

Daniel's History Lesson



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 7.*

Memory Text: “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition” (2 *Thessalonians* 2:3, NKJV).

The vision in Daniel 7 (given about 553 B.C., the first year of Belshazzar's coregency with his father, Nabonidus) is largely parallel to the vision in chapter 2. Some reasons for this repetition may be:

1. Fifty years had gone by since Nebuchadnezzar had received his vision in Daniel 2.
2. To repeat important matters is a good principle of teaching.
3. Daniel 2 gave a general survey of the future from Nebuchadnezzar's days until the Second Advent. Daniel 7 enlarges on the time period between the fourth empire and Christ's return to earth.
4. Daniel 2 portrays the worldly empires from a political and military viewpoint. Daniel 7 includes the spiritual power that plays an important role in the great controversy. Whatever the reasons for the parallel to the earlier chapter, Daniel 7 is a powerful prophecy, one filled with important—and relevant—truth for our time.

The Week at a Glance: What is the essence of the vision in Daniel 7? What is the fourth beast? What is the little-horn power that arises out of, but is still part of, the fourth beast? How did the medieval church justify its persecution of heretics? What does the time prophecy in Daniel 7:25 represent?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 13.*

The Vision (*Dan. 7:1-8*).

In his vision Daniel sees the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea. As a result of it, four wild beasts emerge from the water.

What explanations can we glean from Scripture for most of the symbols appearing in this vision?

Winds (*Jer. 25:31-33*) _____

Water (*Isa. 57:20, Rev. 17:15*) _____

The four beasts (*Dan. 7:17*) _____

Lion (*Dan. 2:38*) _____

Bear (*Dan. 5:28, 8:20*) _____

Leopard (*Dan. 8:21, 11:2*) _____

Any history book about the ancient world will confirm that the great world powers following Babylon were Media-Persia and Greece. But what about the fourth power, the dreadful and terrible beast? Though not specifically named in Scripture, history confirms that the power that defeated Greece was Rome, the only sensible identification for the fourth beast.

What are the similarities between the expressions used to describe the fourth kingdom in Daniel 2 and the fourth kingdom in Daniel 7? Compare *Dan. 2:40* and *Dan. 7:7, 23*.

World power may be said to have passed from the Greeks to the Romans at the battle of Pydna, in 168 B.C., where the Romans won a complete victory over Macedonia, which was divided into four confederacies that eventually became a Roman province. Thus, within another century of conquests, the world was united under Rome. History affirms, again, God's foreknowledge of world events.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: *2 Thessalonians 2:3.*

Teachers Aims:

1. To affirm God's foreknowledge of world events, spanning to the close of time.
2. To show that Daniel 2 and 7 contain parallel prophecies.
3. To identify the little-horn power and understand how this power will persecute God's people again at the time of the end.

Lesson Outline:

I. Daniel's Vision (*Dan. 7:1-8*).

- A. Daniel's vision in chapter 7 is largely parallel to Nebuchadnezzar's vision in chapter 2, approximately 50 years earlier.
- B. Daniel is shown four beasts coming up out of the water.
- C. The beasts represent the world powers that follow Babylon.

II. The Little-Horn Power (*Dan. 7:8, 23-25*).

- A. The horns of the fourth beast correspond to the mingling of the iron with the clay in the feet and toes of the image in Daniel 2.
- B. Out of the ruins of political Rome arose papal Rome, the little-horn power.
- C. Papal Rome exercised both spiritual and political power.

III. A Persecuting Power (*Dan. 7:25*).

- A. The little horn persecutes the saints of God.
- B. During the Dark Ages the little horn uses accusations of heresy, the terror of the Inquisition, and the threats of excommunication and death to punish Christians who oppose it.
- C. The little horn claims to have changed the seventh-day Sabbath to Sunday.

Summary: "Says Daniel, of the little horn, the papacy: 'He shall think to change times and the law.' Daniel 7:25, R.V. . . . Only by changing God's law could the papacy exalt itself above God; whoever should understandingly keep the law as thus changed would be giving supreme honor to that power by which the change was made."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 446.

COMMENTARY

I. The Lord of History.

Many Christians, whether Seventh-day Adventist or not, take a keen interest in biblical prophecy and have quite definite opinions on what it all means. Some would argue that it is acceptable for people to have differing opinions on the significance of prophecy. After all, some or all of prophecy is still waiting for fulfillment, and until that fulfillment occurs, we do not know precisely what form it will take.

The Little Horn (*Dan. 7:8, 23-25*).

The Roman Empire did not succumb to another world empire, as had the previous kingdoms; instead, it disintegrated. From A.D. 330 on, when Emperor Constantine moved the seat of government from Rome to Constantinople, a long decline began in the western half of the empire. Its authority slowly disappeared, its vitality evaporated, and its apparatus of government faded away. Into this void stepped the barbaric tribes from the north, who carved the empire up into many smaller pieces and in A.D. 476 deposed Romulus Augustulus, the last of the Western emperors.

What happens to the fourth beast, as depicted in Daniel 7:19, 20,24?

The prophecy does not treat the horns of the beast independently; on the contrary, they are presented as a continuation of its activities. The horns correspond to the mingling of the iron with the earthenware in the feet and toes of the image of Daniel 2. As in Daniel 2, the fourth empire, as a single power, broke apart; this was depicted in Daniel 7 as the activity of the ten horns. They represent the European nations that emerged from the Roman Empire and, to a large extent, maintained her civilization.

What are the specific characteristics of the little horn, and what power does it represent? *Dan. 7:8, 24, 25.*

Historians tell us that “out of the ruins of political Rome, arose the great moral Empire in the ‘giant form’ of the Roman Church.”—Alexander Flick, *The Rise of the Mediaeval Church* (New York: B. Franklin, 1959), p. 150, quoted in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, article 1142, p. 878. Indeed, when the western half of the Roman Empire fell to the Germanic tribes, the Bishop of Rome became an important figure in the West, and soon he exercised not only spiritual but also political power. “*The Roman Church in this way privily pushed itself into the place of the Roman World Empire, of which it is the actual continuation; the empire has not perished, but has only undergone a transformation.*”—Adolf Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* (quoted in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, article 1359, p. 841, author’s emphasis).

Again, don’t miss this point: The persecuting little-horn power arises out of the Roman Empire—it never ceases to be a Roman power. Why is this point especially important for us to remember, particularly in the context of last-day events, when all sorts of wild speculation is made about the identity of end-time players?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

While this sounds logical, Seventh-day Adventists always have believed it is important to have as accurate a picture of future events as possible. Not only that, we believe that God intended the prophetic books to be understood, although perhaps perfect understanding is impossible. This is also logical. Why would God provide us with books giving at least an outline of events prior to and during the end times if their only effect would be to mystify honest seekers?

So, clearly God revealed this knowledge about future events because He wanted us to know about them. What did He want us to know? It is not uncommon for people to say that the only essential message of such books as Daniel and Revelation is that God controls history and that history is working in accordance with His will. Of course, it is important to be aware of this. Most Christians accept this anyway; otherwise they would not put their faith in God.

There are, however, at least two reasons the specifics of prophecy are important. First, it is not enough to be told that God controls history. Without some evidence in the form of accurate predictions, such a statement is only another unproven claim. Second, without proper guidance, it may be possible for even a believer to be deceived (*see Matt. 24:24*).

One could claim that God will protect believers from deception. True enough, but this is not a magical phenomenon. God gave us His Word, which includes prophecy, for us to study in order to avoid being deceived. We ignore it to our own disadvantage.

II. Useful Quotes About God as Lord of History.

“From the vantage ground of God’s Word, the student is afforded a view of the vast field of history and may gain some knowledge of the principles that govern the course of human events. But his vision is still clouded, and his knowledge incomplete. Not until he stands in the light of eternity will he see all things clearly.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 304.

“God’s sovereignty stands in antithesis [contrast] to the rulership of the ‘prince of this world.’ In his dealing with men and nations God stands in peaceful eternity and waits patiently for human recognition and acceptance of His sovereign will as the only way of wisdom for both man and nations.”—George E. Shankel, *God and Man in History* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Association, 1967), p. 190.

“Beginning with Daniel’s own day history moves steadily and selectively to the establishment of the kingdom of God when all peoples, nations, and languages will render Him undivided worship, and His saints will receive and possess the kingdom for ever and ever. In the NT the end point of Daniel’s history coincides with the consummation of the kingdom of God. The Danielic kingdom of God is established after all earthly dominions are broken to

Persecution of the Saints (*Dan. 7:25*).

Jesus warned (*in Matt. 24:9*) that His followers would be persecuted. What do you read in Daniel 7 about the activity of the little-horn power that fulfills this prediction?

Christians were persecuted during the time of the pagan Roman Empire (the fourth beast itself), but the persecution mentioned in Daniel 7:25 is a persecution of the saints by the little horn, which arose only after the pagan phase had ended. The best-known example of this persecution is the Inquisition. In the Middle Ages, the growing threat of so-called heretical groups led the church to use secular authority to repress what it deemed heresy. In today's climate, with all the talk about Christian unity, these atrocities are not talked about much anymore, but untold numbers perished at the hands of the little-horn power, depicted in Daniel 7.

It is difficult for us to comprehend how people who claimed to be followers of Jesus could torture and kill other Christians. How did they justify this horrible action, all in the name of Christ? See, as an example of this kind of thinking, John 16:2.

The theological justification for the Inquisition was based on Augustine's (A.D. 354–430) understanding of Luke 14:23 where Jesus in the parable of the great supper, says, “ ‘ ‘Compel them to come in’ ’ ” (*NKJV*). Augustine took this to mean “Force them, if they do not come of their own free will.”

The great Roman Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas (A.D. 1224–1274) responded to a question concerning the heretics by saying, “If forgers of money and other evil-doers are condemned to death at once by the secular authority, much more reason is there for heretics, as soon as they are convicted of heresy, to be not only excommunicated but even put to death.”

However horrendous, this thinking should serve as a warning: Those who believe that God is behind what they do are capable of great evil. Why, then, do we need to be so very careful in how we seek to justify our own actions, particularly when we do them in the name of God and for what we believe is His cause?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

pieces and the saints have experienced both the eschatological woes and the resurrection.”—Arthur Ferch, “Authorship, Theology, and Purpose of Daniel,” *Symposium on Daniel* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1986), pp. 81, 82.

“The purpose of the prophetic gift is to provide a means of communication between God and humanity. Because God’s acts in history have a significant effect on His people, God intends to keep them informed. Amos gives this assurance: “ ‘Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Daniel 7:1-8, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.*

❶ The first six chapters of Daniel illustrate the principles involved in the great struggle between good and evil. The last six chapters expand on those themes and provide a timetable—in broad terms—about when these principles will be fulfilled. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being the highest), how familiar is this prophecy to the general population? What would it take to increase the interest of the people in it?

❷ Some people are fascinated by history, while others are bored by it. Is this chapter any more than a history lesson? If so, what themes should be developed as we communicate its truth? List at least three themes and discuss specific ways we see them being played out today.

❸ Is it fair to judge an institution based on what happened centuries ago? To put it another way, would you be comfortable being characterized by what you did or said in your distant past? In what ways is the little-horn power the same as it was 100 years ago? In what ways is it different? Describe in one word the little-horn power as it presently exists.

❹ This history of world religions does not always paint a pretty picture. There is probably nothing more terrifying than religious zealots using force to accomplish religious purposes. What examples of religious bigotry have you experienced firsthand? How has coercion been used to force a certain type of behavior?

❺ The little-horn power of Daniel 7 has as its enduring legacy its attempt to “change times and laws.” What makes this behavior so objectionable?

Changing Times and Laws *(Dan. 7:25)*

Compare Daniel 2:21 and Daniel 7:25. In what specific way does the little horn seek to take upon itself what belongs only to God? How does this action parallel with what is written in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4?

The word for “times” in this text is the same Aramaic word rendered “seasons” in Daniel 2:21. God as the Creator of the times can change them, but the little horn arrogantly claims this power for himself by the attempted change of the “time” of the Sabbath, the one commandment that points to the Lord in His role as Creator—the role that makes Him, and Him alone, God.

Read the following texts (*Gen. 2:1-4; Exod. 20:8; Isa. 40:28; 44:6-8; 45:5, 6*). Together, what message do they have for us, particularly in the context of today’s study?

As Adventists, we love to circulate all sorts of quotes from early Catholic sources mocking Protestants—who claim the Bible as their rule of faith—for keeping Sunday, a day not commanded in the Bible but, instead, was formally instituted by the authority of the Roman Church.

What was the reason for this change? Both external pressures and internal pressures on the church forced many Christians to break radically with the Jews. The conflict between the Jews and the empire caused many of these Christians to develop a new identity, one that helped them avoid the repressive measures applied to the Jews under Roman dominion. Meanwhile, the Judaeo-Christians who insisted on the literal observance of certain Mosaic regulations helped push many others to sever their ties with Judaism in every way possible.

Christians of the first four centuries never confused Sabbath with Sunday but for a time celebrated both, as indicated in the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* (pseudonymous work, c. A.D. 375). “Keep the Sabbath, and the Lord’s day festival; because the former is the memorial of the creation, and the latter of the resurrection.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, article 1414, p. 878.

The change of the Sabbath didn’t happen overnight. Slowly but surely, with one small step at a time, the apostasy from God’s law began. But it can happen only as individuals, one by one, allow it to happen. Had the masses stayed faithful, the changes never would have come. What lessons are in here for us?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

prophets.’ ”—*The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2000), p. 621.

“Mankind greatly needs the beacon light of prophecy, for there is a divine purpose and blessing in prophecy. Mankind needs its guiding rays, and its inspiring hope and steady assurance, in

Witnessing

What a sinister mastermind the devil is. How gifted he is at camouflage, subterfuge, deception, lies—his résumé of tricks is endless. One additional attribute could be added to the list that would seem very much out of place at first glance—*patience*. One might protest, Isn’t patience a virtue? Undeniably. Thus, it seems unnatural to think of Satan possessing virtuous qualities.

Yet, Satan can be very patient when it serves his needs and desires. Certainly, he is more than willing to bide his time in order to bring about ruination for humanity in the end. He is totally absorbed with his plan to bring about death and destruction for God’s chosen people, and he is ingenious at using incremental steps in worming his way into the very core of our lives. Examples of his unrelenting commitment and activity are evident in so many of the beliefs we, as Seventh-day Adventists, hold dear, especially the Sabbath.

Satan patiently and persistently encourages us to chip away at the sanctity of the Sabbath. What does it hurt, he whispers, if our Friday night activities are not *exactly* in harmony with God’s instructions? So what if we fudge a bit and blur the lines on what takes place after the morning church service? After all, we were in church, so that should count for something, right?

But the value we place on the time we spend in God’s presence matters very much to Him. Sabbath keeping is one of the pillars of our faith, one of our defining beliefs of which others take note. How can we possibly witness to those around us regarding the glory of the Sabbath day when our actions speak so differently? Satan exults in our compromise—the big payoff for his fiendish patience.

The patience of God is a healing virtue; but in Satan, patience is a hellish vice. For him it is only the act of waiting, a mere passage of time. God, on the other hand, patiently yearns for us to turn to Him so that He may heal our backsliding. He is “longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 *Pet. 3:9, NKJV*).

Perseverance is another word for patience. “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12, NKJV*). Take decisive action this week to persevere in honoring God’s holy day as was ordained in the Garden of Eden.

A Time Prophecy (*Dan 7:25*).

This time period of three and one-half times, or three and one-half years, is again mentioned in Daniel 12:7 and in various ways in the book of Revelation. Though space doesn't allow for us to show why, all the texts below are talking about the same time period.

Look up these texts and write down the time prophecies given in each one. What can we learn by comparing them with one another?

Dan. 7:25

Dan. 12:7

Rev. 11:2

Rev. 11:3

Rev. 12:6

Rev. 12:14

Rev. 13:5

A comparison of these texts shows that a prophetic year has 360 days, and thus three and one-half years is the same as 1,260 prophetic days, or 42 prophetic months. As Adventists, we have long believed, and rightly so, that these prophecies demand the day/year principle. Among the biblical reasons for the day/year principle are the following: (1) The visions are symbolic, hence the times indicated should also be symbolic. (2) As the visions extend over long time periods, the times specified, therefore, should also be seen as extending over long periods of time. (3) The peculiar way in which the time periods are expressed also indicates that they must apply symbolically; i.e., the fact that the word *years* is never used in any of the time expressions can be explained only on the basis of the year/day principle. (4) The pragmatic test of this principle in Daniel 9:24-27 indicates that, indeed, years are intended.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

order to find the harbor of eternity in safety. Without the light of prophecy the future is a vast and impenetrable unknown, a trackless desert, an uncharted sea. But prophecy is God's index finger pointing the way out for a world engulfed in growing confusion, disillusionment, and despair."—Leroy Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1950), pp. 15, 16.

III. What the Bible Says About God as Lord of History.

“ ‘I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later’ ” (*Rev. 1:18, 19, NIV*).

“ ‘But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come’ ” (*Dan. 2:28, NIV*).

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: A vintage computer game from the 1980s features a persistent little creature with a giant mouth known as Pac-Man. Pac-Man has a ravenous appetite, and its goal is to gobble up all the little white dots in his path before it, in turn, is devoured by adversaries.

In the book of Daniel we see kingdoms appear and disappear, gobbled up by those larger, stronger, and more dangerous. The “game” is not yet over, however. Wars and rumors of wars and nations in turmoil flash across the video screen of present history, foretelling Christ's imminent return. Are we prepared? Have we helped others prepare? More important, will *we be ready*?

Thought Question:

We hear much today about ecumenism and how moving toward a more united Christian body will reward believers with a broader understanding of one another's beliefs and practices. What are your views on this topic? Are you supportive of our church furthering exploration in this area, or do you have reservations because of potentially hidden dangers? Discuss.

Application Question:

Atrocities conducted in the name of God (or Allah) are still that—atrocities. Those who do these things in God's name cannot possibly *know* Him. For if they did, they would understand that He is a God of love and mercy; One who is likened to a lamb. Reflect on ways in which you can help others know God as you know Him.

FRIDAY November 12

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 51–55.

Notice the parallel between Daniel 2 and Daniel 7. We clearly can see how the two chapters are dealing with the same events, though from different perspectives.

Daniel 2

Babylon
Media-Persia
Greece
Rome
Second Coming

Daniel 7

Babylon
Media-Persia
Greece
Rome
Second Coming

Discussion Question:

As mentioned earlier in the week, Adventists love to quote Roman Catholic sources that blatantly boast of Rome's authority in changing the Sabbath to Sunday. In most cases, however, those are older quotes. Rome, today, appears to be taking a different tack on this issue. The best example is the apostolic letter, issued by Pope John Paul II in 1998, called *Dies Domini* (the Lord's Day), in which the pope admonishes the flock to be more faithful in keeping Sunday. What's interesting, however, is that instead of boasting about the church's authority to change the Sabbath day, as apologists for Rome and Sunday so frequently did in the past, the letter in some places sounds like our defense of the seventh-day Sabbath. The pope even goes back to the Genesis Creation account as part of the reason for keeping Sunday, even quoting Genesis 2:2. Why do you think Rome has changed its approach to its defense of Sunday? How does this change fit with our understanding of last-day events?

Summary: God granted Daniel a preview of world history from the days of Babylon down to the time when the saints will receive the kingdom. After the four world powers (Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome), there was to come a religio-political power that would continue until the time of the end.