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Uriah Smith Daniel And The Revelation

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Uriah Smith and His Enduring Commentary: Daniel and the Revelation

For over a century, few works have shaped the Adventist understanding of biblical prophecy as profoundly as **Uriah Smith Daniel and The Revelation**. Written by a key figure in the early Seventh-day Adventist church, this comprehensive commentary has guided generations of readers through the intricate visions of the Old Testament prophet Daniel and the apocalyptic writings of the Apostle John. In an age of renewed interest in eschatology, Smith's methodical, verse-by-verse exposition continues to offer a coherent framework for interpreting prophecy through a historicist lens. This article explores the life of Uriah Smith, the content and impact of his magnum opus, and the lasting relevance of his work for both scholars and lay readers.

Who Was Uriah Smith?

Uriah Smith (1832–1903) was a prolific writer, editor, and theologian during the formative years of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. Born in West Wilton, New Hampshire, Smith converted to the fledgling Adventist movement in the 1840s after the Great Disappointment. He quickly became a leading intellectual force, serving for decades as the editor of the *Review and Herald*, the church's flagship periodical. Smith was not only a writer but also an inventor and educator, yet his greatest legacy remains his biblical commentaries. His most famous work, **Daniel and the Revelation**, first published in 1881, synthesized the Adventist prophetic understanding that had been developing since the 1840s. Smith's clear, accessible prose and careful alignment with the Adventist "pillars" of faith – the Sabbath, the sanctuary doctrine, and the investigative judgment – made his commentary an indispensable resource.

Smith's Theological Approach

Smith employed the historicist method of prophecy interpretation, which views the visions of Daniel and Revelation as unfolding a continuous chain of world history from the prophet's time to the end of the age. He strongly rejected preterist and futurist approaches, insisting that prophecy must be understood as symbolic language describing real historical events and kingdoms. This perspective placed Adventism in direct continuity with many Protestant reformers who saw the papacy as the Antichrist and the 1260 days as a literal 1260-year period of papal supremacy. Smith's work is therefore not merely a commentary but a comprehensive historical theology, linking each beast, symbol, and time prophecy to specific epochs.

The Book: "Daniel and the Revelation" – Structure and Content

Uriah Smith Daniel and The Revelation is divided into two major sections, each following the biblical books chapter by chapter. The first part covers the Book of Daniel, presenting a detailed exposition of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the four beasts, the ram and the goat, the 70 weeks prophecy, and the 2300-day prophecy. Smith meticulously applies the year-day principle (a prophetic day equals a literal year) to unlock the timelines. The second part addresses the Book of Revelation, interpreting the seven churches, the seven seals,

the seven trumpets, and the final scenes of judgment and the New Earth.

Key Prophetic Interpretations in Smith's Work

- The 2300-Day Prophecy (Daniel 8:14): Smith argued that the cleansing of the sanctuary pointed to 1844, the year of the Great Disappointment. He reinterpreted the event as the beginning of Christ's work in the heavenly sanctuary, not the earth, forming the basis of the Adventist doctrine of the investigative judgment.
- The Little Horn Power: Smith identified the little horn of Daniel 7 and 8 as papal Rome, which would reign for 1260 years (538–1798 AD). He presented extensive historical evidence linking the papacy to the characteristics described in the prophecy.
- The Mark of the Beast: In his Revelation commentary, Smith argued that the mark of the beast was a false Sabbath (Sunday observance) instituted by the papacy, while the seal of God was the seventh-day Sabbath. This connection remains a defining feature of Adventist eschatology.
- The Two Witnesses (Revelation 11): Smith interpreted the two witnesses as the Old and New Testaments, which were "slain" during the French Revolution and later revived through the Bible society movement.
- The Seven Last Plagues: He saw these as literal judgments to be poured out in the final days, preceding the second coming of Christ.

Smith's Use of Charts and Illustrations

One of the most distinctive features of **Uriah Smith Daniel and The Revelation** is its inclusion of detailed prophetic charts. Smith believed that visual aids helped readers grasp the complex sequences of empires, dates, and symbols. His famous "image of Nebuchadnezzar" chart and the "line of prophecy for the 2300 days" became iconic in Adventist literature. These illustrations made his commentary particularly popular for personal and group study, and they remain in many modern editions.

Impact on Seventh-day Adventist Theology

Smith's commentary did more than explain prophecy; it solidified the theological identity of the Seventh-day Adventist church during a critical period. In the late 19th century, the church faced internal debates about the nature of Christ, the atonement, and the timing of the judgment. Smith's exegesis provided a stable framework that emphasized the consistency of the Bible as a prophetic book. Many Adventist pioneers, including Ellen G. White, endorsed the work, though White herself wrote that her writings were not intended to replace Smith's systematic study. Consequently, **Daniel and the Revelation** became a standard textbook in Adventist colleges, a resource for pastors, and a devotional staple for lay members.

Influence Beyond the Adventist Church

Although primarily a Seventh-day Adventist work, Smith's commentary attracted interest from other Protestant readers who shared a historicist outlook. In the early 20th century, it was reprinted and distributed widely, influencing evangelical thinkers who sought an alternative to dispensationalism. Even today, while many scholars have moved toward more academic-critical approaches, Smith's work remains a touchstone for those committed to the historicist tradition. However, its strongest resonance continues within the Adventist community, where it is often read alongside more recent commentaries.

Critical Perspectives and Modern Relevance

No commentary is without its limitations, and **Uriah Smith Daniel and The Revelation** reflects the assumptions of its era. Modern biblical scholarship has largely abandoned the year-day principle and the specific historical identifications Smith employed. Critics point out that his dating of the 1260 years (538–1798) relies on a specific starting point that many historians challenge. Likewise, his identification of the papacy as the exclusive little horn has been questioned by Catholic and ecumenical scholars. Furthermore, Smith wrote before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other archaeological finds that have deepened the

understanding of apocalyptic literature in its original Jewish context.

Why Smith's Work Still Matters

Despite these critiques, the book continues to offer value. First, it provides a clear, systematic introduction to historicist interpretation that remains unmatched in its thoroughness. Second, it captures the eschatological urgency of the 19th-century Advent movement, showing how early believers connected prophecy to their own lives. Third, many Adventists still find spiritual meaning in Smith's focus on God's sovereignty over history and the call to prepare for Christ's return. For those seeking to understand the roots of Adventist identity, **Uriah Smith Daniel and The Revelation** is an indispensable primary source.

Contemporary Editions and Study Aids

Today, the book is available in multiple formats, including affordable reprints and digital versions. Many modern editions include updated footnotes that acknowledge alternative views while preserving Smith's original text. Study groups often use the commentary alongside the biblical text, comparing Smith's interpretations with current scholarship. For a student of prophecy, reading Smith's **Daniel and the Revelation** offers a time-tested perspective that integrates history, theology, and devotion.

Conclusion

Over 140 years after its first publication, **Uriah Smith Daniel and The Revelation** remains a milestone in American religious literature. Uriah Smith's clear, passionate, and methodical exposition of biblical prophecy helped define a denomination and gave generations a coherent vision of God's plan for the ages. While modern readers may approach the text with a critical eye, they cannot ignore its influence or its earnest attempt to unlock the mysteries of Daniel and Revelation. Whether one accepts its historicist framework or reads it as a historical artifact, Smith's work invites serious reflection on the symbols and promises that have shaped Christian hope for centuries. For anyone delving into the prophetic books of the Bible, this classic commentary stands as a powerful witness to a time when believers believed that the end was near—and that every vision had a purpose.

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