

Antiochus Epiphanes in 1919:

Ellen White, Daniel, and the Books of Maccabees

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1. Introduction

Since the 1980s, starting with the work of Graybill¹ and leading to my own current scholarship,² Adventist historians have begun to shed new light on the topic of the Apocrypha in early Adventism, something that was obscured primarily by negligence and a lack of access to needed resources. Unlike today, such discussions were part of the 1919 Bible Conference and within their discussions, some rather fascinating proposals were made.

During the meetings, H. C. Lacey noted a text from 1 Maccabees, stating that “You see that the language both in the Bible and the apochryphal book is practically identical.”³ Lacey takes this further a short while later, arguing that Antiochus was indeed the little horn of Daniel 7, but that the prophecy intended to predict two events. The argument he gave was simple: what mainstream biblical scholars see as evidence of an *ex eventu* prophecy, namely the part of the prediction which seemingly did not match known history (and as such

¹ Ronald Graybill, “Under the Triple Eagle: Early Adventist Use of the Apocrypha,” *Adventist Heritage* 12 (Winter 1987): 25-32.

² Matthew J. Korpman, “Adventism’s Hidden Book: A Brief History of the Apocrypha,” *Spectrum* 46.1 (2018): 56-65; see also my series of articles on TheCompassMagazine.com outlining the individual histories of each apocryphal book within early Seventh-day Adventist history.

³ General Conference of SDA, *1919 Bible Conference Collection*, ed. M. C. Wilcox et al. (General Conference of SDA, 1919), 336.

suggests the time of the author), is in fact the hint that the prophecy has a second application which will match the prediction in full.

In the career of Antiochus Epiphanes there is a kind of a little wheel within a wheel. There are events in his life which are very like what is predicted of the little horn—extremely alike, and I do not know why we could not consider this in the same way that Ezekial expresses it—a wheel within a wheel. Just to illustrate: The things said about the little horn of Daniel 7 can apply to Antiochus Epiphanes in a small way. He is the eleventh down the line, three were plucked up in his place (names were mentioned), he did speak great words against the Most High, he did wear out the saints of the Most High in a small way, he did change the law of the Most High; things were given into his hand for just a time, times, and a half in a literal sense, which was three and one-half years. And in a very small way Antiochus Epiphanes might have been the little horn. So, suppose you and I had been living in that day we would have thought that that prophecy met its fulfillment to us, and we should have been sustained through that hour of persecution.⁴

A. G. Daniells took problems with this view, asking Lacey to never speak of this view to his students, because he feared that “our boys will be out over the country saying that [Antiochus] is the little horn.” What is fascinating is that someone in the conference, whose identity is not recorded, spoke up and stated that a number of Adventist ministers at that time were already stating this as a fact. This demonstrates that this view was spreading at

⁴ Lacey, General Conference of SDA, *1919 Bible Conference Collection*, ed. M. C. Wilcox et al. (General Conference of SDA, 1919), 340.

the time and likely was tied to the fact of early Adventism's influence and relationship with the Apocrypha. In fact, Lacey admits as much. He later replies to Daniells that:

I do not see why you [Daniells] object to taking this in a small way as referring to Antiochus Epiphanes,—as a wheel within a wheel view of this prophecy. Living in those times we would have thought that the prophecy met its fulfillment, but in this time we see it has a larger fulfillment, we get a present message from it; and we read any chapter and make other slight allusion to those days and how it applies today. Sister white herself recognized the double application method.⁵

The latter reference to Mrs. White is of particular interest. Does Lacey mean to suggest that Ellen White embraced a theoretical framework of dual fulfillment, or a particular application of that framework to the Daniel passages in question? That is what this brief paper seeks to investigate. In it, I seek to suggest that not only were some early Adventists open to a combined preterist/historicist interpretation of Daniel, but so it appears was Ellen White herself.

2. Antiochus Epiphanes in Daniel

Although disagreeing with Lacey's view, W. W. Prescott admitted that while he does not take the "little horn" to be a reference to Antiochus, "he may have been in a small way a type."⁶ At the Bible Conference held in 1919, J. N. Anderson noted that "it seems to me that

⁵ General Conference of SDA, *1919 Bible Conference Collection*, ed. M. C. Wilcox et al. (General Conference of SDA, 1919), 344.

⁶ General Conference of SDA, *1919 Bible Conference Collection*, ed. M. C. Wilcox et al. (General Conference of SDA, 1919), 849.

to the Jewish mind there could not be a stronger picture of who the antichrist was than the character and conduct of this man Antiochus Epiphanes.”⁷ M. C. Wilcox, within a discussion of “Principles of Prophetic Interpretation,” called Antiochus Epiphanes “a type” of the papal persecution when discussing Daniel 11.⁸ Wilcox went onto say that Antiochus was “a striking type, so far as God’s people are concerned, of the later persecuting power which was to arise.”⁹ Elsewhere, he argued in his presentation, just like Lacey, that prophecies were often doubled. He notes that

Many of the prophecies of the Old Testament are double prophecies in which the local conditions of the prophet’s time are so blended with greater future events that it is impossible to separate them, and we never can get a right understanding unless we recognize the fact that the prophecy is double. In other words, the foreground of the prophet blends with the larger and far future field, so that the objects seem as one. The nearer mountain seems one with the more distant peak or ridge. All blend in the far horizon. But if we were to climb the nearer mountains, we would find, perhaps, great valleys separating us from the higher elevations. The vision does not show the intervening valleys. The prophet sees the smaller, nearer mountains scenery blending with a far distant peak, making one mountain, seemingly, of the two. It is only by the

⁷ General Conference of SDA, *1919 Bible Conference Collection*, ed. M. C. Wilcox et al. (General Conference of SDA, 1919), 393.

⁸ M.C. Wilcox, “Principles of Prophetic Interpretation,” in the General Conference of SDA, *1919 Bible Conference Collection*, ed. M. C. Wilcox et al. (General Conference of SDA, 1919), 58–59. “It again bridges centuries in passing over the remaining kings of Syria after Antiochus IV, B.C. 164, passing Egypt, passing the Roman Republic, to Roman persecution under the Papacy, of which Antiochus (IV) Epiphanes was a type, and rushes on to the last days, when world apostacy shall stand up against the Prince of princes, to be overthrown, when that Prince of Life, “Michael, shall stand up.””

⁹ General Conference of SDA, *1919 Bible Conference Collection*, ed. M. C. Wilcox et al. (General Conference of SDA, 1919), 454.

aid of the Spirit of God that we can divide between the local and far-reaching prophecies. Sometimes we must wait for fulfilment.¹⁰

Although he never specifies which prophecies were double, this could imply, given his description of Antiochus as a “type,” that he possibly understood Daniel’s prophecies to have dual function applying to both the events of the Maccabean rebellion, as well as the future events spoken of by Ellen White. Whether he believed this or not explicitly, he clearly allowed for the possibility. Likewise, speaking on Daniel 11, W. E. Howell echoed similar illustrative language hinting at double prophecy, noting that “Not only has God shown the great mountain peaks of prophecy,” but that the accuracy of Daniel’s prophecies shows that “written 200 years before the days of Antiochus Epiphanes... God could look down and see that man’s whole career.”¹¹

W. G. Wirth notes:

It seems to me the great thing is as Brother Lacey brought out, the fact that Antiochus Epiphanes is really the great figure in this chapter. Really, I think he should be emphasized more than we have emphasized him, and for this reason: That to my mind, Antiochus Epiphanes stands related to the people of God at that time in a typical way as the Pope stands related to the whole people of God. ¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., 53.

¹¹ General Conference of SDA, *1919 Bible Conference Collection*, ed. M. C. Wilcox et al. (General Conference of SDA, 1919), 335.

¹² General Conference of SDA, *1919 Bible Conference Collection*, ed. M. C. Wilcox et al. (General Conference of SDA, 1919), 495.

3. Ellen White and Antiochus

Whether Lacey intended to suggest that Ellen White had ever applied the idea of “Double Prophecy” or “A Wheel within A Wheel” to Daniel herself, it appears that there is indeed evidence pointing to the idea that she did indeed undertake such interpretive moves. In 1898, Mrs. White, referred to the events of 1 Maccabees, writing that:

The prophecy of Daniel revealed the time of His advent, but not all rightly interpreted the message. Century after century passed away; the voices of the prophets ceased. The hand of the oppressor was heavy upon Israel, and many were ready to exclaim, “The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth.” Ezekiel 12:22.¹³

The reference to Daniel, the cessation of prophecy in 1 Maccabees, and the “hand of the oppressor” makes very clear that this oppressor is Antiochus Epiphanes. Though one might imagine that the “oppressor” spoken of was in reference to the Romans, the connection with 1 Macc. 9:27’s discussion of the cessation of prophecy makes clear that the one spoken of is in fact Antiochus Epiphanes IV, the main villain of the book’s history. Likewise, the reference to “not all rightly interpreted” appears to be a reference to 1 Macc. 1:54 and 6:7 where the book reports that Daniel’s prophecy was fulfilled fully during the Maccabean era. There was no one during the Roman period that was misinterpreting the Daniel prophecies. Moreover, prophecy had not ceased during the Roman occupation, for there were prophets mentioned by the Gospels such as Simeon, Anna and John. As such, Antiochus remains the only point of reference within the context of her passage.

¹³ Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), 31.

Furthermore, evidence of Mrs. White's familiarity (and exegesis) of 1 Maccabees may be seen in another comment of hers. Again, like before, it is in connection with the work of Daniel, when she notes that "The world is stirred with the spirit of war. The prophecies of the eleventh of Daniel have almost reached their final fulfillment."¹⁴ The fact that Mrs. White was familiar with and cited 1 Maccabees on other occasions, along with the fact that her husband greatly treasured 1 Maccabees for its history, may point to a confirmation that it is likely and in most respects probable that her reference to "final fulfillment" does indicate that she accepted the interpretation, at least in respect to Daniel 11, that it was both a description of the events surrounding Antiochus Epiphanes around 167 BCE, as well as a prophecy regarding the final days of earth's history. The reference to "spirit of war" also appears to be a reference to the conflicts that enveloped the Maccabean oppression under Antiochus Epiphanes.

Furthermore, other references to this issue by Mrs. White appear to confirm this view. "Study Revelation in connection with Daniel, for history will be repeated," she writes in one place, seemingly alluding to a previous fulfillment of Daniel which Revelation would indicate would be repeated.¹⁵ Likewise she reports that: "The prophecy in the eleventh [chapter] of Daniel has nearly reached its complete fulfillment. Much of the history that has taken place in fulfillment of this prophecy will be repeated."¹⁶ It appears from these quotations, that Mrs.

¹⁴ Ellen White, "The Day of the Lord is Near, and Hasteth Greatly," *Review and Herald* 81.47 (1904): 16. Repeated again, with variation, in White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:14: "The world is stirred with the spirit of war. The prophecy of the eleventh chapter of Daniel has nearly reached its complete fulfillment." The change from "final" to "complete" does not, contrary to the BRI, change the meaning. Both words indicate that a partial fulfillment is possible previously.

¹⁵ Ellen White to J. H. Kellogg, Letter 56, 1896.

¹⁶ Ellen White to Hiram A. Craw, Letter 103, 1904.

White's reference to "the history that has taken place in fulfillment of this prophecy" is indeed a reference to the events of the second century recorded in 1 Maccabees.

This idea of dual fulfillment may help to explain why, in reference to 1 Macc. 9:27, Ellen White commented on the fact that at the time of "the oppressor" (Antiochus), "not all rightly interpreted the message [of Daniel]" and that "the words of the prophets were uncomprehended by many."¹⁷ This may in fact be a reference to the fact that Mrs. White recognized that while the events of 167 BCE were one *part* of the fulfillment, they were in fact misunderstood by the author of 1 Maccabees to be *the* final fulfillment.

Why might Mrs. White have accepted a dual fulfillment or a partial fulfillment view of Daniel's prophecy? Likely the answer lies in the fact that she had, as we now know, explicitly affirmed the Apocrypha as the Word of God in her vision of 1849.¹⁸ There, she exclaimed in vision that Satan was trying to remove the Apocrypha and that Sabbatarian Adventists must "bind it" to the heart and never let its pages close because it was "thy word." Soon after, she would note that the Apocrypha was something "the wise of these last days should understand."¹⁹ James White's reference to them as scripture in *Word to the Little Flock* was likely, given this context and her own usage, not reflective of only his own estimation of the work, but most around him including Mrs. White herself. Given that 1 Maccabees identified Antiochus Epiphanes' work as connected with Daniel, Mrs. White appears to have wanted to honor that identification, while avoiding a strictly preterist understanding of the prophecy that denied the Papacy its role in prophecy. A high view of the Bible as a whole, apocryphal

¹⁷ Ellen White, *Prophets and Kings* (California: Pacific Press, 1917), 700.

¹⁸ Ellen White, "Remarks in Vision," Manuscript 5, 1849.

¹⁹ Ellen White, "A Copy of E. G. White's Vision, Which She Had at Oswego, N. Y., January 26, 1850," Manuscript 4, 1850.

and canonical, appears then to have led to this balanced approach of dual fulfilment which she applies to Daniel.²⁰

4. Conclusion

The 1919 Bible Conference gives us insight into many aspects of early Adventism, but in-particular sheds light in this case on both the role and value of the Apocrypha in the waning years after Mrs. White's death. What we find is that the books of Maccabees and their main villain, Antiochus Epiphanes IV, were vitally important and recognized as authentic and valuable by some for an understanding of biblical prophecy. This followed the tradition of early Adventism and the White's early appeals for increased study into these materials.

The one weakness in many of these approaches from 1919 is that while they proposed that large parts of Daniel mirrored Antiochus, and though some proposed a wheel within a wheel model, they never actually attempted to propose a fully developed and practical double fulfillment proposal. In all their attempts, they consistently try to blend the two together, rather than laying out two separate ways in which the prophecies were each fulfilled. The discussions at 1919 mirror Ellen White's own comments about the Hellenistic period and reveal that Mrs. White's implicit and repeated suggestions of double or partial fulfillment in Daniel at this time were shared by a number of others.

The reality of this evidence points us toward an important conclusion: that Mrs. White appears to have personally believed and privately shared convictions of the partial

²⁰ Prescott reveals that some understood Mrs. White to have dismissed the Antiochus interpretation because she had wrote that the word "sacrifice" should not be added to the Hebrew. However, this ignores the idea of double fulfilment. *General Conference of SDA, 1919 Bible Conference Collection*, ed. M. C. Wilcox et al. (General Conference of SDA, 1919), 612.

fulfillment of Daniel's prophecies at the time of the books of Maccabees. Having read and owned many scholarly books in her library discussing the preterist view of Daniel, it appears that she had come to agree with the scholarly consensus that still exists everywhere outside modern Adventism. Yet, she did not limit such fulfilment only or primarily to then. She and others like Lacey recognized the incomplete preterist interpretation as only a sign of the true fulfillment to come. As the Apocrypha however withered away in importance after her death, these views became less and less convincing or interesting to the new rise of fundamentalism and evangelicalism that was imposing itself onto Seventh-day Adventist leadership.

The result of this study is a fascinating call for pause. Have we, in largely ignoring or minimizing the Maccabees and Antiochus, removed our proper sense of the prophecies which many earlier Adventists had worked with? And could our ability to wrestle with them be improved if we were to follow the course not taken then, by attempting to read them as *both* preterist and historicist? The two views do not necessarily need to compete with each other and we would probably be better off as a church if we could admit as much.