wealthy. In addition to a midsize manor with plenty of land, Isaac Newton Sr. left behind a flock of sheep numbering 234, as compared to the average of 35 in those days.<sup>8</sup>

When Isaac was three years old, his mother Hanna Ayscough married Rev. Barnabas Smith who lived less than two miles away and had also recently lost his spouse. Isaac's mother left Woolsthorpe to live with her new husband, leaving behind her only child in the care of her mother. Growing up in the care of his grandmother, Isaac showed an inclination for innovation and creativity from an early age; he spent much time with

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<sup>5</sup>Continental Europe was ten days out of synchronism with England, thus, its reckoning of Newton's birth was January 4, 1643. The most comprehensive and reliable biography of Isaac Newton is by Richard Westfall, *NR*. Most of the anecdotes of Newton's life at Cambridge come from three sources: William Stukeley, who befriended Newton in the 1710s and 20s and collected information of his hero after Newton's death. Cf. his *Memoirs of Sir Isaac Newton's Life*, ed. A. Hastings White (London: Taylor and Francis, 1936). Humphrey Newton, Isaac Newton's scribe during the first edition of the *Principia*, wrote two letters after Newton's death related to his experiences with Newton. See Sir Isaac Newton, *Keynes Manuscripts* 135. Manuscripts in the Keynes Collection in the Library of King's College, (Cambridge University, n.d.), [www.newtonproject.ox.ac.uk](http://www.newtonproject.ox.ac.uk). For the testimony of Nicholas Wickins, son of John Wickins, Newton's roommate for so many years at Cambridge, see Newton, *Keynes MS* 137.

<sup>6</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS* 130.10.

<sup>7</sup>While improbable, it is still interesting to note Manuel who said that in folklore, there was special meaning for posthumous children, i.e., children born after their father's death, such as being "endowed with curative powers." Similar ideas were suggested for children born on Christmas Day: see Manuel, *RIN*, 17.

<sup>8</sup>Westfall, *NR*, 47.

his knife and pieces of wood, engineering miniature watermills and sundials.<sup>9</sup>

When he fell behind in his school work, he speedily caught up with the other students.

In 1653, Isaac's mother was widowed again and moved back to Woolsthorpe—this time with three additional children, Isaac's half-siblings. Now there were more books to read. As her oldest son, Isaac inherited some two or three hundred books from the minister's library.<sup>10</sup> Woolsthorpe remained the boy's home for twelve years until he left for the Free Grammar School of King Edward VI in Grantham.

Newton was apparently exposed to mathematics for the first time in the grammar school in Grantham. Reading and writing Latin was the school's most important subject.<sup>11</sup> He boarded at the local pharmacist's house where he also had opportunity to read books.

### Years at Cambridge

Isaac Newton entered Trinity College in Cambridge in June 1661 and resided there for the next 35 years, except for a short interval when he returned to Woolsthorpe during the 1665–66 plague.<sup>12</sup> At Cambridge, the young Newton was confronted with

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<sup>9</sup>According to Conduitt, Newton's first "scientific" experiment happened on the day Cromwell died (i.e., Isaac was 16 years old) and was related to wind-measurement. Newton, *Keynes MS* 130.2, pp. 21–2. Obsessed with sundials from at least nine years of age, people consulted him on time. Stukeley, *Memoirs*, 43; Newton, *Keynes MS* 130.2. At the end of his life, he was apparently still alert to the shadows in rooms in order to tell time. Newton, *Keynes MS* 130.2.

<sup>10</sup>Stukeley, *Memoirs*, 16.

<sup>11</sup>In Grantham, Newton learned Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and theology. Henry Stokes, the schoolmaster, added some practical arithmetic. Newton would later be as fluent in Latin as he was in English. Westfall, *NR*, 57–88.

<sup>12</sup>Rev. William Ayscough (Isaac's uncle), who had been a Trinity student, and Mr. Stokes, the headmaster of the grammar school in Grantham, were most likely instrumental in leading the young Newton to Cambridge University. Westfall, *NR*, 46.

Aristotelian philosophy, his first profound ideological encounter. Although Cambridge University was slightly younger than Oxford University, and had earlier been the smaller of the two, it was this time the largest university in England, with approximately 3,000 students. Interestingly enough, as it relates to Newton, Cambridge was also a hotbed of Puritanism. Of all the colleges at Cambridge, Trinity was regarded as the most academically prominent.<sup>13</sup>

Newton turned his attention to mathematics about 1663/64.<sup>14</sup> During his early Cambridge days, he mastered Descartes' very difficult *Geometry* "without having the least light or instruction from anybody."<sup>15</sup> The plague which swept over England during 1665–66 forced Newton to leave Cambridge for Woolsthorpe. To Newton, and to the cause of science, this was definitely a blessing in disguise. The most crucial seconds in the history of ideas elapsed in Woolsthorpe's backyard when the celebrated apple fell to the ground, allowing the observant Newton to overturn the Aristotelian paradigm of natural philosophy.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Elisabeth Leedham-Green, *A Concise History of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>14</sup>Westfall, *NR*, 99.

<sup>15</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS* 130.10, f. 2<sup>v</sup>. Newton was an autodidact and became, on his own, master of all the mathematics from the time of the early Greeks until Descartes, although it is true that he attended some of Barrow's lectures while the latter still had the Lucasian chair, and may have been influenced and/or inspired by them (Newton, *Additional Manuscripts* 3968.5, f. 21).

<sup>16</sup>Newton described to several people his historic contemplation in the Woolsthorpe garden. Although he did not specifically write about a falling apple, a falling fruit appears in four independent retellings. "The notion of gravitation came into his mind . . . occasion'd by the fall of an apple, as he sat in a contemplative mood," Stukeley reported in his *Memoirs*, 20. Voltaire, an admirer and advocate of Newton, perennialized the story in these words: "Having retired to the country near Cambridge in 1666, he was walking in his garden, saw some fruit falling from a tree, and let himself drift into a profound meditation on this weight, the cause of which all the scientists have vainly sought for so long and about which ordinary people never even suspect there is a mystery," Voltaire, *Letters on England*, transl. Leonard Tancock (Harmondsworth, U.K: Penguin, 1980), 75. See also Conduitt's version (which mentions an apple falling to the ground) in Newton, *Keynes MS* 130.4, pp. 10–12.

This period of Newton's life has been fittingly described as his *anni mirabilis* (his miracle years). During these years, he laid the foundation for his future contributions in physics and did advanced and revolutionary experiments in optics. Newton recalled, "All this was in the two plague years of 1665 and 1666. For in those days I was in the prime of my age for invention & minded Mathematicks & Philosophy more than at any time since."<sup>17</sup>

In 1667, Newton returned to Trinity and was elected a minor fellow of the College. On completing his MA in 1668, he became a major fellow. Only wide deviations from the norm, such as crime, heresy, or marriage, could now stop Newton's academic career at Cambridge—as long as he was willing to take orders and be ordained in the Anglican Church within seven years of completing his MA. In 1669, he was appointed the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Trinity College. An anecdote from his amanuensis tells us that "so few went to hear Him [lecturing], & fewer that understood him, that oftentimes he did in a manner, for want of Hearers, read to the Walls."<sup>18</sup>

A major accomplishment of his "miraculous years" was his *Experimentum Crucis* ("crucial experiment") that laid the foundation for his theory of optics. With this behind him, he progressed with confidence. In 1669, he built the world's first operative reflecting telescope. Conduitt recalled a conversation with Newton in 1726, a year before Newton died.

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<sup>17</sup>Newton, *Additional Manuscripts* 3968.41, f. 85.

<sup>18</sup>Newton, *Keynes*, MS 135.



I asked him where he had it [the telescope] made, he [Newton] said he made it himself, & when I asked him where he got his tools said he made them himself & laughing added if I had staid for other people to make my tools & things for me, I had never made anything.<sup>19</sup>

Galileo and others had already developed and refined refraction telescopes, but Newton's compact telescope was far more powerful and became a prototype until the quantum age.<sup>20</sup> He privately enjoyed this powerful tool for two years before he showed it to the king and the Royal Society.<sup>21</sup> Shortly thereafter, Newton was elected a member of the Royal Society. From then, his reputation in British science had no equal.

His first publication, however, was a bitter experience. The paper, describing his *experimentum crucis*, was published in the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions*, in 1672.<sup>22</sup> Robert Hooke (1635–1703), who was, before Newton, the premiere experimental natural philosopher in England and oversaw all the experiments at the Royal Society, doubted the originality of Newton's contribution and rejected the *experimentum crucis*.<sup>23</sup> Newton was also attacked by continental scholars, especially

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<sup>19</sup>Newton, *Keynes*, MS 130.10 (August 31, 1726).

<sup>20</sup>Newton's telescope was only 6 inches long but could magnify 40 times; a refracting telescope with the same magnifying force would have to be made ten times longer, Newton, *The Correspondence of Isaac Newton*, ed. Rubert Hall and Laura Tilling, vol.1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1:3. In a letter of Collins it was reported to magnify 150 times, Newton, *Correspondence*, 59. In 1721, a six-foot-long reflector telescope which could magnify 200 times, made after Newton's plan, was presented to the Royal Society. Westfall, *NR*, 832n167.

<sup>21</sup>The sensation the telescope caused at the Royal Society amazed Newton. With perhaps a little irony, he wrote: "I was surprised to see so much care taken about securing an invention of mee, of which I have hitherto had so little value." Newton to Oldenburg, 6 Jan 1672, Newton, *Correspondence*, 1:79.

<sup>22</sup>The Royal Society, *Philosophical Transactions* 80 (February 19, 1672): 3075, 3083. For Newton's official "desire to withdraw" from the Royal Society after his disappointment, see Newton to Oldenburg, 8 March 1673, Newton, *Correspondence*, 1:262.

<sup>23</sup>In Newton's infamous response to Robert Hooke's open criticism, he stated, "That it is not for one man [i.e. Hooke] to prescribe Rules to the studies of another, especially not without understanding the grounds on which he proceeds." Newton to Oldenburg, 11 June 1672, Newton, *Correspondence*, 1:67.

Jesuits.<sup>24</sup> However, in this and similar incidents, Newton received enormous accolades from his peers, and from this time on, began to be regarded as the leading mathematician in the world.

Newton was incredibly sensitive to critique and, after his first paper was heavily criticized by Hooke, Newton withdrew from scholarly circles in London for a long time.<sup>25</sup> It was impossible, of course, to vanish entirely after his first scientific “teasers.” Ironically, at least for a time, the more he published, the more he desired to withdraw from scholastic interactions altogether.<sup>26</sup> He did not rejoin the Royal Society until 1703.<sup>27</sup>

During the 1670s Newton developed his heterodox anti-trinitarian theology. He kept this his lifelong secret except for communicating it to a handful of trusted friends. Doubting the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity was his cardinal heresy.<sup>28</sup> Newton became

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<sup>24</sup>Ignace Gaston Pardies (Paris), Francis Hall (Latinized: Linus; English college in Liege), and Anthony Lucas (English), see Westfall, *NR*, 242, 562, 853.

<sup>25</sup>In a letter to Oldenburg, the secretary of the Royal Society, Newton wrote: “Sir I desire that you will procure that I may be put out from being any longer fellow of the R. Society. For though I honour that body, yet since I see I shall neither profit them, nor (by reason of this distance) can partake of the advantage of their Assemblies, I desire to withdraw.” Newton to Oldenburg, 8 March 1673, Newton, *Correspondence*, 1:262. A few months later, another letter from Newton to the secretary was even more determined: “I intend to be no further solicitous about matters of Philosophy. And therefore I hope you will not take it ill if you find me ever refusing doing any thing more in that kind.” Newton to Oldenburg, 23 Jun 1673, Newton, *Correspondence*, 1:294–5. About ten years later the sentiment was the same: “I am of all men grown the most shy of setting pen to paper about any thing that may lead into disputes.” Newton to Briggs, 12 Sept 1682, Newton, *Correspondence*, 2:381–5.

<sup>26</sup>After Newton’s disappointing experience with the Royal Society, he withdrew from scientific interactions, thus, the years of silence: 1676–84/85. Newton was particularly bothered by one of the Jesuits who had criticized his work and told Oldenburg that “if I get free of Mr Linus’s buisiness I will resolutely bid adew to it eternally, excepting what I do for my privat satisfaction or leave to come out after me. For I see a man must either resolve to put out nothing new or to become a slave to defend it.” Newton to Oldenburg, 18 Nov. 1676, Newton, *Correspondence*, 2:182–83.

<sup>27</sup>Westfall, *NR*, 630.

<sup>28</sup>Sir Isaac Newton, *Yahuda*, *MS* 14, Manuscripts in the Yahuda Collection in the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, provides much on trinitarianism intertwined with Newton’s thoughts on apostasy. For a recent view challenging the traditional Arian-label on Newton, see Van Alan Herd, “The Theology of Sir Isaac Newton” (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, Graduate College, Norman, 2008).

persuaded of anti-trinitarianism after a penetrating study of the Bible and church history. This was, of course, potentially catastrophic for a professor at Trinity College.<sup>29</sup>

The year 1675 was critical for Newton (and Cambridge).<sup>30</sup> The taking of orders was mandatory for Cambridge scholars, including Newton.<sup>31</sup> If he accepted ordination, his conscience would have to be compromised. He had previously signed an agreement of orthodoxy when graduating from his BA and MA. Again, when installed as the Lucasian Professor in 1669, he had sworn his allegiance to the Anglican faith. It was different in 1675, however, after his heterodoxy had matured. Newton may have been prepared to resign,<sup>32</sup> but apparently Charles II intervened and uniquely exempted the Lucasian chair of Mathematics from taking orders.<sup>33</sup>

A fire in his study chamber in 1676<sup>34</sup> was the probable cause of a nervous breakdown which, for a time, deprived Newton of his exceptional focus and motivation for scientific research, but in 1687, the *Principia* was published, and Newton's place in

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<sup>29</sup>Interestingly enough, Isaac Barrow, Newton's protector, wrote a treatise on the Defense of the Blessed Trinity: "Sermon XXI: A Defence of the Blessed Trinity, Trinity Sunday 1663," in *Sermons Selected from The Works of the Rev. Isaac Barrow* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1810), 1:421–47. For a summary of the Barrow-Newton relationship, see Derek Gjertsen, *The Newton Handbook* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 54–5.

<sup>30</sup>The new library project that year (1675), initiated by Isaac Barrow, became a financial disaster for Trinity College. Only in 1696 (21 years later) was the library ready to display books. Westfall, *NR*, 337. Cf. R. R. Neild, *Riches and Responsibility: the Financial History of Trinity College, Cambridge* (Cambridge, U.K: Granta Editions, 2008), esp. chap. 2, pp. 37–56.

<sup>31</sup>The deadline year was 1675.

<sup>32</sup>This is implied by the following letter: "For the time draws near that I am to part with my Fellowship" (Newton to Oldenburg, [undated] *Corr*, 7:387).

<sup>33</sup>The dispensation was granted Newton on April 27, 1675. The exemption is still in place. Barrow, whom Newton succeeded, may have interceded on behalf of Newton. At this time, he was the Master of Trinity and saw better than others the value of Newton's presence at the University. Westfall agrees, "that on this occasion it was Isaac Barrow who rescued Newton from threatened oblivion. A dispensation was a royal act, and Barrow was the one who had the ear of the court," *NR*, 333.

<sup>34</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS* 130.4, pp. 14–15.

history was permanently secured. Newton's residency at Cambridge ended in 1696 after a second and more severe breakdown which forever changed him.<sup>35</sup>

### The Mature Man

In 1696, Newton was named Warden of the Mint by the king and moved permanently to London. Three years later, he was made Master of the Mint for life.<sup>36</sup> During his early London years, Newton invited his charming niece, Catherine Barton, to live with him as his housekeeper.<sup>37</sup> At this time, after the *Principia* was internationally recognized as a major scientific contribution, and with the nervous breakdown behind him, Newton exhibited more self-confidence and increased social skills.<sup>38</sup> Though living in London, Newton shunned the Royal Society, rejoining it only after Robert Hooke, his nemesis, died in 1703.<sup>39</sup> Later that year, Newton was elected president of the Society and

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<sup>35</sup>The allegations that his apocalyptic interpretations were a result of a distorted and reduced mind were laid to rest long ago due to the evidence we have today from his manuscripts. Newton was invested in apocalyptic studies long before his breakdown in 1693, perhaps before his possible minor breakdown in 1677/78, but certainly before his work on the publication of the *Principia* in 1687. Westfall dated Newton's earliest proper manuscript on the prophecies "to the mid-1670s." Westfall, *NR*, 319n114. Newton had, however, uttered "prophetically" years before that, from lack of proper eating and sleeping, "cometh madness" (Newton, *Additional Manuscripts*, 3996). For the two famous paranoid letters from Newton to Locke and Pepys which reveal the state of his confused mind after his breakdown in 1698, see Newton, *Corr* 3:279–280.

<sup>36</sup>For details, see John Craig, *Newton at the Mint* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1946).

<sup>37</sup>For a discussion of Catharine Barton's allegedly sexual extra-marital affair with Halifax while living in Newton's house, see James Gleick, *Isaac Newton* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 232n11, and Westfall, *NR*, 596–601.

<sup>38</sup>For a penetrating analysis of Newton's social life, see Snobelen, "Isaac Newton, Heretic."

<sup>39</sup>This was typical of how Newton related to people he disliked. Hooke became secretary of the Royal Society in 1677 and remained so until his death in 1703. Newton had at least three serious disputes with Hooke. Due to his hypersensitivity to criticism, Newton possibly overreacted in 1672 during the first clash with Hooke. Newton encountered misunderstandings and unnecessary conflicts in his life because of this. At the same time, it is possible that Newtonian historians may have exaggerated Newton's "fearful, cautious, and suspicious temper." William Whiston, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of William Whiston*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for J. Whiston and B. White, 1753), 250. Although Newton may have overreacted occasionally, this may have been a reasonable response when, for example, those to whom he leased Woolsthorpe did not pay their rent for years; or when Hooke or Leibniz took credit for Newton's

remained so till his death,<sup>40</sup> ruling it with strict decorum, “solemnity and decency.”<sup>41</sup>

*Optics* was published in 1704 (with a second edition in 1717), adding to Newton’s scientific prominence. The *Principia* went to a second edition in 1713, and a third and final edition in 1727. The *Principia* and the *Optics*, the only full-length scientific books he ever published, were the pillars of Newton’s lasting legacy.

### Final Years

Newton’s final years, possibly the happiest in his life, were spent in London, with occasional trips to Cambridge and Lincolnshire. He maintained his leadership position at the Royal Mint and the Royal Society until his death. During his last 30 years, he remained wealthy, admired, and largely healthy. He died “a prolonged and excruciating death from a kidney stone,”<sup>42</sup> March 20, 1727, at the age of 85.<sup>43</sup> He was buried in Westminster Abbey—the first natural philosopher to receive such an honor.<sup>44</sup>

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discoveries; or a colleague shared a confidential work or letter of Newton’s with the world. An analysis of the more passionate and temperate letters corresponding to the above challenges of Newton suggests he was a firm man and not one to play around with.

<sup>40</sup>Newton was installed as President on November 30, 1703, and according to Westfall, “failed to preside at a total of three [weekly] meetings during the next twenty years.” Westfall, *NR*, 630.

<sup>41</sup>Royal Society membership was at a historic low (approximately 100 members) when he took charge of the Society, as was the level of scientific creativity. Newton introduced new rules, organized laboratory experiments, and helped garner financial support. Stukeley reported that when Newton “presided in the Royal Society, he executed that office with singular prudence . . . there was no whispering, talking, nor loud laughter . . . everything was transacted with great attention and solemnity and decency,” and despite Newton’s philosophy of general separation of science and revelation, Stukeley stated that there were no “papers which seemed to border on religion treated without proper respect.” Stukeley, *Memoirs*, 78–81; see also Westfall, *NR*, 627, 632, 636, 681–2, 685.

<sup>42</sup>Gleick, *Newton*, 5.

<sup>43</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS* 130.15. Gleick, in *Newton*, 190, had him dying on March 19.

<sup>44</sup>In Westminster Abbey, a memorandum in Latin for Newton states: “Mortals rejoice that there has existed so great an ornament of the human race.” Gleick, *Newton*, 5.

## Relationships

Newton had few close relationships in his life, especially before he moved to London. To “increase my acquaintance,” Newton once stated, was “the thing which I chiefly study to decline.”<sup>45</sup> As a young man he was much alone in his secretive “laboratory,” exercising his innovative mind. He later recalled with pleasure only one person from his time in Grantham.<sup>46</sup> At Cambridge he was seen as eccentric,<sup>47</sup> and apart from John Wickins, his chamber-fellow for several years, Newton does not seem to have developed many close friendships.<sup>48</sup> From his time in London, only one personal letter to a fellow at Cambridge has been discovered.<sup>49</sup>

In Newton’s former Cambridge days, he could spend days in his chamber forgetting to eat and sleep while searching for answers to nature’s, or the Apocalypse’s, great mysteries. During that time some antisocial behaviors were anecdotally recorded and these have largely shaped posterity’s view of Newton’s personal life. As his celebrity increased, so did his clashes with a number of people.<sup>50</sup> The collection of his letters, however, suggests that Newton corresponded with quite a large circle of admirers—and

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<sup>45</sup>Newton to Collins, Feb. 18, 1670, *Corr*, 1:27.

<sup>46</sup>The one he had a fight with (see Newton, *Keynes MS* 130.2).

<sup>47</sup>There are a number of anecdotal reports of antisocial and eccentric behaviors, especially stories related to his eating habits. Newton, *Keynes MS* 135, 137; Stukeley, *Memoirs*, 48, 61; Newton, *Keynes MS* 130.6, bk. 1.

<sup>48</sup>Westfall, *NR*, 75.

<sup>49</sup>Newton to Francis Aston, May 18, 1669, *Corr* 1:9–11.

<sup>50</sup>Few could aggravate Newton’s temper as Flamsteed. After an unpleasant encounter with Newton, Flamsteed reported that Newton had “called me all the ill names, puppy &c. that he could think of.” Quoted in Gleick, *Newton*, 173.

antagonists.<sup>51</sup> There is a report of a certain Miss Storer to whom he allegedly proposed,<sup>52</sup> but he never married. According to Newton's biographers, however, the post-Cambridge period in London—the latter half of his life—was characterized by public visibility and relatively normal social interactions.<sup>53</sup>

### Newton's Influence

After the publication of *Principia*, Newton's influence on future generations was assured. The European intelligentsia regarded him as the foremost mathematician in history. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) told the Queen of Prussia, "Taking Mathematicks from the beginning of the world to the time of S<sup>r</sup> I[saac], what he [Newton] had done was much the better half."<sup>54</sup>

Newton's breakthrough research revealed a mathematically based order to nature's mysteries and empirically demonstrated a scientific methodology which, today, is regarded as foundational. In 1919, after more than a decade of work on his general theory of relativity, Albert Einstein observed, "Let no one suppose, that the mighty work of Newton can really be superseded by this [Theory of Relativity] or any other theory. His [Newton's] great and lucid ideas will retain their unique significance for all time as the foundation of our whole modern conceptual structure in the sphere of natural philosophy."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>His *Correspondence* fills seven volumes.

<sup>52</sup>Westfall, *NR*, 59.

<sup>53</sup>For a penetrating analysis of Newton's social life see Snobelen, "Isaac Newton, Heretic."

<sup>54</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS* 130.7, sheet 2. Compare Alexander Pope's famous phrase: "God said: Let Newton be! And all was light," in Gjertsen, *Handbook*, 439.

<sup>55</sup>Quoted in Gleick, *Isaac Newton*, 186.

Newton's formulas provided solutions to questions humans had studied for millennia. His contemporary, Edmund Halley (for whom the comet was named), remarked, "It is admirable to observe how easily we are enabled to make out very abstruse and difficult matters, when once true and genuine Principles are obtained."<sup>56</sup>

Some even felt religiously attached to *Principia*.<sup>57</sup> The Marquis de l'Hôpital exclaimed, "Good God what a fund of knowledge there is in that book [*Principia*] . . . Does he eat & and drink & and sleep? Is he like other men?"<sup>58</sup> Most, however, did not understand the content of the publication,<sup>59</sup> and, "to avoid being baited by little smatterers in mathematics," Newton made no attempt to simplify it.<sup>60</sup> Of those who understood it, few rejected its thesis.<sup>61</sup>

In non-scientific areas, however, Newton's influence was not great. As a historian

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<sup>56</sup>Edmund Halley, *Phil. Trans.* 226: 445, 447, quoted in Gleick, *Isaac Newton*, 142.

<sup>57</sup>A scientific-religious sect was started by Henry de Saint-Simon with the startling name: "The Religion of Newton." Manuel, *RIN*, 53. Manuel also reports of another "Newtonian mythomaniac" phenomenon (reminding us of the ideological force behind the Goddess of Reason in the French Revolution): An eccentric French aristocrat, Champlain de la Blancherie, who denounced the "English nation for its failure to honour Newton's divine person," suggested every year to start officially on Newton's birth-date and to establish a sanctuary in Woolsthorpe. Manuel, *RIN*, 53.

<sup>58</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS* 130.5. Halley referred to Newton's *Principia* in a letter as "Your divine Treatise" (*Corr* 2:473); and Halley, again, in the book itself: "Nearer the gods no mortal may approach." Newton, *Principia*, 1st ed. (London: Royal Society, Edmond Halley, 1687), xv. Fatio, in a letter to Huygens, wrote, "I was frozen stiff when I saw what Mr. Newton has accomplished." Quoted in Westfall, *NR*, 495.

<sup>59</sup>An anecdote preserved by Conduitt tells of some students at Cambridge, seeing Newton passing by, saying "there goes the man that writt a book that neither he nor anybody else understands," Newton, *Keynes MS* 130.6. Another anecdote, this time from Humphrey, tells that when twenty copies of the *Principia* were given to faculty and acquaintances at Cambridge, Dr. Babington of Trinity "said that they might study seven years, before they understood anything in it." Newton, *Keynes MS* 135. Even the philosopher John Locke had difficulty reading it; he eventually read it without understanding the mathematics. Newton, *Keynes MSS* 130.6, bk. 2; 130.5, sheet 1.

<sup>60</sup>Newton, *Principia*, 793; Newton, *Keynes MS* 133.

<sup>61</sup>Christian Huygens and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz "rejected its central concept." Westfall, *NR*, 472.



he is rarely praised, although he possessed an understanding of universal history equal to few; as an alchemist, he is almost forgotten, yet few wrote as much on the topic in his time; as a theologian, he is not highly regarded, although his general Bible knowledge exceeded most theologians of his time; and, as a metaphysical philosopher, he had “little success,”<sup>62</sup> despite his popularity among philosophers of his time. Although Newton achieved much, he also knew his limitations. “To explain all nature is too difficult a task for any one man or even for any one age. Tis much better to do a little with certainty & leave the rest for others that come after, than to explain all things by conjecture without making sure of anything.”<sup>63</sup>

## **Newton’s Writings**

### **Scientific Writings**

Compared to the most prolific of his contemporaries, Newton’s publication output falls short. In terms of his influence on posterity, however, there are few equals in history. Newton’s preserved manuscripts are a testament to his extensive scientific work. His notes, drafts, and unpublished manuscripts contain millions of words.<sup>64</sup> He sometimes rewrote his manuscripts scores of times, adding or subtracting a little here and there—but rarely submitted them for publication. However, he published no books until

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<sup>62</sup>Leibniz to Bernoulli, March 29, 1715, Newton, *Corr.* 6:213.

<sup>63</sup>Newton, *Add MS* 3970.3, f. 479.

<sup>64</sup>For an example of Newton’s prodigious output in just one area of science, see D. T. Whiteside, *The Mathematical Papers of Isaac Newton*, 8 vols. (Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press, 1967–82).

his mid-40s.<sup>65</sup> Smaller projects were conveyed through his correspondence and sometimes read to the members of the Royal Society.

The *Principia*, his *magnum opus*, contains in mathematical language the first comprehensive summary of the basis of natural science. *Principia* paved the way for his universal fame, while the *Optics*, at first, slightly less popular than *Principia*, later in the eighteenth century superseded it in popularity.

History regards Newton as a premier mathematician and physicist. He dealt with all the branches of mathematics of his time. He was, moreover, regarded as the greatest scientific experimentalist up to his time; the findings of his countless laboratory experiments were carefully recorded, and a few were incorporated into publications. The *Principia* demonstrates that he invented original and ingenious mathematical methods in order to formulate his mechanics (physics). His breakthrough physical research, building on certain foundations of Kepler and Galileo, incorporated complex mathematics into the discipline of astronomy. In addition, he revolutionized the science of light and color—insights published in *Optics*. His unpublished notes show his interest in biology, botany, and pharmacy, but not astrology,<sup>66</sup> as Will Durant and others have suggested.<sup>67</sup> Newton's

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<sup>65</sup>The *Principia* was published in 1687 when Newton was 45 years old.

<sup>66</sup>Derek Thomas Whiteside, an English historian of science, and a leading Newton scholar, is quoted as asserting that he had “never found any reference to astrology among the fifty million words which have been preserved from Newton's writings.” R. H. Van Gent, “Isaac Newton and Astrology: Witness for the Defense or for the Prosecution?” *Correlation: Journal of Research into Astrology* 12, no. 1 (1993), 33.

<sup>67</sup>Will and Ariel Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, vol. 8, *The Age of Louis XIV*, (New York: MJF Books, 1963), 531. See also H. More, *Tetractys Anti-Astrologica; or, the Four Chapters in the Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness, which Contain a Brief but Solid Confutation of Judiciary Astrology* (London: J.M. for Walter Kettilby, 1681); Thomas George Cowling, *Isaac Newton and Astrology* (Leeds: Leeds University Press, 1977); I. B. Cohen, “Isaac Newton—An Advocate of Astrology?” *Isis* 33 (1941): 60–61.

spectrum of scientific enquiry, however, did include alchemy, a quasi-science and precursor of chemistry.<sup>68</sup> Alchemy was stigmatized and commonly thought to be occult, but Newton, the realist and curious natural philosopher, was not intimidated by this.<sup>69</sup> Yet, despite his extraordinary creativity in so many lines of human inquiry, Newton expressed his self-evaluation late in life in one of his famous sayings: “I don’t know what I may seem to the world, but, as to myself, I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.”<sup>70</sup>

### Historical and Religious Writings

Newton published nothing in the area of historical studies, and little on religious studies during his lifetime. He had only two major publications in these categories. *Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms Amended*, his last manuscript, was published posthumously in 1728,<sup>71</sup> and his unfinished *Observations on Daniel and St. John* was published in 1733.

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<sup>68</sup>According to Westfall, Newton wrote more than one million words related to his alchemical studies. Westfall, *NR*, 21n12, 290–91n32. Cf. Westfall, *NR*, 290–91. Little, if any, was ever published, perhaps due to its stigmatization.

<sup>69</sup>Thus, Brewster argued that “there is no reason to support that Sir Isaac Newton was a believer in the [religious] doctrine of alchemy.” Brewster, *Life of Sir Isaac Newton* (London: John Murray, 1831), 271. According to Humphrey, Newton worked in his alchemy laboratory with great “satisfaction and delight.” Newton, *Keynes MS* 135. Moreover, Newton told Conduitt, presumably to justify his own engagement in this area of inquiry, that “the alchemists were moral and God-seeking men worthy of respect even when they had erred.” Manuel, *RIN*, 45.

<sup>70</sup>Brewster, *Life of Newton*, 303.

<sup>71</sup>Newton, *Add MS* 3987, f. 2<sup>r</sup>, written c. 1700.

The *Chronology* attempted to trace the roots of the human family back to the beginning of time and verify the chronology of the Bible, using ancient sources available during Newton's time. This work was motivated by Newton's strategy in developing a comprehensive theological and apocalyptic thesis.

Newton embarked on a study of church history in order to confirm the truthfulness of the prophecies.<sup>72</sup> His historical studies concentrated on the fourth century, with a particularly detailed analysis of the Christological and Trinitarian conflict.<sup>73</sup>

The total output of Newton's writings on religious topics is estimated to exceed four million words,<sup>74</sup> divided among the following topics: (1) research to ascertain the correct text of biblical manuscripts, (2) OT sanctuary typology,<sup>75</sup> (3) antitrinitarianism, (4) apocalyptic interpretation, (5) church history, (6) ancient history related to the interpretation of the book of Daniel,<sup>76</sup> and (7) teleology. None of these were published in his lifetime, although he came close to publishing "Two Notable Corruptions of Scripture" under a pseudonym (through Locke).<sup>77</sup> Newton's entire theological corpus has

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<sup>72</sup>This aspect will be developed further in chapters 4 and 5 below.

<sup>73</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS 2*. For Newton's other autographs on church history, see, e.g., Newton, *Yahuda MSS 2.3; 2.5b; 7.3*. Newton, *Yahuda MS 14* contains historical discussion regarding the Trinity. Cf. Maurice Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy: Arianism through the Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 77–92, which deals with Newton and Arius. Kochavi believed Newton blamed Athanasius (unfairly) for corruptions like monasticism, adoration of saints, and the Trinity. Kochavi, "One Prophet Interprets Another," 113.

<sup>74</sup>See Manuel, *RIN*, 8.

<sup>75</sup>Newton believed that an understanding of the Jewish sanctuary and temple typology helped to explicate the book of Revelation. See Newton, *Yahuda MSS 2.4; 8.2; 9.2; 10; 14; 28*.

<sup>76</sup>Westfall believed the *Theologiae gentilis origines philosophicae* is Newton's most important theological manuscript. Westfall, *NR*, viii.

<sup>77</sup>The book was printed in Amsterdam, but before it reached its logistic destination, Newton panicked, bought the whole stock, and burned it.

now been published online.<sup>78</sup> William Whiston published some of Newton's metaphysical writings after the latter's death.<sup>79</sup> Smaller non-scientific fragmentary works of variable quality have occasionally been printed over the centuries.<sup>80</sup>

Regardless of whatever Newton decided to study, he never, it seems, neglected to record his findings. He also repeatedly corrected his re-written manuscripts to the point where they were ready to be published, but most of them never were. For Newton to have published his antitrinitarian views would have had major consequences, but his reasons for not publishing his other religious writings can only be speculated. This remains one of the enigmas of Newton scholarship. One obvious factor, which Newton himself alluded to, was his phobia of conflict.<sup>81</sup> As mentioned earlier, he had tasted opposition in the 1670s when Robert Hooke opposed his first publication attempt, and if he did not afterwards entirely avoid conflict and opposition, he must have harbored some fear of it.

The *Chronology of the Ancient Kingdoms Amended* was motivated by Newton's apocalyptic interpretation, especially of the Book of Daniel. Because Newton believed the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation were coded historical predictions, he endeavored

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<sup>78</sup>See [www.newtonproject.ox.ac.uk](http://www.newtonproject.ox.ac.uk). A list of almost all preserved autographs of Newton is available. See Sir Isaac Newton, *CMP*, compiled from three major collections: The collection at Kings College, Cambridge University; the Cambridge University Library collection; and the Yahuda collection in the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem.

<sup>79</sup>Some of Newton's metaphysical writings are found in William Whiston, *Sir Isaac Newton's Corollaries from his Philosophy and Chronology in his own Words* (London: J. Roberts, 1729). Others of Newton's non-scientific works have occasionally been published in works of variable quality. See, e.g., Herbert McLachlan, ed., *Sir Isaac Newton: Theological Manuscripts* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1950).

<sup>80</sup>See, e.g., McLachlan, *Newton: Theological Manuscripts*.

<sup>81</sup>John Craig, an acquaintance of Newton and the author of the *sacra physica* work *Theologicae Christianae Principia Mathematica* (London: John Darby, 1699), explained in a letter to Conduitt that Newton's "thoughts were some times different from those which are commonly received, which would engage [sic] him in disputes, and this was a thing which he avoided as much as possible." Newton, *Keynes MS 132* (April 7, 1727).

to master the history of the Ancient Near Eastern empires. The *Chronology* is the most refined of his non-scientific works and the last he worked on before he died—apparently because he intended it for publication.<sup>82</sup>

His other major non-scientific posthumous publication was *Observations* (1733), a commentary on Daniel and Revelation, written by Newton's hand in five copies with variations in each of them. The edition of *Observations* that went into print did so rather arbitrarily; Benjamin Smith, who was both the publisher and Newton's nephew, is said to have been out for quick cash.<sup>83</sup> The five manuscript copies of *Observations*, now part of the Yahuda collection, have yet to be thoroughly compared and critically analyzed.

*Observations* provides an excellent insight into Newton's developed apocalyptic thought and hermeneutical principles. It will receive more attention in chapters 4 and 5. In a related essay, "Rules for Interpreting,"<sup>84</sup> Newton articulated, most clearly, his rules for interpreting prophecies. This essay is, together with his commentary, an important document in deducing and evaluating his principles of interpretation.

### **Newton's Religious Faith**

Notwithstanding his scientific achievements, Isaac Newton was also a religious person. Christian values profoundly influenced him, and he accepted them into his faith structure from a young age. His stepfather, a minister, possessed an extensive book collection, and much of Newton's inheritance from this clergyman consisted of religious

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<sup>82</sup>Florin Diacu, *The Lost Millennium: History's Timetables Under Siege*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 65–68.

<sup>83</sup>Diacu, *Lost Millennium*, 10.

<sup>84</sup>"Rules for Interpreting" is a section of Newton's apocalyptic writings published in Manuel, *RIN*, 107–25. It will receive detailed examination in chapter 5 below.

books.<sup>85</sup> Little is known of his mother's and grandmother's faith other than their membership within the Anglican Church, but his stepfather was a clergyman and his maternal uncle was a priest and a Trinity graduate.<sup>86</sup>

Newton was sensitive to sin. He confessed, in writing, a list of personal sins.<sup>87</sup> A secondary source reports that he was notorious for objecting to frivolous or irreverent attitudes displayed in his presence.<sup>88</sup> On the other hand, Stukeley, who knew him personally, claimed he often saw Newton laugh, and that he "used a good many sayings, bordering on joke, and wit. In company he behaved very agreeably; courteous, affable, he was easily made to smile, if not to laugh .... He [Newton] could be very agreeable in company, and even sometimes talkative."<sup>89</sup>

John Locke (1632–1704), an influential philosopher and a friend, reported that Newton's knowledge of the Bible was exceptionally good.<sup>90</sup> The archbishop of Canterbury, according to John Conduitt, once told Newton (when trying to persuade him to take orders), "you know more [of religion] than all of us put together—Why then said S<sup>r</sup> I[saac], I shall be able to do you the more service by not being in orders."<sup>91</sup> Newton

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<sup>85</sup>See John Harrison, *Library of Isaac Newton*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

<sup>86</sup>Westfall, *NR*, 45.

<sup>87</sup>Richard Westfall, "Short-Writing and the State of Newton's Conscience, 1662," *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 18, no. 1 (June 1963): 13–15. These are his earliest (1662) preserved religious texts. There were apparently "plenty" of sins between Grantham and Cambridge.

<sup>88</sup>Manuel, *RIN*, 6. According to a testimony, Newton broke with Vigani because he had "told a loose story about a Nun." Newton, *Keynes MS* 130.6, book 2. Newton "being ever grave and serious, and never dealing in ludicrous matters at all," according to Whiston. See Manuel, *RIN*, 653.

<sup>89</sup>Stukeley, *Memoirs*, 57, 68.

<sup>90</sup>Locke to King, April 30, 1703, quoted in Westfall, *NR*, 489.

<sup>91</sup>Newton, *Keynes MSS* 130.6, bk. 1; 130.7, sheet 1.

also paid for Bibles to be distributed to the poor<sup>92</sup> and gave away his worn-out study Bible to a nurse who served him during an illness late in his life.<sup>93</sup>

Newton's underlying motive in scientific research seems to have been to show that there is a God who rules supremely and maintains the universe. "Newton's scrutiny of nature," Manuel wrote, "was directed almost exclusively to the knowledge of God and not to the increase of sensate pleasure or comfort."<sup>94</sup> The Deity is implicitly and explicitly mentioned in the *Principia* and in other scientific works.<sup>95</sup>

Newton declined to take orders, and there are conflicting reports regarding his attendance at church on Sundays.<sup>96</sup> He did *not*, however, often attend the early morning worships during weekdays at Trinity.<sup>97</sup> He may, from the outside, have appeared to be an Anglican in good and regular standing,<sup>98</sup> though he secretly entertained semi-heretical beliefs, was involved in alchemical research which the church frowned on, and ultimately, refused the sacrament of the Anglican Church on his death-bed.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS* 137.

<sup>93</sup>For Newton's mission endeavors, see Snobelen, "Isaac Newton Heretic," 401–8.

<sup>94</sup>Manuel, *RIN*, 48.

<sup>95</sup>E.g., "General Scholium" in Newton's *Principia*, and the "Queries" in his *Optics*, 2nd English ed. (London: Sam. Smith and Benj. Walford, 1718).

<sup>96</sup>For an overview of Newton's religiosity as a young man, see Stukeley, *Memoirs*, 60. Two sources claim that, as an older man, Newton attended church; see Stukeley, *Memoirs*, 69–71 and Newton, *Keynes MS* 130.6. Gleick, however, claimed that "he rarely attended church" *Newton*, 112.

<sup>97</sup>See testimony of Stukeley in Newton, *Keynes MS* 135, cited in Snobelen, "Isaac Newton, Heretic," 397. Cf. Manuel, *RIN*, 6.

<sup>98</sup>Even though being a member on several Anglican sponsored church-committees (see Newton, *Corr* 4:377–80; 4:424; 6:381), including the committee to complete St. Paul Cathedral, Newton apparently appeared positive to iconoclastic views. Newton, *Keynes MS* 130.7, sheet 1.

<sup>99</sup>Newton, *Keynes MSS* 130.6, bk. 1; 130.7, sheet 1.



At least once, Newton used his academic position to defend Protestantism.<sup>100</sup>

Although he is certainly not to be compared to John Wesley or John Whitefield, Frank E. Manuel claimed that a few people of note were converted or religiously influenced as an immediate result of reading his *Observations*—although this report may not be conclusively verifiable.<sup>101</sup>

Newton was, indeed, deeply interested in the study of Holy Scripture. Given the fact that he had inherited a very large collection of 200–300 books as a boy, most of them religious, and had both a step-father and an uncle who were clergymen and highly educated people, it is little wonder he is credited with quotes such as this: “Search the scriptures thy self and that by frequent reading and constant meditation upon what thou redest, and earnest prayer to God to enlighten thine understanding if thou desirest to find the truth.”<sup>102</sup> He attempted to understand the Bible by using a scientific methodology with the assumptions that there was a God in heaven and that the Bible was trustworthy.

Newton’s faith was complex, but comprehensible to us today. It was rational, yet not agnostic or skeptical. He fully accepted the plain word of the Scriptures as true, but occasionally differed from the mainstream in his interpretation of its symbolism,<sup>103</sup> and sometimes doubted whether certain readings were supported by ancient sources.

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<sup>100</sup>In 1687, the Benedictine monk, Alban Francis, attempted to pursue an MA at Cambridge University and, consequently, influence the university in a Catholic direction. This created a profound discussion as to whether this potential infiltration should be accepted. Newton felt that if one papist were accepted, several more would come, and that would be the end of Protestantism at Cambridge; so he put his opinion on paper. Newton, *Keynes MS* 113. For a more complete discussion, see Westfall, *NR*, 474–8.

<sup>101</sup>Manuel, *RIN*, 4.

<sup>102</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS* 1.1, f. 2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>103</sup>E.g., for Newton’s symbolized demonology, see Snobelen, “Lust, Pride and Ambition: Isaac Newton and the Devil,” in *Newton and Newtonianism*, ed. J. E. Force and S. Hutton (Dordrecht, Holland: Kluwer Academic, 2004), 155–81.

## One God

Newton's understanding of God's nature places him firmly among heterodox interpreters of the Bible—he was a secret anti-trinitarian.<sup>104</sup> This is plain from his many autographic notes on church history, on biblical topics, and his research in textual criticism. Newton's anti-trinitarianism must also be seen in light of his restorationist theology. He suggested that the doctrine of the Trinity was not scriptural and was contrary to the teachings of the early church. He understood it to be developed and formulated from the time of Constantine and championed by Athanasius (296–373). Thus, Newton sided with Arius (c. 256–336), though not accepting every proposition of Arius. He charged that both Athanasius and Arius “perplexed the Church with metaphysical opinions and expressed their opinions in novel language not warranted by Scripture.”<sup>105</sup>

It is also unclear whether Newton regarded Jesus as a created being. The best assessment of Newton's position would be to classify him tentatively as a semi-Arian anti-trinitarian.<sup>106</sup> His disdain for the outcome of Nicea, fine-tuned by Athanasius, colored his studies of church history and consequently, his interpretations of apocalyptic. Newton was persuaded that the early church had not believed in the doctrine of the Trinity. He believed it was a creation of the Roman Catholic Church and part of the early Christian apostasy.

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<sup>104</sup>Cf. Herd, “Theology.”

<sup>105</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS* 15.7, f. 154<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>106</sup>E.g., “the cult of three equal Gods.” Newton, *Yahuda MS* 2.2, f. 19; 11, f. 7; Westfall, *NR*, 344.

Newton traced all the Trinitarian proof-texts of the New Testament chronologically, according to their first appearance among writers in the early church. In order to build the best possible anti-Trinitarian case, he decided to determine the text-critical ground of the Trinitarian position. By a thorough study of the oldest manuscripts, Newton satisfied himself that the Trinitarian passages were later interpolations that could not be used to substantiate the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>107</sup> After years of study, Newton not only disbelieved the classic doctrine of the Trinity, but held that the oneness of God was the doctrine *par excellence* that defined true believers from the false.

He was, understandably, extremely secretive about his findings. After all, he was a professor at *Trinity* College and a member of the Anglican Church. People were persecuted at this time for not believing in the Trinity, so he found it most convenient not to publicize his findings, although he was once very close to doing so under a pseudonym.<sup>108</sup>

He confidentially shared his research with John Locke. In 1690 a manuscript of Newton's research was prepared for pseudonymous publication by Locke. His manuscript was a fundamental attack on orthodox faith, and his textual criticism made it much more sophisticated than a mere interpretive study. Newton may have reasoned that if he could show that the most-used Trinitarian texts were not really in the original New

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<sup>107</sup>Newton's "Two Notable Corruptions of Scripture," investigates the origins of the popular Trinitarian wording in 1 Tim 3:16 and 1 John 5:7, discovering that both texts have been altered from the original by later Trinitarians, "perhaps," Newton stated concerning the second text, "Jerome is the first who reads it thus." Newton, *Yahuda MS* 14, f. 57<sup>v</sup>. In a letter to Locke, Newton wrote: "the scriptures have been very much corrupted in the first ages and chiefly in the fourth Century . . . the Catholicks are here found much more guilty of these corruptions then the hereticks." Newton, *Corr*, 3:138.

<sup>108</sup>For an overview of the risk of confessing heresy in Newton's life, see Snobelen, "Isaac Newton, Heretic," 393–96. Newton's anti-trinitarian "Two Notable Corruptions of Scripture" was printed under a pseudonym but, immediately afterwards, Newton panicked and bought the whole stock and had it destroyed. Newton to Locke, Feb. 16, 1692, *Corr*. 3:195.

Testament, but in later interpolations, it would indeed be difficult to argue against him. The manuscript was printed and almost put into circulation, but Newton panicked and bought the entire stockpile, ordering them to be burned.<sup>109</sup>

It has sometimes been argued that Newton's particular interest in Revelation was motivated by his desire to prove from prophetic history that the doctrine of the Trinity was *the* cardinal heresy in the church. There seems to be no ground for this hypothesis. Although Newton doubted the Trinity doctrine, his studies in Daniel and Revelation were focused on general apostasy in Christendom, particularly in the Latin branch, beginning seriously to take shape in the post-Constantine era, which, apparently, coincided with the great Christological debates. Newton's interpretations of Daniel and Revelation were not dependent on his understanding of the Godhead. His historicism could indeed stand on its own feet.

During his early years, Newton repeatedly mentioned the existence of the Devil.<sup>110</sup> He saw him as God's enemy and a real force to combat. Later in life, he seemed to write less about a real, personal, diabolic force, without flatly denying its existence. Scholars have suggested he gradually disbelieved in Satan,<sup>111</sup> which is hard to reconcile with his insistence on the truthfulness of the Bible.

Newton may have been wary of trivializing Satan. In harmony with the spirit of the Enlightenment, Newton did not uncritically accept anecdotal reports of satanic encounters. This shows his skepticism to popular religious beliefs of his day; in his view,

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<sup>109</sup>Newton, *Corr*, 3:82, 83–122.

<sup>110</sup>E.g., Newton, *Yahuda MS* 7.3, f. 32<sup>r</sup>. See also Manuel, *RIN*, 63–4.

<sup>111</sup>For an analysis of Newton's demonology, see Snobelen, "Lust, Pride and Ambition." See also Manuel, *RIN*, 64.

good and evil intervened much less frequently than generally believed. Enthusiasm and fanaticism were enemies of his rational and sober approach to religion.

### Obedience

Newton's religion, as conveyed by his biographers, was a religion of obedience to God and His Word. He broadly viewed sin as the opposite of obedience and his religion could be summarized as simply faith in Jesus and obedience to God's Word.<sup>112</sup> The laws of God "always have & always will be the duty of all nations & The coming of Jesus Christ has made no alteration in them."<sup>113</sup> In addition, Newton held that moral laws are also "laws of nature," and as such, "the essential part of religion which ever was & ever will be binding to all nations, being of an immutable eternal nature . . . grounded upon immutable reason."<sup>114</sup> Thus, by this law, "all men are to be judged at the last day."<sup>115</sup>

Newton attached a comment to the Sabbath command in the Decalogue, urging the reader (and himself) to "set times apart for his service as we are directed in the third & fourth commandment."<sup>116</sup>

### Devotion and Worship

Newton rejected the Catholic notion that one has to go through a priest, church rituals, or sacraments to have access to God. He believed in a one-to-one relationship

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<sup>112</sup>Manuel, *RIN*, 16. See also Newton, *Keynes MS 3*, pp. 1, 5–7, and Newton, *Yahuda MS 15.3*, f. 46<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>113</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS 3*, p. 35.

<sup>114</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS 15.5*, f. 91.

<sup>115</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS 7*, pp. 2–3.

<sup>116</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS 7*, p. 2. Cf. Newton, *Yahuda MS 15.3*, f. 46<sup>v</sup>.

with God in the Protestant manner. We know little of Newton's private prayer life. From his writings there are hints of his understanding of prayer. His philosophy of prayer, its method and goal, was the antithesis of typical monastic prayer. Newton detested the system of the monks in ancient times. "Those Monks who fasted most," Newton opined, "arrived to a state of seeing apparitions of women and other shapes and of hearing their voices in such a lively manner as made them often think the visions true apparitions of the Devil tempting them to lust. Thus while we pray that God would not lead us into temptation these men ran themselves headlong into it."<sup>117</sup>

In the same manuscript, Newton shared his solution to overcome temptation and lust: "The way to chastity is not to struggle with incontinent thoughts but to avert the thoughts by some employment, or by reading, or by meditating on other things, or by convers[ation]."<sup>118</sup> He did not deny the possibility of communicating directly with God and, apparently, he showed no skepticism to the stories of great men's contact, through faith, with their God.

### Conditionalism

Newton's conditionalist belief is less well known than his anti-trinitarianism.<sup>119</sup> He did not often comment on conditioned immortalism, but when he did, it was obvious that he rejected the Christian-platonic notion of the immortality of the soul.<sup>120</sup> Again,

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<sup>117</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS* 18.1, f. 2<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>118</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS* 18.1, f. 2<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>119</sup>See James E. Force, "The God of Abraham and Isaac (Newton)," in *BNS*, 179–200. See also Snobelen, "Isaac Newton, Heretic," 387.

<sup>120</sup>James Force brings the attention to a rare Newton manuscript (Clark Library MS) entitled "Paradoxical Questions concerning ye morals & actions of Athanasius & his followers," under the section called "Quest: Whether Athanasius did not set on foot the invocation of saints." Force provides sufficient

Newton's restorationism may have been part of the motivational force. The Early Church (until the end of the second century) based its eschatological anthropology unanimously on Hebraic biblicism rather than on Greek philosophy.<sup>121</sup>

Christian apologists of the ancient church adopted Greek philosophical thinking in order to argue their case better with their contemporary philosophers who, they thought, would only accept arguments based on Greek philosophical presuppositions. Their intention was perhaps laudable, but that, in the mind of Newton, did not necessarily make their doctrine biblical. A logical consequence of the immortal-soul teaching (beginning c. AD 180)<sup>122</sup> of the Apologists of the Early Church is the notion of eternal hell which Newton did not seem to accept.<sup>123</sup> Newton at least rejected the classic orthodox teaching that the soul lives on, independent of the body, after death. The unbiblical dichotomy between soul and body, according to Newton, stems from Athanasius, who trusted the monk Anthony's testimony on having seen "the soul of Ammon ascend up to heaven"—thus was born the doctrine of souls going directly to heaven or hell immediately after death. In the same manuscript, Newton explained the conditionalist interpretation (i.e. there is no immortality of the soul) of Jesus' conversation with the thief on the cross, in which correct punctuation solves the mystery. Classic conditionalist texts are provided,

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evidence "which strongly suggest that Newton is a Christian Mortalist." James E. Force "The God of Abraham and Isaac (Newton)," 179.

<sup>121</sup>See LeRoy Edwin Froom, *Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1966) 1:757–927.

<sup>122</sup>Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, 1:928 ff.

<sup>123</sup>Besides Newton's own testimonies on the question, delineated in Force's and Snobelen's articles, Whiston revealed to the world, after Newton's death, that the natural philosopher had been a Conditionalist, rejecting the notion of an immortal soul. See Force, "The God of Abraham and Isaac (Newton)," 189. Cf. Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*, 3rd rev. ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 334.

and Newton explained that “according to the tenour of these texts of scripture the first Christians placed all the dead in Hades, that is, not in hell as we corruptly translate the word, but in the land of darkness and silence as the Old Testament sometimes expresses it.”<sup>124</sup> Newton’s religion was based on the Bible, was rational, and was supported by those early church fathers who did not accept a Platonic understanding of man’s nature.<sup>125</sup>

### Anti-Catholicism

Newton was no friend of the Roman Catholic faith.<sup>126</sup> He told John Conduitt that he was happy to live “in a land of liberty where he could speak his mind—not afraid of Inquisition as Galileo.”<sup>127</sup> In fact, he declared his conviction that the church, which dominated Latin Europe during his lifetime, was none other than the biblical antichrist.<sup>128</sup> His studies in church history and dogmatics gave him a large arsenal which found its ultimate platform in his interpretations of Daniel and Revelation. It seemed to him that Roman Catholicism was the enemy of God *par excellence*, and this remained a strong axiom to Newton in all of his religious studies throughout his life. Frank E. Manuel, the pioneer researcher of Newton’s religious manuscripts, stated that in Newton’s mind, the

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<sup>124</sup>Newton, *Clark Library MS*, cited in Force, “The God of Abraham and Isaac (Newton),” 191–2.

<sup>125</sup>Froom suggested that every Apostolic Father was conditionalist: Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Didache, Barnabas of Alexandria, Hermas of Rome, Polycarp, and the Epistle of Diognetus. See Froom, *Conditionalist Faith*, 1:757–73.

<sup>126</sup>“Of all the corrupters of Christianity throughout the ages, two groups obsessed Newton: Papists and metaphysicians, and paradoxically, they were intimately related to each other.” Manuel, *RIN*, 67.

<sup>127</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS* 130.

<sup>128</sup>“The rule of the Papacy was identified with the reign of Antichrist; how this rule came into being and when it would be over was one of Newton’s perennial preoccupations.” Manuel, *RIN*, 67.



“Papists were the very embodiment of the mystery of iniquity and their extermination was ordained.”<sup>129</sup>

Newton disagreed with Catholics, especially on inspiration, the authority of the pope, and their heavy emphasis on ritualism.<sup>130</sup> He was also uncomfortable with their coercive tactics, monastic system, and other aspects of their faith.<sup>131</sup> He was, of course, not the only person expressing this sentiment in England. Long after the English Reformation, anti-Catholicism remained the overwhelming attitude among Protestants.

### Ritualism versus the Biblical Sanctuary

Newton was skeptical of and even opposed to the traditional ritualistic services of both the Roman Catholic Church and his own Anglican Church. He viewed the early proto-church as anti-ritualistic. He believed that early in church history, pagan rituals had usurped the place of biblical teachings. The focus of his religion was one of heart, intelligence, and obedience.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Manuel, *RIN*, 65–6.

<sup>130</sup>See “Irenicum,” Newton, *Keynes MS 3*, p. 21, and Richard H. Popkin, “Newton as a Bible Scholar,” in *EC*, 110.

<sup>131</sup>See Rob Iliffe, “‘Those Whose Business It Is To Cavill’: Newton’s Anti-Catholicism,” in *EC*, 97–119. For Catholics at Cambridge toward the end of Newton’s tenure, see Nicholas Rogers, ed., *Catholics in Cambridge* (Leominster, U.K: Gracewing, 2003), 38–45. Concerning Newton’s key apostasy being Trinitarianism, see Richard S. Westfall, *The Life of Isaac Newton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 126. Barnett stated that Newton’s “*Observations*” was “imbued with a thorough detestation of Roman Catholicism”; S. J. Barnett, ed. *Isaac Newton’s Observations on the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John, A Critical Edition: Prophecy as History* (hereafter *OCE*), Mellen Critical Editions and Translations 2. (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), 17. The papacy’s worst crimes, according to Newton, were killing the innocent and idolatry. Newton, *Keynes MS 5*, ff. 106–9. Newton was grateful to live in England, “in a land of liberty where he could speak his mind—not afraid of the Inquisition as Galileo . . . not obliged as Des Cartes was to go into a strange country and to say he proved transubstantiation by his philosophy.” Newton, *Keynes, MS 130*. For a review of religious liberty and persecution in England during Newton’s stay at Cambridge, see John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England 1558–1689* (London: Routledge, 2013), 134–225.

<sup>132</sup>See “Irenicum,” Newton, *Keynes MS 3*, p. 21 and Popkin, “Newton as a Bible Scholar,” 110.

Provided that rituals could be substantiated by the Bible, Newton was not opposed to them. The Temple rituals in the Old Testament were understood as a *type* of the plan of salvation fulfilled by Jesus in the New Testament (the *anti-type*), and as such, were an important element in his understanding of the book of Revelation.<sup>133</sup> He studied the Old Testament sanctuary service to understand better the mind of God. He thought there were messages there that revealed true religion.<sup>134</sup> He made charts of the sanctuary and studied its structure in great detail, proving to himself (and perhaps a few others) the correlation, through apocalyptic, between Old Testament cultism and pivotal moments in church history. Newton's thoughts on the sanctuary comprise a substantial bulk of his total theological corpus.<sup>135</sup>

### The Remnant

Central to Newton's understanding of Christianity and its history was the concept that there had always been a remnant people who were stewards of the truth in practice and theory. This remnant consisted of a tiny minority of all professing Christians. "Not all that call themselves Christians" are really Christians, Newton stated, "but a remnant, a

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<sup>133</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS* 2.4, f. 46; Sir Isaac Newton, *Babson College's Grace K. Babson Collection of the Works of Sir Isaac Newton: Manuscripts*. (The Huntington Library, San Marino, California, 1660–1750), 434, f. 1; Newton, *Yahuda MSS* 13.2, ff. 1–22; 28.5, ff. 1–3; Westfall, *NR*, 346–7.

<sup>134</sup>Manuel, *RIN*, 92–3.

<sup>135</sup>E.g., Newton, *Yahuda MSS* 2.4; 8.2; 9.2; 10; 14; 28; and Newton's posthumously published "A Dissertation upon the Sacred Cubit of the Jews and the Cubits of the several Nations," in *Miscellaneous Works of Mr. John Greaves, Professor of Astronomy in the University of Oxford*, ed. John Greaves (London: Thomas Birch, 1737), 2:405–33. In addition, Newton worked on a *Lexicon propheticum* in which the temple studies served as a prolegomenon. See Westfall, *NR*, 348. Two recent studies regarding Newton's Old Testament cultism are M. Goldish, *Judaism in the Theology of Sir Isaac Newton* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer Science+Business Media, 1998) and Tessa Morrison, *Isaac Newton's Temple of Solomon and His Reconstruction of Sacred Architecture* (Newcastle, Australia: Birkhäuser, 2011); see especially chapter 3, "Prophecy and Temple," 29–42.

few scattered persons which God hath chosen, such as without being . . . led by interest, education, or humane authorities, can set themselves sincerely and earnestly to search after truth.”<sup>136</sup> The majority of Christians, according to Newton, had apostatized around the time of Constantine. He believed only a select few had remained faithful to God and that he was one of those few.<sup>137</sup> Newton’s concept of a remnant people was evident and integrated into his understanding of Daniel and Revelation.<sup>138</sup>

### Prophecy

As already established, Newton’s faith was heavily centered on the prophecies of the Bible—particularly those found in the books of Daniel and Revelation. His overall understanding of those prophecies was similar to those of Protestant interpreters such as Martin Luther (1483–1546), John Calvin (1509–1564), Thomas Brightman (1562–1607), and Joseph Mede (1586–1638). Newton was a consistent historicist interpreter, seeing the prophecies as providentially fulfilled in historic time. To him, these fulfillments were better evidence of God’s existence than anecdotal miracles. This will be discussed in more detail in chapters 4 and 5 below.

### The Return of the Jews

On the basis of certain promises to the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Old and New Testaments, Newton believed in a literal return of the Jews to their own

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<sup>136</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS* 1.1, f. 1<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>137</sup>“Where are they that live like the primitive Christians,” Newton asked, and then he concluded, “I feare there are but very few whose righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees.” Newton, *Yahuda MS* 1.1, f. 6<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>138</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS* 1.1., f. 1<sup>r</sup>.

homeland just before the Second Coming. This, he believed, would occur at the time of the blowing of the seventh trumpet, “when the return of the Jews from their captivity . . . . lays the foundation of their dominion over the Nations.”<sup>139</sup> Prior to this, the Jews would be attacked by a “numberless” army from the king of the North, described in Ezekiel, Joel, and Daniel. Newton treats Leviathan and Behemoth, mentioned in Isaiah and Job, as apocalyptic animals taking part in the attacks on Israel.

The deliverance of the Jews would happen when the Gospel would be preached in combination with the fall of Babylon: then “the fulness of the Gentiles enter, & so all Israel shall be saved.” Finally in this autograph, dated to 1680s, Newton rebuked the Christian world for “boasting ourselves against the Jews, & insulting over them for their not believing.” Such behavior “is reprehended by the Apostle for high-mindedness, & self-conceit, & much more is our using them despightfully, Pharisaicall & impious.”<sup>140</sup> The Jewish Restoration was part of Newton’s overall prophetic scheme and as such was a significant prophetic sign-post regarding the time of the end and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem.

### **Newton’s Approach to Theological Studies**

Newton’s belief system centered around his prophetic studies. All of his studies, including the scientific, seemed to have one goal: to praise the Heavenly Father and vindicate the true religion of God. Furthermore, his methodological approach to theological studies was, in principle, the same as his approach to scientific studies. The

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<sup>139</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS 9.2.*, f. 147<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>140</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS 9.2.*, f.158<sup>r</sup>.

method he used for the composition of the *Principia* had been established years earlier at the same time he first began to write on prophecy. This will be addressed in more detail in chapter 5 below. Newton's scientific method was meticulously empirical—and the same method and meticulousness is also evident in his theological research. If we define empiricism in terms of transparent, replicable, and methodical analysis and project it into the realm of theological studies, Newton was an empiricist interpreter of the Bible, even though his underlying assumption was that God is real and the Bible is trustworthy. “When asked what enabled him to discover so many new and original ideas, Newton responded, ‘I keep the subject constantly before me . . . and wait ‘till the first dawns open slowly, by little and little, into a full and clear light.’”<sup>141</sup> Newton's *modus operandi* for scientific study was very similar to that of his study of theology.

### God, Science, and Religion

Newton believed in a transcendent God who could use miracles to fulfill His purposes when He chose to. At the same time, he believed that the realms of science and religion should be kept methodologically separate because, while scientific knowledge could be verified by empirical evidence, religious knowledge depended at least partly on supernatural revelation. He detested popular enthusiasm and unwarranted claims about spectacular miracles.

#### **A Transcendent God**

To Newton, the foundational philosophical and religious presupposition (assumption) was the certainty of God's existence. He viewed this as self-evident and his

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<sup>141</sup>Westfall, *NR*, 174.

theological writings rarely attempted to prove the existence of God—it was taken for granted.<sup>142</sup> This is, of course, in harmony with a seventeenth-century world view.<sup>143</sup> Newton often expressed a deep faith in the existence of a personal God.<sup>144</sup> His God was not, however, the God of the ordinary Christian theologian of his day. Newton affectionately promoted a Judaic model of God in contrast to the orthodox Christian trinitarian God. Newton’s God was personal and interested in the affairs of the world. He was not remote from mankind’s daily life or global issues. God intervenes occasionally to tune His creation, thus “a continual miracle is needed to prevent the sun and fixed stars from rushing together through gravity.”<sup>145</sup> However, Newton did not believe God intervened in trivial matters. Like many of his contemporary scholars, Newton was extremely skeptical of sensationalism and enthusiasm.<sup>146</sup>

## Miracles

Newton did not reject the possibility of miracles. He argued against Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz’s view that the universe was a perfect mass of machinery which could

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<sup>142</sup>Manuel, *RIN*, 16–17.

<sup>143</sup>The hiding of Newton’s spiritual identity, while promoting his scientific achievements, was a practice often evident in the past two centuries; e.g., despite Newton’s documented theism, James E. Force wrote: “Newton has often been identified as a deist. . . . In the 19th century, William Blake seems to have put Newton into the deistic camp. Scholars in the 20th-century have often continued to view Newton as a deist. Gerald R. Cragg viewed Newton as a kind of proto-deist and, as evidence, pointed to Newton’s belief in a true, original, monotheistic religion first discovered in ancient times by natural reason. This position, in Cragg’s view, leads to the elimination of the Christian revelation as neither necessary nor sufficient for human knowledge of God.” Force, “The Newtonians and Deism,” in *EC*, 53.

<sup>144</sup>Manuel, *RIN*, 17.

<sup>145</sup>Newton, *Corr.* 3:336.

<sup>146</sup>Manuel, *RIN*, 22. For Newton’s distaste of enthusiasm as it relates to his friendship with Nicholas Fatio de Duillier, see Michael Heyd, “*Be Sober and Reasonable*”: *The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 255–61.

go on and on infinitely without any need for adjustment.<sup>147</sup> Newton's understanding of God's creation was that it sometimes needed readjustment and fine-tuning. Newton was also aware of how easily humans could be influenced by emotions and enthusiasm—particularly among religious people. Claims of having experienced miracles were too often based on an erroneous understanding of the workings of nature. He could not accept a theology that was based on sentimentalism or fanciful and enthusiastic influences. He was convinced that the time of extraordinary miracles had passed with the proto-church of the apostles.<sup>148</sup> He claimed, moreover, that the enthusiasm which existed in his time was partly delusion and naiveté.<sup>149</sup>

Newton apparently believed that God had not left the church without evidence of His presence and intervention, but that prophecy had taken the place of miracles.<sup>150</sup> If people were seeking certainty of the divine, they could consult the prophecies. In these, any sincere seeker for truth and spiritual certainty would be satisfied. The reason for his apparent skepticism was found in his desire to bring balance and sobriety to Christianity because of his dislike of irrationality and enthusiastic spirituality.

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<sup>147</sup>Newton, *Corr* 3:336. Cf. Westfall, *NR*, 773.

<sup>148</sup>Newton's statement of the ceasing of miracles after 200–300 years following the New Testament occurs in Newton, *Corr* 3:195. However, his statement has sometimes been taken further than warranted. See e.g., Manuel, *Historian*, 10, and Manuel, *RIN*, 77.

<sup>149</sup>Manuel, *RIN*, 22; Newton, *Yahuda MS* 15.5, f. 79<sup>r</sup>. Newton followed the critical views of two contemporary writers on this issue: Henry More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* (London: J. Flesher, 1656); and John Spencer, *A Discourse concerning Vulgar prophecies wherein the vanity of receiving them as the certain indications of any future event is discovered, and some characters of distinction between true and pretending prophets are laid down* (London: J. Field for Timothy Garthwait, 1665).

<sup>150</sup>Manuel, *RIN*, 66. Newton and Locke discussed “the prophecies and miracles.” See Westfall, *NR*, 491; Brewster, *Memoires of the Life, Writings and Discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton*. (Edinburgh: T. Constable and Co., 1855), 319–20.

## Reason and Empirical Evidence

Newton used the latest methods of scholarship to approach the field of theological studies.<sup>151</sup> Newton's hermeneutic was a balanced blend of rationalism and empiricism. Located in one of the two intellectual centers of England, he was in a position to converse with foremost scholars. He once stated that "there is no arguing against facts and experiments."<sup>152</sup> He believed the Bible was a book inspired by God and was meant to be understood by reasonable people who apply reasonable methods.<sup>153</sup> Thus, even in biblical and apocalyptic studies, he followed logical, critical, rational, and empirical processes of interpretation. His scientific research had taught him to distrust claims not based on empirical evidence. Thus, to be consistent with his scientific presuppositions, he had to examine established religious theories and traditions critically. His motto was the same as the Royal Society's: *Nullius in verba*.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup>Manuel, *RIN*, 85–86. Many advances in biblical exegesis were made at that time. Manuel, *RIN*, 29. This will be further developed in chapter 4 of this work. Popkin noted: "Sir Isaac Newton's views on the Bible are an intriguing mixture of modern Bible scholarship, of the application of modern science to the Bible, and of a conviction that in the proper reading of the revealed text, God's plan for human and world history can be found." Richard H. Popkin, "Newton's Biblical Theology and His Theological Physics," in *Newton's Scientific and Philosophical Legacy*, ed. P. B. Scheurer and G. Debrock (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic, 1988), 81.

<sup>152</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS* 130.5, sheet 3.

<sup>153</sup>"All sacred Prophecies are given for the use of the Church," Newton stated, "& therefore they are all to be understood by the Church in those ages for whose use God intended them. But these prophecies were never understood by the Church in the former ages . . . [e.g. antichrist] . . . And therefore since they were never yet understood . . . shall prove for the benefit of the present & future ages, & so are not yet fulfilled. Wherefore let men be carefull how they indeavour to divert or hinder the use of these scriptures, lest they be found to be against God." Quoted in I. Bernard Cohen and George E. Smith, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Newton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 393. Cf. Manuel, *RIN*, 86.

<sup>154</sup>English translation: "on the word of no one," or "don't take anyone's word for it." It comes from Horace, *Epistles* I: 1,14, quoted in Gleick, *Newton*, 63. Newton once stated to Locke, "there cannot be a better service done to the truth then to purge it of things spurious." Newton to Locke, Nov. 14, 1690, in *Corr.* 3: 83. See also Brewster, *Memoirs*, 337.



## Science and Religion Separated

Newton also insisted on a separation of the book of nature and the book of Scripture: “Religion and Philosophy are to be preserved distinct. We are not to introduce divine revelations into Philosophy, nor philosophical opinions into religion.”<sup>155</sup> He saw no contradiction between them, but rather, believed them to have a different nature and function.<sup>156</sup> Thus, as a general practice, Newton held his religious convictions alongside his scientific, without mixing the two. However, there are a few exceptions. For example, he furnished the second edition of *Principia* with an elaborate statement of his belief in God.<sup>157</sup> He did the same with *Optics*.<sup>158</sup> As president of the Royal Society, however, he allowed no interference of religion with natural philosophy.<sup>159</sup>

With the exception of Halley, Newton’s closest supporters were all religiously inclined. Newton only half-heartedly tolerated (and occasionally intervened) when they uncritically mingled religion and science.<sup>160</sup> He felt the two could coexist harmoniously

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<sup>155</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS 6*, f. 1<sup>r</sup>, printed in McLachlan, *Theological Manuscripts*, 58. Many members of the Royal Society mixed the two realms in an attempt to demonstrate mastery in the two main fields of studies at that time: science and theology. A complete harmonization of Scripture with Nature was the ultimate evidence of the divine inspiration of Scriptures. Newton, however, focused his attention on harmonizing secular history with sacred history in his *Chronology*.

<sup>156</sup>Manuel, *RIN*, 48–9.

<sup>157</sup>The 1st edition of *Principia* mentions God only once in a passing phrase, Newton, *Principia*, 415. Because of a certain attack from Leibniz of the absence of God in Newton’s natural philosophy, Newton decided to show his religious colors in the 2nd edition of the *Principia*. In the “General Scholium” Newton supplied an elaborate section dealing with God and his nature.

<sup>158</sup>“And though every true Step made in the Philosophy brings us not immediately to the knowledge of the first Cause, yet it brings us nearer to it, and on that account is to be highly valued.” Newton, *Optics*, query 28 (query 20 in the Latin version).

<sup>159</sup>Manuel, *RIN*, 30.

<sup>160</sup>Stein, ed., *EA* 3:278; Manuel, *RIN*, 35. Manuel wrote that Newton “let his children play, and he pulled in the leading-strings sharply only when they created a public incident.” Manuel, *RIN*, 39.

and that stringent methodologies applied in one should also apply in the other.<sup>161</sup>

Mamiani argued that

it is therefore misleading to ask—as many interpreters have done—what influence Newton’s theology had upon his science. In his search for a criterion of the truth, Newton made no distinction between science and theology. It was the same approach that had led him to break down the boundaries between mathematics and physics, between geometric optics and philosophy, between matter and spirit.<sup>162</sup>

Skeptics and atheists have attributed deistic attitudes to Newton and other illuminates of the scientific revolution era.<sup>163</sup> The issues involved in these claims are somewhat complex, but explainable. Because of Newton’s and his time’s intellectually skeptical outlook, they systematically doubted before they arrived at certainty. Certainty was based on evidence, and evidence could only come when claims were tested. Newton’s *Chronology* provides sufficient evidence that he fundamentally believed the words of the Bible to be correct and inspired. One major goal of his work was to align secular historiography with that of sacred history to demonstrate that there was no significant contradiction between the two.

Newton’s autograph manuscripts were often tentative. His notes did not always reflect what he believed, his work in alchemy being a primary example. This being the

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<sup>161</sup>Westfall, *NR*, 407. Christianson believed that “in Newton’s way of thinking there was no place for warfare between science and religion as there was in Voltaire’s—and in our own,” Gale E. Christianson, “Newton, the Man—Again,” in *Newton’s Scientific and Philosophical Legacy*, ed. P. B. Scheurer and G. Debrock (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1988), 19. According to Force, Westfall held that it was not “valid to speak of a theological influence on Newton’s science,” but Force criticized Westfall’s position. Force said, “Newton’s theology, not just his religion, influences his science every bit as much as his science influences the rigorous textual scholarship of his theology.” James E. Force, “Newton’s God of Dominion: The Unity of Newton’s Theological, Scientific, and Political Thoughts,” in Force and Popkin, eds., *EC*, 76–78.

<sup>162</sup>Maurizio Mamiani, “Newton on Prophecy and the Apocalypse,” in *CCN*, 391.

<sup>163</sup>During the lifetime of Newton, it was almost fashionable among the intellectuals to defend a literal reading of the Bible. Manuel, Westfall, Snobelen, and a host of other writers have demonstrated that the prominent natural philosophers of England in those days were believers in the Bible, and those like Halley who did not believe were exceptions to the rule.

case, the final drafts of his manuscripts, the fruit of endless re-writings, may more accurately reflect what he genuinely believed.<sup>164</sup>

There are indications that Newton did not read the Bible's creation story in Genesis 1–2 literally.<sup>165</sup> However, the opposite may very well have been true.<sup>166</sup> Newton, nevertheless, claimed that there is perfect harmony between the books of nature and Scripture despite his assertion that they be held separate and distinct.<sup>167</sup> The creation story was, according to Newton, written by Moses in the simplest language for a non-scientific audience.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>164</sup>Newton principally operated on the basis of the idea expressed in query 28 as quoted above: “brings us not immediately to the knowledge . . . yet it brings us nearer.” To determine what Newton really believed is one of the great challenges in Newtonian studies. Each manuscript on the same topic was often very similar, but aspects could, occasionally, vary significantly. Sometimes he wrote ten or more almost identical manuscripts on a topic. One has to keep in mind that he did not write in order to publish; rather, it was his literary laboratory where he experimented with ideas as well as with words and sentences.

<sup>165</sup>One statement comes close, where Newton apparently claimed that a seven-day creation must not be taken literally, that those days were longer than our days, but were still counted as days. Newton, *Corr* 2:329–34. Cf. Westfall, *NR*, 390.

<sup>166</sup>Whiston was long a favorite of Newton, at least before he began publicly voicing his anti-trinitarianism. At the time of the transference of Newton to the Royal Mint and Whiston to the Lucasian chair at Cambridge, on Newton's recommendation, Whiston expressed Newton's seeming agreement with (the work was dedicated to Newton): “The Mosaick Creation is not a Nice and Philosophical account of the Origin of All Things, but an Historical and True Representation of the formation of our single Earth out of a confused Chaos, and of the successive and visible changes thereof each day, till it became the habitation of Mankind.” William Whiston, *A New Theory of the Earth* (London: Benjamin Tooke, 1696), 3. Manuel notes that “Moses knew the whole of the scientific truth—of this Newton was certain—but he was speaking to ordinary Israelites, not delivering a paper to the Royal Society, and he popularized the narrative without falsifying it.” In Manuel, *RIN*, 39.

<sup>167</sup>However, “religion and Philosophy are to be preserved distinct. We are not to introduce divine revelations into Philosophy, nor philosophical opinions into religion.” In Newton, *Keynes MS.* 6, f. 1<sup>r</sup>, printed in McLachlan, *Newton: Theological Manuscripts*, 58; Manuel, *RIN*, 28.

<sup>168</sup>For Newton's correspondence with Thomas Burnett on creation, see Newton, *Corr* 2:329–34. None could communicate the complexities of creation “as succinctly and theologically as Moses has done,” and “without . . . describing anything material which ye vulgar have a notion of or describing any being further than the vulgar have a notion of it.” Newton, *Corr.* 2:333. Cf. Larry S. Chapp, *The God of Covenant and Creation: Scientific Naturalism and Its Challenge to the Christian Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 90–104.

## The Bible is Trustworthy

Newton assumed without reservation the trustworthiness of the Bible. Manuel noted that Newton knew the Bible “as few theologians did, and he could string out citations like a concordance.” But Newton was first and foremost a natural philosopher, not a theologian. Nevertheless, the Bible in its purest reading was to Newton the Word of God—the ultimate authority, not in conflict with true science, but belonging to another discipline. He encouraged people to read it for themselves, assuring them that in it they would find truth and strengthen their faith.<sup>169</sup>

Since the Renaissance, textual criticism was an essential scholarly method in verifying the authenticity of historical documents. Scholars like Erasmus and others had laid the foundation in the field of critical New Testament manuscript research. Theologians of the Reformation continued to build on this platform. Further progress was made in the field of theological studies in the time of Newton leading up to what some call a theological Enlightenment.<sup>170</sup>

In this intellectual context, Newton realized that to speculate about the meaning of the Apocalypse, without being certain of the authenticity of the manuscript being studied, would not be credible scholarship. To ensure a solid foundation for his interpretations, he gathered at least twenty Greek manuscripts and fragments on the Book of Revelation and redacted for himself a version he felt comfortable with.<sup>171</sup> Thus, Newton’s

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<sup>169</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS* 1.1, f. 2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>170</sup>Manuel, *RIN*, 84. For early Modern interpretations of prophecy in the seventeenth century, see Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1975), 92–3.

<sup>171</sup>See Newton, *Yahuda MSS* 4.1 and 4.2.

comprehensive and time-consuming theological research was based on textual criticism, so that his comprehensive apocalyptic structure could be built on a largely empirical basis. It is not known whether Newton did a similar study of the book of Daniel.<sup>172</sup>

After Newton's death, many Bible translations were discovered in his library of approximately two thousand books.<sup>173</sup> Aside from scores of English Bibles and Bibles in the original Hebrew and Greek, there were translations into Latin and French. Since Newton was not a philologist, he must have relied on trustworthy translations. He understood Greek fairly well and was able to read Hebrew with the help of a dictionary.<sup>174</sup> Thus, he was constantly seeking to ascertain the most authentic reading of the original manuscripts.

### Church History

The Bible was a central interest of Newton's life, and especially the prophecies. Virtually every subject he considered in his religious studies was related to eschatology. He studied church history in order to verify the historical validity of prophecy. To achieve this goal, Newton "brought the standards of scientific demonstration to historical research."<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup>See Newton, *New College MS*, Manuscript in the New College Collection in the Bodleian Library, Oxford University, 361.2, ff. 132–3; Newton, *OP*, 4–13; Sir Isaac Newton, *The Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms Amended. To Which Is Prefixed, A Short Chronicle from the First Memory of Things in Europe, to the Conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great. With Three Plates of the Temple of Solomon*. (Dublin: S. Powell, 1728), 357–8; Manuel, *Historian*, 59–60.

<sup>173</sup>The exact number is 1896 books, plus hundreds of smaller graphic items. Westfall, *NR*, 871; Manuel, *RIN*, 83.

<sup>174</sup>Manuel, *RIN*, 84.

<sup>175</sup>Westfall, *NR*, 329.

In his earlier years, Newton had studied the fourth and fifth centuries in obsessive detail. In his later years, he saw that he had to go back even further to verify his restorationist paradigm. Church history was an essential part of Newton's approach to theological understanding. Thus, he wrote, "The true understanding of things Christian depends upon church history."<sup>176</sup>

### **Apostasy**

In order to understand Newton's religion, it is crucial to grasp his presupposition that true religion was lost in apostasy during and after the period of the Early Church. Truths had been falsified, he believed, especially since the time of Constantine, and his duty was to reveal false doctrines and rediscover lost truth.<sup>177</sup>

In light of his anti-Trinitarian theology, it could be tempting to classify Newton as a Judaizer. He believed that before the Parousia, the Jews would be converted and restored into one nation.<sup>178</sup> His writings show that he was attracted to medieval Jewish scholars<sup>179</sup> and he severely chastised Christians for insulting the Jews: "The humour which has long reigned among the Christians of boasting ourselves against the Jews, and insulting over them for their not believing, is reprehended by the Apostle for high-mindedness and self-concept, and much more is our using them despihtfully, Pharisaicall and impious."<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>176</sup>Newton, *Yahuda*, MS 11, f. 1<sup>r</sup>. For Newton's ecclesiastical history, see especially Newton, *Yahuda* MSS 7.3 and 15.1.

<sup>177</sup>See Newton, *OCE*, 215–43.

<sup>178</sup>Newton, *Yahuda*, MS 9.2, f. 158<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>179</sup>Manuel, *RIN*, 66.

<sup>180</sup>Newton, *Yahuda*, MS 9.2, f. 158<sup>r</sup>.

To label him a Judaizer, however, does not fit his overall religious writings.<sup>181</sup> He was a Christian who accepted the New Testament, and Jesus as Savior, at face value. He studied Jewish thought because he was interested in origins and Jewish thought was involved in the formation of the Christian religion. In harmony with his philosophy of life, time, and matter, Newton, in his search for truth, did not avoid unconventional themes, but sought to overturn every stone.

Newton believed the earliest Christians were in possession of true doctrines and a correct lifestyle. He also believed that from the time of Constantine onward, mainstream Christianity had fallen into a state of apostasy.<sup>182</sup> The church had at an early time begun to modify its message to harmonize with pagan ideologies; hence, Newton admitted that

the education of learned men in the principles of Plato and other heathen philosophers before they became Christians, the study of the heathen learning by some learned men after they became Christians . . . and the easy admission of the hereticks into the latine church . . . gave occasion to the spreading of some erroneous opinions very early in the Church herself.<sup>183</sup>

He believed that only through a study of the Bible and church history could these things be detected and repaired. Thus, Newton's religion was one of restoration, and the study of church history was an essential means to accomplish that. Opposing the tendency to exalt human tradition above the authority of the Bible,<sup>184</sup> Newton focused his historical

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<sup>181</sup>Cf. Goldish, *Judaism*.

<sup>182</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS* 15.5, f. 92<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>183</sup>Newton, *Yahuda, MS* 15.7, f. 116<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>184</sup>“Let me therefore beg of thee,” Newton exhorted in an unusually passionate plea, “not to trust to the opinion of any man concerning these things [religious matters], for so it is great odds but thou shalt be deceived. Much less oughtest thou to rely upon the judgment of the multitude, for so thou shalt certainly be deceived.” Newton, *Yahuda, MS* 1.1, ff. 1<sup>r</sup>–2<sup>r</sup>. Later in the same manuscript, Newton continued his distrust in man as a perfect guide to religious truth: “All parties keep close to the Religion they have been brought up in, and yet in all parties there are wise and learned as well as fools and ignorant. There are but few that seek to understand the religion they profess.” Newton, *Yahuda, MS* 1.1, f. 5<sup>r</sup>.

research on theologians of the Early Church<sup>185</sup> who, he believed, were purer in doctrine than later theologians. It is possible that the Early Church was, for him, only a theoretical ideal and not expedient to put into practice. However, that is unlikely because Newton believed that “Protestantism would once more be covered by as foul a Corruption as ever was that of Popery.”<sup>186</sup>

### **Restorationist Theology**

Newton’s restorationist beliefs developed gradually. He was aware of the practice of adult baptism and the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath in the Early Church,<sup>187</sup> and in harmony with his restorationist convictions, may have had some attraction to these beliefs, although there is no evidence that he ever practiced any of them.

Newton believed, however, in the restoration of all truth at the end of time. He formed his religious beliefs through the study of the Bible (particularly Daniel and Revelation) and church history. He was convinced that his beliefs were confirmed by the earliest generations of the ancient church. Unbiblical practices and doctrines, however, had later crept into Christian belief systems. Despite Newton’s paradoxical secrecy

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<sup>185</sup>Manuel called Newton an Anglican in “acceptance of the witness of those Fathers of the Church who were closest to the apostolic tradition.” Manuel, *RIN*, 11.

<sup>186</sup>William Whiston, *Historical Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Samuel Clarke: Being a Supplement to Dr. Sykes's and Bishop Hoadley's Accounts; Including Certain Memoirs of Several of Dr. Clarke's Friends* (London: F. Gyles and J. Roberts, 1730), 156.

<sup>187</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS* 3, ff. 1–3; Newton, *Yahuda MS* 15.4; Newton, *Bodmer Manuscript*. Copy of the original edition of *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* that was owned by Leibniz. Martin Bodmer Library, Cologne, Switzerland, ff. 36–40. “For [as for the Jews] Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the Synagogues every sabbath day. Act 15.19, 20, 21. & 21.24, 25 . . . they [Gentiles] are to be looked upon as Proselytes of the Gate & nothing more is to be imposed upon them out of the Law then the Precepts of the sons of Noah . . . Circumcision is nothing & uncircumcision is nothing but the keeping of the commandments of God. Let every man abide in the same calling [whether of circumcision or uncircumcision] wherein he was called 1 Cor. 7. Accordingly all the Church of Ierusalem kept the Law Act. 21.20 & so did Paul himself Act 18.18 & 21. 24.” Newton, *Keynes, MS* 3, f. 30.



concerning these things, he nevertheless viewed it as his call from God to restore true doctrines to a remnant people of God.<sup>188</sup>

He was not the only restorationist in his time. His close friend and successor at the Lucasian chair of mathematics at Cambridge, William Whiston, even started a society whose goal was to restore true Christian doctrines and practices.<sup>189</sup> Newton apparently refrained from becoming a member, but seems he may have sympathized with the mission statement of this Anglican offshoot movement. He was criticized after his death by Whiston and others for not leading out in a reform.<sup>190</sup>

The goal of restorationism is readiness for the Second Coming of Christ, a topic Newton frequently mentioned.<sup>191</sup> Earlier in life, he believed the Second Coming would take place relatively soon.<sup>192</sup> In later life, after studying Daniel, he became convinced the

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<sup>188</sup>Not all who call themselves Christians are true Christians, “but a remnant, a few scattered persons which God hath chosen, such as without being led by interest, education, or humane authorities, can set themselves sincerely and earnestly to search after truth.” Newton, *Yahuda MS* 1.1, f. 1. “Having searched [after knowledge in the prophetique scriptures, I have thought myself bound to communicate it for the benefit of others, remembering the judgment of him who hid his talent in a napkin.” Newton, *Yahuda MS* 1.1, f. 1r. “There are but few that seek to understand the religion they profess, & those that study for understanding therein, do it rather for worldly ends.” Newton, *Yahuda MS* 1.1, ff. 5–6.

<sup>189</sup>It was called the “Society for the Restoration of Primitive Christianity.”

<sup>190</sup>See Whiston, *Memoirs*, 2nd ed.; Hopton Haynes, *Causa Dei contra novatores* (London: J. Noon; and J. Robinson, 1747), 31, 58; and Manuel, *RIN*, 62.

<sup>191</sup>A fascinating Newton autograph of 40 pages, dated by the Newton Project to about the early 1680s, is saturated with verbatim Scripture references. Many of the texts cited in the second half of the paper seem to have little direct connection to the Second Coming, although their underlying message is definitely a blend of typology and eschatology. The work ends with quotations from ancient non-canonical sources in their original languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. See Isaac Newton, “Prophecies Concerning Christ’s 2<sup>d</sup> Coming,” Advent Source Collection (ASC MS N47 HER), Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.

<sup>192</sup>Newton had, according to Whiston, a “growing conviction that not years but centuries had yet to pass before the second coming.” Cited in Westfall, *NR*, 816. According to one manuscript, the Second Coming would not take place before 1844 when the seventh trumpet would sound, at which time, according to Newton, “the establishment of true religion” and “the preaching of the everlasting gospel to every nation & and tongue & kindred & people” would take place. Newton, *Yahuda MS* 1.3, ff. 55–56; cf. 1.3, ff. 38–48; 1.4, ff. 1–4, cf. Westfall, *NR*, 325 and 330. In the 1680s, Newton believed the Second Coming would wait at least until 1867. See James E. Force, “Newton’s God of Dominion,” 82. For a much-discussed

Second Coming had to be moved toward the latter part of the twenty-first century, or even later.<sup>193</sup> He believed the Second Coming should motivate us to “fit ourselves to stand before him in that day, & to deserve an early resurrection.”<sup>194</sup>

### Summary and Conclusion

This chapter delineated Newton’s personal life from his youth to his final years, against the background of his historical, social, political, religious, and intellectual environment. It investigated the human factor in Newton’s intricate hermeneutical system and identified circumstances that influenced his thought. Notable persons who shaped his thought will be considered later.

His voluminous writings were divided among three main areas: scientific, historical, and religious. For sheer volume, the latter two categories exceeded the first, though his publications in history and religion were posthumous. The vast bulk of Newton’s writings were autographic records of his many areas of research, totaling millions of words, most of which remained unpublished during his lifetime. All his writings have now been published online.

Newton’s worldview was derived from a strong belief in God and the Bible. He believed in the unity of One God, refuting the idea of three Gods. He was apparently not Arian, for it is next to impossible to find any support in Newton’s writings for the

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interpretation of Newton’s 1260 days/years, expiring in 2060 A.D., see Snobelen, “‘A Time and Times and the Dividing of Time’: Isaac Newton, the Apocalypse and 2060 A.D.” *Canadian Journal of History* 38 (Dec. 2003): 537–51. For Newton’s thoughts on the time up to the Second Coming of Christ, the event itself, and the aftermath, see Newton, *Yahuda MS* 9.2, ff. 123<sup>r</sup>–178. See also Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, ff. 55–56 and 1.2, f. 30<sup>v</sup>. Cf. Westfall, *NR*, 356, 815–16.

<sup>193</sup>Westfall, *NR*, 817.

<sup>194</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS* 15.3, ff. 45–6.

concept that Jesus was created. It seems that he rejected the classical Trinity doctrine as a form of tritheism. He was also skeptical of some other traditional Christian beliefs and entertained a strong antipathy to Catholicism, superstition, and formalism. He also held strong convictions on prophetic interpretation throughout his adult life. His historical studies were primarily motivated by his desire to develop a comprehensive thesis uniting theology and apocalyptic.

This chapter shows that Scripture, theology, intellectual influences at Cambridge, scientific research, and his own personal faith all influenced Newton's prophetic interpretations. The following chapter surveys the history of prophetic interpretation before Newton as a basis for discovering the extent of his indebtedness to earlier expositors and/or the developing interpretive tradition.

## CHAPTER 3

### SURVEY OF HISTORICIST PROPHETIC INTERPRETATION FROM PRE-CHRISTIAN TIMES TO ISAAC NEWTON

Newton's hermeneutic of apocalyptic writings can best be understood when observed in its historical context. Newton was an ardent student of both secular and ecclesiastical history. As he plowed through century after century of history with his particular eye for order and structure, he discovered new perspectives applicable to biblical apocalyptic. His understanding of Daniel and Revelation was, to a large degree, a product of these historical studies. Hence, in order to understand his hermeneutic in its full context, it is necessary to trace the history of the interpretation of Daniel and Revelation. This chapter will evaluate interpretations and seek to identify hermeneutical principles that have influenced the evolution of biblical apocalyptic interpretation. Since few commentators articulated their principles of prophetic interpretation in detail, it will be necessary to discover, delineate, and define hermeneutical principles from a reading of their interpretations.

As noted near the close of chap. 1, the history of interpreting Daniel and Revelation has included four major hermeneutical approaches—historicism, idealism, preterism, and futurism. Among these approaches, Newton clearly positioned himself in agreement with the historicist approach. In order to identify possible precedents for

Newton's views, the following survey, while noting developments in all four approaches, will notice the evolution of historicism in particular.<sup>1</sup>

Historicism was the standard hermeneutic from apostolic times until the mid-nineteenth century, although seriously challenged at two historical junctures—in the fifth century by Augustine, and in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by the Jesuits. Even during the first half of the Middle Ages, some of the foremost expositors employed the principles of historicism. Through most of the late Middle Ages, historicism was not only the preferred hermeneutic of reform-friendly dissenters of all sorts, but also formed a basis for almost all interpreters of Daniel. Throughout church history, Augustine's amillennialism has formed another basis for understanding apocalyptic.

### **Daniel's Foundational Hermeneutic**

It seems logical to begin a survey of historicism with the Book of Daniel. First, because it is the only fully developed apocalyptic book in the Old Testament;<sup>2</sup> second, because the most basic principles of historicist apocalyptic interpretation are derived from the Bible, and particularly, from Daniel; third, because Daniel has had the formative

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<sup>1</sup>The classic study on the history of historicism is LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*. Froom's translations of texts will be used throughout this chapter, unless otherwise noted. Although the term "historicism" is rarely used in many other surveys, historicism fills a large part in them, simply because historicism was, in one shape or another, the overwhelmingly preferred hermeneutic of canonical apocalyptic through the ages until the mid-nineteenth century. See also Kai Arasola, *The End of Historicism: Millerite Hermeneutic of Time Prophecies in the Old Testament*.

Among other surveys of the history of apocalyptic interpretation, the most comprehensive and up-to-date work is that of EA 1–3 in this dissertation (see above for bibliographical information). See also Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages*; and Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist*.

<sup>2</sup>There are sections in several parts of the OT which display characteristics of the apocalyptic genre. Scholars agree that they can be found in Isaiah, Ezekiel, and some of the Minor Prophets.

role in the development of subsequent apocalyptic interpretation—even to the present;<sup>3</sup> fourth, although the dating of Daniel lacks scholarly consensus,<sup>4</sup> the book’s prominence in antiquity is well established; and, fifth, because Daniel, the main person in the narrative, is not only a receiver of visions, but also tells of angels’ interpretation of visions. Finally, Newton scholars commonly agree that Newton himself regarded the book of Daniel as the foundational building block in his apocalyptic structure. Thus, due to these qualities, the book of Daniel is a legitimate and a necessary starting point for this investigation.

### Structure of Daniel

In contrast to the book of Revelation, the book of Daniel, to a large degree, interprets itself. An angelic interpreter guides Daniel with explicit interpretations

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<sup>3</sup>See comment by Moshe Idel: “If European philosophy can be described as a series of footnotes to Plato, as Alfred North Whitehead put it, Jewish apocalypticism, and substantially also Western apocalypticism, may be conceived of as footnotes to the apocalyptic visions of Daniel and the drama of redemption described in Exodus. The content of the enigmatic prophecies of Daniel is perhaps the most puzzling writing in the whole biblical corpus,” see Moshe Idel, “Jewish Apocalypticism: 670–1670,” in *Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture*, ed. Bernard McGinn, vol 2 of *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 207.

<sup>4</sup>The book’s own claim of a sixth century BC date is rejected by mainstream and liberal scholars; those who viewed the book of Daniel as a pseudepigraphic document composed mainly during the Maccabean crisis around 165 BCE. See Collins’ apt comment: “The critical position [i.e. the denial of Daniel’s authenticity] is accepted without question, even in the avowedly evangelical Word Biblical Commentary by John Goldingay,” Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 122.

The Maccabean Thesis has been refuted by a number of scholars during the last 100 years, see William H. Shea, “Early Development of the Antiochus Epiphanes Interpretation,” in *Symposium on Daniel*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, DARCOM 2, 256–328. See also Josh McDowell, *Daniel in the Critics’ Den* for a summary from scholars who support a sixth century BCE dating; see also Arthur John Ferch, *Daniel on Solid Ground* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1988), especially pp. 33–65. Harrison stated that “the arguments for the Maccabean dating of Daniel can hardly be said to be convincing. Such a period of composition is in any event absolutely precluded by the evidence from Qumran.” R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1106–27.

throughout the book (e.g., Dan 2, 7, and 8). There is broad agreement<sup>5</sup> that the book of Daniel is structured after a carefully crafted plan. The four apocalyptic outline visions in Daniel are in chaps. 2, 7, 8–9, and 10–12. Successive cyclical visions progressively enlarge end-time scenarios. Each vision is structurally well-ordered.<sup>6</sup> A meaningful interpretation of Daniel depends, to a large degree, on where the particular text under evaluation is located in the macro- and/or micro-structure of the book. Thus, an interpretation of Daniel, derived from its own clear, internally defined hermeneutical principles, necessitates sensitivity to the structure of the book.

### Daniel 2 and 7

The foundational prophecy of the image of gold, silver, bronze, iron, and iron and clay in Daniel 2 displays the future of the world from the location in time and space of Daniel the prophet. Virtually all interpreters, from the second century CE to our own time, recognize that the vision of Daniel 2 has a defined beginning, with the image's head of gold (Babylon), and a defined end when the stone smashes the image (end of the

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<sup>5</sup>Some major commentaries on the Book of Daniel besides that of John J. Collins, are John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC 30 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1989); Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel*, AB 23 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978); and André Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel*, trans. David Pellauer, English ed. rev. by the author (London: SPCK, 1979). Historicist commentaries or works on Daniel besides the DARCOM series are Zdravko Stefanovic, *Daniel: Wisdom to the Wise* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2007); William H. Shea, *Daniel, A Reader's Guide* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005); Jacques B. Doukhan, *Daniel: The Vision of the End* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987); George McCready Price, *The Greatest of the Prophets, a New Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1955); Desmond Ford, *Daniel*, foreword by F. F. Bruce (Nashville, TN: Southern, 1978).

<sup>6</sup>See, e.g., Paul Tanner, "The Literary Structure of the Book of Daniel," *BSac* 160 (July–Sept 2003): 269–82; William H. Shea, "Further Literary Structures in Daniel 2–7: An Analysis of Daniel 5, and the Broader Relationships within Chapters 2–7," *AUSS* 23, no. 3 (Autumn 1985), 277–95.

world).<sup>7</sup> Between these chronological points, history (i.e. fulfillment) runs its successive and continuous course. Thus, from observing the sequence of the prophecy (beginning, continuous history, end), a basic hermeneutical principle emerges. For convenience, this principle will hereafter be called a “Prophet-to-Eschaton Vision” (PEV).<sup>8</sup>

Another hermeneutical feature easily detected in Daniel, beginning in chap. 2, is the use of symbolism. The different metals making up the image signify a successive line of political superpowers. Except for the power behind the first metal in Daniel 2, none of the succeeding metals is identified in this chapter. In Daniel 8, however, the successive empires are identified as Medo-Persia and Greece, which supports the idea that Daniel described, in symbolic language, the history of the world in an ordered, chronological way. In Daniel 2, the empires are represented as metals; in Daniel 7, the same kingdoms are apparently represented as fierce wild animals; and in Daniel 8, again, subsequent kingdoms after Babylon are described as clean animals associated with Jewish sanctuary rituals. Thus, another hermeneutical key detected from an unforced reading of Daniel itself is that empires, kingdoms, and/or systems are prophetically disclosed symbolically. In fact, the apocalyptic sections of Daniel are enclosed in a highly symbolic language

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<sup>7</sup>Historicists and futurists both argue that the end has not yet come, whereas preterists argue that the end-time scenario in Daniel expired in the second century BCE. I know of no interpreter, regardless of the school of prophetic interpretation, who does not interpret the vision of Dan 2 as beginning in the time of the Babylonian Empire; see tabulations in Froom, *PFF*.

<sup>8</sup>Many suggestions of terminology have been made to clarify the concept of continuous fulfillment, including historical-continuous, outline vision, symbolic periodization, etc. The PEV abbreviation emphasizes the clearly definable beginning and end points: the time and place of the prophet and the time of the final consummation (the end of time), the chronological climax in canonical apocalyptic literature. Moreover, since the main content of these Danielic visions (Dan 2, 7, 8–9, 10–12) conveys a chronologically progressive history between these two points, it follows that they are “Prophet to Eschaton Visions” (PEV). This feature can be observed already in some of the intertestamental writings; see, e.g., 1 Enoch 93:10 (*Apocalypse of Weeks*); 1 Enoch 9:6–7 (*Animal Apocalypse*); *Jubilees* 23:26; and the Damascus Document (the Cairo Damascus document, i.e., CD), CD 1:7; 3:12–20.



which can only be decoded (if it is possible at all) through the application of an appropriate hermeneutic.

Daniel 7, which illustrates a similar PEV, goes over the same ground as Daniel 2, but from another perspective. Several striking similarities between Daniel 2 and 7 can be determined: the four metals parallel the four animals; the ten toes on the feet of iron/clay are parallel in number to the ten horns on the head of the fourth beast. Further, the system of iron/clay lasts until the end—similar to the little horn and the seven other remaining horns on the fourth beast which also last until the end; the destruction of the metal image parallels the ultimate destruction of the four animals (including little horn); and finally, the establishing of the kingdom of God “which shall never be destroyed” (Dan 2:44) parallels the “everlasting kingdom which shall not pass away” (Dan 7:14, 27).

None of the animals in Daniel 7 is explicitly identified in the text. Nevertheless, garnering a logical meaning out of Daniel 7 is viewing it as a PEV intending to forecast world history in several stages beginning with sixth-century Babylon (location of historical Daniel) and ending with the consummation of all things at the end of time.

A unique feature emerges in Daniel 7: a clearly defined personal challenger to the Kingdom of God is seen in the symbol of the little horn. This power is historically defined as coming out of the fourth beast after the initial emergence of the ten horns. Moreover, this power is said to speak against the Most High, persecute His people, think to change times and laws, and hold dominion for three and half years (v. 25). This is the first definite (although hidden behind a symbolic literary framework) information in the Bible on the apocalyptic anti-Messiah, or anti-Christ.

If the writer of Daniel intended to describe or predict history (whether in a

*vaticinium ex eventu* mode or a genuine prophetic mode), and the animals in Daniel 7 represent real superpowers of the ancient world, then it is most logical to think of the little horn as a counterpart to a historic power or person. Since this power, generally identified as the Antichrist by Christians, permeates much of subsequent apocalyptic writings, it is, therefore, tentatively appropriate to establish the dichotomy of Christ and Antichrist as a major feature of biblical apocalyptic and, thus, part of the hermeneutical fabric of canonical apocalyptic.

### Daniel 8 and 9

Daniel 8 covers much of the same historical ground as chaps. 2 and 7. In Daniel 8, however, the prophecy begins in the Persian period. In fact, the angelic interpreter explains the “ram” to represent Medo-Persia and the “goat” to represent Greece (v. 23), which confirms the implicit parallel between Daniel 2, 7, and 8. A prominent feature of Daniel 8 is its Levitical cultic language. The animals, the horns, evenings and mornings, and the cleansing of the sanctuary remind the reader of the Israelite sanctuary service, profoundly described and explained in the Pentateuch—a potential hermeneutical key to understanding Daniel.

From a contextual point of view, historicist scholars have argued that Daniel 9 explains the unsolved mystery in Daniel 8.<sup>9</sup> The enigmatic period of 2300 evenings and mornings in Daniel 8 is, according to current historicist exegetes, explained or commented on in Daniel 9. Here 490 days are cut off from the 2300 days and a proper starting point of the 70-weeks vision is given (9:25). This most notable Messianic

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<sup>9</sup>William Shea, “The Prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27,” in *70 Weeks, Leviticus, Nature of Prophecy*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, DARCOM 3, 105–8; and Zdravko Stefanovic, *Daniel: Wisdom*, 354, 359.

prophecy in the Old Testament provides details concerning the time of the appearance of the Messiah. The 490 days are described as 70 weeks of which, according to a large number of commentators, each week stands for seven years<sup>10</sup>—thus, from a historicist point of view, a distinct hermeneutical feature emerges—the contours of the year-day principle.<sup>11</sup>

### Daniel 10 to 12

Daniel 10–12, making up the fourth and last PEV in Daniel, is somewhat different from the previous three Prophet-to-Eschaton Visions (PEV) (in chaps. 2, 7, and 8–9, respectively). The vision of Daniel 8–12 is an obvious PEV. It starts in the Persian period, the time and place in which the prophet lived, and concludes at the end of time when Michael rescues His people. In between the two extreme chronological points (and here, it differs quite a bit from the previous visions), a somewhat detailed history of God’s people and their challenges is described. This detailed historical account is one of the reasons modern higher-critical scholars who do not believe in genuine prophecy, as well as some conservative scholars who do believe in genuine prophecy,<sup>12</sup> assign the composition of Daniel to the second century BCE. The prophecy from Persia (sixth century BCE) until the Maccabees (second century BCE) is so historically obvious and

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<sup>10</sup>See the extensive survey in Brempong Owusu-Antwi, *The Chronology of Daniel 9:24–27*, ATSDS 2 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 1995), especially pp. 27–58.

<sup>11</sup>William Shea’s two chapters on the year-day principle in *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, DARCOM 1 (Lincoln, NE: College View Printers, 1982) still provide the best Old Testament background to Daniel’s time calculations. Chapter 3, “Year-Day Principle—Part 1” covers the Old Testament background, whereas chap. 4, “Year-Day Principle—Part 2” covers Hellenistic Jewish literature.

<sup>12</sup>John E. Goldingay stated, “Whether the stories [in Daniel] are history or fiction, the visions actual prophecy or quasi-prophecy, written by Daniel or by someone else, in the sixth century BC, the second, or somewhere in between, makes surprisingly little difference to the book’s exegesis.” *Daniel*, xl.

correct in detail, they reason, that it must have been written as *vaticinium ex eventu*. In order to understand the prophetic visions in Daniel, including the fourth one, a knowledge of history is critical. Therefore, another hermeneutical principle for understanding Daniel emerges: the study of history as it relates to God's people.

Thus, a brief summary of major hermeneutical features in Daniel can tentatively be enumerated: (1) distinctive literary structure following a pattern of cyclical progressive enlargement; (2) starting point of prophecy defined; (3) PEV with successive and continuous historical fulfilment; (4) ending point defined; (5) symbolic language; (6) dichotomy of Christ and Antichrist; (7) cultic background; (8) the study of history confirming genuine prophecy; and tentatively, (9) time periods symbolically represented through the year-day principle.<sup>13</sup>

### **Hermeneutical Implications from the Intertestamental Period**

During the intertestamental period, a Babylonian sixth-century BCE origin of the Book of Daniel was uniformly assumed by the relatively few who echoed, alluded to, or explicitly referred to it.<sup>14</sup> Periodization of history, a characteristic of the "historical" apocalyptic genre, can be observed in a number of pseudepigraphical apocalyptic texts,

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<sup>13</sup>The year-day principle was first recognized in the seventy weeks of Dan 9. It was only after Joachim in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that the year-day principle was generally applied to apocalyptic texts outside of the seventy weeks in Dan 9. This issue will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters.

<sup>14</sup>The major corpus of preserved writings from this period which allude or refer to Daniel can be found in James Charlesworth, ed., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*.

similar to Daniel in style, but far from identical in details.<sup>15</sup>

Daniel represents some of the earliest known apocalyptic-historical periodization schemes,<sup>16</sup> although this literary feature was already in use before the sixth century BCE.<sup>17</sup> Hesiod, a Greek poet of the eighth century BCE, described the progress of world history in terms of gold, silver, bronze, a non-metal phase, and concluding with iron, representing distinct historical periods in successive order.<sup>18</sup>

The paradigmatic transition of world empires from Babylon and Persia to Macedonia is assumed and repeated in Jewish pseudepigraphic apocalypses. These use different symbolic scenarios, but the empires are identical to Daniel's (see Dan 8:20–21). Some of these non-canonical texts mention the fourth kingdom as the Roman, in harmony with the hermeneutical principle of successive and chronological fulfillment.<sup>19</sup> Jewish writers between 200 BCE and CE 100 pointed towards the rapidly growing Roman

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<sup>15</sup>For a detailed study, see John Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 63–64, 155–57, 225, 229, 239–40. Referring to the “Apocalyptic of Weeks” in 1 Enoch 93, Collins stated that “the substance of this apocalypse is made up not of heavenly cosmology but of an overview of history. The history is highly schematized and organized into periods of ‘weeks,’” (Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 63). Another text, “the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is exceptional among the Jewish apocalypses,” Collins stated, “in combining the motif of the heavenly journey with the review and periodization of history, characteristic of the ‘historical’ apocalypses” Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 225).

<sup>16</sup>There is no compelling internal evidence in the writings themselves to argue conclusively either that Daniel was based on 1 Enoch, or that 1 Enoch was based on Daniel.

<sup>17</sup>For a penetrating treatment of the historical background to the four kingdoms, see D. Flusser, “The Four Empires in the Fourth Sibyl and in the Book of Daniel,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972); 148–75. John Collins and many others suggested that periodization schemes derived from Persia; see *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 63, 229. Daniel's life, according to the biblical narrative, stretched over two empires: Babylon and Persia. For the general assumption that Jewish apocalypticism derived from Persia, see Anders Hultgård, “Persian Apocalypticism,” in *EA*, 1:39–83.

<sup>18</sup>See his *Works and Days*, 106–201.

<sup>19</sup>*Sibylline Oracle* 4:49–101; 2 *Baruch* 39. Under Charlesworth's editorship, the translator of 2 *Baruch* noted that by the “fourth kingdom” is meant the kingdom that followed Babylon, Persia, and Greece, namely Rome. A. Klijn, “2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Volume 1—Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 1:633.

Empire as the successor of the Greeks.<sup>20</sup>

Rome, therefore, according to intertestamental writers, is the prophetic historic fulfillment of Daniel's fourth kingdom.<sup>21</sup> With the Roman Empire recognized as the fulfillment of the fourth metal in Daniel 2 and the fourth animal in Daniel 7, a crucial interpretation, as we shall see below, is already evident before the beginning of the Christian era.

Both canonical and non-canonical apocalyptic prophecy saw the eschaton as history's climax. Writers in the period under investigation saw Messiah's coming as the last before a renewed earth, sometimes the last in a longer scheme. Just before that last climax, some believed a reform movement would arise.<sup>22</sup> These thoughts contain the idea of a clearly defined beginning point, a continuous development, and a climax at the eschaton, suggesting the first contours of a consistent hermeneutical approach.

Several documents from pre-Christian time assumed the year-day principle, another aspect of this periodization of history in apocalyptic literature.<sup>23</sup> Thus, another

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<sup>20</sup>E.g., Johanan Ben Zakkai (first century CE), cited in Froom, *PFF*, 2:195.

<sup>21</sup>"The prevailing interpretation" in the Jewish tradition regarding Daniel's four kingdoms, "identified the kingdoms as Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome (often represented as Edom)," and one thousand years later, "for Ibn Ezra, Rome was an offshoot of the third empire, the Greeks." Collins, *Daniel*, 87.

<sup>22</sup>See the *Apocalypse of Weeks* (1 Enoch 93:10); the *Animal Apocalypse* (1 Enoch 9:6–7); and *Jubilees* 23:26.

<sup>23</sup>The *Book of Jubilees* referred to the year-day principle in the computation of Noah's age: "And Noah slept with his fathers, and was buried on Mount Lubar in the land of Ararat. Nine hundred and fifty years he completed in his life, nineteen jubilees and two weeks and five years" 10:16–17 (the two weeks here must be understood as 14 years). The *Testament of Levi* applied a year for a day to the fifth and seventh weeks of the jubilee (TLevi 5:8–11). The 70 weeks of Dan 9 is clearly made into ten jubilees in *11Q Melch.*, showing the application of the year–day principle. And finally, *4 Ezra* 7:43, "for it will last for about a week of years." For a comprehensive and scholarly overview of the Old Testament rationale for the year-day principle, see William Shea, "Year-Day Principle—Parts 1 and 2," *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, DARCOM 1: 56–93.

important element of historicist hermeneutic can be discerned, though not much developed at the time.

### **Hermeneutical Implications from the First Century**

The first century of the Christian era introduced two significant bodies of texts, the New Testament and the writings of Josephus: one completes and defines the canon of biblical apocalyptic, the other confirms and expands the pre-Christian Jewish view of Daniel's prophecies. The New Testament quotes or alludes extensively to the book of Daniel,<sup>24</sup> but except for the book of Revelation, it displays features of the apocalyptic genre only in 2 Thess 2 and the synoptic chaps. Matt 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21.

#### **The Olivet Discourse in the Synoptics**

In the Olivet discourse, Jesus gave a distinct hermeneutical hint when He spoke of a part of Daniel's prophecy (Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11) as not yet completely fulfilled. "Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand)" (Matt 24:15; cf. parallel text in Mark 13:14). Jesus thus assumed that Daniel contained genuine prophecy, and implicitly endorsed Daniel's prophetic-historical paradigm. Further, by saying "whoever reads, let him understand," Jesus specifically directed his followers to study the

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<sup>24</sup>See Reimar Vetne, "The Influence and Use of Daniel in the Synoptic Gospels," PhD dissertation, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, 2011. A standard reference work on the use of Old Testament in the New Testament is Beale and Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007). See also G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), which shows comprehensively the use of Daniel in Revelation.

prophecies of Daniel.<sup>25</sup> The larger context of Jesus' words is the synoptic Gospels' "little apocalypse," which contains a clearly defined starting point (Jesus' own time) and a chronologic progression of fulfillment reaching its climax at His Second Coming. The whole prophetic narrative from the Olivet discourse is framed as a prediction about the challenges God's people will meet between Jesus' own time and the eschaton. Thus, Jesus included in this discourse the most foundational elements of historicist hermeneutic: starting point, continuous history, and end-time climax—a classic PEV.

### Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians

An analysis of 2 Thess 2, the unique apocalyptic passage in Paul's corpus, reveals that it contains canonical apocalyptic features similar to those found in Daniel and the Gospel apocalypse, but also lacks several features.<sup>26</sup> That Paul's prophetic-historic structure was based on Dan 7 is highly possible, and this has been convincingly argued.<sup>27</sup> It makes perfect sense, as the church fathers, and later, the Reformers generally believed, that Paul believed he was living in the time of the fourth empire of Daniel 2 and the fourth beast of Daniel 7; that he believed as Daniel predicted, that the ruling Empire would collapse and give way to the Little Horn.<sup>28</sup> Thus, Paul could write that the one who

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<sup>25</sup>See Matt 24:15: "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand)." Here Jesus tells of something that will happen in the future based on what Daniel has stated in the past. We can safely assume that Daniel was not an easy book to understand for people living in Jesus' time; therefore, when Jesus emphatically stated, "Let him understand," he meant one had to study the book of Daniel, otherwise one could not understand.

<sup>26</sup>See Beale and Carson, *Commentary on New Testament Use of Old Testament*, 886–87.

<sup>27</sup>McGinn, *Antichrist*, 38, 41. The sea-beast (an obvious descendant of Dan 7) and land-beast of Rev. 13 are "blended" in 2 Thess 2: 3–12, according to Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity*, 137.

<sup>28</sup>McGinn, *Antichrist*, 41–45.



now is (the Roman Empire) had to be taken away before the next (the “coming one” or Antichrist) could appear.<sup>29</sup>

Paul presented his apocalypse in a PEV format, defining his own time and ending the narrative with the last days. Symbolic language is applied. The Antichrist, modeled on the Little Horn in Daniel 7,<sup>30</sup> is presented in Paul’s narrative as a pseudo-messiah, who calls himself a god sitting in the temple of God. Again, only history can prove or disprove Paul’s interpretation and application of Daniel to Paul’s own present and future time.

### Revelation

John’s letters give evidence of a continued concern with the Antichrist figure, of which the one predicted in Daniel and Paul had yet to appear, although its spirit and smaller antichrists were already present (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7).<sup>31</sup> The Apocalypse, most probably written by the same John, continues the story, complementing

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<sup>29</sup>See 2 Thess 2:7–8.

<sup>30</sup>For the development of understanding Paul’s Antichrist in the Middle Ages, see Kevin L. Hughes, *Constructing Antichrist: Paul, Biblical Commentary, and the Development of Doctrine in the Early Middle Ages* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005). Hughes study illuminates conspicuously dark spots in the history of apocalyptic interpretation between about 500 and 1200 CE. In *The Antichrist*, a comprehensive and detailed story of antichrist the last 2000 years, Bernard McGinn spent about 35 pages (out of the book’s 350 pages) on the years between CE 500 and 1100; see pp. 79–113.

<sup>31</sup>The only place the title “antichrist” is stated in the entire Bible, and the earliest in history, is in John’s Letters (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). Interpreters, in retrospect, have, since ancient times, commonly identified this antichrist with the little horn in Dan 7, the “Man of Sin” in 2 Thess 2, and the beast coming up from the sea in Rev 13. Thus, as we shall see more clearly, the antichrist could appear, according to Dan 7 only after the fall of the fourth animal, which, from ancient times, was commonly seen as Rome. Thus, when John wrote of the antichrist in his letters: “You have heard that the Antichrist is coming” (1 John 2:18); “the *spirit* of the Antichrist . . . is now already in the world” (4:3), it should be understood as a power expected, but not yet arrived, although some of his pre-cursors, or characteristics could be seen at the time of John’s writings. John’s letters cannot be used as evidence for Nero as antichrist, as the prime fulfillment of the Antichrist.

Daniel, Jesus, and Paul, and thus completing the biblical canon.<sup>32</sup> A striking characteristic in Revelation is that its prophetic visions follow a somewhat similar pattern to that found in Daniel, in that different visions complement each other with additional detail, producing a fuller perspective of prophetic history. In these visions, the end time is climactic and associated with judgment.<sup>33</sup>

Symbolic language pervades Revelation, and unless rules of hermeneutics are applied, these symbols remain hidden sayings. The proper way to understand these symbols, it seems, is to go back to their contextual position, and from there, determine their value and meaning.<sup>34</sup> Revelation is, strictly speaking, a compilation of hundreds of paraphrases and allusions derived primarily from the Old Testament, and secondarily

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<sup>32</sup>Beside Beale and Aune's comprehensive commentaries on Revelation, some other 'classic' commentaries are Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998; original pub. by Macmillan, 1906); George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956); Morris, *Apocalyptic*; and finally a representative dispensationalist interpretation, John F. Walwood, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966).

<sup>33</sup>Each of Daniel's four PEV's ends with divine judgment. (1) Dan 2: all these kingdoms" (v. 44), indicating God's judgment. (2) the vision-cycle of Dan 7 climaxes its narrative with a "court" that "shall be seated" (v. 26). (3) Daniel 8 climaxes its PEV with "then the sanctuary shall be cleansed," (v. 14) analogous to the cleansing of the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16), which to the Jews signified judgment. (4) Daniel 10–12 has a long outline prediction that begins in the Persian period and climaxes with a resurrection of the righteous and a resurrection of "some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan 12:2), presumably due to a previous judgment.

Revelation exhibits the same consistency. (1) The seven churches in Rev 2–3 end up with Laodicea as the last mentioned of the septet. The name "Laodicea" contains the composed idea of "people" and "justice/judgment." (2) The sixth seal in Rev 6 leads to an apocalyptic catastrophe (i.e. judgment) identical to conditions connected to the parousia-eschaton climax, while the seventh seal speaks of silence for half an hour (Rev 8:1). (3) The last septet in the historical part of Revelation (chaps. 2–13), that of the seven trumpets in Rev 8–11, clearly ends with a motif of judgment when, in the seventh trumpet, a voice states that "Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead that they should be judged" (Rev 11:18).

<sup>34</sup>See Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Literary Allusions and Interpretation of Revelation 8: 7–12*, AUSDDS 11 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987).

from the New Testament.<sup>35</sup> The Old Testament is, therefore, an excellent starting point for decoding apocalyptic symbolism in the book of Revelation.

The war between Christ and Antichrist is described nowhere in Scripture as thoroughly and vividly as in the Book of Revelation. The similarity between the sea-beast in Rev 13 and the little horn in Daniel 7 is compelling evidence that these symbols represent the same power, commonly called the Antichrist.<sup>36</sup>

The vast number of symbols in Revelation, taken straight out of the Israelite cultic services in the Pentateuch,<sup>37</sup> and the presence of a heavenly temple ought to yield some hermeneutical keys. Moreover, just as there is a progression in historical time in Daniel and John's visions, there is in John's visions a time progression reflecting that of the Levitical daily and annual temple services.<sup>38</sup>

The year-day principle is not explicitly mentioned in any first-century writings but, as in Daniel, is implied. Several chronological time periods are mentioned in Revelation, most remarkably, the 1260-day prophecy which is mentioned twice in Daniel

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<sup>35</sup>The standard commentary on Revelation with the Old Testament background in focus throughout is Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*.

<sup>36</sup>David E. Aune, with most others, saw the Roman Empire in the symbol of the sea-beast of Rev. 13, and understood the sea-beast to be a composite of the series of figurative animals in Dan 7; see David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, WBC 52B (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 734.

<sup>37</sup>E.g., “seven golden lampstands” (Rev 1:12); “a pillar in the temple” (Rev 3:12); “a throne set in heaven” with the “seven lamps of fire . . . burning before” it (Rev 4:2, 5); “golden bowls full of incense” (Rev 5:8); “under the altar” (Rev 6:9); “therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple” (Rev 7:15); “the golden altar” (Rev 8:3); “the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple” (Rev 11:19); “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8); “another angel came out of the temple” (Rev 14:15, 17); “behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened” (Rev 15:5); “a loud voice from the temple” (Rev 16:1); “make war with the Lamb” (Rev 17:14); “a robe dipped in blood” (Rev 19:13); “but I saw no temple in it [i.e. the New Jerusalem]” (Rev 21:22).

<sup>38</sup>Beale, *Revelation*, 559–64.

and five times in Revelation.<sup>39</sup> Thus it is evident that Revelation falls into the same apocalyptic category as Daniel, suggesting that both books require essentially the same hermeneutic when it comes to time periods.<sup>40</sup>

### Flavius Josephus

Flavius Josephus (c. 37–c. 100), a contemporary with the disciples of Jesus, sometimes went beyond his role as a historian to become the earliest explicit interpreter of Daniel.<sup>41</sup> He exalted the book of Daniel and repeatedly showed his appreciation for its prophecies.<sup>42</sup> He used it as an example of a divinely inspired book. Josephus assumed the PEV format of Daniel 2<sup>43</sup> and saw a similar format in Daniel 8—but ended its sequence in the second century BCE at the time of Antiochus IV.<sup>44</sup> He may have alluded to the 70 weeks in Daniel 9 when he indicated that the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed due

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<sup>39</sup>It is significant that the 1260 days period is the only period mentioned in canonical apocalyptic (Daniel and Revelation) more than twice (“five months” is mentioned twice in Rev 9), indeed, it is mentioned seven times under different ways of expression: (1) “time, times and half a time” (Dan 7:25 and 12:7, and Rev 12:14); (2) “forty-two months” (Rev 11:2 and 13:5); and (3) “one thousand two hundred and sixty days” (Rev 11:3 and 12:6).

<sup>40</sup>See footnote 35 above.

<sup>41</sup>Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. William Whiston (London, 1737; repub., Project Gutenberg, 2009), 10.10.4: “And Daniel also revealed to the king the meaning of the stone, but I have not thought it proper to relate this, since I am expected to write of what is past and done and not of what is to be; if, however, there is anyone who has so keen a desire for exact information that he will not stop of inquiring more closely but wishes to learn about the hidden thing that are to come, let him take the trouble to read the Book of Daniel, which he will find among the sacred writings.” In other places Josephus went beyond his role as an historian to actually commenting on future events; see e.g. *Antiquities* 10.11.7.

<sup>42</sup>E.g., Josephus, *Antiquities*, 10.11.7.

<sup>43</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities*, 10.10.4.

<sup>44</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities*, 10.11.7.

to a prophecy in Daniel.<sup>45</sup> If this is so, as several scholars have argued,<sup>46</sup> Josephus must have reasoned that one day in apocalyptic symbolism must mean more than just a literal day, probably a year. Like Paul, but more explicitly, Josephus mentioned Rome as a fulfilment of a prophecy in Daniel, showing that he went beyond the time of Antiochus to find history relevant to Daniel's prophecies.<sup>47</sup>

Josephus claimed to have understood Daniel and told his readers a short version of foundational Danielic prophecy. He leaned, perhaps unconsciously, toward a set of hermeneutical assumptions, but since he did not explain his hermeneutic, it must be inferred from his interpretations. He, therefore, was another voice in an impressive and almost a continuous line which, sixteen centuries later, led to Isaac Newton.

Thus, a brief summary of major hermeneutical features in Daniel, as confirmed in the writings up to the end of the first century CE, can be enumerated: (1) structure follows a pattern of repetition and progressive enlargement; (2) starting point of prophecy defined; (3) PEV with successive and continuous historical fulfilment; (4) ending point defined; (5) symbolic language; (6) conflict of good and evil;<sup>48</sup> (7) cultic background; (8)

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<sup>45</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities*, 10.10.6. See William Whiston's (translator) footnote (*The Genuine Works of Flavius Josephus the Jewish Historian* [London, 1737], 284); Josephus, *Antiquities* 10.11.7: "In the same manner Daniel also wrote about the empire of the Romans and that Jerusalem would be taken by them and the temple laid waste . . . so that those who read them and observe how they have come to pass must wonder at Daniel's having been so honoured by God"; and Josephus, *Wars* 6.2.1: "Who knows not the records of the ancient prophets and that oracle which threatens this poor city and is even now coming true?"

<sup>46</sup>See, e.g., William Adler, "The Apocalyptic Survey of History Adopted by Christians: Daniel's Prophecy of 70 Weeks," in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, eds. James C. VanderKam and William Adler (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 212–15.

<sup>47</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities* 10.11.7

<sup>48</sup>Although Paul in the middle of the first century and John at the end of the same century, addressed the Antichrist theme (probably based on Daniel), the specific terminology "Christ and Antichrist" is anachronistic for pre-NT apocalyptic writings.

the study of history confirming genuine prophecy; and tentatively, (9) time periods symbolically represented through the year-day principle.

Three features from the list above include or imply much of the intention of the other six. First, the PEV concept includes the recognition that each vision in Daniel has a clearly defined starting point in the prophet's time and place, a clearly defined end point in the eschaton and that these starting and ending points are linked by continuous historical fulfilment—leading to the conclusion that history confirms prophecy.

Second, the conflict between good and evil, between the victorious Christ and the defeated Antichrist, undergirds the totality of biblical apocalyptic from Daniel to Revelation. Third, the year-day principle was gradually recognized as the key to specific time prophecies. Thus, to simplify the story of hermeneutical development over the sweep of centuries, these three categories (PEV, the conflict between Christ and Antichrist, and the year-day principle) will be emphasized, with others integrated at opportune points.

### **Hermeneutical Implications from the Second to the Sixteenth Centuries**

Having identified hermeneutical guidelines that were applied to apocalyptic interpretation through the end of the first century CE, and with them their hermeneutical implications, a brief overview will now be given of the subsequent evolution of these guidelines and principles. The approach will follow the hermeneutical lines already detected from an unforced, simple reading of the Book of Daniel. It will become obvious that the Book of Daniel has exerted a central, if not controlling influence on the evolution of apocalyptic hermeneutic among both Jewish and Christian expositors.

## Prophet-to-Eschaton Visions with Successive and Continuous Historical Fulfillment

A foundational historicist principle is clearly present in all the representative writers during the first 400 years of the Christian church. Based on Daniel, prophetic history was seen as developing from a clearly defined beginning point and successively progressing toward a final climax at the end of time. Jerome, perhaps the best and most representative expositor of this period, believed in a literal reading of the Gospel apocalypse beginning with the fall of Jerusalem and ending with the Second Coming. The present life of the Church was seen as occurring between these points.<sup>49</sup>

With few exceptions, almost all writers and commentators from Barnabas (c. 70–120) to Jerome (c. 340–420) agreed on how to understand Daniel 2 and 7.<sup>50</sup> Barnabas, in order to avoid naming Rome negatively in times when Christianity was illegal, wrote, “Ye ought therefore to understand . . . ,”<sup>51</sup> meaning you should know that I’m talking about Rome. Later interpreters openly declared that Rome, the fourth kingdom of Daniel 2 and 7, would collapse, and out of it ten kings, or kingdoms, would emerge, and among

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<sup>49</sup>See Brian E. Daley, “Apocalypticism in Early Christian Theology,” in *EA*, 2:28.

<sup>50</sup>See *EA* 1; see also full tabulation in Froom, *PFF*, 1:456–57 where Froom listed 37 very recognizable writers from Daniel to Jerome. It is evident that the large majority interpreted the four metals and animals as Babylon, (Media)-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Even Origen “accepted its [i.e. the apocalyptic tradition] main features as referring to events in both past and future history.” Daley, “Apocalypticism,” 15. Origen’s comments on Revelation are basically limited to chs. 2–3, 5–7, 12, and 14; see Daley, “Apocalypticism,” 16. For a comprehensive survey of Early Church apocalyptic interpretation, see Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and Froom, *PFF*, vol. 1.

<sup>51</sup>Barnabas, *The Epistle of Barnabas* 4.

them, the terrible Antichrist would start to rule for 1260 days.<sup>52</sup> After that Jesus would return and the promised millennium would be realized.<sup>53</sup>

The prophecies in Dan 2, 7, and 2 Thess 2 were viewed in the early church as “easy”<sup>54</sup> and having “great clearness.”<sup>55</sup> Jerome stated that the mixture of iron and clay is “most plainly attested” and “plainly pertains to the Romans;” and “we say what all ecclesiastical writers have handed down.”<sup>56</sup> This last point of Jerome confirms that there was a clearly understood apocalyptic tradition in the early church. Moreover, Jerome, who is widely recognized as representing orthodoxy in biblical interpretation, is explicit about Christ’s Second Coming as the climax of prophecy, agreeing with previous interpreters.<sup>57</sup>

During the time of Jerome, “a gradual but steady revival in expectations of a more intense and literal kind” appeared.<sup>58</sup> A disturbing dilemma for students of Daniel concerned the apparent climax of the prophecy of Dan 7. The Roman Empire had begun to fade, the ten horns were emerging, but where was the terrible “little horn”?

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<sup>52</sup>Ireneaus, *Against Heresies* 5.25–26; 35; Hippolytus, *Fragments from Commentaries*, “On Daniel,” fragment 2, chs. 3–4; idem., *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* 28–29, 32–33; and Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 7.14–15.

<sup>53</sup>See tabulations in Froom, *PFF*.

<sup>54</sup>Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel*, book 15 (fragment).

<sup>55</sup>Chrysostom, *Homilies on Second Thessalonians*, Homily 4.

<sup>56</sup>Jerome, *Daniel*, 2.38–40; 7.7.

<sup>57</sup>Jerome, *Epistle* 121 to Algasia (*PL* 22:1037); although drawing on Origen’s textual experience, Jerome was much more literalistic. However, he was “also capable of allegorical or spiritual interpretations.” Daley, “Apocalypticism,” 27.

<sup>58</sup>Daley, “Apocalypticism,” 21; cf. Daley, “Apocalypticism,” 378.



This questioning of the fulfilment of Dan 7 coincided with contemporary fears of the end of the world. Sulpicius Severus (d. c. 420) produced a history of the world, the *Chronicle* (c. 402), in which he spoke of his time as “difficult and dangerous, since the churches are polluted by unprecedented evil and all things are in confusion.”<sup>59</sup> Orientius (fl. 430s), a poet of the time, compared what he saw with “the funeral rites of a collapsing world.”<sup>60</sup> Finally, Jerome, after learning of the fall of the city of Rome to the Visigoths in 410, exclaimed: “Indeed the head of the Roman Empire had been cut off, and—to speak more truly—after the whole world died in one city, then I became silent and lay on the ground, and spoke no good words.”<sup>61</sup>

### **Tyconius and Augustine’s Alternative Paradigm**

The dilemma of Daniel 7 and the unrest in the world may be seen as possible factors prompting Augustine’s paradigmatic reaction. At this time, Tyconius the Donatist (d. ca. 400) attempted to formulate something like a comprehensive biblical hermeneutic, which was later adopted by Augustine.<sup>62</sup> Except for Porphyry, Origen, Tyconius, and Augustine, there were few, if any, influential voices from the ancient world objecting to the ongoing historicist interpretation of Daniel and Revelation.

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<sup>59</sup>Cited in Daley, “Apocalypticism,” 23.

<sup>60</sup>Cited in Daley, “Apocalypticism,” 26.

<sup>61</sup>Jerome, *Commentary on Ezekiel* (411) (PL 45:16), translated by Daley in “Apocalypticism,” 28.

<sup>62</sup>Tyconius’ commentary of Revelation is lost, but can be retrieved to a large degree from Augustine, Primasius, Bede, and especially, Beatus. For an English translation of Tyconius, see William S. Babcock, *Tyconius: The Book of Rules* (Atlanta, GA: Scholar Press, 1989). See also Pamela Bright, *The Book of Rules of Tyconius: Its Purpose and Inner Logic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) and Pamela Bright, “Tyconius and His Interpreters,” in *A Conflict of Christians Hermeneutic in Roman Africa: Tyconius vs. Augustine*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser, Pamela Bright, and Wilhelm Wuellner, Colloquy 58 (Berkley, CA: Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 1989).

Tyconius' systematic hermeneutic for Scripture<sup>63</sup> divided people in the world into two distinct opposing "cities." His amillennial scheme began with the suffering of the Savior (seen as the first resurrection) and ended with the Second Coming (seen as the second resurrection).<sup>64</sup> Although designed as a general rule of biblical interpretation, Tyconius' system would come to be applied to biblical prophetic symbolism: Augustine launched his idealist system on Tyconius' platform.

Tyconius' comprehensive biblical hermeneutic, which Augustine (354–430) exploited in his *City of God*<sup>65</sup> and *On Christian Teaching*, was formative in giving a new rationale for interpretation. This is true for Tyconius' symbology as well. Augustine repeated the seven rules of Tyconius in his *On Christian Teaching*, where he accepted most and rejected a few.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>See Tyconius, *Three Books of Rules* (Libri regularum tres).

<sup>64</sup>See Daley, "Apocalypticism," 29. The amillennial idea that the unspecified millennium incorporates proper church history can be found already in Origen's *Commentary on John* 10.243–5.

<sup>65</sup>It is fascinating that three famous literary works of the last 1600 years (*City of God*, the *Divine Comedy*, and *Paradise Lost*), all display a distinct focus on the Book of Revelation: "To speak of the importance of the Book of Revelation to the *City of God* is to mark a departure from the consensus of Augustinian scholarship. The place of the Book of Revelation in Augustine's thought generally and in the *City of God* more particularly continues to be a largely neglected topic in Augustinian studies. This is especially puzzling since the final books of the *City of God* are, as I shall show, structured mimetically after the final chapters of John's Apocalypse," in Harry O. Maier, "The End of the City and the City without End: The *City of God* as Revelation" in *History, Apocalypse, and the Secular Imagination, New Essays on Augustine's City of God*, ed. Mark Vessey, Karla Pollmann, and D. Fitzgerald (Bowling Green, OH: Philosophy Documentation Center, 1999), 157.

<sup>66</sup>Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 3.30: "One Tyconius, who, although a Donatist himself, has written most triumphantly against the Donatists (and herein showed himself of a most inconsistent disposition, that he was unwilling to give them up altogether), wrote a book which he called the Book of Rules, because in it he laid down seven rules, which are, as it were, keys to open the secrets of Scripture."

In light of the influence of Tyconius<sup>67</sup> and Augustine,<sup>68</sup> and the later blending of historicism with this new idealist interpretation, it is important to differentiate between the two systems. Augustine's apocalyptic scheme from the beginning differed from the standardized ancient historicism found in Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, and Jerome. Even if Augustine (and Tyconius) respected the foundational Babylon-Persia-Greece-Rome interpretive chronology of Dan 2 and 7,<sup>69</sup> the 490-years interpretation of the seventy-weeks prophecy in Dan 9,<sup>70</sup> and the interpretation of 2 Thess 2 which identified the power that "now holdeth" with the Roman Empire,<sup>71</sup> Augustine's system differed from historicism, seeing the first resurrection at the first coming of Christ and the second resurrection when the symbolic Millennium expired; between these two historic points, he thought that Satan "shall seduce the Church."<sup>72</sup>

Current events had little or no impact on Augustine's reading of Daniel and

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<sup>67</sup>See the chart of Tyconius' influence until Luther in Froom, *PFF*, 1:545.

<sup>68</sup>Augustine formulated the standard philosophy of history throughout the Middle Ages.

<sup>69</sup>Augustine, *City of God*, 20.23: "In prophetic vision he [Daniel] had seen four beasts, signifying four kingdoms, and the fourth conquered by a certain king, who is recognized as Antichrist, and after this the eternal kingdom of the Son of Man, that is to say, of Christ . . . Some have interpreted these four kingdoms as signifying those of the Assyrians, Persians, Macedonians, and Romans. They who desire to understand the fitness of this interpretation may read Jerome's book on Daniel, which is written with a sufficiency of care and erudition."

<sup>70</sup>Augustine, *City of God*, 18.34: "Daniel even defined the time when Christ was to come and suffer by the exact date," he continued, "it would take too long to show this by computation, and it has been done often by others before us." Cf. Augustine, Epistle 197 to Hesychius (Migne).

<sup>71</sup>Augustine, *City of God*, 20.19: "I frankly confess I do not know what he means. I will nevertheless mention such conjectures as I have heard or read. Some think that the Apostle Paul referred to the Roman Empire, and that he was unwilling to use language more explicit, lest he should incur the calumnious charge of wishing ill to the Empire which it was hoped would be eternal . . . However, it is not absurd to believe that these words of the apostle, 'Only he who now holdeth, let him hold until he be taken out of the way,' refer to the Roman Empire, as if it were said 'And then shall the wicked be revealed:' no one doubts that this means Antichrist."

<sup>72</sup>Augustine, *City of God*, 20.8.

Revelation. Commenting on the sack of Rome in 410 in his *Sermon on the Fall of the City*, the bishop of Hippo saw that event as a judgment from God “to lead us to conversion.”<sup>73</sup> Despite his “neglect” of literalistic interpretation of current events,<sup>74</sup> Augustine still retained parts of the ancient historicist tradition. In his amillennial paradigm, the coming of the Antichrist could now be pushed to a distant future, but he nevertheless retained the Antichrist figure as part of a structured end-time chronology.<sup>75</sup>

Augustine’s apocalyptic scheme was not directly challenged and seemed to work for many interpreters. Pope Gregory I (c. 540–604) used this a-historical system as a basis for his apocalyptic chronology, while the influential Pseudo-Methodius (seventh century) extended Rome to the end of the symbolic thousand years.<sup>76</sup> Accordingly, the end could now be seen as near, in the sense that the extent of the thousand years was undefined, or, if one so desired, far away. Thus, the critical disruption and eventual collapse of the classic Roman Empire in the fifth and sixth century had no longer any relevance for understanding apocalyptic prophecy. The entire end-time scenario was moved to an unspecified future, which could be either near or distant.

The counter-historicist move of the fifth century, set in motion by Augustine’s eschatological blending of neo-Platonic idealism and Tychonian biblical hermeneutic, did not eradicate historicism, as has often been thought.<sup>77</sup> To many, Augustine’s new

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<sup>73</sup>See Daley, “Apocalypticism,” 31.

<sup>74</sup>See Augustine, *City of God*, 18.52–4.

<sup>75</sup>Augustine, *City of God*, 20.30.

<sup>76</sup>See David Olster, “Byzantine Apocalypses,” in *EA*, 2:63–68.

<sup>77</sup>Evidence from the major Christian writers on apocalyptic up to Joachim shows that in most cases, the historicist system of apocalyptic interpretation was integral to their hermeneutic. See tabulations in Froom, *PFF*, 1: 894–7.

perspective only emphasized the importance of “actual history” as the ultimate principle by which apocalyptic interpretation, to a large degree, could be objectively controlled.<sup>78</sup>

Augustine’s system was, by contrast, a non-historical and subjective chronological framework, that, instead of looking for literal historical fulfillments, allowed one to spiritualize the whole interpretive process and look to one’s own soul to find fulfilment. Medieval interpreters repeatedly tried to blend and harmonize pre-millennial historicism and amillennial Augustinian-Tychonianism. However, these two systems would eventually grow apart and finally be dissolved by Joachim of Fiore (c. 1132–1202).

The amillennial paradigm had incredible implications for the church’s interpretations of Revelation because all of Revelation’s content in this new scheme was spiritualized and, from Augustine’s time, integrated within the parameters of the symbolic thousand-year period.<sup>79</sup> In the contrasting PEV-based historicist paradigm, the thousand-year period would come after the unfolding of church history and be introduced by Jesus’ Second Coming and the first general bodily resurrection. In practical terms, Augustine’s model meant that the Antichrist would not appear until the thousand-year period had expired. The precise duration of the thousand years, however, was not certain.

An important element of the PEV is the 1260-days prophecy. Virtually all church fathers before AD 450 believed, some more strongly than others, that Rome was

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<sup>78</sup>Cf. McGinn, *Antichrist*, 79–80.

<sup>79</sup>“Indeed,” Lerner stated, “there was a ‘millennist silence’ in the West from Augustine’s time until about 1050. This is to say that no Latin writer during that long period expressed original millenarian ideas in his or her own words.” Robert E. Lerner, “Millennialism,” in *EA*, 2:329. The Revelations of Pseudo-Methodius and the Tiburtine Sibyl, originally not in Latin, “were all, aside from the Bible itself, that kept the [millennial] doctrine alive.” Lerner, “Millennialism.”

represented by the iron in Dan 2 and the fourth animal in Dan 7. Out of that fourth animal arose ten horns, three of which were uprooted to make way for a “little horn,” which was universally regarded as the Antichrist. Now that Rome had collapsed, about ten groups of barbarians had settled on Rome’s property, yet no Antichrist lasting three and a half years could be observed. To many, the old paradigm had failed, and consequently, Augustine’s a-historicist scheme increased in popularity.<sup>80</sup>

### **Prophet-to-Eschaton Visions and the Book of Revelation**

Throughout the medieval world, there was a strong consensus among interpreters regarding the principle of starting the fulfilment of Daniel’s prophecies at the time and place where the prophet was located. Despite Augustine’s amillennialism, most medieval expositors continued to interpret Daniel’s foundational prophecies as extending to the time of Rome and beyond. Interpretations of Dan 2 and 7 repeatedly show this.<sup>81</sup>

Likewise, most interpreters of Revelation, though not all, saw the first century as the natural starting point of John’s visions.<sup>82</sup> Only gradually, however, did continuity as part of the PEV principle come to be applied to the outline visions in Revelation. Many

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<sup>80</sup>One important influencer, and among the Four Doctors of the Church, Pope Gregory, around 600, promoted Augustinian apocalypticism, focusing on the moral aspect of the Antichrist, rather than when he was to appear. The concept of “the Antichrist within” motivated people to self-examination, more than to the study of history; see McGinn, *Antichrist*, 80.

<sup>81</sup>Thomas Aquinas, a doctor of the church and guide to many, was traditional when he interpreted the four metals and animals in Dan 2 and 7 to represent, in successive order, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. However, Aquinas’ overall apocalyptic approach is in accordance with Augustine’s postmillennialism. The little horn, according to Thomas, is the Antichrist, but yet to come; Antiochus Epiphanes was only a type of the Antichrist. See Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio in Daniele*, ch. 7, pp. 35–6, in *Opera* 18. His interpretations of Revelation were incorporated into his *Summa Theologica*.

<sup>82</sup>Virtually any commentary on Daniel, whether fundamentalist or higher-critical, will testify to this. There has never been, it seems, any controversy over this issue, the contest has, rather, been over where and when the prophecy would be fulfilled.

interpreters of apocalyptic viewed the three septets in the first part of Revelation as outlines of church history. For some, these visions were cyclical and synchronized, whereas others let them follow each other chronologically so that the trumpets are to be found blowing inside the last seal.<sup>83</sup>

Victorinus (d. 303 or 304), provided the first comprehensive hermeneutic for understanding Revelation. Despite his alleged influence from Origen,<sup>84</sup> the driving hermeneutical force in Victorinus' commentary is the core historicist idea that total history is symbolically prefigured in canonical apocalyptic. Significantly, he is the first we know of who spelled out the idea from Revelation (though recognized earlier in Daniel's prophecies), that the Holy Spirit frequently "traversed even to the end of the last times, returns again to the same times, and fills up what He had before failed to say."<sup>85</sup>

Others supporting the historically continuous view included Theodoret in the fifth century,<sup>86</sup> Andreas of Caesarea in the sixth,<sup>87</sup> Sargis D'Aberga in the seventh,<sup>88</sup> Bede<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>The next chapter will explore how Newton pursued such a model.

<sup>84</sup>Jerome *Epp.* 61.2, see Daley, "Apocalypticism," 17–18.

<sup>85</sup>Victorinus, "From the Seventh Chapter [of Revelation]" *Commentary on the Apocalypse of the Blessed John*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, ANF 7 (New York: Christian Literature, 1886; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 352.

<sup>86</sup>Theodoret, *Commentarius in Visiones Danielis Prophetiae* (PL 81:1255–1546; see esp. 1297 and 1420).

<sup>87</sup>Andreas, *Apocalypsin Commentarius* (*Patrologia Graeca* 106:207–458). English transl.: Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, trans. Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou. Fathers of the Church series (FOTC) 123 (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011). For Andrews' eschatology, see Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou, *Guiding to a Blessed End: Andrew of Caesarea and His Apocalypse Commentary in the Ancient Church* (Washington DC Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 232–58.

<sup>88</sup>Sargis D'Aberga, in *Patrologia Orientalis*, 13:45, 46.

<sup>89</sup>Venerable Bede, *The Explanation of the Apocalypse by Venerable Bede*, trans. Edw. Marshall (Oxford and London: James Parker, 1878) (PL 93:129–206). Although Bede generally viewed the visions in Revelation as contemporaneous, he hinted of historicism when he described the seals and trumpets.

and Alcuin<sup>90</sup> in the eighth, Berengaud in the ninth,<sup>91</sup> and many others, including Jewish interpreters.<sup>92</sup>

Haymo of Halberstadt (bishop 840–853) paid attention to literary structure as a hermeneutical device and, accordingly, divided Revelation into seven parts, which he analyzed structurally, bringing the number seven into even greater prominence in apocalyptic numerology.<sup>93</sup> Following this, Rupert of Deutz, in his *Commentary on Revelation* (c. 1120), interpreted Revelation's outline visions not as synchronic (overlapping), but as following each other chronologically. He interpreted the seven heads in Rev 12 and 13 as seven consecutive kingdoms.<sup>94</sup>

In the twelfth century came the first serious challenge to the highly adaptable a-historical system of Augustine. Anselm of Havelberg (d. 1158) resolutely broke with a-historicity by announcing clearly definable historical periods as fulfilments of apocalyptic prophecies.<sup>95</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, in his *Sermons on the Song of Songs* around the same time, understood the four horsemen in Rev 6 as typifying four ages of the church.<sup>96</sup> Later, Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173) introduced the idea that Revelation, on a macrostructure

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<sup>90</sup>Alcuin, *Commentaria in Apocalypsim* (PL 100:1085–1156).

<sup>91</sup>Berengaud, *Expositio Super Septem Visiones Libri Apocalypsis*.

<sup>92</sup>Some Jewish writers are Saadia Ben Joseph, *Sefer Hagalui* and/or *Kitab al-Amanat kal-l'tikadat*, Jepheth Ibn Ali Halevi, Rashi (Solomon Ben Isaac), Abraham Bar Hiyya Hanasi, *Megillah Hamegalleh*, and Abraham Ibn Ezra.

<sup>93</sup>Haymo of Halberstadt, *Exposito in Apocalypsin* (PL 117:937–1220).

<sup>94</sup>See Rusconi, "Antichrist and Antichrists," in *EA*, 2:295–6; McGinn, *Antichrist*, 122.

<sup>95</sup>Anselm of Havelberg, *Dialogi* (PL 188:1139–1248), esp. cols. 1149–50. Cf. McGinn, *Antichrist*, 125.

<sup>96</sup>Rusconi, "Antichrist and Antichrists," 298.



level, is based on a cyclical PEV perspective; i.e., Revelation contains seven successive periods repeated five times—a viewpoint with incredible implications for the historicist system.<sup>97</sup>

Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135-1202), who challenged the Augustinian a-historicist system,<sup>98</sup> continued the ancient tradition of seeing the prophetic visions in Revelation as fulfilled successively and chronologically in a PEV format throughout church history.<sup>99</sup> Wanting to base his reasoning on the Bible as the ultimate authority,<sup>100</sup> Joachim deduced that church history functioned as an antitype to the history of the Old Testament (e.g., as the Old Testament displayed seven persecutions, therefore, he expected seven persecutions in the New Testament era). Thus, to understand the Book of Revelation it was essential to study the Old Testament background. In doing so, Joachim developed a fine-tuned historical perspective of periodization which synchronized the seven seals and

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<sup>97</sup>Richard of St. Victor, *Apocalypsis Joannis* (PL 196:683–888). “The period from the birth of the church till the end of time is five times repeated; namely, first in the vision of the seven churches, which do not figure, however, prominently in his scheme; second, in the vision of the seven seals; third, in that of the seven trumpets; fourth, concerning the woman, the dragon, and the beasts; and fifth, that of the seven vials,” Froom, *PFF*, 1: 558.

<sup>98</sup>Studies on Joachim in English are Marjorie Reeves, “The Originality and Influence of Joachim of Fiore,” *Traditio* 36 (1980): 269–316; E. R. Daniel, “The Double Procession of the Holy Spirit in Joachim of Fiore’s Understanding of History,” *Speculum* 55 (1980): 469–83; West and Zimdars-Swartz, *Joachim of Fiore: A Study in Spiritual Perception and History*; Robert E. Lerner, “Antichrists and Antichrist in Joachim of Fiore,” *Speculum* 60 (1985): 553–70; Bernard McGinn, *The Calabrian Abbot: Joachim of Fiore in the History of Western Thought* (New York: Macmillan, 1985); Dojcin Zivadinovic, “The Origins and the Antecedents of Joachim of Fiore’s (1135–1202) Historical-Continuous Method of Prophetic Interpretation” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2018).

<sup>99</sup>Robert E. Lerner put it thus: “as foretelling the entire history of the church, past, present, and future.” “Millennialism,” 347.

<sup>100</sup>“Let me infer [stated Joachim] only what can be proved according to the letter by the authorities of the Scriptures.” Cited in Henri de Lubac, S.J., *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vols. 1 and 2, trans. Mark Sebanc (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998, [orig. 1959]), 335n47. Joachim, moreover, distrusted the Apocrypha and expositions of the Antichrist as sources of truth. See McGinn, *Antichrist*, 138.

seven trumpets in Revelation.<sup>101</sup> Joachim also applied this periodization scheme to the seven heads in Rev 17, seeing them as successive powers from Herod to the Antichrist.<sup>102</sup>

John Wycliffe (c. 1324–1384), “the morning star of the Reformation” and a towering intellectual of his time, followed the standard interpretation of Dan 2 and 7, viewing both chapters as PEV, beginning in Daniel’s time and, after successive fulfilment throughout history, reaching their climax at Christ’s Second Coming.<sup>103</sup> Seeing beyond the break-up of the Roman Empire, he declared that the Church of Rome was the fulfilment of the little horn which came up among the ten horns in Daniel 7, implying his acceptance of Joachim’s year-day application for the 1260 days.<sup>104</sup>

Among medieval interpreters, the climactic historical-prophetic end point of this class of PEV was consistently seen in the future Second Coming of Christ. A new aspect

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<sup>101</sup>Joachim periodized prophetic-history as follows: (1) From Christ to AD 100, (2) from John to Constantine, (3) from Constantine to Justinian, (4) from Justinian to Charlemagne, (5) from Charlemagne to Joachim’s days, (6) from Joachim’s days to the [smiting] of Babylon, and (7) the Sabbath until the second coming. See Joachim, *Expositio Magni Prophete Abbatis Joachim in Apocalypsim* (1527), f.b.v., in ASC. For Joachim’s particular views on the seals and trumpets, see respectively, McGinn, *Antichrist*, ff. 113<sup>v</sup>–120<sup>f</sup>, 123<sup>r</sup>, and ff. 130<sup>v</sup>, 131<sup>r</sup>. Peter Aureli, e.g., applied Joachim’s periodization scheme in a modified way: the seven churches outline church history. See Froom, *PFF*, 1:783. The seals began in the first century and ended at time of Constantine and are interpretively succeeded by the trumpets. See McGinn, *Antichrist*, 783–4.

<sup>102</sup>See Joachim, *Expositio* [. . .] in *Apocalypsim*, f. 196<sup>v</sup>. Joachim also believed the succession of kingdoms (through the seven heads in Rev 12, 13, and 17) ended with the seventh head as the Antichrist arising “from the west, and he will be “like a universal pope.” Cited in McGinn, *Antichrist*, 141–2. In another place, he synchronized the seven heads in Rev 17 with seven consecutive persecutions; these are in consecutive order: under Herod, Nero, Constantius, Muhammad, Mesemoth (“five have fallen”), Saladin (“one is present”), and the last the Antichrist. Rusconi, “Antichrist and Antichrists,” 300–1.

<sup>103</sup>John Wycliffe, *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae* (1905–7 ed.), 4 vols., 3:262–3. For John Wycliffe’s works on canonical apocalyptic, see the following: *The Last Age of the Chirche* ([1368?]; repub., *The Last Age of the Church*, Dublin: University Press, 1840), *Potestate Papae* (1379; repub., *Tractatus de Potestate Pape*, ed. Johann Loserth, London: Trübner, 1907), *Veritate Sacrae Scripturae* (1377–80; repub., 3 vols., London: Trübner, 1905), and “Speculum de Antichristo” ([1377–84?]; repub. in *Tracts and Treatises of John de Wycliffe, D.D.*, London: Blackburn and Pardon, 1845), 22–24.

<sup>104</sup>Wycliffe, *De Veritate*, 3:267–8. See also Potestà, “Radical Apocalyptic Movements in the Late Middle Ages,” in *EA* 2:123; Rusconi, “Antichrist and Antichrists,” 313.

of the Second Coming, not easily found in the earlier periods, is the prophetic expectation of a time of restitution. Historicist interpreters during this era, especially those critical of ecclesiastical authorities, believed that spiritual darkness had covered Christianity for a long time. Refreshing times were due in which truth, based on the Bible, would again be restored.<sup>105</sup> Wycliffe and Huss clearly showed a correspondence between apocalyptic interpretation and evangelical doctrine. By searching in Scripture and history, the proto-Protestant doctrines were re-discovered and integrated into the eschatological scenario.<sup>106</sup>

By the sixteenth century, interpreters had acknowledged for hundreds of years that after the fall of Rome, the ten western kingdoms continued apocalyptic history. Luther and later generations accepted the transition from imperial to ecclesiastical Rome. There are few hints, if any, among the Reformation interpreters that there might be a gap between the fall of Rome and the last days. Rather, they stressed a smooth continuity between imperial Rome and ecclesiastical Rome.

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<sup>105</sup>This is found implicit in d'Olivier's "three advents of Christ" concept, which viewed the first coming in the flesh; the second, in the spirit; and the third, at the end of time, in glory. See Lerner, "Millennialism," 350.

<sup>106</sup>Walter Brute, a follower of Wycliffe and an ardent prophetic interpreter, wrote "seeing that this time of the Error of the Gentiles is fulfilled: it is likely that Christ shall call the Gentiles from the Rites of their gentility to the perfection of the Gospel." George Townsend, ed., *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe: With a Life of the Martyrologist, and Vindication of the Work* (London: Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley, 1844), 3:142, <https://books.google.com/books?id=4GoPAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA142&lpg=PA142&dq=%22seeing+that+this+is+time+of+the+Error+of+the+Gentiles+is+fulfilled%22&source=bl&ots=40G19JViuA&sig=ACfU3U10tJZJiNV83TRGngOTiWK6bwXjnA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjzITK4dnzAhWJB80KHUn6Be0Q6AF6BAgDEAM#v=onepage&q=%22seeing%20that%20this%20time%20of%20the%20Error%20of%20the%20Gentiles%20is%20fulfilled%22&f=false>. Matthias Janow, a Bohemian follower of Wycliffe, showed similar sentiments when he predicted that "before the end of the world the church of Christ shall be reformed, renovated, and more widely extended." See his *De Regulis Veteris et Novi Testamenti* (Concerning the Rules of the Old and the New Testaments), in Augustus Neander, *General History of the Christian Religion and Church*, tran. J. Torrey (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1850–6), 5:200. This dream of some late Medieval scholars would, of course, come to fruition in the age of the Reformation.

Luther's influential interpretation of Daniel 2, historicism's initiating prophecy, clearly indicated that it climaxed at the Second Coming of Christ. "We find," Luther stated, that "all the dreams and visions," regardless of "how fearful they might be, end always in joy and gladness with the coming of Christ and His kingdom, yea, for that chief article of faith, the coming of Christ, these visions were given, explained, and recorded."<sup>107</sup> This sentiment, in principle, was applied by the followers of Luther to Daniel and most of Revelation.<sup>108</sup>

### **Dichotomy of Christ and Antichrist**

A major characteristic of canonical apocalyptic is the warfare between Christ and the Antichrist.<sup>109</sup> The arch-enemy of Christ first appeared in Scripture under the symbol of a "little horn" in Dan 7 and 8, but did not receive the title Antichrist until John's Epistles at the end of the first century CE. The images of the Man of Sin in 2 Thess 2 and the sea-beast of Rev 13 then became integrated with Daniel's symbols in the same comprehensive historical perspective.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>*Dr. Martin Luthers Sammtliche Schriften*, ed. J. G. Walch (St. Louis: Concordia, 1881–1910), 6:942–3. Translation in *PFF*, 2:273.

<sup>108</sup>Some went beyond Luther's sober approach; even close associates such as Michael Stifel who, from the pulpit, announced that the world would collapse on October 19, 1533, at 8:00 am. See Barnes, "Images of Hope and Despair: Western Apocalypticism: Ca. 1500–1800," in *EA*, 2:153. 156.

<sup>109</sup>A diabolic Antichrist character is also found in Judaism (as shown above) and Islam, respectively named Armilus and Dajjal. See McGinn, *Antichrist*, 109–113. The Antichrist theme is central to Daniel and Revelation. The identification of the Antichrist assumes that foundational hermeneutical principles have been activated and adhered to: historical progression, symbology, theology, year-day principle, etc. Thus, the interpretive process of identifying the Antichrist is loaded with "hermeneutical assumptions" and is, therefore, a proper justification for placing extra focus on the theme of the Antichrist in this historical survey.

<sup>110</sup>See Justin Martyr, *Dialogue With Trypho* 32; Ireneaus, *Against Heresies* 5.25–30; Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 24, and *Apology* 32; Origen, *Against Celsus* 6.45–46; Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* 28–33; Victorinus, *Commentary on Revelation* 13.

Irenaeus (130–200) was the first to formulate the emerging interpretive tradition that Antichrist would be a real future person.<sup>111</sup> According to some, he would come from the tribe of Dan which was hermeneutically defended from Scripture: Dan was the only tribe from the Old Testament not mentioned in the New Jerusalem of the Apocalypse.<sup>112</sup> From Irenaeus on, interpreters attempted to solve the riddle of the apocalyptic number of the beast, 666, in Rev 13. Irenaeus, however, and many after him, refrained from dogmatism on this point: only after the fall of the Empire could anyone know the exact identity of the Antichrist.<sup>113</sup>

Justin Martyr (died c. 165) spoke of the Antichrist as “already at the door,”<sup>114</sup> and Origen (c. 185–c. 254), who so often refrained from apocalyptic speculation, did not deny the possibility of a real Antichrist figure.<sup>115</sup> Tertullian (c. 160–c. 240) was so certain of the coming of Antichrist that he urged fellow Christians to pray for the continuation of the Roman Empire, for what would come would be worse than what was then.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.25–28. See also Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist*.

<sup>112</sup>Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* 14–15.

<sup>113</sup>Irenaeus believed gematria solved the riddle related to 666 and tentatively suggested Teitan, Evanthis, or Lateinos as solutions, with the last, in his opinion, being the most probable. For Irenaeus formative interpretation on the number of the beast, see his *Against Heresies* 5.30.3.

<sup>114</sup>Justin, *Dialogue* 32. Justin, furthermore, believed in two comings of Christ, the first in humility; the second, after the Antichrist’s coming, would be in glory and expected to come soon, see Justin, *Dialogue*, 31 and 49. He did not refrain from acknowledging that “many . . . of pure and reverent faith” saw end-time events differently than himself. Justin, *Dialogue*, 80.

<sup>115</sup>Origen, *Against Celsus* 6.45 f.

<sup>116</sup>“There is also another and a greater necessity for our offering prayer in behalf of the emperors, nay, for the complete stability of the empire, and for Roman interest in general. For we know that a mighty shock impending over the whole earth—in fact, the very end of all things threatening dreadful woes—is only retarded by the continued existence of the Roman empire. We have no desire, then, to be overtaken by these dire events; and in praying that their coming may be delayed, we are lending our aid to Rome’s duration,” (Tertullian, *Apology* 32). Cyprian, as well, felt “its end nearly approaching,” in Cyprian, *Ad Demetrianum* 3. Hippolytus, however, did not sense the same nearness. He suggested, like many after him,

Here again, as noted previously, it is clear that Daniel was the guide and reference-point to history, and interpreters increasingly applied hermeneutical principles derived from Daniel to their study of Revelation. John Chrysostom (c. 347–407) and others explicitly stated their indebtedness to Daniel for understanding Paul.<sup>117</sup> The synchronization of Daniel, Paul, and Revelation meant that the Antichrist was expected to appear after the fourth beast, universally interpreted as the Roman Empire.<sup>118</sup>

Since this empire, though dying, had not yet collapsed completely by the time of Jerome and Augustine (c. 420), the Antichrist was seen as yet future.<sup>119</sup> Jerome also saw the Antichrist in the latter part of Daniel 11.<sup>120</sup> Interestingly, Tyconius identified the Church of Rome with both the Babylonian whore and the Antichrist imagery.<sup>121</sup>

Augustine's challenge to historicism took place during a significant transition period in the history of prophetic interpretation. As Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome succeeded each other, according to Dan 2 and 7, so Rome was expected to be divided into ten kingdoms, among which the Antichrist would appear. History would then reach its climax in the Second Coming of Christ. That was the opinion until Augustine, but a

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that the second coming of Christ would take place 500 years after Christ's first coming," see his *On Christ and Antichrist*, 4.23 f.

<sup>117</sup>See Chrysostom, *Homilies on Second Thessalonians*, homily 4.

<sup>118</sup>See tabulation in *PFF*, 1:456, 894.

<sup>119</sup>Toward the end of the period, expositors increasingly sensed a nearness. This is reflected in Sulpicius Severus (c. 400) who saw in the appearance of some prophets "that the coming of antichrist is at hand, for he is already practicing in these persons the mystery of iniquity." Cited in Daley, "Apocalypticism," 23. Sulpicius, interestingly, is probably the first Christian to associate Nero with the appearance of the Antichrist; see Daley, "Apocalypticism," 23. Pagan Roman writers had earlier told of Nero's alleged resurrection, or revival, and his post-death appearances well into the second century. Tacitus, *History* 1.2; 2. 8, 9; Suetonius, *Nero* 57; Dio Cassius 64.9.

<sup>120</sup>Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel* 11.21.

<sup>121</sup>Tyconius, *Commentary on Revelation* (preserved largely in Augustine), cf. Froom, *PFF*, 1:471–72.

remarkable silence rests over this question in the period after Augustine. In the aftermath of the fall of Rome, no “boasting” king, whether secular or ecclesiastical, could be identified who would rule for three and a half years and thus fulfil the prophecy of the little horn (Antichrist) of Daniel 7.

### **Antichrist in the Middle Ages**

Augustine’s a-historical system had apparently explained away the necessity for a literal coming of Antichrist around the time of the fall and division of the Roman Empire. The fact that no single person fulfilling the characteristics of Antichrist given in Daniel, Paul, and Revelation, including his rule for 1260 days, had appeared in the fifth or sixth centuries. This apparently justified a revision of ancient Christian historicism. Augustine edited that new version.

Although Augustine’s influence on subsequent generations can hardly be overstated, some dared to challenge him. Hundreds of years after classic Rome fell and was split into smaller independent nations and later united under pope and emperor, Walafrid Strabo (808–849) in the ninth century was among the earliest to suggest that the Roman Church could be associated with the Man of Sin in 2 Thess 2.<sup>122</sup> Around the turn of the millennium (c. 1000), Bishop Arnulf of Orleans (d. 1003) also associated the

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<sup>122</sup>Walafrid Strabo, *Glossa Ordinaria*, on 2 Thess 2:3 (PL 114:622): “Except there shall have come already [a falling away]. He speaks in a hidden way concerning the destruction of the Roman Empire that he might not incite them to the persecution of the church; or, he says this, concerning the spiritual empire of the Roman Church or the departure from the faith unless a fugitive comes first. Thus, certain manuscripts mention it. No one doubts that he spoke of the Antichrist whom he calls a fugitive from God. For if this can be said deservedly of all the wicked, how much more about him! Son of perdition, Antichrist not by nature, but by imitation.” Trans. and quoted in Froom, *PFF*, 1:551. Walafrid was typically a historicist when he, in his Revelation commentary, interpreted the seven trumpets historically as periods; the first four trumpets he believed were in the past while the last three were located in the future.

papacy with the Antichrist and argued that the Antichrist is not a person, but a system.

The Church historian Phillip Schaff quoted Arnulf as follows:

What, in your eyes, reverend fathers, is that Pontiff, seated on a throne, and clad in purple and gold? If he hath not charity, and be puffed up with his learning only, he is Antichrist sitting in the temple of God, and demeaning himself as a god; he is like unto a statue in that temple, like a dumb idol, and to ask him a reply, is to appeal to a figure of stone.<sup>123</sup>

A little later, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) and King Frederick II (1194–1250)

believed that both Islam<sup>124</sup> and the papacy had something to do with the Antichrist.<sup>125</sup>

Joachim of Fiore was probably the first Christian expositor to suggest directly what other authors had only implied, namely, that the 1260 days—mentioned seven times in Daniel and Revelation—were to be understood as literal years.<sup>126</sup> Many felt Joachim had solved the mystery of the 1260 days.<sup>127</sup> During the period beginning with Joachim, the argument that “the antichrist need not be looked for; he is here” motivated interpreters

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<sup>123</sup>Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1882–1910), 4:290–2. See also McGinn’s comment: “This rather daring identification of an *unworthy* pope with Antichrist was such a logical conclusion of the 2 Thessalonians picture of the false teacher enshrined in the temple (which many identified with the Church) that one wonders why it had not been drawn earlier. It was to have a vital posterity.” *Antichrist*, 100 (emphasis in original).

<sup>124</sup>See Rusconi, “Antichrist and Antichrists,” 293; McGinn, *Antichrist*, 85–6.

<sup>125</sup>For Bernard of Clairvaux, see his Letters # 124–7, in *Life and Works*, 4 vols., ed. D. J. Mabillon, tran. Samuel J. Eales (London: John Hodges, 1889–96), 1:397–417 (note that the Antichrist is seen as an anti-pope). In addition, Bernard believed the clergy had become servants of the Antichrist; see idem, *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, sermon 33, sec. 15, in *Life and Works*, 4:223–4. For Frederick II see Froom, *PFF*, 1:795–6.

<sup>126</sup>Joachim of Fiore, *Liber Concordia Novi ac Vereris Testamenti* (Venice: Per Simonem de Luere, 1519), fol. 12 v., see also Froom, *PFF*, 1:700.

<sup>127</sup>One possible exception is the Jewish writer Halevi who suggested Islam’s rule represents the three and a half years of apocalyptic supremacy of the Antichrist, (see Halevi, *Daniel*, 33, 41–42), and by so doing, indirectly indicated a much longer period than a literal three and a half years of supremacy.



to explore Dan 7, 2 Thess 2, and Rev 13.<sup>128</sup> Thus, in the atmosphere of ecclesiasticism and politics, there was “an increased emphasis on the eschatological role of the ecclesiastical figure of the Roman pope.”<sup>129</sup> The Antichrist, which the ancient Christians feared would come and whose contemporary existence was not recognized up to the 1100s, was seriously reconsidered during the period from Joachim to Luther.<sup>130</sup>

Joachim of Fiore set in motion a reaction against Augustinian eschatology, which would one day grow into the Protestant Reformation.<sup>131</sup> The irony of history is that Joachim remained a friend of the Roman Catholic Church and entertained close contact with three popes.<sup>132</sup> His followers, (often called Joachimites and recruited especially from

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<sup>128</sup>Bernard of Cluny declared in poetic language, as Dante would do later, the degraded state of the Roman church, and inspired a deeper exploration of the apocalyptic writings of the Bible for prophetic verification. Bernard, for example, alleged the antipope Anacletus II to be the Antichrist (*Letter* 124). Thus, begins a lengthy period of identifying the system of the church with the one that “need not be looked for.” See, e.g., Gerhoh of Reichenberg, Archbishop of Salzburg Eberhard II, Robert Grosseteste, and Pierre Jean d’Olivi. D’Olivi counted the 1260 days from the seventh year after the death of Christ when Peter was, allegedly, elevated as Jesus’s successor; for all these interpreters, see Froom, *PFF*, vol. 1. From d’Olivi’s time, interpreters (too many to mention in this work), continued to entertain the interpretation that the papacy had something to do with the figure of the Antichrist. In *The Life of Saint Benedict* (c. 1187), Joachim hinted in that direction when he stated that “we ought to beware lest Antichrist himself now be hiding among the Latins” (cited in Rusconi, “Antichrist and Antichrists,” 302). Three or four years later Joachim expressed the idea that “the Antichrist has already been born in the city of Rome and will obtain the Apostolic Throne there” (cited in Rusconi, “Antichrist and Antichrists,” 302). Finally, in his famous *Exposition on Revelation*, the Abbot of Fiore expressed: “He is the great Antichrist whom I think is already present in the world” (cited in Rusconi, “Antichrist and Antichrists,” 302). Thus, according to Roberto Rusconi, “for Joachim, then, Antichrist ceased to be a false Jewish Messiah, and became, in contrast to tradition, a figure within Latin Christendom.” Rusconi, “Antichrist and Antichrists,” 303.

<sup>129</sup>Rusconi, “Antichrist and Antichrists,” 297.

<sup>130</sup>See Reeves, “The Originality and Influence of Joachim of Fiore.”

<sup>131</sup>“What makes Joachim of Fiore so significant in history of apocalypticism? First, the tendency to link apocalyptic symbolism with concrete past and present events . . . Despite his politeness toward Augustine, Joachim’s theology of history is fundamentally at odds with that of the bishop of Hippo.” McGinn, *Antichrist*, 136–7.

<sup>132</sup>Despite this, Joachim repeatedly implied the close proximity between the Antichrist and the papal system. Two “new religious orders” of “spiritual men,” according to Joachim, “would resist the Antichrist not by force of arms but by prayer and preaching.” See McGinn, “Apocalypticism and Church Reform: 1100–1500,” in *EA*, 2:80, 89.

among the Spiritual Franciscans), however, soon became hard-core critics of the papacy. After his death, Joachim was eventually regarded as either a prophet or a heretic. The medieval Bohemian reformers, and Wycliffe's followers, the Lollards, all traced important aspects of their apocalyptic hermeneutics back to Joachim.<sup>133</sup> Before Joachim, the medieval world had "failed" to identify the Antichrist. After Joachim, the Antichrist began to be seen as already present. Joachim's innovative year-for-a-day hermeneutic set in motion a search for the identity of the Antichrist.<sup>134</sup>

Joachim's year-day application enabled subsequent historicist interpreters to see that the Antichrist might have been among them for hundreds of years already. The text in 2 Thess 2 had indicated to a representative group of interpreters from ancient times that the Man of Sin would rule within the church. Although the consensus was not yet as complete on the interpretation of the sea-beast of Rev 13, the texts in Daniel and Paul provided sufficient scriptural foundation for many expositors to declare the papacy, in one aspect or another, to be the Antichrist.<sup>135</sup>

Pierre de Jean Olivi (1248–1298) agreed with Joachim's history-based hermeneutic and added that the fifth period (of Joachim's historical septets)<sup>136</sup> described

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<sup>133</sup>See Reeves, "The Originality and Influence of Joachim of Fiore."

<sup>134</sup>For surveys of writings on the Antichrist during this period see, McGinn, *Antichrist*, 114–99.

<sup>135</sup>This explicit interpretation, which began with Eberhard, is of course found more frequently toward the end of the Middle Ages. On Daniel, from Augustine until the Waldensians, see Froom, *PFF*, 1:894–5. On Revelation, from Dante until end of Middle Ages, see Froom, *PFF*, 2:156–7. Joachim once responded to an inquiry regarding whether the Antichrist had already been born; McGinn, "Apocalypticism and Church Reform," 86.

<sup>136</sup>On Joachim, see pp. 87, 91–93, 99–100, above.

the papacy.<sup>137</sup> D’Olivi, the most important of Joachim’s followers and a student of Bonaventure, went beyond the hints from both masters in explicitly associating the current papal system with the Antichrist,<sup>138</sup> and/or Babylon,<sup>139</sup> an interpretation that eventually led the dissenting movement of the Spiritual Franciscans, and others, to go underground.<sup>140</sup> Nicholas of Lyra (d. 1340), a Greek and Hebrew scholar and commentator on Daniel and Revelation, became part of this breakaway movement from Augustine’s spiritualization effort.<sup>141</sup> He viewed, according to McGinn, the Apocalypse “as a straightforward account of the history of the church.”<sup>142</sup>

As the tension between the papal church and dissenting reformist voices increased, so also did the need for the reformists to sharpen their arguments for identifying the papacy as the Antichrist. While in the midst of a cross-fire between king and pope,<sup>143</sup> Archbishop Eberhard II of Salzburg (c. 1170–1246) introduced an expanded

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<sup>137</sup>Pierre Jean d’Olivi, *Postilla in Apocalypsim (Lecture on Revelation)* in Froom, *PFF*, 1:708. Rusconi said that d’Olivi invented “the individuation of an *antichristus mixticus*, who was seen as preparing the way for the other Great Antichrist, and who was a sort of incarnation of the corruption present in the church.” Rusconi, “Antichrist and Antichrists,” 304.

<sup>138</sup>See McGinn, *Antichrist*, 161; idem, “Apocalypticism and Church Reform,” 94; cf. Gian Luca Potestà, “Radical Apocalyptic Movements,” 115.

<sup>139</sup>Potestà, “Radical Apocalyptic Movements,” 115; Lerner, “Millennialism,” 350.

<sup>140</sup>McGinn, “Apocalypticism and Church Reform,” 95; Potestà, “Radical Apocalyptic Movements,” 111. D’Olivi, according to Rupescissa, produced “the most extensive prophetic program formulated in the later Middle Ages” in the form of “systematic prophetic handbooks.” Lerner, “Millennialism,” 351–2.

<sup>141</sup>He did, however, maintain, Tyconius’ seven rules, Froom, *PFF*, 2:67.

<sup>142</sup>McGinn, *Antichrist*, 145. Nicholas, according to Collins, “favored a linear prophetic reading that saw in the apocalypses a prediction of history down to the end of the world,” Collins, *Daniel*, 118–9.

<sup>143</sup>Gregory IX identified the emperor Frederick as the sea-beast of Rev 13, while Frederick responded by calling the Pope the red horse of Rev 6. This war of words (applying apocalyptic imagery polemically) intensified, since no side would concede. See McGinn, “Apocalypticism and Church Reform,” 88–9. Cf. Idem, *Antichrist*, 152–57.

interpretation of Daniel 7 consistent with the history of the last 700 years—since the fall of Imperial Rome. He identified the Church of Rome as the historical fulfillment of the little horn of Daniel 7. He was the first to do so consistently and based on the Bible and history. The significance that this interpretation would gain among historicists justifies its being cited in full.

Ten kings exist at the same time, who have divided the circle of the earth, formerly the Roman empire, not for ruling but for destroying. There are ten horns, *that which seemed incredible to divine Aurelius Augustine*; the Turks, the Greeks, the Egyptians, the Africans, the Spaniards, the Gauls, the English, the Germans, the Sicilians, the Italians possess the Roman provinces and have cut off the Roman colonists in these parts. And a little horn has sprung up under these, which has eyes and a mouth speaking great things; he reduces to order the three most powerful kingdoms of Sicily, Italy, and Germany, and compels them to serve him; with an unendurable lordship he plagues the people of Christ, and the saints of God; he mingles divine and human things, he sets in motion the abominable and the detestable things. What is more clear than this prophecy? All the signs and wonders which that heavenly teacher of ours pointed out to us (unroll the chronicles) have been fulfilled long ago.<sup>144</sup>

Eberhard's formative interpretation would soon, though not in detail, become a standard among many if not most historicists.

Although many would follow the logic of Eberhard, Thomas Aquinas (1125–1274), hesitated to ground this prophecy on contemporary fulfillment, preferring to look to the distant past or future for its fulfillments. Here Aquinas anticipated the yet-to-come Counter-Reformation dual interpretive paradigm. Thus, Aquinas, as most preterist interpreters, saw the little horn in Dan 8 representing Antiochus IV Epiphanes (distant past), who was a *type* of the future Antichrist.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup>In Johannes Turmair, (pseudo. Ioanne Aventino), *Annalium Boiorum Libri Septem* (Ingoldstadt: Per Alexandrum & Samuelem Weissenhorn, 1554), 685. (italics mine). For authentication support of Turmair's or Aventinos' (1477–1534) *Annals*, see Froom, *PFF*, 1:798.

<sup>145</sup>Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio in Danielelem*, chaps. 8, 12, pp. 38, 40, 58.

Many intellectuals and reformers within the medieval Roman Catholic world would openly declare their conviction of a papal fulfilment of apocalyptic prophecies.<sup>146</sup> The *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, and Bernard McGinn's *Antichrist* all document an extensive list of such people, including, for example, Robert Grosseteste, Pierre de Jean Olivi,<sup>147</sup> Dante Alighieri,<sup>148</sup> Bridget of Sweden,<sup>149</sup> Jan Milic,<sup>150</sup> John Wycliffe,<sup>151</sup> John Huss,<sup>152</sup> and Girolamo Savonarola.<sup>153</sup>

Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498), the last renowned prophetic voice of the late Middle Ages, a reformer before Luther, and a martyr for his prophetic interpretation, advocated the historical continuity of canonical apocalyptic interpretation.<sup>154</sup> Moreover, he increasingly identified the current pope, Alexander VI, with the Antichrist, and saw the overthrow of Roman Babylon as imminent.<sup>155</sup> He met his death at the stake in 1498. Less than twenty years later, similar expressions prompted the Lateran Council (1512–

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<sup>146</sup>“Dissident Franciscans [the Spirituals and the Fraticelli] were the most energetic proponents of the identification of a false pope with Antichrist thus far.” McGinn, *Antichrist*, 166.

<sup>147</sup>McGinn, *Antichrist*, 159–62.

<sup>148</sup>McGinn, *Antichrist*, 170–2.

<sup>149</sup>Birgitta probably applied canonical apocalyptic for polemic reasons, on one occasion she even implied that the Pope was worse than Lucifer, see Froom, *PFF*, 2:69.

<sup>150</sup>McGinn, *Antichrist*, 183.

<sup>151</sup>McGinn, *Antichrist*, 181–7.

<sup>152</sup>McGinn, *Antichrist*, 183–7.

<sup>153</sup>“His reformist ideas brought him increasingly into conflict with the corrupt Alexander VI and the papal curia (though he never denounced the pope as Antichrist).” McGinn, *Antichrist*, 188.

<sup>154</sup>Savonarola in the sermon “The Renewal of the Church” understood, e.g., the seven seals as fulfilled in a progressive manner. Jan 13, 1495, in *Compendium Revelationum* (Manual of Revelations), 1495. For an English tran. of some of Savonarola's thoughts on apocalyptic, see Bernard McGinn, trans., *Apocalyptic Spirituality* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979), section on Savonarola.

<sup>155</sup>Potestà, “Radical Apocalyptic Movements,” 134.

17) to forbid any personal interpretations of the Antichrist.<sup>156</sup> Savonarola himself was regarded as a revolutionary reformist, not a true heretic. The same council proudly declared that Huss was the last heretic, and after Huss, said one cardinal at the council, “there is barely a voice of dissent; glorious times lie ahead.”<sup>157</sup>

### The Reformers and the Antichrist

Martin Luther (1483–1546) set the tone and standard for subsequent interpreters, owing much to earlier interpreters for his insight into the prophetic word. His enthusiasm for the Book of Daniel is shown in that he made sure to send its German translation to the printer before the other translated books of the Old Testament.<sup>158</sup> His interpretation of Daniel 2 is evidence for the longevity of an interpretation beginning already in pre-Christian time.

The first kingdom is the Assyrian or Babylonian kingdom; the second, the Medo-Persian; the third, the great kingdom of Alexander and the Greeks; and the fourth, the Roman Empire. In this the whole world agrees, and history supports it fully in detail. But the prophet has the most to say about the Roman empire . . . : the legs, the feet, and the toes. The Roman empire will be divided. Spain, France, England, and others emerged from it, some of them weak, others strong, and although it will be divided there will still be some strength, as symbolized by the iron in it.... This empire shall last until the end; no one will destroy it but Jesus himself, when His kingdom comes.<sup>159</sup>

In response to attacks from Ambrosius Catharinus, a Catholic theologian, Luther defended his identification of papacy with the Antichrist in the most emphatic language,

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<sup>156</sup>For session 11, Dec. 19, 1516: “Nor shall they presume to announce or predict in their sermons any fixed time of future evils, the coming of Antichrist, or the day of the last judgment,” see J. D. Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum conciliorum nova, et amplissima collection* (Paris: Huberto Welter, 1901–27), 32:946.

<sup>157</sup>See Mansi 32:892.

<sup>158</sup>See Froom, *PFF*, 2:266–267.

<sup>159</sup>Luther, *Schriften*, 6:898–900. Translation from Froom, *PFF*, 2:267–68.

seeing Rome as the little horn, in its respective pagan and papal phases, coming up from the direction of one of the four horns of the goat (Dan 8:8–9).<sup>160</sup> Luther apparently struggled with the little horn in Dan 7, particularly with the 1260 days, a struggle he shared with Melancthon, the latter calling it a “dark passage” representing a long time.<sup>161</sup> Elsewhere in Daniel and Revelation, Luther generally applied the year-day principle. He believed the 70 weeks (490 days) in Dan 9 represented 490 years, which he began to count from the second year of Darius, and argued that

all teachers are in harmony that these are year-weeks and not day-weeks, that means, a week encompasses seven years and not seven days. This also is taught by experience, for seventy day-weeks would not even span two years, and that would not be a remarkable period for such a wonderful revelation; therefore, these seventy weeks are 490 years.<sup>162</sup>

During this time, 2 Thess 2 remained a key text for identifying the Antichrist. Luther and most other Protestants in the post-Reformation era accepted the interpretation that when Imperial Rome fell, the papal Antichrist had placed himself in “the temple of God” (2 Thess 2:4). Luther sometimes seemed ambivalent when he, at one moment, referred to Mohammed as the Antichrist and in the next, referred to the Pope as the same. However, when Luther referred to Mohammed and the papacy together as the Antichrist, he implied that the papal part was the most formidable antichristian of the two.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup>See Luther, *Schriften*, vol. 18, cols. 1470 ff. Luther’s long letter to Catharinus is also in the Weimar edition, 7:705–78. See also Froom, *PFF*, 2:261.

<sup>161</sup>See Melancthon’s, *Danielem Prophetam*, on Dan 7, in *Opera* 13:858–60. Luther stated that he could not “adequately define or comprehend this prophecy [of 1260 days].” See Luther, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, ed. and tran. W. Hazlitt (London: H. G. Bohn, 1857), 195–6.

<sup>162</sup>Luther, *Schriften*, 6:906, translation in Froom, *PFF*, 2:270. For a recent English translation, see M. Luther, *Luther’s Works*, eds. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald and H. T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 55 vols., 35:303.

<sup>163</sup>See Luther, *Table Talk*, no. 430, pp. 193–4. Cf. McGuinn, *Antichrist*, 206; Froom, *PFF*, 2:271–2.

Although Luther republished Purvey's commentary on Revelation in 1528 in Wittenberg<sup>164</sup> and wrote a warm and passionate preface to it, Luther was not so explicit in his own interpretations of Revelation, a book he only gave full credence to later in life.<sup>165</sup> Because of his relative silence on Revelation, Luther did not exert the formative influence on interpreting Revelation as he did with his interpretations of Daniel. Before Luther and beyond, at least until Newton, the consensus on how to interpret Daniel was almost universal, while no consensus for Revelation can be seen in any era up to Newton, except for the general application of historicist hermeneutic.

The Reformers agreed on the identity of the Antichrist, but not always on the precise scriptural basis for it. The little horn in Dan 7 was almost always seen as the Antichrist, usually identified with the papacy, but occasionally with Islam, whereas the sea-beast in Rev 13, an apparently identical figure under another symbol,<sup>166</sup> was almost as often interpreted as either pagan or papal Rome, whereas the land-beast in the same chapter was almost always interpreted as the papacy or its prelates. Despite such disagreements, the Reformers could unite completely on the identity of Paul's antichristian "man of sin" in 2 Thess 2.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup>See *PFF*, 2:284 and McGinn, *Antichrist*, 335n25. The first Protestant commentary of Revelation by a contemporary was issued the same year by Francis Lombert. See Barnes, "Images of Hope and Despair," 149.

<sup>165</sup>Barnes stated that in later years, Luther's "tone became more markedly and consistently apocalyptic as his interest in the historical dimension grew." Barnes, "Images of Hope and Despair," 152.

<sup>166</sup>Revelation 13:1–10. Similarities between Dan 7 and Rev 13 are so numerous and explicit that we could conclude, together with many interpreters from ancient times on, that they may represent the same power.

<sup>167</sup>See the various tabulations in Froom, *PFF*, for the entire period' for commentators on Daniel, see 2:528–29; and for commentators on Revelation, see 2:530–31.



Through the strong influence of the medieval historicist tradition, logic, and his own historical and Scriptural research, Luther was convinced by 1520 of Antichrist's identity with the papacy.<sup>168</sup> On this point, Luther was strong, even rebuking Melanchthon's wording in the *Confession of Augsburg* (*Confessio Augustana*) for having "passed lightly over" certain articles of faith, "and above all, of the Pope and of Antichrist."<sup>169</sup> Here also, Luther set the tone for his contemporaries and later generations.

That Luther and Melanchthon<sup>170</sup> saw the Turkish Antichrist in the little horn of Dan 7, did not prevent several major writers from challenging this by explicitly ruling out Mohammed and the Turks and claiming the papacy as the prime fulfillment of the little horn. Nicolaus von Amsdorf (1483–1565), one of Luther's intimate friends, protested against the Turkish interpretation.<sup>171</sup> The English reformers from Wycliffe on were especially unified in opposing the Turkish interpretation.<sup>172</sup> The Swiss Reformer Bullinger argued:

By the little horn many understand the kingdom of Mohammed, of the Saracens and of the Turks. ... But when the apostolic prophecy in Second Thessalonians 2 is more carefully examined, it seems that this prophecy of Daniel and that prophecy of the

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<sup>168</sup>See Scott H. Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy: Stages in a Reformation Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), esp. 95–143. See also Martin Luther, *Dr. Martin Luthers Sammtliche Schriften*, ed. J. G. Walch, vol. 15 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1881–1910), 1639 (translation in *PFF* 2:256). By 1520, Luther had identified the papacy with Antichrist. Jean-Robert Armogathe, "Interpretations of the Revelation of John: 1500–1800," in *EA* 2:188, and Rusconi, "Antichrist and Antichrists," in *EA* 2:311–13.

<sup>169</sup>Cited in Merle d'Aubigné, Jean-Henri, *History of the Reformation of the 16th Century* (New York: Worthington, [n.d.]), 5 vols. in one. Book 14, ch. 8, p. 573.

<sup>170</sup>Melanchthon's *Danielem Prophetam Commentarius*, in *Opera quae supersunt omnia*, 13:858–60.

<sup>171</sup>Nicolaus von Amsdorf, *Funff fürnemliche und gewisse Zeichen aus göttlicher heiliger Schrift* (Jena: Rödinger, 1554), sig. A<sub>4</sub><sup>v</sup>.

<sup>172</sup>See Froom's tabulation for this period, Froom, *PFF*, 2:528–31.

apostle belong more rightly to the kingdom of the Roman pope, which kingdom has arisen from small beginnings and has increased to an immense size.<sup>173</sup>

Various Reformers found the Antichrist in other places than Dan 7, Rev 13, and 2 Thess 2. Luther saw the Antichrist as the little horn in Dan 8,<sup>174</sup> the king of the north in Dan 11:36,<sup>175</sup> and in Dan 11:37, he ruled out the Turks.<sup>176</sup> William Tyndale (1494–1536) saw the papal Antichrist in 1 Tim 4,<sup>177</sup> while Nicholas Ridley (c. 1500–1555) found him in the figure of Babylon in 1 Pet 5:13.<sup>178</sup> Thus, they found the Antichrist in “Daniel, Paul, Peter, John, and even in the words of Christ.”<sup>179</sup> And finally, the poet John Milton (1608–1674), in the words of Emerson, “developed the ready-made anti-Catholicism of Protestant apocalypticism . . . which repeatedly identifies the pope as the Antichrist.”<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>173</sup>Heinrich Bullinger, *Daniel Sapientissimus Dei Propheta*. (Tiguri [Zurich]: C. Froshoverus, 1576), ch. 7, f. 78<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>174</sup>Melanchthon saw the fulfillment of the little horn in Antiochus Epiphanes, both in Daniel 7 and 8, making him at least a type of the Antichrist, see his *Daniel*, in *Opera*, 13:866–72. Luther ironically, saw Islam in the little horn of Dan 7 while he sees Rome and its continuation in the little horn of Dan 8, see *Schriften*, 6:904–05; cf. his writing to Ambrosius Catharinus.

<sup>175</sup>Luther, *Schriften*, 6:917. Cf. Froom, *PFF*, 2:271.

<sup>176</sup>Luther, *Schriften*, 22:844–845. There is a consensus among contemporary scholars that Luther “did not believe that the Turkish threat was the Antichrist in the same true and proper sense that the papacy was. It was Luther’s followers who really introduced the dual Antichrist of pope and Turk,” McGinn, *Antichrist*, 206.

<sup>177</sup>Tyndale, *An Answer to Sir Thomas More’s Dialogue*, in *The Works of William Tyndale* (Cambridge: University Press, 1850), 3:171.

<sup>178</sup>Nicholas Ridley, *A Piteous Lamentation of the Miserable Estate of the Church in England . . .*, in *The Works of Nicholas Ridley* [ . . . ] *Martyr*, 1555, ed. H. Christmas (Cambridge: University Press, 1841), 53.

<sup>179</sup>Froom, *PFF*, 2:327.

<sup>180</sup>Richard K. Emerson, “Apocalyptic Themes and Imagery in Medieval and Renaissance Literature,” in *EA*, 2:411. Milton, who was an ardent apocalyptic historicist interpreter, is conspicuously absent from Froom’s *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, except for his poem on the massacre of the Waldensians in 1655, in which Milton attacked papal brutality in exalted poetry. For a detailed study of Milton’s prophetic eschatology, see Juliet Cummins, ed., *Milton and the Ends of Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

The opposite of the Antichrist, the true church, was seen as one day shining in its brilliance, freed from papal or kingly interferences. Thus, the idea of restitutionism—the appearing of a true church before the Second Coming of Christ—gradually emerged.<sup>181</sup>

To arrive at these interpretations, historicism was the hermeneutical guide with its focus on Scripture and history as sources. It was also clear to Luther that “prophecies can only be perfectly understood after they have been fulfilled.”<sup>182</sup> Apocalyptic history was prophecy fulfilled and paved the way for a modern understanding of history.<sup>183</sup> The new theological construction of humanism required more rigor from historical studies in which primary sources were required to support a case historically.

Finding support for the beginning point of the 1260 years, therefore, became closely associated with historical studies. After thorough investigations into the period between Constantine and Charlemagne, the long transition between antiquity and the medieval world, interpreters increasingly focused on the period of one hundred years before and after Justinian. They were searching for decrees and events to discover the beginning of the papal reign.<sup>184</sup> Toward the end of the period, several interpreters settled

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<sup>181</sup>See Barnes, “Images of Hope and Despair,” 166.

<sup>182</sup>Luther, *Schriften* 6:933, 936; translated in *PFF*, 2:272. In 1541, Luther issued “a major world chronology, the *Supputatio annorum mundi*, in which he reckoned the age of the world and made clear his conviction that time was running out.” Barnes, “Images of Hope and Despair,” 153. In 1538, Johann Carion’s popular *Chronica*, edited by Melancthon, was published. See Barnes, “Images of Hope and Despair,” 153. After the death of Luther, “ever-larger collections of his prophecies also appeared, mostly those he made in the period after 1530. Proliferating in these collections (which were huge publishing successes) was a blood-curdling picture of the short time remaining in this world.” Barnes, “Images of Hope and Despair,” 155.

<sup>183</sup>Thus, in this period we find “an expressed need to investigate the past history of the church for prophetic signs to allow one to understand the future.” Armogathe, “Interpretations,” 197.

<sup>184</sup>From the middle of the seventeenth century the majority of representative writers focused in on the period between 400 and 600 as the beginning point of the 1260 years. See Froom’s tabulation in *PFF*, 2:784–87.

on Justinian's own reign as the great transition-point in which the Pope was exalted universally above the other patriarchs.<sup>185</sup>

### The Year-Day Principle and Historical Verification

The symbolic use of "day" to represent a historic year had very early been hinted at and commonly applied to the seventy-weeks prophecy in Dan 9. Eusebius of Ceasarea (265–339) was in a historicist mindset when he placed the seventy weeks of Daniel between Artaxerxes (fifth century BCE) and Jesus (first century CE), clearly reasoning from the day-for-a-year principle.<sup>186</sup> Tyconius (d. c. 400) seemed to have been the first Christian to regard "a day" (i.e., one day) as an apocalyptic symbol outside of Dan 9 when he interpreted the three and a half days in Rev 11 to represent 350 years: a day for 100 years.<sup>187</sup>

The interpretation of the seventy weeks of Dan 9 supplemented and strengthened this historic perspective.<sup>188</sup> These weeks were increasingly viewed as prophetic and (without any stated hermeneutic) were understood on the basis of a year for a day. This was the only logical conclusion since interpreters believed these weeks began at an early time after the sixth century BC and reached their fulfilment at the time of Jerusalem's

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<sup>185</sup>Froom, *PFF*, 2:784–87.

<sup>186</sup>Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel* 8.2.

<sup>187</sup>See Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticæ*, 4:332; argumentation for this in Daley, "Apocalypticism," 44, see endnote 12. Tyconius' *Commentary on Revelation* is reconstructed through Augustine, Primasius, Bede, and Beatus. He was followed in this year-day understanding almost 200 years later by Primasius, see his *Primasii Commentaria super Apocalypsim B. Joannis*, 11 (PL 68:867).

<sup>188</sup>Ireneaus continued the speculation about the age of the world; it was by his time common to regard world history as a week of 6,000 years; see Ireneaus, *Against Heresies* 5.28.3. For a short insightful presentation of the 6,000 years theory, spanning interpreters from antiquity to the modern era, see Roy Gane, "Apocalypse Now," *JATS* 8, no. 1 (1997): 221–5.

destruction in AD 70.<sup>189</sup> Eventually, the Jerusalem expiration date was moved increasingly toward the time of Jesus' first coming.<sup>190</sup> Thus, two PEVs (Dan 2 and 7) and the seventy-weeks prophecy of Dan 9 were grasped and consented to, in principle, by the earliest Christians.

The year-day principle continued to be applied uniquely to the seventy weeks, only hundreds of years later to the 1260 days, occasionally to the 2300 evenings-mornings in Dan 8,<sup>191</sup> and to the 1290 and 1335 days in Dan 12. The famous Jewish interpreter Rashi (Solomon Ben Isaac, 1040–1105) even suggested a specific year for the fulfilment of the time prophecies in Dan 12.<sup>192</sup> The “three and a half days” period in Rev 11 was likewise occasionally interpreted with this principle in mind. Jepheth Ibn-Ali Halevi (tenth century) suggested that Islam was the little horn in Dan 7 and, therefore, would rule for three and a half years.<sup>193</sup> Since Halevi wrote many years after the rise of Islam, it follows that he might have applied the year-day principle to the prophecy. Bruno

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<sup>189</sup>Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews* 8,11; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.21. Origen, apparently, put ten years for a day from Adam to AD 70; see *PG* 13:1656–58; cf. Daley, “Apocalypticism,” 15–16, which suggests that Origen placed the seventy weeks of years “between the prophet and the fall of Jerusalem.”

<sup>190</sup>Hippolytus placed the period between Ezra and Christ; see his *Fragments From Commentaries*, “On Daniel,” fragment 2, chs. 10–16, (*ANF* 5:180–81); Julius Africanus (c. 160–c. 240), in *The Extant Fragments of the Five Books of the Chronography of Julius Africanus*, fragment 19, placed the seventy weeks from 444 BC to AD 31.

<sup>191</sup>Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464), German cardinal and philosopher, was apparently the earliest to suggest the year-day principle for the 2300 evenings and mornings in Dan 8. See L. E. Froom, *Finding the Lost Prophetic Witnesses* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1946), 31.

<sup>192</sup>Rashi believed the 1290 and 1335 prophetic symbolic days expired in AD 1352; see Froom, *Prophetic Faith*, 2:210. For Jewish interpreters on Daniel during this period, see Joseph Sarachek, *The Doctrine of the Messiah in Medieval Jewish Literature* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1932), esp. 188–232.

<sup>193</sup>Jepheth Ibn Ali Halevi, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. and tran. D. S. Margoliouth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), 33, 41–2.

of Segni (c. 1049–1123) suggested Ezek 4:6 as a supporting text for the year-day principle.<sup>194</sup>

Thus, long before the Protestant Reformation, influential writers on canonical apocalyptic agreed that the year-day principle could also be applied to the time periods in Revelation.<sup>195</sup> Arguments from Scripture, logic, and history, in favor of the year-day principle, continued to be added to those Joachim had introduced.<sup>196</sup> R. Wimbledon, a Lollard preacher, wrote at the end of the fourteenth century: “A day must be taken for a year, both by authority of Holy Writ in the same place and in other, and also by reason.”<sup>197</sup> There was no consensus among interpreters on specific years as starting points or ending points as yet, though much speculation took place in both Judaism and Christianity concerning the exact year of the appearing of the Antichrist.

After Joachim, interpreters attempted to fine tune when to start and end the 1260 and 2300 days and the seventy weeks without reaching a consensus. The hermeneutical key from the year-day principle, combined with the Messianic imagery in the text itself, helped many interpreters to locate the endpoint of the seventy weeks more precisely on Jesus’ last three and a half years.<sup>198</sup>

The above shows that learned men of this period considered history as an

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<sup>194</sup>Bruno of Segni, *Expositio in Apocalypsim* (PL 165:663–4).

<sup>195</sup>See Froom, *PFF*, 1:896–7.

<sup>196</sup>See Froom, *PFF*, 1:700–1. In Abraham Abulafias’ Commentary on Sefer ha-Edut, Dan 12:7, which contains that enigmatic time period of “a time, two times, and half a time,” is gematrically calculated to begin in AD 1280 (the Jewish year of 5040); see Idel, “Jewish Apocalypticism,” 211. Gematria was one of the most popular hermeneutical approaches among Jewish interpreters in the Middle Ages.

<sup>197</sup>John Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, ed. Stephen Reed Cattley (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1841), 1:628.

<sup>198</sup>Owusu-Antwi, *Chronology of Daniel* 9, 32.

objective source to verify unfulfilled and fulfilled prophecy. Without an evaluation of church history, historicism cannot exist simply because church history, according to this system of interpretation, is prophecy fulfilled. This is a key assumption of historicism.

Sustained by the principle of consistency, Protestant Reformers interpreted most of the time prophecies in Daniel on a year-day basis. Scottish mathematician John Napier (1550–1617) applied Num 14:34, Ezek 4:5–6, and the seventy weeks as biblical proof of the historicist year-day principle.<sup>199</sup>

The apocalyptic 1260 days and the seventy weeks (490 days), with the days understood as representing years, began to receive much attention by interpreters in the post-Reformation era. After medieval interpreters connected the 1260 symbolic days with the little horn of Dan 7, and subsequently with the papacy, Protestants increasingly sought to find the starting point for the 1260 years, for then the ending year would be revealed. Luther did not understand it. Nor did John Calvin (1509–1564), who wrote commentaries regarding all the books of the Bible except Revelation.<sup>200</sup> Despite the hesitancy on the part of the magisterial Reformers on this point, their followers viewed the transition between the classical and medieval world as the starting point of the career of Antichrist. Suggestions for the beginning of the 1260 days ranged from AD 325 to 800, many zooming in on the period between AD 400 and AD 600 as the best solution.<sup>201</sup>

There was a parallel focus on determining the end point of the 1260 days. Since

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<sup>199</sup>See John Napier, *A Plain Discovery of the Whole Revelation of Saint John: Set Downe in Two Treatises* (Edinburgh: R. Walde-grave, 1593), 1–2.

<sup>200</sup>That is surprising in light of the 1000 plus works or commentaries regarding Revelation published between 1500 and 1700, see Armogathe, “Interpretations,” in EA 2:200n7.

<sup>201</sup>See Froom, *PFF*, vol. 2.

that moment had not yet come, expositors focused their historical research on the transition period between the ancient and medieval world. John Napier (1550–1617), the Scottish mathematician, predicted that papal Rome would fall in 1639.<sup>202</sup> According to Robin Barnes, Nostradamus, the French astrologer of the sixteenth century, “suggested that profound changes could be expected around 1790.”<sup>203</sup>

William Tyndale (c. 1484–1536) carefully explained historical circumstances around the exaltation of the pope during the time of Phocas, who ruled in the first decade of the seventh century, as a possible starting point for the 1260 days.<sup>204</sup> John Jewel (1522–1571) was the first of several to focus on Justinian as the possible starting point.<sup>205</sup> The Renaissance age provided historical tools in the search for a certain *terminus ad quem* for the 1260 symbolic-prophetic days. James Ussher (1581), John Foxe (1516/17–1587), Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575), Nicholas Bernard (c. 1600–1661), John Bale (1495–1563), and even the Jesuit Robert Cardinal Bellarmine (1542–1621)<sup>206</sup> all provided historical background, insight, and facts related to the 1260 days’ fulfillment.

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<sup>202</sup>Froom, *PFF*, 2:162.

<sup>203</sup>Froom, *PFF*, 2:177.

<sup>204</sup>William Tyndale, *The Practice of Prelates* (1530), in *Works*, 2:257.

<sup>205</sup>John Jewel, *A Defense of the Apology*, in *The Works of John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury*, ed. J. Ayre, 4 vols. (Cambridge: The University Press, 1845–50), 4:1032. Thomas Brightman (1562–1607), another influential prophetic interpreter, focused in on a decree of Justinian as a starting-point. See his *A Revelation of the Apocalypse*, ch. 13, in *The Workes of that famous Reverend, and Learned Divine, Mr. Tho: Brightman* (London: Printed by John Field for Samuel Cartwright, 1644), 433.

<sup>206</sup>No wonder his book, *Disputationes Roberti Bellarmini [. . .] de Controversiis Christianae Fidei, Adversus Huic Temporis Haereticos*, 4 vols. (Cologne: Anton & Arnold Hieratorus Brothers, 1628) was placed on the *Index*. See John Kidd, *The Counter-Reformation, 1550–1600* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1937), 185–86. The first edition of the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* appeared in 1557 and was published by Pope Paul IV.



Robert Cardinal Bellarmine, the greatest Roman Catholic apologist of the time, used the lack of consensus among Protestants on the exact starting point of the 1260 days as an argument against the year-day principle.<sup>207</sup> If the Protestants could not agree on the beginning of the 1260 years, the Cardinal argued, their year-day system had failed. The hermeneutical and apologetic significance of such a certain starting point was, of course, immense. Thomas Pyle (1674–1756) understood and acknowledged that though the 1260 years mystery “is yet a secret,” it is

of the highest Concern to Christians to attend to, whether they can precisely fix the Beginning and End of this remarkable Period, or not. Idolatry, Saint Worship, Image Worship, Persecution, Monks, and forged Miracles, are Marks clear enough to warn us against the Danger of being seduced into the Apostacy, tho’ the Date of its Rise and Continuance remain yet a Secret.<sup>208</sup>

### The Jesuit Alternatives

It was evidently the identification of the 1260 days as years—leading Protestants to positively identify the papacy with the Antichrist—that compelled the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation to introduce two other systems of interpretation, preterism and futurism.<sup>209</sup> Preterism located the Antichrist in the first century, contemporaneous with

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<sup>207</sup>Bellarmino’s fifth argument stated that “Antichrist will not reign except for three years and a half. But the Pope has now reigned spiritually in the church more than 1500 years; nor can anyone be pointed out who has been accepted for Antichrist, who has ruled exactly three and one-half years; therefore the Pope is not Antichrist. Then Antichrist has not yet come,” in “De Summo Pontifici,” book 3, ch. 8, in *Disputationes*, tome 1, vol. 1, p. 190, cited in Froom, *PFF*, 2:502.

<sup>208</sup>Thomas Pyle, *A Paraphrase with Notes on the Revelation of St. John* (London: Printed for Noon, 1735), xiii.

<sup>209</sup>The new Jesuit systems of interpretation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have been surveyed by Armogathe, “Interpretations,” 186–97. It includes a section on Jacques Benigne Bossuet’s (non-Jesuit Catholic preacher) blending of all three systems, i.e., futurism, preterism, and historicism, in order to defend Catholicism from all Protestant allegations. McGinn’s *Antichrist*, in the section, “Catholics Respond to the Protestant Challenge,” gives proportionally little attention to the new schemes, despite their incredible impact on later perceptions of Antichrist, see pp. 226–30. For a comprehensive survey of formative preterist and futurist Catholic interpreters, see E. B. Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticæ*, 4:464–506. Froom is, as usual, encyclopedic on any given period and expression, especially this one. *PFF*, vol. 2,

the writer of Revelation. Futurism located the Antichrist in the very last days, the far-distant future, separated from continuous church history by a long indefinite historical gap. Both these approaches located the Antichrist far from the Middle Ages and thus insulated the papacy from any association with the Antichrist.

The Protestant Reformation produced the greatest crisis the Roman Church had ever experienced to that point and led to a “universal” Council being held in Trent between 1545 and 1563. The Society of Jesus, newly approved by Pope Paul III’s bull *Regimini Militantis Ecclesiae* (1540), influenced the council immensely and became a force to be reckoned with.

High on the Jesuit agenda was the challenge of Protestantism. Not only had Rome lost control and income from vast territories in the north, but the heretics also accused the pope of being the Antichrist. Through the printing press, this teaching spread like a virus through the Holy Roman Empire. The hegemony, if not the very existence, of the Roman Catholic Church was at stake. Basic to this threat was the Protestant interpretation of apocalyptic prophecy.

Protestant interpretation of biblical apocalyptic during the sixteenth century had been remarkably united on key issues of historicist hermeneutic. Protestants were united on the historical continuity of prophecy from Prophet-to-Eschaton, the year-day principle, and the identification of the papacy with the biblical Antichrist. That last understanding was to them the most natural reading of Daniel and Revelation when synchronized with history. In that reading of prophecy and history, the most critical historical junctures—

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devotes three chapters to the foremost Jesuit interpreters of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries; see pp. 464–512. Filling in the gaps in *EA* and in *PFF*, while also treating the Jesuit schemes in their correct polemical context, is Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium*, 66–90.

when one kingdom or empire gave way to another—were the eras of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (160s BCE) and Emperor Justinian (CE 500s). The first was critical to interpreting Daniel and the second was foundational to interpreting both Daniel and Revelation. As the Jesuits' influence increased, Protestant interpreters increasingly focused on these periods. In order to verify historicism historically and prophetically, Rome had to succeed Greece, and the European states and the papacy had to succeed Rome. Continuity, without significant gaps, became an even more significant feature of historicism.

The first of these competing systems, *futurism*, was a unique hermeneutic applicable especially to the Book of Revelation, in which the prophetic symbols for the fifth and sixth-century Roman Empire arbitrarily interrupted the sequence of the historical fulfillment of prophecy. This interruption begins a parenthesis that extends until seven years before the Second Coming of Christ. That seven-year period was rationalized by reference to the last week of the seventy weeks of Dan 9. Thus futurism accepts the reality of a coming Antichrist, but puts it off until just before the eschaton, completely absolving the papacy of any complicity in the affair.<sup>210</sup> Futurism was the first major counter-attack on historicism in the post-Trent era.

The second system, a philosophical antithesis to futurism, is preterism. Though an entirely different system of interpretation from futurism, preterism had several points in common with futurism in their shared opposition to historicism.<sup>211</sup> The year-day principle, believed and defended for hundreds of years, was repudiated in both futurism

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<sup>210</sup>EA, 2:189–91; Froom, *PFF*, 2:489–505; Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium*, 75–80.

<sup>211</sup>EA, 2:191–931; Froom, *PFF*, 2:506–09; Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium*, 71–75.

and preterism. Instead, both Jesuit systems favored a-day-for-a-day measuring of apocalyptic time periods. Thus, the reign of Antichrist could easily be confined to a single person whose rule lasted literally three and a half years.

The other important common ground between preterism and futurism was that the historical fulfillment of Revelation does not extend beyond the fall of the classical Roman Empire. Thus, preterism completely excludes the Middle Ages as a historical source of prophetic verification. The historical part of the prophecy ended with Rome, though the last few chapters of Revelation are projected into the distant future eschaton when all history ends. Preterism, as popularized in the seventeenth century by Jesuit Luis del Alcazar (1554–1613),<sup>212</sup> seeks to synchronize Rev 1–19 with Roman history between the first and fifth centuries.

The conspicuous feature of this two-pronged counter attack on historicism was its complete removal of papal history—which had dominated European civilization for the past one thousand years—as a source of prophetic authentication. Sixteenth-century Protestant interpretation clearly connected the rise of the papal Antichrist with the fall of the Roman Empire.<sup>213</sup> Thus preterism and futurism became the Catholic Church’s major defense against Protestant allegations. Neither the pope nor the papacy were the Antichrist. The best candidates for the role of Antichrist were removed to the two extremes of the historical sequence: either Antiochus Epiphanes, Nero, or Domitian at the

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<sup>212</sup>See Luis del Alcazar, *Vestigatio Arcani Sensus in Apocalypsi*. (Antverpiae: Apud Ioannem Keerbergium, 1614). Alcazar might have found inspiration in the writings of Porphyry (c. 232-c. 303), a pagan philosopher, was the first to suggest that Daniel much have been written around the time of Anitochus Epiphanes.

<sup>213</sup>See charts in Froom, *PFF*, 2: 528–31.

beginning, or a Jew in the temple in Jerusalem at the end of the historical Prophet-to-Eschaton sequence.<sup>214</sup>

Francisco Ribera (1537–1591), Spanish Jesuit theologian, was the first to apply the futurist system to the book of Revelation.<sup>215</sup> Ribera’s initiating system saw the fulfillment of all of Revelation from the sixth seal onward as future. The trumpets would unfold inside the seventh or even the sixth seal. Antichrist would die after the sixth, but before the seventh trumpet. Babylon, as most futurists after him believed, was a symbol of the city of Rome. Not present Rome, but either a pagan Rome in the distant past or a paganized apostate Rome in a distant future. Ribera’s system effectively pushed the Antichrist to a distant future; thus he could not be identified presently. He and others after him sought to legitimize their case by citations from the ancient church fathers who also saw the Antichrist as an unknown figure in the distant future.<sup>216</sup> The crucial question is this: Would the church fathers have said the same if they had seen church history’s progression one thousand years beyond their time? Protestants would certainly answer “no” to that question.

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<sup>214</sup>See McGinn, *Antichrist*, 226–30.

<sup>215</sup>Francisco Ribera, *In Sacram Beati Ioannis Apostoli, and Euangelistae Apocalypsin Commentarij* (Lugduni: Ex Officina Iuntarum, 1593). Later proponents of futurism included Blasius Viegas, S.J. (1554–99), Francisco Suarez, S.J. (1548–1617), Robert Bellarmine, S.J. (1542–1621), Cornelius of Lapide, S.J. (1567–1637), James Mumford, S.J. (1606–66), Jacques Benigne Bossuet (1627–1704) and Richard Challoner (1691–1781), the last two being non-Jesuit Catholics. Some of these, although defending futurism, sometimes blended their futurism with a soft portion of preterism. Few if any Protestants followed the new hermeneutic of futurism until the rise of the Plymouth Brethren in the early 1800s.

<sup>216</sup>Ribera, *Apocalypsin*, 209–10.

## Protestant Hermeneutical Implications from the Seventeenth Century

By the early seventeenth century, there was a broad consensus among Protestants regarding the interpretation of Daniel. There was much less agreement, however, on how to apply historicist principles to the book of Revelation. To obtain a more accurate picture of Newton's apocalypticism, this section considers the contributions of several influential expositors who lived just prior to or contemporaneous with Newton.

Several scholarly studies have investigated Newton's apocalyptic understanding as compared to Mede and More.<sup>217</sup> Newton was certainly aware of the important British apocalyptic interpreters of his age; he drew much from Joseph Mede and Thomas Brightman and was personally acquainted with John Locke, William Whiston, Robert Boyle, Henry More, Fatio de Duillier, and others.

### Joseph Mede

Joseph Mede (1586–1638), the intellectual mentor of Newton's apocalyptic writings,<sup>218</sup> wrote extensively on Daniel, and even more, on Revelation. He was sometimes regarded as the preeminent interpreter of apocalyptic literature up to his time.<sup>219</sup> He utilized a rigorous methodology of understanding the prophecies, which Newton paid great attention to. "And as Mr. Mede layed [*sic*] the foundation and I have

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<sup>217</sup>Especially Rob Iliffe, *Priest of Nature: The Religious Worlds of Isaac Newton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). See also his article, "Making a Shew," 55–88 and Sarah Hutton's, "More," 39–54. See also Manuel, *RIN*, 90–92 and Popkin, "Some Further Comments on Newton and Maimonides," in *EC*, 1n2.

<sup>218</sup>See above p. 6 f. #18. Joseph Mede is a rare exception of those Newton named as having influenced him in regard to interpretation of Revelation; see Manuel, *RIN*, 114; Iliffe, *Priest of Nature*, 233; and Gjertsen, *The Newton Handbook*, 355.

<sup>219</sup>Manuel, *RIN*, 90–2.

built upon it,” Newton stated, “so I hope others will proceed higher until the work be finished.”<sup>220</sup>

Mede was born in 1586 at Berden in Essex and was educated at Christ College, Cambridge, receiving an MA in 1610 and a BD in 1618. Due to his intellect, Mede received multiple offers of prosperous positions in England and abroad, but chose to remain a professor of Greek at Cambridge University. He was a master of letters and excelled in philology, history, and natural philosophy. He is best known, however, for his apocalyptic writings. His main work, *Clavis Apocalyptica* [The Key of Revelation], became a best-seller and influenced generations of prophetic interpreters, including Newton.<sup>221</sup>

Mede’s special contribution to apocalyptic hermeneutics is found in his analysis of the structure of Revelation. He based this analysis on internal evidence he called synchronism, and it is certain that Newton adopted much of this into his own *Observations*.<sup>222</sup> Mede focused particularly on the 1260-day prophecy found five times in three chapters in Revelation (11, 12, and 13). He believed, with the rest of Protestantism in his day, that these days were symbolic of 1260 years, a year for a day. He believed, furthermore, that they referred to the life span of the papal Antichrist starting with his rise and ending with his demise. Every other structural detail in Revelation had to fit this.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>220</sup>Yahuda MS 1.1, f. 15<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>221</sup>Joseph Mede’s *Clavis Apocalyptica* was translated into English in 1643 as *The Key of Revelation*. Mede’s other important works include *The Apostasy of the Latter Times* (London: L.N. for Samuel Man, 1644); *Cardo Synchronismorum*; *Daniel’s Weeks* (London: By M. F. for John Clark, 1643); *The Key of the Revelation* [ . . . ] *With a Comment Thereupon* (London: By F. L. for Phil. Stephens, 1650).

<sup>222</sup>See Mede’s *Cardo Synchronismorum*. Mede’s system worked as “a sort of reference for the historical reading of Revelation.” Armogathe, “Interpretations,” 194.

<sup>223</sup>See prefixed sketch to Mede’s works, 1663–4, ed., in Froom, *PFF*, 2:543–4.

Not only were the sevenfold occurrences of the 1260 symbolic days in Daniel and Revelation synchronic, but Mede was also convinced that the main visions in Revelation were, too.<sup>224</sup> He divided the book into three parts—all preceded by a voice like a trumpet (Rev 1:10; 4:1; and 10:8). The last two divisions were each divided into seven synchronisms.<sup>225</sup>

Mede understood the first six seals to have been fulfilled chronologically between the apostolic age and the time of Constantine, while the seventh seal encompassed the seven trumpets beginning at the time of the barbarian invasion of the Roman Empire at the end of the fourth century. These trumpets were successively fulfilled through history, with the seventh yet future. The seventh trumpet represented the Day of Judgment at the time of the Second Coming and would last for 1000 years. This period would start with the first resurrection and end with a second judgment and a second resurrection, with Christ's millennial rule in between.<sup>226</sup> Mede was breaking new ground when he suggested a future, literal second coming, succeeded by the Millennium.<sup>227</sup> Not since the days prior to Augustine had leading Christians claimed this.

Revelation 12–18 was interpreted by Mede in antipapal, Protestant fashion, within his synchronistic outline. He suggested that the two beasts in Rev 13 represented the secular and religious aspects of papal Rome respectively.<sup>228</sup> The seven plagues were seen as the historic reform-movements attempting to break loose from papal Rome's control

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<sup>224</sup>Mede, *The Apostasy*, 72–3; *The Key of the Revelation*, 1, 27–9.

<sup>225</sup>Joseph Mede, *Works*, 419–23; See Iliffe, *Priest of Nature*, 224–28.

<sup>226</sup>Mede, *The Key of the Revelation*, “Compendium,” on ch. 20.

<sup>227</sup>Mede, *The Key of the Revelation*, “Comment,” part 2, 121–5.

<sup>228</sup>Mede, *The Key of the Revelation*, 38–48, 65, 75, 76.



(e.g., the Waldenses, Hussites, and Protestants during the Reformation era).<sup>229</sup> Mede's hermeneutic is indeed historicist in its very essence. He argued heavily against the counter-reformation notion of preterism and futurism to the point of calling the latter advocates "our adversaries."<sup>230</sup> Further details of his scheme will be considered later in comparison with the interpretations of Henry More and others.

### Henry More

Of Newton's living contemporaries (Joseph Mede had died four years before the birth of Newton), Henry More probably influenced Newton the most on prophetic issues,<sup>231</sup> with the possible exception of Locke.<sup>232</sup> More was certainly the most prolific contemporary writer on apocalyptic—deserving a position in the history of prophetic interpretation similar to the one he achieved as a philosopher.<sup>233</sup> Newton and More, both

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<sup>229</sup>Mede, *The Apostasy*, 46–53.

<sup>230</sup>Mede, *The Apostasy*, 72–3.

<sup>231</sup>Newton acknowledged More as an important interpreter; see Yahuda MS 1.28; Hutton, "More, Newton, and the Language of Biblical Prophecy," 41. Newton owned several of More's works; see Hutton, "More, Newton, and the Language of Biblical Prophecy," 52n19. For the ecstatic state of Newton, as reported by More, "in a ma[n]ner transported," when having read More's work, see Sarah Hutton and Marjorie Hope Nicolson eds., *The Conway Letters: The Correspondence of Anne, Viscountess Conway, Henry More and their Friends, 1642-1684*, rev. ed. (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1992), 478; Iliffe, "Making a Shew," 69; Hutton, "More, Newton, and the Language of Biblical Prophecy," 41. According to More: "We [Newton and More] have a free converse and friendship w[hi]ch these differences will not disturb. He does still profess my Exposition is a perspicuous and coherent piece," quoted in Iliffe, "Making a Shew," 70–1, cf. 68 ff. Newton even worked with More on a commentary on Revelation; see Popkin, "Newton's Biblical Theology and His Theological Physics," 88.

<sup>232</sup>It is difficult to evaluate Locke's relationship with Newton on apocalyptic. They certainly exchanged letters and cooperated on a few spiritual enterprises, especially in relation to antitrinitarianism and Locke's commentary on Corinthians. For an exchange on apocalyptic see below.

<sup>233</sup>More's important works on apocalyptic issues are *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness* (London, 1660); *Divine Dialogues. Containing Sundry Disquisitions and Instructions Concerning the Attributes of God and His Providence in the World*. (London, 1668); *An Exposition of the Seven Epistles to the Seven Churches, Together with a Brief Discourse of Idolatry, with Application to the Church of Rome* (London, 1669); "Antidote against Idolatry," in *A Brief Reply to a late Answer*, 1–201 (London: Walter Kettibly, 1672); *Visionum apocalypticarum ratio synchronisticis* (London: 1675); *Apocalypsis apocalypseos* (London, 1680), *A Plain and Continued Exposition of the Several Prophecies or*

influenced by Mede,<sup>234</sup> continued in the scientific spirit of their master, each developing a different, but nonetheless, clearly definable historicist apocalyptic system. Newton scholars today, perhaps mistakenly, regard Newton and More's apocalyptic relationship as one of nemesis.<sup>235</sup>

There are probably a variety of motives behind the enigmatic relationship between Newton and More over apocalyptic.<sup>236</sup> The "conflict," which may after all not have been more than a short period of tension, or friendly open talk,<sup>237</sup> is interesting because the direct and indirect dialogue between the two is the only incident we know of today, where a contemporary friend, on issues related to apocalyptic interpretation, seriously commented on Newton's exposition.<sup>238</sup> Of all the "apocalyptic" friends of

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*Divine Visions of the Prophet Daniel* (London: M. F. for Walter Kettilby, 1681); *An Illustration of those two Abstruse Books in Holy Scripture, the Book of Daniel and the Revelation of S. John* (London, 1685); and *Paralipomena prophetica* (London: Walter Kettilby at the Sign of the Bishops Head in S. Paul's Church-yard, 1685). For a contemporary evaluation of More's apocalypticism as it relates to Newton, see Hutton, "More, Newton, and the Language of Biblical Prophecy," 39–45; Iliffe, "Making a Shew," 57–63, 68–70; and Manuel, *Historian*, 2.

<sup>234</sup>According to Iliffe, Henry More "drew from Mede—his terminologies, his hermeneutic, and his general thesis," "Making a Shew," 56.

<sup>235</sup>Gjertsen, *The Newton Handbook*, 369; Iliffe, *Priest of Nature*, 253–56; Westfall, *NR*, 348–49.

<sup>236</sup>Around 1680, More and Newton had a falling out on the understanding of Revelation, resulting in "bitter disagreement." See Popkin, "Newton as a Bible Scholar," 113.

<sup>237</sup>More stated: "We [Newton and More] have a free converse and friendship w[hi]ch these differences will not disturb. He does still profess my Exposition is a perspicuous and coherent piece," quoted in Iliffe, "Making a Shew," 70–1.

<sup>238</sup>The "tension" between the two Cambridge professors can be sensed by the following incidents: (1) More presented twenty arguments in favor of a total church history fulfillment of the seven churches. See his *An Exposition of the Seven Epistles to the Seven Churches* (1669), of which Newton owned a copy. The philosopher apparently arrowed these 20 "proofs" at the natural philosopher, for Newton confined the fulfillment of the seven churches to the ancient period. (2) More suggested that his own arguments were bullet proof, as "a certainty plainly mathematical," while Newton compared the "mathematical demonstration," (apparently referring to More), of apocalyptic interpretation as fancy, (in preface of More's *Theological Works*; Iliffe, "Making a Shew," 80–81, also n62). (3) This was Newton's response relating to synchronization in the margin of a copy he owned of More's book: "No. They [trumpets and vials] are the same . . . [quoting scripture]," and More's critique of Newton's "pretended synchronization [unleashing of the seven last plagues] . . . they will . . . quite vanish." Quoted in Iliffe, "Making a Shew," 71n47.

Newton, none responded more honestly and authentically than Henry More. The difference between Newton and More, however, is not over the overall apocalyptic picture, since they both adhered to the outline of the tradition of historicism (see chap. 2 of this study). Their disagreement was over interpretive issues related to the synchronization of Revelation's three successive septets and over the seven vials.<sup>239</sup>

More, like Mede, and, of course, in sharp contrast to rationalists,<sup>240</sup> believed the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation were fairly easy to comprehend. In the preface of his *Theological Works*, More stated (regarding the evidence for the truthfulness of canonical apocalyptic): "I dare appeal to the Conscience and judgment of anyone [whether my Exposition] hath not a Certainty plainly mathematical, and of which no Man in his Wits can make any doubt."<sup>241</sup>

The friendship between Newton and More went beyond their disagreement. Although More played the role of the spiritual aesthetician, and Newton, the theological pragmatist, they both shared a deep love for canonical apocalyptic that for both would intensify with age. Moreover, they shared a common understanding on how to interpret the language of prophecy (Scripture explains Scripture), the place of the papacy in prophecy, the apostate condition of the contemporary church, and, interestingly, they both produced a dictionary of symbols.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>239</sup>See Iliffe, "Making a Shew," 71n47.

<sup>240</sup>See Hutton, "More, Newton, and the Language of Biblical Prophecy," 44–5.

<sup>241</sup>Quoted in Iliffe, "Making a Shew," 80.

<sup>242</sup>See Hutton, "More, Newton, and the Language of Biblical Prophecy," 40–4, 49–50.

## William Whiston

William Whiston, a disciple and close associate of Newton, was one of the few contemporaries of Newton who truly understood the Newtonian *scientific* system and, at the same time, had insight into Newtonian theology and apocalypticism. His friendship with Newton, however, would increasingly cool off, mainly due to Whiston's provocatively open and bold Arianism, as opposed to Newton's milder and secretive antitrinitarianism. Because Newton would take no risks, he gradually dissociated himself from Whiston, perhaps his most promising theological disciple, as Whiston increasingly raised his voice.<sup>243</sup>

William Whiston's contribution to apocalyptic is in the area of theology and apologetics.<sup>244</sup> As could be expected, Whiston is thoroughly historicist in his approach to apocalyptic. He followed standard interpretations in Daniel, and came close to Newton, Mede, and More on the interpretation of Revelation.<sup>245</sup> For example, Whiston understood the opening of the last seal to have occurred in the latter part of the fourth century CE.<sup>246</sup> This was similar to Newton's synchronization scheme. Whiston, however, like many of his time, did not refrain from predicting future events. Based on prophetic time prophecies, he predicted great expectations for the year 1736.<sup>247</sup> Newton, as already

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<sup>243</sup>For the full story, see, e.g., Westfall, *NR*, 649–53; and Manuel, *Historian*, 143–4.

<sup>244</sup>See, e.g., his *New Theory of the Earth*, dedicated to Newton, and his *The Literal Accomplishment of Scripture Prophecy* (London: For J. Senex, 1708).

<sup>245</sup>See Froom, *PFF*, 2:671–74.

<sup>246</sup>See Force, “Newton's God of Dominion,” 82.

<sup>247</sup>Force, “Newton's God of Dominion,” 82.

noted, had other ideas on apocalyptic time-prophecies; he refused to be explicit on near future events.

It is clear that Whiston's role as disciple did not allow too much influence over Newton. It is also clear that Newton must have had much confidence in Whiston's intellectual abilities since he was Newton's preference for the vacant Lucian Chair at Trinity College, a position Whiston later lost because of his outspoken antitrinitarianism.

Newton and Whiston<sup>248</sup> integrated restorationism (in the sense of restoring truth), into their total apocalyptic scenario, giving this doctrine a central place in the fulfillment of Daniel and Revelation in the final days of earth's history. Both believed that biblical truth had been lost through a long progressive apostasy, and that the restoration had already begun.<sup>249</sup>

### **Other Contemporaries of Newton**

Another contemporary with whom Newton dialogued about apocalyptic was John Locke, the English philosopher of this new age.<sup>250</sup> Manuel characterized their relationship by stating, "It was the elder, Locke, who was anxious about the younger's esteem."<sup>251</sup> Sacred history, interpretations of First and Second Corinthians, the doctrine of the Trinity, and, related to this, Newton's nearly disastrous publication experience, seem to have been the focus of their interactions. Concerning Newton's Scripture

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<sup>248</sup>Whiston published a magazine called *The Restoration*.

<sup>249</sup>On Newton and restorationism, see section "Restorationist Theology," in chapter 2 above.

<sup>250</sup>Locke's epistemological philosophy, built on Newton's scientific empiricism, came to be heralded as a primary philosophical manifest of the Enlightenment. Much of Locke's interaction with Newton is in Newton, *Corr*. See also Westfall, *NR*, 488–537; Manuel, *Historian*, 141–3. For Locke on prophecy and Catholicism, see Manuel, *Historian*, 2n8, 154n41.

<sup>251</sup>Manuel, *Historian*, 143.

knowledge, Locke admitted, “I know few his equal.”<sup>252</sup>

Newton’s dialogues with Robert Boyle are clouded in esoteric secrecy. Boyle, the alchemist and Newton’s “intellectual hero,”<sup>253</sup> thought and lived at Oxford and later, in London. We know they shared ideas on alchemy and apocalyptic, but this has yet to be further explored. Boyle gave evidence for his strong faith in the Bible and the Christian religion by providing means in his will for the famous “Boyle lectures” against unbelievers.<sup>254</sup>

Fatio de Duillier, a noted mathematician and one of Newton’s dearest friends, deserves to be briefly mentioned as well. Although much younger than Newton, he was one of the few to whom Newton became emotionally attached.<sup>255</sup> Fatio was a serious student of canonical apocalyptic interpretation and became, after leaving Newton’s life, attached to a religious fringe movement. Newton, in a letter to Fatio, generally commends his apocalyptic views, “but fear[s]” he “indulge[s] too much in fansy [*sic*] in some things.”<sup>256</sup> This again shows Newton’s cautious attitude about apocalyptic interpretation. These intellectuals obviously spoke freely, directly, and openly to each other.<sup>257</sup>

More, Whiston, Locke, Boyle, and Fatio were all close to Newton and known to

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<sup>252</sup>See Manuel, *Historian*, 141.

<sup>253</sup>According to Christianson, in “Newton, the Man—Again,” 10.

<sup>254</sup>For Boyle on religion and science, see Richard McMasters Hunt, *The Place of Religion in the Science of Robert Boyle* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1955).

<sup>255</sup>See Manuel, *RIN*.

<sup>256</sup>Newton, *Corr.*, 3:245; Manuel, *RIN*, 156.

<sup>257</sup>Cf. the Newton and More dialog above (n. 240).

have had a special interest in apocalyptic.<sup>258</sup> It is true that Newton was uncompromising with some of his ideas, but it is also true that he had a curious ear for other people's ideas—an essential part of the process of scientific thinking.

John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, of which Newton owned a copy,<sup>259</sup> is saturated with phrases and allusions from the Book of Revelation.<sup>260</sup> Sir Samuel Morland was a renowned prophetic interpreter. Richard Baxter, who apparently disagreed with the historicist platform on some points, seriously provoked More<sup>261</sup> and others. These and other interpreters of Newton's time, except those mentioned previously, contributed little to his system.

### Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to trace the development of prophetic interpretation prior to and contemporary with Newton in order to evaluate better Newton's interpretations, underlying hermeneutic, and relation to previous expositors.

The foregoing survey of historicist prophetic interpretation shows clearly that the essence of the historicist system of interpretation was rooted in the book of Daniel itself. Characteristics of this system include: (1) a distinctive literary structure following a pattern of repetition and enlargement; (2) a starting point of prophecy defined; (3) PEV with successive and continuous historical fulfilment (also called periodization of history);

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<sup>258</sup>For Newton's communication with contemporaries, see Snobelen's intriguing essay "Heretic," esp. pp. 402–9. See also Manuel, *RIN*, 90.

<sup>259</sup>According to Huggins, Newton owned several of Milton's books; see Manuel, *Historian*, 43.

<sup>260</sup>On Milton's apocalypticism, see Juliet Cummins, ed., *Milton and the End of Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>261</sup>Baxter claimed Revelation was unintelligible and committed the unpardonable sin by denying the papal fulfillment of the biblical Antichrist; see Iliffe, "Making a Shew," 62.

(4) an ending point defined; (5) symbolic language; (6) the dichotomy of Christ and Antichrist; and (7) a cultic background.<sup>262</sup> These seven characteristics of historicist hermeneutics were each directly grounded in the visions Daniel saw, in the words of the angelic interpreter, and/or in the words of Daniel himself. Two further elements of the historicist system were recognized by both Jewish and Christian expositors as early as the first century of the Christian era: (8) history confirms genuine prophecy; and (9) the time periods are symbolically represented through the year-day principle.<sup>263</sup>

These nine elements were recognized (or rediscovered), further developed, and independently corroborated by scores of subsequent Jewish and Christian expositors from very diverse backgrounds and over long periods of history. Finally, the principles discovered through the study of Daniel began to be applied to the study of the book of Revelation.

Tyconius and Augustine introduced an alternate system detached from the necessity of verification by historical fulfillment. This hermeneutical system, known as idealism, directly challenged historicism for the next 700 years. Joachim's suggestion that the 1260 days of Daniel and Revelation represented 1260 years of the reign of Antichrist reinvigorated historicism and directly contributed to the Protestant Reformation. In the Reformation era, prominent interpreters reached a consensus that canonical apocalyptic described a conflict between Christ and the Antichrist. With

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<sup>262</sup>The cultic aspect of Dan 8 and throughout Revelation is obvious in the canonical texts, yet few interpreters utilized this feature to understand better canonical apocalyptic literature.

<sup>263</sup>The year-day principle was first recognized in the seventy weeks of Dan 9. It was only after Joachim in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that the year-day principle began to be applied generally to apocalyptic texts outside of the seventy weeks in Dan 9. This issue will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.



increasing confidence, the Reformers deduced from Scripture, tradition, and history that the papal church was the Antichrist. The need to defend the papacy from identification with the Antichrist led to the invention of two additional systems of interpretation—preterism and futurism. Thereafter, historicism as a system of interpretation remained the standard Protestant hermeneutic, at least until the early nineteenth century.<sup>264</sup>

Chapter 4 will consider Newton's own exposition of Daniel and Revelation as a further step toward articulating his hermeneutical reasoning and defining his hermeneutical principles in chap. 5.

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<sup>264</sup>Kai Arasola, in *The End of Historicism*, proposed that historicism ceased to be the standard Protestant hermeneutic after and due to the Millerite movement and the Great Disappointment in 1844. Froom concluded his monumental study, *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, with an analysis of the last great evangelical historicist: Henry Grattan Guinness (1835–1910). After the Millerite Movement in the 1840s, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was the primary denomination endorsing a historicist paradigm.

CHAPTER 4

ISAAC NEWTON'S INTERPRETATIONS  
OF APOCALYPTIC TEXTS

It has been estimated that Isaac Newton wrote in excess of four million words on the canonical apocalyptic portions of Daniel and Revelation.<sup>1</sup> His constantly expanding commentaries on these books were written from the 1670s,<sup>2</sup> perhaps as early as the 1660s.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the rest of his life, Newton continued rewriting his “not for publication” commentaries on the Apocalypse. Most of the revisions were philological and insignificant, but occasionally, there were substantive deletions, additions, or revisions.

His interpretations, especially those based on the book of Daniel, are often strikingly similar to those of his predecessors. In fact, all of his foundational interpretations of the Book of Daniel (chaps. 2, 7, 8, and 9) were consistent with the standard Protestant historicism of his own time. On the book of Revelation, however,

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<sup>1</sup>Manuel, *RIN*, 8. Beside his biblical writings, Newton wrote more than one million words on the subject of alchemy. Michael White, *Isaac Newton*, 4. According to Popkin, almost half of Newton's writings dealt with the Bible. See his “Newton's Biblical Theology and His Theological Physics,” 81. For the history of Newton's papers see, Dry, *The Newton Papers*.

<sup>2</sup>Westfall, *NR*, 319n114.

<sup>3</sup>“Newton wrestled with the meaning of these books [i.e., Daniel and Revelation] from early manhood until his death.” Manuel, *RIN*, 87. There is record going back to the 1660s of Newton's purchasing Sleidan's *Four Monarchies* which was based on the four empires in Dan 2; see Manuel, *RIN*, 92.

historicist interpreters prior to Newton had never reached consensus on its basic interpretive structure. Therefore, in contrast to the case of the book of Daniel, it is problematic to speak of a historicist tradition on Revelation prior to Newton.

The objective of this chapter is to determine Newton's interpretations of representative passages in the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation. This is an essential step if we want to understand Newton's apocalyptic hermeneutic. In the canonical apocalyptic tradition, hermeneutical principles are seldom explicitly explained or spelled out. They are usually hidden in the interpreter's interpretation, from which the reader may seek to discover the progressive logic and driving hermeneutical force which influenced or controlled the interpreter. It will be seen below that Newton often, but not always, gave explicit explanation of the bases for his interpretations.

Essential to Newton is the idea that these prophecies can be understood.<sup>4</sup> However, like the mysterious processes of nature, they have to be decoded. By Newton's time, this decoding of canonical apocalyptic had been ongoing for more than 1500 years, and yet, pieces of the puzzle were still missing. Newton viewed this as a challenge to his spirit and intellect and vowed to remedy it systematically; therefore, as a logical starting point, he established certain rules from which he proceeded. Newton's rules and principles of canonical apocalyptic will be discussed and explored in chap. 5.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>"If they are never to be understood," Newton stated, "to what end did God reveale them?" Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, f. 1<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>5</sup>At this stage, it is sufficient to state that Newton's rules of interpreting apocalyptic "were a replica of those he insisted upon for interpreting the Book of Nature," and that "Newton was as certain of his method and results in the interpretation of the Apocalypse as he was in the *Principia*." Manuel, *RIN*, 98. Newton "proceeded in his exposition in a mathematical style." Westfall, *NR*, 326–28.

## Newton's Interpretations of Daniel

Isaac Newton's manuscripts, published and unpublished, including those on Daniel and Revelation, have, for the most part, been preserved. The bulk of his theological manuscripts, however, have only recently become available to scholars. Manuscripts directly related to Daniel and Revelation have been published online.<sup>6</sup> Since 1733, a limited introduction to Newton's apocalyptic ideas has been available through his *Observations of Daniel and Revelation*.<sup>7</sup> This publication from 1733 is the only manuscript selection from the hand of Newton that attempts to interpret systematically the whole range of visions in the book of Daniel. Thus, it is the obvious source from which to determine Newton's understanding of Daniel (although other sources will be used in this research as well). *Observations on Daniel* covers the essential apocalyptic chapters in Daniel, but not the historical narrative chaps. 1 and 3–6).

In an introductory note to the book of Daniel, Newton mentioned the successive development of structure from the earliest visions to the later, that they were "related to one another, as if they were but several parts of one general Prophecy, given at several times. The first is the easiest to be understood, and every following Prophecy adds something new to the former."<sup>8</sup> Newton's era preceded the scholarly debate on the date of Daniel. He believed the prophetic sections in Daniel were written by Daniel in the

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<sup>6</sup>See [www.newtonproject.ox.ac.uk](http://www.newtonproject.ox.ac.uk).

<sup>7</sup>Referred to as *NC10* in Newton, *CMP*.

<sup>8</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 83.

sixth century BCE, whereas certain historical sections in Daniel might have been written by someone other than Daniel at a later time.<sup>9</sup>

### Daniel 2: The Image and Stone<sup>10</sup>

Newton regarded the prophecy of the image of four metals as “the foundation of all Daniel’s Prophecies.”<sup>11</sup> With one exception, Newton’s interpretation of Dan 2 was identical to the standard Protestant interpretation in his time. The standard interpretation understood the four metals as representing the four successive empires: Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Newton, however, included the Medes along with the Babylonians, represented by gold in Dan 2 and a lion in Dan 7, because these two empires together shared the then known world after Assyria was conquered.<sup>12</sup> This variation shows that Newton did not rigidly follow the historicist tradition when his own studies pointed in other directions.

The second part of the image, silver, represented the Persians, while the third represented Greece. The Romans, represented by the fourth metal, began ruling, according to Newton, “in the eighth year of Antiochus Epiphanes” and continued until

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<sup>9</sup>The Book of Daniel, according to Newton, “is a collection of papers written at several times. The six last chapters contain Prophecies written at several times by Daniel himself: the six first are a collection of historical papers written by others.” Newton, *OP*, 10; cf. Popkin, “Newton as a Bible Scholar,” in *EC*, 105; Popkin, “Newton’s Biblical Theology and His Theological Physics,” 84. Thus Manuel was not entirely accurate when he imputed to Newton the dating of Daniel to the second century B.C. See Manuel, *RIN*, 97. Newton emphatically critiqued an unknown scholar, (“probably. . . Grotius,” according to Westfall), on that person’s insistence that Antiochus (and the time of Antiochus) is the ultimate fulfillment and destination of Daniel’s prophecies. See also Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 9.2, f. 105; Westfall, *NR*, 350n53.

<sup>10</sup>See Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, 6<sup>r</sup>–12<sup>r</sup>; 1.5, 1<sup>r</sup>–73<sup>r</sup>; 7.1d, 1<sup>r</sup>–7<sup>r</sup>; 7.1j, 1<sup>r</sup>–16<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>11</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 84.

<sup>12</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 87. Newton did not state this in his interpretation of Dan 2, but did so when he interpreted the four animals in Dan 7.

“the days of Theodosius the great.”<sup>13</sup> “Then,” Newton continued, “by the incursion of many northern nations, they brake into many smaller kingdoms, which are represented by the feet and toes of the Image, composed part of iron and part of clay.”<sup>14</sup> In identifying the kingdoms represented by the feet, Newton gave special attention to the development of the Goths and cited Procopius, Jordanes, Orosius, and others as historical sources.<sup>15</sup>

#### Daniel 7: The Four Animals<sup>16</sup>

In Dan 7, the prophet saw four animals coming out of a stormy sea. The first looked like a lion with eagle’s wings; the second was like a bear, raised up on one side with three ribs in its mouth; and the third looked like a leopard with four wings and four heads. The fourth beast was the most elaborate and mysterious. It was different from the others and had ten horns, three of which were removed to provide space for a little horn that emerged among the ten. This “little horn” showed antichristian attributes and ruled for three and a half years. Then there was a heavenly court-scene in which the Son of Man figured prominently. The vision is explained by an *angelus interpretes* twice, first briefly, then thoroughly.

“By the consent of all men,”<sup>17</sup> Newton built his interpretation of Dan 7 on that of Dan 2. Parallel to his interpretation of the head of gold in Dan 2, Newton saw the lion in Dan 7 as including Babylon and the Medes; “both Empires [were] represented together

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<sup>13</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 88.

<sup>14</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 88. See also Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 36<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>15</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 91–100.

<sup>16</sup>See Newton, *Yahuda MSS*, 7.1b; 7.1d, 8<sup>r</sup>–26<sup>v</sup>; 7.1j, 17<sup>r</sup>–22<sup>r</sup>; 7.1l; 7.1m.

<sup>17</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 30<sup>r</sup>.

by the two wings of the lion.”<sup>18</sup> The bear represented Persia (with less influence of the Medes), “which reigned next after the Babylonians.”<sup>19</sup> This bear, in which one side rose higher than the other, symbolized the change in balance of power between the Medes and the Persians following Cyrus the Great’s successful rebellion against Median overlordship and the establishment of the Achaemenid dynasty in 550 BCE. Newton understood the three ribs in the mouth of the bear to mean Persia’s conquest of Sardis, Babylon, and Egypt.<sup>20</sup> The third animal, the leopard, he understood to represent the empire of the Greeks, with its four heads and four wings representing its division into four kingdoms under the four generals who succeeded Alexander: Cassander, Lysimachus, Ptolemy, and Seleucus.<sup>21</sup>

The fourth animal, according to Newton, signified the Romans who conquered the Hellenists during the time of Antiochus Epiphanes.<sup>22</sup> Rome ruled until Theodosius the Great, “then brake into ten kingdoms. ... and continued in a broken form, till the Antient [*sic*] of days sat in a throne like fiery flame, and the judgment was set.”<sup>23</sup> “The eleven horns,” according to Newton,

are among the nations on this side of Greece. . . we include no part of the Chaldeans, Medes and Persians in those kingdoms, because they belong to the bodies of the two first Beasts [i.e., the lion and the bear]. Nor do we reckon the Greek empire seated at

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<sup>18</sup>Newton, *OP*, 87. Here Newton’s view appears unique as compared to previous interpreters.

<sup>19</sup>Newton, *OP*, 87.

<sup>20</sup>Newton, *OP*, 88.

<sup>21</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 88.

<sup>22</sup>“Daniel’s four Kingdoms are a Calender [*sic*] of all times to the end of the world, whereof the 4th falls to the Roman Empire.” Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 12<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>23</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 88–9.

Constantinople, among the horns of the fourth Beast, because it belonged to the body of the third.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, Newton allocated the geographical area of the eleven horns to the western part of the classical Roman Empire.

Newton then identified the ten horns of the fourth beast as the Vandals, Suevians, Visigoths, Alans, Burgundians, Franks, Britains, Huns, Lombards, and the (imperial) capital city, Ravenna. Newton especially elaborated on the Huns and the Franks from around A.D. 400 to the mid-sixth century. He included the later rulership of the Heruls and the Ostrogoths within the horn of Ravenna.<sup>25</sup>

Newton gave two entire chapters of *Observations* to the little horn that came up among the ten.<sup>26</sup> It was “a horn of the fourth Beast, and rooted up three of his first horns,” Newton observed, “and therefore we are to look for it among the nations of the Latin Empire, after the rise of the ten horns.”<sup>27</sup> Another identifying mark of the little horn was its appearance. Expounding on Dan 7:24–25, Newton continued, “By its eyes it was a Seer; and by its mouth speaking great things and changing times and laws, it was a Prophet as well as a King.” From this he concluded that “such a Seer, a Prophet and a King, is the Church of Rome.”<sup>28</sup>

To further support his case, Newton argued that “a Seer, Episkopos, is a Bishop in the literal sense of the word; and this church [Church of Rome] claims the universal

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<sup>24</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 89.

<sup>25</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 101–21.

<sup>26</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 123–60. See also Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, ff. 44<sup>r</sup>–45<sup>r</sup>; 1.4, f. 3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>27</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 123.

<sup>28</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 123.



Bishopric.”<sup>29</sup> The papacy “acquired Peter’s Patrimony” after having conquered the three horns, respectively: Ravenna, the Lombards, and the senate of Rome, starting with Pipin the Pious in the eight century, “and thereby rose up as a temporal Prince or King, or horn of the fourth Beast.”<sup>30</sup> The climax came on Christmas day, in the year 800, when the pope crowned Charles the Great as emperor, “and worshipped him on his knees after the manner of adoring the old Roman Emperors.” The emperor, for his part, “promise[d] to protect and guard the Holy Roman Church.”<sup>31</sup>

Such historical observations convinced Newton of his interpretation. He ruled out the time of Justinian as the starting point of papal supremacy because “Rome” during that time only “obtained some dominion over the Greek Churches, but of no long continuance.”<sup>32</sup> Chapter 8 of the *Observations* is a historical investigation into empirical decrees and authoritative ecclesiastical letters from the latter part of the fourth century until the middle of the fifth century. Quoting these documents verbatim in Latin, Newton deduced that papal authority was unquestioned in the western part of the Empire by the beginning of the sixth century.

Newton reasoned that by the conversions of the Arian barbarians to Roman Catholicism, “the Pope only enlarged his spiritual dominion, but did not yet rise up as a horn of the Beast.” It was the pope’s “temporal dominion which made him one of the

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<sup>29</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 124.

<sup>30</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 124.

<sup>31</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 129–30.

<sup>32</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 135

horns; and this dominion he acquired in the latter part of the eighth century, by subduing three of the former horns.”<sup>33</sup>

Newton, in his *Observations*, refrained from predicting the exact expiration year of the 1260 years, although it is clear from the passage in the *Observations* that he believed it would take place in the 21st century.<sup>34</sup> He regarded the vision of the Son of Man coming in the clouds as applying to Christ’s second coming, after the rule of the Antichrist in church history.<sup>35</sup>

### Daniel 8: The Ram and the Goat<sup>36</sup>

In Dan 8, the prophet is taken in vision to the River Ulai, where he sees a ram conquering territory westward and then, in the next sequence, a goat from the west attacking the ram (which was, presumably, from the east). The goat completely destroys the ram. The great horn on the goat breaks off and in its place four other horns, each

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<sup>33</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 159–60. In another manuscript, Newton suggested that the 1260 years began closer to the time of Justinian. Here Newton placed the start of the reign of Antichrist “about the time of the invasion of the Barbarous nations and their erecting several Kingdoms in the Roman Empire, and had we nothing more then this it were sufficient to ground an expectation that the prevalency yet to come of Popery cannot continue long; it being certain that 1200 of the 1260 years are run out already.” See Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 23, f. 6<sup>r</sup>. Yet in other places, he begins the 1260 years in the year 607 CE. See Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, ff. 60–61; 1.3 ff. 40–48. One of his calculations leads the 1260 years through the sixth trumpet into the seventh (seen as the culmination of Revelation and the second coming of Christ) to the year 1844 CE. See Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.7, ff. 65–6. Cf. Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 9.2, f. 157, 168–9. Cf. Newton, *OP*, 251.

<sup>34</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 160. In a late manuscript (Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 7.3g, f. 13), Newton suggested that the Second Coming could even come beyond 2060 CE. Counting from 800 CE, the year of Charlemagne’s coronation, 2060 CE is the expiration year of the 1260-year prophecy, an implication set out more emphatically in several of Newton’s documents. Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 7.30, f. 8; *Yahuda MS*, 7.3n, f. 1<sup>v</sup>. The rediscovery recently of this interpretation was a reason for some global mass-media exposure to Newton’s “exact” prediction of the year of Jesus’ Second Coming; see Stephen Snobelen, “Statement on the Date 2060” (updated June 2003), <http://www.isaac-newton.org/statement-on-the-date-2060> (accessed Oct. 15, 2015). Cf. Westfall, *NR*, 816.

<sup>35</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 4<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>36</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.7e, 25<sup>r</sup>–7<sup>r</sup>; 1.7i, 1<sup>r</sup>–12<sup>v</sup>; 1.7j, 1<sup>r</sup>–16<sup>r</sup>.

growing in a different direction, appear. From one of the horns, or from one of the heavenly directions,<sup>37</sup> another horn, a little one, emerges, and grows toward heaven, and behaves in an anti-Christian manner. The vision, which covered a period of 2300 evening-mornings—until the sanctuary would be cleansed, was partly explained by an *angelus interpretes*.

According to the explicit explanation by the angelic interpreter, Newton synchronized the reigns of the ram and the goat in Dan 8 with those of the second and third animals in Dan 7. He reasoned that the Medes and the Persians represented the “beginning of the four empires [i.e., during the times of Babylon and Persia], and the Goat represents the kingdom of the Greeks to the end of them [i.e., the four empires of Dan 7]. By this means, under the symbol of the Ram and He-Goat, the times of all the four Empires in Dan 7 are again described.”<sup>38</sup> He further dissected the synchronization by identifying the rule of the four horns with that of Greece and the little horn with that of the fourth empire, Rome. The shift between the last two empires, Greece and Rome, he again identified around the time of Antiochus Epiphanes IV. Newton justified his belief in the prophetic transition point from Greece to Rome from the text in Daniel: The little horn in Dan 8 had to “rise up in the northwest part.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>The little horn grew forth “from one of the heavenly directions” is a better translation of the Hebrew in Dan 8:8–9, compared to the traditional translation “from one of the four horns”; see Gerhard Hasel’s chapter “The ‘Little Horn,’ the Heavenly Sanctuary, and the Time of the End: A Study of Daniel 8–14,” in *Symposium on Daniel*, ed. F. Holbrook, 378–461, DARCOM 2 (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), especially pp. 387–94.

<sup>38</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 161–2.

<sup>39</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 164. For Newton’s understanding of the origin of the Little Horn in Dan 8, see Newton, *OCE*, 162: “The little horn which came up out of one of the four horns, and vexed exceeding great. The latter time of their kingdom [i.e. the divided kingdoms of Alexander] was when the Romans began to conquer them [the Macedonians].” From this, Newton reasoned that the Little horn would “rise up

Regarding the activity of the little horn, Newton observed that the 2300 evening-mornings are literal years and “may perhaps be reckoned either from the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in the reign of Vespasian, or from the pollution of the Sanctuary by the worship of Jupiter Olympius, or . . . from some other period which time will discover.”<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Antiochus is ruled out of the equation as the fulfillment of the little horn in Dan 8 because a horn is “never taken for a single person” and the “character” of the little horn is that of the Antichrist, “not of Antiochus,” and Antiochus never ruled 2300 years.<sup>41</sup> Rather, the rule of the little horn would last until the “time of the end,” and its activity would last “till the Sanctuary which had been cast down should be cleansed, and the Sanctuary is not yet cleansed.”<sup>42</sup> Explaining the time span from the fall of the classical Roman Empire to the end of time, that is until the expiration of the 2300 years, Newton believed that Daniel “describes the affairs of the Christians.”<sup>43</sup>

#### Daniel 9: The Seventy-weeks Prophecy<sup>44</sup>

In Dan 9, Newton’s mathematical talent was tested by perhaps the most celebrated Messianic prophecy in the Scriptures. The prophecy speaks of a period of

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in the northwest parts of those nations, and extend his dominion towards *Egypt*, *Syria* and *Judea*,” all based on the heavenly directions pointed out in the biblical text. See Newton, *OCE*, 164.

<sup>40</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 165–6. See also Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 7.30, f. 8, which predicted 2132 CE as the earliest expiration year for the 2300 prophetic days prophecy. Cf. Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 7.3n, f. 1<sup>v</sup> (dated 1708).

<sup>41</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 166. The first horn which was broken off, called “the first king,” is the empire Alexander made after ten years of expansive warfare. The horn did not signify one person, but an empire led by Alexander.

<sup>42</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 166–7.

<sup>43</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 168.

<sup>44</sup>See Newton, *Yahuda MSS*, 7.1c, ff. 1<sup>r</sup>–11<sup>r</sup>; 7.1e, 27<sup>r</sup>–28<sup>r</sup>; 10b, 10<sup>r</sup>–12<sup>r</sup>.

seventy weeks divided up into three sections: seven weeks, sixty-two weeks, and one week. The text in Daniel predicts that within the period of seventy weeks, the Messiah would appear. The exact date for his coming is seemingly alluded to—at the end of these weeks, specifically, during the last week. Newton maintained that this prophecy speaks of 490 years, not days, and related it to both comings of Christ.<sup>45</sup>

Concerning the starting point of the seventy-weeks prophecy, Newton found a clue in Dan 9:25, “from the going forth of the command to cause to return and to build Jerusalem.” Here he deduced that from the time when “the dispersed Jews should be re-incorporated into a people and a holy city, until the death and resurrection of Christ” is to be counted from the seventh year of the rule of Artaxerxes I of Persia (465–424 BCE) “when Ezra,” according to Ezra 7, “returned with a body of Jews from captivity and revived the Jewish worship; and by the king’s commission created Magistrates in all the land.”<sup>46</sup>

From this, Newton concluded that 490 years from 457 BCE brings us to 34 CE, the year Christ died. With some uncertainty, Newton applied the seven weeks, the first division of the seventy weeks, “to the time when Antichrist shall be destroyed by the brightness of Christ’s coming.”<sup>47</sup> He confessed a contradiction to tradition on this point.<sup>48</sup> In dealing with the 490 years, Newton delved into an elaborate chronological investigation attempting to prove on historical grounds that the seventy weeks began in

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<sup>45</sup>*Yahuda MS*, 10a, 2r. Newton believed that only the first part of Dan 9:24–7 (69 weeks) referred to the First Coming of Christ, whereas the last “week” (i.e., week number 70) referred to the time of the Second Coming of Christ; see Newton, *OCE*, 171, 174, 175.

<sup>46</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 172–3.

<sup>47</sup>“The manner I know not, let time be the Interpreter.” Newton, *OCE*, 174.

<sup>48</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 177.

457 BCE by the decree of Artaxerxes I. His starting point was Luke 3:1, which specifies the fifteenth year of Tiberius as the year close to Christ's baptism. From this, it was common to subtract thirty years to arrive at the birth of Christ. Thus, the fifteenth year of Tiberius became pivotal for Newton to establish the date of Christ's birth. From this historical reference point, he reckoned backward and forward with careful steps. Following some of Eusebius' reasoning, that Jesus' messiahship lasted three and a half years from his baptism to his crucifixion, Newton attempted to determine what time of year the different gospel passages referred to and concluded that there were five Passovers described in the Gospels. When, for example, the disciples "followed him [i.e. Jesus] in the open fields," Newton argued that this meant "the summer-season,"<sup>49</sup> and when Jesus silenced the storm, it meant "that winter was now come on."<sup>50</sup> Assuming that the gospels of Matthew and John together presented a chronological order of the Gospel incidents, Newton established the five Passovers between Christ's baptism and his crucifixion.<sup>51</sup>

From these proceedings, intermixed with the sciences of chronology and astronomy, Newton fixed 34 CE as the year Christ was crucified. He ruled out 31, 32, 35 and 36 CE as the year of Christ's death, because in those years, according to his detailed tables, the fourteenth day of the first month—the day of the Passover slaying did not occur on a Friday: "in the year of *Christ* 31, on Wednesday *March* 28; in the year 32, on

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<sup>49</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 188.

<sup>50</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 189.

<sup>51</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 191. Concerning the chronological aspects of John and Matthew, Newton opined, "John is more distinct in the beginning and end," but "Matthew in the middle: what either omits, the other supplies." Newton, *OCE*, 191.

Monday Apr. 14; in the year 33, on Friday Apr. 3; in the year 34, on Friday Apr. 23.”<sup>52</sup>

Although 33 CE and 34 fit with a Friday dating, only 34 CE had a mathematical relationship with 457 BCE, and the slaying of the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day in Nisan, according to Newton’s view, happened on a Friday in 34 CE. “Thus,” he concluded, “all the characters of the Passion, agree to the year 34; and that is the only year to which they all agree.”<sup>53</sup>

#### Daniel 11: The King of the North and the King of the South<sup>54</sup>

This vision gives a detailed description of political warfare with a continual shifting of power between the kings of the north and the kings of the south. Many modern scholars agree that the vision begins as a clear parallel to the unfolding history in the inter-testamental period, but becomes increasingly symbolic and historically complex in its description of an anti-Christian figure. It climaxes with the saving appearance of the Archangel Michael, which finalizes the war between God’s people and the Antichrist.

Newton described Dan 11 as “a commentary upon the Vision of the Ram and He-Goat,”<sup>55</sup> culminating with the last days. Newton provided details regarding the smooth transition between the Persians and Greeks, and went on to interpret the transition between Greece and Rome in Dan 11:31,<sup>56</sup> and the transition between pagan Rome and

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<sup>52</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 196.

<sup>53</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 198.

<sup>54</sup>See Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 7.1n.

<sup>55</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 199.

<sup>56</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 211.

papal Rome in Dan 11:36.<sup>57</sup> *Observations* gives substantial emphasis to the period from Constantine to Theodosius in the late fourth century,<sup>58</sup> but does not attempt to cover the continuous prophetic history of papal Rome beyond antiquity.

### **The Gospels and Paul**

The Olivet Discourse (or “Little Apocalypse”) in the synoptic Gospels is Jesus’ response to the disciples’ inquiry regarding the last days and the signs of His coming. In Matt 24 and 25, Jesus gave an overview of the future, beginning with the fall of Jerusalem and ending with the signs just prior to the Second Coming. The text clearly follows the pattern of a PEV. Jesus expected his followers to “read” and “understand” the sections in Daniel related to the “abomination of desolation.” There are repeated warnings (Matt 24:4, 11, 24) to be on guard against being deceived. The narrative also alludes to Antichrist figures (vv. 5, 23, 24, 26). Newton believed that the “abomination of desolation” spoken of by Daniel, and referred to by Jesus in Matt 24:15, “was to be set up in the times of the Roman Empire.”<sup>59</sup>

Paul’s “Man of Sin” in 2 Thess 2, who is prevented from appearing until “the restrainer” is taken out of the way, also exhibits clear characteristics of an Antichrist. This Antichrist figure, moreover, is described as sitting in the temple of God and calling himself God.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 213.

<sup>58</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 215–43.

<sup>59</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 177.

<sup>60</sup>For Newton’s comments on 2 Thessalonians 2, see Newton, *Yahuda MSS*, 15.3, 65<sup>r</sup>–7<sup>r</sup>; 15.7, 139<sup>v</sup> ff.



## The Book of Revelation

Compared to his expositions of Daniel, Newton's work on the Revelation was much less complete.<sup>61</sup> As noted in chap. 1, Newton grounded his study of Revelation on a firm textual platform of ancient biblical manuscripts. At a "rather early" time,<sup>62</sup> he traced and compared twenty-one early manuscripts of the Apocalypse.<sup>63</sup> Besides textual research, he believed that evaluations of the Church fathers' use of Revelation was a necessary step to a responsible interpretation. In *Observations*, he claimed that no book in the New Testament was more often quoted by the Church fathers than Revelation.<sup>64</sup> From these starting points he attempted to develop hermeneutical rules for the book of Revelation that would also be applicable to all canonical apocalyptic.<sup>65</sup>

Newton treated the structure of Revelation in general conformity to Mede's synchronized interpretations. He considered the late Cambridge scholar one of few competent interpreters of the book.<sup>66</sup> Through most of his adult life, he was in dialogue with leading British intellectuals on the topic of canonical apocalyptic.<sup>67</sup> Thus, from the

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<sup>61</sup>Referred to as *NC10* in Newton, *CMP*.

<sup>62</sup>Westfall, *NR*, 328.

<sup>63</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 2.5c, ff. 1–2. Iliffe remarked that "his work in reading and compiling variant reading lists of such manuscripts constituted another essential element of his hermeneutics," Rob Iliffe, "'Making a Shew': Apocalyptic Hermeneutics," in Force and Popkin, eds., *BNS*, 78. In Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 7.2i, f. 4, Newton categorically stated that in all the Bible, no book is "so much recommended & guarded by providence as this [i.e. Revelation]"; cf. Newton, *OCE*, 249.

<sup>64</sup>Newton, *OP*, 246–9.

<sup>65</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, ff. 12–19. These 15 (16) rules are discussed in chap. 5 below.

<sup>66</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, f. 15<sup>r</sup>. Frank Manuel aptly stated, in relation to canonical apocalyptic interpretation in the early Modern period, that "the scientific spirit [which] began to emerge in [Joseph] Mede, was strengthened in [Henry] More's use of mathematical language, and reached its apogee in Newton's system of interpretation." Manuel, *RIN*, 91.

<sup>67</sup>For example, see Henry More to Sharp, August 16, 1680, quoted in Westfall, *NR*, 349. Robert Boyle, John Locke, William Whiston, and Samuel Clarke were all part of Newton's inner circle, and

well of his privileged position, Newton repeatedly revised his commentary on the Apocalypse—some revisions more comprehensive than others—but not one that is even close to complete, in contrast to his work on Daniel.<sup>68</sup>

Newton's approach and method for studying Revelation was much the same as that of his study of Daniel. He believed the Apocalypse reached its ultimate fulfillment in the Christ versus Antichrist antithesis. To avoid being deceived, one must trust in Christ and the word of God, and learn about the Antichrist and his coming.<sup>69</sup> In a comment on Revelation he opined that "to describe the times of Apostasy was the main design of the Apocalypse."<sup>70</sup> Thus Newton's inquiry was not driven by intellectual stimulus alone, but perhaps more by the urgent desire to be accepted by the Lord at His coming.<sup>71</sup> The crucial role of the Antichrist in the apocalyptic narrative led Newton to focus his attention on the history of the papacy between later classical antiquity and the early Middle Ages, approximately 400 to 800 CE, seeking to locate the beginning of the 1260 years.<sup>72</sup>

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although there are few known letters, if any, of correspondence on apocalyptic between these men and Newton, it is likely they communicated ideas on apocalyptic with Newton through other venues.

<sup>68</sup>See Sir Isaac Newton, *CMP*: Lots # 80, 84, 217, 229, 241–3, 247.

<sup>69</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, ff. 1–10. To reach a conclusion of certainty regarding the Antichrist's identity, Newton would have had to apply almost all of the major principles of historicist hermeneutic (see chap. 3 above and chap. 5 below for characteristics of historicist hermeneutic).

<sup>70</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 9.2, f. 96; cf. 97–122.

<sup>71</sup>For instance, in Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, ff. 5–6, Newton stated: "There are but few that seek to understand the religion they profess, & those that study for understanding therein, do it rather for worldly ends, or that they may defend it."

<sup>72</sup>It seems clear from chap. 8 in Newton's *Observations* that he attempted to locate the 1260 days period within the above-mentioned timespan; see Newton, *OCE*, 135–60.

## Isaac Newton's Synchronization Scheme and the Structure of Revelation

It is widely recognized that Newton followed Joseph Mede, and to a lesser extent, Henry More, on the *structure* of Revelation, which determined his views of the *sequence* of Revelation's visions, and had a far-reaching impact on all of Newton's interpretations of Revelation. The two main options are simply whether the septet visions of Revelation (seven each of churches, seals, trumpets, and vials) represent (1) generally synchronic PEV sequences; or whether the septet visions represent (2) shorter non-synchronic consecutive periods *within* history (*not* spanning the *entire* history from Prophet to Eschaton), except for the seals. The following figures show the respective synchronization schemes of Mede, More, and Newton.

### Joseph Mede's Synchronization Scheme

Joseph Mede's interpretation of John's Revelation (though not the three initial septets) depended entirely on a set of synchronisms derived from Revelation (and largely clustered around occurrences of the 1260 years) which he integrated into a fixed prophetic macro-structure of the book. An artist, or Mede himself, made a representation of this macro-structure which is supplied in Figure 1.

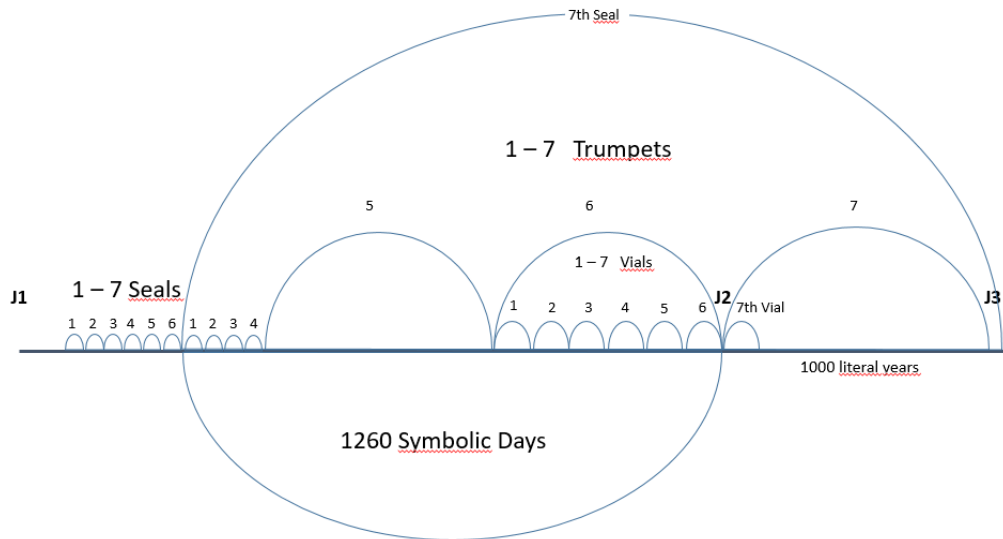


Figure 1. Joseph Mede's synchronization scheme.<sup>73</sup>

It will be seen below, that Newton's scheme was similar to Mede's. The only difference is that Newton began the seals a little later than Mede, and, contrary to both Mede and More, Newton synchronized the trumpets and vials. Mede's strictly consecutive (in contrast to synchronic) macro-structure of Revelation began with the seals in Rev 6 and 7, and most important, the seventh seal in Rev 8:1. He did not view the seven churches in Rev 2 and 3 as prophecy; he, therefore, began unfolding the seals from an early time. The seven seals are successively and historically fulfilled, with the seventh and last seal beginning to unfold around 400 CE, when barbarian hordes invaded the Roman Empire. From that time, the seven trumpets began unfolding, one after the other, from inside the seventh seal. Thus, the seventh seal extends to the end of the seventh trumpet (and the seventh plague).

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<sup>73</sup>I am thankful to Henrietta, my dear wife, for designing this and figures 2 and 3. The idea of the design for this and the following two diagrams is found in Iliffe, *Priest of Nature*, plates 8–13 in the picture section. The abbreviations J1, J2, and J3 represent Jesus' First, Second, and Third Comings. The coming millennium separates the Second and Third Coming.

The sixth trumpet will be the scene for the outpouring of the first six plagues, while the seventh trumpet will inaugurate the seventh plague and the Second Coming of Christ. The seventh trumpet, still inside the seventh seal, lasted a thousand years until the general resurrection of the wicked and their final destruction. Mede's architecture of Revelation, including his premillennialist view, became formative to many subsequent interpreters, including More and Newton.

### Henry More's Synchronization Scheme

Henry More's strictly chronological macro-structure of Revelation is almost identical to Mede's, except for a few details. As did Mede, More understood the seals as the encompassing vision covering the whole of church history, into which the subsequent visions are integrated. In contrast to both Mede and Newton, More viewed the seven churches as a prophecy covering all of church history (Prophet-to-Eschaton) and approximately synchronous with the seven seals. Newton, however, ended the seventh church in the fourth century (elsewhere he contradicts this).<sup>74</sup> Ephesus, the first of the seven churches, More synchronized with the first seal. Smyrna, the second church, he synchronized with the second through to, and halfway into the sixth seal. The third church (period) he stretched from the time of the sixth seal until the end of the fifth trumpet (which unfolded in the seventh seal), whereas the fourth church covered the time of the sixth trumpet. The fifth, sixth, and seventh church periods he integrated chronologically between the first and sixth plagues, all of which unfolded inside the latter half of the seventh seal. The seven trumpets were unfolded during the first half of the

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<sup>74</sup>See ch. 3, above, for Newton's interpretations of Rev 2 and 3.

seventh seal. Thus, the major difference between More and Mede is that More placed all the trumpets and plagues in successive order inside the seventh seal, and, moreover, the seven churches are evenly spread across the entire church history, somehow synchronously connected to the seals (see Figure 2). More was generally happy with Mede's synchronisms of smaller literary sections in Revelation, but differed, of course, where Mede's macro-structure differed from his.<sup>75</sup>

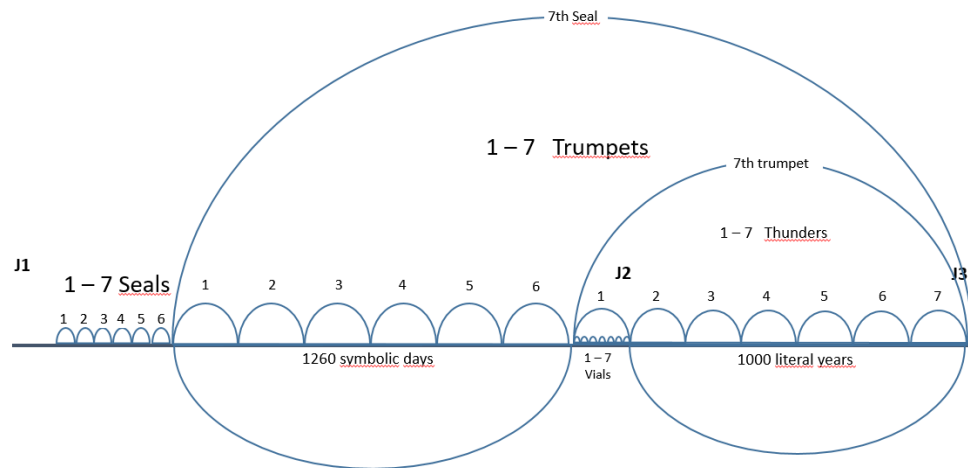


Figure 2. Henry More's synchronization scheme.<sup>76</sup>

Newton's macro-structure of Revelation follows Mede's, except for the beginning of the seals, due to Newton's view that the seven churches were confined to the era of the primitive church. Thus, since Revelation's text will be fulfilled more or less chronologically and successively, in harmony with the synchronisms around the 1260

<sup>75</sup>Much was lacking in research regarding More's understanding of Mede's apocalyptic scheme twenty-five years ago. According to Sarah Hutton, "More's contribution to the development of Mede's scheme is still largely unstudied, and his possible influence on the [sic] Newton, in particular is still largely unexplored" (James E. Force and Richard H. Popkin, eds., *The Books of Nature and Scripture . . .*, p. 39). Robert Iliffe has corrected much of that gloomy picture through his recent publication *Priest of Nature: The Religious Worlds of Isaac Newton*, in which he compares in detail, Mede's, More's, and Newton's apocalypticism, including their synchronisms and their successive prophetic macro-structures.

<sup>76</sup>See p. 150n73.

symbolic days, Newton began the unfolding of the seals at the end of the last church, around the time of Emperor Constantine. From there, the seven seals are successively unfolded in chronological order, covering all of history until the end of the millennium, as Mede also thought. In Newton, as in Mede and More, most of Revelation unfolds inside the seventh seal, starting from the fourth/fifth century on. According to Newton, the trumpets blow in successive order, synchronous with the plagues. Here he departed from Mede and followed More. That Newton otherwise followed Mede's Revelation scheme quite rigidly, however, remains a fact. In considering Newton's interpretations of specific portions of Revelation, it will be evident how thoroughly his synchronization scheme impacts his interpretations (Figure 3).

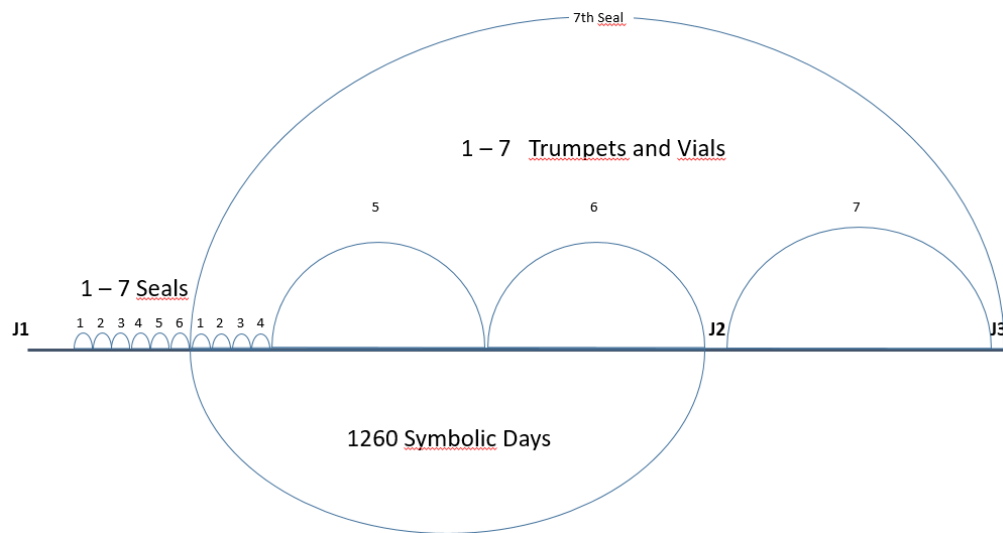


Figure 3. Isaac Newton's synchronization scheme.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>See p. 150n73. In the 1690s Newton sent a prophetic chart to John Locke related to the 1260 days/years, together with other charts, (see *Yahuda MS*, 7.2a, ff. 29<sup>r</sup>-38<sup>r</sup>). For information on Newton's letter to Locke, see Snobelen, "A Time and Times and the Dividing of Time," p. 546n18.

## Revelation 2 and 3: The Seven Churches

After an introduction in Rev 1, chaps. 2 and 3 present seven epistles from the glorified Christ to Christian churches in seven cities of ancient western Anatolia. To each city's congregation, a spiritual and personal message is given, usually in the form of rebuke and encouragement.

At different times, Newton suggested several possible and apparently confusing interpretations of “the prophetique [*sic*] epistles to the seven churches.”<sup>78</sup> In one place, he equaled them with the seven horns on the Lamb,<sup>79</sup> in another with the seven remaining horns on the fourth beast in Dan 7.<sup>80</sup> In *Yahuda MS* 1.4, he focused on the ten days of special persecution (Rev 2:10) in the Smyrna church and used that as a prophetic chronological reference point: The ten days were regarded on the year-day basis and fulfilled during the Diocletian persecution between 303 and 313.<sup>81</sup>

In *Yahuda MS* 9.2, his most exhaustive locus on the seven churches, Newton suggested that each church represents an epoch in the prophetic unfolding of church history:

The first Church is the twelve tribes of Israel together with the 144,000 servants of God sealed out of them, the second is the saints whose prayers the Angel offers with incense upon the golden Altar, the third is the mystical body of the mighty Angel standing upon the earth & sea, the fourth is the measured Temple of God & they that worship therein, the fifth is the woman flying into the Wilderness together with the remnant of her seed, the sixth is the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven out of which the seven Angels come with the vials of wrath, the seventh is the Church

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<sup>78</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 7<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>79</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 41<sup>r</sup>

<sup>80</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 9.2, f. 81<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>81</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, ff. 14<sup>r</sup>–15<sup>r</sup>, 148<sup>r</sup>, 150<sup>r</sup>.



of the saints & martyrs with whose blood the Whore is drunken called the Lamb's wife which after the fall of Babylon doth make her self ready for marriage.<sup>82</sup>

Newton explored yet a third possibility for the seven churches when he suggested

“second” that:

it is to be considered that Asia signifies mud or earth & that mountains are the type of Cities & Temples. And in this respect the seven Cities & Churches of Asia may *typifie the sevenfold Church of the whole earth in the last times* & be accounted seven mountains opposite to [the] seven mountains on which the whore sitteth in those times.<sup>83</sup>

In an attempt to synchronize Daniel and Revelation, the seven churches are equated with the seven horns on the Lamb in Revelation,<sup>84</sup> the seven horns of Dan 7,<sup>85</sup> and the seven angels in Rev 2–3. Further, the “sevenfold appearance” he equated with the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of prophecy.<sup>86</sup> This Spirit, which was in Christ, dictated the seven epistles.<sup>87</sup>

#### Revelation 4–8: The Seven Seals

The next septet prophecy of the Apocalypse projects a heavenly scene in which a document is sealed with seven seals. Only the Lamb of God can open it. The purpose of the sealed book, according to Newton, was “to describe & obviate the great Apostacy

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<sup>82</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 9.2, f. 81<sup>r</sup>, sec. ix.

<sup>83</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, Newton believed the seven heads in Rev 17 expressed progressive historical fulfillment; see below under heading of Rev 17 and 18. Italics supplied.

<sup>84</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 41<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>85</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 9.2, f. 81<sup>r</sup>. Newton, here in Dan 7, counted from after the little horn had eradicated three horns on the fourth animal.

<sup>86</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 82<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>87</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 82<sup>r</sup>–3<sup>r</sup>.

[sic],”<sup>88</sup> and ”representing that plenary revelation which the great God imparted to our Saviour after his resurrection & to none but him.”<sup>89</sup> He also connected the seals thematically with the trumpet-plagues stating that “the seven seales are the first plagues inflicted upon the Jews[,] heathens[,] & true Christians[,] & the seven Trumpets or Thunders the last [plagues] inflicted upon the Apostates of the last times.”<sup>90</sup>

In order to understand Newton’s particular interpretation of Revelation’s seals (and successive visions), it is essential to grasp his synchronization scheme. In relation to the seals, Newton regarded the trumpets as subordinate because they are the “immediate consequences” of opening the seventh seal.<sup>91</sup> Hence, the seven trumpets begin after the opening of the sixth seal. As indicated above in one of his three interpretations of the seven epistles, Newton interpreted the remaining prophecies in the book of Revelation according to a previously confirmed overall structure of the entire Apocalypse. Just as the seven epistles represented seven epochs of church history, beginning with the first century and ending with the judgment in a successive, uninterrupted flow, so do the seals. The only significant difference between the two septets is that the seventh seal began unfolding at a much earlier time (immediately after the death of Theodosius, 380 CE) than the seventh church.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 158<sup>r</sup>. That great apostasy, described in the Lamb’s book (seven seals), is linked to his understanding of the growth of trinitarianism: “That Apostacy was to begin by corrupting the truth about the relation of the Son to the Father in putting them equal.” Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 158<sup>r</sup>–63<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>89</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 156<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>90</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 9.2, f. 39<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>91</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 1<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>92</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, ff. 57–59.

From around 400 CE, and within the seventh seal, the seven trumpets begin to unfold, reaching until the end: “The Seales[,] & with in the seventh Seal the trumpets[,] are distributions of time which succeeded one another orderly without any interruption or interfering.”<sup>93</sup> The trumpets, moreover, were equated and synchronized with the seven vials in Newton’s apocalyptic scheme.<sup>94</sup> Thus, most of the rest of Revelation is integrated into the historical framework of the seventh seal.<sup>95</sup>

The complexity of Newton’s synchronic apocalyptic scheme is illustrated in his description of the seven heads’ chronology and how they relate to the seals:

The heads of the Dragon & Beast are the distributions of the Kingdom according to the seven seales. For since St Iohn no where distributes it into such parts but by the seales & trumpets, & the Beast or seventh head takes up the seventh Seale by Prop 10 it remains that the first six heads be coincident with the first six seales. And indeed what els[e] should be meant by calling these heads Kings in ch 17.10 but to point at the four horsmen in the 4 first Seales as being . . . a specimen of the rest.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2 f. 1<sup>r</sup>. Newton found support for this classic historicist thinking from the last three angels (of the seven seals) which were said to be “yet to come” (Rev 8:13), and “one woe is past” (Rev 9:12). See also Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3a; 1.2 f. 1<sup>r</sup>: “in the Vision as it appeared to St Iohn the Seales were opened & the Trumpets sounded one after another in order & the contents of every Seale & Trumpet are in this book of the Apocalyps described in the same order without any interfering or real interruption.”

<sup>94</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, ff. 3<sup>r</sup>–6<sup>r</sup>; cf. 1.2, ff. 3<sup>r</sup>–5<sup>r</sup> with 1.3 ff. 1–4, where Newton compared the trumpets and vials in a parallel diagram. “You see the agreement between the plagues of the seven Vials & Trumpets is throughout very punctual so that I think there can be no doubting of their coincidence” and “the Vials are called the seven last Plagues, they suit well with the Trumpets which are the Plagues of the last Seale & inflicted on those wicked ages which the Prophets & Apostles considered as the last times.” Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2 f. 6<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>95</sup>This includes the woman and dragon in Rev 12. See Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 11<sup>r</sup>; 1.3 f. 12. Newton stated that “the dragon’s symptoms are described at the opening of the seales,” and that the reign of the dragon is found throughout the seals and the trumpets, (Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3 f. 10); Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3 f. 14. The beast (presumably the sea beast of Rev 13) began to rule with the trumpets (including seventh seal), (Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3 f. 9, 16a), but rose up from the sea already at the sixth seal, (Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3 f. 15<sup>v</sup>); the seven heads on Dragon and beast are successive kingdoms “by the opening of the seals in order,” (Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3 f. 23); and, finally, the two horned-beast of Rev 13 is part of the seventh seal’s historic parameter, (Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3 f. 19).

<sup>96</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3 f. 26 (prop. XII).

Newton located the first four seals historically between the time of “St. John & the beginning of the tenth persecution [i.e. the Diocletian persecution].”<sup>97</sup> These beasts are part of the throne environment and represent the four heavenly directions toward which the Israelites were encamped during the desert wandering. Newton deduced this with support from the Bible and a Rabbinic source.<sup>98</sup> Thus, a corresponding identifying symbol is given to each of the four directions: (1) The eastern standard had as its sign, a lion; (2) the western, an ox; (3) the southern, a man; (4) and the northern, an eagle. Ultimately, the vision in Revelation represented God’s glory through the “four quarters of Israel.”<sup>99</sup>

Newton used this, together with the textual information about the four riders on the four horses, as indicators to locate these first seals historically. Hence, Roman rulers were identified on the basis of their geographical origin and were seen to spearhead each successive period. However, Newton perceived the first rider on the white horse as none other than Jesus.<sup>100</sup> The second rider he identified as Trajan (98–117 CE), who came out of the east, the third as Septimus Severus (193–211 CE) of Africa, and the fourth as Maximinus I (235–238 CE) from Thracia.<sup>101</sup> “The design of these seales,” Newton stated, “is to describe and distinguish successive times by incommunicable characters.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>97</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4 f. 17<sup>r</sup>. From “the first preaching of Christianity . . . the Ascension or Pentecost A.C. [i.e., CE] 33,” in Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 152<sup>r</sup>–3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>98</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4 f. 19<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>99</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4 f. 19<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>100</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4 f. 168<sup>r</sup>. F. 165<sup>r</sup> has “from Iulius Cæsar.”

<sup>101</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4 f. 19<sup>r</sup>. In other locations, Newton mentioned Decius as the fourth. Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 153<sup>r</sup>, 167<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>102</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 23<sup>r</sup>.

The second seal began with Trajan who came out of the west and “inlarged it [the empire] exceedingly.”<sup>103</sup> The third seal began unfolding with Septimus Severus, allegedly an African.<sup>104</sup> Newton, moreover, thought the balance weight in the third seal represented judgment,<sup>105</sup> and not a literal famine, as the literal sense would suggest.<sup>106</sup>

Although the fourth seal, “the most dismal seal,”<sup>107</sup> began with Maximinus I, originally from Thracia,<sup>108</sup> Newton believed this seal also/or represented Trajan’s expanded empire when Rome grew to become one fourth of the “then known world.”<sup>109</sup> He stated elsewhere that the brutality of this period represented the dictatorship of Maximinus and the successive emperors up to Diocletian.<sup>110</sup> Preparing to interpret the rest of the seals, Newton affirmed that

since there are no more Horsmen, we are not any longer to be guided by the succession of Emperors, but must limit the three remaining seales by the succession of such other things as are described in them, so as to begin each seale where the things therein begin to be fulfilled, & end it where they end, or where those of the next begin, without regarding whether that period be the beginning or end of the reign of any Emperor.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>103</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 17<sup>r</sup>–18<sup>r</sup>, 21<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>104</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 18<sup>r</sup>, 19<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>105</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, f. 48.

<sup>106</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 23<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>107</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 29<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>108</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 19<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>109</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 30<sup>r</sup>. See also f. 196<sup>r</sup>; 1.2 f. 23<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>110</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 25<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>111</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 198<sup>r</sup>.

The fifth seal, which is synchronized with an event belonging in the second church period in Rev 2:10,<sup>112</sup> describes persecution “under the altar” and covers the ten years’ persecution under Diocletian, beginning in 303.<sup>113</sup> This seal, moreover, indicated to Newton the end of focus on Roman rulers and the beginning of “the affairs of the Church.”<sup>114</sup> The empire at this time was seen as ruling over one third of the “whole habitable world known to the old Romans.”<sup>115</sup>

The sixth seal covers the period from the reign of Constantine until the death of Theodosius (380).<sup>116</sup> This seal, which describes the overthrowing of a kingdom,<sup>117</sup> is synchronized with the casting out of Satan from heaven in Rev 12, which caused the “universal ruin” and abolition of idolatry.<sup>118</sup> This triumph, in turn, foretells persecution.<sup>119</sup> The beast, “which rose out of the Sea at the death of Constantine,”<sup>120</sup> was only “imperfectly” beginning in this period.<sup>121</sup> Newton understood the signs and shaking of heavens, in the sixth seal to mean the total overthrow of heathenism.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 15<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>113</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 13, 30<sup>r</sup>, 197<sup>r</sup>–200<sup>r</sup>; 1.3, f. 11.

<sup>114</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 9.2, f. 35<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>115</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 29<sup>r</sup>, 30<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>116</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 12<sup>r</sup>.; 152<sup>r</sup>. Cf. Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4 f. 197<sup>r</sup>–8.

<sup>117</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, f. 11.

<sup>118</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 12<sup>r</sup>, 13<sup>r</sup>, 202<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>119</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS* 1.3, f. 10.

<sup>120</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 17.

<sup>121</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 17; 152<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>122</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 12<sup>r</sup>.

Newton regarded Rev 7 as a parenthesis between the sixth and seventh seal,<sup>123</sup> although the seventh seal manifestly begins together with those things described in the seventh chapter “because[e] the hurting of the Earth & the Sea & the Trees which was immediately to follow the sealing of the saints ch 7.3 was put in execution at the sounding of the Trumpets.”<sup>124</sup>

The design of such an interruption in the septet narrative, according to Newton, signified

an end of the former state of things & the beginning of a new one by some grand revolution, & so it will most fitly agree to that cardinal period of time which concluded the reign of the Dragon in heaven & began the flight of the Woman into the wilderness.<sup>125</sup>

The seventh seal began “with the peace made with the Goths & the delivery of the Churches to the Homoüsians, Decemb. A.C. [i.e., CE] 380,”<sup>126</sup> and in the following year, the beast began to be worshipped.<sup>127</sup> Newton called the generation after Theodosius “Blasphemers & spiritual fornicators”<sup>128</sup> and equated the opening of this seal to the Day of Atonement.<sup>129</sup> The half hour of silence (Rev 8:1) he applied on a “double” year-day principle yielding fifteen years.<sup>130</sup> In contrast to the general impression one gets from his

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<sup>123</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 2.1, f. 2<sup>r</sup>; 1.3 f. b.

<sup>124</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, f. b (prop. I).

<sup>125</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 13, (prop. VIII).

<sup>126</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 210<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>127</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 50.

<sup>128</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 67–8. For a full treatment of this age, see Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 68–84.

<sup>129</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 9.2, f. 37<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>130</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.5, f. 13<sup>r</sup>.

church historiography, Newton apparently saw no significant “apocalyptic” apostasy in the church before the opening of the seventh seal, while the last seal, through the seven trumpets, exhibited a continuous apostasy.<sup>131</sup> He explained his intricate system of synchronization in this exceedingly informative statement:

And indeed so notable are the times of this Apostacy that the whole Apocalyps from the fourth chapter seems to have been written for the sake of it. For the first six seales are but like an introduction to give warning of these times approaching & the 13 following chapters do all of them concern these times, some part of the 12th chapter onely excepted. And these are the times also which Daniel in no less then three of his visions (chap 7, 8, 11) has so long before described to be above all others exceedingly wicked.<sup>132</sup>

The Dragon, which was active during the first seals, does not disappear after the emerging and appearance of the beast in the beginning part of the sixth and seventh seal, “but becomes a member of him (i.e., the beast).”<sup>133</sup>

#### Revelation 8–11: The Seven Trumpets

The seven trumpets unit in the Apocalypse, like the unit of the seven seals and the seven cities, is built on a septet system. The cultic background to these septets, including the trumpets and vials, was clear to Newton: He equated the angels blowing the trumpets with priests in the old sanctuary service,<sup>134</sup> and the seven trumpets as alluding “to the sacrifices of the seven days of the feast of Tabernacles,” including “the plagues &

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<sup>131</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, f. 58.

<sup>132</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 59 (prop. XII).

<sup>133</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, f. 10 (prop. VIII).

<sup>134</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 9.2, f. 41<sup>r</sup>. And, “the dedication of the Temple by Solomon is herein plainly alluded unto.”



Vials.”<sup>135</sup> These seven trumpets also present a scene of judgment.<sup>136</sup> Newton equated the seven trumpets and seven vials and affirmed, after analyzing the type of figures applied in the biblical text, that they represented judgment executed through war.<sup>137</sup> The trumpets, beginning to unfold in late antiquity, reached down to the time of Newton, and beyond, for the trumpets lasted “above a thousand years.”<sup>138</sup> The trumpets, moreover, were seen as figuring judgment on apostates because from

the time from the beginning of the seventh seale to the beginning of the seventh Trumpet is but one & the same continued Apostacy which arrives to a greater height at the beginning of the fifth Trumpet, & at the greatest height at the death of the Witnesses[,] & after their resurrection declines gradually until first the great City Babylon be ruined & a while after all the Nations which gave their Kingdom to it [would] be overthrown with an exceeding great slaughter.<sup>139</sup>

The first six trumpets, and their corresponding vials, therefore, represent successive “Furies” against the empire “sent in by the wrath of God to scourge the Romans.”<sup>140</sup> Regarding the synchronization of the seven seals with that of the seven trumpets in the previous section, it was shown that Newton’s historic transition point (from the sixth to the seventh seal) was located in 380 CE. Thus, the first trumpet began

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<sup>135</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 42<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>136</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 63; cf. 9.2, f. 39<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>137</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 1<sup>r</sup>–10<sup>r</sup>.; in Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 6<sup>r</sup>: “the Vials are called the seven last Plagues, they suit well with the Trumpets which are the Plagues of the last Seale & inflicted on those wicked ages which the Prophets & Apostles considered as the last times.” See also Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, ff. b–d. In 1.2, f. 3<sup>r</sup>–6<sup>r</sup>, he compared the trumpets and vials in two parallel columns, “and thus you see the agreement between the plagues of the seven Vials & Trumpets is throughout very punctual so that I think there can be no doubting of their coincidence.” Cf. 1.3, ff. 1–4, 33–38.; 1.4, f. 62.

<sup>138</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, f. 24.

<sup>139</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, f. 57.

<sup>140</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 127.

sounding at the unsealing of the seventh seal, and each successive trumpet would then blow within that seal, “in the same order without any interfering or real interruption.”<sup>141</sup>

Regarding the unfolding of the trumpets, Newton summarized their progressive nature

as an indication of [the] orderly succession of all the rest [of the trumpets], the succession of the four last is described in express words. For between the 4th & 5th Trumpet an Angel proclaimed Wo because of the three angels which were yet to sound. And the fifth & sixth Trumpet are successively joyned by this expression between them, One wo is past & behold there come two more woes hereafter[.] And so the sixth & seventh are joyned by this, The second Wo is past & behold the third wo cometh quickly.<sup>142</sup>

The parenthesis of Rev 7, located between the sixth and seventh seals, Newton paralleled with Rev 10:1–11:13 as also constituting “a Paranthesis [*sic*] between the sixth & seventh Trumpet.”<sup>143</sup> Moreover, he synchronized the first four trumpets with the “four winds” of Rev 7,<sup>144</sup> whereas he thought the seven thunders of Rev 10:3 “most probably denote the same thing with the seven Trumpets.”<sup>145</sup>

“The Dragon begins with the Seales & the Beast with the Trumpets,”<sup>146</sup> Newton affirmed, to indicate that the beast [the Antichrist?], “derived out of the dragon” and began to rule around the time of Theodosius, whereas the Dragon, representing old Rome, had ruled since the unfolding of the seals.<sup>147</sup> During the time of the trumpets, these

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<sup>141</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 1<sup>r</sup>. Cf. 1.3, ff. a–b.

<sup>142</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 1<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>143</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 1<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>144</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 10<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>145</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, f. 4.

<sup>146</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 63<sup>r</sup>; 1.3 f. 9.

<sup>147</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, f. 14.

beasts were melting together, in which “the Beast is coextended to all the Trumpets,”<sup>148</sup> thus, “the common period of the Dragon & Beast is coincident with the common period of the Seales & Trumpets.”<sup>149</sup>

Historically, Newton allocated the first four trumpets to the time and events of the barbarian invasions in the fourth and fifth centuries. The eastern invasions of 395 CE constituted the first trumpet; the invasion of Gallia and Spain in 408 was the second trumpet; the invasion of Africa in 427 was the third trumpet; and the wars in Italy in 536 were the fourth trumpet.<sup>150</sup> The last three trumpets are naturally disconnected from the first four in that the latter three are each preceded with a “woe” (Rev 9:12; 11:14), signifying some sort of “new scene.”<sup>151</sup>

The first trumpet began to blow “after the short peace during the stillness of the winds”<sup>152</sup> after the death of Theodosius the great, 395 CE.<sup>153</sup> It thus declared “the end of the Church & beginning of the Beast’s wicked reign.”<sup>154</sup>

A significant change in universal religious history, worthy of apocalyptic notice, took place in 380, “which of all changes that ever were wrought on a sudden in the christian Religion was the greatest both in regard of the universality, it being wrought

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<sup>148</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 9. Cf. 1.4, f. 5<sup>r</sup> [4<sup>v</sup>].

<sup>149</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, f. 10. Cf. 1.4, f. 5<sup>r</sup>: “Becauss it is coextended to all the seales & Trumpets & so must last from Saint Iohn's time to the end of the world; & the Roman is the onely Kingdom of that continuance which can come into consideration,” and Newton, *Yahuda MS*, “the Beast must signify the latter ages of the same Empire.”

<sup>150</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 43<sup>r</sup>. An elaborate study of each trumpet is found 1.6, 1<sup>r</sup> ff.

<sup>151</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, ff. 42–3.

<sup>152</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 16<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>153</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 63<sup>r</sup>, 110<sup>r</sup> ff.

<sup>154</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 67<sup>r</sup>.

over all the Empire, & in regard of the nature of the thing, it being the foundation of all following Apostacy.”<sup>155</sup>

Newton equated the emerging Trinitarian teachings with apostasy, and having researched a number of sources, he declared that the apostasy of the greatest proportions had already begun at the blowing of the first trumpet.<sup>156</sup> The Huns and Goths, coming from the east, particularly challenged the political Roman system in these early barbarian invasions, illustrated with the “hail & fire mingled with blood.”<sup>157</sup>

The second trumpet is characterized by a war with a western wind, “that is in the regions westward of Rome and indicates the Frankish invasion.”<sup>158</sup> The great mountain thrown into the sea is seen as Rome, and the “third part of the sea” which became blood, he understood as the third part of “the western Roman Empire.”<sup>159</sup> Thus, “the third part of every thing therein [i.e., in all four trumpets] is an expression used to signify those things which are within this Empire.”<sup>160</sup> In introducing the third trumpet, Newton stated that

the western empire being now rent into many kingdoms, & those pretty well settled under their new lords: there brake out A.C 427 a war in the southern quarter which is the quarter of the third wind. For Afric which had æ [62] hitherto flourished in peace & prosperity having had no other considerable molestation since the beginning of Theodosius’s reign.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>155</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.6, f. 50<sup>v</sup> (insertion from 9<sup>v</sup>).

<sup>156</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, ff. 68<sup>r</sup>–106<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>157</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS* 1.6, f. 1<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>158</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 138<sup>r</sup> ff.

<sup>159</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 145<sup>r</sup>.; 1.9, ff. 9<sup>r</sup>, 17<sup>r</sup>; 1.7, f. 8<sup>r</sup>. For western part, see 1.7, f. 9<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>160</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.6, f. 10<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>161</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.6, f. 25<sup>r</sup>; cf. 1.7, f. 14<sup>r</sup>.

The Vandals and Alans were the major barbarian forces creating the action described in this trumpet.<sup>162</sup> Later, the Ostrogoths were included in this trumpet's scenario because they expelled the Heruli during the time of Odoacer<sup>163</sup> and the Vandals in the 530s.<sup>164</sup> The third part of the rivers was seen as "the people of the Western Empire."<sup>165</sup> An important point in Newton's interpretation of the trumpets is his insistence that although the barbarian tribes "plagued the Romans by wars, yet all did not persecute them much for religion"; of this, the Ostrogoths, he declared, were an impeccable example.<sup>166</sup>

Newton associated the fourth trumpet with "that famous Ostrogothic war" which began in 534 and originated from a northern point, vis-à-vis the city of Rome.<sup>167</sup> After the defeat of the Ostrogoths, another Germanic tribe, the Lombards, moved in against Rome from the north and reduced the city's size significantly. The darkening of moon and stars he understood as "the utter extinction of the remaining light of the western Empire,"<sup>168</sup> which was no longer "in the Dominion of the Emperour, but in that of the city of Rome."<sup>169</sup> The darkening period thus began, Newton stated, "at the beginning of the siege of Rome which was Feb: 20 in the third year of the Gothic war . . . A.C. [i.e. CE]

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<sup>162</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.6, f. 25<sup>r</sup> ff.

<sup>163</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 31<sup>r</sup>.; cf. 1.7, f. 15<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>164</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.7, f. 21<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>165</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.7, f. 16<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>166</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.6, f. 40<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>167</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 45<sup>r</sup>.; cf. 1.7, f. 21<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>168</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.6, f. 45<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>169</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.7, f. 21<sup>r</sup>.; cf. 9.1, ff. 6<sup>r</sup>–9<sup>r</sup>.

537.”<sup>170</sup> The Ostrogoths, inhabiting that city at a crucial time of history, contributed, according to Newton, to Rome’s regaining of some of its old glory:

Thus Rome flourished under the Goths after the same manner as formerly under her own Emperors, as if she had changed nothing but the title of her Emperors to that of Kings And together with Rome [,] Ravenna & divers other cities were repaired & restored to their pristine lustre, so that Italy seemed in a state as peacefull & prosperous as in the reign of some of their best Emperors.<sup>171</sup>

Nevertheless, the wars with the Ostrogoths ignited the fourth trumpet and vial. Emperor Justinian “sent his armies into Italy,” and was thereby “the cause of the wars,” despite appeals of peace from the Gothic king.<sup>172</sup>

The fifth trumpet, according to Newton, began unfolding through “the wars of the Saracen Empire upon the Romans” at the beginning of the seventh century.<sup>173</sup> The period is characterized with the rise of a new religion, Mahometanism (Mohammedanism) which, according to Newton, arose from the bottomless pit. “This fals [sic] religion,” Newton stated, “is to rise at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> Trumpet. For this the order of the Trumpets requires. Yet between the contents of these two Trumpets some little interval may be allowed answering to the space taken up by the flight of the Angel through heaven wich cryed Wo.”<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.7, f. 29<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>171</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.6, f. 48<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>172</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.7, f. 30<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>173</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 31<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>174</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 31<sup>r</sup>.

The supporters of this new religion were numerous and symbolized by thick smoke and a great number of locusts. The animal coming up from the bottomless pit was synchronized somehow with “the rise of Antichrist.”<sup>175</sup>

The symbol of locusts Newton understood as “the Arabians,”<sup>176</sup> a people well ordered under a king, “both a spirituall & temporall Prince,”<sup>177</sup> and enemies of the Roman state. The fifth vial, thus, was seemingly poured out on the Roman state. Newton applied the year-day principle to the period of five months, thus yielding 150 years.<sup>178</sup> Newton saw the creation of only two new religions since Revelation was written: The Roman and Mahometan. This he explained in the following way:

And so in the Prophecy of the Seales & Trumpets there are described but two states which arise out of the bottomless pit, the Beast & the Locusts. Wherefore since the Beast is the Roman state (as shall be further explained hereafter,) it remains that the Locusts be the Mahometan. 2. The Mahometan is the religion which arose at the end of the 4th Trumpet. For the darkness of the Sun Moon & stars in that Trumpet continued till the year 609. And in the year 609 the Mahometan religion began to be hatched.<sup>179</sup>

Newton interpreted the sixth vial (trumpet) as a warning of the parousia,<sup>180</sup> which began its unfolding from “the [dis]solution of the four Euphratean Sultanies [in] A.C. 1258,” during which time the Turks made wars against the Romans.<sup>181</sup> Newton literalized the imagery related to the river Euphrates. The “Euphratean horsemen,” which succeeded

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<sup>175</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 31<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>176</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 37<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>177</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 32<sup>r</sup>–3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>178</sup>In Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.7, f. 38<sup>r</sup> ff., Newton attempted to find the beginning and end of this 150 year period, focusing on the 600s as the beginning point.

<sup>179</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 34<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>180</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>181</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.7, f. 42<sup>r</sup>.

the “locusts” from the previous trumpet now attacked Roman territory. Similar to the number of subjects in the previous trumpet, the number of soldiers in this trumpet was “an immense number.”<sup>182</sup> The Turks, Newton stated,

& the Saracen’s Empire have been the two greatest & the only two very great scourges of the Christian world for this last thousand years, & therefore none but these can be intended by the two first of these three great woes, unless we will suppose that the Holy Ghost has been very particular in describing some smaller plagues of the Christians & taken no notice of the greatest, which would be to make the parts of the Prophecy hold no proportion with those of history.<sup>183</sup>

The angel described in this trumpet ceased its activity in 1258 “when Hulacu the Tartar took Bagdad & put an end to the Califate; & immediately after this,” Newton continued, “followed the loosing of the four angels,”<sup>184</sup> whom he identified as the four Tetrarchies.<sup>185</sup> Later, however, Newton admitted that there should really be five angels because “Miepharekin was at this time a distinct Sultany.”<sup>186</sup> Newton, moreover, felt that the larger proportion of space in Revelation given to the fifth and sixth trumpets, as compared to the space allotted to the first four trumpets, warranted his interpretation of a relatively short time period for the barbarian invasions and a longer period for the Islamic assaults.<sup>187</sup>

Since the trumpets, except the last one or two, indicated an ongoing apostasy, there seemed to be a victory at the end; thus, Newton stated that “after the greatest decay

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<sup>182</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 43<sup>r</sup>; cf. 62<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>183</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.7, f. 44<sup>r</sup>; cf. 56<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>184</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 44<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>185</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 49<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>186</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, ff. 52<sup>r</sup>–3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>187</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, ff. 45<sup>r</sup>–6<sup>r</sup>.; cf. f. 57<sup>r</sup>.



of religion there is to be a universal preaching of the Gospel immediately before the seventh Trumpet. . . . But this is not yet fulfilled; there has been nothing done in the world like it, & therefore it is to come.”<sup>188</sup> Concurrently, “a little before the pouring out of the 7th Vial,”<sup>189</sup> a warning would be given that the Second Coming was at hand. Moreover, Newton saw the end of the world in the symbolism of this last trumpet because it indicated that there was no more time left; thus, the mystery of God had been finished.

The description of a judgment in the seventh trumpet indicated to Newton that at the last trumpet’s beginning phase, the world as we know it, would end.<sup>190</sup> With the blowing of the final trumpet, Newton understood the battle of

the great day, & the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdoms of Christ & he shal reign for ever, . . . & the time of the dead that {they} should be judged, & that God should give reward unto his servants the {Priests} & to the saints & destroy them who {destroyed the earth. . . } For the general judgment commences with the 1000 years . . . the new kingdom founded at the sounding of the seventh Trumpet, & the new Ierusalem . . . came down from heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband being the Lambs wife who had made herself ready for marriage before the war between the Lamb & the Beast & whose marriage supper was celebrated in that war.<sup>191</sup>

### Revelation 12: The Woman and the Dragon

The scene in Rev 12 depicts a war between Michael and the dragon. A pregnant woman (whose “seed” will eventually experience the wrath of the dragon) is persecuted

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<sup>188</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 2<sup>r</sup>. See also 1.3, ff. 55–6; and ff. 38–48.

<sup>189</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>190</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 3<sup>r</sup>; cf. 9.2, f. 33<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>191</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 9.2, f. 44<sup>r</sup>. Note that the symbol { } indicates that the editor is uncertain of the reading because the text is undetectable in Newton’s autograph.

by the dragon and protected by Michael. The dragon's identity is explained in the text as primarily Satan.

“The woman in travail is the Church of Christ, & the Dragon a great Heathen Kingdome & both together the subject of the seven Seales.”<sup>192</sup> Newton accepted the historicity of Rev 12: that the Church<sup>193</sup> and state were involved in a historic battle that began in antiquity, from whence Newton began the seven seals, until the latter days. He placed the beginning part of the vision during “Dioclesian's [*sic*, Diocletian's] Persecution, the conversion of the Empire to christianity, & the hiding or disappearing of the true church through the rise of the great Apostacy.”<sup>194</sup> Newton believed the twelve stars on the woman's head signified the twelve apostles, and her being “cloathed with the Sun,” signified “the righteousness of Christ.” The war between the dragon and Michael “denote[d] also a very great persecution of the Church” represented by the woman in travail.<sup>195</sup>

“The inner court of the Temple of heaven,” was seen as the geographic area from which Satan was cast “into the outward court.”<sup>196</sup> The saints, moreover, were seen as worshipping “in the Inner court,” and were then, therefore, “freed from the tyranny of the

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<sup>192</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 11<sup>r</sup>; cf. f. 17<sup>r</sup>, where Newton “suppose[d] it will not now be doubted” that the activity of the dragon went back to the earliest seals as well, and, in relation to his entire existence, Newton continued to state that he, the dragon, “was in being even before the writing of this Prophecy [i.e., the Book of Revelation].” It is interesting to see that Newton viewed Rev 12 as a “parable.” See Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 150<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>193</sup>“True Church,” in Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 150<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>194</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 150<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>195</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 150<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>196</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 9.2, f. 33<sup>r</sup>. “The inhabitants of the Earth & Sea” is here explained as the place where Satan and his host is cast down.

persecuting Dragon there.”<sup>197</sup> The church conquered heathenism when the dragon was cast out through the ten-year persecution of Diocletian; this, in turn, produced a Christian empire.<sup>198</sup>

Although Newton refused to identify the woman and the child born to her in Rev 12 with two single persons (i.e., Mary and Jesus), he saw the background of the “parable” here linked closely to “the times of the Law,” and that time

conceived by our Saviour's preaching, had her Infant formed by the preaching of the Apostles, was after the manner of weomen often ill & discomposed by smaller persecutions & troubles under the heathens, & at length travailed in this persecution of Dioclesian [*sic*, Diocletian]: for I count, according to the usual time of Weomen, 40 prophetique weeks or weeks of years from our Saviours baptism (the time of her conception) to find the time of her travail, & her count will end in the year of our Lord 309 neare the middle of that persecution.<sup>199</sup>

The key to understanding Newton’s interpretations of Revelation after chap. 11, nonetheless, is to understand his synchronization scheme. The seals and trumpets, in successive order, make the synchronic backbone of subsequent interpretations. The woman and the dragon of Rev 12 are no exception. He equated and synchronized “the temple in the holy city trodden under foot by the Gentiles” in Rev 11 with the woman and the dragon respectively,<sup>200</sup> and placed both within the seventh seal and during “the last head of the Dragon.”<sup>201</sup> Newton, moreover, saw “the seeds of her [i.e., the church’s]

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<sup>197</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 33<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>198</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 150<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>199</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 150<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>200</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, ff. 48<sup>r</sup>–49<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>201</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 50<sup>r</sup>. In Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 9.2, Newton perceived the seven heads on the dragon in Rev 12 (and Rev 17) as “seven successive Kings or Dynasties.”

offspring” in 12:17 as an indication of her being the “mother of believers”<sup>202</sup> during the 1260 prophetic days, and further synchronized this with the fifth and sixth trumpets.<sup>203</sup>

There should be no doubt that Newton attempted to synchronize subsequent visions in the Apocalypse with those of the earlier visions of seals and trumpets, as the following statement makes plain:

Let therefore the parallel be put between the worshippers in the Temple & the seed of the woman, & then the Temple will answer to the Woman & so differ from the worshippers in it no otherwise then the Woman from her seed, or then the whole from some of its members. The same may be argued from the common affection of being measured with a reed, which would be improper were the things measured of a different kind.<sup>204</sup>

Newton later continued, stating that “therefore it is not to be doubted but that these circumstances were intended to connect the beginning of this vision of the Temple with that of sealing & numbering the servants of God, & so to fix it at the beginning of the seventh Trumpet.”<sup>205</sup>

In the apocalyptic narrative of Rev 12, Newton saw the dragon as signifying both the devil and a heathen kingdom, while the third part of all the angels who joined him are “the Princes of the world with his armies.”<sup>206</sup> “The empire,” or “heathen kingdom,” Newton stated, we should “understand [as] the extent of the Empire in respect of the whole habitable world known to men in those ages.”<sup>207</sup> The war that followed, taking up

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<sup>202</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 11<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>203</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 16<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>204</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, ff. 49–50.

<sup>205</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 51.

<sup>206</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 14; 1.2, f. 11<sup>r</sup>; cf. 1.4, f. 29<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>207</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 29<sup>r</sup>.

the middle part of chap. 12, Newton synchronized with the fifth seal, while the victory over the dragon (synchronized with the sixth seal) he saw as “a victory of Christianity over Heathenism.”<sup>208</sup> The persecution of the woman by the dragon and her flight into the desert would begin no earlier than at the blowing of the first trumpet. The great interval between the sixth and seventh seal was, as described under the sixth seal, seen as representing “some grand revolution,” and fits well with the overthrow of a kingdom.<sup>209</sup>

The apocalyptic period of 1260 days figures prominently in the book of Revelation.<sup>210</sup> It is mentioned twice in Rev 12. Newton argued in one instance that this period began after the beginning of the sounding of the trumpets because “they [i.e. the 1260 days] are the duration of the little horn, & that begins after the ten horns & consequently after the beginning of the Trumpets.”<sup>211</sup> The period therefore “extend[s] from the beginning of the Woe-Trumpets to the killing of the Witnesses.”<sup>212</sup>

Newton suggested that the ending-point to this period occurred between the killing of the witnesses and the time of their resurrection.<sup>213</sup> Newton, here, began counting the 1260 days, not from the rise of the sea beast in Rev 13, but from the time of the healing of its wound at “the end of the fourth Trumpet, & so [it, i.e., the 1260 days] begins with the woe-trumpets.”<sup>214</sup> In accordance with Joseph Mede, Newton emphasized

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<sup>208</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 12<sup>r</sup>.; cf. 9.2, f. 34<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>209</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, ff. 14<sup>r</sup>–15<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>210</sup>It is mentioned twice in Daniel and five times in Revelation.

<sup>211</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 60<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>212</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, ff. 57<sup>r</sup>, 60<sup>r</sup>; 1.3, f. 38.

<sup>213</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, ff. 39–39<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>214</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 39<sup>v</sup>–42. See also 1.2, ff. 60–1; 1.3, ff. 40–8, where Newton confirmed 607 CE as the beginning point of the 1260 years.

a crucial principle: All the references in Daniel and Revelation to this particular period (i.e., the 1260 days) “are of equal duration,” and “synchronal.”<sup>215</sup> In a manuscript from the 1680s to avert speculations on the exact timing of the Second Coming, Newton extended the 1260 days-years from the coronation of Charlemagne by the pope in 800 CE to 2060 at the earliest.<sup>216</sup>

### Revelation 13: The Two Beasts

A sea beast and a land beast, both of evil character, are the main figures in Rev 13. Newton put much effort into proving that the sea beast of Rev 13 was identical and synchronous to the beast the whore rides on in Rev 17.<sup>217</sup> He also synchronized and identified the sea beast with the fourth beast of Dan 7.<sup>218</sup> That common beast, with its worshippers, was seen as “the universal subject on which the plagues of the Trumpets & Vials are inflicted.”<sup>219</sup>

The sea-beast rose “either at or a little after the opening of the sixth seal,”<sup>220</sup> and its wound must have been healed before the end of that seal, Newton argued,<sup>221</sup> for during the opening of the seventh seal, the world began worshipping this sea beast.<sup>222</sup> The

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<sup>215</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 57<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>216</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 7.3g, f. 13. Similar but slightly earlier statements saying the same are found in *MS* 7.3i., f. 54; 7.3l, f. 5; and Newton, *OP*, 113–14, 125–6.

<sup>217</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, ff. 17<sup>r</sup>–20<sup>r</sup>; 1.3, f. 6.

<sup>218</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 30<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>219</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 20<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>220</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2 f. 21<sup>r</sup>; 1.3 f. 15<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>221</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, ff. 22<sup>r</sup>, 24<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>222</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 22<sup>r</sup>; cf. 1.3, f. 13a. In 1.3, f. 39<sup>v</sup>, Newton argued that the wound was healed “at the end of the fourth Trumpet.”

dragon began earlier “with the Seals,”<sup>223</sup> to the degree that it “coextended to all the seales.”<sup>224</sup> Attempting to synchronize the frequently mentioned apocalyptic 1260 days, Newton agreed with previous and contemporary interpreters that these days are designated “the famous reign of Antichrist,”<sup>225</sup> and they began “after the beginning of the Trumpets. For they [the 1260 days] are the duration of the little horn, & that begins after the ten horns & consequently after the beginning of the Trumpets,”<sup>226</sup> when the Woe Trumpets begin.<sup>227</sup>

The sea-beast’s resurrection was accompanied, according to Newton, by “a new fals religion, which began visibly to be set up at the opening of the seventh Seale,”<sup>228</sup> until “the sounding of the first Trumpet.”<sup>229</sup> Newton, moreover, thought this transition, “propagated by the fals miracles of the two hornd beast,”<sup>230</sup> to be “one of the most cardinal revolutions in all the Prophecy.”<sup>231</sup> That false religion was seen as “a general Apostacy in the visible Church,” and “Christianity corrupted.”<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>223</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, f. 9.

<sup>224</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 10a.

<sup>225</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 44.

<sup>226</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 60<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>227</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 60<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>228</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, ff. 23<sup>r</sup>–4<sup>r</sup>, 28<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>229</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 24<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>230</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 23<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>231</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 28<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>232</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 24<sup>r</sup> ff. Newton used 2 Tim 3–4, 2 Thess 2, and the Epistles of John to support this.

Newton believed the seven heads on the sea beast successively synchronized with the opening of the seals: “every part or head being continued from the opening of one seale to the opening of the next & the seventh head first through the time of silence & holy rites & then through all the Trumpets.”<sup>233</sup>

Interpreters up to Newton often confused the identity of the two-horned beast with that of the sea beast. Newton was clear here: The sea beast elsewhere in Revelation is simply called “the beast”; the two-horned beast is identical to the false prophet mentioned in chaps. 16 and 19. “This,” he said, “is evident by the agreement of their descriptions.”<sup>234</sup> By the same rule, the two-horned beast is identical to the Babylonian whore in chap. 17.<sup>235</sup> This beast began at the opening of the seventh seal.<sup>236</sup> Newton, furthermore, synchronized the time of the image of the beast with the time of the ascension of the beasts, “between the opening of the seventh Seal & beginning of the first Trumpet to sound.”<sup>237</sup>

Newton summarized the meaning behind the apocalyptic narrative in Rev 13 related to the first beast, the one coming up from the sea:

The wounded Beast is a great heathenizing Christian Kingdome derived out of the Dragon, & rose in the sixt Seale first out of the Sea & then after a deliquium out of the bottomles pit, & became the subject of the seven Trumpets: being the same with the Whore’s Beast, & with the fourth Beast in Daniel, & with the legs of Nebuchadnezzar’s Image, & with the apostate Church of the latter times prophesied of by St Paul.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>233</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 31<sup>r</sup>, which is almost identical to 1.3, ff. 23–4.

<sup>234</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, f. 5.

<sup>235</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 7.

<sup>236</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 19.

<sup>237</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 56<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>238</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 17<sup>r</sup>. See also 1.3, f. 10; 1.3 ff. 16a, 16.



John's description of the sea-beast, as it came up from the sea, indicated to Newton the identity of the sea-beast: Only the first three of the four animals in Dan 7, in reverse order, are named by the author of Revelation to help identify the sea-beast; the fourth animal, the only superpower of Dan 7 still remaining in the times of the author, must therefore be of the same identity as the sea beast,<sup>239</sup> Newton reasoned. He admitted having some reservations,<sup>240</sup> which "insinuate the correspondence between the two [i.e. Dan 7 and Rev 13] Prophecies."<sup>241</sup> That "western"<sup>242</sup> superpower, however, Newton explained elsewhere to be the Roman Empire, as "all kinds of interpreters are agreed upon,"<sup>243</sup> extended in Christian form into the Middle Ages and beyond.<sup>244</sup> "Yea," Newton next exhorted, "Daniel's Beast (as will hereafter appear) is a combination of both the Apocalyptic Beasts & Dragon in one: St John distinguishing & describing articulately what Daniel considers in general."<sup>245</sup> Thus, this describes the history of Rome's division and the rise of the Beast out of the Sea.

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<sup>239</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 30<sup>r</sup>. Cf. 1.3 ff. 17–19; 1.4, f. 6<sup>r</sup>: "by which all ages from the Apostles have understood the Roman."

<sup>240</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 30<sup>r</sup>. Daniel's fourth kingdom succeeded the Greeks and must, therefore, have begun before the time of John, the author of Revelation, and "consequently before the rise of the Apocalyptic Beast, & so must comprehend the Dragon & Beast together, the Dragon being considered as containing the Beast virtually in him untill his rise out of the Sea. . . . the heads & horns . . . insinuate that they are but one fundamentally."

<sup>241</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 30<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>242</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.5, f. 15<sup>r</sup>–16<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>243</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 5<sup>r</sup>. Insertion from 4<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>244</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 30<sup>v</sup>. Cf. 1.4, ff. 4<sup>v</sup>, 5<sup>r</sup>, 12<sup>r</sup>; 1.5, f. 1<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>245</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 30<sup>v</sup>.

The beast's rise from the sea indicates that it is "only beginning to be a temporal kingdom," while his coming up and out of the "bottomles pit expresses . . . his bringing up with him a fals infernall religion. The first preceded his mortal wound with a sword, the second was at his reviving."<sup>246</sup>

Although the sea-beast received its seat and authority from the dragon, "the Dragon did not give all away so as to cease himself, for immediately before [in the text of Revelation] it is said that he went to make war with the remnant of the seed of the woman ch 12.17."<sup>247</sup> Both the sea beast and the dragon, but distinct from one another, continued in "one common period"<sup>248</sup> until, and within, the seventh trumpet.<sup>249</sup> Thus, the sea beast "is a kingdom derived out of the Dragon & coextended to the latter part of him."<sup>250</sup> The chronologic transition between the dragon and the beast, however, is located after the death of Constantine, when the dragon gives "him [the beast] his old seat, Rome."<sup>251</sup>

The seven heads on the sea beast, moreover, he understood as seven kingdoms ruling parallel to and concurrent with the succession of the seven seals.<sup>252</sup> The seven-headed dragon in Rev 12 had seven crowns on its heads; the sea beast had none (on its heads, only on its horns) "because his reign takes up no more than the last head of the

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<sup>246</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, f. 15<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>247</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS* 1.2, f. 20<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>248</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, f. 17.

<sup>249</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 24<sup>r</sup>. Cf. 1.3, f. 16<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>250</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, f. 9.

<sup>251</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 17<sup>r</sup>; 1.5, ff. 1<sup>r</sup>, 3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>252</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, ff. 31<sup>r</sup>, 35<sup>r</sup>.

seven.”<sup>253</sup> The ten horns, in turn, are not successive but “are ten contemporary kingdoms springing out of their seventh head at or soon after the beginning of the Trumpets,”<sup>254</sup> and accordingly, “must denote so many Kings or kingdoms all which together make up the universal kingdom signified by the whole Beast.”<sup>255</sup> Yet the number ten might not stay constant—“no more than” Alexander’s empire stayed constant with four horns.<sup>256</sup>

The heresies of Paul’s time, signaled by “pseudochrists,”<sup>257</sup> Newton understood to be indicators for what was coming. In the rise of the beasts of Rev 13, he saw the beginning of the rise of the one antichrist, which has shown its apostate nature to the “tradition of the Church from the first ages” and until “all ages ever since.”<sup>258</sup> Newton thought this system to be “propagated by the fals miracles of the two hornd beast”<sup>259</sup> and concluded that both beasts are “of the same religion.”<sup>260</sup> That false religion is seen as a general apostasy in the visible Church, “Christianity corrupted,”<sup>261</sup> “heathenizing Christianity,”<sup>262</sup> “that great Antichristian Apostacy,”<sup>263</sup> located in “the polluted temple of

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<sup>253</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 31<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>254</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 36<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>255</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 37<sup>v</sup>. Cf. 1.3, f. 27.

<sup>256</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 40<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>257</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 26<sup>r</sup> ff.

<sup>258</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 27<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>259</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 23<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>260</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 29<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>261</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 24<sup>r</sup> ff. Cf. footnote 229 above.

<sup>262</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 27<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>263</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.5, f. 10<sup>r</sup>.

God in which the man of Sin sits,”<sup>264</sup> because “Christianity being . . . the profession of both Beasts[,] from the truth of which they were now degenerating.”<sup>265</sup> That form of religion was deplorable to Newton because it took place under a cover of holiness, for

the worst things require[e] the corruption of the best to generate them. Sins are the greatest where they are against the greatest light, & if Hypocrisy or a corruption of the meaning of the Law be added to the sin, it is yet a further aggravation & still a further if any shall without commission pretend a power to make lawfull what he acknowledges to be prohibited by God: And hence a Christian is capable of being worse then any other sort of me[n].<sup>266</sup>

Again, with equal passion, Newton explained why, apocalyptically speaking, such a creature as the beast is dangerous: “for a secret enemy is the worst & most carefully to be shund, & such are they that put the best colour of Christianity upon the worst corruption of it.”<sup>267</sup> This makes things so much worse with the realization that this institution is universal. The universality of that apostate church Newton explained from the phrase “all the world (that is the Christian world) wondred after the Beast.”<sup>268</sup> Thus, the sea beast “is the Whole visible body of Christians, the Catholic visible Church during his reign, & accordingly has a double authority: temporall from the Dragon ch 13.2, & spiritual from the two hornd Beast vers 12.”<sup>269</sup>

Newton understood the two-horned beast,<sup>270</sup> which caused the nations to worship

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<sup>264</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 30<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>265</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 56<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>266</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 29<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>267</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 29<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>268</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, Cf. 1.3, f. 20.

<sup>269</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 56<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>270</sup>Also called the false prophet to distinguish it from the sea beast. See Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 42<sup>r</sup>.

the sea beast, to be a dual Christian dynasty “subordinate to two supreme Bishops.”<sup>271</sup> It might have functioned as a “fore-runner” for the sea-beast in similar “manner used to express John the Baptist’s fore-running & preparing the way before our Saviour.”<sup>272</sup>

Newton also identified the two-horned beast with the whore, not the beast, of Rev 17,<sup>273</sup> as an “opposite relation” to the woman in Rev 12.<sup>274</sup> Thus, in explicit words Newton affirmed that “the Ecclesiastical hierarchy of the triunitarian Church commencing after the death of Constantine &, headed by the Bishops of Rome & Alexandria, was the two horned Beast,”<sup>275</sup> because from this time, “the Clergy . . . became soon exalted in honours privileges & riches.”<sup>276</sup> History shows that soon thereafter, the bishop of Rome would “aspire to the universal B[isho]prick,” though not yet successfully.<sup>277</sup> “Thus were the seeds of the Beast sown by these two great Bishops, & as it were, lay buried in the earth till after the reign of Constantius & Julian, & then his two horns began to spring up.”<sup>278</sup> The land beast of Rev 13, moreover, is identical and synchronous with Babylon and the whore in Rev 17 and are, therefore,

alike [and] conjoined to the ten hornd Beast: the two hornd Beast being contained in him & conspiring with him & doing all things for him & over his subjects; & the Whore riding upon him that is ruling him & reigning over him, & that not by the

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<sup>271</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2 f. 41r. Cf. 1.3 f. 19v.

<sup>272</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 42<sup>r</sup>. It, however, does not begin “his Whorish reign upon the other Beast till some time after his first rise.” Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 45<sup>r</sup>. And “it was some considerable time before the two hornd Beast became the Whore upon the other Beast’s back.” Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 49<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>273</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 42<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>274</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 43<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>275</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.5, f. 74<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>276</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 75.

<sup>277</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 77<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>278</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 77–8.

power of the sword but [by] consent & agreement, ch 17.13, 17. Both are finally destroyed together: the two hornd Beast or fals Prophet at the same time with the 10 hornd Beast ch 19.20, which was shown to be at the sounding of the seventh Trumpet; & Babylon at the pouring out of the seventh Viall. ch: 16.19. By the agreement of their qualities these two therefore must be the same.<sup>279</sup>

The land beast, which “grew up by policy & not by force of arms,”<sup>280</sup> is thus “a heathenizing Christian Ecclesiastical State,” and this “makes him ipso facto a Whore in the strictest sense, & we have no reason to suppose more Apocalyptic Whores then one.”<sup>281</sup>

One peculiar interpretation of Newton regarding the two-horned beast is that he saw the little horn of Dan 7 as “one of the horns of the two horned Beast growing up after a seventy years depression,” as compared to a prophecy of Tyre in Ezekiel.<sup>282</sup> “And hence,” Newton said of the fourth beast in Dan 7,

that it is a combined representation of the Apocalyptic Dragon & two Beasts in one Body, this only excepted, that the two hornd beast (as we shall presently show) begins not his Whorish reign upon the other Beast till some time after his first rise, & consequently begins but at a second rise to be represented by the horn in Daniel.<sup>283</sup>

“The Image of the Beast,” Newton wrote, “is an Ecclesiastical Assembly of men representing the ten hornd Beast & deriving its authority from the two hornd Beast”<sup>284</sup> and “placed rather in a body of men then in a single person: for so it will more truly represent the Beast who is not a single person but the most universal Body politique.”<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>279</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 43<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>280</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, f. 20.

<sup>281</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 44<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>282</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 49<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>283</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 45<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>284</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS* 1.2, ff. 53<sup>r</sup>–4<sup>r</sup>; 1.3, f. 21.

<sup>285</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 55<sup>r</sup>.

However, the image of the beast is ontologically distinct from either beast in Rev 13.<sup>286</sup>

After logically evaluating and analyzing the interpretive possibilities of the text, Newton deduced that it must be “an Ecclesiastical Assembly. For it was convened by Christians,”<sup>287</sup> and “it [i.e., the image of the beast] must necessarily be some Assembly of men (as a Senate, Parliament, or Council) selected & convened out of the Subjects of the Beast to be his representative. For such & none but such a Body politique can significantly be called the Image . . .”<sup>288</sup>

According to Rev 13, man would be forced to worship both beast and image. This is nothing less, according to Newton, than to “trust in their Authority, [and] to believe & rely on their decrees statutes or opinions upon the account of their Authority, to have that faith in them which is dew [*sic*] only to God[,] that is to divine revelation.”<sup>289</sup> Finally, Newton concluded that the mark of the beast is antithetical to the sealing of God’s people: “the [sealed] saints & Apostates were thus universally distinguished.”<sup>290</sup>

#### Revelation 15 and 16: The Seven Plagues

With the seven plagues, the wrath of God is settled. These plagues, unmixed with mercy, are the last executive judgments from God before the Second Coming of Christ. As has already been noted, Newton supplemented and synchronized the seven trumpets with the seven plagues and saw them fulfilled within, and as part of, the seventh seal. To

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<sup>286</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, f. 22.

<sup>287</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 56<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>288</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, ff. 55<sup>r</sup>–6<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>289</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 56<sup>r</sup>. Cf. 1.3, f. 22.

<sup>290</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 24<sup>r</sup>.

reach the conclusion that the trumpets and vials are parallel and synchronous, he carefully compared, in two parallel columns, the trumpets with the vials.<sup>291</sup> “You see,” he concluded, “the agreement between the plagues of the seven Vials & Trumpets is throughout very punctual so that I think there can be no doubting of their coincidence,”<sup>292</sup> and since the trumpets and vials “are collateral & both together make up one complete prophecy, the one supplying what is sometimes wanting in the other I shall consider them joyntly [*sic*].”<sup>293</sup>

The seven thunders in Rev 10 “also most probably denote the same thing with the seven Trumpets.”<sup>294</sup> Revelation 15:1 and 21:9 state that the vials are the “last plagues,” which Newton thought “suit well the Trumpets which are the Plagues of the last Seale & inflicted on those wicked ages which the Prophets & Apostles considered as the last times.”<sup>295</sup>

After a textual analysis of each plague, from the first to the last, Newton affirmed that these plagues represent “seven wars or courses of war.”<sup>296</sup> These plagues began at the death of Theodosius the Great in 395 CE<sup>297</sup> when the first invasions of the Eastern Roman Empire took place (exactly 365 year-days from the baptism of Jesus in 30 CE).<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>291</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, ff. 3<sup>r</sup>–6<sup>r</sup>.; 1.3, ff. 1–4.

<sup>292</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 6<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>293</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, ff. 62<sup>r</sup>–b.

<sup>294</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, f. 4–3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>295</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 6<sup>r</sup> (the word “last” is three times underlined in original).

<sup>296</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 6<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>297</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.4, f. 62<sup>v</sup>, “Resumes.”

<sup>298</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 67<sup>r</sup>.



“The second [plague began] with the invasion of the western [Roman Empire] A.C. [i.e. CE] 408. The third with the invasion of Africa A.C. 427. And the fourth with the wars in Italy A.C. 536.”<sup>299</sup> After having explained each trumpet, later in the same manuscript Newton attached to each trumpet a section pertaining particularly to the vials: “Having explained this Trumpet it remains now that I say something of the correspondent Vial [i.e. plague].”<sup>300</sup>

### Revelation 17 and 18: Babylon

Babylon is the eschatological and typological antagonist to Jerusalem. Revelation 17 provides a description of Babylon in which a woman, dressed as a prostitute, is riding on a beast with seven heads. The woman is called Babylon the Great. Chapter 18 presents, in graphic language, the downfall of Babylon. As already noted, Newton synchronized the seven heads on the beast(s) in Rev 12, 13, and 17 with the seven seals. He saw the heads’ “distributions” as “so many successive parts by the opening of the seales in order: every part or head being continued from the opening of one seale to the opening of the next & the seventh head first through the time of silence & holy rites & then through all the Trumpets.”<sup>301</sup>

He argued that each head must not be understood as “a single” person, but rather an “aggregate of kings whether collaterall or successive unto some determinate period,” with all heads combined stretching over the seven seals and trumpets and lasting “above

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<sup>299</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 107<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>300</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, ff. 133 ff.

<sup>301</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 31<sup>r</sup>. Cf. 1.3, ff. 23–24.

thousand years.”<sup>302</sup> As compared to Rev 12 and 13, there are no crowns to see on either heads or horns in chap. 17 “because his [the beast’s] reign takes up no more than the last head.”<sup>303</sup>

Newton interpreted the ten horns or kings in Rev 17 as “contemporary kingdoms”<sup>304</sup> on the eighth and last head in the same story because these kings “receive power as kings the same hower [*sic*, hour] with the [eighth] beast.”<sup>305</sup> Regarding the ten kings, moreover, “we are not to suppose they continue that number constantly to the end[,] no more than [did] the 4 principal kingdoms,” on the head of the goat in Dan 8.<sup>306</sup>

In reference to the enigmatic challenge, “Five are fallen & one is & the other is not yet come” (Rev 17:10), Newton ingeniously suggested that it cannot be understood when seen from the perspective of John’s time, but rather, from “the time of the non-existence of the Beast . . . & [thus] considered as present [time] in the vision. It’s the tenour [*sic*, tenor or tendency] of all the visions to represent future time as present.”<sup>307</sup> Newton emphatically refused to limit the “present time” in the story to John’s time.<sup>308</sup> The beginning of the seventh head, according to Newton’s complex synchronization scheme, was in the “little interval between the opening of the seventh seale & sounding

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<sup>302</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 31<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>303</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 32<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>304</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 36<sup>r</sup>. He supported his argument with evidence from Dan 7 in which the little horn is said to “rise among them [i.e., the other ten horns]” and from Dan 8 in which the horns on the goat certainly describes four contemporary kingdoms.

<sup>305</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 32<sup>r</sup>. Cf. 1.2, f. 37.

<sup>306</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 39<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>307</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 33<sup>r</sup>. The expression “Babylon is fallen, is fallen” is another example mentioned by Newton in this connection.

<sup>308</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 34<sup>v</sup>.

of the first Trumpet.”<sup>309</sup> Concluding his synchronization of the seven heads, Newton found that the

best reason why the Beast that was & is not is called the eighth is that the Trumpets with which he is coincident are an eighth portion of time at the end of the seven which the seales make. And the best reason why he is notwithstanding said to be of the seven & the Beast to have but seven heads is that the Trumpets are contained within the seventh Seale.<sup>310</sup>

In mathematical fashion, Newton equated the “kings” and “waters” and “beast” in Rev 17 “since they are indifferently used for one another.”<sup>311</sup> Thus, he distinguished the beast from the woman riding on it. In addition, Newton supplied several similar equations, one in which he identified Babylon, the whore, who rides on the beast, with the two-horned beast of Rev 13,<sup>312</sup> with the little horn of Dan 7,<sup>313</sup> and with the Man of Sin in 2 Thess.<sup>314</sup> The ten-horned beast of Rev 17 is, moreover, identified with the beast with the same number of horns in Rev 13.<sup>315</sup> Rev 17 consequently is, or serves, as a commentary on previous sections in the books of Revelation and Daniel.<sup>316</sup>

Regarding particular features of the whore, and her belongings, Newton found the golden cup in her hand and its content interesting, commenting,

As water of life given to the thirsty & wine given to drink in the Eucharist signify the doctrine of truth by which men are nourished to life eternal so the wine of fornication in this Cup must signify the doctrine of idolatry by which as with a Philter [a potion

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<sup>309</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 35<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>310</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 35<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>311</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 39<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>312</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 43.; 1.3, f. 7.

<sup>313</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 44<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>314</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 53<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>315</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.3, f. 6.

<sup>316</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, f. 44<sup>r</sup>. Cf. 1.3, f. 16.

or drug supposed to induce a person to fall in love with someone] she entices her lovers to commit spiritual fornication with her & makes them err & reel to & fro like drunken men & become furious in their inordinate affections & passions towards their spiritual mistress. For drunkenness is the type of error & confusion & therefor the Philter by which she inebriated the nations is afterwards called her sorceries by which she deceived them.<sup>317</sup>

Newton found the biblical proof for the above interpretation in Isa 29:9–13, where the prophet stated that some people are “drunken, but not with wine.”

Newton found the background for the fall of Babylon described in Rev 18 in several places in the Bible. The predictions of the shaking of the heavens, extraordinary natural phenomena, and the darkening of the sun, moon and stars, to mention a few, represented to Newton the final and decisive overthrow of Babylon.<sup>318</sup> He grouped and analyzed these natural phenomena, and other elements of figurative language, discovering their antitypes in the world of politics and its relation to religion.<sup>319</sup>

### **Impact of Earlier Interpretations**

The canonical apocalyptic tradition, no doubt, provided the backbone to Newton’s interpretations. He occasionally mentioned the ecclesiastical dignitaries of the past, and where they stood in relation to a certain text or point. He also skimmed over scores of commentators in the past and felt comfortable stating for example, “all agree,” “from the earliest time interpreters [say],”<sup>320</sup> or words to that effect.

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<sup>317</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 9.1, f. 4<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>318</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 9.1, f. 5<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>319</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, f. 6<sup>r</sup>–9<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>320</sup>“Newton set himself the task of mastering the whole corpus of patristic literature . . . In addition to the early Fathers, he read some later theology as well . . . The bulk of his citations [, however,] came from the early Fathers.” Westfall, *NR*, 312.

Newton's confidence in previous apocalyptic interpreters grew proportionally with their antiquity. He had a special confidence in Josephus, other Jewish writers, and several pre-Constantine theologians. The history of prophetic interpretation gives evidence of a remarkable agreement among learned men when it comes to foundational hermeneutical and interpretive understanding. The foundation chapter of canonical apocalyptic, Dan 2, has been interpreted in an almost unbroken chain with progressive supplementary information from Josephus' time to the nineteenth century. Except for a few individuals in the ancient world, and those adhering to the post-Tridentine preterist position, all major interpreters, with rare exceptions, have agreed that the four metals in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and the four animals in Dan 7, represent a consecutive development of the empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome.

Interpreters living around the time of Rome's fall anticipated it and sensed that the revolution was near. They expected Antichrist to arise among the ten horns which succeeded the Roman Empire.<sup>321</sup> Most ancient interpreters up to Jerome were in almost perfect agreement that antichrist was at the door and that he would rule for 1260 literal days. After Jerome, there were few historicists of note until Joachim of Florence eight hundred years later.

Newton did not challenge this standard four-empire interpretation; indeed, he built his interpretive foundation upon it, calling Dan 2 the ABC of prophecy. To Newton, this interpretation was a pillar—something against which all successive interpretations

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<sup>321</sup>See chap. 2, above. From a modern perspective, it is easy to see the different ages coming and going, but the ancients and medieval men and women had no clue of this historical bird's-eye perspective. Nevertheless, that critical transition period between the ancient and medieval world was accompanied by great havoc. Many intellectuals in the fifth century knew that Rome was outdated and was about to be transformed or eliminated. Many interpreters of apocalyptic in the Christian tradition at this significant juncture in world history dreaded the soon-expected appearing of the little horn of Dan 7.

had to be measured all the way into the book of Revelation. His synchronization scheme depended on it, and so did the rise of antichrist, the distribution of the seals and trumpets, and the puzzle in Rev 17.

### **Summary**

This chapter delineated an overview of Newton's thoughts on apocalyptic. He interpreted the main apocalyptic sections in Daniel systematically, beginning with chap. 2 and ending with chap. 11. In chaps. 2, 7, and 8, he saw Daniel's prophecies fulfilled successively and chronologically from the time of the prophet in the sixth century BCE until his own time and beyond. Daniel 2 was seen as the ABC prophecy of the remaining apocalyptic prophecies. Daniel 9 he viewed as pointing forward to both the First and Second Coming of Christ, beginning to count the years in 457 BCE. Daniel 11 was seen as an outline prophecy in the same manner as Dan 2, 7, and 8.

Newton's interpretations of Revelation were shown to be much more complex than his views on Daniel. The seven churches, seals, and trumpets he understood as one large, uninterrupted, continued prophecy from the time of the prophet John until the Second Coming of Christ. He saw the seven churches as being somehow synchronous with the seals and with a transition between the seals and trumpets around 380 CE, making the trumpets unfold progressively and chronologically within the seventh seal. The rest of Revelation was incorporated into that larger outline format.

Newton viewed Revelation's main content as a symbolic exposition of fallen Christianity headed by the Roman Catholic Church. A crucial historical transition point in Newton's understanding of Revelation's historical fulfillment is the period of Theodosian the Great, the first emperor to make the Church officially a state church.

From that point on, Christian emperors began persecuting and even killing dissenting Christians. Newton placed all of the seals and the first four trumpets and plagues between 300 and 550. One can only wonder what motivated him to focus so intently on this period. Was it his desire to expose Trinitarianism, as Richard Westfall suggested,<sup>322</sup> or was he searching for an apocalyptic holy grail: the exact beginning of the 1260 years?

Newton's interpretations of specific passages in Daniel and Revelation reveal a general consistency with the historicist school of prophetic interpretation, though to a greater degree for Daniel than for Revelation. The chapter concludes with some reflections on the impact that earlier interpreters had on Newton.

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<sup>322</sup>Westfall, *NR*, 311–21.

## CHAPTER 5

### ISAAC NEWTON'S HERMENEUTIC OF BIBLICAL APOCALYPTIC

The previous chapter showed that Newton's interpretations of specific passages in Daniel and Revelation reveal a general consistency with the historicist school of prophetic interpretation. The purpose of chap. 5 is to discover the reasoning by which Newton arrived at those interpretations and to define the foundational principles of his hermeneutical approach.

#### **Scientific and Historical Aspects of Newton's Approach to Apocalyptic**

Newton's celebrated contributions to science are proof that Newton's faith in God did not diminish or frustrate his scientific mindset in any way. Indeed, he put faith and empirical research methodologies together in a respectful symbiotic partnership using essential tools in order to decode the divinely inspired Sacred Scriptures.

Seventeenth-century intellectuals in England, and elsewhere, respected the Bible in any way regardless of their theological orientation.<sup>1</sup> Although many of them despised fanaticism and institutionalized religion, they still maintained a profound respect for the Bible and were interested in biblical topics. Indeed, the attitude of admiration, respect,

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<sup>1</sup>For interpretation of prophecy in the seventeenth century, see Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, quoted in Newton, *OCE*, 10.



and curiosity towards the Bible was an essential feature of the most noteworthy part of the early Modern Era and perhaps, contrary to popular opinion, the very cause of it.

Newton approached apocalyptic mysteries as he approached any complex problem: He investigated, analyzed, compared, and measured. Why should he not do with the Apocalypse as he had done with nature? His scientific mindset guided him to study the book of Revelation from a comprehensive perspective, probably more so than any previous interpreter.<sup>2</sup> However, his presuppositions about the structure of the book of Revelation may have blinded him to some of the empirical data.

As Newton developed his scientific and theological systems, he reflected much on foundational philosophical questions, although he kept these thoughts to himself. He countered Aristotle, Augustine, the scholastics, Rene´ Descartes, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz, and the Jesuits. He took from these inventors of ideas what he could use and rejected, or left behind, the rest. His scratch book reveals his thoughts: “I am a friend of Plato, I am a friend of Aristotle, but truth is my greater friend.”<sup>3</sup> Philosophy and science were useful tools in bringing him nearer to “the first Cause,” and in that sense, they were “highly valued.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>When investigating the book of Revelation, Newton viewed it from the following perspectives: manuscript research, textual criticism, history of interpretation, chronology, ancient history, church history, Greek and Latin languages, cultic typology, mythology, structure, Bible knowledge, theology, hermeneutics, etc. I am inclined to believe no single person in history approached the book of Revelation as comprehensively as Newton did, and through some of these approaches, Newton did a more thorough job than had been done previously. Newton’s approach to Revelation certainly excelled in the following areas: manuscript research, chronology, and historical studies.

<sup>3</sup>From scratch book “Certain Philosophical Questions”; Gale E. Christianson, “Newton, the Man—Again,” 8. For Newton on Aristotle, Descartes, and metaphysics, see Howard Stein, “Newton’s Metaphysic,” in *CCN*, 256–61.

<sup>4</sup>Newton, *Optics*, 2nd ed. London, 1717, query 28; Manuel, *RIN*, 40.

From his fortunate location at Cambridge and London, and through his network of friends, including those in the Royal Society, Newton's scientific mindset is revealed. In short, Newton became a catalyst of what led to the Enlightenment epoch; after the publication of the *Principia*, there was not one significant thinker at that time who did not desire an acquaintanceship with Newton. Thus, although many of these friendships were through correspondence only and of a professional and impersonal nature, Newton's social network included some of the most prominent intellectuals of his day.<sup>5</sup>

### Separation of Science and Religion

Scholars have debated Newton's apparent ambivalence toward the relationship between science and religion.<sup>6</sup> The relationship between science and religion in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries was the main concern in Popkin and Force's vast project in which Newtonianism has been an important part.<sup>7</sup> The scholars who facilitated ground-breaking second generation research on Newton's theology united emphatically in the belief that Newton's scientific-religious studies are part of the great Newtonian synthesis, logically harmonious and symbiotic.<sup>8</sup> Both Popkin and Force were critical of

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<sup>5</sup>Some of these were Locke, Boyle, Barrow, More, Bentley, Burnet, Taylor, Wallis, and Halley.

<sup>6</sup>The late pioneer student of Newton's religion, Frank E. Manuel, declared that in Newton "two characters, a critical doubter and a true believer, lived together in the same mind," Manuel, *Historian*, 56. Manuel later stated: "On numerous occasions in his lifetime Newton formally proclaimed the separation of the realm of religion from the realm of science, but there is ample evidence that in his innermost thoughts he himself made no such bifurcation," Manuel, *Historian*, 164. Cf. Gale E. Christianson, "Newton, the Man—Again," 19, and Mamiani, "Newton on Prophecy and the Apocalypse," 391.

<sup>7</sup>See Popkin, "Introduction," in *EC*, vii.

<sup>8</sup>See Force, "Newton's God of Dominion," 78. "For Newton, God's real and absolute dominion profoundly affects his metaphysical view of nature and of how we can know nature." Force, "Newton's God of Dominion," 83. "Newton's thought is a seamless unity of theology, metaphysics, and natural science." Force, "Newton's God of Dominion," 84.

Westfall's insistence on a separation between science and religion in Newton's writings.<sup>9</sup>

### Scientific Research

Newton's scientific mindset found a satisfactory outlet in his research and experimentation. The Book of Revelation, his lifelong companion, received the same unrelenting scrutiny that he gave to any of his scientific or religious research projects. There was, however, a *critical difference* between Newton's scientific and his apocalyptic research. Scientific research could be verified by observation and measurement of natural phenomena. However, prophetic research is by definition impossible to verify with certainty until confirmed by the unfolding of history. Newton the natural philosopher could observe natural phenomena, but Newton the expositor had no way to discover precisely what would happen in the future, especially the distant future. Thus his interpretations of prophecy could draw on analogy with earlier fulfilled prophecies and prophetic symbols, but could never be unerringly confirmed before the unfolding of history.

Newton did, however, use scientific tools and methods in his attempt to solve the apocalyptic mystery of Revelation. In the spirit of, and as a precursor of the Enlightenment, he knew he had to verify the textual foundations in order to prove anything.<sup>10</sup> Thus, Newton embarked on a tedious comparison of more than twenty ancient

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<sup>9</sup>See Force, "Newton's God of Dominion," 76–7.

<sup>10</sup>Newton was generally more critical of the transmission of the text of the New Testament than of that of the Old Testament. In the area of his antitrinitarian research, he found that canonical texts had been tampered with. See Popkin, "Newton as a Bible Scholar," 110–11. Newton's "historical research," according to Manuel, "meant to uncover the true text of the gospel and to demonstrate the latitudinarianism of the primitive Church to which he wanted all men to return." Manuel, *Historian*, 159. For Newton's thoughts on the Old Testament, see Manuel, *Historian*, 60–61, and Popkin, "Newton as a Bible Scholar," 104–5.

manuscripts of Revelation.<sup>11</sup> He discovered that in all the New Testament, no book is “so strongly attested, or commented upon so early as this [i.e. the Book of Revelation].”<sup>12</sup> Newton argued that all the spurious writings of the time imitated the true apocalyptic text: “Since it [Revelation] was in such request with the first ages,” therefore “many endeavoured to imitate it.”<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the earliest and most trustworthy interpreters accepted Revelation “as the foundation for their opinion.”<sup>14</sup> The numerous temple allusions in Revelation, and this book’s apparent similarity to Second Peter and Hebrews,<sup>15</sup> were additional arguments in favor of dating Revelation to Nero’s era rather than to Domitian’s.

The effort he invested in collecting these manuscripts and then comparing them minutely with one another reveals a sophisticated and consistent scientific thinking.<sup>16</sup> Certain common features of methodology and verification exist between theology and science. For example: a true natural philosopher is not supposed to believe in human testimonies unless verified through observation and experimentation.<sup>17</sup> Newton

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<sup>11</sup>See Westfall, *NR*, 327. Iliffe understood the essential implication of this when he stated that Newton’s “work in reading and compiling variant reading lists of such manuscripts constituted another essential element of his hermeneutics.” Iliffe, “Making a Shew,” 78.

<sup>12</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 255. See also Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 7.2, f. 4; *CE*, 81 and Westfall, *NR*, 319. Cf. “Newton as a Bible Scholar,” 109, 117n66, in which Popkin displayed an extraordinary Newton fragment (in private hands), stating that God cared so much for the accuracy of the text of Revelation that “he sent Jesus, the messenger of God, to watch over John as he wrote down the prophecies.”

<sup>13</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 246. Cf. Newton, *OCE*, 238–39.

<sup>14</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 248.

<sup>15</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 239–40.

<sup>16</sup>Mary E. Mills believed that Newton applied the historical-critical method, using both form and source criticism, in the “Introduction” to Newton (“Essential Notes on Newton’s Approach to Biblical Studies”), *OCE*, 49–50.

<sup>17</sup>The Royal Society had as its motto, “*nullius in verba*,” (don’t take anyone’s word for it) from Horace’s Epistles. In Gleick, *Isaac Newton*, 63. The more comprehensive goal of the Society was stated in

approached Revelation with that spirit of true science; he did not trust anecdotes or tradition. He had to see the text(s) with his own eyes, or come as close to it as humanly possible.

Newton's critical outlook was the hallmark of the era of scientific revolution. Although being critical of every source, he considered non-verifiable records (including gods and mythology) useful as guides in darkness,<sup>18</sup> even to measure human generations.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, his scientific spirit endeavored to achieve perfection in everything he did. To reach that, he had to verify the foundation of apocalyptic—the text itself.

In accordance with the book of Daniel's internal information and Jesus' own testimony (Matt 24:15), Newton believed that the book of Daniel was genuinely prophetic and written by the prophet Daniel during the Babylonian-Persian period. In the *Observations*, Newton stated that Daniel "is a collection of papers written at several times. The six last chapters contain Prophecies written at several times by Daniel himself: the six first are a collection of historical papers written by others."<sup>20</sup> He believed that in the fifth century BCE, Ezra had collected canonical manuscripts, including the book of Daniel. About 300 years later, Antiochus IV Epiphanes ordered these "sacred books... to

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its charter on 1663 as the glorification of the Creator through experimentation and study of nature. See Force, "The Breakdown of the Newtonian Synthesis of Science and Religion: Hume, Newton, and the Royal Society," in *EC*, 143.

<sup>18</sup>Manuel, *History*, 103–4.

<sup>19</sup>Newton used Greek mythology to measure human generations. See Manuel, *Historian*, 56.

<sup>20</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 10.

be burnt wherever they could be found.”<sup>21</sup> Newton’s historical studies show that he investigated non-canonical literature with equal scepticism.

### Historical Studies

The world has known of Newton’s particular interest in history since the posthumous publication of his *Chronology Amended* in 1728.<sup>22</sup> Looking into his unpublished works on history and the *Chronology*<sup>23</sup> reveals an amazing variety of specialized compartments. The natural philosopher mastered many branches and periods of historical studies:<sup>24</sup> (1) the ancient classical history and historians;<sup>25</sup> (2) the literary background to the Trinitarian conflict in the post-Constantine Era; (3) “I seriously doubt,” the respected historian of science stated, “that any historian [other than Newton] has ever attained a firmer grasp on the facts relating to the barbarian invasions of the fifth and sixth centuries;”<sup>26</sup> (4) secular and ecclesiastical chronology; (5) astronomical dating;<sup>27</sup> and (6) the history of the Church.<sup>28</sup> In short, anything of historical value that

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<sup>21</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 11.

<sup>22</sup>Full title is *The Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms Amended*. There is one exception, however; see below.

<sup>23</sup>According to Manuel, the Portsmouth Collection, packed with non-scientific writings of Newton, and auctioned out in 1936, contained 200,000 words alone directly on Chronology. Manuel, *Historian*, 2.

<sup>24</sup>We must remember that many modern branches of historical studies, at the time of Newton, did not exist or were in an embryonic state like, for example, archaeology.

<sup>25</sup>For important historiographical sources to Newton, see Manuel, *Historian*, 45–47, 137.

<sup>26</sup>Westfall, *NR*, 329.

<sup>27</sup>“The surest arguments for determining things past,” Newton stated, “are those taken from Astronomy.” New College MSS, III, f. 166; Manuel, *Historian*, 66. Joseph Scaliger was the pioneer astro-historian, Manuel, *Historian*, 41. See also Popkin, “Newton as a Bible Scholar,” 111. For a full discussion of Newton’s astronomical dating, see Manuel, *Historian*, 65–77.

<sup>28</sup>Newton began on a history of the church in “the late 1670s” (Westfall, *NR*, 344, see his interesting footnote, n. 34), which had “grown out of his interpretation of the prophecies” (Westfall, *NR*,

could fit into Newton's grand scriptural paradigm, and particularly those related to apocalyptic, he hunted down through an immense reading endeavor.<sup>29</sup>

History was indeed important to Newton, for only through it could Daniel and Revelation be verified. Both secular and church history verify the fulfillment of the predictions in Daniel and Revelation.<sup>30</sup> Thus, as Newton approached biblical apocalyptic, he did so with a critical and scientific mindset. He searched for the best historical sources available that could shed light on apocalyptic fulfillment. The historical epochs of interest to Newton's apocalyptic paradigm followed closely his interpretation of Dan 7:

The whole scene of sacred prophecy is composed of three principal parts: the regions beyond Euphrates, represented by the first two beasts of Daniel, the empire of the Greeks on this side of Euphrates, represented by the Leopard and by the He-Goat; and the empire of the Latins on this side of Greece, represented by the beast with ten horns.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, the historical scene from which fulfillment of apocalyptic prophecy is born covers a long historic line, for

the Jews & the nations by which they were to be captivated, & particularly the nations within the bounds of the four Monarchies are the subject of sacred prophecy in the old Testament, & the nations through which the Christian religion was to be propagated are the subject of sacred prophesy in the new, & especially of the Apocalypse.<sup>32</sup>

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345–6); cf. Westfall, *NR*, 819n123. Catherine Conduitt felt a special need to see “church history compleat” by Isaac Newton be printed. See Manuel, *Historian*, vii. The book disappeared in the nineteenth century, see Newton, *OCE*, 15.

<sup>29</sup>For a full treatment of Newton's historical writings as a background to his apocalyptic interpretations, see Cornelis J. Schilt, *Isaac Newton and the Study of Chronology: Prophecy, History, and Method* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021).

<sup>30</sup>Thus, as suggested by Manuel, “The *Chronology* and the *Observations upon the Prophecies*, if ‘connected’, constitute a fairly complete universal history of mankind, both sacred and profane, since the Creation—a counterpart to the physical history of the world,” Manuel, *Historian*, 163.

<sup>31</sup>Newton, *OP*, V, 463; Manuel, *Historian*, 145.

<sup>32</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS*, 5, ff. 29–30; Manuel, *Historian*, 154–5.

Another part of Newton's apocalyptic program was his apologetic component.<sup>33</sup> Ancient chronology was in conflict with Scripture and astronomy; thus, it was pivotal for Newton to verify the true chronology based on scientific historiography in which all available sources were objectively evaluated and analyzed. To synchronize pagan civilizations with Hebrew history meant a correction of the Olympic chronology.<sup>34</sup> The chronological outline of the foundational prophecy of Dan 2 was Newton's paramount historic foundation.<sup>35</sup> "History without chronology is confused,"<sup>36</sup> said Newton; therefore, he constructed his own chronology.

There was general agreement among Newton's contemporaries that the earth was about 5,500–6,500 years old, depending on whether one followed the Hebrew MT text (shorter age) or the Greek LXX text (longer age).<sup>37</sup> Apart from biblical historiography,<sup>38</sup> serious secular historiography began developing in Greece by the sixth century BCE. Because all the history of Greece is uncertain before 1100 BCE, Newton reasoned that "the best way to come to any certainty . . . is to begin with the later times when history & Chronology is certain & reason upwards, as high as we can proceed by good

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<sup>33</sup>"Vindication of biblical chronology became a central issue in the battle of pious Christians against the philosophers, deists and atheists," Manuel, *Historian*, 39. Newton said that his intention with the *Chronology* was "to make Chronology suit with the Course of Nature, with Astronomy, with Sacred History, with Herodotus the Father of History, and with it self." *Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms*, 8; Manuel, *RIN*, 812–13. Cf. *New College MSS*, II, f. 18; Manuel, *Historian*, 5.

<sup>34</sup>Cf. Manuel, *Historian*, 1.

<sup>35</sup>Newton considered Hesiod's (7/8 century BCE) famous analogy of metals with epochs of world history; see Newton, *New College MSS*, II, f. 115<sup>v</sup>.; Manuel, *Historian*, 127.

<sup>36</sup>Newton, *New College MSS*, II, f. 72; Manuel, *Historian*, 37–8.

<sup>37</sup>See Manuel, *Historian*, 38, especially n. 4.

<sup>38</sup>Newton "generally accepted Hebrew chronology as it had been presented by Petau and Marsham with minor modifications," Manuel, *Historian*, 40.



arguments.”<sup>39</sup> Newton concluded that Israel’s history was the oldest authentic history among the ancient peoples,<sup>40</sup> and the Scriptures “are by far the oldest records now extant.”<sup>41</sup>

The *Chronology*,<sup>42</sup> which Newton worked on during the last months of his life,<sup>43</sup> had gone through a complex evolution over many years; its original title was “Theologiae gentiles origins philosophicae.”<sup>44</sup> Newton completed sixteen revised versions of the *Chronology* in his own hand, and eighteen copies of the first chapter alone, according to Whiston.<sup>45</sup> The book created debate among historians for the next fifty years.<sup>46</sup>

In his *Chronology*, based on biblical and pagan sources,<sup>47</sup> Newton argued that the Vestal cult was the most ancient of all cults, that pagans everywhere worshiped identical gods under different names, and that Egypt was the original home of pagan theology. The

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<sup>39</sup>Newton, *New College MSS*, II, f. 133<sup>v</sup>; Manuel, *Historian*, 64.

<sup>40</sup>See Westfall, *NR*, 812.

<sup>41</sup>Newton, *New College MSS*, III, f. 89 (or 189 as in Manuel, *Historian*, 89); Manuel, *Historian*, 58.

<sup>42</sup>Published by Conduitt in 1728.

<sup>43</sup>See Popkin, “Introduction,” ix.

<sup>44</sup>Translated: “The Philosophical Origins of Gentile Theology,” shortened “Origines” in Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 16.2. See Westfall, *NR*, 351–6, esp. pp. 351–2n55 for details of Newton’s historical work. A longer version of this work, the *Abstract of Chronology*, later called “Short Chronology,” (see Westfall, *NR*, 805) was the only work in the humanities department published by Newton in his lifetime, however much against his real desires.

<sup>45</sup>Whiston, *Memoirs*, 39; Westfall, *NR*, 812.

<sup>46</sup>Westfall, *NR*, 812. Manuel saw that “the reasoning [in the *Chronology*] is as powerful as in his [Newton’s] scientific works, and the scholarship is painstaking and accurate. All that is missing is a measure of scepticism about the absolute factual validity of the literary remains from antiquity,” Manuel, *Historian*, 49.

<sup>47</sup>Manuel insisted that “throughout” Newton’s final *Chronology*, “biblical chronology remained the touch-stone, incontrovertible, by which all heathen chronologies were tested.” Manuel, *Historian*, 48–49.

Egyptians and Greeks imitated the true proportions found in Solomon's temple and Hebrew cultism.<sup>48</sup> "The first religion," according to Newton, "was the most rational of all others till the nations corrupted it. For there is no way (without revelation) to come to the knowledge of a Deity but by the frame of nature."<sup>49</sup>

Newton's scientific mindset approached historical documents or sources with scepticism and criticism as he would with any mass or force in his laboratory. Empirical evidence, if attainable, was always his goal. The fine-tuned laws of nature controlled his purely scientific studies as just the authority of the Bible had been his yardstick in his religious studies. Age, authenticity, and antiquity became testing questions in Newton's historical research. Thus, generally speaking, ancient interpreters of Scripture, or history in general, were to be preferred before modern interpreters:<sup>50</sup> "And therefore since God gave the sacred Prophetesies to be interpreted by humane skill, we cannot next after the Scriptures have a better guide then the established doctrin of the ancient interpreters."<sup>51</sup>

In a New College manuscript, Newton summarized the historiography he trusted that covered the time of the prophet Daniel. The biblical books

are the oldest historical books now extant & the only books which with the Chronological canon of Ptolemy & the books of Tobit, Judith, Herodotus, Thucydides, the Annals of Tyre & Carthage, & what has been taken from ancient monuments & records by Diodorus, Strabo, Pausanias, Josephus, & a few others, can

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<sup>48</sup>Cf. Manuel, *Historian*, 93.

<sup>49</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 41, ff. 6–7; Westfall, *NR*, 355.

<sup>50</sup>See Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.7:4; Kochavi, "One Prophet Interprets Another," 117.

<sup>51</sup>Quoted in Mamiani, "Newton on Prophecy and the Apocalypse," 402. Newton, however, was extremely critical of certain theologians of the ancient church. For example, he "adduced evidence against" Jerome, Manuel stated, "as if he were in a court of law." Manuel, *Historian*, 158n56. Thus, sometimes later writers, e.g., the Jewish philosopher Maimonides of the 1200s CE who was among Newton's favorites, were preferred before the older writers. See Popkin, "Further Comments," 1–7. Newton's favorite modern historian, according to Manuel, "seems to have been" Carlo Sigonio. See his *Historian*, 45. Although Newton consulted modern historians, he did not rely on them. See Westfall, *NR*, 328.

give us light into the history & chronology of the first ages down to the reign of Darius King of Persia.<sup>52</sup>

Among “a few others” were the priest Manetho of Egypt, Phoenician historians, Berosus, Herodotus, and Eratoshenes (third century BCE), who was the keeper of the Alexandrian Library. Josephus was especially dear to Newton.<sup>53</sup> The Jewish historian had access to a Tyrian archive, became Rome’s official historian of the First Jewish War, and exhibited great faith in the Old Testament. As a historian, Clement of Alexandria achieved almost the same status as Josephus in the mind of Newton. Manuel, who compared the two writers, concluded that “all the crucial elements except the astronomical proofs that Newton required for the revision of ancient chronology can be found side by side in the *Stromata* [of Clement].”<sup>54</sup>

Of the significant historical writings of the early Christian era, Newton carefully considered Ptolemy’s canon, which was in harmony with Babylonian chronology and was more recent than the earlier and erroneous Greek chronologies.<sup>55</sup> Newton consulted other historians as well, both secular and religious, who covered the Christian era up to the Middle Ages: Eusebius, Orosius, Prosper, Marcellinus, Cassiodorus, Jornandes, Zosimus, Theodoret, Socrates, etc.<sup>56</sup> Newton generally preferred the ante-Nicene fathers before those who came later and understood the magnitude of Augustine’s contribution in both theology proper, eschatology, and particularly millenarianism. Yet, despite his

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<sup>52</sup>Newton, *New College MSS*, III, f. 152; Manuel, *Historian*, 63n48.

<sup>53</sup>Manuel, *Historian*, 92–3.

<sup>54</sup>Manuel, *Historian*, 94. Clement’s particular historical writing, relevant to Newton’s larger historical scheme, is found in Clement, *Stromata*, xv. See also Manuel, *Historian*, 93.

<sup>55</sup>Newton considered Ptolemy’s *Kanon basileion* in his *Chronology*, 303–4, 360.

<sup>56</sup>See Westfall, *NR*, 328.

aversions to Augustinianism, the *City of God* attracted Newton's admiration.<sup>57</sup>

Newton applied source criticism in the sense that he often specified levels of source quality: Whether the writer which Newton desired to quote indicated that he was a prime witness, or specified particular circumstances, that, to Newton, vindicated authenticity to a large degree. Newton was wary of careless scholarship where writers did not critically evaluate the quality of their sources.<sup>58</sup>

Westfall noted that Newton "brought the standards of scientific demonstration to historical research."<sup>59</sup> Newton did this to build a historical foundation for his apocalyptic scheme—because without historical certainty there could be no certainty of prophetic fulfilment. Of course, certainty of historical phenomena is attainable only in proportion to the quality of the available primary sources. Thus, the noted historian of intellectualism, Manuel, after years of studying Newton's non-scientific writings, stated (and Westfall did not disagree) that "the fatal defects in his [Newton's historical] system are not hard to find in the light of modern textual criticism—it would be supererogatory to dwell upon them—but for all its flaws the Newtonian reconstruction of chronology has a grandeur of its own."<sup>60</sup> Thus, Newton's scientific mindset and historical studies laid the foundation for his apocalyptic methodology.

Since Newton's method of studying apocalyptic did not differ much from his

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<sup>57</sup>See Manuel, *Historian*, 47.

<sup>58</sup>Manuel, *Historian*, 51.

<sup>59</sup>Westfall, *NR*, 329.

<sup>60</sup>Manuel, *Historian*, 49.

scientific method,<sup>61</sup> scholars have sometimes argued that Newton modelled his scientific methodology on the former.<sup>62</sup> To these scholars, it was likely that this Newtonian methodology was first tested empirically on his prophetic interpretations before he applied it to what is universally regarded the greatest single work in the history of science—the *Principia*,<sup>63</sup> a work of exceptional originality and genius. For the first time nature was tamed and subjected to theoretical mathematics with all its far-reaching implications in the formation of the modern world. It could also be argued that the methodological similarities occurred naturally as he pursued both apocalyptic and scientific research more or less simultaneously for many years.

In whatever study he immersed himself, Newton's goal was always to reduce the complex into smaller parts, analyzing and measuring them so they could be tested and verified according to known laws or new laws to be discovered. His mathematizing of the working of all matter in the universe<sup>64</sup> was a result of this methodology.

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<sup>61</sup>See Mamiani, "Newton on Prophecy and the Apocalypse," 397. Mamiani told us that "the rules for interpreting the words and language in Scripture were later to become, in the *Principia*, the Rules of Reasoning (*Regulae Philosophandi*). At the heart of the scientific rules, we again find analogy as the key for reading the book of nature. The analogy of nature corresponds entirely to the analogy of the prophetic style, because God is the same author of the infinite world and of the eternal prophecy." Maurizion, "Newton on Prophecy and the Apocalypse," 404.

<sup>62</sup>See below.

<sup>63</sup>Manuel stated that "Newton saw his 'methodising of prophecy' as an ideal scientific structure, exhibiting the greatest possible simplicity and harmony. *His rules for interpreting the language of prophecy were a replica of those he insisted upon for interpreting the Book of Nature*. . . Newton was as certain of his method and results in the interpretation of the Apocalypse as he was in the *Principia*, and he uttered thinly veiled threats against those who might be rash enough to contradict him." Manuel, *RIN*, 98; emphasis mine. Cf. Westfall's contradictory statement; "Even before he was concerned with the interpretation of the Apocalypse, Newton had developed many of his methodological ideas." Maurizion, "Newton on Prophecy and the Apocalypse," 396.

<sup>64</sup>Modified by Einstein's Theory of Relativity.

## Newton's Seven-step Methodological Approach to Apocalyptic

Newton believed that both revelation and nature follow certain infinite unbreakable laws, enabling the interpreter to understand these two spheres respectively.<sup>65</sup> In approaching revelation, Newton attempted to create a hermeneutic of prophetic interpretation which could be universally applied and easily understood.<sup>66</sup> Thus Newton's starting point and foundation as he approached canonical apocalyptic literature was his belief that God is the Master of creation and Lord of history. Newton believed that God maintains His creation by adjusting and correcting it from time to time. Newton saw no reason to doubt that God is able to reverse His laws if He chooses to. To believe that Daniel and Revelation are divinely inspired sources implies that miracles are possible. The apocalyptic "miracle" is even progressive and displayed throughout church history. Newton did not protest against that kind of miracle,<sup>67</sup> but was repulsed by the naïve perception of miracles. Newton believed that the apostolic miracles "ceased a second time" around 200–300 CE.<sup>68</sup> He also believed in the continuation of miracles in order to maintain the universe.<sup>69</sup>

Newton's God was a God of history, a God who knew the past as well as the future. History was delineated through the pages of prophecy; humans needed no further

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<sup>65</sup>See Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, f. 14.

<sup>66</sup>See rules of interpretation below.

<sup>67</sup>See Mamiani, "Newton on Prophecy and the Apocalypse," 401–3; Westfall, *NR*, 345n37; and Manuel, *Historian*, 10.

<sup>68</sup>Newton, *OP*, V. 304; cf. *Corr* 3:195, Manuel, *Historian*, 10, 148, and Force, "Newton's God of Dominion," 87. Manuel, *Historian*, 10, claimed that the statement of Newton is taken further than warranted.

<sup>69</sup>See Manuel, *Historian*, 258, n. 35.

evidence to be convinced of God's existence. Newton was certain enough of God's existence to include a section on God's nature in an appendix in the second edition of his *Principia*<sup>70</sup> in which he took the existence of God for granted.<sup>71</sup>

The existence of God, according to Newton, does not destroy the truthfulness of science and its power to convey exact facts. Experimental science can be trusted, even without a Creator. The claims of canonical apocalyptic, in contrast, cannot be trusted without assurance of a personified Master of the universe. Thus, to Newton, God, active and involved in human affairs, was essential if Daniel and Revelation should yield any meaning.

The *second step* in Newton's overall methodology was to make sure the canonical apocalyptic foundation—the Bible—was trustworthy. Believing in the God of creation gives deeper meaning only as the Creator reveals himself. Foundational to Newton's method is that he thoroughly, and almost as a Puritan, accepted the Bible as authentic, authoritative, and true. When he interpreted the Bible, Newton followed the Protestant *sola scriptura* principle,<sup>72</sup> but with Daniel and Revelation, he applied a complementary set of more complex rules.<sup>73</sup>

The *third step* to Newton's scientific method of understanding apocalyptic involved an evaluation of Greek texts of the Apocalypse—thus, he applied textual

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<sup>70</sup>See Westfall, *NR*, 748–9.

<sup>71</sup>See Snobelen's interpretation of *Principia*'s second edition "General Scholium," in his "Isaac Newton, Heretic," 406–7, 415; cf. Manuel, *RIN*, 75–9.

<sup>72</sup>However, in addition to the Bible, Newton used a variety of sources from the ancient and the medieval world (including Jewish and Arabic literature). Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, 1r-11r, cf. f. 28; Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 14, ff. 78–80; Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, ff. 20–3, 24–7.

<sup>73</sup>See below.

criticism.<sup>74</sup> With extreme focus and concentration, he sorted and evaluated every available Greek manuscript of the book of Revelation in order to determine the most reliable text tradition.

The *fourth step* was to affirm that Daniel and Revelation were authentic, reliable, and possible to understand. He went to great length to defend this position. That God has made it a revelation means He has opened it up. “If it cannot be understood, then why did God give it?”<sup>75</sup> Newton asked.

The *fifth step* was to determine the structure of the prophetic document.<sup>76</sup> Jewish Old Testament influence in the book of Revelation,<sup>77</sup> in which the temple service formed an important background structure, intrigued Newton. The Old Testament temple service was also an integral part of the Book of Daniel, something Newton certainly observed, but did not exploit as a hermeneutical potentiality.<sup>78</sup> Structure determines the final interpretation. Accordingly, Newton stated that “the parts of Prophecy are like the separated parts of a Watch . . . [which] appear confused and must be compared and put together before they can be useful, and those parts are certainly to be put together which fit without straining.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>See subheading “Scientific Research” above.

<sup>75</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, f. 4<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>76</sup>Iliffe appropriately stated Newton’s view here: “First ‘internal order of the visions,’ and then the ‘interpretation.’” Iliffe, “Making a Shew,” 63.

<sup>77</sup>Cf. Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse Through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002).

<sup>78</sup>See Winfried Vogel, “The Cultic Motif in Space and Time in the Book of Daniel,” (PhD dissertation, Andrews University, 1999).

<sup>79</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 7.2j, f. 114<sup>v</sup>.



Newton's *sixth step* was to determine what the apocalyptic text says through proper exegesis. Newton read the text carefully and it seems certain that he gave attention to it in its original language. Newton, like most Protestant interpreters in his day, respected the *sola scriptura* principle, "opening scripture with scripture."<sup>80</sup> This principle, however, did not stop him from occasionally consulting ancient myths from the pagan world in order to find influences on the language of the prophets.<sup>81</sup> His fifteen (or sixteen) rules of interpretation, and a dictionary he made with explanations of seventy symbols,<sup>82</sup> helped determine the right reading.<sup>83</sup>

The *seventh and final step* in Newton's methodology<sup>84</sup> was to collect, verify, analyze, and interpret secular and ecclesiastical history in order to vindicate his interpretations of Daniel and Revelation. He was confident that a harmonization between them was possible,

for if Historians divide their histories into Sections, Chapters, and Books at such periods of time where the less, greater, and greatest revolutions begin or end; and to do otherwise would be improper: much more ought we to suppose that the holy Ghost observes this rule accurately in his prophetick dictates since they are no other then histories of things to come.<sup>85</sup>

This final step opened up his interpretation of Daniel and Revelation, in which he perceived structure, order, and harmony between history and revelation. Thus, history served empirically to verify correct interpretation.

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<sup>80</sup>Westfall, *NR*, 326.

<sup>81</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 14, ff. 78–80.

<sup>82</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, 20–27. Henry More and a few others did the same.

<sup>83</sup>See below.

<sup>84</sup>Manuel, *RIN*, 93.

<sup>85</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, f. 16'.

## Newton's Fifteen/Sixteen Rules<sup>86</sup> for Decoding Biblical Apocalyptic

Newton's essay, "The Language of the Prophets"<sup>87</sup> reveals his method of decoding Daniel and Revelation. Newton's fifteen (or sixteen) "Rules for Interpreting the Words and Language in Scripture,"<sup>88</sup> particularly applicable to the Book of Revelation, is a notable summary of essential biblical hermeneutic. He conceived these principles from reason and an intense observation of the entire organism of the Bible as though it was an observable universe in itself.

Newton's scientific works searched for understanding and simplification, summarizing the working of nature into simple laws. His laws of gravity and motion are good examples. "Nature is exceedingly simple and conformable to herself," Newton wrote. "Whatever reasoning holds for greater motions, should hold for lesser ones as well."<sup>89</sup> Newton believed that as in the Book of Nature, there were universal rules in the Book of Scripture, as well. God is the author of "order and not of confusion."<sup>90</sup> Thus, he sought the laws that govern apocalyptic interpretation and assured himself that he had found them.

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<sup>86</sup>Newton's 15 or 16 rules are given in three sections. Through some oversight, the last rule of the first section and the first rule of the second section are respectively numbered "5" and "5 B," yet they do not seem to be closely connected. See Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, 12r–19r.

<sup>87</sup>The final editor of the *Observations* chose sections in Newton, *Yahuda MSS*, 1, 7, and 9 as the introductory chapter, whereas Newton, *Keynes MS*, 5 "is a far more complete, better organized, and more consecutive narrative covering a similar ground [as *Yahuda MS*, 1], though without explicitly mentioning the 15 rules." Manuel, *Historian*, 150, see esp. n. 29. "Nowhere else [than *Keynes MS*, 5]," Manuel stated, "is Newton so precise in identifying each phrase and image in the prophecies with a specific event," Manuel, *Historian*, 148. In Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 9.1, we find the most extensive treatment on "the Language of the Prophets," topic. Cf. Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 2.1 and Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 2.5a.

<sup>88</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, 12r–19r.

<sup>89</sup>Newton, *Add MS*, 4005.

<sup>90</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, f. 14.

In a fragment from a “Treatise on Revelation,” Newton provided the rules for how to understand and interpret Revelation (Daniel is implicitly included).<sup>91</sup> Since these rules are invaluable to determine Newton’s method, it is fitting to present them here in an abbreviated form beginning with the first of three sections:

1. “To observe diligently the consent of Scriptures and analogy of the prophetique stile, and to reject those interpretations where this is not duely observed.”
2. “To assigne but one meaning to one place of scripture ... the same thing may have divers meanings [in other places].”
3. “To keep as close as may be to the same sense of words, especially in the same vision ... and to prefer those interpretations where this is best observed.”
4. “To choose those interpretations which are most according to the litterall meaning of the scriptures unless where the tenour and circumstances of the place plainly require an Allegory.”
5. “To acquiesce in that sense of any portion of Scripture as the true on which results most freely and naturally from the use and propriety of the Language and tenor of the context in that and all other places of Scripture to that sense.”

There is no doubt that Newton in this section of his rules showed great sensitivity and emphasis to the *sola scriptura* principle of Wycliffe and Luther. “To keep as close as may be to the same sense of words” was Newton’s way of expressing that the Bible itself must be the premise of any interpretation. A literal meaning of the text is preferred if context

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<sup>91</sup>This treatise is published in Manuel, *RIN*; see the appendix to his book. A brief outline of his 15 rules of prophetic interpretation must suffice. Westfall appropriately stated that “these were not the rules of an enthusiast in direct communion with God, but the rules of a sober man who regarded the prophecies as objective revelations of a God Who does not trifle.” Westfall, *NR*, 326.

does not contradict it. Thus, a sharp distinction between the real world and the figurative world is evident. According to Newton, these principles are essential for all reading of Scripture.

The second section focuses on “rules for methodizing the Apocalypse.”

6. [*sic*] “To prefer those interpretations which ... are of the most considerable things. For it was Gods designe in these prophesies to typify and describe not trifles but the most considerable things in the wo[r]ld during the time, time of the Prophecies.”

The “most considerable things” or events of history are, according to Newton, the fulfillments of apocalyptic prophecy. Thus, to study and understand Revelation’s fulfillments, Scripture and history are the best guides, and particularly that history relevant to God’s people and, ultimately, the part of that history with the greatest impact in the war between good and evil. Newton illustrated this by focusing on the fourth and fifth centuries, formative years of a false edition of Christianity. Needless to say, Newton believed the fulfillment of Revelation went beyond the ancient world.

7. “To make the [visions and] parts of [the same] a vision succeed one another according to the order of the narration without any breach or interfering unless when there are manifest indications of such a breach or interfering.”

8. “In collaterall [parallel or overlapping] visions to adjust the most notable parts and periods to one another: And if they be not throughout collaterall, to make the beginning or end of one vision fall in with some notable period of the other. For the visions are duely proportioned to the actions and changes of the times which they respect.”

9. “To choose those constructions which without straining reduce contemporary visions to the greatest harmony of their parts ... opening scripture by scripture.”

10. “To choose those constructions which without straining reduce things to the greatest simplicity.... Truth is ever to be found in simplicity, and not in the multiplicity and confusion of things.... He is the God of order and not of confusion.”

11. “In construing [determining the structure of] the Apocalyps to have little or no regard to arguments drawn from events of things; Because there can scarce be any certainty in historicall interpretations unless the construction be first determined.”

12. “To acquiesce in that construction of the Apocalyps as the true one which results most naturally and freely from the characters imprinted by the holy ghost on the severall parts thereof for insinuating their connexion, and from the observation of the precedent rules.... God who knew how to frame it [the Revelation] without ambiguity intended it for a rule of faith.”

In a PEV,<sup>92</sup> the story follows along chronological, progressive, and continuous lines unless context contradicts this. Then Newton established the law of synchronizing, i.e., making the elements in each parallel vision conform “to the greatest harmony of their parts.” Thus, he could then interpret “Scripture by Scripture.” As in his method of science, so also with his apocalyptic: Truth was in the simplification of structure. It was an important presupposition to Newton that “there [could] scarce be any certainty in historical interpretations unless the construction be first determined,” and this

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<sup>92</sup>As discussed in chap. 3 above, a PEV refers to an outline vision which is fulfilled chronologically from the time and place of the prophet who uttered the prophecy until the vision reaches a climax at the time of the eschaton. As discussed in chap. 4 above, Newton combined the first three septet visions of Revelation (seven churches, seals, and trumpets) as one large consecutive outline vision stretching history from John to Jesus’ Second Coming.

construction had to be understood “naturally and freely.”

In the third and last section, headed “Rules for interpreting the Apocalypse,” Newton repeated himself, but provided a few additional points.

13. “The Construction of the Apocalyps after it is once determined must be made the rule of interpretation; And all interpretations rejected which agree not with it. That must not be strained to fit history but such things chosen out of history as are most suitable to that.”

14. “To interpret sacred Prophecies of the most considerable things and actions of those times to which they are applied. For if it would be weakness in an Historian whilst he writes of obscurer actions to let slip the greater, much less ought this to be supposed in the holy Prophecies which are no other then histories of things to come.”

15. “To proportion the most notable parts of Prophecy to the most notable parts of history, and the breaches made in a continued series of Prophecy to the changes made in history. And to reject those interpretations where the parts and breaches of Prophecy do not thus bear a due proportion to the parts and changes in History.”

16. “To cho[o]se those interpretations which without straining do most respect the church [i.e., the Protestant view of church history and/or history of prophetic interpretation] and argue the greatest wisdom and providence of God for preserving her [the church] in the truth.”

Construction determines the “rule of interpretation.” Straining structure to fit history may be considered cheating. Relevant to Newton, furthermore, is the history “of the most considerable things.” There is correspondence between “the most notable parts of Prophecy to the most notable parts of history,” and there should be no stretching to

harmonize Scripture and history. Those interpretations are to be preferred which “do most respect the church and argue the greatest wisdom and providence of God for preserving her [the church] in the truth.”

From the foundation laid in previous chapters on the history of historicist hermeneutic, Newton’s own interpretations of Daniel and Revelation, his seven-step methodology, and his hermeneutical rules, we can delineate major hermeneutical assumptions in Newton. The following sections synthesize all the foregoing into nine hermeneutical principles of Newton’s canonical apocalypticism.

### **Synthesis: Nine Foundational Principles of Newton’s Prophetic Interpretation**

#### **Principle #1: Presupposition of *Sola Scriptura***

Newton, as other Protestants of his time, believed that the Bible is its own interpreter.<sup>93</sup> He reasoned that it was possible to deduce from the Bible the laws that govern its interpretation. One such fundamental law expresses that the Bible must be read and understood by a natural reading, and one text must be allowed to explain another text. Skeptical as he was to every human hypothesis, Newton reasoned that the Bible, in its purest textual version, is divinely purified from human errors (except errors in the transmission process) and cannot share ultimate authority with human additions. The Bible and only the Bible is the ultimate authority and source of truth. Thus, Newton maintained the *sola scriptura* principle as a foundational hermeneutical key to understand biblical apocalyptic.

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<sup>93</sup>Rule # 1, in Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1.

Newton made a distinction between historical narrative and prophetic literature. Since most of the Bible displays a historical prosaic narrative style, Newton insisted it be read in a straightforward manner with as little ambiguity as possible. His exegetical approach to the figurative language of prophecy was identical to the traditional Protestant approach. In one of the Jerusalem manuscripts, he stated it unambiguously: “Contending for a language which was not handed down from the Prophets and Apostles is a breach of the command ... an article of faith ... must be express in the very form of sound words in which it was delivered by the Apostles. ... All the old Heresies lay in deductions; the true faith was in the text.”<sup>94</sup>

Proper *sola scriptura* interpretation of the Bible includes sensitivity to the etymology of a word and to the evolution of the meanings of that word, particularly at the time an inspired writer used it. Thus, Newton observed: “We are also to allow for the changes that have been made in the signification of words.”<sup>95</sup>

Newton was emphatically skeptical of the medieval school’s “four senses of Scripture,” which can be traced back to Origen’s allegorizing scheme.<sup>96</sup> An allegorical interpreter, Newton stated, “trust[s] [more] in his own imagination in that human authority then [than] in the Scripture (and by consequence that he is no true believer).”<sup>97</sup> The following statement is indicative of Newton’s foundational Protestant leaning in the area of biblical interpretation, which of course had great impact on his apocalypticism.

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<sup>94</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 15.1, f. 11<sup>r</sup>. Cf. “The Church has no authority to alter the foundation upon wch she was built by Christ & his Apostles.” In Newton, *New College MS*, 361.2, f. 41<sup>r</sup> ff., quoted in Iliffe, “Making a Shew,” 79–80n60.

<sup>95</sup>Newton, *New College MSS*, II, f. 133; Manuel, *Historian*, 149.

<sup>96</sup>Newton on allegorization, see Kochavi, “One Prophet Interprets Another,” 108.

<sup>97</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, ff. 13 ff.; Kochavi, “One Prophet Interprets Another,” 108.



He that without better grounds [than] his private opinion or the opinion of any human authority whatsoever shall turn scripture from the plain meaning to an Allegory or to any other less naturall sense declares thereby that he reposes more trust in his own imaginations or in that human authority then in the Scripture. And, therefore, the opinion of such men how numerous soever they be, is not to be regarded. Hence it is & not from any reall uncertainty in the Scripture that Commentators have so distorted it; And this hath been the door through which all Heresies have crept in & turned out the ancient faith.<sup>98</sup>

Although Newton adhered to the rules of historicism (hammered out from Daniel) and frequently followed previous interpreters in detail when he commented on texts in Daniel and Revelation, he realized he needed a set of additional (i.e., complementary) and uniquely designed rules for decoding apocalyptic.<sup>99</sup> He believed Daniel formed the key to subsequent prophecies in the Bible. “In those things which relate to the last times,” Newton stated, Daniel “must be made the key to the rest.”<sup>100</sup>

## Principle #2: Structure

Another non-negotiable feature of apocalyptic hermeneutic to Newton’s system is his constant insistence on a determined structural framework as a basis for any

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<sup>98</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, f. 13<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>99</sup>Although, since, strictly speaking, they derive from the inner logic of the Bible itself and, therefore, should be part of the *Sola scriptura* principle.

<sup>100</sup>Newton, *OP*, 15; Manuel, *Historian*, 164. Cf. Since Daniel is the easiest prophecy in the Old Testament to understand, “therefore in those things which relate to the last times, he must be made the key to the rest” (Newton, *OCE*, 15); Popkin, “Newton as a Bible Scholar,” 107. Cf. also Newton, *OCE*, 306; Hutton, “More, Newton, and the Language of Biblical Prophecy,” 46.

interpretation.<sup>101</sup> From Newton's interpretation of Daniel, even if he did not spell out its structure, it is easy to determine it.<sup>102</sup> "*Daniel's* Prophecies reach to the end of the world . . . are all of them [i.e., visions] related to one another, as if they were but several parts of one general Prophecy, given at several times."<sup>103</sup>

Newton applied the principle of recapitulation as one important feature of his apocalyptic interpretation. This hermeneutical feature is particularly visible in his commentary on Daniel. Daniel's structure, according to Newton, incorporates five synchronous parallel visions representing the history of the world from Daniel's time to the eschaton. These are Dan 2, 7, 8, 9, and 10–12. Each vision builds on the former and each expands correspondingly and successively on to the end-time. Newton explained the first part of this in the following way:

This [is] certain [:] that the same things are described again and again in prophesy: And all the descriptions of one and the same thing must be conjoined that they may interpret one another and supply one anothers defects and jointly make one complete description which cannot be misapplied to history. And those interpretations are always to be preferred which reduce the parts of scripture to the greatest consent [consistency] and harmony. Daniel has described the same Monarchies again and again in four several prophecies, and yet the words were shut up and sealed till the time of the end. John's Prophecy is a Revelation of what was shut up and sealed before, and therefore must be compared with Daniel's that all may be understood.<sup>104</sup>

In his work on Revelation, admittedly, Newton's consistent application of the recapitulationist principle is not as obvious as in his Daniel commentary. In his

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<sup>101</sup>Methodologically, Newton began by determining what was the original text, then he analyzed that original text to determine its structure, and then he used that determined structure of the text as the framework for interpretation; thus, in his own words, "there can scarce be any certainty in historical interpretations unless the construction be first determined." See rule #10 above.

<sup>102</sup>Newton insisted, "Daniel is [the] most distinct in order of time, and easiest to be understood." Quoted in Newton, *OCE*, 32, 75–6 [14–15].

<sup>103</sup>Quoted in Newton, *OCE*, 32, 83, 174 [24, 132] (emphasis in original).

<sup>104</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS*, 5, ff. 29–30.

commentary, or notes, on Revelation, Newton's structural hypothesis was incredibly complex and somehow different from Daniel's consistent simplicity. Newton designed his structural paradigm for Revelation on his conviction that Revelation's visions, which each represented a phase or epoch of human history, succeeded one another. In Daniel, the visions covered the same historical period, but seen from different angles, whereas in the first half of Revelation, the visions interpretively and historically succeed one another without repeating the same ground.

Thus, to Newton, the three septets of Revelation (seven cities/churches, seven seals, and seven trumpets, Rev 2–11) succeed one another: (1) The seven churches represent the earliest history in the early church; (2) the first seal chronologically succeeds the last church (Laodicea); and (3) the first trumpet of the seven succeeds the sixth seal and, combined with the remaining six trumpets in successive line, cover the same ground as the seventh seal (i.e., from 381 CE until the end of time). Finally, the seven trumpets are synchronous with the seven last plagues. Within this macro-structure, Newton incorporated the rest of Revelation's content.<sup>105</sup>

### Principle #3: Symbolism and Analogy

To decipher biblical apocalyptic writings, Newton maintained the standard *sola scriptura* principle. Part of that principle is to let the Bible itself explain its own terminology. Sometimes this is not possible, especially when a word or symbol has a confused meaning or is used only once in the Scriptures, thus preventing internal

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<sup>105</sup>See chap. three of this dissertation.

comparison; then external sources may be relevant, but only as a secondary source.<sup>106</sup>

Newton, for example, consulted the Greek pagan Artemidorus on a dream-interpretation issue<sup>107</sup> and claimed that “the language of the Prophets being Hieroglyphical, had affinity with that of the Priests & Eastern wise men.”<sup>108</sup> Newton found no affiliation with other ancients, especially the allegorizers.<sup>109</sup>

In addition to, or complementing the *sola scriptura* principle, Newton provided a rationale for understanding apocalyptic in the introduction chapter of his commentary on Daniel and Revelation: “The Language of the Prophets.”<sup>110</sup> Newton explained in this section how we are to understand prophetic figure of speech, what underlying principles are to be followed, and a few warnings against mishandling the Word of God. The essence of his argument was that without an understanding of biblical prophetic language, there can be no understanding of Revelation; thus, principles must be established and consistently followed.<sup>111</sup> There is an overwhelming representation of biblical examples of simple analogies throughout Newton’s writings on apocalyptic.<sup>112</sup> It

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<sup>106</sup>Kochavi’s assessment of Newton’s hermeneutic, however, is that “the interpreter of the ancient East who is an idol worshipper can decode the sacred prophetic language perhaps even better than can a theologian.” Kochavi, “One Prophet Interprets Another,” 108.

<sup>107</sup>See Westfall, *NR*, 327.

<sup>108</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS*, 5.2.

<sup>109</sup>E.g., Philo. See Manuel, *Historian*, 148.

<sup>110</sup>Newton began intensive studies of prophetic language in the early 1680s and returned to this topic between 1705 and 1710. See Force, “Newton’s God of Dominion,” 80.

<sup>111</sup>See Kochavi, “One Prophet Interprets Another,” 107–8.

<sup>112</sup>E.g., Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.7:1, f. 3.

is possible to establish logical and sensible analogies, and thus, another important component to Newton's scheme was established.<sup>113</sup>

Despite the complexity of symbolic language, according to Newton, it was still possible to understand, but only fully by the elect.<sup>114</sup> Thus, faith (in the elect) seems to be an unidentified component in his hermeneutic.<sup>115</sup> Newton asked rhetorically in his *Observations*, "Why did God give us so many clues if we cannot understand the symbols."<sup>116</sup> One reason for the lack of understanding is "the want of sufficient skill in that [symbolic] language."<sup>117</sup>

"John did not write in one language, Daniel in other, Isaiah in a third and the rest in another," Newton stated, but rather, all of them employed the same "mystical language."<sup>118</sup> Failing to be consistent here caused "interpreters so frequently [to] turn the Prophetick types & phrases to signify whatsoever their fancies & Hypotheses held them to."<sup>119</sup> God "designed" sometimes the literal sense "to hide ye more noble mystical sense

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<sup>113</sup>See, e.g., Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, ff. 28–55. Cf. Manuel's assessment of Newton's confidence to decode the "hieroglyphs" of the Scripture: "Newton's superb confidence in the superiority of his own method of deciphering the language of prophecy over those of all his predecessors was rooted in the eminently scientific reflection that his formulae for reading the sacred "hieroglyphs" actually worked in all instances in Scripture where like images were used," Manuel, *Historian*, 149. For Newton's method of analogy see Newton, *OCE*, 14.

<sup>114</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.18; cf. 1.1; Hutton, "More, Newton, and the Language of Biblical Prophecy," 48.

<sup>115</sup>Cf. John 7:17, "If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority"; and Hebrews 11:6, "If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine [interpretation], whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority."

<sup>116</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 252–3; Popkin, "Newton as a Bible Scholar," 112.

<sup>117</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS*, 5.1; Hutton, "More, Newton, and the Language of Biblical Prophecy," 46.

<sup>118</sup>McLachlan, *Manuscripts*, 119; Kochavi, "One Prophet Interprets Another," 107. Cf. Newton, *OCE*, 31–2, 259 [254].

<sup>119</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS*, 5.1; Hutton, "More, Newton, and the Language of Biblical Prophecy," 47.

as a shell ye kernel from being tasted either by unworthy persons, or until such time as God shall think fit [to reveal] it.”<sup>120</sup>

Newton’s method was simple: Select “those interpretations which are most according to the litterall meaning of the scriptures unless where the tenour and circumstances of the place plainly require an Allegory,”<sup>121</sup> and in a *Keynes* manuscript Newton stated that he “received also, much light in this search by the analogy between the world natural and the world politique. For the mystical language was founded in this analogy & will best be understood by considering its original.”<sup>122</sup> Thus, “Scripture (or at least prophecy) is written using the vocabulary of the natural world which represents not nature but human affairs.”<sup>123</sup>

Newton determined that each symbol had one fixed meaning and that cryptic language is the language of prophecy.<sup>124</sup> Regarding his rule to compare Scripture with Scripture, “where the same prophetic phrase or type is used,” the interpreter should “fix such a signification to that phrase as agrees best with all places.”<sup>125</sup> Moreover, when a symbol had several meanings, he noted, “the circumstances by which it may be known [is] in what signification the phrase is taken in any place.”<sup>126</sup> Newton’s method was

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<sup>120</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.12<sup>v</sup>; Hutton, “More, Newton, and the Language of Biblical Prophecy,” 47.

<sup>121</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, in Popkin, “Newton as a Bible Scholar,” 103.

<sup>122</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS*, 5 in Hutton, “More, Newton, and the Language of Biblical Prophecy,” 48–9. Cf. Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 9.

<sup>123</sup>Hutton, “More, Newton, and the Language of Biblical Prophecy,” 49.

<sup>124</sup>See Kochavi, “One Prophet Interprets Another,” 106.

<sup>125</sup>Kochavi, “One Prophet Interprets Another,” 106.

<sup>126</sup>McLachlan, *Manuscripts*, 120; Kochavi, “One Prophet Interprets Another,” 106.

thoroughly similar to that of Protestantism, and indeed a biblically legitimate way to know (if that is possible) the secrets behind the symbolic language of prophecy. Indeed, regarding Newton's symbology, according to one current scholar, "in general, modern scholarship is much in agreement with him."<sup>127</sup>

#### Principle #4: Cultic Background

Another essential feature of Newton's apocalypticism is his insistence that cultic elements are part of the overall structure of Revelation,<sup>128</sup> which contains an abundance of cultic phraseology, that is, terms used in the Jewish sanctuary service.<sup>129</sup> Newton saw the sanctuary service as a type of the church and history.<sup>130</sup> For example, the Passover was seen as representing the crucifixion of Jesus, while the Fall feast, including the Day of Atonement, Newton understood to represent the end of time.<sup>131</sup> It was not a long leap for Newton to synchronize a dynamic sanctuary typology with apocalyptic eschatology.<sup>132</sup> Thus, Newton's interpretive level took on a new dimension enriching the outcome.

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<sup>127</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 51.

<sup>128</sup>See Westfall, *NR*, 346–48. Revelation is by any evaluation infused with sanctuary terminology, Daniel, however, is not so obviously immersed in cultic language, but in chaps. 8–11, it cannot be missed. For Newton on Dan 8, see Newton, *OCE*, 40, 165–8, and 122–6. For a detailed study of the sanctuary in Daniel, see Vogel, "The Cultic Motif in Space and Time in the Book of Daniel."

<sup>129</sup>Newton worked on a *Lexicon propheticum* where the Levitical sanctuary system served as a prolegomena, see Westfall, *NR*, 348.

<sup>130</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MSS*, 2.4, f. 46; 13.2, ff. 1–22; 28.5, ff. 1–3; Newton, *Babson MS*, 434, f. 1; Newton, *OCE*, 14; Westfall, *NR*, 246.

<sup>131</sup>See Newton, *OCE*, 53. 259–30.

<sup>132</sup>According to Westfall, "in the middle of 1680s, Newton undertook a major revision of his treatise on Revelation in which he incorporated his new perception of Jewish ritual as a type and much else besides." Westfall, *NR*, 349; see interesting n. 49.

In his *Observations*, one full chapter is dedicated to the relationship between the book of Revelation and OT sanctuary teachings.<sup>133</sup> The scenes from heaven in Revelation are taken straight from the heavenly temple, often as a background scene for the visions. In light of Newton's understanding of sanctuary typology, that is, that the three annual Jewish feasts represent a beginning-point (Passover and fifty days later Pentecost) and an end-point (Day of Atonement) of church history, he found a helpful control-mechanism here for determining the time of fulfillment of the prophecies in Revelation.

Newton's sanctuary typology focused especially on the Day of Atonement. Beside placing that unique day anti-typically to the end-of time, he attached to it Levitical concepts such as "preparation," "fasting," "praying," "expiation of sin," and "judgment."<sup>134</sup> By doing this, the spiritual need of people in preparing for the end-time could now be blended with people's intellectual need.

Newton's thoughts on the Jewish sanctuary theology are found in several other writings of his, and particularly, in "A Dissertation upon the Sacred Cubit of the Jews and the Cubits of the several Nations."<sup>135</sup> To achieve mastery of such a large study, Newton consulted the Scriptures, Talmudic scholars, Josephus, Philo, Maimonides, and whoever could bring reliable facts on the table.<sup>136</sup>

Moreover, Newton regarded Moses to be privileged since he knew the secrets of

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<sup>133</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 259–72

<sup>134</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 264–67.

<sup>135</sup>In Greaves, *Miscellaneous Works*, 2:405–33; Kochavi, "One Prophet Interprets Another," 122n47; Popkin, "Newton as a Bible Scholar," 115n4. Newton, "A Dissertation upon the Sacred Cubit of the Jews," first published in 1737, see Manuel, *Historian*, 14. See also Newton, *Yahuda MSS*, 1.2:4; 1.2:5; 1.13:2 and 1.28:5.

<sup>136</sup>For Newton "concerning the method and synchronisms of the Apocalypse & the allusions therein to the Law and history of the Jews," see Iliffe, "Making a Shew," 75.



the universe; that is, the temple was a miniature structure of heaven, though not denying the existence of a sanctuary *in* heaven. Thus, herein is evidence for a correlation between astronomy and his apocalyptic scheme. One scholar even claimed that the story of Moses, who received secrets about the universe, motivated Newton's astronomical studies.<sup>137</sup>

Thus, Manuel summed up Newton's thinking on these issues:

In the same sense that passages in the prophecies of Daniel and St. John were hieroglyphs for the facts of future history, every part of the earthly abode of the Law had its correspondence in the heavenly Jerusalem of the next world . . . a blueprint of heaven . . . here was the ultimate truth of God's kingdom expressed in physical terms. Thorough knowledge of the structure of the Temple was a prolegomenon to the establishment of the correspondences.<sup>138</sup>

#### Principle #5: Prophet to Eschaton Vision

The PEV format<sup>139</sup> is particularly obvious in the Book of Daniel.<sup>140</sup> Newton, together with virtually all historicists, interpreted Daniel's five great prophecies as recapitulation visions. That is, Newton realized that the hermeneutical key to understanding Daniel was to view the interpretation of each of his visions, which cover the entire span of history from the time of the prophet to the eschaton, as synchronous and recapitulatory.

Newton thought differently about synchronization in the book of Revelation. He applied the PEV format to all three septets (Rev 2–11) *combined and in successive order*.

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<sup>137</sup>"Newton's constant preoccupation with studying the structure of the universe was meant to acquire knowledge like that which was transmitted to Moses by God." Kochavi, "One Prophet Interprets Another," 117.

<sup>138</sup>Manuel, *Historian*, 162.

<sup>139</sup>For a discussion of this concept, see chap. 3.

<sup>140</sup>"Daniel has described the same Monarchies again and again in four several prophecies," Newton, *Keynes MS*, 5, ff. 29–30. Cf. Newton, *OCE*, 32, 83, 174.

In other words, Newton did not see Revelation's major visions as synchronous as is the case with the major visions in Daniel.<sup>141</sup> Instead, he viewed the three septets *in combination* as a chronological unit, beginning with Ephesus, the first of the seven churches representing the earliest church history and ending, in a successive line with the second coming represented by the seventh trumpet, which (together with the former six trumpets) unfolded within the seventh seal. Newton interpretively integrated the rest of Revelation (after chap. 11) into his comprehensive single PEV between chaps. 2 and 11. The seven plagues (Rev 16), however, he viewed as synchronous with the seven trumpets.

Newton's particular synchronization scheme of Revelation is different from Mede's and More's, and different from most in the historicist tradition (see chap. 3 above). Can we detect herein a desire to excel? Was he too proud to follow More too closely? Or, did he find clues in the structure of Revelation itself? We can only speculate what the answers are. The result, however, is clear. Newton's laws of interpretation say that interpretation follows structure, not the opposite. Therefore, if Newton's Revelation structure is mistaken, his interpretation will be, by his own definition, correspondingly and proportionally in error. Following his own logic and rules derived from the Bible, Newton interpreted Rev 2–11 as one successive prophecy with its interpretive consequences.

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<sup>141</sup>“Among the old Prophets, Daniel is most distinct in order of time, and easiest to be understood: and therefore in those things which relate to the last times, he must be made the key to the rest.” Newton, *OCE*, 32, 75–6.

### Principle #6: Symbolic Days Represent Literal Years

The year-day principle in historicism and in Newton's apocalyptic eschatology is another essential hermeneutical law for understanding Daniel and Revelation. The time span from Babylon to Rome and then to the barbarian kingdoms and ecclesiastical Rome as evidenced in Dan 2, 7, and 8 is obviously over a thousand years. The year-day principle can be argued *from* the great length of the succession of empires *to* the obvious conclusion that 1260 days or even 2300 evenings-mornings cannot span that length of time unless they mean more than mere literal days. The prophetic time periods in Daniel and Revelation, especially the 1260 days (= 42 months or 3½ years, mentioned seven times in Daniel and Revelation), have a significant bearing on the apocalyptic narrative. The year-day principle was applied by extra-biblical apocalyptic writers as far back as the intertestamental period,<sup>142</sup> but it took on a more significant role when Joachim of Fiore, 800 years ago, first suggested the year for a day to the 1260-days prophecy. Thus, Joachim invented, or reinvented, a synchronization yardstick to understand Revelation's interpretive structure—with great implications to future commentators.

Newton agreed, although, as far as I have seen, giving no credit to Joachim. Although Newton apparently did not provide an explicit rationale for applying the year-day principle to apocalyptic interpretation, he eagerly and consistently applied it to all the time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.<sup>143</sup> On the 2300 evenings-mornings in Dan 8, Newton refuted the day for a day on the ground that “the reign of Antiochus did not last

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<sup>142</sup>See chap. two above and William Shea's important study in this line, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*.

<sup>143</sup>E.g., for Dan 8–9, see Newton, *Keynes MS*, 5, f. 126–7.

so many days.”<sup>144</sup> Thus, Newton’s rationale is a simple one: If the prophetic periods of Daniel and Revelation are to be understood literally, they make no sense in their context and do not correlate with history; thus, they must be symbolically understood.<sup>145</sup>

In light of the rich apocalyptic tradition and Newton’s awareness of its historicist branch, including the application of the year-day principle, it is not accurate that Newton received the year-day clue from Mede as has been suggested.<sup>146</sup> It is true, however, that Newton learned new dynamics of the year-day principle from Mede, such as the consistent interpretive synchronization of the 1260 days in Revelation, which was one of Mede’s particular contributions.

In light of its enormous implication for apocalyptic interpretation, it is disappointing and a puzzle as to why Newton refrained from writing a paper, or at least an explanation, on the year-day principle.<sup>147</sup> Even more puzzling, Bentley, a fellow at the Royal Society, asked Newton to give a rationale for the year-day principle by which, according to Whiston, “Sir Isaac Newton was so greatly offended . . . as invidiously alluding to him being a Mathematician; which science was not concerned in the matter; that he would not see him, as Dr. Bentley told me himself, for a twelve month afterward.”<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>144</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 123; Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.7:1, f. 2; Kochavi, “One Prophet Interprets Another,” 111.

<sup>145</sup>The philosopher and friend of Isaac Newton, Henry More (1614–1687), argued that if one were to apply a day for a day [rather than a day for a year] to these prophecies “no sense can be made of . . . the Prophesie.”

<sup>146</sup>E.g., Kochavi, “One Prophet Interprets Another,” 115, and Newton, *OCE*, 31.

<sup>147</sup>Perhaps he did write such a paper, which might have been, as several other of his papers, consumed by the fire in his chamber at Cambridge that triggered his mental break-down.

<sup>148</sup>Whiston, *Memoirs*, I, 107, quoted in Iliffe, “Making a Shew,” 87n62. Cf. Manuel, *Historian*, 141, who offered one interpretation of this extraordinary incident: “The scholar had, it seems, belittled

### Principle #7: Prophecy is Confirmed by History

To Newton the intrinsic relationship between history and apocalyptic is unbreakable and cannot be overemphasized.<sup>149</sup> Therefore, prophecy must be studied in conjunction with history. “The content of the prophecy is history,” wrote Mamiani, describing Newton’s history-based hermeneutical paradigm.<sup>150</sup> Prophecy is meaningless without subsequent history, which is essentially prophetic fulfillment. The Christian religion itself hangs on Daniel, and the credibility of Christianity “depends on church history,” according to Newton.<sup>151</sup> Seeing the need for a closer investigation of the correspondence between the prophetic utterances and their historical fulfillment, Newton set out to study history in light of apocalyptic eschatology. In doing so, according to Westfall, Newton “brought the standards of scientific demonstration to historical research.”<sup>152</sup>

As a complement to Daniel and Revelation, Newton selected a canon of historiographical writings that could faithfully verify apocalyptic eschatology. According to Newton and the Protestant tradition up to his time, Daniel and Revelation could

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Newton’s gifts as an expositor, implying he was nothing but a mathematician.” Newton applied, e.g., Rev 8–9 on a year-day basis (Newton, *Keynes MS*, 5, ff. 126–7), and likewise Dan 8, where the 2300 days equal years because “the reign of Antiochus did not last so many days,” (*Observations*, 123 and Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.7:1, f. 2). Kochav claims Newton got his years-days for 1260 from Mede, Kochavi, “One Prophet Interprets Another,” 115; Barnett believes the same, Newton, *OCE*, 31. In Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 9.2, f. 105, Newton critiqued a contemporary (“probably . . . Grotius,” Westfall, NR, 350n35) for his views that Antiochus was the antichrist fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecies.

<sup>149</sup>John 13:19 and 14:29 confirms this. Prophecy is confirmed by history. The fact that prophecy is confirmed by history does not contradict *sola scriptura*, but rather confirms it, and functions as a central purpose of prophecy, that “when it does come to pass, you may believe.”

<sup>150</sup>Mamiani, “Newton on Prophecy and the Apocalypse,” 392–3.

<sup>151</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 11, f. 1r.

<sup>152</sup>Westfall, NR, 329.

articulate and predict the great epochs of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and pagan and papal Rome. This proved the close correlation between prophecy and history, for

if Historians divide their histories into Sections, Chapters, and Books at such periods of time where the less, greater, and greatest revolutions begin or end; and to do otherwise would be improper: much more ought we to suppose that the holy Ghost observes this rule accurately in this prophetick dictates since they are no other then histories of things to come.<sup>153</sup>

There is, therefore, in the mind of Newton, a total history of the world from creation<sup>154</sup> until the Day of Judgment, including the apocalyptic history of the world from Daniel in the sixth century BCE until the end of time. Total history verified all the Scriptures, whereas apocalyptic history verified the prophecies. Newton subdivided apocalyptic history into three categories:

The whole scene of sacred prophecy is composed of three principal parts: the regions beyond Euphrates, represented by the first two beasts of Daniel, the empire of the Greeks on this side of Euphrates, represented by the Leopard and by the He-Goat; and the empire of the Latins on this side of Greece, represented by the beast with ten horns.<sup>155</sup>

Again he divided all history since the sixth century BCE into two categories:

The Jews & the nations by which they were to be captivated, & particularly the nations within the bounds of the four Monarchies are the subject of sacred prophecy in the old Testament, & the nations through which the Christian religion was to be propagated are the subject of sacred prophesy in the new, & especially of the Apocalypse.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>153</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, f.16<sup>r</sup>; cf. Manuel, *RIN*, 3.

<sup>154</sup>There was general agreement among chronologists of Newton's time that the earth was about 4000–5000 years old when Christ came the first time; see Manuel, *Historian*, 38; especially interesting is n. 4. "While he [Newton] never committed himself on the precise day of creation . . . he generally accepted Hebrew chronology as it had been presented by Peteu and Marsham with minor modifications." Manuel, *Historian*, 40.

<sup>155</sup>Newton, *OP*, 463; Manuel, *Historian*, 145.

<sup>156</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS*, 5, ff. 29–30; Manuel, *Historian*, 154–55.

When Newton's *Chronology* and *Observation* are put together, they make "a fairly complete universal history of mankind" and, according to Manuel, this was Newton's intention.<sup>157</sup> How well he succeeded is another question. What is clear is that the quality of historical sources became a key issue in Newton's historiography.<sup>158</sup>

Newton studied church history to verify Revelation—or to confirm what others had already said. His focal point was the complex historical transition period between the ancient and the medieval world. This period of some two hundred years contained the core evidence of Newton's apocalyptic thesis: The church became apostate and corrupt because she allied herself with the state and, in the process, compromised the Word of God. "The true understanding of things Christian depends upon church history."<sup>159</sup>

Of course, the fact that some aspects of a prophecy may not be fully understood until they reach their historical fulfillment<sup>160</sup> does not remove the need to study prophecies of future events. Even partially understood, the prophecies enable the careful

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<sup>157</sup>See Manuel, *Historian*, 163. Regarding the *Abstract of Chronology*, Newton's intention was "to make Chronology suit with the Course of Nature, with Astronomy, with Sacred History, with Herodotus the Father of History, and with it self." Newton, *Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms*, 8; Westfall, *NR*, 812–13.

<sup>158</sup>Newton, *New College MSS*, III, f. 152; cf. Manuel, *Historian*, 45–7, 51, 63n48, 92–4, 137; and Westfall, *NR*, 328. Since historical certainty from pagan writers did not emerge until the middle of the first millennia BCE, Newton reasoned that "the best way to come to any certainty therefore is to begin with the later times when history & Chronology is certain & reason upwards, as high as we can proceed by good arguments." Newton, *New College MSS*, II, f. 133v.; Manuel, *Historian*, 64.

<sup>159</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 11, f. 1<sup>r</sup>.; Manuel, *RIN*, 68.

<sup>160</sup>"Until the time of the 'signal revolutions predicted by the holy Prophets,' we can only 'content ourselves with interpreting what hath already been fulfilled.'" Newton, *OCE*, 45, 256–7 (252–3). Regarding Dan 10:21 and 12:4–9, Newton stated: "This therefore a part of this Prophecy, that it should not be understood before the last age of the world; and therefore it makes for the credit of the Prophecy, that it is not yet understood. But if the last age, the age of opening these things, be now approaching as by the great successes of late Interpreters it seems to be, we have more encouragement than ever to look into these things." Newton, *OCE*, 250–51; Popkin, "Newton as a Bible Scholar," 108, 113. Popkin mistakenly claimed that Newton viewed Revelation to be the book that is sealed to the end of time, Popkin, "Newton as a Bible Scholar," 108, 113; cf. Dan 8 and 9 with Rev 11.

student to prepare for the coming crisis,<sup>161</sup> and how could historical fulfillments be recognized if there had not been careful previous study of the prophetic predictions?

#### Principle #8: War between Christ and Antichrist

The victorious Christ and the defeated Antichrist is arguably the prime theme in biblical apocalyptic. The war between these two powers is graphically described in Dan 7, where the Antichrist (disguised as the little horn) is introduced for the first time in the Bible, and then in successive chapters of canonical apocalyptic until the sea and land beasts are completely annihilated in Rev 19. As a critical observer of this warfare, Newton asserted that he and the whole world were part of that war. The war between good and evil had raged for thousands of years, whereas the war between Christ and the Antichrist was relatively recent.

Newton believed it had raged since the transition from antiquity to the medieval world. With his insight into church history, and consulting several biblical accounts, Newton detected a discrepancy between the early church of the New Testament and the post-Constantine church. Newton, together with most Protestants, was convinced that an apostasy had taken place at an early time and was still in practice. He was skeptical of

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<sup>161</sup>One such is, of course, the coming (or present) Antichrist.



monastic life,<sup>162</sup> of the invocation of saints,<sup>163</sup> of pagan rituals,<sup>164</sup> and of Gentile beliefs<sup>165</sup> that had been established in the church at an earlier time, including, in his view, the apostate doctrine *par excellence*,<sup>166</sup> the Trinity.<sup>167</sup> The apostasy of Christians,<sup>168</sup> Newton stated,

began to work in the Apostles days, and was to continue working till the man of sin should be revealed. It began to work on the disciples of Simon, Menander, Carpocrates, Cerinthus, and such sorts of men as had imbibed the metaphysical philosophy of the Gentiles and Cabalistical Jews, and thence called Gnosticks. John calls them Antichrists, saying that in his days there were many Antichrists.... So long the Apostolic traditions prevailed, and preserved the Church in its purity: and therefore the affairs of the Church do not begin to be considered in this prophecy until the opening of the fifth seal.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>162</sup>“The profession of a Monastic life they found themselves more tempted in the flesh then before.... The way to chastity is not to struggle with incontinent thoughts but to avert the thoughts by some imployment, or by reading, or by meditating on other things, or by convers. By immoderate fasting the body is also put out of its due temper and for want of sleep the fancy is invigorated about what ever it sets it self upon and by degrees inclines towards a delirium in so much that those Monks who fasted most arrived to a state of seeing apparitions of women and other shapes and of hearing their voices in such a lively manner as made them often think the visions true apparitions of the Devil tempting them to lust. Thus while we pray that God would not lead us into temptation these men ran themselves headlong into it.” Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 18. 1, f. 2<sup>v</sup>; Manuel, *RIN*, 13.

<sup>163</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 30, 227 (209).

<sup>164</sup>Around the time of Theodosius, then, “began ye Devil to overspread ye Christian world wth ye worship of Sts & reliques.” Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.5, f. 5<sup>r</sup>; Iliffe, “Making a Shew,” 66.

<sup>165</sup>“Newton was convinced that gentile theology represented a falling away from true religion.” Westfall, *NR*, 353.

<sup>166</sup>Newton believed, according to Westfall, that the great apostasy “was trinitarianism”; see Westfall, *NR*, 321. In his abridged version of *Never at Rest*, Westfall claimed that Newton’s real enemy was not the papacy, but Trinitarianism. See Westfall, *The Life of Isaac Newton*, 126. Barnett challenged Westfall here. See Newton, *OCE*, 17.

<sup>167</sup>Kochavi stated that Newton blamed Athanasius for monasticism, adoration of saints, and the Trinity. Kochavi, “One Prophet Interprets Another,” 113.

<sup>168</sup>The apostasy was visible “soon after the days of the Apostles.” Newton, *OCE*, 27, 75 (13–14).

<sup>169</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 33–4, 260, (256). Newton suggested a certain chronological structure in the development of apostasy in the Christian church: “the education of learned men in the principles of Plato and other heathen philosophers before they became Christians, the study of the heathen learning by some learned men after they became Christians . . . and the easy admission of the hereticks into the latine church . . . gave occasion to the spreading of some erroneous opinions very early in the Church herself,” Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 15.7, f. 116<sup>r</sup>; Manuel, *RIN*, 71. Cf. Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 7.3i, f. 46<sup>v</sup>; Westfall, *NR*, 817.

Apostasy, as a reality in church history, and incorporated into his hermeneutical system, was a powerful motif in Newton's apocalyptic thought. "To describe the times of Apostacy," according to Newton, "was the main design of the Apocalypse."<sup>170</sup> He saw the whole drama, the warfare depicted in Daniel and Revelation that unfolded in history, as a key to understanding biblical apocalyptic. He asserted that ignorance of the apostasy and its spiritual fruits throughout the centuries disqualified interpreters from understanding Revelation. Thus, the war between good and evil, including its ecclesiastical apostasy with its progeny, was a hermeneutical principle in Newton's apocalyptic scheme.

As the Antichrist occupies an essential role in Daniel and Revelation, and in the apostasy,<sup>171</sup> Newton paid particular attention to him.<sup>172</sup> He analyzed him from all angles: historically, politically, spiritually, and morally, and concluded that the Antichrist, represented as a little horn in Daniel,<sup>173</sup> a lawless one in 2 Thess, and a sea-beast in Revelation, was the Roman papacy. Newton attempted to figure out the 666 riddle, and agreed with Ireneaus<sup>174</sup> who had acknowledged his ignorance and, thus, left the solution

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<sup>170</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 9.2, ff. 96, 97–122; Westfall, *NR*, 350.

<sup>171</sup>Newton detected the apostasy of the Roman Church "in the reign of Diocletian" (Newton, *OCE*, 29).

<sup>172</sup>The latter half of *Keynes MS*, 5 is mainly a history of the papacy. Quoting Jesus, Newton wrote in a *Yahuda* manuscript: "Ye Hypocrites ye can discern the face of the sky but can ye not discern the signes of the times? . . . Wherefore it concerns thee to look about thee narrowly lest thou shouldest in so degenerate an age be dangerously seduced and not know it. Antichrist was to seduce the whole Christian world and therefore he may easily seduce thee if thou beest not well pretared to discern him." Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, ff. 2<sup>r</sup>–3<sup>r</sup>. Manuel, *RIN*, 89.

<sup>173</sup>According to Newton, the little horn is identical with the woman in Rev 17; see Newton, *OCE*, 37, 276–77 (282–3). Cf. Newton, *Keynes MS*, 5, ff. 106–9.

<sup>174</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS*, 5, f. 32; and Newton, *OCE*, 59.

for posterity to solve.<sup>175</sup> One must question why a person with Newton's intellectual capabilities would give up so easily on one of the premiere riddles in the Bible.

Newton's understanding that the Roman papacy was the only religious system which fit the biblical characteristics of the Antichrist is, of course, not an original idea.<sup>176</sup> He did not need to hide this belief, as he did with certain other beliefs, because most historicists believed it, and Christians in England were largely historicists, or, at least, did not object to historicism. A mastery of Daniel and Revelation, combined with a comprehensive study of history, convinced him that the Antichrist's identity is a significant hermeneutical force in apocalyptic interpretation.

Although Newton showed little interest in the riddle of 666, he put all his energies into solving the 1260-days mystery.<sup>177</sup> This period, in which the Antichrist will rule, mentioned seven times in Daniel and Revelation, is of paramount importance in the overall canonical apocalyptic scheme. This period is a key to determine synchronization possibilities that are harmonious with fulfilled prophecy, that is, church history. In all his many attempts to solve the "1260 days" mystery, he consistently adhered to the year-day principle, which indeed speaks to Newton's full acceptance of that principle.

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<sup>175</sup>Ireneaus, without knowing it, gave a strong hint to posterity concerning the identity of the antichrist (whose number is six hundred and sixty six) when he suggested "Lateinos" as the best suggestion. "Lateinos" indicates a remnant or continuation of the Latin language and the Roman Empire. Thus, the fact that Newton followed Ireneaus tentative thought indicates that Newton was looking for the decoding of the number in the Roman papacy, which is, according to standard historicist understanding, the actual continuum of the Roman Empire.

<sup>176</sup>Those texts are commonly understood as Antichrist texts, e.g., Dan 7 and 8; 2 Thess 2; and Rev 13.

<sup>177</sup>"The time of the end is said to be a *time, times, and half a time*: which is the duration of the reign of the last horn of *Daniel's* fourth Beast, and of the *Woman and Beast* in the *Apocalypse*." Newton, *OCE*, 31, 168–69 (127).

Besides accepting a year for a day, Newton understood that the beginning of this period must be located at a historical event when a pope or the papacy received the momentum to begin its regime of 1260 years. Newton, interestingly, could never decide from a number of options ranging from the time of Constantine (320s CE) until Charlemagne (800 CE). The crowning of the emperor by the Pope on Christmas day 800<sup>178</sup> possibly began the 1260 years, which lead to 2060 as the expiration year. Newton gave this period “not to assert it, but only to show that there is little reason to expect it [i.e., the end of the 1260 years] earlier and thereby to put a stop to the rash conjectures of interpreters.”<sup>179</sup> When Newton’s interpretation of the 1260 days prophecy reached the mass media of the world a few years ago, it was sensationalized.<sup>180</sup>

Another year considered by Newton for the beginning of the 1260 years was CE 381, which interestingly, lead up to the year 1641, a year before his own birth.<sup>181</sup> In a fascinating note on this topic, Newton suggested a slightly later starting point, for the reign of the Antichrist had started:

about the time of the invasion of the Barbarous nations and their erecting severall Kingdoms in the Roman Empire, and had wee nothing more then this it were sufficient to ground an expectation that the prevalency yet to come of Popery cannot continue long; it being certain that 1200 of the 1260 years are run out already.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>178</sup>“In which the Pope’s supremacy commenced,” Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 7.3o, f. 8.

<sup>179</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.7:3, f. 13; Kochavi, “One Prophet Interprets Another,” 115. Cf. Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 7.3g, f. 13, cf. f. 13<sup>v</sup>; Newton, *OCE*, 113–14; Westfall, *NR* 816.

<sup>180</sup>See Stephen D. Snobelen, “‘A Time and Times and the Dividing of Time’”

<sup>181</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1:4, f. 50; Kochavi, “One Prophet Interprets Another,” 116. For more detail on 381 CE in Newton’s thoughts, see Iliffe, “Making a Shew,” 66.

<sup>182</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 23, f. 6<sup>r</sup>.; Manuel, *RIN*, 99.

“The Church of Rome began now to reign over the ten kings.”<sup>183</sup> He also suggested CE 607 as a commencement year, as barbarians had converted from Arianism to orthodoxy by that time.<sup>184</sup>

There was a twist and a happy conclusion to the dramatic apocalyptic-historical unfolding. Newton’s end-time paradigm included a restitution of ancient purity in the church.<sup>185</sup> Newton synchronized this revival and reformation with the expiration of the 1260 years.<sup>186</sup> However, before this, according to Whiston, who was an ardent restorationist, “the Face of Protestantism would once more be covered by as foul a Corruption as ever was that of Popery, before the happy liberty and Light of the Gospel should take place.” Whiston claimed this idea came from Newton.<sup>187</sup>

There had always been a remnant, the few chosen ones “such as without being led by interest, education, or humane authorities, can set themselves sincerely & earnestly to

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<sup>183</sup>Newton, *Keynes MS*, 5, ff.120–21.

<sup>184</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.2, ff. 60–61; 1.3, ff. 40–48; Westfall, *NR*, 325; Force, “Newton’s God of Dominion,” 82. “I put in ye year 607 when ye bishop of Rome obtaind ye universall bishopric,” Newton states “not sooner because ye Lombardic wars continued till ye year 604 & not later because then Rome began again to be Empress of then Rome . . . from that time broke forth more & more out of ye cloud till they outshone all other temporall potentates,” on draft paper of Letter to Oldenburg; Iliffe, “Making a Shew,” 72–3.

<sup>185</sup>See Newton, *OCE*, 27, 75, (13–14). Newton’s prime goal, according to Westfall was “to purge Christianity . . . the prophecies . . . one of the cornerstones of his program.” Westfall, *NR*, 826.

<sup>186</sup>Even if Newton did experiment with determining what year could fit best as the starting point of the 1260 years, he did not, as has been claimed, predict the year or any date for the second coming of Christ. The expiration of the 1260 years is not the same as Jesus’ Second Coming. The Antichrist will revive after its death blow according to the Bible (Rev 13). Newton’s intention was not to predict a time for Jesus’ Second Coming, but to determine when the papacy would receive a death blow and the times of refreshing would come to God’s people.

<sup>187</sup>Whiston, *Memoirs*, 156; quoted in Westfall, *NR*, 815.

search for truth.”<sup>188</sup> A part of that search is the purging “of things spurious”<sup>189</sup> and “a recovery and re-establishment of the long-lost truth.”

For the event of things predicted many ages before, will then be a convincing argument that the world is governed by providence. For as few and obscure prophecies concerning Christ’s first coming were for setting up the Christian religion, which all nations have since corrupted; so the many and clear Prophecies concerning the things to be done at Christ’s second coming, are not only for predicting but also for effecting a recovery and re-establishment of the long-lost truth, and setting up a Kingdom wherein dwells righteousness. But if the last age, the age of opening these things, be now approaching, as by the successes of late Interpreters it seems to be, we have more encouragement than ever to look into these things.<sup>190</sup>

#### Principle #9: Validity of the Historicist Tradition

Newton acknowledged that he owed his scientific discoveries to people before him. The same was true of his prophetic interpretation. He credited the late Joseph Mede for being his “apocalyptic” mentor.<sup>191</sup> He also learned much from More and others, as noted earlier, even if he minimized that influence in another manuscript.<sup>192</sup> Newton was a

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<sup>188</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, f. 1; in Westfall, *NR*, 325.

<sup>189</sup>Quoted in Jared Sparks, *A Collection of Essays*, Boston, 1823, 2:236; Manuel, *Historian*, 156.

<sup>190</sup>Newton, *OP*, 251–2; Force, “Newton’s God of Dominion,” 87; Newton, *OCE*, 13. Cf. “and this Prophecy [Revelation] thus proved and understood, will open the old Prophets and all together will make known the true religion, and establish it.” Newton, *OP*, 306; Hutton, “More, Newton, and the Language of Biblical Prophecy,” 46.

<sup>191</sup>“It was the judiciously learned and conscientious Mr. Mede who first made way into these interpretations, and him I have for the most part followed . . . His mistakes were chiefly in his Clavis [i.e., the shorter name of Medes’ famous commentary on Revelation].” Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, f. 8<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>192</sup>“And yet all that I have seen besides the labours of Mr. Mede have been so botched and framed without any due proportion, that I fear some of those Authors did not so much as believe their own interpretations, which makes me wish that they had been moved to more caution by considering the curs that is annexed to the end of this Prophecy [i.e., Rev 22:18–19],” Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, f. 8<sup>r</sup>. In some of his earliest purchases during his Cambridge stay were two books on history aligned to prophecies. One of them was Joannes Philippson (Sleidanus), *The Key of History* [. . .] *the Four Chiefe Monarchies* (London, 1631). Newton also bought theological books in Latin by Theodore Beza, John Calvin, Isaac Feguernekinus, and Lucas Trelcatius. Newton used ancient sources, as well, to determine the meaning of the prophecies. Newton noted that Mede had mentioned an Arab by the name of Achmet, and Newton also studied Artemidorus as a guide on interpretations of dreams, see Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 14, ff. 78–80.

serious student of church history, especially the early church, and he mentioned that there is no book in the Bible more commented on by the ancients and “guarded by providence” than the book of Revelation,<sup>193</sup> but regarding the interpretation of Revelation, the early ages did not offer as much to draw from as did Mede and some of Newton’s contemporaries.<sup>194</sup>

Wycliffe’s writings were readily available to Newton, and it is unlikely, with today’s knowledge of Newton’s rich collection of theology books, that Joachim of Fiore’s influential writings on the Apocalypse passed by without his notice, or likewise, Luther and Calvin’s thoughts on Daniel’s prophecies.<sup>195</sup> The English Reformers were firm historicists and were certainly evaluated by Newton. Newton’s commentaries on Daniel and Revelation did not emerge in a vacuum—his ideas were often prevalent, especially his thoughts on the book of Daniel, which contributed few new major interpretations.<sup>196</sup> To Newton, an evidence of the reliability of his interpretations was the broad Protestant agreement with him on all the principle themes.

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<sup>193</sup>Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 7.2i, f. 4.

<sup>194</sup>Newton wrote that Revelation’s “prophecies were never understood by the Church in the former ages. They did not so much as pretend to understand them.” Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.1, f. 9<sup>r</sup>. However, Newton read Henry More’s commentary on Revelation and seemed to concur with most of his findings; see Westfall, *NR*, 349.

<sup>195</sup>Newton’s library contained books of all kinds. Among these are books on prophecy such as Sleidanus’ *The Key of History. . . the Four Chiefe Monarchies*. Of Newton’s 1,752 volumes in his private library, 477 were in the category Theology/Bible, see Gjertsen, *The Newton Handbook*, 312; see also Harrison, *Library of Isaac Newton*. Through these, Newton acquainted himself with historical theology from the earliest Fathers through to his own time. There is no doubt that Newton’s sources of knowledge in the realm of apocalyptic went beyond his master, Joseph Mede.

<sup>196</sup>“Voltaire,” Brewster opined, “has erroneously stated that Sir Isaac Newton explained the Revelations in the same manner as all those that went before him.” Brewster, *Memoirs* (1855 ed.), 331. Popkin argued that “Newton broke new interpretive ground both in the application of modern scientific techniques to the understanding of the Bible and in the historical interpretation of prophecies. Newton attempted to provide a better basis for dating ancient literature through astronomical events. Of course, his method has been superseded by archaeological and anthropological techniques.” Popkin, “Newton as a Bible Scholar,” 114.

## Newton's Contribution to Historicism

Having evaluated the history of historicism up to the time of Newton and Newton's own writings on apocalyptic, we are in a favorable position to determine his overall contribution to the science of biblical prophetic interpretation. Newton was well aware of Mede's approach and final accomplishment and, as we have seen, followed him closely, particularly on the structural part of the Book of Revelation (see above). If Newton did not occasionally depart from Mede and tradition, for that matter, in method and interpretation, then Newton would not have contributed much to historicism.<sup>197</sup>

Newton was very faithful to the historicist tradition and even expanded on it, especially on the historical and geographical confinements of the apocalyptic narrative. With a mastery of history, he established parallels between Dan 7 and the fall of Rome, its division into ten kingdoms, the growth of the papacy, and the beginning of the 1260 years of papal rule. That had been done before, but not with Newton's attention to empirical and replicable research methodology.

Moreover, Newton argued vehemently against an Antiochus Epiphanes interpretation of the little horn in Dan 8, using explicit and persuasive evidence, arguing that history and the apocalyptic text forbid this interpretation.<sup>198</sup> According to Newton, this new little horn represented the Roman power in its pagan and papal phases. Next, based on biblical typology, he interpreted the 2300 evening-mornings as years yet to be fulfilled, a position still maintained by current historicists.

In addition, Newton's enormous knowledge in the field of chronology helped him

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<sup>197</sup>See, e.g., the following comments of Newton on Dan 7–9 in *OCE*.

<sup>198</sup>See above p. 229.



on the seventy-week prophecy of Dan 9. His starting point for the seventy weeks was the command in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, that is, 457 BCE, to restore Jerusalem, a year Newton showed great confidence in. Among the myriads of different potential solutions to this mathematical riddle, Newton chose the one solution that afterwards won the most assent among historicists because of its foundation on certain historical events and the expressed command in Ezra 7. Thus, Newton counted 490 years from that year and ended with the crucifixion of Christ in 34 CE, of which he showed that the fourteenth of Nisan that year happened on a Friday. Seventh-day Adventists, the largest denomination still adhering to historicism,<sup>199</sup> end the prophecy in 34 CE, but place the death of Christ in 31 CE.<sup>200</sup>

These innovative constructions and interpretive possibilities contain only a smaller part of Newton's overall contribution to historicism; other historicists throughout history had contributed a variety of new interpretations, some personal and fanciful, others sober and according to a scientific mind-set.

Newton's integration of a wide variety of branches of knowledge into his study of biblical apocalyptic, while applying "cutting edge" tools in the decoding process and pursuing his objective during a whole lifetime with a prodigious output of papers on apocalyptic as a result, was Newton's supreme contribution to historicism and the science of canonical apocalyptic interpretation in general.

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<sup>199</sup>Other denominations who still adhere to historicism include the Advent Christians (a remnant of the Millerites) and the Christadelphians (restitutionists).

<sup>200</sup>Most conservative evangelicals start the seventy weeks in 458 BCE and place the death of Christ in 30 CE. For a recent explanation of the chronological complexities around the seventy weeks, see Owusu-Antwi, *The Chronology of Dan 9*.

The sanctuary system of the ancient Israelites, delineated in the Pentateuch, thus found its way into Newton's apocalypticism. He saw significant parallels between the spring festivals of the OT sanctuary service and the first Advent of Christ, and between the fall festivals and the second advent of Christ as alluded to in Revelation. One of his prophetic-period calculations extends the 1260 years through the sixth trumpet into the seventh (seen as the culmination of Revelation and the second coming of Christ) to the year 1844 CE.<sup>201</sup> Likewise, the sanctuary courtyard was associated with events of the first coming of Christ, and the most holy place of the sanctuary was associated with events of the end of time. Thus, he saw in Revelation a progression from the courtyard toward the Most Holy as one proceeds from the early part of Revelation to the later parts.<sup>202</sup> There had been little exploration of that apocalyptic dimension before Newton, and indeed, for a long time after his death.<sup>203</sup> A brief reading of the book of Revelation, and to a lesser degree in the book of Daniel, discloses a significant cultic atmosphere.<sup>204</sup> Newton's coupling of the Old Testament cultic service and New Testament apocalyptic is in line with his explorative mind.

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<sup>201</sup>See Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 1.7, ff. 65–6. Cf. Newton, *Yahuda MS*, 9.2, f. 157, 168–9. Cf. Newton, *OP*, 251.

<sup>202</sup>For Newton's temple theology, see, e.g., Newton, *Yahuda MSS*, 1.2, 4–5; 1.13, 2; and 1.28, 5.

<sup>203</sup>For a full study on Newton and Judaism, see M. Goldish, *Judaism in the Theology of Sir Isaac Newton*. A popular work on Old Testament cultism as a hermeneutical key from the 1600s (*not* listed in John Harrison's, *The Library of Isaac Newton*), is Thomas Godwin, *Moses and Aaron; or the civil and Ecclesiastical Rites used by the Ancient Hebrews, Observed and at Large Opened for the Clearing of Many Obscure Texts throughout the Whole Scriptures, etc.*, 12th ed. (London, 1685). The Millerites, and later the Seventh-day Adventists, began (re)discovering the Old Testament sanctuary cultus as a key to open up apocalyptic mysteries. See P. Gerard Damsteegt's very detailed study, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 33–35, 115–35. A comprehensive scholarly study on the relationship between Old Testament cultism and apocalyptic from an evangelical perspective is Gregory K. Beale's *The Temple and the Church's Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

<sup>204</sup>See Vogel, "The Cultic Motif in Space and Time in the Book of Daniel."

Realizing the typological relation between Old Testament religion and canonical apocalyptic, Newton formulated the analogy between Israel's cultic year and the span of church history described in Daniel (from Daniel's fourth metal or fourth beast onward) and in Revelation. The spring festivals, Passover and Pentecost in particular, represented Christ's First Coming, whereas the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month represented Christ's Second Coming.<sup>205</sup> Thus, correspondingly, Newton interpreted the cleansing of the sanctuary after 2300 evening-mornings in Dan 8:14 as a prophecy yet to be fulfilled. The rule of the little horn would last until the "time of the end," and its activity would last "till the Sanctuary which had been cast down should be cleansed, and the Sanctuary is not yet cleansed."<sup>206</sup> Newton reasoned that because the cleansing of the typical sanctuary took place during the fall festival on the Day of Atonement, which represented the time of the Second Coming of Christ, and since Christ's Second coming was not expected for some time, Dan 8:14 was yet to be fulfilled.<sup>207</sup>

A sign of a good scholarship (in addition to mere quantitative and theoretical mastery of a specialty) is the scholar's ability to incorporate findings in related disciplines into one complete and logical unit. As we have seen, Newton was able to do this and, therefore, set a new standard for studying apocalyptic hermeneutic, adding to the work of Tyconius, Joachim, Mede, and More.<sup>208</sup> Thus, Newton's major contribution

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<sup>205</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 259–60.

<sup>206</sup>Newton, *OCE*, 166–7.

<sup>207</sup>"*Daniel's* days [in Dan 8] are years .... in *Daniel's* Prophecies days are put for years ... and the Sanctuary [in Dan 8] is not yet cleansed," in Newton, *OCE*, 165–67 (emphasis in original).

<sup>208</sup>Current specialists in the apocalyptic genre are specialists in either Daniel or Revelation, never both (earlier apocalyptic scholars mastered both realms, e.g., Charles and Swete). Daniel specialists today

consisted certainly not in a revolutionary interpretation of Revelation or Daniel. By combining disciplines and using empirical methods of exploration, Newton made apocalyptic interpretation more understandable and more clearly coordinated with the flow of history. Thus, he placed the existing interpretive tradition on a broader and more solid foundation.

Newton's work on Daniel, illustrated in *Observations*, is much more refined and contains some innovative interpretations—fruits of his comparative studies of history and prophecy. His Revelation commentary in *Observations*, however, seems less organized.<sup>209</sup> This could be attributable to Newton's using Mede's scheme as his model in his Revelation commentary,<sup>210</sup> or it could be due to other factors.<sup>211</sup> In this instance, Newton did not invent a new interpretation of Revelation. Rather, he built on a new and

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are generally interested in the Old Testament and Jewish studies, not in history after 100 CE, and rarely issues pertaining to the Christian religion. Today's specialists on Revelation have rarely much interest in history outside the Roman Empire. Since Daniel and Revelation are so closely related and explain one another, there is a great advantage in studying them together. Modern scholarship, however, has evolved into smaller realms of specialization, in essence, preventing this.

<sup>209</sup>*Observation's* Revelation section is not a systematic commentary as is the Daniel section. Nor does any of Newton's unpublished manuscripts treat Revelation in an ordinary commentary style. Newton, nevertheless, proceeded prophetic-chronologically when he commented on Revelation, whether in the printed or autograph textual versions.

<sup>210</sup>Before a final verdict can be stated, any critique of Mede's Revelation structure in his time or afterwards needs to be more carefully analyzed. Mede's structural Revelation scheme operates in a PEV format, but *only* when viewed comprehensively. Each vision in Revelation is taken as part of, not synchronous with the other visions, a line of prophetic-historic fulfillment successively from the seven churches until the seven trumpets, in which the trumpets are synchronous to the seven vials, See Mede's *Clavis*. It is obvious that Mede's scheme, which Newton followed, was as vulnerable as the scheme generally followed by historicists, i.e., the three foundational septets in Revelation (Rev 2–11) are somehow synchronous (few, if any so far, have managed to produce a perfect synchronous prophetic-historic line between these three septets). These variant views contradict each other and show at least one of the views to be incorrect.

<sup>211</sup>Throughout his comments on Revelation, Newton bombarded the reader with the esoteric language of apocalyptic. He assumed that the reader was familiar with the metallic and animal world of Dan 2 and 7–8 and their proper historic-prophetic domains and demise. Newton attempted, in good historicist fashion, to make this a foundation for Revelation. For the uninitiated, it appears chaotic, almost as his *Chronology* may sound to those not concerned with the past.

short-lived invention, and his legacy regarding Revelation rested with Mede. Newton did not use Mede to the same degree when he structured the book of Daniel because the structure in Daniel was clearer and there had been, for a long time, a unified historicist interpretive tradition for Daniel.<sup>212</sup>

Having established Revelation's macro-structure according to Mede's architecture, Newton experimented and explored the text in Revelation from a micro-level perspective. Unfortunately, his choice of the macro-structure determined the parameters and available options of the micro-structure. Thus, Newton's adoption of Mede's macro-structure became, from the perspective of historicism the last 150 years, the Achilles' heel of Newton's commentary on Revelation.

Though not in total harmony with recent historicism, Newton contributed significantly to subsequent generations of historicists. Interwoven in Newton's apocalyptic system was a broad variety of disciplines and specialized bodies of knowledge, including the Bible, both Old and New Testaments; Hebrew, Greek, and Latin; ancient, secular, and church history; the Old Testament cultic system; textual criticism; symbology; and the methodology of empirical research, all of which he united to address the apocalyptic riddle. This list seems to show that Newton did not limit himself to *sola scriptura*, but understood Scripture better through these added dimensions, all of which required keen rational thinking.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>212</sup>Mede followed the standard historicist outline for Daniel with the consecutive four empires followed by the breakup of Rome into 10 states which he lists, followed by the rise of the little horn of Dan 7 which Mede identified with the papacy who would rule for 1260 years. Mede's treatment of Dan 9 differs significantly from Newton's scheme. For further reading regarding Mede's positions on Daniel, see Froom, *PFF*, 2:784–5.

<sup>213</sup>There is no question that Newton regarded the Bible as the last word in determining any question of eternal value. Establishing this, he then applied a variety of specialized insights to verify the

He persistently applied the tools of academia to solve mysteries in the world of apocalyptic. He argued strongly in favor of correlating prophecy and history. He refined the historicist model for interpreting canonical apocalyptic, but while his scientific contributions could be verified, refined, and brilliantly perfected by empirical research, no human research can predict future history. When prophecy and history consistently match, then there is a sort of empirical verification for supernatural interaction. While Newton contributed few major innovations, he contributed a huge amount of scholarly data in support of the already established historicist hermeneutical platform. Thus, he built a broader and more substantial foundation for the existing historicist consensus. Popkin provided a well-informed verdict on Newton's contribution:

Newton broke new interpretive ground both in the application of modern scientific techniques to the understanding of the Bible and in the historical interpretation of prophecies. Newton attempted to provide a better basis for dating ancient literature through astronomical events. Of course, his method has been superseded by [more recent] archaeological and anthropological techniques.<sup>214</sup>

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to uncover the reasoning by which Newton arrived at his interpretations of biblical apocalyptic, especially Daniel and Revelation, and to define the foundational principles of his hermeneutic.

Newton's methodological approach to interpreting apocalyptic included seven logical steps: (1) God is sovereign over both creation and history; (2) the Bible is authentic, authoritative, and true; (3) textual criticism; (4) Daniel and Revelation are not

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most authoritative ancient MS text of the Bible. He also believed that predictive biblical apocalyptic is only understood through the lenses of historical documentation. Thus, Newton served as precursor to the Wesleyan quadrilateral which describes the four sources of authority operational in Wesley's theology: Scripture (the supreme authority), tradition, reason, and experience.

<sup>214</sup>Popkin, "Newton as a Bible Scholar," 114.

inscrutable, but can be understood; (5) textual structure determines interpretation; (6) responsible exegesis; and (7) history verifies prophecy.

He also articulated sixteen rules that explain how he arrived at his interpretation of Scripture, and especially of the apocalyptic prophecies. From Newton's seven-step methodology and his sixteen rules can be synthesized nine characteristic principles of historicism: (1) presupposition of *sola scriptura*, (2) structure, (3) symbolism and analogy, (4) cultic background, (5) PEV format, (6) symbolic days represent literal years, (7) historical confirmation of prophecy, (8) war between Christ and Antichrist, and (9) validity of the historicist tradition.

Regarding Newton's contribution to apocalyptic interpretation, the chapter argues that his greatest contribution was in amassing scholarly data from a wide variety of disciplines in support of the existing historicist consensus. Though he contributed few major innovations, he certainly constructed a broader and more substantial foundation for the historicist hermeneutical platform than it had before. The final chapter will offer some further reflections on his contributions.

## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### **Summary**

The purpose of this dissertation has been to synthesize and define Isaac Newton's hermeneutic of prophetic interpretation. Chapter 2 situated Newton in his social, political, scientific, and religious environment and suggested a wide range of influences and sources—including Scripture, theological reasoning, apocalyptic tradition, the views of contemporary expositors, and other factors—that may have impacted the development of his interpretations.

Chapter 3 made an in-depth investigation of one of these potential sources of influence—the apocalyptic tradition—as a necessary step toward weighing the relative importance of the bases and sources of Newton's interpretations and concluded that many of the basic interpretations of Daniel (which many commentators agree is foundational to understanding the Book of Revelation) went back to the early Christian church, and even to Jewish apocalypticists in the pre-Christian era. Thus, due to Newton's great collection of books, especially in the field of theology, and his deep knowledge of the Fathers, which did not exclude historicist writings from the early church, and his own construction of a church history, it is very likely, especially on the book of Daniel, that Newton owed at least as much to the ancient and late medieval apocalyptic tradition as he did to any



contemporary expositors—an observation with significant implications, though rarely mentioned by Newtonian researchers.

Chapter 4 examined Newton’s interpretation of Daniel and Revelation and concluded that his biblical basis is clear and primary, but that, especially in Revelation, there are also clear signs of influence by prior and contemporary expositors.

Chapter 5 sought to uncover the hermeneutical reasoning by which Newton arrived at his interpretations of biblical apocalyptic. The chapter showed, first, that Newton followed a seven-step methodological approach. Second, Newton articulated sixteen “rules” that explain how he interpreted the Book of Revelation, in particular, but which are also applicable to his interpretations of biblical apocalyptic in general. Third, nine characteristic principles of his hermeneutic were synthesized from Newton’s methodology and his rules. Evaluating these nine principles and assessing Newton’s overall contribution is one focus of the conclusions which follow.

## **Conclusions**

The purpose of the dissertation included discovering which sources exerted the greatest influence on Newton’s views, identifying his most significant contributions to prophetic interpretation, and evaluating his hermeneutical principles.

### **Ranking the Major Sources of Influence on Newton’s Views**

On the basis of chaps. 3–5, it is now possible to suggest the relative weight of various influences on Newton’s interpretation:

1. *Authority of the Bible*. From Newton’s seven-step methodology and the sixteen rules presented in chap. 5 (as well as from less significant evidences), it is definitely

concluded that Newton placed the highest priority on the authority of Scripture. He believed that his interpretations were ultimately derived from Scripture and certainly intended them to reflect Scripture as accurately as possible. When other sources than the Bible were used, they were used to illuminate the Bible text itself, in its purest version, as close to the autographs as possible. That text was the supreme authority to Newton.

2. *Scientific methodology and historical evidence.* His well-known intellectual genius and the similarity between his methods of scientific inquiry and his methods of biblical inquiry suggest that his own intellectual reasoning was also a preeminent source of his developed views. The university environment and his close association with other luminaries who were among the world's brightest minds certainly would have stimulated the highest development of his intellectual powers. On the other hand, there is little evidence to suggest that popular theological reasoning had much influence on him at all, except that it sometimes warned him to keep his views secret when he disagreed. In theological reasoning, Newton showed such marked independence of thought (for example, his rejection of the classical doctrine of the Trinity, despite the hostility of his peers to his views on that subject) that it seems obvious, indeed, that he did not adopt theological views just because they were popular.

3. *Theological presuppositions.* Newton was a deeply convinced Protestant, though neither Lutheran nor Calvinist, but a nominal Anglican. Proportional to his distaste of Roman Catholicism, he was a worthy apologist for the Reformation, and his anti-Catholic presuppositions were determinative for some aspects of his expositions.

4. *The historicist tradition.* Within the history of apocalyptic interpretation, Newton recognized that the historicist tradition was both more ancient and reflected

Scripture more accurately than either the idealist, preterist, or futurist traditions.

Consequently, he held many of the historicist interpreters, both prior to and contemporary with him, in very high regard.

### Identifying Newton's Overall Contributions to Prophetic Interpretation

1. In contrast to most expositors who left their readers to guess at the specific mechanisms of their reasoning, Newton articulated his hermeneutic in detail by means of explicit explanations within his comments on biblical texts, as well as by his sixteen rules of interpretation. His sixteen rules constitute his major contribution to the development and strengthening of historicist hermeneutics. His seven-step methodology represents a synthesis of his methodological approach, though never spelled out as such by himself.

2. With a few exceptions, he did not conceive major innovations in interpreting specific apocalyptic passages. One exception was his suggestion regarding the relevance of the OT sanctuary services to the interpretation of Revelation. This is an area that is even now becoming widely accepted by academic theologians.

3. Nevertheless, the reach of his expertise, his multidisciplinary approach, and his years of investigation resulted in placing the historicist hermeneutic on a much broader and stronger intellectual foundation than it had previously been. To Newton, establishing and articulating the hermeneutics of biblical apocalyptic was more important than spelling out particular interpretations, though, obviously, the latter is a fruit of the former.

### Suggestions for Further Research

Although Newton's thought has been explained and evaluated in an immense quantity of learned papers, comparatively little has been produced on Newton's biblical

theology, particularly his apocalyptic interpretations. Rob Iliffe and Stephen D. Snobelen have written extensively about Newton's apocalyptic views, and scores of articles from others have also appeared, but no one has yet produced a full-length book on Newton's apocalyptic scheme. Moreover, virtually nothing has been published so far which compares Newton's biblical apocalyptic with past and future historicism. Below are challenges still waiting for future Newton scholars:

1. Newton's influence on later interpreters and his continuing relevance. There is universal agreement that Newton was of an extraordinary intellectual spirit. Theology is really about logic and God. Newton believed in God and the Bible, and his *Observations* (on Daniel and the Revelation) was available to the general public from 1733 on. After the middle of the nineteenth century, when historicism went out of fashion as a Protestant Christian hermeneutic, what happened to the influence of the *Observations*, Newton's historicist manifesto?

2. Newton's insights on the role of OT sanctuary imagery in Revelation compared with twenty-first-century expositors. The theological world today is highly aware of the cultic atmosphere in the Book of Revelation. Countless commentaries on Revelation have been published since Newton's *Observations*. A comparative study of Newton's thoughts on sanctuary imagery in Revelation with the thinking of twenty-first-century commentators on Revelation could potentially reveal the degree of Newton's textual and contextual penetration in the area of apocalyptic temple typology.

3. Newton's encounter with preterism and futurism. Less than one hundred years before the birth of Newton, the Jesuits had invented futurism and re-invented preterism as counterattacks on Protestant historicism. These two paradigmatic prophetic hermeneutics

had incredible implications for the understanding of Daniel and Revelation. Moreover, the Jesuits became some of the bitterest critics of Newton's *scientific* contributions. Newton's private manuscripts did not often address the Jesuit hermeneutic directly, although they left no doubt of his disagreement with it. Thus, a comprehensive investigation into Newton's thoughts on this issue would probably display undiscovered motivational factors in Newton's apocalypticism.

4. What was the motivation for Newton's obsession with the religious-political history of the fourth through the sixth centuries? Was it only a search for detecting the heresy of Trinitarianism or was it (also) an inquiry into the beginning point of the mysterious 1260-days/years prophecy? This question has never been properly addressed. Richard Westfall, the major biographer of Newton, was convinced that Newton's "obsession" with anti-Trinitarianism caused him to focus particularly on this period. The fact remains, however, that in Newton's mind, the rise of Roman Catholic Trinitarianism and the beginning of the 1260 days with growing papal dominance coincided with one another to some degree.

5. Newton's neglect to explain properly the year-day principle which he consistently followed. It is quite remarkable that a person like Newton, who was a master in formulating the laws of nature and of Scripture interpretation, never seemed to have proposed a valid, formal, and comprehensive formulation and justification for his application of the year-day principle. To explain historicism, and thus bring a sensible meaning to the biblical apocalyptic text, the year-day principle is absolute pivotal. A *day for a day* is proportionally essential to make sense of preterism and futurism. Did Newton consider it too obvious to need stating? Did he formulate a meaningful definition

somewhere that has not yet been discovered? Would a study into the apparent lack of a Newton statement regarding the year-day principle reveal other possibilities?

6. Newton's undetermined *terminus a quo* for the 1260-days/years prophecy.

When to begin the 1260 prophetic days must have been a nagging question throughout Newton's life. After all, from all perspectives, that period is hermeneutically significant for a meaningful understanding of Daniel and Revelation. The 1260-days/42 months/3½ years period is mentioned seven times in the two apocalyptic books combined. This is the only prophetic time-period in Daniel and Revelation combined that is mentioned more often than twice. Although Newton offered several tentative suggestions for the beginning point of the 1260 years, stretching from the late fourth century to the eighth century, he never settled on any of them. An in-depth study of Newton's thoughts on this question could yield new insights into his apocalyptic scheme.

7. Newton's choice of interpreting most of Revelation as a successive continuous line of prophetic fulfillment, as opposed to how he treated Daniel's four parallel/synchronous lines (Dan 2, 7, 8, and 11), is indeed strange and unharmonious. No rationale, apparently, is given for this choice, except that he followed Mede. A further investigation into this topic would perhaps explain a very important feature in Newton's understanding of the Book of Revelation, in fact a presupposition, which governs most of his interpretation of Revelation.

## APPENDIX A

### ESSAY ON ARCHIVES AND MANUSCRIPTS

Isaac Newton's non-scientific manuscripts are scattered throughout the world. The great bulk of these, however, are located in three archives: The Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem; Babson College in Boston, Massachusetts; and Kings College at Cambridge University. By far the largest of these collections, in terms of Newton's autographs on the prophecies, are stored in the Jewish National and University Library. Cambridge University is the custodian of the largest collection of Newton's scientific writings. Fortunately, most of these MSS (in Latin and English), from these collections, are digitalized and translated, and are freely available through the "Newton Project": <http://www.newtonproject.ox.ac.uk/texts/newtons-works/religious>

#### **The Yahuda MSS, The Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem**

The collection at the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem contains the largest bulk of Newton's autographs on biblical (including canonical apocalyptic) interpretations, theology, historical writings, and the Old Testament sanctuary (see Yahuda MS Var. 1). Abraham Shalom Yahuda (1877-1951), a professor of Middle East studies, purchased the collection at the Sotheby auction in 1936. These items are part of the larger "Memory of the World" collection. Fortunately, these manuscripts

of Newton are digitalized and freely available: <https://www.nli.org.il/en/discover/humanities/newton-manuscripts>.

**The Grace K. Babson Collection, Babson College, Massachusetts**

Babson College stores the largest Newton collection in U.S., containing more than 1,000 items of Newton's works, autographs, published books (in English and foreign languages), and Newtonian artifacts.

**The Portsmouth Papers, Cambridge University Library**

The full collection is listed in the *Catalogue of the Portsmouth Collection* (Cambridge, 1888). The largest collection of Newton's scientific writings: Mathematics, mechanics, optics. A gift from the Portsmouth family to Cambridge University. The remaining manuscripts were later sold at auction 1936 producing three additional major collections.

**The Keynes MSS, Kings College, Cambridge**

The Keynes collection came together from the left-over manuscripts formerly possessed by the Portsmouth family. These manuscripts are thematically of great variation, with a few theological items, and the largest collection anywhere of Newton's alchemical writings.

**The New College MSS, Bodleian Library, Oxford**

This collection was already sorted out from the rest of Newton's autographs in the 18th Century, and contains many of Newton's theological and historical-chronological autographs. See New College MSS 361.1-4.



Smaller, and less significant collections of Newton's writings are stored in the Royal Society (London), Trinity College Library (Cambridge), Babson College (Massachusetts), the Library of the University of Chicago, and in the Smithsonian Institute Libraries (Washington, D.C.). Beside these, a number of single items were bought separately by individuals at the Sotheby auction in 1936 and remain scattered throughout the world.

## APPENDIX B

### TOPICAL TABLES OF MANUSCRIPTS

Abbreviations  
 L = Latin  
 E = English  
 X = Main content  
 2/X = Part content  
 X/2 = Shared content  
 \* = MS available  
 D = Daniel  
 R = Revelation  
 G = Gospels  
 2T2 = 2 Thessalonians 2

1. Newton Manuscripts on Daniel, the Gospel Apocalypse, and 2 Thessalonians 2,  
 in the Yahuda Collection of Newton Manuscripts

	<b>Dan 2</b>	<b>Dan 7</b>	<b>Dan 8</b>	<b>Dan 9</b>	<b>Dan 11</b>	<b>2 Thess 2</b>
<b>MS7.1</b>	d)1 j)1–27	b)1–8 d)8–31 l)1-m)8	e)25 i)1–12	c)1–11 e)27 f)1–5	n)1–26	
<b>MS9.1*</b>		5 <sup>th</sup> book, ch.1				
<b>MS10</b>			10b, i, sec. 6 [L]	10b, i, sec. 5 [L] ii, cap. 3		
<b>MS15.3*</b>						63v
<b>MS15.7*</b>						139v



### 3. Newton Manuscripts on Apocalyptic Hermeneutic: Yahuda Collection

	42 months	year- day	structure	symbolism	rules	Daniel	Revelation
<b>MS1.1*</b>					X		
<b>MS1.2*</b>	57r						
<b>MS2.1*</b>				X			
<b>MS2.5a*</b>				1–11 [L]			
<b>MS3</b>							X [L]
<b>MS6*</b>						[E] synchronone	[E] synchronone
<b>MS7.2</b>				j)131–139		i)1–6	j)1; 3; 11; 23; 50; 52; 75
<b>MS7.3</b>						b)1–6	c)1–48
extremely fragmented (check)						l)1.11	g)1–26
						n)1–2	j)1–5
							k)1–5
							l)1–11
<b>MS8.2*</b>							X [E+L]
<b>MS9.1*</b>				3r; ch.1–11; 5 <sup>th</sup> book, 5– 51			
<b>MS9.2*</b>		1r					
<b>MS10</b>		10b, i, sec 7 [L]					
<b>MS23*</b>							X (in another hand)
<b>MS31*</b>							
						x/2	

## 4. Newton Manuscripts on Apocalyptic Theology: Yahuda Collection

	temple	Trinity	abomination	Messiah	true church	apostasy	eschaton	antichrist	Bible
<b>MS2.4*</b>	X [E+L]								
<b>MS7.1</b>			a)7–11						
<b>MS7.2</b>				h)1–4					
<b>MS8.2*</b>	[E+L]								
<b>MS8.3*</b>				X					
<b>MS9.2*</b>	1r, ch. 1–24r				59r-73r	97r	123r-178		
<b>MS10</b>	10b, i, sec. 3 [L]							10a	
<b>MS14</b>	1r-8v; 32r-43v [L]	25r; 83r-84v; 86r-111v; 171r-174r; 191r; 201r-207r; 212r-v; 218r-220v				9r; 34r-43v [E+L]; 118r; 135r-138v; 183r-186v;			
<b>MS15.1*</b>				23r					
<b>MS15.2*</b>						X			
<b>MS15.3*</b>						X		X	
<b>MS15.4*</b>						X			
<b>MS15.5*</b>		77r				91r-92r			
<b>MS15.6*</b>						100r			
<b>MS15.7*</b>						104r-139v			
<b>MS18</b>						X			
<b>MS19</b>		X [L]							
<b>MS21*</b>									X
<b>MS28*</b>	d) 1–2 [L]								
<b>MS29*</b>		X							

## 5. Newton Manuscripts by Chapters in Daniel and Revelation, from Yahuda Collection

	D2	D7	D8	D9	D11	R2-3	R6-8	R8-11	R12	R13	R16	R17-18
MS1.2							1r	1r; 3r	11	17r;36r; 53r	3r	31r
MS1.3							a	a; c; [x]		[x]; 9; 16a; [x] posit xi, ix, viii, ix++	1	
MS1.4						30r	12r; 17r; 20r- 24r; 31r; 152r- 181r; 197r- 210r	1r; 43r; 62v- 147r		4v; 26r; 183r	62r; 183r	
MS1.5										total		
MS1.6								total				
MS1.7								total				
MS1.8												
MS2.1												
MS2.2												
MS7.1	d)1; j)1- 27	b)1- 8; d)8- 31; l)1- m)8	e)25; i)1-12	c)1-11; e)27; f)1-5	n)1- 26				[L]			
MS7.2							j)130	j)97- 129	a)26- 27; 45r-49r	a)45r-49r; e)1-4; f)61		

## 6. Newton Manuscripts by Daniel and Revelation Topics, from Yahuda Collection

	42m	Sym- bol- ism	Ch. hist.	Temple	Daniel	Rev	ms re- search	Chrono- logy	Abomin- ation	Observ- -ations	Messiah
MS 1.2	57r										
MS2.1		total									
MS2.3			total [L]								
MS2.4				total [E+L]							
MS2.5a		1–11 [L]									
MS2.5b			total [E+ L]								
MS3						[L]					
MS4							[L]				
MS5.1								[L]			
MS5.2								[L]			
MS5.3								[L]			
MS6					[E] synchr one	[E] synch rone					
MS7.1								a)1; g)1- h)52 j)56	a)7–11		
MS7.2		j)131– 139	j)53		i)1–6	j)1; 3; 11; 23; 50; 52; 75				b)1–9	h)1–4
MS7.3 extremely fragmented					b)1–6	a)1– 10; c)1– 48					



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