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The Apotelesmatic Principle: Origin and Application

Roberto Ouro
Pontevedra, Spain

In 1980, Dr. Desmond Ford, professor of theology at Avondale College in Australia, presented a 700 page manuscript to theologians, professors, pastors, and administrators of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church meeting at Glacier View Camp in Colorado. This document has had wide consequences in the church.

Ford called into question a set of fundamental teachings of the Adventist church, including the pre-advent investigative judgment beginning in 1844, the antitypical day of atonement, several aspects of the theology of the sanctuary, and especially the historicist method of interpreting the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

In his study of the prophecies of Daniel, Ford claims the pre-advent investigative judgment beginning in 1844, as taught by Seventh-day Adventists, cannot be supported in an exhaustive and precise study of the biblical text. To establish his presuppositions, Ford adopted what he calls the apotelesmatic principle of prophetic interpretation as the correct approach to solving this supposed problem. Ford indicates:

It seems to this writer that the apotelesmatic principle is the very key we need to authenticate our denominational appropriation of Dan 8:14 to our own time and work. *By apotelesmatic principle we mean dual fulfillment or more.*¹

He writes later:

The answer to this problem is also the answer to our other key problems in the area of the sanctuary. It can be given in a single phrase—the apotelesmatic principle. This principle affirms that a

¹Desmond Ford, *Daniel 8:14, the Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment* (Glacier View Manuscript, 1980), 345 [emphasis not added].

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prophecy fulfilled or fulfilled in part, or unfulfilled at the appointed time, may have a later, recurring, or consummated fulfillment.²

Thus, Ford considers the apotelesmatic principle the fundamental methodological principle to solve the supposed problems in two essential beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church: the pre-advent investigative judgment and the theology of the sanctuary.

Ford, uses this hermeneutical principle to accept various reinterpretations and applications of descriptions and of prophetic symbols. As the *modus operandi* of his principle, Ford states the following axiom:

Once the principle is grasped we will readily understand why many excellent scholars can be listed under each separate school of interpreters: preterism, historicism, futurism, idealism. All are right in what they affirm and wrong in what they deny.³

Ford stated this axiom for the first time in his thesis submitted to Manchester University, England, in 1972. It is stated as follows: “Here again, as is so often the case, the heresies prove ‘true in what they affirm, but false in what they deny’”.⁴ The same thought recurs in his commentary on Daniel published in 1978. There it occurs in a discussion of the different schools of prophetic interpretation:

It must be said that each of the systems is right in what it affirms and wrong in what it denies. Preterism is right when it says that prophecy has something to say to the people living at the time of the prophecy, but it is wrong when it asserts that that “something” is the whole intent of the visions of the seer. Futurism is right when it affirms that the final crisis, the impending conflict awaiting the world, is a central focus of prophecy, but it is wrong when it denies that the prophetic pictures have meaning for prior crises. Idealism is right in affirming that prophets symbolically illustrate the principles governing the great controversy between good and evil. It is wrong in denying that specific events are foretold. The very nature of apocalyptic was concerned with those events in history which foreshadowed the coming of the kingdom of God. Historicists are right in looking for the prophetic scroll to be gradually unrolled, having meaning for its first and last readers and those in between. But they are wrong if they minimize the stress on the future climactic struggle that the prophetic word emphasizes . . . If the apotelesmatic principle was more widely understood, some differences between systems would be automatically resolved.⁵

²Ibid., 485.

³Ibid., 505.

⁴D. Ford, *The Abomination of Desolation in Biblical Eschatology* (Doctoral Dissertation, Manchester University, 1972), 74.

⁵D. Ford, *Daniel* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1978), 68-69 [emphasis on the original].

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The purpose of this article, is to show the lack of validity of both the apotelesmatic principle and Ford's axiom, explicitly or implicitly, because with both presuppositions the author affirms that what is affirmed in all prophetic interpretations of the four most important schools of biblical hermeneutics—preterist, historicist, futurist, or idealist—is correct, which is a logical and theological contradiction. Since the models of prophetic interpretation are so distinct and dissimilar in their origin, development, and conclusions, their affirmations cannot all be valid and correct at the same time. What is more, *this principle and its axiom cannot be falsified or verified by applying a scientific methodology to the study of the prophetic interpretation.* We will try to demonstrate what was just said in a precise and exact way.

(I do not mean to suggest that there are not elements of truth in each of these interpretations. For example, the messages to the seven churches were meaningful to the churches that received them, point to periods of church history, may apply in an idealist manner to a specific congregation today, and may have a future significance as well, so far as we know. That is very far from saying, however, that everything affirmed by the preterists about the identity of the beast is true, or everything affirmed by the futurists about the 1,260 days and the rebuilding of Jerusalem is accurate. Does Ford truly mean what he says, or is his axiom a deliberate hyperbole? If he means it, he is wrong. If not, he is imprecise.)

The Philosophy of History in Greece and Rome

According to William H. Shea, the apotelesmatic principle was originally used in Classical Greek for making astrological predications based upon the reading of horoscopes. By the time of the early Church Fathers, however, it had merely become a synonym for prophecy.⁶ We think that besides this origin in classical Greek, this hermeneutical principle can be placed more accurately in the Greek conception of history, especially in the Platonic philosophy of history. Our hypothesis is as follows: *The apotelesmatic principle has its philosophic origin in the Platonic conception of history based on the idea of recurring historic cycles.*

The disciplines of history and philosophy originated in Greece. The starting point of historical study is found in the work of Herodotus of Halicarnassus or Thurii (484-425 B.C.), called the "Father of history" since the time of Cicero. Herodotus is the author of *Historias* (446 B.C.), where not only does he christen history forever, but he also tries to make a precise study of past events and offers a critique of the handling of testimonies and a more scientific explanation of them. However, in spite of Herodotus' good intentions, a part of what he said can be considered false.

⁶W. H. Shea, "The Apotelesmatic Principle: Philosophy, Practice, and Purpose" (unpublished MS., 1981), 1.

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However, in Herodotus, and also in Thucydides, supposedly a more strict and intricate historian, there is an important absence of the sense of time, and the usage of chronology is inadequate. Heraclitus emphasized the changing nature of the universe, repeating that war is the father of all things, which means that transformation will consist in the movement from one stage to another in a strained but harmonic succession of opposites. It is also possible, in his opinion, that the world comes from fire and returns to fire, *in successive cycles*, for all eternity.

In several of Plato's works (427-347 B.C.)—*Timeus*, *The Republic*, *The Laws*, *The Sophist*, *The Politician*—there are references to *cosmic cycles*, an idea the Greeks must have borrowed from Indian, Babylonian, and Egyptian traditions. These books also include his observations of nature and of periodical catastrophes. Plato often mentioned the great catastrophes that devastated the world periodically—fires, floods, earthquakes—and had provoked the vanishing of many other civilizations. (It is important to bear in mind the model of prophetic interpretation used in ancient Israel—particularly how it valued historical time—the day-year principle, for example—in a completely different way from that of the ancient Near East, especially Mesopotamian, Babylonian and Canaanite).

Likewise, the stoics considered the concepts of “eternal return,” “cosmic cycles,” and “cyclic events” very significant. In general, the hypothesis prevailed among Greek thinkers that there exists an *analogy* between the phases of civilization and the phases of the physical universe, and between the human race and the individual human being. These thinkers supposed that civilizations followed one another by virtue of their own laws, and at the same time, within a common universal law. In the Greek way of thinking, this concept of cycles, and its applications to the history of humankind, was the natural corollary of a sensational astronomic discovery made in the Babylonian world between the 8th and the 6th centuries B.C. The discovery consisted in the verification or the simple affirmation of a great cycle of cosmic months and years that made the solar year seem insignificant by contrast. The minds fond of this idea projected their periodicity patterns to all events.

Greeks knew how to look and see. Their visual-spatial dimension was notoriously superior to their audio-time dimension. This science of observation (the *theoria*) was born in Greece as a result of a purely contemplative attitude, besides it being the right place for the development of theater (a way of seeing) and spatial-visual arts. Among the Greeks the spatial nature won over temporal history. And the fact that it is repeated suggested a cyclic idea of events.

Among the Romans, the idea of fatality and relentless fate appears in Cicero, and the circular conception of historical time that seems predominant among Romans as well as the Greeks is quite clearly affirmed by Plutarch.⁷

⁷For an exhaustive analysis of this subject, see J. L. García Venturini, *Filosofía de la Historia*

The Philosophy of History in Israel and the Ancient Near East

Israel constituted in ancient times a culture with very special characteristics, similar to neither the ancient Near East [ANE] people nor the Greco-Romans. Hebrew thought has a different attitude regarding historical time, and it is characterized by a certain way of thinking and living.

There is a clear and distinctive contrast between Greek and Hebrew thought. Greek thought states that reality is static, unchangeable, and immovable. On the contrary, for the Hebrews reality consists in action and movement. The Greeks were interested in contemplation; the Hebrews were interested in action. For the Greeks, movement was not the final reality. For the Hebrews, true reality was action and movement; inactivity and immobility were not reality at all.⁸

The Hebrews' dynamic approach to reality is expressed in their interest in history. Their God acts in history, and these actions in history are the center of Israel's religion. The Hebrews' interest in history corresponds with their perspective of time. Time was real for them. Greek philosophy was interested in an unchangeable and static reality that did not pay attention to action in history. Greek history was similar to anecdote or tragedy. They did not see in historical processes a Supreme Power but a destiny or a necessity. The Greeks considered history to be unchangeable, static and immovable. Therefore, in their refined philosophical thoughts, their perspective of time was *cyclic*.⁹

A general agreement exists among researchers that history acquired a singular meaning among the Hebrews. For Ernest Renan, the author of the book of *Daniel* is the "true creator of philosophy of history."¹⁰ Therefore, from Israel springs a powerful deliberation about history and, for the first time, specific historical material. In Israel a historical-philosophical reflection developed which was completely original because of its prophetic sense.

The prophets, are well known for their work in the philosophy of history, and this is of great importance for our subject matter. They were in charge of predicting the future and were prominent as philosophers of history, though a kind of backward history. The prophets were those who reflected on historical time as it was constituted by significant events and as it emerged from the past and was projected towards the future. In this way any kind of cyclic conception (a basic characteristic, as we have just seen, of the philosophy of history in Greece and Rome) and complete denial of history is surpassed, because of the assumed existence of time with a determined direction and sense. *History, for Hebrew*

(Madrid: Gredos, 1972), 47-59; L. Dujovne, *La Filosofía de la Historia en la Antigüedad y en la Edad Media* (Buenos Aires: Galatea, 1958), 67-147.

⁸For an analysis of Hebrew thought compared with Greek, see T. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), especially 27-73 for a study of static and dynamic thought.

⁹See J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1961), 11.

¹⁰E. Renan, *La Vie de Jésus* (Paris, 1861), 49.

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prophets, is spread out in linear time, not cyclic time. That is why for them the idea of the future always suggests something new, original, and unknown.

Yahweh is the center of every prophecy. Since before time, He is Lord of time and center of time. Amongst the prophets, Daniel stands out. He is convinced that history is not an unconnected succession of events with no relation between them, but on the contrary, an orderly succession, a unit with sense, sense that in the long run aims at the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

If there is a standard mark by which the Hebrew people could be known, it was hearing and listening to God's Word. In this way, the people of Israel *heard*, while the people of Greece *saw*. While other people were better placed in space (Greeks), the Hebrews were placed by God in time, since the beginning (Gn 1:1). God was in the beginning, and God will be in the end, while being present during the journey.¹¹

The Philosophy of History in the Christianity

It could be said that if ANE people lived holding onto the past, and the Greeks held an untemporal present, Christianity, based on Hebrew thought, emphasizes future history. The promise of Hebrew-Christian thought is *forever*, that is the reason why time is decisive in the future. Christianity reaffirms that history is linear and progressive. Hope and waiting give sense to history and meaning to time. That is to say, history is comprehensible only in prophetic dimension. God and man become coprotagonists in human life.

To Christianity the reaffirmation of linear time, as well as the universalization of the promise. For example, Agustine of Hippo was worried about the subject of time. He was completely against an "eternal return" to cyclic events; in his opinion time has a single direction and sense and is completely irreversible.¹²

From what we have described, we think that our hypothesis, initially stated, about the philosophical origin of the apotelesmatic principle in the Greek conception of history (especially Plato's conception), which is based on the idea of recurring historic cycles, starts to solidly and accurately confirm itself based on the analysis of philosophical conceptions of history which are clearly different from the Hebrew conception.

Greek Philosophy of History, Apotelesmatic Principle, and Modern Prophetic Interpretation

In this part we will try to establish a connection between Greek philosophy in history, the apotelesmatic principle, and modern prophetic interpretation. We will find that Ford's principle and all the presuppositions and theological

¹¹García Venturini, 37-46.

¹²Ibid., 60-70.

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applications that surround it are strongly influenced by the historical-critical method of biblical study.

In Ford's opinion, the apotelesmatic principle is a term that explains the concept that a prophecy can have more than one application in time. Ford points out that this should not be thought of as implying a double sense of prophecy, but rather the same sense in recurring situations.¹³

The principle of double or multiple fulfillments of prophecies was developed especially in the 19th century,¹⁴ as we can verify in the following reference:

The same prophecies frequently have a double meaning, and refer to different events, the one near, the other remote; the one temporal, the other spiritual or perhaps eternal. The prophets thus having several events in view, their expressions may be partly applicable to one, and partly to another, and it is not always easy to mark the transitions. What has not been fulfilled in the first, we must apply to the second; and what has already been fulfilled, may often be considered as typical of what remains to be accomplished . . . Thus it is evident that many prophecies must be taken in a double sense, in order to understand their full import; and this twofold application of them, by our Lord and his apostles, is a full authority for us to consider and apply them in a similar way.¹⁵

The Critical Context. Next we are going to consider some of the authors of the biblical hermeneutics and modern theology in which Ford is based, men who quote, support, and defend the apotelesmatic principle: they are C. F. Keil, B. Ramm, L. Berkhof, P. Beyerhaus, G. E. Ladd, among others.

C. F. Keil is coauthor of a fundamental *Old Testament Commentary*, together with F. Delitzsch. In his commentary on Daniel (a key book in the Bible for the prophetic interpretation), an erudite commentary by one of the greatest biblical German scholars of the Old Testament in the second half of the 19th century, he talks about the apotelesmatic principle—actually he gives it that name—and he defines and backs it as the fundamental principle of prophetic interpretation and historical critique in the 19th century, demonstrates the theological origin of this hermeneutic principle in the historical critique of the Bible, and relates its origin in the Greek philosophy of history with to its

¹³Ford, *Daniel*, 49.

¹⁴For a brief but recent perspective about roots of prophetic interpretation in the 19th century, see I. S. Rennie, "Nineteenth-Century Roots of Contemporary Prophetic Interpretation," in C. E. Armerding & W. W. Gasque (eds.), *A Guide to Biblical Prophecy* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 41-59. On page 70, referring to the principles or guides of prophetic interpretation, C. E. Armerding says: "*Together with the question of multiple fulfillment*, a student of prophecy should expect an indirect fulfillment by a correspondence of historical events" [emphasis added].

¹⁵T. H. Horne, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures* (Boston, 1868), 2:641-43 [emphasis in the original]. Note that this is a critical study of the Bible. This point is very important in relation to our position of the origin of apotelesmatic principle, from the theological viewpoint of a historical critique of the Scriptures.

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theological origin. This important author in the rationalist critique of 19th century says the following:

If the prophets before the captivity, therefore, connect the deliverance of Israel from Babylon and their return to Canaan immediately with the setting up of the kingdom of God in its glory, without giving any indication that between the end of the Babylonish exile and the appearance of the Messiah a long period would intervene, this uniting together of the two events is not to be explained only from the perspective and *apotelesmatic* character of the prophecy, but has its foundation in the very nature of the thing itself . . . The prophetic perspective, by virtue of which the inward eye of the seer beholds only the elevated summits of historical events as they unfold themselves, and not the valleys of the common incidents of history which lie between these heights, is indeed peculiar to prophecy in general, and accounts for the circumstance that the prophecies as a rule give no fixed dates, and *apotelesmatically* bind together the points of history which open the way to the end, with the end itself.¹⁶

Other authors also use the concept of the apotelesmatic principle when they refer to this principle of prophetic interpretation, such as Way, Gillet, and Brinsmead, who say the following in an unpublished article:

As the eleventh and twelfth chapters of Daniel expand the prophecy of chapter eight, we should expect to find that the passages dealing with the antichrist power in these last two chapters would parallel the passages in the chapter they are illuminating. That being the case, we find that many of the differences in interpretation have not been contradictions, but merely the different applications of this *apotelesmatic* prophecy. It will depend entirely upon our focal point as to whether we see antichrist as Antiochus Epiphanes, pagan Rome, or papal Rome in either of its two phases. Once again, only the consummative manifestation of the antichrist will fill out the details of this *apotelesmatic* prophecy.¹⁷

We must point out the important and significant fact that there are other authors who do not use the name apotelesmatic principle directly to refer to this hermeneutic principle, but they accept and assume the apotelesmatic principle with its concept that prophecies can have multiple or double fulfillment; in other words, a germinant fulfillment before the complete fulfillment. The following are some examples.

B. Ramm, another author of a critical perspective, talks about the possibility of *multiple fulfillment*:

¹⁶Carl F. Keil, Daniel, in C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986 [rpr.]), 9:9-10 [emphasis added].

¹⁷R. Way, E. Gillet & B. Brinsmead, "The Consummation," (unpublished MS.), 24 [emphasis added].

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There is a difference between 'multiple sense' and 'multiple fulfillment'. Misunderstanding has arisen due to the failure to distinguish double fulfillment . . . Beecher affirms, if the Scriptures had many meanings interpretation would be equivocal, but manifold fulfillment of the generic prophecy preserves the one sense of Scripture. Both promises and threats work themselves out over a period of time and therefore may pass through several fulfillments. Or one may view the same event from more than one perspective.¹⁸

Berkhof says in relation with this:

The fulfillment of some of the most important prophecies is germinant, i.e., they are fulfilled by installments, each fulfillment being a pledge of that which is to follow. Hence while it is a mistake to speak of a double or treble sense of prophecy, it is perfectly correct to speak of a two or threefold fulfillment. It is quite evident, e.g., that Joel's prophecy in 2:28-32 was not completely fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. Notice also the predictions respecting the coming of the Son of Man in Matt. 24.¹⁹

Peter Beyerhaus states:

The prophetic texts constitute a peculiar literary species. They very seldom convey an unequivocal message that can be collected from their plain wording. Rather we have to distinguish carefully between the historic application at the time of the author, the employment of metaphorical imagery, sometimes taken from the contemporary world of religions, and the really prophetic prediction that sometimes even finds its fulfillment in different events at different stages of salvation history.²⁰

G. E. Ladd talks about the way the biblical passages about 'Kingdom' belong to the pattern of promise, fulfillment, and consummation. That is to say, according to Ford, Ladd is saying that the first coming of Jesus attested the veracity of the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, but the second coming testifies its completion.²¹

In reference to the prophetic interpretation system, Merrill C. Tenney concurs:

The final conclusion on the chronological methods of interpretation is that all contain some elements of truth, and that

¹⁸B. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Wilde, 1956), 233-34 [emphasis added].

¹⁹L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950), 153 [emphasis in the original].

²⁰P. Beyerhaus, "The Perils of Prophecy," in *Christianity Today* (February 16, 1973), 58, quoted in Ford, *Daniel*, 49 [emphasis added].

²¹G. E. Ladd, "Unity and Variety in New Testament Faith," in *Christianity Today* (November 19, 1965), 21-24, quoted in Ford, *Daniel*, 58n.

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all are in a measure overstrained.²²

This is a similar affirmation to the Ford axiom that was indicated earlier, though less hyperbolic, and in this declaration by Tenney Ford's intention becomes clearer and more understandable.

Ford quotes English philosopher Francis Bacon to show that the apotelesmatic principle is not a new idea, and that this principle was already in Bacon's thoughts centuries ago, when he talked about a "germinant fulfillment."²³

Joseph Angus also quotes Lord Francis Bacon in the following reference concerning divine prophecies:

But here we must allow that latitude which is peculiar and familiar to divine prophecies, which have their completion not only at stated times, but in succession, as participating of the nature of their author, "with whom a thousand years are but as one day," and therefore are not fulfilled punctually at once, but have a growing accomplishment through many ages, though the height or fulness of them may refer to a single age or moment.²⁴

Both references to Bacon are very interesting, especially that by Ford, since it was precisely this empiricist English philosopher who said that every truth is found inductively. He rendered the establishment of man as the measure of all things methodologically feasible. At the same time, the Holy Scriptures were excluded as the source of truth. Consistent with his outlook, he completely separated the realm of reason and science from that of faith and religion and defined faith as *sacrificium intellectus*, the surrender of the attempt to understand.²⁵ Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was one of the founders of empiricism, a paradigm 17th century English philosophical, and his philosophical system constituted one of the fundamental bases on which the modern historical criticism of the Bible was developed. This obvious fact more clearly places the grounds on which the apotelesmatic principle is used out of a theological-biblical context and into a philosophical context, especially in the origin of the historical criticism of the Bible.²⁶

The last author that we are going to quote is J. S. Baxter, who presents an extraordinarily significant and clarifying declaration in relation to historical philosophy. After referring to the value which he gives to the idealist and

²²Merril C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 146 [emphasis added].

²³D. Ford, *Daniel*, 69, quoting to F. Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, 2:60.

²⁴F. Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, Book II, quoted by J. Angus, *The Bible Hand-Book* (London: The Religious Tract Society, n.d.), 290 [emphasis added].

²⁵Quoted in E. Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 28-29.

²⁶For an analysis of philosophical empiricism, see C. G. Hempel, *Filosofia de la Ciencia Natural* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1993).

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preterist prophetic interpretation systems, he says the following:

With the *Historicists* [emphasis on the original] I can see recurrent correspondences and fulfilments *all* [emphasis added] through the present age, inasmuch as “*history repeats itself*,” [emphasis added] and God has overruled events to adumbrate and lead onward to the *ultimate* [emphasis in original] fulfillment.²⁷

Baxter precisely establishes within the historicist system his perspective that history repeats itself, expressing his circular or cyclic view of history that again goes back to our hypothesis and the origin of apotelesmatic principle in the Greek philosophy of history.

We conclude this analysis with an especially revealing sentence by Ford which leads us toward the origin and source of his apotelesmatic principle. He writes:

Some commentators link this *principle* [apotelesmatic principle] with the *spiral view of history* implied by Ec 1:9, 10.²⁸

We definitely think that this Ford comment confirms and proves our hypothesis that the philosophical origin of the apotelesmatic principle is Greek philosophy in history, especially the repeated historical cycles of Platonist philosophy. As we just mentioned, Ford uses this principle as a basis for his spiral and cyclic view of history. As a result, his apotelesmatic principle concurs with a cyclic philosophical conception of history inconsistent with the Hebrew-Christian conception, thought, and philosophy of history that supports a linear view of time and prophetic interpretation. We submit that an external principle of biblical interpretation, extracted from the Greek philosophical and prophetic perspective and artificially transplanted into the completely different Hebrew perspective of history and prophetic interpretation, is an invalid tool unlikely to lead to a correct understanding of the Word of God.

All that has been previously stated leads us to the following conclusion:

If Ford's apotelesmatic principle is invalid, as we believe we have shown, the logical and evident conclusion is that his whole system and structure of prophetic interpretation crumbles like a castle made of cards, where the apotelesmatic principle “joker” is the sustaining factor and the presuppositional grounds of his theological system by which he explain his whole prophetic system, starting with the 1844 beginning of the pre-advent investigative judgement, the day of the antitypical atonement, diverse aspects of the theology of the sanctuary, and especially his hermeneutic of prophetic interpretation.

²⁷J. S. Baxter, *Explore the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 6:340.

²⁸Ford, *Daniel*, 58n [emphasis added]. Continuing, he quotes Ellen White: “God’s work is the same in all time, although there are different degrees of development” [Ellen White, *The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1958), 373], seeking to establish a link between the apotelesmatic principle with its spiral or circular view of history in Ellen White, an idea and belief that, as we will see later, is completely opposite to her thought.

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The Theological Application of the Apotelesmatic Principle

We have shown that the idea that prophecies may have more than one fulfillment is not a new contribution to prophetic interpretation. What is new is Ford's wholesale application of this idea. The common approach to some of the Old Testament prophecies is that they had a primary fulfillment in the times of ancient Israel and a secondary fulfillment in Christ, the Church, or the New Earth. For example, Adventist interpreters have seen a dual application of the little horn of Daniel 8 in both pagan and papal Rome. It should be noted carefully, however, that this is virtually the only clearly dual application of the apocalyptic symbols of Daniel that such interpreters have adopted. These apotelesmatic reapplications of the little horn in Daniel 8 are relatively restricted, however, compared to what Ford does with Dan 8:14.²⁹ In Ford's prophetic interpretation system, the little horn of Daniel 8 is not only pagan and papal Rome but also Antiochus Epiphanes and a final Antichrist just before Christ comes, and probably also a revived Antichrist at the end of the millennium.

Since the beginning the Seventh-day Adventist Church has accepted and applied the historicist method of prophetic interpretation to explain apocalyptic symbols. The historicist method accepts that the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation are to find fulfillment in historical time—in the period between the prophet Daniel and the final establishment of God's Kingdom. The day-year principle (a symbolic or prophetic day equals a literal year) is an essential part of this method, provided that the symbolic times can be explained and we can locate the aforesaid events throughout the historical periods.

Jesus himself used the historicist method to interpret Daniel when he announced: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). This verse alludes to the prophetic fulfillment of the 70 weeks prophecy of Daniel (Dan 9:24-27) that predicts the appearance of the Messiah.

The protestant reformers (from whose roots we spring) used the historicist method, as well. Through this method they concluded that the Papacy was the center of various Daniel and Revelation prophecies. By following this system, the Seventh-day Adventist Church pioneers arrived at an understanding of our own time, the ministry of Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary, and our mission as God's people. Our comprehension of Daniel and Revelation has become our distinctive mark in illuminating the biblical truths that we teach as a church.³³

One of the main problems we have found with Ford's application of the apotelesmatic principle is the lack of coherence and internal consistency. If it is indeed a fundamental principle of interpretation and a scientific methodology, then it should apply to prophetic texts throughout the Bible. Ford applies the

²⁹See Ford, *Daniel 8:14*, 356, 420, 422.

³³Ibid.; Holbrook, 338, 341-43, 426, 435-36. For the biblical foundation and use in Jewish literature of the day-year principle, see W. H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation* (Lincoln, NE: College View Printers, 1982), 56-93.

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apotelesmatic principle to Daniel but not to Christ's apocalyptic prophecy in Mark 13. What is more, he uses it only in selected portions of Daniel. In his commentary on this book, Ford does not apply it to Daniel 2 or 7, but he does apply it to Daniel 8, 9 and 11.³⁴ We will look at some examples of these problems.

Daniel 7. For the four beasts and the little horn of Daniel 7, Ford has followed the traditional historicist Adventist interpretation of: (1) Babylon, (2) Medo-Persia, (3) Greece, (4) pagan Rome, and (5) papal Rome. He has combined it, however, with aspects of the preterist interpretation, stressing the importance of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The preterist interpretation of these symbols is that they represent: (1) Babylon, (2) Media, (3) Persia, (4) Greece, and (5) Antiochus IV Epiphanes. (This school of interpretation, which is the dominant scholarly view on this subject at the present time, also holds that Daniel was written in the second century B.C.)³⁵

Since Ford accepts both of these interpretations (preterist and historicist) for the little horn in Daniel 8, he could just as well have applied the apotelesmatic principle to the little horn in Daniel 7, but he did not. Thus his application of this principle, as Shea points out, is very arbitrary. What it finally proves is that it is not a principle at all.³⁶

Daniel 9. In the preface to his interpretation of the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27, Ford has noted that preterism, "by far the most prominent school today, because of its dating of the book in Maccabean times, sees in these verses a description of events that transpired in connection with Antiochus Epiphanes and his attack on the Jewish faith."³⁷

In his evaluation of this point of view, however, Ford rejects it: "The evidence is overwhelming that the New Testament teaches that 9:24-27 was *not* accomplished in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes."³⁸

Furthermore, Ford applies the Messianic prophecy of Dan 9:24-27 to Jesus' time in the first century and to what will be accomplished at the end of the age. He rejects the preterist interpretation that applies these events to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, and he rejects the dispensationalist (or futurist) interpretation that splits off the 70th week and transfers it down to the end of time. Since this is something Ford denies, and the interpreters are right in what they affirm and wrong in what they deny, Ford is inconsistent in disagreeing with their rule.³⁹

Thus, Ford defends a syncretist method of prophetic interpretation, mixing aspects of the preterist, futurist, idealist, and historicist methods. This leads, however, to an easily observable internal incoherence and inconsistency, so

³⁴Ford, *Daniel*, 84-101, 138-59, 160-238, 252-77.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 138-59.

³⁶See Shea, "Apotelesmatic Principle," 10-12.

³⁷Ford, *Daniel*, 199.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 207 [emphasis in the original].

³⁹*Ibid.*, 225-38.

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evident that it precludes consideration of the apotelesmatic principle as a universal principle of prophetic interpretation, useful in a methodologically scientific approach to the study and interpretation of the biblical text.

Ellen White and the Apotelesmatic Principle

Ford has attempted to show that Ellen White made similar apotelesmatic applications in her comments on such prophecies. Let's see if this is true in general and especially in the book of Daniel.⁴⁰

1. Ford quotes White as saying, "God's work is the same in all time, although there are different degrees of development,"⁴¹ then explains, "History and prophecy thus illustrate each other."⁴² However, in context, it is clear that White is not talking about prophecy here at all, but about progressive revelation:

God's work is the same in all time, although there are different degrees of development and different manifestations of His power, to meet the wants of men in the different ages. Beginning with the first gospel promise, and coming down through the patriarchal and Jewish ages, and even to the present time, there has been *a gradual unfolding of the purposes of God in the plan of redemption.*⁴³

2. Ford is correct in noting that Ellen White applies Joel 2:28 first to Pentecost and secondly to the latter rain.⁴⁴ This symbolism for the Holy Spirit's falling is drawn from the two rainy seasons of Palestine, in the fall and the spring, which are distinct from one another. He does not point out, though, that in *The Great Controversy*, Ellen White is not suggesting that there are two fulfillments for the early rain and two for the latter rain, but rather she sees just one fulfillment for each.

As the "former rain" was given, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the opening of the gospel, to cause the springing up of the precious seed, so the "latter rain" will be given at its close for the ripening of the harvest.⁴⁵

As Shea indicates, Ellen White is not here using the apotelesmatic principle, which would require two or more former rains and two or more latter rains.⁴⁶

3. Ford claims that Ellen White applied Mal 4:5-6 first to John the Baptist, and secondly to the Advent movement.⁴⁷ She does writes that as a prophet, John

⁴⁰See Shea, "Apotelesmatic Principle," 21-35.

⁴¹White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 373.

⁴²Ford, *Daniel 8:14*, 493.

⁴³White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 373 [emphasis added].

⁴⁴Ford, *Daniel 8:14*, 538, quotes Ellen White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950), 611.

⁴⁵White, *Great Controversy*, 611.

⁴⁶Shea, "Apotelesmatic Principle," 24-25.

⁴⁷Ford, *Daniel 8:14*, 533, quotes Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA:

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was “to return the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. In preparing the way for Christ’s first advent, he was a *representative* of those who are to prepare a people for our Lord’s second coming.”⁴⁸

Saying that John “was a representative of those who are to prepare a people before our Lord’s second coming,” however, is quite different from making an apotelesmatic application of this prophecy to the Advent movement.

4. Ford claims that Ellen White applies 2 Thes 2 to both Paul’s day and to the final counterfeit by Satan when he appears as Christ.⁴⁹ Unfortunately for Ford, in the passage he quotes, Ellen White does not apply the prophecy of 2 Thes 2 to the final appearance of Satan. She quotes other texts such as Rev 1:13-15; Acts 8:10; Matt 24:24-27, 31; 25:31; Rev 1:7; and 1 Thes 4:16-17. Therefore, Ellen White simply did not apply 2 Thes 2 to this scene as Ford says she did.

5. Ford claims that Ellen White applied Rev 7:1-4, the shaking, first to the years immediately following 1844⁵⁰ and later to the future.⁵¹ This simply is not what Ellen White says in *Early Writings*: She writes, “The mighty shaking *has commenced and will go on*, and all will be shaken out who are not willing to take a bold and unyielding stand for the truth and to sacrifice for God and His cause.”⁵² The shaking, thus, is one continuous event, not a several distinct events.

6. Ford claims that Ellen White first applied Rev 14:6-8, the first angel’s message, to the Millerite movement⁵³ and later applied it to the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s message till the end of time.⁵⁴ The second angel’s message, he writes, was applied first to the midnight cry of 1844 and the fall of Protestant churches and second to the loud cry and the fall of all churches throughout the world.⁵⁵ Here Ford wants to change this continuum in Ellen White’s thought and in the interpretation of the Church into separate and independent poles of prophetic fulfillment. The first angel’s message began with the Millerite movement and it has *continued* on in its proclamation by the Adventist Church. The fulfillment of the second angel’s message among the churches began with their rejection of the judgment hour message of the first angel and its fulfillment will continue on until its climax before the coming of Christ.⁵⁶

7. Ford claims that Ellen White applies the prophecy of Dan 8:13 to AD

Pacific Press, 1940), 79-80.

⁴⁸White, *Desire of Ages*, 79-80 [emphasis added].

⁴⁹Ford, *Daniel 8:14*, 484, 533-34, quotes Ellen White, *Great Controversy*, 624ff.

⁵⁰Ellen White, *Early Writings* (Washington: Review & Herald, 1945), 50.

⁵¹Ford, *Daniel 8:14*, 537, quotes Ellen White, *5 Testimonies*, 80-82.

⁵²White, *Early Writings*, 50 [emphasis added].

⁵³*Ibid.*, 232-37.

⁵⁴White, *Great Controversy*, 450, 453, 425.

⁵⁵Ford, *Daniel 8:14*, 538, quotes Ellen White, *Great Controversy*, 389-90.

⁵⁶Shea, “Apotelesmatic Principle”, 29.

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70, the Middle Ages, and the fulfillment of the last crisis sketched in Revelation 13⁵⁷ However, he does not supply any quotation from Ellen White where she makes such an application.

8. Ford claims that this being the case, it is not strange to find that Ellen White also used Dan 8:14 eschatologically as pointing not only to 1844, but also to “the final purification of the universe from sin and sinners.”⁵⁸ Neither of the references cited by Ford, however, says this.⁵⁹ Therefore, the application of the cleansing of the sanctuary in Dn 8:14 to the cleansing of the earth when it is made over new again is Ford’s apotelesmatic application, not Ellen White’s.

9. Ford claims that Ellen White makes an apotelesmatic application of the language of Dan 9:24 to the future consummation of all things in the following passage:⁶⁰

Through union with Christ, through acceptance of His righteousness by faith, we may be qualified to work the works of God, to be colaborers with Christ. If you are willing to drift along with the current of evil, and do not cooperate with the Heavenly agencies in restraining transgression in your family, and in the church, in order that everlasting righteousness may be brought in, you do not have faith. Faith works by love and purifies the soul. Through faith the Holy Spirit works in the heart to create holiness therein.⁶¹

This is simply a *homiletical* use of biblical phraseology. There is no basis in this passage for saying, as Ford does, that she indicated thereby that this prophecy should be applied apotelesmatically to the “consummation of all things.”

10. Finally, in referring to Ellen White’s supposed apotelesmatic use of Daniel 11, Ford states: “Later prophets have not hesitated to apply Daniel’s words to more than one occasion. The most recent illustration is Ellen White in Letter 103, 1904.”⁶²

We have no time to lose. Troublous times are before us. The world is stirred with the Spirit of war. Soon the scenes of trouble spoken of in the prophecies will take place. The prophecy in the eleventh [chapter] of Daniel has nearly reached its complete fulfillment. Much of history that has taken place in fulfillment of this prophecy will be repeated.⁶³

What Ellen White is referring to here is that the troublous times and

⁵⁷Ford, *Daniel 8:14*, 534.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 536, 539 [emphasis in the original].

⁵⁹White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 372; *Great Controversy*, 720-37.

⁶⁰Ford, *Daniel 8:14*, 503, quotes Ellen White, *Selected Messages* (Washington: Review & Herald, 1958), 1:374.

⁶¹White, *Selected Messages*, 1:374.

⁶²Ford, *Daniel 8:14*, 492.

⁶³Ellen White, *Letter 103*, 1904, 4-5.

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persecution suffered by the church of God in fulfillment of Dan 11:33-35 will occur again in fulfillment of Dan 12:1-2. But saying that troublous times and persecution will occur again is different from saying that verses 33-35 will be fulfilled again apotelesmatically at the end of time when there are other verses later in the prophecy which refer to those conditions.

We have considered ten examples Ford gives to support his claim that Ellen White has carried out apotelesmatic reapplications of prophecies, indicating a principle of repeated fulfillment. However, none of them confirm what Ford tries to demonstrate. Specifically, Ford has tried to find support in Ellen White quotations for using the apotelesmatic principle in Dan 8:13, Dan 8:14, Dan 9:24, Dan 11, and Dan 12:2, but none of these references show the so called repeated and apotelesmatic application supposed and defended by Ford.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this article is that there is no evidence that Ford is correct in his assertion that the doctrine of the pre-advent investigative judgment beginning in 1844, several aspects of theology of the sanctuary, the antitypical atonement day, the historicist method of the prophetic interpretation, and the day-year principle cannot be supported on the basis of an exhaustive and precise hermeneutics and exegetics of the Bible text. The apotelesmatic principle does not solve the supposed problem that exists in Adventist theology, as that problem does not exist but has been imagined by Ford himself. Finally, the philosophical and theological origin of the apotelesmatic principle in an irrelevant and distinctly Greek model rather than in a model of biblical conception and thought (Hebrew-Christian) invalidates it and renders all the presuppositions and conclusions of Ford's theological interpretation unsustainable.