

How Restoration Groups Utilize Apocalyptic Literature

By

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C. K. Chesterton has stated one doesn't understand his religion unless he understands the faith of others. Bookshelves of anti-cult material abound from fundamentalist publishers who attempt to evaluate the religion of restorationist communities of faith while showing little or no understanding about what leads a person to be a disciple of one of these particular sects. First of all, the disciple or potential member usually isn't satisfied either with life's circumstances or the religious environment they experienced in the home or community. Potential members are often challenged by alternative view of reality (Barker 1983, 26). For many the heaven-hell paradigm as taught by fundamentalist Christianity has no relevance to their day to day lifestyle or existence. Therefore they are looking for an ideology or faith community that has special revelation contained in its theology and these questions are not usually dealt with by traditional church groups. A potential restoration member is usually not content with the direction of society and has a great deal of tension and generally believes that society will not end on a positive note. The rejection syndrome is quite prevalent here and the seeker is generally unaware of the pathology that awaits them as they search for a group who resonates with their own thinking.

The unsuspecting student of Biblical Prophecy may not realize the "day for a year" concepts did not originate in North America but came out of the Enlightenment and Scholastic Periods in Europe to be applied to Daniel and Revelation in the New World. Expositors out of Britain, France, Germany, and other leading nations gave rise to the Historicist method of interpreting Apocalyptic Literature which opposed the Roman Church and the papacy in particular based on Daniel's little horn. The 1260 days in the Book of Revelation was seen by scholars such as Philipp Nicolai and Johannes Piscator as the rise of papal power and its dominance over Europe which would last to approximately 1798. It would begin with Justinian 554 AD and end with the French Revolution in 1798. Then, at the end of a probationary period (see Rev 11:18), the Kingdom of the Son of Man from Daniel 7 would be established. This Apotelesmatic (Ford 1980, 339) approach begins with the life setting context of the ancient writer (a *Sitz im Leben*) and telescopes through history down to the final eschaton which forces the exegete or the historical theologian to use historical events with apocalyptic literature to answer Daniel's ten toes coupled with the 2300 days of evening and morning sacrifices now applied to prophetic years. Even nations such as the Turks are the last power mentioned in Dan 11:44 and the Prince Eugene's Great Victory over the Turks in 1699 is seen by both Brightman, Cressener and Lloyd to be the Victory over the Beast. In a similar fashion, Daniel 9:27's 70 weeks are used to show a 483 year prophecy which would be terminated in the Week of the Ministry of the Messiah. The final 70th Week would either be completed by the church at the stoning of Stephen in AD 34 (see Acts 7) or as dispensationalists claim, the Messiah would return in the middle of the prophetic week to complete His ministry and to restore Israel during the Messianic Reign. The "day for a year" advocates state Daniel's 2300 days and the 1290 days

How Restoration Groups Utilize Apocalyptic Literature

coupled with the 1335 days and the time of the two witnesses combine to complete the 1260 years simultaneously. This concept was introduced by Drue Cressener in 1690.

“This schematization of history is developed even more in that section of I Enoch known as the Apocalypse of Weeks (93.1-10; 91.12-17). There, the history of the world is divided into ten ‘weeks’ of unequal lengths, each of which is marked by some great event. From the point of view of the writer seven ‘weeks’ are in the past, and three are still to come. These three represent the messianic age at the close of which the final judgment takes place” (Russell 1964, 226-227).

Other rabbinic times schemes divided the world into twelve parts contained in the Testimony of Abraham 7b where, once again, the twelve parts are separated by great historical events putting the world in a duration of 7000 years (Ibid). So literal years are not as important as the timing of historical events which picture God’s complete interval between the events. Rabbinic commentators have often stated that Daniel in his 70 weeks prophecy is using a similar figure of speech when he states “70 weeks shall be determined upon thy people” (Dan 9:24). On the American scene John Darby of the Plymouth Brethren has to answer the problems of the 70 weeks being fulfilled and no messianic kingdom having arrived. Thus began the train of thought which divided the 69th from the 70th week which the Messiah would complete with the gathering of Israel and the Church to complete their separate roles. The roots of dispensational theology were born.

At America’s earliest beginnings the foundations were set for a hotbed of restoration theology to develop. America was the land of promise where a new Zion society could be developed with a new exodus to take place which would give rebirth and a new application to Old World biblical prophecies. Many of the Founding Fathers believed that Americans were descendants of the Lost Ten Tribes (McKillop 1902, 498). These New World prophecies gave way to mystical writings, divination, seer stones and other prophetic devices which were installed to develop a continuing revelation and to serve as counterpart to ancient times in the modern world. It is commonly assumed among these groups that the early church fell into apostasy just as had Israel. Therefore the Creeds and the Councils and the apostolic succession were not reliable sources in identifying true Christianity because they were all considered to be in a state of apostasy by these restorationists in the New World.

Simultaneously, Charles Finney and the great Sunday school and theological movements were happening in the mainline denominations. The Princetonians promoted such greats as Charles Hodge. Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone would provide the seed bed for an American ethos within Christian thought which included the rite of baptism being required for church membership and a prophetic warning against the fallen Roman Catholic Church (Boring 1997, 375). Some would advocate soul sleep and no instrumental music to be a part of church worship. This New World approach to the faith would take its shape in Cambellite groups such as Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ and other independent Cambellite movements. In years to come, the Disciples of Christ would move in a modernist direction. The preaching of George Whitfield led the way in the coffee house revivals which affected Great Britain and American Christianity. William Miller, a Baptist preacher, began to follow the train of

How Restoration Groups Utilize Apocalyptic Literature

thought which began in the Reformation about speculative prophecy with a day for a year pattern through the Holy Day symbology which was from the Sanctuary discussed in Daniel 8:14. The fulfillment of this scripture was originally thought to be the earthly sanctuary. Historian LeRoy Edwin Froom states in his Movement of Destiny that members from over 70 denominations took part in the original movement of William Miller and in 1843, a second exodus of over 100,000 members left mainline churches (Froom 1971, 68-71). The impact of this movement upon North American Christianity cannot be over emphasized. Later, Ellen G. White would reverse this teaching with the Great Disappointment of October 22, 1844 by stating the cleansing of God's sanctuary occurred in Heaven and an earthly fulfillment was not possible because the Savior remained in the Outer Court of the Sanctuary until October 22, 1844 when He was allowed to fulfill the typology of the Holy of Holies. Adventists have advanced the notion that Ellen G. White received by revelation the idea that the Reign of the Messiah would be in Heaven during the thousand years. However this theory was advanced in Germany by Matthias Hoe von Hoeneegg (1580-1645), Doctor of Theology, Wittenberg, during the Enlightenment Period of biblical studies. Johann Petri advanced the theory with the day for a year concept/2300 days based on Ezekiel 4:6 as early as 1768. It was reintroduced by Samuel Sheffield Snow who began the Seventh Month Movement (Schwarz 1989, 49). Restorationist denominations other than Seventh Day Adventist adopted the day for a year principle. The Radio Church of God (Worldwide Church of God) founded by Herbert W. Armstrong in 1934 applied this view to the 1260 days of the Book of Revelation, chapter 12. This same principle was also applied by George A Njeim in his commentary entitled Insights into the Book of Revelation – As Illuminated by the Book of Mormon (Njeim 1970). Joseph Smith in the JST changes days to years in Rev 12:5 (Smith 1970, 519) probably to suggest that the stay in the wilderness would be of long duration (Draper 1991, 138). Elbert A. Smith in his book Restoration: A Study in Prophecy ties the “day for a year” principle to be fulfilled in 1830 on April 6th when the inauguration of LDS traditions occurred (Smith 1946, 67-69; 189-194).

In modern times the annual festival days have been a constant source of debate. In the 1840's, during the Millerite Period, the Seventh Month Movement appeared. Studies surrounding the Day of Atonement and the controversies about how to interpret Daniel 8:14 which lead to the Great Disappointment of October 22, 1843 and October 22, 1844 lie at the foundations of this movement. Portions grew into the Midnight Cry sub-category but, as we shall see, the Holy Days were adopted by other related Sabbatarian groups. The Millerite Period has been called by some “The Movement of the Great Awakening”. But just how large the Seventh Month Movement actually became and the leaders it impacted is a matter of conjecture. Some have estimated that, at its peak, it may have had as many as 300,000 adherents. If this is true, it would not be surprising for other groups to be impacted by its teachings (for more information see the Seventh Day Adventist Encyclopedia, Commentary Reference Series, Vol 10, pp. 1337-1338).

During the same time period, a movement within Mormonism emerged in 1848 led by James Strang who founded the Hebrew Mormonism Movement. They believed in One God, the annual Holy Days, the weekly Sabbath and the teachings of the Book of Mormon (Thomsen 1971, 24-33). Later, in the 1970's, David L Roberts would lead a break-away group of over 11,000 Sabbatarian and Holy Day followers.

How Restoration Groups Utilize Apocalyptic Literature

In 1858, Gilbert Cramer from the Marion Party, founded eight churches which would ultimately become the Church of God Seventh Day. Out of this ministry arose the Remnant of Israel under the leadership of G. G. Rupert who definitely advocated the meaning of Holy Day observance (Rupert, 1929). Today, some are suggesting that G. G. Rupert was a delegate at the 1888 Seventh Day Adventist Conference which began the change of direction of the SDA Church from its founders with the departure of Wagner and Jones. This conference was very significant because its theme was "Righteousness by Faith" and was needed to free Sabbatarians from legalism. Unfortunately, as the years passed, many of the founding voices of Adventism who once gave support to the Seventh Month Movement were no longer influential. Ellen White even stated that the Adventist camp meetings should replicate the Feast of Tabernacles (see booklet *Ellen White Speaks Out on the Work of the Jewish People*, Sanford Howard). Wagner and Jones argued that the Holy Days were not the subject of the "weak and beggarly elements" described in the writings of Paul but were indeed forms of fallen Judaism mixed with pagan observances. Today, a growing number of scholars such as Troy Martin, Mark Nanas and Paul Torazi support this view. It should be noted, that in 1870, D. T. Niles and other scholars would begin to see the meaning of the Holy Days contained in the Book of Revelation. This would later be enlarged by Frank Holbrook and expanded further by Lewis F. Were in the 1980's. However, in the early 1900's, many Adventist writers such as F. C. Gilbert (*The Jewish Problem and Judaism and Christianity*) tied Adventist prophecy to the Day of Atonement and other festival days. He intended to establish Jewish missions in the city of New York but the \$1500 in contributions to this work were never forwarded to him from the General Conference of the SDA Church.

From the 1840's until 1917, Methodism in the United States had three major Sabbatarian outgrowths. Teachings from Methodism which were adopted by the founders of these groups were the doctrine of man as soul-ish being, the free agency of man, the eschatological Kingdom of God which will heal creation at the end of time and the doctrine of holiness and sanctification, vegetarianism and emphasis on healing through herbs and natural practices. Gilbert Cramer who founded the Church of God Seventh Day in 1858 had been a Methodist. Ellen G White grew up in the Methodist Church until she was a teenager. Then, in 1917, a former Methodist bishop named Johnson founded with two Adventist leaders the denomination called the House of God. He advocated the Kingdom of God on earth and the keeping of the annual festivals. This history of his ministry reaches back into the 1890's with missions to Africa and today, has approximately 10 million members worldwide.

Non-Adventist writers such as Clarence Larkin were also very influential in bringing the Holy Day concept to Christian readers in the 1930's. Thus Herbert Armstrong would have had many sources from within the Church of God 7th Day tradition such as A. N. Duggar and C.O. Dodd and G. G. Rupert on which to base his Holy Day theology.

By the 1950's, Adventism was undergoing many changes. The church was attempting to be more evangelical in its emphasis on Christ with a grace orientation. L. E. Froom, a fantastic historian, who problematically, downplayed the role of the Seventh Month Movement as well as Ellen White's fallen nature of Christ, met with Walter Martin and Donald Gray Barnhouse. These meetings resulted in the 1957 publication, Questions

How Restoration Groups Utilize Apocalyptic Literature

on Doctrine. Not all Adventist scholars were pleased with this publication. Even Zondervan, the evangelical publisher, questioned Walter Martin on the lack of follow up in several areas such as Froom's statements about 70 Trinitarian denominations being in the formation of Adventist theology and the non-Trinitarian leanings of Uriah Smith, Wagner and Jones in the beginning of Adventist history (Smith 1944, 215-219). Walter Martin simply touted his credentials as proof of the excellent scholarship for his part of this publication as a defense of its legitimacy (Larson, 1986, 292-300).

As the years progressed, Adventist scholars such M. L. Andreason, Raymond Cottrell, Ken Richards, Desmond Ford, and many others began to question the classical Adventist positions taught about the history of their beginnings and the direction the church was taking. There were those who wanted to go back to the non-Trinitarian, Holy Day, Kingdom of God on earth positions of the church. Others such as Desmond Ford, wanted the church to move in an evangelical direction while some at La Sierra University have tried to place the church on a more progressive path. Once again, the church is beginning to denounce all feast day keepers. Angel Rodriguez, PhD, and others have denounced the entire feast day movement. In spite of this, the ethos of feast day movements are still behind the thinking of much of Seventh Day Adventist theology. On such example is Leslie Hardinge's Shadows of His Sacrifice. He does an absolutely brilliant job of teaching Christianity the meaning of the Holy Days and the lessons that should impact their thinking about the Messiah.

Today there is a growing but small number of small groups of Adventist and Mormon Holy Day Keepers who are attempting to resurrect the Seventh Month Movement in the Adventist Church. Dr. John Vandenberg is leading the charge with a few scholars and pastors by showing the Seventh Month Movement should never have been buried in Adventist history but modified to exclude its theological errors. It should have retained the spirit of Holy Day keeping in the worship and the life of the church.

The Investigative Judgment teaching of Ellen G. White is in direct opposition to the plain New Testament text contained in the Book of Hebrews where Christ had already passed through the Veil into the Holy of Holies to become our High Priest (Heb 9:1-26). The term *ta hagia* shows Christ has already ascended through the Veil and has provided the Atonement once and for all. Once the Great Disappointment had past, many groups claiming the original teaching of William Miller began to appear. Among them were the Advent Christian Church which was the direct descendant of William Miller's original teachings. Other groups such as the Seventh Day Adventists would accept Trinitarianism and add the Seventh Day, the Investigative Judgment, a health message and other distinctives to the theology and lifestyle mix. Others who would emphasize the millennial reign and sleep of the dead with an Arian or Unitarian view of the Godhead would be the Church of God of Abrahamic Faith movement founded by Benjamin Wilson and the Marionites founded by Gilbert Cranmer which became the Church of God 7th Seventh Day whose teachings would inspire Herbert W. Armstrong to begin The World Tomorrow radio broadcast and the "Plain Truth" magazine in 1933. Mr. Armstrong would retain his ministerial credentials from the Church of God 7th Day until 1937.

How Restoration Groups Utilize Apocalyptic Literature

By 1870, Charles Taze Russell would teach that Christ would come spiritually to his band of followers in 1914.

“The desolating of Jerusalem, and the land of Judah by the Babylonians in 607 B.C. E. marked the overthrow of the Messianic kingdom of David, and hence this is what marked the beginning of the ‘seven times’ of the Gentile domination of the world of mankind. Unalterably, then, the 2,520 years of the Gentile Times began then, and, because of beginning there, they ended in early autumn of the year 1941 C. E. “ (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania 1973, 261).

However in 1931, the Watchtower Bible and tracts would alter this position and teach that only the “called out ones” would go to Heaven during the millennial reign and only the 144,000 of this group could take communion creating two classes of Jehovah’s Witnesses since the membership roles exceeded 144,000 (Gruss 1970, 159)(Watchtower Bible & Tract Society 1968, 86-90). Many of these erroneous prophecies were allegedly taken from a Daniel and Revelation blend. The theological heritage of the Russellites extends even beyond the formation of the North American colonies. During this period, the Unitarian Godhead movement gained a great deal of theological acceptance with such groups as the Christadelphians and the Dawn Bible Association who held Michael Servetus in a great deal of esteem due to his Socinianism view of the Godhead (see my article on the Council of Venice, www.academic.edu). This stance is still held by the National Church of Poland to this very day so there is a historical precedent for this doctrine within the Christian church (Hastings, 2000). However, it is entirely possible that John Calvin arranged the murder by burning at the stake of Michael Servetus on October 27, 1553 in defense of Calvin’s view of the Christian Trinity. Activities such as this only add fuel to the fire in support of restoration theology and its rejection of the historical Christian Creeds, although, it should be noted not everything within the Creeds of Christendom have been rejected by restorationist groups.

Many restorationist groups are extremely anti-intellectual in their approach to Scripture and History leaving the average member to feel these doctrinal issues which are so important for group identity have seldom if ever been discussed by the church at large (T’Kach 1997, 130-131). History and theological development do not maintain these positions. For example, John Wycliffe, William Tyndale and Nestorius as well as Martin Luther and others taught soul sleep for the status of the dead (Martin 1965, 386). All one has to do is to read the book Heaven, A History and one will understand why many scholars will advocate an earthly paradise for God’s Kingdom which will take place at the final consummation of the universe (McDannell 1988, 29).

The groups who have stressed education in their growth and development are the RLDS traditions now the Community of Christ, the LDS Salt Lake City church within the Brigham Young traditions, the Seventh Day Adventists who have been strong in archaeology, creation science and health message, the Church of God of Prophecy movement emphasizing the Wesleyan approach to church history and the Advent Christian Church who has moved from a Unitarian stance to a Trinitarian concept while upholding the sleep of the dead and the Kingdom of God on earth as an end time

How Restoration Groups Utilize Apocalyptic Literature

scenario. The SDA tradition has given birth to over 58 Christian universities from medical institutions to archaeological PhD program from Andrews University. Atlanta Bible College from the Church of God of Abrahamic Faith has held academic symposiums that look very promising as they find their place in the world of scholarship within the Christian faith. Francis J Beckwith, Carl Mosser and Paul Owen state in their book, The New Mormon Challenge (Beckwith, 2002, 740) that Mormon scholarship has achieved a place in the academy unparalleled by any group commonly classified as a “new religious movement”. Education can be a real blessing and aid any sect or denomination in the upwardly mobile professional growth of its members. Simultaneously, education and professional growth produces challenges to the alternative reality in favor of paramount reality. This phenomenon in particular happens as students, leaders and religious scholars are educated to think beyond the confines of their particular religious movement. This causes great tension with the conservative leaders who attempt with all their might to hold fast to the original teachings of their sect while others try to modify, broaden or even reject some of the former positions of the faith community. The tension is always between academic freedom and confessional responsibility. C. Raymond Holmes stated, “In such schools, responsibility for revealed truth marks the limits of academic freedom, and the administration and faculty must take seriously the duty to teach and guard the faith of the church to which the school belongs” (Holmes 1989, 16). Wow! What an admission! No wonder F. F. Bruce has stated “denominational scholarship ain’t!” With that lack of objectivity, is it any wonder why our secular counterparts can opposed the findings of our religious academies? A movement locked into their past cannot advance. This is what creates the break between liberal and conservative ideology once denominations get to this threshold in their development.

One great exception to this growth pattern was promoted by Frederick M. Smith, PhD who became President of the RLDS and Dr. Joseph Luff who was one of the great prophetic writers about Israel. Dr. Smith’s writings in Comparative Religion were quite prolific (Smith 1918, 115). He promoted the expansion of Graceland College and along with Dr. Luff had a great devotion to unlocking an early patristic understanding of the early Hebrew Church (Ruoff 1979, 33). This was coupled with the unfolding drama of the Kingdom of God coming to this earth. All one has to do is to read the RLDS publications such as “Restoration Studies”, a periodical presenting a collection of essays about the history, beliefs and practices of the Community of Christ (RLDS) to understand the marvelous transition their professional teachers and scholars have given this church movement. The Community of Christ has shown remarkable courage in its transition from a restoration theological mindset to a progressive mainline ethos. This migration is given its community the freedom to truly grow and experience Christianity in broader terms than were previously maintained.

The Church of God has produced a few scholars over the decades but with the demise of the Worldwide Church of God the mid 1990’s, the academic tradition was never fully developed. The Jehovah Witnesses have started some vocational training but completely avoid making contributions to the world of academics even though they developed the New World Translation Bible which was not well received by textual critics or Bible translators. This New World Translation from 1950 claims to be a

How Restoration Groups Utilize Apocalyptic Literature

translation which followed Wescott and Hort's text but there were not capable translators on the project (Standish 1993, 175). As communities of faith develop and become professionally educated, some of their theological founding concepts are softened or eliminated as they seek wider acceptance in society at large. This general trend tends to occur after the centennial anniversary of the organization. Some groups who seek to avoid societal integration will revert back to their interpretation of the teachings of the founder with even more exclusion than the main body has continued to maintain. For example, study Hope International and the Reformed SDA church's relationship to the modern Seventh Day Adventist Church or the FLDS and its relationship and beliefs about the Utah LDS church. The same phenomenon exists with the ex-Worldwide Church of God movements. Joe T'kach called for his faith community to grow in the Gospel of Christ but still used the same dictatorial practices and polity to force the movement into traditional Christian thought. These examples show that the offshoots actually believe that the main body has apostatized from the original calling of their sect. So, some of the groups are truly a restoration of a restored theology of their own making.

The Layman's Home Missionary movement from Chester Springs, PA have made noticeable improvements in Jehovah's Witness Theology through books such as At-One-Ment Between God and Man – A Helping Hand for Bible Students and Christ Spirit Covenants – A Helping Hand for Bible Students.

Throughout church history, writes Raymond Brown, there have always been muffled voices who have attempted to correct the general Christian thrust in its Gentile trajectory. That could be the metanoia that prepare the church of the Kingdom (Brown 1984, 150). It is time these voices were heeded as Hans Kung illustrates in his statement that Jehovah Witness and Seventh Day Adventists have stayed closer to the true teachings of Daniel and see it as the heart of theological interpretation (Kung 1984, 90). Even other scholars such as Clark Pinnock and Edward Fudge are challenging the eternal duration of Hellfire. All this theological change suggests there can and should be more integration of restoration theology into the general Christian church to create spiritual and theological wholeness in a spirit of objectivity. Nominal Christianity is going to have to deal with its traditional teachings which were influenced by the Bible, tradition, the Creeds, liturgical worship and western neo-Platonic thought while the restorationists are going to have to separate themselves from cultic theological assumptions and exclusionary beliefs and promote their members to move forward in their Gospel understanding. The Eastern Christian churches such as the Coptics, Oriental Orthodox Church, the Eastern Orthodox churches, the Assyrians Church of the East, the Nestorians in India, the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Celtic Christian church in the British Isles and elsewhere have existed almost entirely unnoticed by Western Christianity even though they offer keys from our historical and liturgical past which link Christianity to its Hebrew foundation. The Christian church at large would be well served to study the Eastern and Celtic traditions.

Modern Apocalyptic studies considered the term "revelation" to be misunderstood by many. The original term *apocalyptos* meant "to lift the veil at the end of a wedding procession". Former expositors did not always consider the gap there was between Daniel and Revelation. The Bell and the Dragon, the Sibylline Oracles, the Slavonic

How Restoration Groups Utilize Apocalyptic Literature

Book of Enoch's account of the Celestial City, and the Dead Sea Scrolls as well as Matthew's and Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse, echoes of Isaiah 47 which were fulfilled in Revelation 17 with the Fall of Babylon were never considered by medieval expositors.

"The second vision, the vision of wisdom which Enoch saw . . . And I saw the dwellings of the holy ones and the places where the righteous reset. And they made request and interceded and prayed for the children of men. And righteousness flowed like water before them, and mercy like dew on the ground." (Eaton 199,172)

These prophetic trains of apocalyptic tradition expressed itself in prophetic oracles, covenant lawsuits, kingship decrees, prayers, judgments, enthronement psalms. The day for a year of Isaiah 4:6 belongs in Isaiah's own timeframe where he looked to a time in the post exilic era where the Reign of God would unite Israel and Judah and a new temple in Isaiah 44 which would symbolize a time when Yahweh would heal and give his truth to all nations.

In every religious tradition, there is a tendency to worship the teachings and practices we create even though all have positive and negative aspects in their theology and religious structures. This tendency can give way to cultic conversions rather than creating a holistic scriptural understanding about how God truly deals with human affairs. Biblical justice demands that God's people begin to operate from a spiritual reservoir which will promote growth in the Gospel from a healthy religious experience. Church dogmas are like portals into specific lines of thinking. To truly progress, one has to journey beyond all the portals accepting what is good rejecting the human limitations and to move Godward in an eternal pursuit of the Holy One.

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How Restoration Groups Utilize Apocalyptic Literature

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How Restoration Groups Utilize Apocalyptic Literature

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How Restoration Groups Utilize Apocalyptic Literature

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