GENERAL

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Published: September 3, 2026 | Index ID: #-

Uriah Smith, Daniel and the Revelation: A Deep Dive into a Pioneering 19th Century Commentary

In the annals of early Mormon scholarship, few names resonate as strongly as Uriah Smith. A prolific writer, editor, and visionary, Smith devoted much of his life to exploring the intersections between the ancient biblical texts and the emerging revelations of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Among his many works, the title *Daniel and the Revelation* stands out as a seminal study that bridges the prophetic visions of the Old Testament book of Daniel with the apocalyptic imagery of the New Testament's Revelation. This article offers a comprehensive examination of that work—its author, context, themes, and lasting influence on both Mormon and broader Christian thought.

Who Was Uriah Smith?

Uriah Smith (1830 1884) was an industrious scholar, poet, and one of the most prolific writers in the early Latter Day Saint movement. Born in Pennsylvania, he was baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in 1847 and quickly became a trusted scribe for church leaders. Smith's most enduring legacy is perhaps the *Smith–Ketcham Journal*, a comprehensive encyclopedia of Mormon doctrine, history, and scripture that remains a reference point for scholars today.

Beyond his encyclopedic work, Smith was known for his lyrical prose and his passion for scriptural interpretation. He believed that the ancient biblical prophecies were not merely historical narratives but living, unfolding revelations that spoke directly to the contemporary faithful. This conviction led him to produce a series of commentaries on key biblical books, culminating in his ambitious study of *Daniel and the Revelation*.

What Is "Daniel and the Revelation"?

Published in 1877, *Daniel and the Revelation* is a two part treatise that examines the prophetic visions of the prophet Daniel alongside the apocalyptic revelations of John's book of Revelation. Smith treats the two books not as isolated texts but as complementary strands of a single divine tapestry. His thesis is simple yet profound: the symbolic imagery found in Daniel—such as the four beasts, the statue of Nebuchadnezzar, and the seventy weeks—prefigures the events described in Revelation, including the rise and fall of empires, the appearance of the Antichrist, and the ultimate establishment of God's kingdom.

Smith's approach is characterized by meticulous exegesis, comparative analysis, and a distinctively Mormon lens. He draws on a range of sources—from classical biblical commentaries to contemporary scientific theories—to illuminate the symbolic meanings behind the visions. In doing so, he seeks to provide Latter Day Saints with a deeper understanding of how the ancient prophecies align with modern revelations, especially those contained in the *Book of Mormon* and the *Doctrine and Covenants*.

Historical Context: 19th Century America and the Rise of Prophetic Literature

The late 1800s in America was a period of rapid change and spiritual searching. The Second Great Awakening had already reshaped the religious landscape, and new movements—such as the Latter Day Saint movement—were gaining traction. In this milieu, scholars and laypeople alike sought to reconcile ancient scripture with contemporary experience.

Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation* emerged against this backdrop of theological curiosity. The book was part of a broader trend of prophetic literature that aimed to interpret biblical prophecy in light of modern events, from the rise of industrialization to the political upheavals of the Civil War. Smith's work, therefore, can be seen as an attempt to provide a coherent narrative that linked the past, present, and future—an endeavor that resonated with many who felt that the world was in a state of constant flux.

Key Themes and Interpretations

One of Smith's most detailed analyses concerns the four beasts described in Daniel 7. He interprets each beast as representing a successive world empire—Babylon, Medo Persia, Greece, and Rome—mirroring the way Revelation's beasts symbolize contemporary political powers. Smith argues that the beasts' shared features (such as the lion's head and the eagle's wings) signify a continuity of oppressive rule that culminates in the rise of the Antichrist.

In Daniel 2, the statue's successive materials—gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay—symbolize the rise and fall of empires. Smith parallels this with Revelation's depiction of the "great beast" made of various elements, suggesting that the statue's final piece (clay) foreshadows the fragility of human institutions in contrast to God's eternal kingdom.

Smith delves into the prophetic timeline of the seventy weeks in Daniel 9, proposing a correlation with the timeline of the Latter Day Saints' history. He posits that the "seventy weeks" represent a period of preparation, revelation, and eventual fulfillment, aligning with the Church's own development from 1830 to the late 19th century.

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of Smith's work is his attempt to synthesize biblical prophecy with contemporary revelation. He interprets Revelation's apocalyptic imagery as not merely symbolic but as a literal, unfolding process that includes the coming of the Second Coming, the establishment of the New Jerusalem, and the final judgment. Smith's Mormon perspective allows him to connect these events with the revelations recorded in the *Book of Mormon*, thereby reinforcing the idea that prophecy is a continuous, living dialogue between God and humanity.

Impact on Mormon Thought

Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation* had a profound influence on early Mormon eschatology. By offering a detailed, scriptural basis for understanding the end times, he helped shape the Church's teachings on the Second Coming, the gathering of Israel, and the role of modern revelation in interpreting ancient prophecy.

His work also inspired subsequent scholars. For instance, Joseph Smith's own writings on the Book of Daniel found echoes in Smith's comparative approach, while later leaders such as Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball referenced his analyses in sermons and doctrinal discussions. Smith's emphasis on the continuity between ancient and modern prophecy helped establish a tradition of prophetic interpretation that persists in Latter Day Saint thought to this day.

Reception and Criticism

While *Daniel and the Revelation* was widely praised for its depth and scholarship, it was not without controversy. Critics from more traditional Protestant backgrounds questioned Smith's interpretations, particularly his tendency to read modern events directly into biblical prophecy. Others within the Church felt that Smith's reliance on speculative

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