

# When Did God's Kingdom Begin Ruling?

## —PART 1

The following is a typical conversation that one of Jehovah's Witnesses might have with a neighbor. Let us imagine that a Witness named Cameron has come to the home of a man named Jon.



### “KEEP SEARCHING” FOR UNDERSTANDING

**Cameron:** Jon, I've really enjoyed the regular discussions we've been having about the Bible.\* The last time we spoke, you raised a question about God's Kingdom. You asked why Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the Kingdom began ruling in the year 1914.

**Jon:** Yes, I was reading one of your publications, and it said that God's Kingdom started ruling in 1914. That made me curious because you say that you base all of your beliefs on the Bible.

**Cameron:** That's right, we do.

**Jon:** Well, I've read through the Bible myself. But I can't remember ever seeing a passage that mentioned the year 1914. So I went to an online Bible and did a search for "1914." Sure enough, the search engine said: "0 results."

**Cameron:** I have to commend you on two counts, Jon. First, that you've read through the entire Bible. You must really love God's Word.

**Jon:** I do. There's nothing like it.

**Cameron:** I agree. Second, I want to commend you for turning to the Bible when trying to find an answer to your question. You did exactly what the Bible encourages us to do: "Keep searching"

\* By means of their free home Bible study program, Jehovah's Witnesses often have systematic discussions about the Bible with their neighbors.

for understanding.\* It's good that you are putting forth effort like that.

**Jon:** Thank you. I do want to keep learning. In fact, I dug around a little more and found some information about 1914 in this book we've been studying. It mentions a dream that a king had—it was about a big tree that was cut down and then grew back or something like that.

**Cameron:** Ah, yes. That's the prophecy recorded in Daniel chapter 4. It involves a dream that King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had.

**Jon:** Yes, that's the one. I read the prophecy over and over. But to be honest, I still don't see what it has to do with God's Kingdom or the year 1914.

**Cameron:** Actually, Jon, even the prophet Daniel didn't understand the full meaning of what he was inspired to record!

**Jon:** Really?

**Cameron:** Yes. Here at Daniel 12:8, he says: "Now as for me, I heard, but I could not understand."

**Jon:** I'm not the only one then. That makes me feel a little better.

**Cameron:** The truth is, Daniel didn't understand because it was not yet God's time for humans to discern completely the meaning of the

\* Proverbs 2:3-5.

prophecies in the book of Daniel. But now, in our time, we *can* understand them more fully.

**Jon:** Why do you say that?

**Cameron:** Well, notice what we read in the very next verse. Daniel 12:9 says: “The words are to be kept secret and sealed up *until the time of the end*.” So these prophecies would only be understood much later, during “the time of the end.” And as we will soon discuss in our Bible study, all evidence indicates that we are now living in that time period.\*

**Jon:** So, can you explain the prophecy in Daniel to me?

**Cameron:** I’ll do my best.

### NEBUCHADNEZZAR’S DREAM

**Cameron:** To begin, let me briefly summarize what King Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream. Then we can talk about what it means.

**Jon:** OK.

**Cameron:** In the dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw an enormous tree that reached all the way to heaven. Then he heard God’s messenger command that the tree be cut down. However, God said for its rootstock to be left in the ground. After a period of “seven times,” the tree would grow again.<sup>#</sup> This prophecy initially applied to King Nebuchadnezzar himself. Although he was a prominent king—like the tree that reached clear to heaven—he was cut down for “seven times.” Do you remember what happened?

**Jon:** No, I don’t recall.

**Cameron:** That’s all right. The Bible shows that Nebuchadnezzar lost his sanity, evidently for seven years. During that time, he was unable to rule as king. But at the end of the seven times, Nebuchadnezzar regained his sanity and started ruling again.<sup>△</sup>

\* See chapter 9 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses. Also available at [www.jw.org](http://www.jw.org).

<sup>#</sup> Daniel 4:13-17.

<sup>△</sup> Daniel 4:20-36.

**Jon:** OK, I’m with you so far. But what does all of this have to do with God’s Kingdom and the year 1914?

**Cameron:** In a nutshell, this prophecy has two fulfillments. The first fulfillment happened when King Nebuchadnezzar’s rulership was interrupted. The second fulfillment involved an interruption of *God’s* rulership. So it is this second fulfillment that is related to God’s Kingdom.

**Jon:** How do you know that the prophecy has a second fulfillment in regard to God’s Kingdom?

**Cameron:** For one thing, we find an indication in the prophecy itself. According to Daniel 4:17, the prophecy was given “so that people living may know that the Most High is Ruler in the kingdom of mankind and that he gives it to whomever he wants.” Did you notice the expression “the kingdom of mankind”?

**Jon:** Yes, it says that “the Most High is Ruler in the kingdom of mankind.”

**Cameron:** Right. Who do you suppose is “the Most High”?

**Jon:** I guess that’s talking about God.

**Cameron:** Correct. So that tells us that this prophecy is not only about Nebuchadnezzar. It also involves “the kingdom of mankind”—that is, God’s rulership over mankind. And that makes sense when we look at the prophecy in its context.

**Jon:** What do you mean?

### THE BOOK’S CENTRAL THEME

**Cameron:** Time and again, the Bible book of Daniel develops a central theme. It keeps pointing forward to the establishment of God’s Kingdom under the rulership of his Son, Jesus. For example, let’s turn back a couple of chapters. Would you please read Daniel 2:44?

**Jon:** OK. It says: “In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. And this kingdom will not be

passed on to any other people. It will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, and it alone will stand forever.”

**Cameron:** Thank you. Would you say that this verse sounds as if it is referring to God’s Kingdom?

**Jon:** Hmm. I’m not sure.

**Cameron:** Well, notice that it says that this Kingdom “will stand forever.” That’s true of God’s Kingdom, but it’s not something that we can say of any human government, can we?

**Jon:** No, I guess not.

**Cameron:** Here’s another prophecy in the book of Daniel that points to God’s Kingdom. It’s the prophecy recorded at Daniel 7:13, 14. Regarding a future ruler, the prophecy says: “To him there were given rulership, honor, *and a kingdom*, that the peoples, nations, and language groups should all serve him. His rulership is an everlasting rulership that will not pass away, and his *kingdom* will not be destroyed.” Is there anything in this prophecy that sounds familiar?

**Jon:** It mentions a kingdom.

**Cameron:** That’s right. And not just any kingdom. Notice it says that this Kingdom would have authority over “peoples, nations, and language groups.” In other words, this Kingdom would have global rulership.

**Jon:** I didn’t pick up on that, but you’re right. It does say that.

**Cameron:** Also, notice what else the prophecy says: “His rulership is an everlasting rulership that will not pass away, and his kingdom will not be destroyed.” That sounds a lot like the prophecy we just read at Daniel 2:44, doesn’t it?

**Jon:** Yes, it does.

**Cameron:** Let’s briefly review what we’ve discussed so far. The prophecy in Daniel chapter 4 was given so that people would know that “the Most High is Ruler in the kingdom of mankind.” This in itself indicates that the prophecy has a bigger fulfillment than just the one involving Nebuchadnezzar. And throughout the book of Daniel, we find prophecies about the establishment of God’s Kingdom under the rulership



of his Son. Do you think it’s reasonable to conclude, then, that this prophecy in Daniel chapter 4 also has something to do with God’s Kingdom?

**Jon:** I suppose so. But I still don’t see the connection with 1914.

#### **“LET SEVEN TIMES PASS”**

**Cameron:** Well, let’s go back to King Nebuchadnezzar. He was represented by the tree in the first fulfillment of the prophecy. His rulership was interrupted when the tree was chopped down and left for seven times—that is, when he lost his sanity for a period of time. That period of seven times ended when Nebuchadnezzar regained his sanity and resumed his rulership. In the second fulfillment of the prophecy, God’s rulership would be interrupted for a period of time—but not because of any deficiency on God’s part.

**Jon:** What do you mean?

**Cameron:** In Bible times, the Israelite kings who ruled in Jerusalem were said to sit on “Jehovah’s throne.”\* They represented God in governing his people. So the rulership of those kings

\* 1 Chronicles 29:23.

was really an expression of God's rulership. In time, however, most of those kings became disobedient to God and most of their subjects followed suit. Because of the Israelites' disobedience, God allowed them to be conquered by the Babylonians in 607 B.C.E. From that time on, no more kings represented Jehovah in Jerusalem. In that sense, then, God's rulership was interrupted. Are you with me so far?

**Jon:** I think so.

**Cameron:** So 607 B.C.E. marked the beginning of the seven times, or the period when God's rulership would be interrupted. At the end of the seven times, God would install a new ruler to represent Him—this time, someone in heaven. That's when the other prophecies we read about in Daniel would be fulfilled. So the big question is: When did the seven times end? If we can answer that question, we will know when God's Kingdom began ruling.

**Jon:** I see. Let me guess—the seven times ended in 1914?

**Cameron:** Exactly! You got it.

**Jon:** But how do we know that?

**Cameron:** Well, during his earthly ministry, Jesus indicated that the seven times had not yet ended.\* So they must be a very long period of time. The seven times started hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth, and they continued until sometime after he returned to heaven. Remember, too, that the meaning of the prophecies in Daniel was not to become clear until "the time

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\* In his prophecy concerning the last days, Jesus said: "Jerusalem [which represented God's rulership] will be trampled on by the nations until the appointed times of the nations are fulfilled." (Luke 21:24) So the interruption of God's rulership was still in effect in Jesus' time and would continue until the last days.

of the end."\*\* Interestingly, during the late 1800's, sincere students of the Bible were moved to examine this and other prophecies very carefully. They began to discern that the seven times would end in the year 1914. And major world events since then confirm that 1914 was indeed the year that God's Kingdom began ruling in heaven. It was the year when this world entered its last days, or the time of the end. Now, I know this is probably a lot to digest . . .

**Jon:** Yes. I'm definitely going to have to go over this again to get it all straight.

**Cameron:** Don't worry. It took me a while to see how all the pieces fit together too. But at the very least, I hope our discussion has helped you to see that Jehovah's Witnesses do base their beliefs about the Kingdom on the Bible.

**Jon:** For sure. I've always been impressed with how you rely on the Bible for your beliefs.

**Cameron:** And I can see that you have a similar desire. As I said, this is a lot to take in all at once. You probably still have some questions. For example, we've established that the seven times relate to God's Kingdom and that they began in 607 B.C.E. But how, exactly, do we know that these seven times ended in 1914?#

**Jon:** Yes, I'm wondering about that.

**Cameron:** The Bible itself helps us to determine the precise length of the seven times. Would you like to examine that topic the next time I'm here?

**Jon:** That sounds good. ■

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\* Daniel 12:9.

# See pages 215-218 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* Also available at [www.jw.org](http://www.jw.org).

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The next article in this series will consider Bible verses that shed light on the length of the seven times.

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Do you have a particular Bible subject that you have wondered about? Are you curious about any of the beliefs or religious practices of Jehovah's Witnesses? If so, do not hesitate to ask one of Jehovah's Witnesses. He or she will be pleased to discuss such matters with you.