

# Weighed in the Balances and Found Wanting

A review of David Flynn's *Temple at the Center of Time: Newton's Bible Codex Deciphered and the Year 2012* (2008)

**D**URING the summer of 2008, David's Flynn's *Temple at the Center of Time* was released to a small chorus of effusive praise emanating from a number of evangelical websites and blogs.<sup>1</sup> The book's central claim is that the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is linked to other notable geographical locations around the globe by prophetically-significant distances. Isaac Newton's prophetic writings provide one of the foundations for this work of eschatological speculation aimed at the reading public. On 14 August 2008 WorldNetDaily, a popular evangelical news site, heralded the publication of the book in a celebratory review entitled: "Is the Temple Mount God's time bomb? New book sees Jerusalem real estate as road map to future events".<sup>2</sup> The anonymous review claimed that the book had reached the number 1 spots on Amazon.com for "unexplained mysteries" and "world history" and had attained number 73 overall. WorldNetDaily also offered the book for sale on its website. The review concludes: "Before it is even officially released, Flynn's book is causing a sensation in some circles where it is being compared to 'The Bible Code'". Whether or not comparison to Michael Drosnin's Bible Code actually elevates a book's status will be left to each reader's individual judgement, but the analogy was clearly meant to do so.

Continuing to market the book, WorldNetDaily published two further enthusiastic reviews on their site. The second appeared on 17 August 2008 and was entitled: "'Temple Mount points to location of lost Ark': new best-selling prophecy book claims resting place is Mt Nebo".<sup>3</sup> The third was posted on 16 September 2008 and bore the headline: "End of the world in 2013? New book recalculates Newton's endtimes clock".<sup>4</sup> This third report summarises Flynn's claims that Newton was wrong about 2060 and that the date to look for is instead 2013 (although the title of his book gives the year as 2012). The report also draws attention to the speculation about the conclusion of the Mayan calendar at the end of 2012 and the possibility that this may signal the end of the world as we know it.

The aim of this review is to demonstrate that Flynn's new book—popular or not—is shot full of errors, distorts historical truth, displays a reckless disregard for the rules of sound scholarship, makes a mockery of biblical exegesis, shamelessly trots out false etymologies, is replete with poor (or non-existent) editing, misunderstands Newton's prophetic views and, what is more, most certainly does *not* fulfill the claim of its author to have uncovered the secrets of "Newton's Bible Codex"—whatever that may be. In short, this review issues a strong warning: *caveat lector*.

After reading such a thorough-going indictment of the contents of the book, some may wonder why it is necessary to produce a detailed response. Would not such a book be seen by all for what it is? If the errors in this book are really so egregious, why devote time and energy to a written rebuttal? Two reasons immediately offer themselves. First, careful and professional Newton scholarship is being mishandled and misinformation about Newton is being spread. Second, partly because of the uncritical endorsement by WorldNetDaily, many undiscerning readers are rhapsodising about a book that does not accomplish what it promises its readers. To put it another way: they are being misled (perhaps unintentionally).

But there is one more reason. Among the transcriptions of Newton's prophetic writings on which Flynn relies in his book are some that I either administered or transcribed myself. Flynn also either misuses or ignores my scholarship on Newton's prophetic views, especially with respect to the 2060 date. I thus find myself indirectly involved with (but not responsible for) some of the contents of this book and, accordingly, believe it is incumbent on me to identify its apparently fraudulent nature and to distance it from professional Newton scholarship. It is my hope that this review will prove useful to others who may in the future write popular works on Newton's prophetic views. It is not my practice to comment on works of popular prophetic interpretation. But when someone misuses the scholarship of Newton produced by my colleagues and me in such a sensationalistic way and, what is more, promotes misunderstanding about Newton's prophetic beliefs, a line has been crossed. Part of the problem relates to a misconception about a year that lies in the future.

### **Newton and 2060 A.D.**

Let me explain. In 2002 the BBC began production on a television documentary intended to explore Isaac Newton's non-scientific work—that is, his studies in alchemy, Christian theology and biblical prophecy.<sup>5</sup> I was asked to serve as one of the historical consultants for the documentary and was also interviewed in Jerusalem and Cambridge. In Jerusalem I was interviewed with some of the manuscripts that make up the Newton-Yahuda Collection at the Jewish National and University Library. One of these manuscripts contains some casual jottings of Newton on the time of the end. This scrap of paper showed Newton's informal calculations with the prophetic time period of 1260 days, which Newton, along with other historicist prophetic exegetes of his day, took to be years. The time period is given in Daniel 7:25 and 12:7 (as “a time, times and half a time”). It reappears in the New Testament in Revelation 11:3, 12:6 and 13:5. For Newton this time period represented the period of the deepest corruption of the Church. A fervent Christian and passionate believer in the Bible, Newton was convinced that the majority of Christendom was astray from the purity of primitive Christianity. For him, the Trinity was the doctrinal centerpiece of the corruption and the Roman Catholic Church its institutional font. On the manuscript scrap shown on the BBC documentary Newton had suggested that the 1260-year time period began in 800 A.D. Simple arithmetic that would not have taxed a mathematician as great as Newton provides the end-point of the period. In Newton's own handwriting can be seen the date 2060 A.D.

As part of their publicity efforts, the BBC asked me to make myself available to the media prior to the screening of the documentary. I was interviewed for London's *Daily Telegraph*, which ran a front-page story on 22 February 2003 entitled: “Newton set 2060 for end of world”. Then followed an international media frenzy that lasted roughly seven days (with residual effects that continue to the present). To say that I had mixed feelings about the way the story was being handled is an understatement. In the interviews that followed, I tried to explain the nuances of Newton's prophetic researches, emphasizing that they were examples of a high scholarly tradition in his own age, not the ravings of a crackpot. While there was, thankfully, some intelligent reporting, most of it veered towards the sensational. Sadly, the media usually prefers to deal in sound-bites and exaggerated distortions.

An unfortunate by-product of this sensationalistic news story is that another myth about Newton was born: that he was a wild-eyed enthusiast and prophetic date-setter. The reality was the

reverse, for in the now-famous 2060 manuscript Newton was arguing *against* the date-setters of his own age, contending that the time of the end, when the return of the Jews to Israel, the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple, the Battle of Armageddon and the return of Christ would occur, was still centuries away.<sup>6</sup> But Newton also believed that setting dates based on biblical prophecy was a reckless endeavour that ultimately brought discredit to God's Word and the Almighty Himself when the predicted dates inevitably failed. Many examples of such bold predictions since Newton's lifetime have vindicated the wisdom of his prophetic caution. Flynn's book is both a partial by-product of the popular understanding of Newton generated by the 2003 news story and an example of the very thing Newton spoke against: prophetic date-setting.

During the media frenzy that arose in the wake of the *Daily Telegraph* story I posted a statement about Newton's 2060 date on my website.<sup>7</sup> This statement places the date in its proper context and demonstrates that Newton was not predicting that the end of the world would occur in 2060, only that it seemed likely to him when he wrote the jottings that the events of the time of the end could not come to a conclusion until around the third quarter of the twenty-first century at the earliest. Then, at the end of 2003, I published a scholarly paper offering reflections on the 2060 media story along with a more detailed explanation of Newton's eschatology.<sup>8</sup> Strangely, even though my name is given in the *Daily Telegraph* report that David Flynn highlights in his book's seventeenth chapter, and even though my statement on the 2060 date and my 2003 paper are available on my personal website, Flynn neither contacted me nor included references to my material on the 2060 "prediction", even though it seems likely that part of chapter 17 is dependant on my statement or my paper or both. If he had taken the trouble to get in touch with me, I could have saved him from misrepresenting Newton's prophetic scholarship. If he had taken to heart the warnings presented in my statement and article, he would not have so thoroughly misused Newton's name and so heavily distorted his prophetic writings.

### **The problems begin on the cover**

Turning to the book, one needs to go no further than the title itself to see problems. There is no "Newton's Bible Codex" and despite the claim made in the subtitle Flynn in any case certainly has not deciphered any aspect of Newton's prophetic writings not already understood by Newton scholars. But it is worse than this. Not only has he offered no new valid insights into Newton's prophetic views, but he has grossly misinterpreted and misrepresented elements of Newton's prophetic writings that have already been established by sound scholarship. But to what does the expression "Newton's Bible Codex" refer? A 'codex' is simply a book and yet Newton did not write a single book on prophecy, but a series of manuscript drafts from which a tiny portion was excerpted to produce the posthumous publication *Observations on the prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of St. John* (1733).<sup>9</sup> It is possible that Flynn or his publishers chose the term "Bible Codex" to suggest an association with the "Bible Code", which is indeed mentioned in Flynn's book.<sup>10</sup> Another possibility is that an attempt was made to ride on the coattails of the *Da Vinci Code*.<sup>11</sup> As for the use of Newton's name in the title and his status as a prophetic exegete in the book itself, it seems be that Flynn has attempted to borrow from Newton's historical and scientific prestige to bolster the status of his own work.

The publisher's description on the back cover presents additional problems. This description refers to the belief that many thinkers in the Scientific Revolution had in the *prisca sapientia*, or

ancient wisdom—that is, the belief that the Ancients possessed high levels of knowledge about nature and spiritual things that were either lost or corrupted since deep Antiquity. Some figures during the early modern period, Newton included, believed that elements of this ancient wisdom could be recovered. The book’s description goes on to state: “Many have investigated whether Newton believed that this original pure knowledge existed. Some conclude that he did in fact search for it”. These statements will sound odd to anyone familiar with Newton’s career. We *know* that Newton was committed to a belief in the existence of the *prisca sapientia*. We *know* that he sought to recover elements of it. There is no secret about any of this; nor is there any debate about it among Newton scholars. Throughout his book, Flynn uses the expression *prisca sapientia* as if it were some sort of mathematical key that unlocks biblical prophecy. This is not what it meant in the early modern period and this is certainly not what it meant to Newton himself.

The description then goes on to make a claim that can only be described as simultaneously outlandish and untrue: “For the first time in history, in *Temple at the Center of Time*, David Flynn uncovers what Newton was looking for and, in so doing, proves that pivotal events in history are unquestionably connected in time and space to the Temple of Jerusalem”. It is true that Newton spent years studying biblical prophecy and that he believed the Jewish Temple was central to God’s purpose with the world, yet despite what may be implied by the statement on the back cover, David Flynn most definitely has not uncovered any secret in Newton’s prophetic writings, nor does he “prove” his main thesis about geography and prophecy, as I will show below.

While one must make allowances for the desire of a publishing house to market its product and while there is nothing wrong with a little healthy enthusiasm, Flynn’s treatment of Newton’s prophetic works reveals that he either misunderstands or is misrepresenting these writings, which in any case are not yet fully accessible and certainly have not yet been fully studied. These are complex writings that should not be mined for select quotations to serve individual agendas. The final sentence of the book description adds delusion to false claims: “Flynn’s revelations are sure to be heralded as one of the greatest discoveries in modern times”. It would be a sad indictment of the good sense of the majority of humanity if this were to come to pass. Fortunately, this turn of events is extremely unlikely and the publishers probably realise this.

### **Factual errors**

The book *Temple at the Center of Time* is replete with examples of poor scholarship, sloppy editing and outright factual errors. I will now offer some examples, beginning with the latter. Near the end of his Introduction, Flynn claims that “the majority of Newton’s works were theological” and that “Newton produced three times as many theological papers than scientific”.<sup>12</sup> I will pass over the awkward grammar in the second statement. Since no definitive estimate of the size of Newton’s manuscript corpus has yet been produced—even by the Newton Project—it is hard to say how Flynn can be so confident. We do have a good enough sense of the size of the collection of papers to know that it is neither true that the majority of Newton’s writings are theological in nature nor that there are three times more theological papers than those on natural philosophical and mathematical subjects. It does seem clear, however, that the theological section of Newton’s corpus is the single largest category.

In the penultimate paragraph of his Introduction, the author writes: “A strange condition remains; despite the resolve in which Newton searched for the *prisca theologia* and the *prisca*

*sapientia*, he did not leave any direct assertions concerning the matter”.<sup>13</sup> This is wildly off the mark. Newton did write directly about the *prisca sapientia*. His unpublished manuscripts “Origines” and the Classical Scholia are but two examples that are commonly discussed in publications on Newton.

In writing about the history of Newton’s manuscript writings in his first chapter, Flynn asserts:

It had not been realized until fairly recently that Newton wrote far more concerning theology, philosophy, and even alchemy than he did in natural philosophy. The family of the Earl of Portsmouth inherited Newton’s vast collection of writing and stored it in the library of Cambridge University. These papers were held in Cambridge until 1936 when they were purchased in auction from John Maynard Keynes.

These three sentences are full of misinformation. First, Newton did not write more on alchemy than he did on natural philosophy and in any case many of Newton’s alchemical manuscripts are not his original compositions, but rather transcriptions from other alchemists. This is not to say that this collection is not both interesting and important to an understanding of Newton’s career, for it most certainly is. The majority (not all) of the manuscripts did descend to the Portsmouth family, Newton’s collateral descendants. However, the earls of Portsmouth did not store the entire collection of manuscripts at the Cambridge University Library except for several years in the Victorian period when they were put on deposit at the library to be assessed by a team of scholars. Cambridge University retained the scientific papers, but the rest went back to the Portsmouth family. These non-scientific papers were then auctioned at Sotheby’s in London in 1936. Keynes bought a large collection of Newton’s papers from this auction and left them to King’s College, Cambridge when he died in 1946. A close reading of the final sentence of the above quotation will reveal nothing but confusion: if the manuscripts were held by Cambridge why would they have been purchased “from John Maynard Keynes”? And why would Cambridge sell *Newton* manuscripts that it already had in its possession? The source Flynn cites for his error-ridden statement provides the correct history as given above, not the garbled reading of it presented in his book.

Here are some additional examples. In chapter 2, Flynn derives the number 2520 (and a time period of 2520 years) through tendentious exegesis of Daniel 5:25-28,<sup>14</sup> the passage where the prophet Daniel explains to the Babylonian ruler Belshazzar the meaning of the handwriting on the wall:

And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: Mene; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. Tekel; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. Peres; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians. Daniel 5:25-28 (KJV)

The number 2520 is a pivotal number for Flynn’s theories. He then goes on to claim that this very number “is the key to Newton’s hidden prophetic direction, and the metaphysical design of prophecy and time itself. It is a theory of the *prisca sapientia* that Newton intuitively believed existed, but did not have the resources or the data to investigate”.<sup>15</sup> But Newton did not “intuitively” believe that the *prisca sapientia* was a number to unlock the secrets of prophecy; he, like others in his age, believed the *prisca sapientia* was ancient wisdom (as the Latin term itself suggests) given by God that had been corrupted over time. It is certainly interesting that the number 2520 is twice 1260 (a number that explicitly appears in the Book of Daniel) and there is no doubt that Daniel’s prophecy contains time periods. But Flynn is off the mark when he says that 2520 “is the key to Newton’s hidden prophetic direction” even if he only means this in a general sense.

There are more examples from chapter 2. Flynn speaks of “Newton’s fluency in ancient Greek, Hebrew and Latin”.<sup>16</sup> Newton knew a little Hebrew, but he was by no means fluent in it. In another example from chapter 2, Flynn says that the Jewish king Zedekiah fled the city through a water tunnel before being captured by the Babylonians. This tunnel, Flynn claims, is “known as Zedekiah’s tunnel”.<sup>17</sup> There is no tunnel by this name. This wicked king did not leave his mark on Jerusalem in this way. Flynn is evidently confusing Zedekiah with the name of his ancestor, the good king Hezekiah, who ruled from Jerusalem more than a century earlier. There is, of course, a famous water tunnel in Jerusalem called “Hezekiah’s conduit”.

In chapter 5, Flynn claims that Christ was born in 1 A.D.<sup>18</sup> Since Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. and he was evidently alive at the time of Christ’s birth (according to the Gospel accounts), no biblical scholar today would date the birth of Christ to later than 4 B.C. In chapter 13, Flynn states that Jesus was crucified and resurrected in 33 A.D. at the age of 33.<sup>19</sup> Scholars debate what year Christ was crucified, but Christ could not have been 33 years old in 33 A.D. for reasons just explained.

As part of his argument for the importance of London to biblical prophecies about the return of the Jews to Israel and Jerusalem, Flynn writes: “During the time he wrote the *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel*, Newton’s living quarters were in the Tower of London, while he was employed as Master of the Royal Mint from 1696 to 1727”.<sup>20</sup> In fact, Newton only lived at the Tower of London for a few short months in 1696. For most of his London period, he dwelt in private residences in the West End. It is also not true that Newton was *Master* of the Mint from 1696 until 1727. It is a small point, perhaps, but Newton first went to the Mint as its Warden and was then promoted to the Mastership at the end of 1699. Since Flynn correctly makes this distinction earlier in his book,<sup>21</sup> this lack of precision from this later example is presumably just another example of editorial sloppiness.

When discussing the Ark of the Covenant in chapter 8, Flynn notes that the letters of the name ‘Solomon’ spelled in Greek add up to 1260 (both Greek and Hebrew letters have numerical equivalents).<sup>22</sup> But why would the sum of the *Greek* letters of a *Hebrew* name be significant in any case? (Incidentally, the sum of the Hebrew letters of the name ‘Solomon’ is 375). After making this point about the numerical value of Solomon’s name in Greek, Flynn utters the following bold assertion: “[t]hese values [the supposed 2520ft elevation of the Temple Mount and the sum of Solomon’s name, which is half 2520] are consistent with Newton’s scheme of the temple’s *prisca theologia*, based on 25.20 of the Sacred Cubit and 2,520 of time recorded in the books of Daniel and Revelation”.<sup>23</sup> This is balderdash. Flynn is simply making it up. He clearly does not understand how Newton viewed the *prisca theologia* and, as I have just suggested, the number 1260 only bears a relationship to the name Solomon in Greek, not Hebrew—which would surely be more appropriate.

### **Problems with the quotations**

The author also plays fast and loose with many of his quotations. In chapter 1, Flynn presents a short series of quotations from Newton’s posthumous *Observations upon the prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of St. John* (1733). One of these is given as follows:

He who denies Daniel’s prophecies, undermines Christianity, which is founded on Daniel’s prophecies concerning Christ.... For Daniel’s Prophecies reach to the end of the world; and there is scarce a prophecy in the Old Testament concerning Christ, which doth not in something or other relate to his second coming. If divers of the ancients, as Irenaeus, Julius

Africanus, Hippolytus the martyr, and Apollinaris Bishop of Laodicea, applied the half week to the times of Antichrist; why may not we...<sup>24</sup>

The reference for this quotation is given as “Ibid. Newton. *Observations* Pg. 13.”<sup>25</sup> The portion of the quotation that comes after the first ellipsis marker is from page 132 of the original 1733 edition. I know of no edition that provides this quotation on page 13, not even the online edition that Flynn cites in his previous endnote. The portion of the quotation situated before the ellipsis marker does not appear anywhere in Newton’s *Observations*; it is possible that it is a garbled paraphrase from the book that Flynn picked up somewhere, perhaps on the Internet.

A rhetorical quotation from Newton’s *Observations* at the beginning of chapter 2 is given as:

*For as the few and obscure Prophecies concerning Christ’s first coming were for setting up the Christian religion, many and clear Prophecies concerning the things to be done at Christ’s second coming are not only for predicting, but also for effecting a recovery and re-establishment of the long-lost truth.*

Newton’s first name underneath this quotation is misspelled “Issac”, but the source is given below this correctly as “*Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John*”.<sup>26</sup>

However, the original passage actually reads as follows (with the portions Flynn missed underlined):

For as the few and obscure Prophecies concerning *Christ’s* first coming were for setting up the *Christian* religion, which all nations have since corrupted; so the many and clear Prophecies concerning the things to be done at *Christ’s* second coming, are not only for predicting but also for effecting a recovery and re-establishment of the long-lost truth, and setting up a kingdom wherein dwells righteousness.<sup>27</sup>

It is normal scholarly practice to signal an unquoted portion of a passage with an ellipsis marker (e.g., “. . .”). Clearly Flynn feels able to disregard normal scholarly practice. Since Flynn used the professional and accurate transcription found on the Newton Project website (a transcription I produced), it is clear that he (or perhaps an unprofessional research assistant) is responsible for the sloppy transcription.

It will be instructive to consider Flynn’s truncated quotation from Newton’s *Observations* in its original context:

The folly of Interpreters has been, to foretel times and things by this Prophecy, as if God designed to make them Prophets. By this rashness they have not only exposed themselves, but brought the Prophecy also into contempt. The design of God was much otherwise. He gave this and the Prophecies of the Old Testament, not to gratify men’s curiosities by enabling them to foreknow things, but that after they were fulfilled they might be interpreted by the event, and his own Providence, not the Interpreters, be then manifested thereby to the world. For the event of things predicted many ages before, will then be a convincing argument that the world is governed by providence. For as the few and obscure Prophecies concerning *Christ’s* first coming were for setting up the *Christian* religion, which all nations have since corrupted; so the many and clear Prophecies concerning the things to be done at *Christ’s* second coming, are not only for predicting but also for effecting a recovery and re-establishment of the long-lost truth, and setting up a kingdom wherein dwells righteousness. The event will prove the *Apocalypse*; and this Prophecy, thus proved and understood, will open the old Prophets, and all together will make known the true religion, and establish it. For he that will understand the old Prophets, must begin with this; but the time is not yet come for understanding them perfectly, because the main revolution predicted in them is not yet come to pass.<sup>28</sup>

As this passage demonstrates, Newton believed biblical prophecy only became absolutely clear on its fulfilment in history. Newton's own words condemn Flynn, who claims to have completed Newton's prophetic project and provided a more accurate date.

Not only does Flynn misquote Newton, he also plucks illusory quotations uncritically from cyberspace. Flynn's Introduction begins with an epigram: "*I suspect that my theories may all depend upon a force for which philosophers have searched all of nature in vain*".<sup>29</sup> Underneath this quotation is the name Isaac Newton. This is certainly a provocative statement and a potentially-effective way to begin a book. The statement suggests that there is something powerful behind Newton's physics—perhaps God Himself. Yet no source is given for the quotation and there is a good reason for this. As it stands, it is bogus. It was pieced together by someone other than Newton—and likely very recently. One will search all of Newton's writings in vain for a sentence with this particular sequence of words. But it does exist on the Web. Most Internet references to this quotation can be traced back to a 17 August 2005 spoof article by the satirical news website *The Onion* entitled, "Evangelical scientists refute gravity with new 'intelligent falling' theory".<sup>30</sup> *The Onion* may well be the origin of this sham quotation.

The quotation is not *entirely* fraudulent, however. Some person (or persons)—perhaps the anonymous author (or authors) of the piece in *The Onion*—appears to have constructed the quotation from select words and phrases found in a sentence from Newton's "Preface to the Reader" published in his famous *Principia mathematica* (1687). Here is the passage from the first English translation of the *Principia* with the words found in the quotation in *The Onion* underlined:

*For by the propositions mathematically demonstrated in the first books, we there derive from the celestial phaenomena, the forces of Gravity with which bodies tend to the Sun and the several Planets. Then from these forces by other propositions, which are also mathematical, we deduce the motions of the Planets, the Comets, the Moon, and the Sea. I wish we could derive the rest of the phaenomena of Nature by the same kind of reasoning from mechanical principles. For I am induced by many reasons to suspect that they may all depend upon certain forces by which the particles of bodies, by some causes hitherto unknown, are either mutually impelled towards each other and cohere in regular figures, or are repelled and recede from each other; which forces being unknown, Philosophers have hitherto attempted the search of Nature in vain. But I hope the principles here laid down will afford some light either to that, or some truer, method of Philosophy.*<sup>31</sup>

Although it is true that Newton firmly believed that Creation was ultimately upheld by God's providence, and that this passage *may* hint at this belief, the above-quoted passage speaks more overtly of Newton's suspicion that as yet unknown forces were operating in matter. The implied meaning of the quotation from *The Onion* is not the same as the meaning of the sentence from which its essential components came. The concocted sentence over-determines the meaning of the source text.

How much faith can be placed in a book that lifts from the Web a bogus quotation that was popularised and possibly created through some kind of literary alchemy by a low-brow satirical news site? It is possible that Flynn found this quotation on one of the small number of websites that does not give *The Onion* as the source. If so, a quick search of the Internet would have revealed the likely origin. The trouble with quotations like these is that they can become dislodged from their original context and then are quoted and requoted in contexts that make them appear authentic. Such are the perils of using the Internet as a research tool. Woe betide those who do not trace the provenance of

their sources!

Flynn concludes the first chapter of his book with yet another quotation that is attributed to Newton:

[A]bout the time of the end, in all probability, a body of men will be raised up, who will turn their attention to the prophecies, and insist upon their literal interpretation in the midst of much clamor and opposition.<sup>32</sup>

This, too, is a powerful statement. To the untrained reader the tone of the language is suggestive of an earlier age, perhaps the time of Newton himself. In this case Flynn provides a source in his endnotes: “Rev. J.W. Brooks *The Literalism Elements of Prophetic Interpretation*. E.G. Dorsey, Printer. Philadelphia USA 1840. V. Preface. page VI.”<sup>33</sup> The ungrammatical title given for this book does not inspire confidence; in fact the actual title of the book is simply *Elements of Prophetic Interpretation*. Irrespective of the quality of the source, this second quotation is also bogus. Whoever first wrote this quotation, we can be sure it was not Newton. There is not a shred of evidence from Newton’s own writings that he ever said or wrote these words. Instead, it seems likely that they were invented to lend Newton’s prestige to the literalistic interpretation of biblical prophecy. Once again, however, there is a level of plausibility in the quotation, as Newton certainly did write on prophecy and, what is more, he did tend towards the literal in his interpretations.

If Mr Flynn had taken the time to verify these two quotations he would have discovered that they are not authentic. It is true that one can find both quotations (with the latter being much more common) floating around the seedier corners of the Internet, but once again this only serves to underscore the perils of relying on the Web for research (something I constantly warn my undergraduate students about).<sup>34</sup> With respect to the above-mentioned quotations, anyone who is in any doubt as to their veracity should contact any professional Newton researcher.

But there is more. In chapter 4, in a discussion about the sacred cubit, Flynn attributes the following quotation to Newton:

The 7-palm cubit would stand out as sacred due to its relation to the number 7.

Seven is the only cardinal number that does not divide evenly into 360. The sacred number, 2,520, (100 times the sacred cubit) is also the result of  $360 \times 7$ .<sup>35</sup>

This sounds a lot like Flynn, who presumably wrote these lines. Newton did not. Despite providing a reference for this quotation from Newton’s writings,<sup>36</sup> these words did not come from Newton’s pen.

Finally, in his chapter entitled “Newton’s prediction” (chapter 17), Flynn quotes a passage on the 1260 days from Yahuda MS 23,<sup>37</sup> which is found on the Newton Project website. Flynn attributes this manuscript to Newton, but while it formed part of his manuscript corpus, it is neither by Newton nor written in his hand—something the online catalogue of the Newton Project makes clear.<sup>38</sup>

### **False etymologies**

The book also contains several false or folk etymologies. The first example occurs in the Introduction, where Flynn writes:

Historically, the Scientific Revolution was united with an Occult Renaissance, the vestiges of which can be seen even today within the names of established branches of modern science. For example, *chemistry* originated from *alchemy*, (the dark art) from the Arabic word meaning “from Egypt” or from the land of Kemet, meaning “darkness”.<sup>39</sup>

Two elements of this quotation reflect history. First, it is true that some of the occult arts played a role in the rise of modern science in the early modern period. One area where the influence of the magical traditions was felt was in their emphasis on empiricism. It is also true that modern chemistry has its roots in the early modern practice of alchemy. However, one would be hard pressed to find other “names of established branches of modern science” that derive from the occult traditions, which helps explain why Flynn does not proffer additional examples. Second, it is true that the modern term ‘chemistry’ is related to the term ‘alchemy’, which does indeed come from Arabic. However, the Arabic word ‘*al-kīmiyā*’ does not mean “from Egypt”. Instead, both the terms ‘chemistry’ and ‘alchemy’ have a much more mundane origin: they derive from the Greek word ‘*chēmeia*’ (also spelled ‘*chymeia*’), a noun related to the Greek word ‘to smelt metals’ (*cheein*). But the problems do not end here. Flynn provides as his source for his folk etymology *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* of 1961. A reference containing such a highly-respected source will no doubt at first glance appear impressive and authoritative. But Flynn’s romantic etymology evaporates if one takes the trouble to check the cited dictionary, which in fact does not give the fanciful Egyptian etymology, but rather the one that I have presented above. Thus, Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary is not to blame.

Turning from Noah Webster to Noah of Genesis, in the final paragraph of chapter 10, Flynn blithely states: “Noah is ... the etymological root of the words ‘navy,’ ‘navigation,’ and the Greek *naus*, the holy place of the temple of Jerusalem”.<sup>40</sup> Is Flynn having us on? There is absolutely no etymological association between the Hebrew proper name ‘Noah’ and the words ‘navy’ and ‘navigation’, both of which derive from the Latin word *navigare* (‘to navigate’). Nor does ‘Noah’ provide the root for the Greek word *naus*.

There are yet more false etymologies. In chapter 15, Flynn claims that the root of Ulai, the name of a river in Elamite territory mentioned in the book of Daniel, is “*ev-eel*” and, what is more, that this root “is the ancient source for the English word ‘evil’”.<sup>41</sup> Wrong again. A quick look at the entry for evil in any good English dictionary will soon dispel this etymological fantasy. Finally, one more etymological hopeful monster: the author asserts that the English word ‘church’ descends from the name of the Greek goddess Circe.<sup>42</sup> It does not. While English Bible translator William Tyndale may well have been right to translate the New Testament word *ekklēsia* as ‘congregation’ instead of ‘church’, as Flynn goes on to report, the English word ‘church’ ultimately derives from the decidedly-unpagan Greek ecclesiastical expression *kyriakon dōma* (lit., ‘the Lord’s house’).

### **Sloppy editing**

Numerous examples of sloppy editing in the book suggest a hasty production, a careless attitude towards publishing standards or both. A few examples will suffice to establish this point. When referring to centuries in history, the author gives these in the informal abbreviated form (e.g., ‘17<sup>th</sup> century’, ‘18<sup>th</sup> century’) rather than in the form they normally appear in a professionally-produced book (e.g., ‘seventeenth century’, ‘eighteenth century’). On page 45 (figure 4), an engraving of the Jerusalem Temple (lifted without permission from the Newton Project website) is printed both upside down and in reverse. Also in chapter 2, the New Testament book of Hebrews is described as being in the Old Testament.<sup>43</sup> When quoting passages from the Old Testament that include the divine name Yahweh, Flynn renders the English replacement for the Tetragrammaton as “LORD” (all capitals) rather than “LORD” (small capitals) as is standard in English translations of the Bible.<sup>44</sup>

A sentence from the beginning of chapter 8 reads: “That the menorah was set on display in this manner underscores how unlikely the Babylon’s would have been to destroy the Ark, the greatest symbol of the God of the Hebrews”.<sup>45</sup> A good copyeditor would have replaced “Babylon’s” with “Babylonians”. In chapter 15, Flynn correctly notes that the final letter in the Greek number 666 is stigma (a ligature combining sigma and tau), but in both places where the letter is printed in his book it is final sigma not stigma.<sup>46</sup> The editing process should also have eliminated the silly truisms that crop up in the book. For example, in chapter 7, Flynn writes: “The words for shadow, *skia* in Greek and *tzel* in Hebrew, have virtually the same meaning”.<sup>47</sup> There is nothing profound here. Since both words mean ‘shadow’, what would one expect? These egregious errors and banal statements are not what one would expect from a book that purportedly heralds one of the greatest discoveries of our time.

### **Misspelled words and proper names**

In his introduction Flynn misspells three seventeenth-century names well known in the history of science (all in the same sentence and all in a row): “Kercher”, “Descarte” and “Leibnez”.<sup>48</sup> These should read “Kircher”, “Descartes” and “Leibniz”. The latter two names are spelled correctly in other parts of the book. Although the word is given in its correct spelling elsewhere, in note 9 to the Introduction, the term pseudepigrapha is misspelled “pseudopigrapha”.<sup>49</sup> The reference to “Plinii the Elder” in chapter 2 should read “Pliny the Elder”.<sup>50</sup> In chapter 2, the term *prisca sapientia*, so important to Flynn’s prophetic theory, is elongated to “*prisca sapatientia*”.<sup>51</sup> Poor Villalpando, the early modern Spanish Jesuit who wrote on the Jewish Temple, has his name spelled “Villalpanda” in endnote 33 to chapter 2.<sup>52</sup> Flynn does, however, spell the name correctly in other places.

The title of Newton’s second-most important work on natural philosophy, the *Opticks* (1704), is frequently misspelled as *Optics*.<sup>53</sup> In his attempt to demonstrate that the centre of Mecca in Saudi Arabia is 666 nautical miles from the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, Flynn refers to the Kaaba stone in Mecca as “Kabbah”, “Kab’ah” and “Kabba”.<sup>54</sup> Quite apart from the inconsistency of the spelling (all in a mere six-page range), Kaaba is not spelled with a double ‘b’ and the break in the word falls before the ‘b’ (the standard forms are: ‘Kaaba’, ‘Ka’ba’ and ‘Ka’bah’). If careful writing missed these spelling errors, a good copyeditor would have picked them up. It would appear that the book lacked both.

### **The scholarly apparatus**

The scholarly apparatus in the book is a mess. There is no other way to describe the endnotes. The scholarly apparatus is an important part of any book based on research. Even a popular book should have precise references given in a consistent format. These references allow the inquisitive reader to track down an author’s sources. They also should demonstrate the genuineness of the research carried out by the author. The apparatus is not simply for show. It has to be workable and accurate. Flynn’s endnotes are neither. They are garbled and full of titles with missing italics, lower-case initial letters, omitted page references and a range of inconsistencies in formatting.

The endnotes to chapter 1 alone provide a plethora of examples. First, Flynn does not adhere to a uniform style for his bibliographic references. Sometimes the place of publication is given first, sometimes the publisher. Sometimes the information following the title is in parentheses, sometimes it is not. Sometimes page numbers are given, sometimes they are not. Sometimes pages are referred

to as “Pg.”, sometimes as “p.”

Now for some specific examples. Endnote 2 provides a reference for a quotation from Newton’s General Scholium to the *Principia*. The source given is the Motte-Cajori translation published by the University of California. However, there is no page number (a *sine qua non* of a scholarly reference to a specific passage). Moreover, the place of publication is given as Los Angeles when it should be Berkeley. Then, inexplicably, the next reference to the *Principia* (in endnote 4) is from the 1999 Cohen-Whitman translation. Page numbers are given, but these do not match the quotation with which they are associated. In endnote 12 the title of the book cited is not given in full (it should be *Sir Isaac Newton theological manuscripts*), nor it is italicised, as it should be. The publishing house is incorrectly given as “Manchester University press [sic]”, even though the place of publication is rightly given as Liverpool. The correct publisher is Liverpool University Press.

A particularly blatant example of sloppy editing is seen in endnote 17, which contains the following reference: “J.E. Force and R.H. Popkins, eds. *Newton and religion: Context nature and influence*. (Boston: Dordrecht publishers, 1999).” Where does one begin? The surname of the second editor is ‘Popkin’, not ‘Popkins’. A comma should be placed after ‘context’ in the title and no period should appear at the end of the title. The primary place of publication is Dordrecht, which has been garbled as “Dordrecht” and then transformed into the name of the publishing house (which is actually Kluwer Academic). On top of all this, since the reference is to a specific point made in a published collection of papers, it should mention the bibliographic details of one of the papers in this book, which it fails to do.<sup>55</sup>

In endnotes 16 and 17 two different editions for Newton’s *Observations* are given, one printed in India in 1998 and the other my transcription that appears on the Newton Project website. The transcription on the Newton Project website is incorrectly attributed to Shelley Innes with the year 1998, even though the website clearly gives my name and the date 2003. This specific error is repeated throughout the book, as are other errors related to the referencing of Newton Project transcriptions of Newton’s manuscripts. Additionally, the location of the Newton Project’s sponsoring institution, the University of Sussex, is incorrectly given as “East Sussex London”. Residents of Brighton, where the University of Sussex is situated, would be surprised to discover that they have become a suburb of London. Britain’s largest city is large, but not that large. Brighton sits proudly on England’s south coast with miles of beautiful countryside separating it from the metropolis to its north.

Flynn cites the Newton Project website numerous times and it is without question one of the most important sources for his book. Why then did he not contact any of the members of the Newton Project? Was this sloppy scholarship or a worry that we would correct his errors? And why the studious avoidance of my name, even though he cites my transcription of Newton’s *Observations*? Why no reference to my online and published statements on the 2060 date? Was he concerned that readers might contact me to comment on his claims? Or, was he worried that they might read my statements and see that the emperor has no clothes? Even so, some did contact me to ask if the book was legitimate. This review is in part my response to these queries.

It is clear that for all the praise heaped on this book on its publication, Flynn’s *Temple at the Center of Time* displays a cavalier attitude towards sources and demonstrates extremely poor research standards. Any undergraduate student of mine who produced such appalling references would get marked down for their effort (or lack thereof) and find themselves with a mark in the C-range (or worse). Please understand that I am not trying to be unkind. Even a book produced by one

of the most prestigious publishing houses in the world will let the occasional typographical error, spelling mistake or faulty reference slip through. But this book is rife with such errors. It would appear that little or no effort was made to correct them.

If this book really does herald one of the greatest discoveries of modern times, as its back cover confidently declares, one would think that the author and his publishers would have taken much greater care in the production of such a treasure. Yet the poor quality of the publication belies such care. The imprint of this book, Official Disclosure, is listed on the book's title page as "A Division of Anomalos Publishing House". The irony here is that the book contains many a formatting anomaly and many an editing irregularity (the literal meaning of the Greek word *anomalos*). It is hard to resist the conclusion that the author and the publishing house were more interested in fame and fortune than truth and accuracy. If they are sincere, they will at the very least correct the more blatant errors and retract the more exaggerated claims made in the book.<sup>56</sup>

### **Bible prophecy, time periods and sacred geography**

The centrepiece of Flynn's book is its prophetic argument, which on the surface may appear stunning to many observers, particularly those who find the books in the end times *Left Behind* series paragons of compelling prophetic exegesis. Although the idea is not entirely unique with Flynn, certainly the most original feature of his book—for better or for worse—is that certain notable prophetic and historical time periods are literally mapped onto the geography of the earth.<sup>57</sup>

To begin, it must be stressed that these putative prophetically-significant distances between various historically-significant geographical locations and the Jerusalem Temple Mount (the "Temple at the center of time" of the book's title) are not all given in the same units of measurement, which surely would be much, much more impressive. Some are given in statute miles, some in nautical miles, some in yards and some in feet. So, why miles? What does modern imperial measure have to do with biblical prophecy? Why not cubits or multiples of cubits? Why not stadia? Cubits are found in the Old Testament and the New Testament, while stadia are found in the New Testament. Cubits are associated with the Temple in the Old Testament and both cubits and stadia are mentioned in the Apocalypse. Why the mixing of measurements? Is it because Flynn had to switch back and forth to make his measurements fit the noteworthy numbers that bolster his theory? And why are the distances given in straight lines, when in the ancient world great distances were measured along trade routes, which people then actually used to travel? Straight line measurements for geographical distances only make sense in the contemporary age, after the advent of air travel and satellite maps. For instance, the distance between cities in Mesopotamia and towns in the Holy Land would be measured along the trade routes of the Fertile Crescent, not directly across the northern ranges of the Arabian desert.<sup>58</sup> A review of some of the specific examples will illustrate the fundamental prophetic claims of *Temple at the Center of Time* and identify further problems.

In chapter 3, Flynn asserts that the Babylonian city of Nippur is 587.25 statute miles from Jerusalem and that this distance connects providentially with the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, an event he claims happened in 587 B.C.<sup>59</sup> But was the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple by the neo-Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar accomplished in 587 or 586 B.C.? Many credible sources give the latter date.<sup>60</sup> In fact, the relevant historical sources differ on the date of the destruction of Jerusalem. This is due to uncertainty over which calendar recorded the date, with one calendar yielding the year 587 B.C. and the other 586 B.C.<sup>61</sup> Thus we must be cautious about attaching any significance to the date 587 B.C. A particular date should not be chosen merely because

it better fits an interpretative scheme.

In chapter 5, Flynn contends that the distance between the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and the center of London is 1948 statute miles. He also points out that Britain played a role in the emergence of the modern state of Israel (this role was often positive, but sometimes negative). Thus, he suggests, it is significant that modern Israel was founded in the year 1948. But why 1948 when the Temple Mount was not captured by Israeli forces until the Six-Day War of 1967? And again, why miles (statute or otherwise)? Also in chapter 5, Flynn attempts to show that there are precisely 2520 biblical (360-day) years between “the release of the Jews from Babylon (by Cyrus the Great in 538 BC) and the rebirth of Israel in 1948”.<sup>62</sup> Flynn believes in the prophetic significance of the number 2520 (twice 1260 and the number of days in seven biblical 360-day years). He arrives at the figure 2520 by converting what he says is a 2486-solar-year span of time between these two events into 360-day years.<sup>63</sup> However, one must not simply add dates Before Christ with *Anno Domini* dates, since there is no year zero. If one subtracts the nonexistent year 0 in the span from 538 B.C. to 1948 A.D. and then converts the sum (2485), the result is not so stunning, but rather 2519.5138 ‘biblical’ years. This is not an attempt to deflate anyone’s belief in biblical prophecy; rather, it is simply to point out that for the sums used for any claims about prophecy to be credible, they must add up.

In the same chapter, after explaining that one-third comes to 33.33% “[i]n the system of percent”, which he wants to connect to the supposed date of Christ’s crucifixion in 33 A.D., Flynn contends that “Newton was well aware of St. John’s incorporation of the number 33(1/3) throughout Revelation”. He was? No, he was not. The number 33 does not occur “throughout Revelation”. It does not occur at all. It is true that there are in the Book of Revelation fourteen references to “third” in the proportional as opposed to the ordinal sense of that word (albeit only in three chapters: 8, 9 and 12), but none of these has anything to do with the date of Christ’s crucifixion, as Flynn tries to imply. Nor is it likely that a first-century reader of the Apocalypse would have associated the notion of one-third with the number 33 (which is in any case one-third of 99 not 100), even though the association may seem natural to us, as accustomed as we are to the use of decimals and percentage.

In chapter 8, Flynn argues that there is some significance in the fact that the length of the sacred cubit is 25.2 inches and the distance between Israel’s Temple Mount and Jordan’s Mount Nebo (where Flynn proposes the Ark of the Covenant is buried) is 25.20 nautical miles.<sup>64</sup> He does not explain why the length of the sacred cubit in *inches* (a unit of measurement not in existence in Bible times) has any prophetic meaning at all, let alone have anything to do with a geographical distance measured in *nautical miles* (another unit of measurement not in existence in Bible times). Nor does Flynn justify his use of decimals, which were unknown in Antiquity.

Chapter 13 offers the bizarre claim that the neolithic ruins of Avebury in Wiltshire, England are somehow prophetically relevant. Flynn writes: “The angle of a line extending from the center of the Avebury Circle to Jerusalem’s temple mount lies 21.60 degrees south of true East”.<sup>65</sup> Flynn relates 21.60 to the whole number 2160, which just so happens to be 2520 minus 360 (the number of degrees in a circle). Then, in chapter 18, Flynn attempts to link the crop circles of Wiltshire with the Temple Mount. He writes:

From the temple mount in Jerusalem, to the location of the world’s greatest concentration of authentic crop circles in Wiltshire, England, there are exactly 33 to 33.33 degrees of the circle of the earth. This is in a wide swath 1,980 to 2,013 nautical miles from the temple in Jerusalem. The crop circle phenomenon began in 1980, some of which are equivalent in distance from the temple in nautical miles to their date/year of appearance.<sup>66</sup>

The trouble is, the “crop circle phenomenon” did not begin in 1980 (it dates back to the early modern period at least) and it exists outside the swath identified by Flynn (indeed, outside of England itself). And what on earth does the pagan monument of Avebury and the probable hoaxes known as crop circles have to do with Jerusalem other than the fact that they are both on earth?

In chapter 15, Flynn states that there are 666 years between the time when the Roman Empire took control of Jerusalem and the time they lost control to the Muslims.<sup>67</sup> At first glance, this seems curious, if not significant. However, there is a problem. The dates he gives for the commencement and cessation of Roman occupation are 31 B.C. and 636 A.D. This is a problem because the Roman general Pompey took control of Jerusalem for Rome in 63 B.C. and the Byzantine Empire finally lost control of the city in 638 A.D. To be fair, it should be pointed out that in coming up with his sum 666, Flynn in this case apparently (and correctly) subtracts the non-existent year 0.

He does not do so, however, in his next example. Flynn claims that there are 666 biblical (360-day) years between the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians and the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans. The dates he gives are 587 B.C. and 70 A.D. By adding the solar years between these dates he comes up with 657, which he then converts into 666 biblical years.<sup>68</sup> However, the sum of 587 B.C. and 70 A.D. is not 657, but 656 (since the non-existent year 0 has to be subtracted). Using Flynn’s formula for conversion, 656 solar years comes to 665.11 biblical years. But this is not the only problem here. As already stated, many scholars believe Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians and saw its temple destroyed in the summer of 586 B.C., not 587 B.C. If the date 586 is correct, then the chronological gap is 655 solar years, which equates to 664.09 biblical years. In any case, what does the number of the beast in Revelation 13:18 have to do with the time period between the destruction of the First and Second Temples? And why the switching between solar and biblical years? Is this switching not motivated by a desire to obtain numerically-significant results?

In chapter 17, in which he treats Newton’s “prediction” for 2060 A.D., Flynn adds more reckless speculation and misinformation to a book already bursting to overflowing with it. I have already confessed my involvement in the release of the 2060 date to the media in 2003, my attempts to place this date in its proper context and to show that far from being a prophetic date-setter, Newton disapproved of those who were. Flynn quotes from both passages in Newton’s manuscripts that mention the date 2060 in chapter 17. Curiously, one of the passages he quotes condemns the very thing Flynn is trying to do. After mentioning the date 2060 A.D., Newton writes:

This I mention not to assert when the time of the end shall be, but to put a stop to the rash conjectures of fanciful men who are frequently predicting the time of the end, & by doing so bring the sacred prophecies into discredit as often as their predictions fail. Christ comes as a thief in the night, & it is not for us to know the times & seasons which God hath put in his own breast.<sup>69</sup>

Flynn goes on to imply that Newton believed the 1260-year period from 800 A.D. to 2060 A.D. referred to the Holy Roman Empire. This idea, Flynn contends, “was contradicted in 1806 when Napoleon forced the Empire’s dissolution”.<sup>70</sup> Here Flynn misunderstands Newton’s prophetic system. There can be no question that Rome and its historical heirs were important to Newton’s understanding of prophecy. But in the case of the 1260-year period from Daniel, it did not for Newton predict in the first instance the duration of the Holy Roman Empire but rather the period of the Trinitarian church’s deepest corruption (Newton was strongly anti-Trinitarian in his theology). In other words, the time period related principally to the apostasy of the orthodox Church.

After making his claim about the Holy Roman Empire, Flynn comes up with an alternative prediction based on the balancing of Rome's foundation in 753 B.C. with 753 A.D., which he suggests is the "Prophetic reflection of Rome's founding".<sup>71</sup> To 753 A.D. Flynn adds the 1260 years, a calculation that provides an end date of 2013, a date (along with 2012) that Flynn sees as prophetically significant.<sup>72</sup>

It is an ingenious proposal. But ingenuity does not necessarily equate with truth. And is not Flynn providing yet another example of "the rash conjectures of fanciful men" to which Newton wanted to put a stop? If Flynn is insinuating that something prophetically significant will happen in 2012 or 2013, he is setting dates and as such is *not* working in the spirit of Newton, whom he uses to promote his book and theories. Perhaps we probably should expect these kinds of bizarre assertions from an author who claims that there are artificial pyramids and a sphinx face on Mars, as outlined in his previous book *Cydonia: The Secret Chronicles of Mars*. Nevertheless, it is necessary to point to the questionable assertions of this book precisely because some are taking it seriously.

### **Final appeals**

*Temple at the Center of Time* treats an array of fascinating biblical, historical and contemporary topics. This is a book that ranges through discussions about the Jewish Temple, the location of the Ark of the Covenant, the site of the Garden of Eden, Jerusalem, Babylon, Rome, Mecca, London, Paris, the Avebury Circle in Wiltshire, the Washington Monument, the Statue of Liberty, the Middle East, modern Israel, Elizabethan magus John Dee, natural philosopher Isaac Newton, military man Napoleon Bonaparte, crop circles, the occult, cyphers, numerology, symbolism, the Jewish Kabbalah, the Bible Code, biblical archaeology and biblical prophecy—complete with an interpretation of the number 666 from the Apocalypse. Public interest in these kinds of themes is borne out on the one hand by the popularity of such films as *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *National Treasure*, along with Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code* (including its cinematic adaptation), and, on the other hand, by popular pulp prophecy books that collectively sell in the millions. This review is not suggesting that readers should not find the above-named subjects rich and fascinating, for it is perfectly understandable that these themes will arouse interest. But a distinction must be made between escapist entertainment and serious scholarship. The fact that many took *The Da Vinci Code* to embody serious scholarship and accurate history suggests that a worryingly-large number of people have trouble making this very distinction. The *Temple at the Center of Time* is presented as serious scholarship and therefore it must be measured by that standard. It has failed this test.

Let there be no mistake: David Flynn has not made any significant discovery about Newton's prophetic work. What is more, his claims about numerology and sacred geography are full of inconsistencies, unsupported speculation and unanswered questions. While one must try to be charitable and while one does not wish to characterise this work as a *deliberate* fraud, when such outlandish and hyperbolic claims are made they should be challenged and corrected with vigour. This is not to say that some elements of the book are not the result of hard work or that everything contained between its covers is nonsense. For these things the author should be given his due. Any element of this book that is truthful, accurate or even plausible should be able to withstand even the most withering criticism. The author deserves credit for anything that does remain standing after such criticism and is also original to this book. Nor am I saying that only scholars should write books or that popular books do not have their place. But we must recognise that like *The Da Vinci Code*

this book contains some indisputable facts and these will provide the book with plausibility or even authority in the minds of the unwary. Scholarly or not, like the *Da Vinci Code*, this book is an admixture of truisms known for decades by historians along with a great many errors and incautious, speculative claims that fail to stand the test of even the gentlest critique.

As for the author himself, is he then a naïve amateur in over his head whose enthusiasm has got the better of him? Or is he perhaps an opportunist who is cynically deceiving gullible readers with false claims about Newton and dubious interpretations of biblical prophecy? The principle of charity must allow for the first possibility; I do want to believe it is not the second. If it is the first, I appeal to David Flynn to correct his errors and qualify his more striking claims. If it is the second, I fear this review will fall on deaf ears. The difference between innocent mistakes and fraud lies in intentionality. It is not my purpose to state what the author's intentions may or may not have been. Nor does this reviewer bear any ill will towards him or his publishers. Authors are not infallible and can make mistakes, including myself (and I welcome any criticism of this review). Since a number of errors have been identified in this review, the onus is on the author to correct his mistakes and misrepresentations—if only for the sake of his readers.

And what about those people of faith who, lacking the necessary sophistication and the ability to discern between fact and fantasy, become elated after reading Flynn's book, believing it to offer another conclusive proof that there is a God in heaven? What happens to their faith if they come to conclude that the book does not in fact do what it says it does? Is there not a risk that this will breed cynicism about the study of the Bible and biblical prophecy? Surely this is the opposite of the outcome Flynn desires? And does this work not offer ammunition to critics of Christianity despite its advertised aim of offering support to the inspired Word of God? The author presents himself as a believing Christian who respects the Bible. Does he really want his book to bring scorn on Christianity and the Scriptures? Is this not the reverse of his goals?

In addition to the appeal to the author, three more will be added. First, an appeal to those who read books such as Mr Flynn's. Read them with a critical eye. Challenge the claims. Whenever possible, check the sources. Ask for other opinions. Second, to those who endorse books such as Flynn's that make extravagant claims about historical figures and biblical prophecy: I appeal to you to make sure such books are sound before committing yourself to them. Flynn's book has been celebrated on various evangelical websites and blogs. Evangelicalism is not a monolithic movement within Christianity and the more sensible and sophisticated adherents of evangelicalism will want to distance themselves from this work. So, a third appeal, to evangelical and other scholars of good sense: provide sound criticism of these kinds of book in print and online. It would be perfectly understandable, on the other hand, if they chose instead to ignore it. Either way, I hope that this review will offer signposts for those encountering any similar misuse of Newton's prophetic works that may appear in the future and, additionally, help keep those who craft such books honest, thus obviating the need for similar correctives in the future.

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*The circulation of this review is encouraged, but permission to republish online or in other media must be obtained beforehand from the author. Comments, criticism and corrections are welcome. Those wishing to learn more about the history of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem are encouraged to consult the sound archaeological scholarship of Leen Ritmeyer (Ritmeyer Archaeological Design). Scholarly presentations*

of Newton's theological and prophetic writings are available on the websites of the Newton Project (UK) and the Newton Project Canada. A valuable online exhibition of the Yahuda collection of Newton's papers, including prophetic and theological writings, can be found on the website of the Jewish National and University Library (Jerusalem). The author wishes to thank all those who offered helpful advice and criticism on this review prior to its release to the public, including David Flynn himself.

Stephen D. Snobelen is a historian of science who specialises in the interaction of science and religion. Much of his research is devoted to the religious thought of Isaac Newton and he is currently writing a book dedicated to this theme. In 1998, while a doctoral student in the UK, he helped found the Newton Project. He established the affiliated Newton Project Canada in 2004. This review is released under the auspices of the Newton Project Canada, which operates as part of History of Science and Technology Programme at the University of King's College, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

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### Endnotes

1. Before releasing this review in April 2009, I sent David Flynn a draft (February 2009). A small number of corrections and clarifications were made based on his reply, for which I am grateful. My sense is that the author recognises that his book was not well edited and that he was in over his head with respect to the relevant scholarship. Mr Flynn also told me that Isaac Newton was more of a general inspiration for his book (because he was impressed that someone of Newton's stature was also a prophetic exegete) and thus he did not intend to make it sound like he was completing Newton's prophetic work for him. In what follows I try to be charitable even while I make it clear where I believe *Temple at the Center of Time* is in error.
2. [www.worldnetdaily.com/index.php?fa=PAGE.view&pageId=72319](http://www.worldnetdaily.com/index.php?fa=PAGE.view&pageId=72319)
3. [www.worldnetdaily.com/index.php?fa=PAGE.view&pageId=72663](http://www.worldnetdaily.com/index.php?fa=PAGE.view&pageId=72663)
4. [www.worldnetdaily.com/index.php?fa=PAGE.view&pageId=75434](http://www.worldnetdaily.com/index.php?fa=PAGE.view&pageId=75434)
5. *Newton: the dark heretic* (Blakeway Productions, 2003). The documentary first aired on BBC 2 on 1 March 2003.
6. For more detail on Newton's beliefs about the return of the Jews as a fulfilment of biblical prophecy, see Snobelen, "'The mystery of this restitution of all things': Isaac Newton on the return of the Jews", in *Millenarianism and Messianism in the Early Modern European culture: Volume III. The millenarian turn: millenarian contexts of science, politics, and everyday Anglo-American life in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*, ed. James E. Force and Richard H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2001), pp. 95-118 (available online at: [www.isaac-newton.org](http://www.isaac-newton.org)).
7. [www.isaac-newton.org/update.html](http://www.isaac-newton.org/update.html)
8. Stephen D. Snobelen, "'A time and times and the dividing of time': Isaac Newton, the Apocalypse and 2060 A.D.", *The Canadian Journal of History* 38 (December 2003): 537-51 (available online at: [www.isaac-newton.org](http://www.isaac-newton.org)).
9. In a personal communication, Mr Flynn confirmed to me that Newton's *Observations*, at least, was in mind when the title was chosen.
10. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 271.
11. Mr Flynn also confirmed this in a personal communication.

12. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 10.
13. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 11.
14. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, pp. 41-2. The interpretation is based on taking ‘mene’ to stand for mina, ‘tekel’ to stand for shekel and ‘parsin’ to stand for half a mina. This part of the interpretation is possible (the view that the words refer to monetary units is not new, but was first presented around a century ago), although it is not clear whether ‘parsin’ (‘divide’) would in this case refer to half a mina or half a shekel. It is also possible to calculate the mina as being worth 1000 gerahs and the shekel at 20 gerahs, but it is not clear that the terms act as anything more than puns (e.g., with ‘parsin’ referring to the Persians). In any case, Daniel’s interpretation is in fact given in Daniel 5:25-28 and this suggests that text is making a poetic statement about the end of the Babylonian Empire, not setting up another time period. Thus, Flynn’s case rests upon a supposition (that the words can be added up as a number) upon another supposition (that the sum is a time period). The view that the message written on the wall refers to a 2520-year time period is a common one and many examples can be found on the Internet. For non-chronological interpretations of the handwriting on the wall of Daniel 5, see *New International Version Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005), pp. 1393-5.
15. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 43.
16. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 51.
17. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 73.
18. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 97.
19. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 195.
20. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 99.
21. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 42.
22. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 143.
23. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 143.
24. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, pp. 23-4.
25. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 33 (note 18).
26. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 37.
27. Isaac Newton, *Observations upon the prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of St. John* (London, 1733), p. 252.
28. Newton, *Observations*, pp. 251-2.
29. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 1.
30. [www.theonion.com/content/node/39512](http://www.theonion.com/content/node/39512)
31. Isaac Newton, *The mathematical principles of natural philosophy*, trans. Andrew Motte (London, 1729), sig. A2r.
32. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 31.
33. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 35.
34. This is not to say that the Internet is the only place one will find shoddy scholarship. *All* sources, including those in print publication, should be checked for accuracy. Nor do I want to suggest that there is no good scholarship on the Internet. There are many sound and well-vetted websites, including those sponsored by universities and respectable publishing houses.
35. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 87.
36. The reference is: “Isaac Newton *Prolegomena to a Lexicon propheticumhe*, {sic} Yahuda mss 14. f. The Newton Project—University of Sussex, East Sussex London: 2007 [www.newtonproject.sussex.ac.uk](http://www.newtonproject.sussex.ac.uk)” (Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 94, n. 16). There are several problems here in addition to the fact that the University of Sussex is not in London (as explained below). First, the statement quoted on page 87 is simply not by Newton and no reference, even if it were to *appear* authoritative to the untrained eye, can rectify this error. Second, while there is a Newton manuscript on Solomon’s Temple entitled “Prolegomena ad Lexici Prophetici partem secundum” (note the correct spelling of the title) that is on the Newton Project site, this is Babson MS 434 and it is entirely written in Latin. Third, while there is a lengthy Newton theological manuscript with the designation “Yahuda MS 14” (the first eight folios of which relate to the “Prolegomena”), a transcription of this text has not yet been released by the Newton Project.
37. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 253.
38. To be fair to Flynn, when he wrote and published his book, the page showing the transcription of this document on the Newton Project website mistakenly contained the attribution “by Isaac Newton” under the title of the manuscript. This has since been removed. However, this page did correctly note that the manuscript was not in Newton’s hand and the catalogue entry on the website all along correctly noted that the manuscript was “[n]ot by Newton and certainly not in his hand”.

39. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 2.
40. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 163. See also p. 66 where similar claims are made.
41. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 211.
42. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 267.
43. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 51.
44. See, for example, Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 83.
45. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 129.
46. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, pp. 216-17.
47. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 113.
48. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 2.
49. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 12.
50. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 38.
51. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 45.
52. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 63.
53. See, for example, Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, pp. 157, 161 and 162.
54. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, pp. 222, 224, 225, 226 and 227.
55. I would be remiss if I did not specifically recommend to the inquisitive reader this excellent collection of essays on Newton's theology and prophetic beliefs. The correct bibliographic details are: *Newton and religion: context, nature and influence*, ed. James E. Force and Richard H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1999). See also the more recent *Newton and Newtonianism: new studies*, ed. James E. Force and Sarah Hutton (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2004), which, despite its general title, contains essays on Newton's theological and prophetic writings.
56. A quick review of the Anomalos Publishing website suggests that this publisher simply publishes book manuscripts as is.
57. Flynn provides a map showing all the suggested prophetic distances together in Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 278.
58. Thus, a chart of distances between cities mentioned in the Old Testament given in the *New International Version Archaeological Study Bible* provides approximate distances measured along the ancient trade routes (p. 341).
59. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 73.
60. For examples of sources giving 586 B.C. as the date for the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, see *The New Encyclopædia Britannica: Macropædia* (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1986), 22: 359A; ; K.A. Kitchen, *On the reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 25, 32; "The last days of Jerusalem", in *New International Version Archaeological Study Bible*, p. 1197 (this source gives the date of the final destruction of Jerusalem as July 586).
61. "The Temple fell in August 587 BC (according to the Nisan calendar, or 586 by the Tishri new year reckoning) and the city fell a month later" (*The Harper Atlas of the Bible*, ed. James B. Pritchard [Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1987]), p. 130).
62. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 102.
63. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, pp. 102-3.
64. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, pp. 141-2.
65. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 193.
66. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 260.
67. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, pp. 220-1.
68. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 221.
69. Newton, as cited in Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 250. See Snobelen, "'A time and times and the dividing of time'" (cited in full above) for a discussion of Newton's 2060 "prediction".
70. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 253.
71. Flynn, *Temple at the center of time*, p. 254.
72. Flynn's focus on 2012 or 2013 may relate to the current fascination with the supposed eschatological significance of the date 2012 in the Mayan calendar.