

How to Understand The End-Time Prophecies of the Bible

The following book review by Dr. Desmond Ford appeared in the July-August 1998 edition [Vol. 6, No. 4] of Adventist Today. It is reprinted by kind permission of Adventist Today. A few paragraph divisions have been changed to fit the GNU magazine format.

Hans LaRondelle's volume is chiefly a commentary on the book of Revelation, but it includes significant discussions of Matthew 24 and 2 Thessalonians 2. It is a scholarly work worthy of its author and is a mine of exegetical diamonds.

In particular we have in this study a competent rebuttal of Dispensationalism. For example, the author points out that both Christ and Paul took the Old Testament promises made to literal Israel and applied them globally. (Compare Psalm 37:11, 29 with Matthew 5:5, and Genesis 13:15 with Romans 4:13.) Then we have this excellent summary:

The underlying principle is clear. Christ removes all ethnic restrictions in the new-covenant people and therefore also the geographic Middle East center for Christ's church. Wherever Christ is, there is the holy place! This is an essential part of the gospel hermeneutic. For the Shekinah holiness of the old temple, the New Testament substitutes the holiness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Giving evidence of wide research, LaRondelle has skillfully attempted a difficult task—blending positions taken by non-Adventist exegetes with several Adventist distinctives. To this end some of the traditional positions taken by Uriah Smith and even Ellen White are discarded. He points out that a number of features found in Revelation 11 were not fulfilled in the French Revolution. Similarly, the USA does not satisfy the characteristics of the two-horned beast of Revelation 13. He repudiates August 11, 1840, as a fulfillment of Revelation 9:15.

On the other hand, the author still follows historicist patterns and speaks in denominational categories, seeing both the Papacy and an end-time remnant of Sabbath-keepers within the prophet's purview.

The year-day principle is retained, despite the fact that nearly all Adventist scholars trained in apocalyptics have rejected it. Dr. Kai Arasola's book, *The End of Historicism* clearly shows that since 1844 most major exegetes have forsaken the morass of date-seeking within this era.

Typical of the author's choice to retain historicism despite its almost universal rejection today is his following Uriah Smith in seeing the captivity of the Pope in 1798 as the "deadly wound" of Rev. 13:3. I find this surprising, as the symbolism of this verse reflects that of Genesis 3:15 and is clearly commentary on Messiah's victory depicted in the previous chapter. LaRondelle is aware of this position but rejects it on inadequate grounds, and clings to an Adventist tradition which, so far as I know, no non-Adventist scholar of note would dare follow. Who among the first-century Christians would ever have guessed it?

As with almost all detailed studies on Revelation by Adventists since 1980, this work tends in the same direction as my own commentary (Crisis!) in its exposition of the seals, trumpets, Revelation 10, and 11 and other passages, despite the marked departure from long-held Adventist positions thereby. Thus there is appropriately a great gulf fixed between the author's views and those presented in the typical Revelation seminar.

The same is true of Dr. Roy Naden's excellent work, *The Lamb Among Beasts* recently published by the Review and Herald.

When I first wrote along such lines in 1979 I told my wife that I might be sacked in consequence. Now such divergence is acceptable.

Particularly to be commended here is the clear-cut stand taken by LaRondelle against the Adventist tendency to use Ellen G. White as another Bible. He goes out of his way in pages 491,497 to show that we have misused Revelation 19:10. And happily he invokes Ellen White in support of his position.

This work is not a devotional commentary, and neither does it set forth the gospel of grace as the chief key to the apocalypse. But it remains a learned and valuable text which can bring great profit to every reader. It towers above popular works such as *The Late Great Planet Earth* as the Empire State Building does above a single story Woolworth's!

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