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Daniel, Prophet of the End



As the nineteenth century disappeared into the twentieth, a sense of optimism pervaded the West. Through science and technology, humanity was advancing toward a golden age, a future of wonderful possibilities when war, pestilence, poverty, and hunger would finally be ended. That was the hope, anyway.

Of course, the twentieth century proved this hope not only wrong but foolish and naïve. This helps explain why, when we entered the twenty-first century, it was with no great sense of optimism about a better future.

From a worldly perspective, the world still seems in pretty dismal shape and, worse, holds little prospect of improvement. Humans seem just as inclined toward greed, oppression, violence, conquest, exploitation, and self-destruction now as our ancestors were in ages past. Meanwhile, many of our great technological advances, though sometimes serving humanity well, have aided us in our greed, oppression, violence, conquest, exploitation, and self-destruction.

None of this should be surprising, of course, not with such texts as “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (*Jer. 17:9, NKJV*) or “For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places” (*Matt. 24:7, NKJV*).

And yet, amid all this despair and calamity, we have the book of Daniel, our study for this

quarter, a book that's especially relevant for us who are living in the *ayt qatz*, "the time of the end" (*Dan. 12:9*). And that's because in the sacred pages of Daniel we have powerful, rational, faith-affirming evidence not only for our belief in God but in the Lord Jesus Christ and His death on the cross, as well as the promise of His return and all that His return entails.

Think about it. All through Daniel (*chapters 2, 7, 8, 11*), we have been given, from various angles, the following sequence of empires: Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, Rome, and God's eternal kingdom after the Second Coming. From our perspective today, living when we do, we can see that all the worldly kingdoms have come and gone as predicted. Or, in the case of Rome, it came and remains, at least for now, just as Daniel wrote. It is depicted in the feet and toes of Daniel 2:33, 41 and is manifested in the still-divided nations of Europe as well as the Roman church itself. Thus, we have an affirmation of biblical prophecy as broad and as solid as the history of the world that someone living in the time of Babylon, or Greece, or even in the earlier days of Rome, could not have had.

Daniel remains what it was when penned thousands of years ago: a powerful revelation of the love and character of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Living where we are on the prophetic timescale, we also can see that Daniel was correct about all these kingdoms; thus, we have even more reasons to trust him regarding the only one yet to come: God's eternal kingdom—after the Second Coming.

Yes, the book of Daniel remains a powerful, faith-affirming document, especially for Seventh-day Adventists, who find within its pages texts seminal to our church, especially Daniel 8:14, "And he said to me, 'For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed' " (*NKJV*). This text is parallel to Daniel 7:22, 26, 27, which shows that after the great heavenly judgment, given "in favor of the saints of the Most High," God's eternal kingdom will be established. In contrast to the fleeting, earthly empires, it will last forever.

And yet, alongside the "big picture," we see just how close Christ can be to us, individually. From King Nebuchadnezzar's dream to Daniel's deliverance from the lions' den, the book shows us God's immanence, or His nearness to us; as Daniel told wicked King Belshazzar, He is the God "who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways" (*Dan. 5:23, NKJV*).

In short, the book of Daniel, our study for this quarter, remains what it was when penned thousands of years ago: a powerful revelation of the love and character of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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From Reading *to* Understanding



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 24:25–27; 2 Pet. 3:11–13; Jon. 3:3–10; Num. 14:34; Dan. 9:23; 10:11, 12.*

Memory Text: “So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ ” (*Acts 8:30, NKJV*).

Our church was born from within the pages of the book of Daniel, our study for this quarter. As we begin, we should keep the following points in mind as a template to help guide us through our study.

First, we should always remember that Christ is the center of Daniel, as He is of the entire Bible.

Second, Daniel is organized in a way that shows literary beauty and helps us to understand its major focus.

Third, we need to understand the difference between classical and apocalyptic prophecies. This will help us distinguish between the prophecies of Daniel and those of others, such as Isaiah, Amos, and Jeremiah.

Fourth, as we study the time prophecies of Daniel, we should understand that the prophetic outlines of Daniel span long periods of time and are measured according to the year-day principle.

Fifth, we shall emphasize that the book of Daniel not only conveys prophetic information but is profoundly relevant to our personal life today.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 4.

Christ: The Center of Daniel

Read Luke 24:25–27; John 5:39; and 2 Corinthians 1:19, 20. In what ways is Christ the center of the Scriptures?

There is no question that Jesus is central to the Scriptures, and this includes Daniel, as well. For example: Chapter 1 shows, although in a limited and imperfect way, that Daniel's experience is analogous to that of Christ, who left heaven to live in this sinful world and confront the powers of darkness. Moreover, Daniel and his companions are endowed from above with Christlike wisdom to face the challenges of the Babylonian culture. Chapter 2 describes the figure of the end-time (eschatological) stone to indicate that the kingdom of Christ will eventually replace all the kingdoms of the world. Chapter 3 reveals Christ walking with His faithful servants within a furnace of fire. Chapter 4 shows God removing Nebuchadnezzar from his kingdom for a period of time so that the king could understand that "Heaven rules" (*Dan. 4:26, NKJV*). The expression "Heaven rules" reminds us that Christ, as "the Son of Man" (*Dan. 7:13, NKJV*), receives the dominion and the kingdom, as depicted in Daniel 7. Chapter 5 shows the demise of King Belshazzar and the fall of Babylon to the Persians during a night of revelry and debauchery. This foreshadows the defeat of Satan and the obliteration of end-time Babylon by Christ and His angels. Chapter 6 shows the plot against Daniel in ways that resemble the false accusations voiced against Jesus by the chief priests. Moreover, as King Darius unsuccessfully tries to spare Daniel, Pilate unsuccessfully tries to spare Jesus (*Matt. 27:17–24*). Chapter 7 depicts Christ as the Son of man receiving the kingdom and reigning over His people. Chapter 8 shows Christ as a priest of the heavenly sanctuary. Chapter 9 portrays Christ as the sacrificial victim whose death reconfirms the covenant between God and His people. And chapters 10–12 present Christ as Michael, the Commander in Chief, who fights the forces of evil and victoriously rescues God's people, even from the power of death.

So let us bear in mind that Christ is central to Daniel. At every chapter of the book there is some experience or idea that points to Christ.

Amid struggles, trials, or even times of great happiness and prosperity, how can we learn to keep Christ at the center of our lives? Why is it so important that we do so?

The Structure of Daniel

The arrangement of the Aramaic section of Daniel, chapters 2–7 (parts of Daniel were written in Hebrew and other parts in Aramaic), reveals the following structure, which helps reinforce a central message of that section, and of the book:

- A. Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of four kingdoms (*Daniel 2*)
 - B. God delivers Daniel’s companions from the fiery furnace (*Daniel 3*)
 - C. Judgment upon Nebuchadnezzar (*Daniel 4*)**
 - C'. Judgment upon Belshazzar (*Daniel 5*)**
 - B'. God delivers Daniel from the den of lions (*Daniel 6*)
 - A'. Daniel’s vision of four kingdoms (*Daniel 7*)

This kind of literary arrangement serves to highlight the main point by placing it at the center of the structure, which in this case consists of C and C' (*Daniel 4 and 5*): God removes the kingdom from Nebuchadnezzar (temporarily) and from Belshazzar (permanently). Therefore, the emphasis of chapters 2–7 is on God’s sovereignty over the kings of the earth as He establishes and removes them.

One of the most effective ways of conveying a message and making a point clear is by repetition. For example, God gives Pharaoh two dreams about the immediate future of Egypt (*Gen. 41:1–7*). In the first dream, seven fat cows are devoured by seven thin cows. In the second dream, seven ears of healthy grain are devoured by seven thin and blighted ears. Both dreams make the same point: seven years of prosperity will be followed by seven years of scarcity.

In the book of Daniel, God also uses repetition. There are four prophetic cycles, which are repetitions of an overall basic structure. In the end, this structure shows us the ultimate sovereignty of God. Although each major prophetic outline conveys a distinct perspective, together they cover the same historical period, extending from the time of the prophet to the end, as the following diagram shows:

Daniel 2	Daniel 7	Daniel 8, 9	Daniel 10–12
Babylon	Babylon		
Media-Persia	Media-Persia	Media-Persia	Media-Persia
Greece	Greece	Greece	Greece
Rome	Rome	Rome	Rome
God’s Kingdom Is Established	Heavenly Judgment That Leads to New Earth	Purification of the Sanctuary	Michael Stands Up

What great hope do these texts present regarding our long-term prospects? *Dan. 2:44, Ps. 9:7–12, 2 Pet. 3:11–13.*

Apocalyptic Prophecies in Daniel

The prophetic visions recorded in the book of Daniel are of a different nature than most prophetic messages delivered by other Old Testament prophets. Daniel's prophecies belong to the category of *apocalyptic prophecy*, whereas most of the other Old Testament prophecies belong to the category of *classical prophecy*. An understanding of the basic difference between these prophetic genres is crucial for a correct understanding of biblical prophecy.

Apocalyptic prophecies display some peculiar features that differentiate them from the so-called classical prophecies:

Visions and dreams. In apocalyptic prophecy God uses mainly dreams and visions to convey His message to the prophet. In classical prophecy, the prophet receives “the Word of the LORD” (which can include visions), an expression that occurs with slight variations about one thousand six hundred times in the classical prophets.

Composite symbolism. While in classical prophecy, there is a limited amount of symbolism, mainly involving symbols that are true to life; in apocalyptic prophecy, God shows symbols and imagery beyond the world of human reality, such as hybrid animals or monsters with wings and horns.

Divine sovereignty and unconditionality. In contrast to classical prophecies, whose fulfillment is often dependent on human response in the context of God's covenant with Israel, apocalyptic prophecies are unconditional. In apocalyptic prophecy God reveals the rise and fall of world empires from Daniel's day to the end of time. This kind of prophecy rests on God's foreknowledge and sovereignty and will happen regardless of human choices.

Read Jonah 3:3–10. Is this a classical or apocalyptic prophecy? Justify your answer. What about Daniel 7:6?

Knowing about broad prophetic genres such as classical and apocalyptic prophecy can be of great benefit. First, these genres show that God uses a variety of approaches to communicate prophetic truth (*Heb. 1:1*). Second, such knowledge helps us better appreciate the beauty and complexity of the Bible. Third, this knowledge also helps us to interpret biblical prophecies in ways that are consistent with the testimony of the entire Bible and rightly explain “the word of truth” (*2 Tim. 2:15*).

On the basis of such passages as Hosea 3:4, 5; Amos 8:11; Zechariah 9:1; and 14:4, some Christians today expect the final events of world history to unfold in the Middle East. What is wrong with this interpretation? How can knowing the difference between apocalyptic and classical prophecies help us clarify this matter?

God's Timescale

Another important concept that we need to keep in mind as we study the book of Daniel is the historicist approach to apocalyptic prophecies. This approach, also known as historicism, can be better understood if compared with the opposing views of preterism, futurism, and idealism.

Preterism tends to view the prophetic events announced in Daniel as having occurred in the past. *Futurism* contends that the same prophecies still await a future fulfillment.

Idealism, in turn, holds that apocalyptic prophecies are symbols of general spiritual realities without any specific historical referents.

Historicism, in contrast, holds that in apocalyptic prophecy God reveals an unbroken sequence of history from the time of the prophet to the end of time. As we study the book of Daniel, we will see that each major vision in the book (*Daniel 2, 7, 8, 11*) repeats this historical outline from different perspectives and with new details. The Adventist pioneers, including Ellen G. White, understood the biblical prophecies of Daniel and Revelation from a historicist perspective.

Read Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:5, 6. In prophetic language what does a “day” represent?

As we study the book of Daniel, we also should keep in mind that prophetic time is measured according to the year-day principle. That is, a day in prophecy equals one year in actual historical time. Thus, for example, the prophecy of the 2,300 evenings and mornings should be understood as referring to 2,300 years (*Dan. 8:14*). Likewise, the prophecy of the 70 weeks should be understood to be 490 years (*Dan. 9:24–27*).

This timescale seems to be correct for some obvious reasons: (1) Since the visions are symbolic, the times indicated also must be symbolic. (2) As the events depicted in the visions unfold over long periods of time, even to the “time of the end” in some cases, the time spans related to these prophecies should be interpreted accordingly. (3) The year-day principle is confirmed by the book of Daniel. A clear example comes from the 70-week prophecy, which extended from the days of King Artaxerxes to the coming of Jesus as the Messiah. So, the most obvious and correct way to make sense of the prophetic time periods given in the book of Daniel is to interpret them according to the year-day principle.

Some of these time prophecies cover hundreds, even thousands, of years. What should this teach us about patience?

Contemporary Relevance of Daniel

Although written more than 2,500 years ago, the book of Daniel remains profoundly relevant for God's people in the twenty-first century. We shall note three areas in which Daniel can be relevant for us.

God stands sovereign over our lives. Even when things go wrong, God stands sovereign and works through the whims of human actions to provide the best for His children. The experience of Daniel in Babylon resembles that of Joseph in Egypt and Esther in Persia. These three young people were captives in foreign countries and under the overwhelming power of pagan nations. To the casual observer they may have seemed weak and God-forsaken. However, the Lord strengthened them and used them in powerful ways. When facing trials, sufferings, and opposition, we can look back to what God did for Daniel, Joseph, and Esther. We can rest assured that the Lord remains our Lord, and He has not abandoned us even amid our trials and temptations.

God steers the course of history. At times we feel troubled by a confused and aimless world that is full of sin and violence. But the message of Daniel is that God stands in control. In every single chapter of Daniel, the message is hammered home that God steers the flow of history. As Ellen G. White says: "In the annals of human history the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as dependent on the will and prowess of man. The shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, behind, above, and through all the play and counterplay of human interests and power and passions, the agencies of the all-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will."—*Education*, p. 173.

God provides a role model for His end-time people. Daniel and his friends serve as role models for life in a society that holds a worldview often at odds with that of the Bible. When pressed to compromise their faith and make concessions to the Babylonian system in areas that would deny their commitment to the Lord, they remain faithful to the Word of God. Their experience of faithfulness and absolute commitment to the Lord provides encouragement when we face opposition and even persecution for the sake of the gospel. At the same time, Daniel shows that it is possible to make a contribution to the state and society and remain committed to the Lord.

Read Daniel 9:23; 10:11, 12; and Matthew 10:29–31. What do these verses say about God's interest in our personal struggles?

Further Thought: “The Bible was designed to be a guide to all who wish to become acquainted with the will of their Maker. God gave to men the sure word of prophecy; angels and even Christ Himself came to make known to Daniel and John the things that must shortly come to pass. Those important matters that concern our salvation were not left involved in mystery. They were not revealed in such a way as to perplex and mislead the honest seeker after truth. Said the Lord by the prophet Habakkuk: ‘Write the vision, and make it plain, . . . that he may run that readeth it.’ Habakkuk 2:2. The word of God is plain to all who study it with a prayerful heart. Every truly honest soul will come to the light of truth. ‘Light is sown for the righteous.’ Psalm 97:11. And no church can advance in holiness unless its members are earnestly seeking for truth as for hid treasure.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 521, 522.

“Study the history of Daniel and his fellows. Though living where they were, met on every side by the temptation to indulge self, they honored and glorified God in the daily life. They determined to avoid all evil. They refused to place themselves in the enemy’s path. And with rich blessings God rewarded their steadfast loyalty.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases* [No. 224], pp. 169, 170.

Discussion Questions:

- ① As we study the book of Daniel, one powerful point will come through. God is not only sovereign over all the nations but also intimately acquainted with each of us, at even the deepest level. For example, as we will see in Daniel 2, He was able to give a pagan king a dream. To be able to get into someone’s mind while that person is sleeping and implant a dream reveals a closeness that we cannot even begin to fathom. At the same time, as we will see, the nature of the dream reveals that God is ultimately in control even of the world’s vast empires and knows how everything is going to end. What comfort and hope can we draw from these depictions of reality? At the same time, how does it make you feel to know that the Lord is so close that He knows your very thoughts? In this context, why does the promise of the Cross become so important?
- ② In class, discuss the difference between classical and apocalyptic prophecy. What other examples of both can you find in the Bible?

Make Friends, Not Adventists

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Igor Gospodarets ordered 800 colorful evangelistic posters reading “Bible Opens the Path to a Healthy and Happy Life” from Moscow. He plastered the advertisements around his city in a former Soviet republic where a majority of the population is not Christian. Then an elderly evangelist told him to start over.

“Order 800 new posters advertising the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s five-day stop-smoking program,” said Arturo Schmidt, the evangelist from Argentina.

Gospodarets couldn’t believe his ears. The posters had taken considerable money and time to place, and he didn’t want to start from scratch again. “Why?” he asked.

“Our goal is not to make Adventists out of non-Christians,” Schmidt said. “Our goal is to make friends.”

It was 1992, only a year after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Gospodarets, a young Adventist pastor, was eager to take advantage of newfound religious freedom to share his love for Jesus.

He didn’t like Schmidt’s advice. It didn’t make sense to him not to preach Jesus. He didn’t see the logic of offering stop-smoking classes. He didn’t want to lose the money invested in the evangelistic posters. He prayed.

Finally, Gospodarets decided to take a chance. Perhaps the elderly evangelist knew something that he didn’t. He ordered 800 stop-smoking posters from Moscow and placed them over the old posters.

A surprise greeted Gospodarets’s eyes when he showed up for the first stop-smoking seminar. The rented hall was packed with 1,000 people. Most of the visitors were not Christians. He realized that the original posters never would have attracted such a large turnout.

Five years passed. After a Sabbath sermon, a stranger reached out to shake Gospodarets’s hand in church.

“Do you remember me?” the man asked.

Gospodarets didn’t.

“I was in that crowd of 1,000 people who took the stop-smoking class five years ago,” the man said. “I heard you and Pastor Schmidt speak.”

The man explained that he had been raised in a non-Christian home and had struggled to quit smoking. The seminars had helped him stop, and, realizing that the Adventists were his friends, he had started attending church every Sabbath.

Gospodarets couldn’t believe his ears.

“It was at that moment that I understood the importance of friendship evangelism,” said Gospodarets, now 59 and a church leader in southern Russia. “Our goal is not to make Adventists out of non-Christians. Our goal is to make friends for Jesus.”



From Jerusalem *to* Babylon



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *2 Kings 21:10–16; Daniel 1; Gal. 2:19, 20; Matt. 16:24–26, 2 Cor. 4:17; James 1:5.*

Memory Text: “As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams” (*Daniel 1:17, NKJV*).

The Bible does not shy away from showing the weaknesses of fallen humanity. From Genesis 3 onward, human sinfulness and its sad results are prominently displayed. At the same time, too, we also see cases of those who show great faithfulness to God, even when faced with powerful incentives to be anything but faithful. And some of the most poignant examples of such faithfulness are seen in the book of Daniel.

However, as we study Daniel, let us keep in mind that the true hero of the book is God. We are so used to stories that stress the faithfulness of Daniel and his friends that we may forget to exalt the faithfulness of the One who guided and sustained those four young men as they confronted the power and allure of the Babylonian Empire. To be faithful is enough of a challenge in one's own land and place, let alone when facing the pressure of a foreign land, culture, and religion. But the human protagonists meet the challenges because, like the apostle Paul, they “know whom [they] have believed” (*2 Tim. 1:12*), and in Him they trust.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 11.

God's Sovereignty

At first glance the book of Daniel begins with a somber note of defeat. Judah has capitulated to Nebuchadnezzar, and the temple vessels have been taken from Jerusalem to the land of Shinar. The word *Shinar* appears in the Bible in Genesis 11:2 as the location of the Tower of Babel. Shinar is an ominous sign, as it alludes to a project rooted in open defiance of God. But even if the builders of Babel failed in their attempt to reach the heavens, external appearances suggested that Nebuchadnezzar and his gods—located in the land of Shinar—had overpowered the covenant God of Israel.

Still, the opening lines of Daniel make it clear that the defeat of Jerusalem is not credited to the superior power of the Babylonian king; rather, it has occurred because “the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his [Nebuchadnezzar’s] hand” (*Dan. 1:2, NKJV*). Much earlier, God announces that should His people forget Him and break the covenant, He would send them as captives to a foreign land. So, Daniel knows that behind and beyond the military power of Babylon, the God of heaven is leading the march of history. It is this clear view of God’s sovereignty that sustains these young men and gives them strength and courage to face the temptation and pressure of the Babylonian Empire.

Read 2 Kings 21:10–16, 2 Kings 24:18–20, and Jeremiah 3:13. Why does God give Judah and Jerusalem into the hands of the Babylonians?

As we face the challenges of the twenty-first century, we need to recapture the perception of God that is so vividly reflected in the book of Daniel. According to this book, the God whom we serve not only drives the forces of history through His sovereignty but also mercifully intervenes in the lives of His people to provide them with crucial help in times of need. And as we shall see later, what God did for the Hebrew captives He will do for His people in the end time, regardless of the various attacks on them and their faith.

What are some of the challenges your faith faces now, either from outside sources, from within the church, or from your own personal defects of character? How can you learn to lean on the power of God to help you overcome whatever is before you?

Faith Under Pressure

Read Daniel 1. What pressures are put on these young men to conform?

Upon arrival in Babylon, these four young men have to face a most serious challenge to their faith and convictions: they are selected to undergo special training in order to serve the king. Ancient kings would often recruit some of their best captives to serve in the royal palace, and, thereby, switch their loyalty to the king and the gods of the empire that captured them. Indeed, the whole process was intended to effect a conversion and indoctrination that would result in a change of worldview. As part of that process, the Hebrew captives have their names changed. A new name signals a change of ownership and a change of destiny. Thus, by renaming the captives, the Babylonians intend to assert authority over them and force them to assimilate the values and culture of Babylon. Their original names, which point to the God of Israel, are replaced with names honoring foreign deities. In addition, the king determines that the young men should eat from his table. Eating from the king's food had deep implications in antiquity. It meant undivided allegiance to the king and reflected dependence on him. And as the food was usually offered to the god or gods of the empire, eating also had a profound religious meaning. It obviously meant acceptance of and participation in the king's worship system.

Thus, Daniel and his companions find themselves in challenging circumstances. For them to remain loyal to God and survive the overwhelming power of the imperial system demands nothing less than a miracle. To further complicate matters, the city of Babylon itself also stood as a monumental expression of human achievement. The architectural beauty of the Babylonian temples, the hanging gardens, and the Euphrates River meandering across the city conveyed an image of unsurpassable might and glory. So, Daniel and his friends are offered an opportunity for promotion and the chance to enjoy the benefits and prosperity of this system. They can cease to be Hebrew captives and become royal officers. Will they compromise their principles to tread the easy path to glory?

In what ways could these boys have rationalized a decision to compromise their convictions? In what ways might you now be facing similar, if subtler, challenges?

Firm Resolution

Read Daniel 1:7–20. We see two factors at work here: Daniel's free will and the intervention of God. What important principle also exists here?

It appears that the four Hebrew captives do not object to their Babylonian names. Most likely there is nothing they can do about it, apart from using their Hebrew names among themselves. But in regard to the food and wine from the king's table, it is certainly in their power to consume it or not. Thus, the free choice of the four men is very important here.

However, if an officer can change their names, he also can change the menu. There are two likely reasons the four do not want to eat from the king's table.

First, the meals from the king's table may contain unclean meats (*Leviticus 11*). Second, food is first offered as a meal to the god's image and then sent to the king for his consumption. Thus, when Daniel makes clear, without resorting to subterfuge or deception, that his request has a religious motivation (i.e., the food at the palace will defile him and his friends [*Dan. 1:8*]), he is being very courageous.

As we look into the interaction between Daniel and the Babylonian officer, a few important points stand out. First, Daniel seems to understand well the difficult position of the officer, so he proposed a test. Ten days of consuming the alternative meals should suffice to demonstrate the benefits of the diet and thus to put down the fears of the officer. Second, Daniel's certainty that the outcome would be so positive within such a short time span stems from absolute confidence in God. Third, the choice of a diet of vegetables and water points back to the food God gave humanity at Creation (*see Gen. 1:29*), a fact that perhaps influences Daniel's choice, as well. After all, what could be a better diet than the one God originally gave us?

What is so important about Daniel's free choice that opens the way for God to act as He does (*see Dan. 1:9*)? What lessons can we draw from this about the importance of our choices? How should our trust in God impact our choices?

Unblemished and Wise

Daniel and his companions are chosen for royal service because they fit within the profile established by Nebuchadnezzar. According to the king, palace officers must have “no blemish” and be “good-looking” (*Dan. 1:4, NKJV*). Interestingly, sacrifices and people serving in the sanctuary should have no “blemish” (*Lev. 22:17–25, 21:16–24*). The Babylonian king seems to compare himself to the God of Israel insofar as he demands similar qualifications for those serving in his palace. On the other hand, such qualifications may inadvertently suggest that Daniel and his compatriots were living sacrifices for God as they faced the challenges of the Babylonian Empire.

Read Galatians 2:19, 20; Matthew 16:24–26; and 2 Corinthians 4:17. What do these verses tell us about how we can stay faithful amid whatever temptations we face?

God honors the loyalty of the four Hebrew captives, and at the end of their 10-day testing period they look healthier and better nourished than the other students who have eaten from the royal table. So, God gives His four servants “knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom,” and to Daniel alone God gives “understanding in all visions and dreams” (*Dan. 1:17, NKJV*). This gift will play a significant role in Daniel’s prophetic ministry.

Just as God honors the faith of His servants in the Babylonian court, He gives us wisdom as we face the challenges of the world. From the experience of Daniel and his companions, we learn that it is indeed possible to remain untainted by the corrupting elements of our society. We also learn that we do not need to isolate ourselves from society and its cultural life in order to serve God. Daniel and his companions not only live amid a culture built on lies and errors and myths but are schooled on those lies and errors and myths. And yet, they remain faithful.

No matter where we live, we face the challenge of staying faithful to what we believe amid cultural and social influences that are contrary to that belief. Identify the negative influences in your culture, and ask yourself: *How well am I defying them?*

Final Exam

Read Daniel 1:17–21. What is the key to the success of the four men?
(See also Job 38:36, Prov. 2:6, and James 1:5.)

After three years of training in the “Babylonian University,” the four Hebrews are brought before the king for the final examination. They not only are healthier than the other students, but they surpass them in knowledge and wisdom. The four are immediately hired to serve the king. We shouldn’t forget that this “knowledge and wisdom” no doubt comprises a lot of paganism. Yet, they learn it anyway, and obviously they learn it well, too, even if they don’t believe it.

Nebuchadnezzar may think that such an accomplishment would have something to do with the palace diet and the training program the four students have undergone. However, Daniel and his companions know, and the narrative clearly shows, that their superior performance owes nothing to the Babylonian system. Everything comes from God. What a powerful example of what God can do for those who trust Him. We should not fear the overwhelming power of media, governments, and other institutions that may threaten to destroy our identity as God’s children. As we place our confidence in God, we can be sure that He can sustain us in difficult moments and preserve us against all odds. The key is for us to make the right choices when confronted with challenges to our faith.

Looking at Daniel 1, we learn some very important lessons about God: (1) God is in control of history. (2) God gives wisdom so that we can navigate the hostile environment of our culture and society. (3) God honors those who trust in Him through inner conviction and lifestyle.

The chapter concludes by pointing out that “Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus” (*Dan. 1:21, NKJV*). The mention of Cyrus here is significant: it provides a glimpse of hope amid an experience of exile. Cyrus is the one chosen by God to liberate His people and allow them to go back to Jerusalem. Though the chapter begins with the appearance of defeat and exile, it concludes with a glimpse of hope and a homecoming. This is our God: even amid the most difficult moments of our lives, He always opens a window of hope so that we can see the glory and joy that lie beyond the suffering and pain.

Further Thought: “Daniel and his companions in Babylon were, in their youth, apparently more favored of fortune than was Joseph in the earlier years of his life in Egypt; yet they were subjected to tests of character scarcely less severe. From the comparative simplicity of their Judean home these youth of royal line were transported to the most magnificent of cities, to the court of its greatest monarch, and were singled out to be trained for the king’s special service. Strong were the temptations surrounding them in that corrupt and luxurious court. The fact that they, the worshipers of Jehovah, were captives to Babylon; that the vessels of God’s house had been placed in the temple of the gods of Babylon; that the king of Israel was himself a prisoner in the hands of the Babylonians, was boastfully cited by the victors as evidence that their religion and customs were superior to the religion and customs of the Hebrews. Under such circumstances, through the very humiliations that Israel’s departure from His commandments had invited, God gave to Babylon evidence of His supremacy, of the holiness of His requirements, and of the sure result of obedience. And this testimony He gave, as alone it could be given, through those who still held fast their loyalty.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 54.

Discussion Questions:

- ① In class, talk about the various cultural and social challenges that you face as Christians in your society. What are they, and how can the church as a whole learn to respond to them?
- ② Think about how easy it would have been for Daniel and the others to have compromised their faith. After all, the Babylonians were the conquerors. The Jewish nation had been defeated. What more “proof” was needed that the Babylonian “gods” were greater than the God of Israel, and thus Daniel and his companions needed to accept that fact? In this case, what important biblical truths might they have held on to that helped sustain them during this time? (See Jer. 5:19 and 7:22–34.) What should this tell us about how important it is to know our Bibles and to understand “present truth”?
- ③ Why is faithfulness so important, not just for ourselves but for those for whom our faithfulness witnesses to the character of the Lord, whom we seek to serve?

Novel Approach to Evangelism

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

University student Samuel Naumann has a unique way of sharing Seventh-day Adventist literature in Germany—and it appears to be winning hearts.

Naumann, together with his father and grandfather, sets up a mobile book booth in city centers and at annual festivals. Then a family member stands a short distance away and hands out gift cards to passersby. Those who accept a gift card are directed to the booth to choose a free book. The result: the family can provide a personal touch, and the book-taker may be more likely to read the book.

“We have received reactions from people who attend festivals,” said Naumann, a 25-year-old Slavonian studies student at the University of Leipzig. “Some come back and say, ‘I took a book last year. It was good, and I want another one.’”

The gift card idea took a circular route to Germany, where the Adventist Church’s 35,000 members have struggled to make inroads in a highly secularized country of 83 million people. Naumann’s older brother saw a similar book project at an Adventist summer camp in Poland. The Poles, in turn, borrowed the idea from Ukraine. In any case, the Naumann family loved the idea and started making the rounds after securing a trailer to serve as the book booth.

Visitors to the booth are asked about their interests as they scan dozens of titles such as Ellen White’s *The Desire of Ages* and *The Great Controversy* and health books like *Health and Wellness: Secrets That Will Change Your Life*, by Mark Finley and Peter Landless.

The conversations provide a witnessing opportunity, especially when visitors choose a book and inevitably ask whether it really is free, Naumann said.

Naumann likes to reply, “You can take the book. It’s already been paid for.” “Why?” the visitor often asks.

“It’s like the cross,” Naumann says. “Jesus paid the price. You just have to accept. The only thing it will cost is your time to read. That’s the price you have to pay.”

Reaction to the books has been largely positive, he said.

His father, Steffen, recalled a high school teacher who liked *The Great Controversy* so much that he asked for nine extra copies to share with students in his history class. Another time, a European Union politician took a copy of *The Great Controversy* and read the thick volume in a single night. He returned the next day to ask for a copy for his son, a reporter.

Naumann, pictured, was unaware of any baptisms, but he wasn’t worried. “I consider this ministry to be the sowing of seeds, and someone else will harvest,” he said.



From Mystery to Revelation



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Dan. 2:1–16, Acts 17:28, Dan. 2:17–49, Psalm 138, John 15:5, Deut. 32:4, 1 Pet. 2:4.*

Memory Text: “Daniel answered and said: ‘Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might’ ” (*Daniel 2:20, ESV*).

In the waters around Greenland are icebergs of many sizes. Sometimes the small ice floes move in one direction while their massive counterparts flow in another. What happens is that surface winds drive the little ones, whereas the huge masses of ice are carried along by deep ocean currents. When we consider the rise and fall of nations throughout history, it is similar to accounting for the surface winds and ocean currents. The winds represent everything changeable and unpredictable, just like human will. But operating simultaneously with these gusts and gales is another force, even more powerful and very similar to the ocean currents. It is the sure movement of God's wise and sovereign purposes. As Ellen G. White said, “Like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, God's purposes know no haste and no delay.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 32. Although the rise and fall of nations, ideologies, and political parties seem to happen at the discretion of human whim alone, Daniel 2 shows that it is the God of heaven who actually moves human history to its grand finale.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 18.

The Immanence of God

Read Daniel 2:1–16. What crisis do the Hebrews face because of the dream that the Lord gives to the king?

Dreams were taken very seriously in the ancient world. When a dream seemed foreboding, it often indicated an impending disaster. Thus, it is understandable why Nebuchadnezzar becomes so anxious about a dream that, to make things even more ominous, he can no longer remember. Babylonian experts believed that the gods could reveal the interpretation of dreams, but in the case of this dream in Daniel, there is nothing that the experts can do because the king has forgotten the dream. If the content of the dream were conveyed to them, they would come up with an interpretation to please the king. But in this unprecedented situation, when the dream experts are unable to tell the king what his dream is about, they are forced to admit that “there is no other who can tell it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh” (*Dan. 2:11, NKJV*).

Overwhelmed with frustration, the king commands that all the wise men of Babylon be killed. Such an atrocity was not unknown in the ancient world. Historical sources attest that, because of a conspiracy, Darius I had all the magi executed, and Xerxes put to death the engineers who had built a bridge that collapsed. When Nebuchadnezzar issues his decree, Daniel and his companions have just finished their training and been admitted into the circle of the king’s experts. For this reason, the death decree issued by the king applies to them, as well. In fact, the original language suggests that the killing starts immediately, and Daniel and his friends will be executed next. But Daniel, with “counsel and wisdom” (*Dan. 2:14*), approaches Arioch, the man in charge of carrying out the executions. Eventually Daniel requests time from the king himself in order to solve the mystery of the dream. Interestingly, although the king has accused the magicians of trying to buy “time,” he promptly grants the “time” Daniel requests. Daniel certainly agrees with the magicians that no human being can solve such a mystery, but the prophet also knows of a God who can reveal both the content and the interpretation of the dream.

Theologians talk about the “immanence” of God, that though distinct from the creation, God can still be so close to it. What does the fact that He gives King Nebuchadnezzar a dream teach us about just how immanent God can be to us? (See also Acts 17:28.)

The Prayer

Daniel immediately grabs his three friends for a prayer session, explaining that they will be executed if God does not reveal the dream. Whenever we face a big problem, we also should recognize that our God is great enough to resolve even the most unsolvable challenges.

Read Daniel 2:17–23. What are the two kinds of prayers prayed here?

Two types of prayer are mentioned in this chapter. The first is a petition prayer in which Daniel asks God to reveal the content of the dream and its interpretation (*Dan. 2:17–19*). The words of this prayer are not given, but we are told that Daniel and his friends “seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret, so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon” (*Dan. 2:18, NKJV*). As they pray, God answers their petition and reveals the content and interpretation of the king’s dream. We can rest assured that whenever we seek “mercies from the God of heaven” our prayers will be heard, as well, even if not in such a dramatic manner as we see here, because the God of Daniel is our God too.

In response to God’s answering their petition, Daniel and his friends burst into a prayer of thanksgiving and praise. They praise God for being the source of wisdom and for being in control of nature and political history. There is an important lesson we can learn here. As we pray and plead with God for so many things, how often do we praise and thank Him for answering our prayers? The experience of Jesus with the 10 lepers provides an apt illustration of human ingratitude. Out of 10 who are healed, only one comes back “to give glory to God” (*Luke 17:18*). Daniel’s response not only reminds us of the importance of thanksgiving and praise but also reveals the character of the God we pray to. When we pray to Him, we can trust Him to do what is in our best interest, and thus we should always praise and thank Him.

Read Psalm 138. What can you take away from this prayer of thanksgiving that can help you learn to be thankful to God, regardless of your circumstances?

The Image: Part 1

Daniel 2:24–30. What does Daniel say here that’s so important for us always to remember? (*See also John 15:5.*)

In response to prayer, God reveals the content of the dream and its interpretation. And Daniel does not hesitate to tell the king that the solution for the mystery comes from the “God in heaven.” Also, prior to reporting the content of the dream and its interpretation, Daniel mentions the unexpressed thoughts and concerns of the king as the latter lay sleepless in bed. This circumstantial information further emphasizes the credibility of the message, because such information known only to the king must have come to Daniel through a supernatural power. But as Daniel proceeds to report the content of the dream, he risks triggering another crisis, because the dream is not necessarily good news for Nebuchadnezzar.

Read Daniel 2:31–49. What does the dream say is the fate of Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom?

The dream consists of a majestic image with its head “of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay” (*Dan. 2:32, 33, NKJV*). Eventually a stone “struck the image on its feet” (*Dan. 2:34*), and the whole structure was destroyed and scattered like chaff on the wind. Daniel explains that the different metals represent successive kingdoms that will replace one another throughout the course of history. For Nebuchadnezzar, the message is clear: Babylonia, with all its might and glory, will pass away and be replaced by another kingdom, which will be followed by others until a kingdom of a completely different nature will replace them all: God’s eternal kingdom, which will last forever.

Look at how fleeting and temporary all human things are. What should this fact teach us about the great hope we have in Jesus, and in Jesus alone (*see John 6:54, 2 Cor. 4:18*)?

The Image: Part 2

Read again the dream and its interpretation (*Dan. 2:31–49*). What does this teach us about God’s foreknowledge of world history?

The prophecy conveyed by Nebuchadnezzar’s dream provides a general prophetic outline and functions as the yardstick with which to approach the more detailed prophecies of Daniel 7, 8, and 11. Also, Daniel 2 is not a conditional prophecy. It is an apocalyptic prophecy: a definitive prediction of what God foresaw and would actually bring to pass in the future.

1. *The head of gold* represents Babylon (626–539 B.C.). Indeed, no other metal could better represent the power and wealth of the Babylonian Empire than gold. The Bible calls it “the golden city” (*Isa. 14:4*) and “a golden cup in the LORD’s hands” (*Jer. 51:7; compare with Rev. 18:16*). The ancient historian Herodotus reports that an abundance of gold embellished the city.

2. *The chest and arms of silver* stand for Media-Persia (539–331 B.C.). As silver is valued less than gold, the Medo-Persian Empire never attained the splendor of the Babylonian. In addition, silver also was a fitting symbol for the Persians because they used silver in their taxation system.

3. *The belly and thighs of bronze* symbolize Greece (331–168 B.C.). Ezekiel 27:13 portrays the Greeks as bartering bronze vessels. Greek soldiers were noted for their bronze armor. Their helmets, shields, and battle-axes consisted of brass. Herodotus tells us that Psammetichus I of Egypt saw in invading Greek pirates the fulfillment of an oracle that foretold “men of bronze coming from the sea.”

4. *The legs of iron* aptly represent Rome (168 B.C.–A.D. 476). As Daniel explained, the iron represented the crushing power of the Roman Empire, which lasted longer than any of the previous kingdoms. Iron was a perfect metal to represent the empire.

5. *The feet partly of iron and partly of clay* represent a divided Europe (A.D. 476–second coming of Christ). The mixture of iron with clay provides a fitting picture of what happened after the disintegration of the Roman Empire. Although many attempts have been made to unify Europe, ranging from marriage alliances between royal houses to the present European Union, division and disunity have prevailed and, according to this prophecy, will remain so until God establishes the eternal kingdom.

The Stone

Read Daniel 2:34, 35, 44, 45. What do these verses teach us about the ultimate fate of our world?

The focus of the dream is on what will happen in the “latter days” (*Dan. 2:28*). As powerful and rich as they may have been, the metal (and clay) kingdoms are nothing but a prelude to the establishment of the stone kingdom. Whereas to some extent metals and clay can be products of human manufacture, the stone in the dream comes untouched by human hands. In other words, although each of the previous kingdoms eventually comes to an end, the kingdom represented by the stone will last forever. The metaphor of the rock, then, often symbolizes God (*for example, Deut. 32:4, 1 Sam. 2:2, Ps. 18:31*), and the stone likewise may be a representation of the Messiah (*Ps. 118:22; 1 Pet. 2:4, 7*). Thus, nothing is more appropriate than the figure of a stone to symbolize the establishment of God’s eternal kingdom.

Some argue that the stone kingdom was established during Jesus’ earthly ministry, and that the propagation of the gospel stands as an indication that the kingdom of God has taken over the entire world. Yet, the stone kingdom comes into existence only after the four main kingdoms have fallen and human history has reached the time of the divided kingdoms, represented by the feet and toes of the image. This fact rules out the fulfillment during the first century, because Jesus’ earthly ministry took place during the dominion of Rome, the fourth kingdom.

But the stone gives way to a mountain. That is, “the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (*Dan. 2:35, NKJV*). A mountain such as this evokes Mount Zion, the place where the temple stood, the concrete representation of God’s earthly kingdom in the Old Testament times. Interestingly, the stone cut from the mountain becomes a mountain itself. This mountain, which according to the text is already in existence, most likely points to the heavenly Zion, the heavenly sanctuary, whence Christ will come to establish His eternal kingdom. And in the Jerusalem that will come down from heaven (*Rev. 21:1–22:5*), this kingdom will find its ultimate fulfillment.

Daniel 2 has been correct on all the kingdoms so far. Why, then, is it so logical and wise to trust its prophecy about the coming of the final kingdom, God’s eternal one? Why is it so irrational *not* to believe the prophecy?

Further Thought: It is instructive to note that the image of Daniel 2 is made of gold and silver, which are metals related to economic power. The image also is made of bronze and iron, which were used for tools and weapons, and of pottery, which was used in the ancient world for literary and domestic purposes. Thus, the image provides a vivid portrayal of humanity and its accomplishments. Most appropriately, the distinct anatomical parts of the image convey the succession of world kingdoms and the final disunity that will prevail in the last days of human history. The stone, however, is distinctly depicted as something not made with “human hands” (*Dan. 2:45, NIV*), a powerful reminder of the supernatural end that will come to this temporary world and all its human accomplishments.

Although “to the unaided human eye, human history may appear to be a chaotic interplay of forces and counterforces . . . Daniel assures us that behind all of this stands God, looking down upon it and moving within it to achieve what He sees best.”—William H. Shea, *Daniel: A Reader’s Guide* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005), p. 98.

Discussion Questions:

- ① How good to know that amid all the chaos and suffering of this world, God is ultimately in control and will bring everything to a glorious end. Until then, what is our role in seeking to do all the good that we can to help alleviate the suffering that exists in this fallen world?
- ② How do we explain Daniel and the captives working so closely with and apparently loyally to a pagan leader who has done so much damage to Daniel’s own people?
- ③ As we saw, some have argued that the stone cut out without hands refers to the spreading of the gospel to the world. That can’t be right for a number of reasons, including what Daniel 2:35 says, which is that the stone will crush the previous nations and that “the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found” (*NKJV*). That did not happen after the Cross. Furthermore, some attempts to identify the stone kingdom with the church fail to note that the stone kingdom replaces all other forms of human dominion. It is a kingdom that encompasses the whole world. Therefore, only Jesus’ second coming can set in motion the process portrayed as the climax of this prophetic dream. Why, then, is the second coming of Jesus the only sensible interpretation of what the stone does in the end of days?

Book Untouched by Fire

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

A Nigerian student lost his possessions in a red-hot blaze that melted even the iron pipes in his apartment, but he was shocked to find one item undamaged—a copy of Ellen White’s book *The Great Hope*.

The student, Olajide Oluwatobi Igbinyemi, immediately read the book and rushed to the local Seventh-day Adventist church, whose members had given him the book on a literature evangelism Sabbath.

“This book is great, wonderful,” Igbinyemi told astonished church members, holding up his intact copy of *The Great Hope*, an 11-chapter abridged version of *The Great Controversy*.

“I have not seen this type of book,” he said. “The miracle made me to finish reading the book.”

A church member presented the book to Igbinyemi, 30, in Ede, a city located about 135 miles (220 kilometers) northeast of Nigeria’s capital, Lagos. Church members—working in cooperation with a world church Mission to the Cities goal to distribute one billion pieces of literature in cities around the globe—hand out thousands of copies of *The Great Hope* across Nigeria’s state of Osun every quarter on Great Hope Day, a special Sabbath set aside for sharing the book, said Joseph Adebomi, president of the Adventist Church’s Osun Conference.

But then Igbinyemi, a student at a Nigerian institution of higher education called Federal Polytechnic, Ede, went for a trip in September 2018, leaving the book in his rented one-room apartment. When he returned, he found that a fire had gutted the house. His schoolbooks, furniture, and mattress were destroyed.

“Even iron melted,” Adebomi said.

The cause of the fire was not immediately clear.

But as Igbinyemi sifted through the ashes, he found *The Great Hope*.

That day, he eagerly finished reading the book, which uses history and prophecy to make sense of the chaos unfolding in today’s world. Then he ran to the Adventist church to share his testimony.

“You do not know the book you are sharing,” he declared, according to Adebomi. “The power of God is in it.”

Igbinyemi, pictured, knelt before the congregation and praised God.

The story is touching hearts and increasing people’s faith in Nigeria’s state of Osun.



“I have heard about Bibles not burning in fires, but I have never heard about any other book not burning,” said Onaolapo Ajibade, a retired pastor and former executive secretary of the West-Central Africa Division, whose territory includes Nigeria. He lives in Inisa in Osun state. “This miracle has increased my love for the Spirit of Prophecy books.”

From Furnace to Palace



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 3, Rev. 13:11–18, Exod. 20:3–6, Deut. 6:4, 1 Cor. 15:12–26, Hebrews 11.*

Memory Text: “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king” (*Daniel 3:17, NKJV*).

Thus these youth, imbued with the Holy Spirit, declare to the whole nation their faith, that He whom they worshiped is the only true and living God. This demonstration of their own faith was the most eloquent presentation of their principles. In order to impress idolaters with the power and greatness of the living God, His servants must reveal their own reverence for God. They must make it manifest that He is the only object of their honor and worship, and that no consideration, not even the preservation of life itself, can induce them to make the least concession to idolatry. These lessons have a direct and vital bearing upon our experience in these last days.”—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 149. While facing the threat of death because of the issue of worship might seem a thing of some prescientific and superstitious age, Scripture reveals that at the end of time, when the world has greatly “advanced,” something similar will unfold, but on a worldwide scale. Thus, from the study of this story, we get insights into the issues that, according to Scripture, God’s faithful will face.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 25.

The Golden Image

Read Daniel 3:1–7. What likely motivates the king to make this statue?

Some time elapsed between the dream and the construction of the image. Nonetheless, it seems that the king can no longer forget the dream and the fact that Babylon is doomed to be replaced by other powers. Not satisfied with being only the head of gold, the king wants to be represented by an entire image of gold in order to communicate to his subjects that his kingdom will endure throughout history.

This attitude of pride calls to mind the builders of the Tower of Babel, who, in their arrogance, attempt to challenge God Himself. No less arrogant is Nebuchadnezzar here. He has accomplished much as ruler of Babylon, and he cannot live with the idea that his kingdom will eventually pass away. Thus, in an effort at his own self-exaltation, he builds an image to evoke his power and thereby assess the loyalty of his subjects. Although it may not be clear whether the image is intended to represent the king or a deity, we should keep in mind that in antiquity the lines separating politics from religion were often blurred, if they existed at all.

We should remember, too, that Nebuchadnezzar has had two opportunities to get acquainted with the true God. First, he tests the young Hebrews and finds them 10 times wiser than the other sages of Babylon. Then, after all other experts have failed to remind him of his dream, Daniel reports to him the thoughts of his mind, the dream, and its interpretation. Finally, the king recognizes the superiority of the God of Daniel. But surprisingly enough, those previous theology lessons do not prevent Nebuchadnezzar from reverting to idolatry. Why? Most likely, pride. Sinful human beings resist acknowledging the fact that their material and intellectual accomplishments are vanity and are doomed to disappear. We may at times act like little “Nebuchadnezzars” as we pay too much attention to our accomplishments and forget how meaningless they can be in the face of eternity.

How can we learn not to fall, even in very subtle ways, into the same trap that Nebuchadnezzar does?

The Call to Worship

Read Daniel 3:8–15 and Revelation 13:11–18. What parallels can we see between what happens in Daniel’s time and what will happen in the future?

The image of gold standing on the plain of Dura, whose name in Akkadian means “walled place,” gives the impression of a vast sanctuary. As if it were not enough, the furnace nearby can well evoke an altar. Babylonian music is to be part of the liturgy. Seven types of musical instruments are listed, as if to convey the completeness and effectiveness of the adoration protocol.

Today, we are bombarded from every side by calls to adopt new lifestyles, new ideologies, and to abandon our commitment to the authority of God as expressed in His Word and to surrender our allegiance to contemporary successors of the Babylonian Empire. The allure of the world at times seems overwhelming, but we should remind ourselves that our ultimate allegiance belongs to the Creator God.

According to the prophetic calendar, we are living in the last days of earth’s history. Revelation 13 announces that the inhabitants of the earth will be called to worship the image of the beast. That entity will cause “all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads” (*Rev. 13:16, NKJV*).

Six categories of people are said to give allegiance to the image of the beast: “small and great, rich and poor, free and slave.” The number of the beast, which is 666, also emphasizes six. This shows that the image erected by Nebuchadnezzar is just an illustration of what the eschatological Babylon will do in the last days (*see Dan. 3:1 for the imagery of 6 and 60*). Therefore, we do well to pay close attention to what transpires in this narrative and how God sovereignly directs the affairs of the world.

Worship isn’t just bowing down before something or someone and openly professing ultimate allegiance. What are other ways, much more subtle ways, that we can end up worshipping something other than our Lord?

The Test of Fire

For the three Hebrews, the image worship imposed by the king is a blatant counterfeit of the temple worship in Jerusalem, which they experienced in their earlier years. Although they hold offices in the empire and are loyal to the king, their allegiance to God sets a limit on their human loyalty. They are certainly willing to continue to serve the king as faithful administrators; however, they cannot join the ceremony.

Read Exodus 20:3–6 and Deuteronomy 6:4. What do these texts convey that surely influenced the stand these men took?

Following the instructions issued by the king, all the people at the sound of the musical instruments bow and worship the golden image. Only the three—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego—dare to disobey the king. Immediately, some Babylonians bring the matter to the king’s attention. The accusers seek to enrage the king by saying: (1) it was the king himself who put these three young men over the province of Babylon; (2) the Jewish men do not serve the gods of the king; and (3) they do not worship the gold image that the king had set up (*Dan. 3:12*). But in spite of his fury against them, the king offers the three men a second chance. The king is willing to repeat the whole procedure so that these men can retract their position and worship the image. Should they refuse, they will be thrown into the fiery furnace. And Nebuchadnezzar closes his appeal with a most arrogant claim: “And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?” (*Dan. 3:15, NKJV*).

Endowed with supernatural courage, they respond to the king: “If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” (*Dan. 3:17, 18, NKJV*).

Though they know their God can deliver them, they do not have the guarantee that He will. Nevertheless, they refuse to obey the king’s command, even knowing that they could be burned alive. Where do we get that kind of faith?

The Fourth Man

Read Daniel 3:19–27. What happens? Who is the other person in the fire?

Having thrown the faithful Hebrews into the fire, Nebuchadnezzar is puzzled to perceive the presence of a fourth person inside the furnace. To the best of his knowledge, the king identifies the fourth figure as “the Son of God” (*Dan.* 3:25).

The king cannot say much more, but we do know who that fourth person is. He appears to Abraham before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, wrestles with Jacob beside the brook Jabbok, and reveals Himself to Moses in a burning bush. He is Jesus Christ in a preincarnate form, coming to show that God stands with His people in their troubles.

Ellen G. White says, “But the Lord did not forget His own. As His witnesses were cast into the furnace, the Saviour revealed Himself to them in person, and together they walked in the midst of the fire. In the presence of the Lord of heat and cold, the flames lost their power to consume.”—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 508, 509.

As God says in Isaiah, “ ‘When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you’ ” (*Isa.* 43:2, *NKJV*).

Though we love stories like these, they do raise the question about others who are not miraculously delivered from persecution for their faith. Those men surely knew the experience of Isaiah and Zechariah, who were put to death by impious kings. All through sacred history, even to our day, faithful Christians have endured terrible suffering that ended for them, at least here, not in a miraculous deliverance but in a painful death. Here is one case in which the faithful receive a miraculous deliverance, but, as we know, such things don’t usually happen.

On the other hand, what is the miraculous deliverance that all of God’s faithful people will have, regardless of their fate here? (See 1 Cor. 15:12–26.)

The Secret of Such a Faith

As we reflect on the experience of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, we may ask ourselves: *What is the secret of so strong a faith?* How could they have been willing to burn alive rather than worship the image? Think about all the ways that they could have rationalized bowing in submission to the orders of the king. And yet, despite realizing that they could have died, as so many others had done, they nevertheless stood firm.

Read Hebrews 11. What does it teach us about what faith is?

In order to develop such a faith, we need to understand what faith is. Some people have a quantitative perception of faith; they measure their faith by the answers they seem to receive from God. They go to the shopping mall, and they pray for a parking space. If they happen to get a space upon arrival, they conclude that they have strong faith. If all the slots are filled, they may think their faith is not strong enough for God to listen to their prayers. This understanding of faith becomes dangerous because it attempts to manipulate God and does not reckon with God's sovereignty and wisdom.

Indeed, true faith, as manifested by Daniel's friends, is measured by the quality of our relationship with God and its resulting absolute confidence in God. Authentic faith does not seek to bend God's will to conform to our will; rather, it surrenders our will to the will of God. As we saw, the three Hebrew men did not know exactly what God had in store for them when they decided to challenge the king and to remain faithful to God. They decided to do the right thing despite the consequences. This is what really characterizes a mature faith. We show real faith when we pray to the Lord for what we want but trust Him to do what's best for us, even if at the time we don't understand what is happening or why.

What are ways we can exercise faith day by day, even in "little things" that can help our faith grow and be ready for greater challenges over time? Why, in many ways, are the tests over the "little things" the most important ones?

Further Thought: “Important are the lessons to be learned from the experience of the Hebrew youth on the plain of Dura. In this our day, many of God’s servants, though innocent of wrongdoing, will be given over to suffer humiliation and abuse at the hands of those who, inspired by Satan, are filled with envy and religious bigotry. Especially will the wrath of man be aroused against those who hallow the Sabbath of the fourth commandment; and at last a universal decree will denounce these as deserving of death.

“The season of distress before God’s people will call for a faith that will not falter. His children must make it manifest that He is the only object of their worship, and that no consideration, not even that of life itself, can induce them to make the least concession to false worship. To the loyal heart the commands of sinful, finite men will sink into insignificance beside the word of the eternal God. Truth will be obeyed though the result be imprisonment or exile or death.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 512, 513.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Read 1 Peter 1:3–9. Why does God rescue some and not others from suffering? Or is the answer to questions such as this something that we just aren’t going to get now? In cases in which miraculous deliverances don’t occur, why do we need to trust in God’s goodness despite such disappointments?
- ❷ If this incident had ended with the death of the Hebrew men in the fiery furnace, what lessons could we take away from it still?
- ❸ From our understanding of last-day events, what will be the issue, the outward sign, that will show whom we worship? What should this tell us now about how important the Sabbath really is?
- ❹ Read Luke 16:10. How do Christ’s words here help us understand what it means truly to live by faith?
- ❺ Read again Daniel 3:15, where Nebuchadnezzar says, “Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?” How would you answer that question?

Attacked at School

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Stepan Avakov, born and raised in Azerbaijan's capital, Baku, had his life planned out at the age of 13. He loved basketball and claimed the title of best player in his age group in Azerbaijan.

"You have nothing to worry about," his coach said. "You will become a professional basketball player."

One day, a group of students burst into the school classroom during the lesson.

"He's Armenian," one said, pointing to Avakov.

"We will kill him!" snarled another.

The students dragged Avakov to a square in front of the school, where an angry crowd of fellow ethnic Azeris waited. As Avakov braced himself for the worst, his captors inexplicably relaxed their grip. An Azeri classmate appeared beside Avakov and pulled him to safety.

Once away from the crowd, the two boys ran to Avakov's house, where the young rescuer left Avakov with his mother. Avakov never saw the boy again.

Avakov's mother refused to allow him to return to school, and, a month later, in late 1989, the family fled to Russia to save their lives.

Avakov struggled to adjust to his new life in Volgodonsk, a city of about 175,000 people in southern Russia. He tried to play basketball, but something was broken inside him. He couldn't understand why lifelong friends had turned against him because of his ethnicity. His heart searched for answers.

One day at school, the history teacher announced that she had invited a guest to speak about biblical history. The guest teacher stood up and spoke about the prophecy of the image in Daniel 2. Avakov listened with deep interest. He had never thought about God, and for the first time in his life he considered the existence of a God who rules over the earth. He wondered whether God knew his future. After the class, Avakov approached the guest teacher with many questions.

The woman shook her head. "My husband, who is a pastor, will be at the school in two weeks," she said. "He can answer your questions."

Two weeks later, Pastor Veniamin Tarasyuk taught the history lesson. He proposed four questions that every person should answer: Who am I? Where do I come from? Why am I here? What will happen after me? The questions shocked Avakov. He had never considered them.

"If a person can answer these four questions, he will have all the answers for life," the pastor said. "God can answer these questions."

Avakov went home determined to find God and answers to the four questions. He found them when he was baptized a few years later. "I lost peace when I had to flee Baku," said Avakov, pictured. "I was looking for peace all my life until my baptism."



From Pride *to* Humility



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Dan. 4:1–33, Prov. 14:31, 2 Kings 20:2–5, Jon. 3:10, Dan. 4:34–37, Phil. 2:1–11.*

Memory Text: “How great are His signs, and how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation” (*Daniel 4:3, NKJV*).

Pride has been called the first sin. It is first made manifest in Lucifer, an angel in the courts of heaven. Thus God says through Ezekiel, “Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee” (*Ezek. 28:17*).

Pride leads to Lucifer's fall, so he now instills pride in men thus leading them to be against God and so, to go down a path toward destruction. We are all fallen human beings, dependent upon God for our very existence. Any gifts we have, any things that we accomplish with those gifts, come only from God. Hence, how do we dare to be proud, boastful, or arrogant when, in reality, humility should dominate all that we do?

It takes a long time for Nebuchadnezzar to understand the importance of humility. Even the appearance of the fourth man in the fiery furnace (see last week) does not change the course of his life. Only after God takes away his kingdom and sends him to live with the beasts of the field does the king recognize his true status.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 1.

Is Not This Babylon the Great?

Read Daniel 4:1–33. What happens to the king, and why?

God gives Nebuchadnezzar a second dream. This time, the king does not forget the dream. But because the Babylonian experts fail again, the king summons Daniel to provide the interpretation of the dream. In the dream, the king sees a big tree reaching up to heaven and a heavenly being commanding that the tree be chopped down. Only the stump and roots would be left in the earth and would be wet with the dew of heaven. But what must have troubled Nebuchadnezzar was the part of the dream in which the heavenly being said, “Let his heart be changed from *that of* a man, let him be given the heart of a beast, and let seven times pass over him” (*Dan. 4:16, NKJV; emphasis supplied*). Recognizing the seriousness of the dream, Daniel politely expresses the wish that the dream would refer to the enemies of the king. However, faithful to the message conveyed by the dream, Daniel says that in fact the dream refers to the king himself.

Trees are commonly used in the Bible as symbols of kings, nations, and empires (*Ezekiel 17: 31; Hosea 14; Zech. 11:1, 2; Luke 23:31*). So, the big tree is a fitting representation of an arrogant king. God gives Nebuchadnezzar dominion and power; nevertheless, he persistently fails to recognize that everything he possesses comes from God.

Focus on Daniel 4:30. What does the king say that shows he still does not grasp the warning that the Lord has given him?

Perhaps what’s so dangerous about pride is that it can lead us to forget just how dependent we are upon God for everything. And once we forget that, we are on dangerous spiritual ground.

What things have you accomplished in your life? Can you take pride in them without being proud? If so, how so?

Warned by the Prophet

Read Daniel 4:27. Besides the warning about what will happen, what does Daniel tell the king to do, and why? (See also Prov. 14:31.)

Daniel not only interprets the dream but also points Nebuchadnezzar to a way out of his situation: “Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity” (*Dan. 4:27, NKJV*).

Nebuchadnezzar performs a massive work of building in Babylon. The gardens, a system of canals, and hundreds of temples and other building projects turn the city into one of the wonders of the ancient world. But such splendor and beauty, at least in part, is accomplished through exploitation of slave manpower and neglect of the poor. Furthermore, the wealth of the empire is used to gratify the pleasures of the king and his entourage. Thus, the pride of Nebuchadnezzar not only prevents him from acknowledging God, but, as a consequence, also makes him oblivious to the hardships of those in need. Given the special care that God shows for the poor, it is not surprising that from the other possible sins that Daniel could have highlighted before the king, he singles out the sin of neglecting the poor.

The message to Nebuchadnezzar is by no means something new. The Old Testament prophets often warn God’s people against oppressing the poor. Indeed, prominent among the sins that bring about the king’s exile is neglect of the needy. After all, compassion for the poor is the highest expression of Christian charity; conversely, exploitation and neglect of the poor constitutes an attack on God Himself. In caring for the needy, we recognize that God owns everything, which means that we are not owners but merely stewards of God’s property.

By serving others with our possessions, we honor God and recognize His Lordship. It is God’s ownership that should ultimately determine the value and function of material possessions. This is where Nebuchadnezzar fails, and we risk failing too, unless we recognize God’s sovereignty over our accomplishments and manifest our recognition of this reality by helping those in need.

“The Most High Rules . . .”

Despite his being told to repent and seek God’s forgiveness, Nebuchadnezzar’s unrelenting pride causes the heavenly decree to be executed (*Dan. 4:28–33*). While the king is walking in his palace and praising himself for what he has accomplished, he is afflicted with a mental condition that forces his expulsion from the royal palace. He may have experienced a pathological mental condition called clinical lycanthropy or zoanthropy. Such a condition leads the patient to act like an animal. In modern times this disease has been called “species dysphoria,” the feeling that one’s body is of the wrong species and, hence, the desire to be an animal.

Read 2 Kings 20:2–5; Jonah 3:10; and Jeremiah 18:7, 8. What do these texts tell us about the king’s chance to have averted the punishment?

Unfortunately, Nebuchadnezzar has to learn the hard way. When invested with royal power, Nebuchadnezzar has no ability to reflect on his relationship with God. Thus, by depriving the king of royal authority and sending him to live with the beasts of the field, God gives the king an opportunity to acknowledge his total dependence on Him. In fact, the ultimate lesson God wants to teach to the arrogant king is that “Heaven rules” (*Dan. 4:26, NKJV*). Indeed, the judgment upon the king has an even larger purpose in God’s design, as so clearly expressed in the decree of the heavenly beings: “ ‘In order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men’ ” (*Dan. 4:17, NKJV*).

In other words, the discipline applied to Nebuchadnezzar should be a lesson for all of us, as well. Because we belong to the group of “the living,” we should pay better attention to the main lesson we are supposed to learn that “the Most High rules in the kingdom of men.”

Why is knowing that the Most High rules so important a lesson for us to learn? How should this knowledge, for instance, impact how we treat those over whom we have power?

Lifting Eyes Toward Heaven

Read Daniel 4:34–37. How, and why, do things change for the king?

God allows Nebuchadnezzar to be stricken by a strange disease, but eventually He readily restores him to a sound mental state. Interestingly, everything changes when, at the end of the seven years predicted by the prophet, the ailing king lifts up his eyes to heaven (*Dan. 4:34*).

“For seven years Nebuchadnezzar was an astonishment to all his subjects; for seven years he was humbled before all the world. Then his reason was restored and, looking up in humility to the God of heaven, he recognized the divine hand in his chastisement. In a public proclamation he acknowledged his guilt and the great mercy of God in his restoration.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 520.

No question, great changes can happen when we lift our eyes to heaven. As soon as his understanding comes back, the king gives evidence that he has learned this lesson.

But this story is not as much about Nebuchadnezzar as it is about the mercy of God. The king has missed three previous opportunities to accept the God of Israel as the Lord of his life. Such occasions are available to him when he recognizes the exceptional wisdom of the four young Judean captives (*Daniel 1*), when Daniel interprets his dream (*Daniel 2*), and when the three Hebrew men are rescued from the fiery furnace (*Daniel 3*). *After all, if that rescue doesn’t humble him, what will?* In spite of the ruler’s stubbornness, God gives him a fourth chance, finally wins the king’s heart, and restores him to his royal office (*Daniel 4*). As the case of Nebuchadnezzar illustrates, God gives one chance after another in order to restore us to a right relationship with Him. As Paul writes many centuries later, the Lord “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (*1 Tim. 2:4, NKJV*). We see in this story a powerful example of that truth.

What are ways that you have been humbled by God? What did you learn from the experience? What changes might you need to make in order to avoid having to get taught the lesson again?

Humble and Grateful

The repentant king declares: “All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing” (*Dan. 4:35*). Given the context, what important point is he making?

How do we know that Nebuchadnezzar indeed genuinely accepts the true God? We find a major piece of evidence in the fact that Nebuchadnezzar himself is the author of the letter inserted by Daniel in chapter 4. Indeed, most of this chapter seems to be a transcription of a letter that the king distributes to his vast kingdom. In this letter, the king tells about his pride and insanity, and humbly recognizes God’s intervention in his life. Ancient monarchs would rarely write anything derogatory about themselves. Virtually all ancient royal documents that we know of glorify the king. A document such as this, therefore, in which the king admits his pride and his beastly behavior, points to a genuine conversion. In addition, by writing a letter recounting his experience and humbly confessing God’s sovereignty, the king is acting as a missionary. He can no longer keep to himself what he has experienced and learned from the true God. What we have seen here, then, in the king’s prayer and praise (*Dan. 4:34–37*), reveals the reality of his experience.

The king now has a different set of values and can recognize the limitations of human power. In a profound prayer of thanksgiving, the king extols the power of Daniel’s God and admits that “all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing” (*Dan. 4:35, NKJV*). That is to say, humans have nothing of themselves of which to be boastful. Thus, this last glimpse of Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel shows a king humble and grateful, singing the praises of God and warning us against pride.

Of course, God continues to change lives today. No matter how proud or sinful people may be, in God there is mercy and power to turn rebellious sinners into children of the God of heaven.

Read Philippians 2:1–11. What do we find here that should eradicate pride in our lives?

Further Thought: “The once proud monarch had become a humble child of God; the tyrannical, overbearing ruler, a wise and compassionate king. He who had defied and blasphemed the God of heaven, now acknowledged the power of the Most High and earnestly sought to promote the fear of Jehovah and the happiness of his subjects. Under the rebuke of Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords, Nebuchadnezzar had learned at last the lesson which all rulers need to learn—that true greatness consists in true goodness. He acknowledged Jehovah as the living God, saying, ‘I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase.’

“God’s purpose that the greatest kingdom in the world should show forth His praise was now fulfilled. This public proclamation, in which Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the mercy and goodness and authority of God, was the last act of his life recorded in sacred history.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 521.

Discussion Questions:

❶ “Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind. Does this seem to you exaggerated? If so, think it over. . . . [T]he more pride one had, the more one disliked pride in others. In fact, if you want to find out how proud you are the easiest way is to ask yourself, ‘How much do I dislike it when other people snub me, or refuse to take any notice of me, or shove their oar in, or patronise me, or show off?’ The point is that each person’s pride is in competition with everyone else’s pride. It is because I wanted to be the big noise at the party that I am so annoyed at someone else being the big noise. Two of a trade never agree.”—C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), p. 110. What is Lewis saying here that could perhaps help you see pride in your own life?

❷ A theme seen in this chapter, as well as in some preceding it, is the sovereignty of God. Why is this such an important topic to understand? What role does the Sabbath play in helping us understand this crucial truth?

Finding Christ in the Caucasus

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Seventeen-year-old Stepan Avakov volunteered to help interpret when a group of Americans organized a Quiet Hour health expo in the southern Russian city of Volgograd. When the expo ended, organizer Vincent Page invited Avakov to follow the expo to the North Caucasus region. It was summer, and Avakov was free. He asked his mother for advice.

“Why don’t you go?” she said. “You can practice your English.”

Local pastor Veniamin Tarasyuk also gave his blessing but added, “Remember, if you want to be baptized, come back and I will baptize you.” Avakov was stunned. *Are you crazy?* he thought. *I’m not going to be baptized.*

But for the next two months, he lived a Seventh-day Adventist life as he visited various towns. The Adventist organizers woke up early, read their Bibles, prayed, and then had morning devotions together. To Avakov, it was a new world.

One day, Page invited Avakov to go to Lithuania next. Avakov, however, had left his passport at home. Page gave him a \$100 bill. “Go home, get your passport, and come back here in one day,” he said.

The next morning, the teen jumped out of the hotel bed promptly at 5:00 A.M., earlier than ever before. He didn’t know how to find a way out of town. As he left the hotel, he prayed, “God, if You exist, lead me to the bus station.”

Avakov began walking and, to his surprise, found the bus station. A bus was waiting with open doors. Inside, passengers were complaining, “Driver, why are we waiting? Let’s go!” As Avakov sat down, the doors closed, and the bus left.

Similar miracles occurred throughout the day. When Avakov returned to the hotel with his passport that night, he knelt beside his bed. “God, now I know that You exist,” he said. “You have shown that You love me and are drawing me to You. From this moment, You are my Lord, and I want You to live in me.”

In the morning, Avakov showed his passport to Page. “Here is my passport,” he said. “But something more important happened. Last night, I became a Christian.” Page and the other workers spontaneously clapped with joy.

Avakov was baptized by Pastor Tarasyuk three weeks later, on September 10, 1993.



Six years later, Pastor Tarasyuk became Avakov’s father-in-law. Avakov, now 42, works as a professional interpreter for the United Nations and other agencies. He also is the founder and director of an organization that helps Russian orphans. His conversion story, he said, can be found in Romans 5:1, which reads, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (NKJV). “This verse interprets my conversion story,” said Avakov, pictured.

From Arrogance to Destruction



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 5, Rev. 17:4–6, Ps. 96:5, Col. 1:15–17, Rom. 1:16–32, Eccles. 8:11, Rev. 14:8.*

Memory Text: “And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding” (*Daniel 2:21, NKJV*).

In Daniel 5, the Word of God gives us a powerful example of human hubris that ends in a stunning and dramatic way. Though one could say that it takes Nebuchadnezzar a long time to learn his lesson, at least he learned it. His grandson, Belshazzar, does not. In using the temple vessels in a palace orgy, Belshazzar desecrates them. Such an act of desecration is tantamount not only to a challenge of God but an attack on God Himself. Thus, Belshazzar fills up the cup of his iniquities, acting in ways similar to the little horn (*see Daniel 8*), which attacked the foundations of God's sanctuary. By removing dominion from Belshazzar, God prefigures what He will accomplish against the enemies of His people in the very last days. The events narrated in Daniel 5 took place in 539 B.C., on the night Babylon fell before the Medo-Persian army. Here occurs the transition from gold to silver, predicted in Daniel 2. Once more it becomes evident that God rules in the affairs of the world.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 8.*

Belshazzar's Feast

Read Daniel 5:1–4 along with Daniel 1:1, 2. What is Belshazzar doing that is so bad? How does it reveal his true character? Compare his actions with Revelation 17:4–6. What parallels can you find?

The king commands that the sacred utensils of the Jerusalem temple be used as drinking vessels. Nebuchadnezzar seizes the vessels from the Jerusalem temple, but he places them in the house of his god, which shows that at least he respects their sacred status. But Belshazzar turns the sacred vessels into drinking utensils in a most profane way.

While drinking from the sacred vessels, Belshazzar's lords "praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone" (*Dan. 5:4, NKJV*). It is worth noticing that six materials are mentioned. The Babylonians used the sexagesimal system (a system based on the number 60) in contrast to the decimal system used today (based on the number 10). Thus, the six categories of gods represent the totality of the Babylonian deities and, therefore, the fullness of the Babylonian religious system. Interestingly enough, the order of the materials follows the order of the components of the dream statue of Nebuchadnezzar, except that wood replaces the clay. As in the dream, stone appears last; although here it designates the material composition of idols, stone also evokes God's judgment upon worldly empires (see *Dan. 2:44, 45*), which Babylon symbolizes.

This feast serves as an apt representation of end-time Babylon as seen in the book of Revelation. Like Belshazzar, the woman in end-time Babylon holds a golden cup and offers polluted drink to the nations. In other words, by means of false doctrines and a distorted worship system, modern Babylon lures the world into evil (*Rev. 17:4–6*), oblivious to the judgment that will soon fall upon her. One day judgment will come.

What are ways in which our society and culture profane the truth of God's Word? How can we be careful not to take part in that profanation, even in subtle ways? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

An Uninvited Guest

Read Daniel 5:5–8. What happens, and why does the king respond as he does? In what ways does this account parallel Daniel 2, and why is that parallel important? (See Ps. 96:5 and Col. 1:15–17.)

As Nebuchadnezzar does in previous crises (*Dan.* 2:2, 4:7), Belshazzar calls the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers to clarify the mysterious writing. And to make sure that they give their best, the king promises them extravagant honors: (1) purple clothing, a color worn by royalty in ancient times (*Esther* 8:15); (2) a chain of gold, which was a sign of high social status (*Gen.* 41:42); and (3) the position of third ruler in the kingdom. This last reward reflects accurately the historical circumstances of Babylon at that time. Because Belshazzar was second ruler as co-regent with his father, Nabonidus, he offers the position of third ruler. But despite the tempting rewards, the sages once again fail to provide an explanation.

On top of all his sins, then, the king attempts to find wisdom in the wrong place. The Babylonian experts cannot uncover the meaning of the message. It is written in their own language, Aramaic, as we shall see tomorrow, but they cannot make sense of the words. This might remind us of what the Lord speaks through Isaiah: “For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden” (*Isa.* 29:14, *NKJV*). After quoting this verse the apostle Paul states: “Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (*1 Cor.* 1:20, 21, *NKJV*).

Some truths are too important to be left for humans to try to figure out for themselves. That’s why God, instead, reveals these truths to us.

Think about what the rewards were going to be and, given what was soon to follow, how worthless those rewards really were. What should this tell us about just how fleeting things in the world can be—and why we always need to keep the perspective of eternity in mind in all that we do?

Enter the Queen

Read Daniel 5:9–12. What does the queen say about Daniel that the king should have known already? What does it say about him that he seems ignorant even of Daniel's existence?

As the banquet hall is thrown into confusion because of the mysterious message on the wall, the queen comes and provides direction to the befuddled king. She reminds the king about Daniel, whose ability to interpret dreams and solve mysteries has been demonstrated during the time of Nebuchadnezzar. If Belshazzar were as smart as his predecessor, he would have known where to turn to find the meaning of this mysterious writing. The intervention of the queen proves necessary for the king, who at this point seems utterly at a loss as to what to do next. Her words sound like a rebuke to Belshazzar for having overlooked the only person in the kingdom who can interpret the mysterious writing. And she also gives the king an oral résumé of Daniel: the prophet has the Spirit of the Holy God, light and understanding and divine wisdom, excellent spirit, knowledge; he is capable of understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas; he was chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers in Nebuchadnezzar's time (*Dan. 5:11, 12*).

At this point, we again wonder why Belshazzar had ignored Daniel. The text does not offer a direct answer to this question, but we presume that at this time Daniel, after serving the king at least until the third year of his reign (*Dan. 8:1, 27*), is no longer in active service. One factor could be Daniel's age. He is probably around 80 years old, and the king may have wanted to replace the old leadership with a younger generation. The king also may have decided to ignore Daniel because he did not want to commit himself to Daniel's God. But whatever the reason or combination of reasons, it remains striking that someone with such a portfolio as Daniel's could be forgotten so soon.

Read Romans 1:16–32. In what ways do we see the principle expressed in these texts manifested, not just in this story but also in the world today?

Weighed and Found Wanting

Read Daniel 5:13–28. What is the reason Daniel gives for the soon-to-come demise of this king?

Forced by the circumstances, the king resorts to consulting Daniel, but he seems to do so with reluctance. This may tell more about the attitude of the king toward the God of Daniel than toward Daniel himself.

In turn, Daniel's response to the king's offer of reward says a lot about Daniel's priorities and character. It also is likely that Daniel, knowing the meaning of the mysterious words, realizes just how worthless the reward really is.

Daniel then indicts the king on three counts.

First, Belshazzar totally has ignored the experience of Nebuchadnezzar. Otherwise he would have repented and humbled himself like his predecessor.

Second, Belshazzar has used the temple vessels in order to drink wine and to praise his idols. Here Daniel mentions the six kinds of materials used to make idols in the same order noted previously.

Third, the king has neglected to glorify God, the One "who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways" (*Dan. 5:23, NKJV*).

Having addressed the failures of the king, Daniel proceeds to the interpretation. Now we learn that the divine graffiti consists of three Aramaic verbs (with the first repeated). Their basic meaning should have been known to the king and his sages—*MENE*: "counted"; *TEKEL*: "weighed"; and *PERES*: "divided."

With the Medo-Persian army at the gates of Babylon, the king and the sages must have suspected some ominous meaning in that writing, but the sages do not dare to say something unpleasant to the king. Only Daniel proves capable of decoding the actual message into a meaningful statement in order to convey its full meaning to Belshazzar: "*MENE*: God has *numbered* your kingdom, and finished it; *TEKEL*: You have been *weighed* in the balances, and found wanting; *PERES*: Your kingdom has been *divided*, and given to the Medes and Persians" (*Dan. 5:26–28, NKJV; emphasis supplied*).

Not exactly words of comfort and cheer.

Judgment comes swiftly upon the king. How can we learn to trust God in cases in which, for the present, justice and judgment have not yet come? (*See Eccles. 3:17, 8:11, Matt. 12:36, and Rom. 14:12.*)

The Fall of Babylon

Read Daniel 5:29–31 along with Revelation 14:8, 16:19, and 18:2. What can we learn about the fall of Belshazzar’s Babylon that points to the fall of end-time Babylon?

Whatever his faults, Belshazzar is a man of his word. So, despite the bad news, he is satisfied with the interpretation given by Daniel, which is why he bestows upon the prophet the promised gifts. It appears that by admitting the truth of Daniel’s message, the king implicitly recognizes the reality of Daniel’s God. Interestingly, Daniel now accepts the gifts he has refused before, probably because such gifts can no longer influence his interpretation. Besides, at that point such gifts are meaningless since the empire is about to fall. Thus, probably as a matter of courtesy, the prophet accepts the rewards, knowing all the while that he will be the third ruler of the kingdom for only a few hours.

Exactly as announced by the prophet, Babylon falls. And it does so quickly; while the king and his courtiers drink, the city falls without a battle. According to the historian Herodotus, the Persians dug a canal to divert the Euphrates River and marched into the city on the riverbed. That same night Belshazzar is slain. His father, King Nabonidus, has left the city already, surrendering himself later to the new rulers. Thus, the greatest empire humanity has ever known to this point comes to an end. Babylon, the head of gold, is no more.

“Belshazzar had been given many opportunities for knowing and doing the will of God. He had seen his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar banished from the society of men. He had seen the intellect in which the proud monarch gloried taken away by the One who gave it. He had seen the king driven from his kingdom, and made the companion of the beasts of the field. But Belshazzar’s love of amusement and self-glorification effaced the lessons he should never have forgotten; and he committed sins similar to those that brought signal judgments on Nebuchadnezzar. He wasted the opportunities graciously granted him, neglecting to use the opportunities within his reach for becoming acquainted with truth.”—Ellen G. White, *Bible Echo*, April 25, 1898.

What opportunities do we have to become “acquainted with truth”? What does that mean? At what point can we say that we are acquainted with all the truth that we need to know?

Further Thought: Large feasts were common in the courts of the ancient world. Kings loved to throw parties with extravagance and luxury to show their greatness and confidence. Although we do not know all of the details of this particular feast, we know that it took place when the Medo-Persian army was poised to attack Babylon. But humanly speaking, there was no reason for concern. Babylon had fortified walls, a food supply for many years, and plenty of water, because the Euphrates River flowed through the heart of the city. So, King Belshazzar sees no problem in having a party while the enemy surrounds the city. And he orders a momentous celebration, which soon degenerates into an orgy. What a powerful testimony to the hubris of humanity, especially in contrast to the power of the Lord. Through Daniel, God tells the king that despite the opportunities he has had to learn truth, “the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified” (*Dan. 5:23, NKJV*).

“The history of nations speaks to us today. To every nation and to every individual God has assigned a place in His great plan. Today men and nations are being tested by the plummet in the hand of Him who makes no mistake. All are by their own choice deciding their destiny, and God is overruling all for the accomplishment of His purposes.”
—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 536.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In class, discuss the answer to Sunday’s question about the ways in which society and culture profane the truth of God. What are these ways, and how should we as a church and as individuals respond to those profanations?
- ❷ What does this story teach us about how salvation is not so much about *what* we know but about how we *respond* to what we know? (See *Dan. 5:22*.)
- ❸ Read Daniel 5:23. What important spiritual principles are found in this verse? For example, how does the text warn us against defiance of God? Or, what does the text teach us about God as not only the Creator but also the Sustainer of our existence?
- ❹ Even without knowing what the words mean, Belshazzar was frightened (*Dan. 5:6*). What does this tell us about what it means to live with a guilty conscience?

Better Than a Dentist

By MADELINE DYCHE

The woman was grinning from ear to ear.

But hours earlier, she told me, she had been disappointed to learn that she couldn't receive a free tooth cleaning at the Pathway to Health mega clinic in the U.S. state of Texas.

The woman had joined a long line of people seeking health care and other services at the sprawling Will Rogers Memorial Center in Fort Worth on the first day of a three-day free megaclinic organized by Seventh-day Adventists. But when she reached the front of the line, she learned that no more dental openings were available for the day.

Hopes dashed, she began to turn away when a volunteer suggested that she choose another free service. She opted for a vision checkup.

After having her blood pressure and other vital signs taken, a requirement for all patients, she sat down with an eye doctor.

The man looked at a printout of her vital signs and asked a few questions. He thought something wasn't quite right. Seeing a physician nearby, he asked for help.

The physician examined her, ordered a sonogram, and diagnosed the woman with hypothyroidism, an abnormally underactive thyroid gland. He asked whether the woman suffered common symptoms of the condition, such as fatigue, irritability and depression, intolerance for cold, and weight gain.

"Yes, for six years!" the woman replied.

She had visited various doctors, but none had been able to diagnose her condition. Her medical insurance didn't allow tests such as a sonogram, and she hadn't been able to afford to pay for more than a medical consultation.

When I met the woman, she was leaving the Pathway to Health event. She told her story when Pathway to Health volunteers asked whether she was satisfied with her experience. I was able to empathize with her because I have hyperthyroidism, an overactive thyroid gland.

"I thought I was dying a few months ago," I told the woman. "I didn't know what was wrong with me. Once I started taking medicine, I felt much better. The difference was like night and day. You will feel so much better once you get this problem regulated."



The woman was all smiles.

"I came for a tooth cleaning, and I never would have found out what my real problem was if the dentist had seen me," she said. "The way God worked this out has been such a blessing."

MADELINE DYCHE, pictured, is a mother of two in Keene, Texas.

From *the* Lions' Den to *the* Angel's Den



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 6, 1 Sam. 18:6–9, Matt. 6:6, Acts 5:27–32, Mark 6:14–29, Heb. 11:35–38.*

Memory Text: “So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him” (*Daniel 6:4, NKJV*).

After the Medo-Persians take over Babylon, Darius the Mede recognizes the wisdom of Daniel and invites him to be part of the new government. The aging prophet so excels at his public duties that the new king appoints him a chief administrator of the whole Medo-Persian government.

However, as the chapter unfolds, Daniel faces the result of what could rightly be called the first sin—that of jealousy. Yet, before the story ends, we can see that Daniel is faithful, not only to his secular duties under the Medo-Persians, but most important to his God. And we can be sure that, to a great degree, his faithfulness to God directly impacts his faithfulness in these other areas, as well.

Daniel's experience with persecution serves as a paradigm for God's people in the time of the end. The story does not imply that God's people will be spared from trials and suffering. What it does guarantee is that, in the conflict with evil, good will ultimately win out, and God ultimately will vindicate His people.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 15.

Jealous Souls

Even in heaven, a perfect environment, Lucifer feels jealous of Christ. “Lucifer was envious and jealous of Jesus Christ. Yet when all the angels bowed to Jesus to acknowledge His supremacy and high authority and rightful rule, he bowed with them; but his heart was filled with envy and hatred.”—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 14. Jealousy is such a dangerous feeling to harbor that in the Ten Commandments themselves, alongside the forbiddance of murder and theft, there is the command against covetousness (*see Exod. 20:17*).

Read Daniel 6:1–5, along with Genesis 37:11 and 1 Samuel 18:6–9. What role does jealousy play in all these stories?

Daniel’s administrative abilities impress the king but provoke the jealousy of other officers. Thus, they conspired to get rid of him by accusing him of corruption. But as much as they search, they find no fault in Daniel’s administration. “They could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him” (*Dan. 6:4, NKJV*). The Aramaic word translated as “faithful” also can be translated as “trustworthy.”

Daniel is blameless; there is nothing the officers can do to raise an accusation against him. However, they also perceive how faithful Daniel is to his God and how obedient he is to his God’s law. So, they soon realize that in order to frame Daniel, they will have to produce a situation in which Daniel will be faced with the dilemma of obeying either God’s law or the law of the empire. From what the officers have learned about Daniel, they are absolutely convinced that under the right conditions he will side with his God’s law over the empire’s. What a testimony to Daniel’s faithfulness!

What kind of struggles with jealousy have you had to deal with, and how have you dealt with them? Why is jealousy such a deadly and crippling spiritual fault?

The Plot Against Daniel

Read Daniel 6:6–9. What is the thinking behind this decree? How does it play on the king’s vanity?

Darius may appear silly in promulgating a decree that he soon wishes to repeal. He falls into the trap laid by the officers, who are smart enough to play with the political circumstances of the recently established kingdom. Darius has decentralized the government and established 120 satraps in order to make the administration more efficient. However, such action entails some risks in the long run. An influential governor can easily foster a rebellion and split the kingdom. Thus, a law forcing everyone to petition only to the king for 30 days seems a good strategy to foster allegiance to the king and, thus, prevent any kind of sedition. But the officers mislead the king by claiming that such a proposal has the support of “all” the governors, administrators, satraps, counselors, and advisors—an obvious inaccuracy, since Daniel is not included. In addition, the prospect of being treated as a god may have been appealing to the king.

There is no evidence that Persian kings ever claimed divine status. Nevertheless, the decree may have been intended to make the king the sole representative of the gods for 30 days; that is, prayers to the gods have to be offered through him. Unfortunately, the king does not investigate the motivations behind the proposal. Thus, he fails to perceive that the law that would allegedly prevent conspiracy was itself a conspiracy to hurt Daniel.

Two aspects of this law deserve attention. First, the penalty for transgression is to be cast into the lions’ den. Since this kind of punishment is not attested elsewhere, it may have been an ad hoc suggestion of Daniel’s enemies. Ancient Near Eastern monarchs placed lions in cages in order to release them on certain occasions for hunting. So, there was no shortage of lions to maul whoever dared to violate the king’s decree. Second, the decree cannot be changed. The unchangeable nature of the “law of the Persians and Medes” also is mentioned in Esther 1:19 and 8:8. Diodorus Siculus, an ancient Greek historian, mentions an occasion when Darius III (not to be confused with the Darius mentioned in Daniel) changed his mind but could no longer repeal a death sentence he had passed on an innocent man.

Daniel's Prayer

“But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (*Matt. 6:6, NKJV*).

Read Daniel 6:10. Why doesn't Daniel simply pray quietly without anyone seeing him?

Daniel is an experienced statesman, but, above all, he is God's servant. As such, he is the only member of the government who can understand what lies behind the king's decree. For Darius the decree amounts to an opportunity to strengthen the unity of the kingdom, but for the conspirators it is a strategy to get rid of Daniel.

Of course, the real causes and motives behind the plot lie in the cosmic battle between God and the forces of evil. At this time (539 B.C.) Daniel already has received the visions recorded in Daniel 7 (553 B.C.) and 8 (551 B.C.). So, he can understand the royal decree, not as a matter of mere human politics but as an instance of this cosmic war. The vision of the Son of man delivering the kingdom to the people of the Most High and the comforting assistance of the angel interpreter (*Daniel 7*) may have brought him the courage to face the crisis head-on. He also may have reflected on the experience of his companions, who have been brave enough to challenge the decree of Nebuchadnezzar (*Daniel 3*).

Thus, he does not change his devotional habits but continues his customary practice of praying three times a day toward Jerusalem. In spite of the prohibition to make petition to any man or god but the king, Daniel takes no precaution to hide or disguise his prayer life during those critical 30 days also. He is an absolute minority since he is the only one, among dozens of governors and other officers, on a collision course with the royal decree. Through his open prayer life, though, he demonstrates that the allegiance he owes to God comes before his allegiance to the king and his irrevocable decree.

Read Acts 5:27–32. Though the admonition here is clear, why must we, when acting in defiance of human law, always be sure that what we are doing is truly God's will? (After all, think of people who died rather than betray a belief or belief system that we believe is wrong!)

In the Lions' Den

Read Daniel 6:11–23. What does the king say to Daniel that reveals just how powerful a faithful witness Daniel is to God?

The conspirators soon spot Daniel praying—that is, doing exactly what the decree has forbidden. And as they bring the accusation before the king, they refer to Daniel in a demeaning way: “that Daniel, who is one of the captives from Judah” (*Dan. 6:13, NKJV*). In their eyes, one of the chief officers of the empire, the king’s favorite, is no more than “a captive.” In addition, they pit Daniel against the king by saying that Daniel “does not show due regard for you, O king, or for the decree that you have signed” (*NKJV*). Now the king realizes he has been entrapped by signing the decree. The text says that “he labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him” (*Dan. 6:14, NKJV*). But there is nothing he can do to save the prophet from the prescribed punishment. The irrevocable law of the Medes and Persians must be applied to the letter. Thus the king, however reluctantly, issues the command to throw Daniel to the lions. But in doing so, Darius expresses some glimmering hope, which sounds like a prayer: “ ‘Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you’ ” (*Dan. 6:16, NKJV*).

The biblical text does not say what Daniel does among the lions, but one can assume he is praying. And God honors Daniel’s faith by sending His angel to protect him. In the morning, Daniel remains unharmed and ready to resume his activities in the government. Commenting on this episode, Ellen G. White says: “God did not prevent Daniel’s enemies from casting him into the lions’ den; He permitted evil angels and wicked men thus far to accomplish their purpose; but it was that He might make the deliverance of His servant more marked, and the defeat of the enemies of truth and righteousness more complete.”—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 543, 544.

Though this story has a happy ending (at least for Daniel), what about those accounts, even those in the Bible (see, for instance, Mark 6:14–29), that don’t end in deliverance here? How are we to understand them?

Vindication

Read Daniel 6:24–28. What testimony does the king give about God?

An important point of the narrative is the fact that Darius praises God and recognizes God's sovereignty. This is a culmination, even a climax, of the praises or expressions of recognition offered to God in the previous chapters (*Dan. 2:20–23; 3:28, 29; Dan. 4:1–3, 34–37*). Like Nebuchadnezzar, Darius responds to Daniel's deliverance by praising God. But he does more, too: he reverses his previous decree and commands everyone to "fear before the God of Daniel" (*Dan. 6:26*).

Yes, Daniel is miraculously saved, his faithfulness rewarded, evil punished, and God's honor and power vindicated. But what we see here is a mini-example of what will happen on a universal scale: God's people delivered, evil punished, and the Lord vindicated before the cosmos.

Read Daniel 6:24. What might we find rather troublesome about this verse—and why?

There is, however, one disturbing problem, and that is the wives and the children who, as far as we know, are innocent, and yet who suffer the same fate as the guilty ones. How can we explain what seems to be a mishandling of justice?

First, we should note that the action is decided and implemented by the king according to Persian law, which includes the family in the punishment of the culprit. According to an ancient principle, the entire family bears responsibility for the offense of a family member. This doesn't mean it's right; it means only that this story fits with what we know about Persian law.

Second, we must note that the biblical narrative reports the event but does not endorse the action of the king. In fact, the Bible clearly forbids that children be put to death because of the sins of the parents (*Deut. 24:16*).

In the face of injustices such as this and so many others, what comfort can you get from such texts as 1 Corinthians 4:5? What does it say, and why is the point it makes so important?

Further Thought: Daniel's deliverance has been recorded in Hebrews 11. What can be called "The Hall of Fame of Faith" says that prophets, among other accomplishments, "stopped the mouths of lions" (*Heb. 11:33*). This is wonderful, but we should keep in mind that the heroes of faith are not only those who escaped death as Daniel does but also those who suffer and die courageously, as Hebrews 11 also notes. God calls some to witness by living and others by dying. Thus, the narrative of Daniel's deliverance does not imply that deliverance is granted to everyone, as we learn from the multitude of men and women who have been martyrs because of their faith in Jesus. However, the miraculous deliverance of Daniel does show that God rules, and He will eventually deliver all His children from the power of sin and death. This will become clear in the next chapters of Daniel.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Frenchman Jean-Paul Sartre once wrote that "the best way to conceive of the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project is to be God" (*Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology* [New York: Washington Square Press, 1956], p. 724). How does this help us understand, at least on one level, why the king falls for the trap? Why must we all, in whatever our station in life, be careful of this same dangerous inclination, no matter how subtly it might come? What are other ways we might want to be "like God"?
- ❷ What kind of witness do we present to others in regard to our faithfulness to God and to His law? Would people who know you think that you would stand for your faith, even if it cost you your job—or even your life?
- ❸ What do you see in Daniel that makes him a person that God can use effectively for His purposes? With the Lord's help, how can you develop more of the same characteristics?
- ❹ In what ways could Daniel have been justified in deciding, in light of the decree, to have changed the way he prayed? Or would that have been a dangerous compromise? If so, why?

Praying Spanish Mother

By REBECA RUIZ LAGUARDIA

As a 10-year-old girl, Pilar Laguardia stared at the starry heavens over Spain and asked herself, *Who created the stars? Do we have a Creator, or are we just the result of chance?*

This question filled her thoughts for years. She asked relatives for their opinions, but no one could provide a satisfying answer. She attended church services on Sundays, but the sermons about burning hellfire and a tyrannical and vengeful God caused her to drift away from her family's faith.

An illness nearly killed her at the age of 22. Laguardia was terrified about dying without any answer to her question about God.

One day, in anguish, she opened the window and screamed at the sky, "God, if You exist, I want to know You! Help me! Answer me!"

God answered three days later when a Seventh-day Adventist church member, Simón Montón, knocked on the door of her home. Montón invited Laguardia's father, an agnostic shepherd, to evangelistic meetings, and he accepted out of curiosity. Laguardia asked to go along, but he insisted on going alone. Laguardia persisted and finally won the argument.

Laguardia, sick and weak, entered a Seventh-day Adventist church for the first time in the late 1960s. She heard beautiful hymns and the end-time prophecy of Daniel 2. Although her father never returned after the first night, she attended until the end of the meetings. On the last night, she received a book as a gift, and a church member wrote down her address.

Several days later, a woman visited her at home and offered Bible studies. Through the weekly studies, Laguardia received answers to her questions about God. She found calm and peace for the first time.

Pastor Luis Bueno baptized Laguardia 10 months after the Bible studies began.

She married at 32, but it was difficult for her to conceive a child because of her health problems. Again, she went to God in prayer—and became pregnant with me.

My mother, pictured, born in the humble home of a Spanish shepherd 73 years ago, is joyfully leading souls in the flock of the Great Shepherd today. I'm thankful to God for giving me such a mother.



REBECA RUIZ LAGUARDIA lives in Spain. Read about her missionary work in this quarter's Youth and Adult Mission Quarterly.

From *the* Stormy Sea to *the* Clouds of Heaven



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 7, 2 Thess. 2:1–12, Rom. 8:1, Mark 13:26, Luke 9:26, 12:8, 1 Tim. 2:5.*

Memory Text: “Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him” (*Daniel 7:27, NKJV*).

The vision of Daniel 7, our topic for this week, parallels the dream in Daniel 2. But Daniel 7 expands on what was revealed in Daniel 2. First, the vision occurs at night and portrays the sea agitated by the four winds. Darkness and water evoke creation, but here creation appears to be somehow distorted or under attack. Second, the animals in the vision are unclean and hybrid, which represents a violation of the created order. Third, the animals are portrayed as exerting dominion; thus, it appears that the dominion God gave to Adam in the garden has been usurped by these powers. Fourth, with the coming of the Son of man, God's dominion is restored to those to whom it properly belongs. What Adam lost in the garden, the Son of man recovers in the heavenly judgment.

The above description gives a panoramic view of the biblical imagery that runs in the background of this highly symbolic vision. Fortunately, some of the crucial details of the vision are explained by the angel, so we can understand the main contours of this amazing prophecy.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 22.

Four Animals

Read Daniel 7. What is the essence of what Daniel is shown, and what is the vision about?

Each animal shown to Daniel corresponds to a section of the statue shown to Nebuchadnezzar, but now more details about each kingdom are given. How interesting that the creatures, symbolizing pagan nations, are all unclean beasts. Also, except for the fourth beast, Daniel describes the animals as resembling some known creatures. So, the animals are not arbitrary symbols, inasmuch as each one bears some characteristics or points to some aspect of the kingdom it represents.

Lion: A lion is a most fitting representation of Babylon. Winged lions decorated palace walls and other works of Babylonian art. The lion depicted in the vision eventually has its wings pulled off, is made to stand upright like a man, and receives a human heart. This process symbolizes the Babylonian Empire under its kings.

Bear: The bear represents the Medo-Persian Empire. The fact that it is raised up on one side indicates the superiority of the Persians over the Medes. The three ribs between its teeth stand for the three main conquests of the Medo-Persian Empire: Lydia, Babylon, and Egypt.

Leopard: The swift leopard represents the Greek Empire established by Alexander the Great. The four wings make this beast even swifter, an apt representation of Alexander, who in a few years brought the entire known world under his dominion.

The dreadful and terrible animal: Whereas the previous entities only resemble the animals mentioned, this one is an entity unto itself. That is, the first ones are depicted as “like” a lion or “like” a bear, but this one is not depicted like anything. This multi-horned beast also appears far more cruel and rapacious than the previous ones. As such, it is a fitting representation of pagan Rome, which conquered, ruled, and trampled the world with its feet.

All these thousands of years of human history have come and gone, just as predicted. How much comfort can you get from knowing that above all the clamor, unrest, and at times utter chaos, God rules? What does this teach us about the trustworthiness of Scripture?

The Little Horn

Read Daniel 7:7, 8, 19–25. Who is the little-horn power that arises directly from, and remains part of, the fourth beast?

Yesterday we learned that the ferocious animal with ten horns ruling the world with utmost cruelty represents pagan Rome. Now we must consider the little horn and the power it represents. As portrayed in the vision, the fourth animal has ten horns, of which three horns were plucked out to make way for a little horn. This horn has human eyes and speaks “pompous words” (*Dan. 7:8, NKJV*). It is clear that the little horn emerges from the entity represented by the terrible animal, which is pagan Rome. In a way, the horn extends or continues some features of pagan Rome. It is just a later stage of the same power.

Daniel sees this other horn making war against the saints. The angel explains to him that this horn is a king who will perform three unlawful actions: (1) speak pompous words against the Most High, (2) persecute the saints of the Most High, (3) intend to change times and law. And as a consequence, the saints would be given into his hand. Next, the angel gives the time frame for the activities of the little horn: *a time and times and half a time*. In this instance of prophetic language, the word *time* means “year,” and so the expression *times* signifies years, a dual form: “two years.” Hence, this is a period of three and a half prophetic years, which, according to the year-day principle, indicates a period of 1,260 years. During this time the little horn will mount an attack against God, persecute the saints, and attempt to change God’s law.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12. What similarities are there between the man of lawlessness and the little horn? What power do we believe that this is talking about—and why? What is the only power that arose out of pagan Rome but remains part of Rome, a power that extends from the time of pagan Rome until the end of the world, meaning that it still exists today?

The Court Was Seated

After the vision of the four animals and the activities of the little horn, the prophet sees a scene of judgment in heaven (*Dan. 7:9, 10, 13, 14*). As the court convenes, thrones are put in place and the Ancient of Days takes His seat. As the heavenly scene shows, thousands and thousands of heavenly beings minister before the Ancient of Days, the court is seated, and the books are opened.

What's important to note about this judgment is that it occurs *after* the 1,260-year period of the little horn's activity (A.D. 538–1798; see Friday's study) but *prior* to the establishing of God's final kingdom. In fact, *three times* in the vision the following sequence appears:

Little-horn phase (538–1798)

Heavenly judgment

God's eternal kingdom

Read Daniel 7:13, 14, 21, 22, 26, 27. In what ways does the judgment benefit God's people?

The Old Testament describes several acts of judgment from the tabernacle and temple, but the judgment referred to here is different. This is a cosmic judgment that affects not only the little horn but also the saints of the Most High, who will eventually receive the kingdom.

Daniel 7 does not describe the judgment or give details about its beginning and closing. But it implies that the judgment is undertaken in the wake of the little horn's attack against God and His people. The point here, then, is to emphasize the beginning of a judgment of cosmic proportions. From Daniel 8 and 9 (see following weeks), we will learn about the time of judgment's beginning and the fact that this judgment is related to the purification of the heavenly sanctuary on the heavenly Day of Atonement. The lesson here is that we clearly will have a pre-Advent judgment in heaven that will be in favor of God's people (*Dan. 7:22*).

Why is an understanding of what Jesus accomplished for us at the cross so central to why we can have assurance in the day of judgment? What hope would we have, or even could we have, without the Cross? (See Rom. 8:1.)

The Coming of the Son of Man

Read Daniel 7:13. Who is the Son of man here, and how do you identify Him? (See also Mark 13:26, Matt. 8:20, 9:6, Luke 9:26, and 12:8.)

As the judgment unfolds, a most important figure enters the scene: the Son of man. Who is He? First, the Son of man appears as an individual heavenly figure. But as the title implies, He also displays human traits. In other words, He is a divine-human individual who comes to play an active role in judgment. Second, the Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven is a common image of the Second Coming in the New Testament. However, in Daniel 7:13 specifically, the Son of man is not depicted as coming from heaven to earth, but as moving horizontally from one place in heaven to another in order to appear before the Ancient of Days. Third, the depiction of the Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven suggests a visible manifestation of the Lord. But this imagery also is reminiscent of the high priest who, surrounded by a cloud of incense, enters the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement to perform the purification of the sanctuary.

The Son of man also is a royal figure. He receives “dominion and glory and a kingdom” and “all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him” (*Dan. 7:14, NKJV*). The verb “serve” also can be translated as “worship.” It appears nine times in chapters 1–7 (*Dan. 3:12, 14, 17, 18, 28; 6:16, 20; 7:14, 27*) and conveys the idea of paying homage to a deity. So, as a consequence of the attempt to change the law of God, the religious system represented by the little horn corrupts the worship due to God. The judgment portrayed here shows that true worship is eventually restored. The worship system set by the papal system, among other elements, places a fallen human being as a mediator between God and humanity. Daniel shows that the only mediator capable of representing humanity before God is the Son of man. As the Bible says, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (*1 Tim. 2:5, NKJV*).

From all that we have read in the Bible about the life and character of Jesus, why is it so comforting to know that He is so central to the judgment depicted here?

The Holy Ones of the Most High

What happens to God's people according to the following texts? *Dan. 7:18, 21, 22, 25, 27.*

The “holy ones of the Most High” (*NKJV*) is a designation of God's people. They are attacked by the power represented by the little horn. Because they insist on remaining faithful to God's Word, they are persecuted during the times of papal rule. Christians were persecuted during the time of the pagan Roman Empire, too (the fourth beast itself), but the persecution mentioned in Daniel 7:25 is a persecution of the saints by the little horn, which arises only after the pagan phase of Rome ends.

However, God's people won't be subjected to oppression by worldly power forever. The kingdom of God will replace the kingdoms of the world. Interestingly, in the actual vision, to the Son of man “was given dominion and glory and a kingdom” (*Dan. 7:14, NKJV*). But in the interpretation offered by the angel, it is the “holy ones” who receive the kingdom (*Dan. 7:18, NRSV*). There is no contradiction here. Because the Son of man is related to God and humanity, His victory is the victory of those He represents.

When the high priest asks if Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus points back to Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13, 14 and says: “I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (*Mark 14:62, NKJV*). Therefore, Jesus is the One who represents us in the heavenly tribunal. He already has defeated the powers of darkness and shares His triumph with those who come close to Him. Therefore, there is no reason to fear. As the apostle Paul so aptly states: “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (*Rom. 8:37–39, NKJV*).

Look at how accurately Daniel's vision depicts history, thousands of years in advance. How should this help us learn to trust all of God's promises for the future?

Further Thought: A cursory look at history reveals that after the collapse of the Roman Empire, which came about by attacks from barbarians from the north, the bishop of Rome took advantage of the overthrow of three barbarian tribes and established himself as the sole power in Rome as of A.D. 538. In this process, he adopted several institutional and political functions of the Roman emperor. From this emerged the papacy, invested with temporal and religious power until it was deposed by Napoleon in 1798. This did not bring an end to Rome, but only to that specified phase of persecution. The pope not only claimed to be the vicar of Christ but also introduced several doctrines and practices contrary to the Bible. Purgatory, penance, auricular confession, and the change of the Sabbath commandment to Sunday are among many other changes of the “times and law” introduced by the papacy.

“In his own strength, man cannot meet the charges of the enemy. In sin-stained garments, confessing his guilt, he stands before God. But Jesus, our Advocate, presents an effectual plea in behalf of all who by repentance and faith have committed the keeping of their souls to Him. He pleads their cause, and by the mighty arguments of Calvary, vanquishes their accuser. His perfect obedience to God’s law has given Him all power in heaven and in earth, and He claims from His Father mercy and reconciliation for guilty man. To the accuser of His people He declares: ‘The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan. These are the purchase of My blood, brands plucked from the burning.’ And to those who rely on Him in faith, He gives the assurance, ‘Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.’ Zechariah 3:4.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 586, 587.

Discussion Question:

① Look again at all the characteristics of the little-horn power that arises from, and remains part of, the fourth beast, Rome. What power alone arose out of pagan Rome many centuries ago and, besides having persecuted God’s people, remains in existence today? Why should this clear identification help protect us from speculation about its identity, including the idea that the little horn refers to a pagan, Greek king who disappeared from history more than a century and a half before the first advent of Jesus? How should these clear identifying marks also protect us from the belief that the little horn is some future power yet to arise?

Miracle in Egypt

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

The plan seemed perfect: transform an aging Seventh-day Adventist church in the heart of Egypt's capital into a vibrant community center.

But construction companies dismissed the idea of completely rebuilding Cairo's Center Church. "There is no way that you can get a permit," said a top engineer at one construction company.

Church leaders prayed and decided to move forward in faith. They contacted one more construction company and inquired about the process of securing a permit to renovate the building.

"It's true that it is difficult," a senior engineer replied. "But we think that we can obtain the permit in one to three months."

A month later, the engineer called back to announce that the building permit was ready.

The quick progress astounded Akram Khan, treasurer of the Adventist Church's Egypt-Sudan Field. "One month!" he said in an interview. "That was the first sign that God really wanted us to do something with the building."

More miracles followed in rapid succession, church leaders said. Center Church's premises underwent a complete renovation within a year and reopened its doors as the Ramses Cultural Center in 2018. Adventist Church president Ted N. C. Wilson rededicated the four-story complex and reminded church members that a key part of the church's mission is helping people in big cities. "Cairo is a city with almost 20 million people—people who are brokenhearted, people who are captured by evil things, people who are blind to their own needs, people who are spiritually hungry," Wilson said in a speech in the refurbished hall of the Center Church. "That is why the Ramses Cultural Center exists."

The Center Church, whose 750 seats once filled the building, now occupies a corner and has seating for up to 280 people. The renovated building also has a preschool, a dental clinic, a fitness center, a massage room, a kitchen for cooking lessons, and seven classrooms for wellness lectures and English classes.

The Adventist Church has 200 members in Cairo and 800 in all of Egypt, an African country with a population of about 100 million.

Wilson and other church leaders praised God for the speed with which the Ramses Cultural Center was completed, starting with the crucial step of obtaining the building permit. Khan, pictured, said the miracles didn't end there. "Everything that we are doing with this building is a miracle," said Khan, a Pakistani native who has served in Egypt for eight years.



Pray for more mission miracles in Egypt and beyond. Thank you for your mission offerings that make miracles possible.

From Contamination to Purification



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 8, Dan. 2:38, Gen. 11:4, Leviticus 16, Heb. 9:23–28.*

Memory Text: “And he said to me, ‘For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed’” (*Daniel 8:14, NKJV*).

The vision reported in Daniel 8 was given to the prophet in 548 or 547 B.C., and it provides some significant clarifications about the judgment referred to in Daniel 7. Unlike the visions of Daniel 2 and 7, the vision of Daniel 8 leaves out Babylon and starts with Media-Persia, because at this time Babylon was in decline and the Persians were about to replace Babylon as the next world power. The vision of Daniel 8 parallels that of Daniel 7. The language and the symbols change in Daniel 8 because it brings into sharp focus the purification of the heavenly sanctuary in connection with the heavenly Day of Atonement. Thus the distinctive contribution of Daniel 8 lies in its focus on aspects of the heavenly sanctuary. Whereas Daniel 7 shows the heavenly tribunal and the Son of man receiving the kingdom, Daniel 8 shows the purification of the heavenly sanctuary. So, as the parallels between these two chapters indicate, the purification of the heavenly sanctuary depicted in Daniel 8 corresponds to the judgment scene of Daniel 7.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 29.

The Ram and the Goat

Read Daniel 8. What is this vision all about and how does it parallel what we have seen in Daniel 2 and 7?

As in Daniel 2 and 7, we are given here another vision of the rise and fall of world empires, though with a different kind of symbolism. This symbolism is directly related to God's sanctuary. In this case, the symbols of a ram and a goat are used because of their connection with the Day of Atonement sanctuary ritual, a time of judgment for ancient Israel. Rams and goats were used as sacrificial offerings in the sanctuary service. But only on the Day of Atonement are the two mentioned together. Hence, these two animals are intentionally chosen here to evoke the Day of Atonement, which is a major focus of the vision.

As the vision unfolds, Daniel sees a ram pushing in three different directions: westward, northward, and southward (*Dan. 8:4*). This triple movement indicates the expansion of this power: "so that no animal could withstand him; nor was there any that could deliver from his hand, but he did according to his will and became great" (*Dan. 8:4, NKJV*). As the angel explains, the ram with two horns represents the Medo-Persian Empire (*Dan. 8:20*), and the three directions most likely literally pointed to the three major conquests of this world power.

Next, a goat emerges with a big horn, which represents the Greek Empire under the command of Alexander the Great (*Dan. 8:21*). That the goat moves "without touching the ground" (*Dan. 8:5, NKJV*) signifies that it is moving quickly. This symbolism conveys the rapidity of Alexander's conquest, which Daniel 7 presents as a winged leopard. But, as the prophecy indicates, when the goat "became strong, the large horn is broken" (*Dan. 8:8, NKJV*) and gives way to four horns, which extend to the four quadrants of the compass. This is fulfilled when Alexander dies in Babylon in June of 323 B.C., and his kingdom is divided among his four generals.

Between Daniel 2:38 and Daniel 8:20, 21, three of the four empires revealed in the visions have been named for us. How should this amazing fact help confirm the correctness of our interpretation of these prophecies?

The Rise of the Little Horn

Read Daniel 8:8–12 carefully. In which directions is this little horn moving, and why is this important to understand?

After depicting four horns spreading to the four winds of heaven, the biblical text says that from one arose a little horn. The question here is whether this horn or power comes from one of the four horns, which, as we saw yesterday, represent the four generals of Alexander—or one of the four winds. The grammatical structure of the text in the original language indicates that this horn comes from one of the four winds of heaven. And since this power arises after the Grecian Empire and its four offshoots, a common understanding is that this horn is Rome, first pagan and then papal. “This little horn represents Rome in both its phases, pagan and papal. Daniel saw Rome first in its pagan, imperial phase, warring against the Jewish people and the early Christians, and then in its papal phase, continuing down to our own day and into the future.”—*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 841.

According to the biblical text, the little horn first undertook a horizontal movement and “grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land” (*Dan. 8:9, NKJV*). These three directions correspond to the three major areas that fell under the domination of pagan Rome.

As the little horn becomes the main player in the vision, its vertical expansion receives detailed attention. In this regard, the horn corresponds closely to the little horn of Daniel 7, as the following comparison shows: (1) Both horns are little in the beginning (*Dan. 7:8, 8:9*). (2) Both become great later on (*Dan. 7:20, 8:9*). (3) Both are persecuting powers (*Dan. 7:21, 25; 8:10, 24*). (4) Both are self-exalting and blasphemous (*Dan. 7:8, 20, 25; 8:10, 11, 25*). (5) Both target God’s people (*Dan. 7:25, 8:24*). (6) Both have aspects of their activity that are delineated by prophetic time (*Dan. 7:25; 8:13, 14*). (7) Both extend until the time of the end (*Dan. 7:25, 26; 8:17, 19*). (8) And both face supernatural destruction (*Dan. 7:11, 26; 8:25*). Last, because the little horn of Daniel 7 represents the papacy, the vertical expansion of the little horn in Daniel 8 must represent the same power. Thus, as in Daniel 2 and 7, the final main power is Rome, both pagan and papal.

The Attack on the Sanctuary

Read Daniel 8:10–12. What kind of activity is the little horn depicted as doing here?

In Daniel 8:10, the little horn attempts to replicate, at the spiritual level, the efforts of the builders of Babel (*Gen. 11:4*). The terms “host” and “stars” can designate God’s people in the Old Testament. Israel is designated the host or armies of the Lord (*Exod. 12:41*). Daniel also depicts God’s faithful people as shining like the stars (*Dan. 12:3*). This is obviously not a literal attack on the heavenly bodies, however, but a persecution of God’s people, whose “citizenship is in heaven” (*Phil. 3:20, NKJV*). Although thousands of Christians were murdered by pagan emperors, the focus now is on the vertical activities of the little horn. Thus the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy must be linked with papal Rome and its persecution through the ages.

Also, Daniel 8:11 talks about a “Prince,” who is elsewhere mentioned in Daniel as “Messiah the Prince” (*Dan. 9:25*), “Michael your prince” (*Dan. 10:21*), and “Michael” the “great prince” (*Dan. 12:1*). No one but Jesus Christ could be the referent of this expression. Jesus Christ is the Prince of the aforementioned “host” and our High Priest in heaven. Therefore, the papacy and the religious system it represents obfuscates and attempts to supersede the priestly role of Jesus.

In Daniel 8:11, the “daily sacrifice” is a reminder of what happened in the earthly sanctuary to designate the various and continual aspects of the ritual services—including sacrifices and intercession. It is through these services that sinners are forgiven and sins are dealt with in the tabernacle. This earthly system represents Christ’s intercessory ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. So, as the prophecy predicts, the papacy exchanges the intercession of Christ for the intercession of priests. By means of such counterfeit worship, the little horn takes away Christ’s intercessory ministry and symbolically casts down the place of Christ’s sanctuary.

“And he cast truth down to the ground. He did all this and prospered” (*Dan. 8:12, NKJV*). Jesus declares Himself to be the truth (*John 14:6*) and also points to the Word of God as truth (*John 17:17*). In contrast, the papacy prohibited the translation of the Bible into the language of the people, put the interpretation of the Bible under the authority of the church, and placed tradition, alongside the Bible, in theory, but, in practice, tradition is placed above the Bible as the supreme rule of faith.

What should this study tell us about how important the knowledge of *biblical* truth really is in contrast to human traditions?

The Cleansing of the Sanctuary

Read Daniel 8:14. What happens here?

After the devastating attack of the horn, the announcement is made that the sanctuary will be cleansed. In order to understand this message, we must bear in mind that the cleansing of the sanctuary mentioned in Daniel 8:14 corresponds to the judgment scene depicted in Daniel 7:9–14. And since that judgment takes place in heaven, the sanctuary must be located in heaven, too. Thus, while Daniel 7 portrays God’s intervention in and relationship with human affairs from a judicial perspective, Daniel 8 describes the same event from a sanctuary perspective.

The earthly sanctuary was modeled after its heavenly counterpart and served to illustrate the broad contours of the plan of salvation. Every day, sinners brought their sacrifices to the sanctuary, where the people were forgiven their confessed sins as the sins were, in a sense, transferred to the sanctuary. As a result, the sanctuary became contaminated. Therefore, a periodic process of purification was needed in order to cleanse the sanctuary from the sins recorded therein. It was called the Day of Atonement and took place once a year (*see Leviticus 16*).

Why should the heavenly sanctuary need cleansing? By analogy, we can say that the confessed sins of those who have accepted Jesus have been “transferred” to the heavenly sanctuary, just as the sins of the repentant Israelites were transferred to the earthly sanctuary. On the earthly Day of Atonement, numerous animals were slain, symbolizing the future death of Jesus, which is how sinners were able to stand in the Day of Atonement.

And just as that happened in the earthly Day of Atonement when the sanctuary was cleansed, how much more so in the heavenly, when Christ’s blood alone gets us through the judgment? The cleansing of the sanctuary, depicted in Daniel 8:14, is the heavenly counterpart of the earthly service, whose basic message is: as sinners, we need the blood of the Messiah to forgive us our sins and enable us to stand in judgment.

Read Hebrews 9:23–28. How do these verses reveal the salvation we have in Jesus through His sacrifice for us?

The Prophetic Timetable

Read Daniel 8:13. What is the question asked here, and how does it help us understand the answer in the next verse?

What is the timing of the 2,300 evenings and mornings? First, we must note that after Daniel is shown the ram and the goat, followed by the actions of and the damage caused by the little horn, the vision turns into a question in Daniel 8:13. This question is especially concerned with what will happen at the end of that prophetic period, as well as the duration of the entire vision. In addition, such a period cannot be limited only to the duration of the actions of the little horn, because the term *vision* includes everything from the ram to the actions of the little horn. So, this must be a long period of actual historical time.

To the question “How long shall be the vision” (ram [Media-Persia], goat [Greece], and the little horn and its actions [Rome, pagan and papal]), the other heavenly being replied: “For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed” (*Dan. 8:14, NKJV*). As has already been noted, this period is so long because it begins during the time of the Medo-Persian Empire and extends through the timing of the Greek Empire and pagan and papal Rome, thousands of years. According to the historicist method of interpretation (see lesson 1), this prophetic period should be calculated on the basis of the year-day principle, which means that the 2,300 evenings and mornings correspond to a time span of 2,300 years. Otherwise, the 2,300 days would amount to a bit more than just six years, an impossibly short time for all the events of the vision. Hence, the year-day principle must be in effect.

Daniel 8 does not provide the information to allow us to calculate the beginning of this time period, which of course could establish its end. But Daniel 9 provides the crucial piece of information (see next week’s lesson).

The 2,300 years of this prophecy constitute the longest time prophecy in the Bible. Think of it: 2,300 years! That’s a long time, especially in comparison to how long we live now. How can this contrast help us learn to be patient with God and in our own anticipation of the timing of final events?

Further Thought: Below is a chart summarizing what we have looked at so far regarding the sequence of kingdoms depicted in Daniel 2, 7, and 8. What does this tell us about the cleansing of the sanctuary?

Daniel 2	Daniel 7	Daniel 8
Babylon	Babylon	—————
Media-Persia	Media-Persia	Media-Persia
Greece	Greece	Greece
Pagan Rome	Pagan Rome	Pagan Rome
Papal Rome	Papal Rome	Papal Rome
—————	Judgment in heaven	Cleansing of sanctuary
Second Coming	Second Coming	—————

As we can see here, there are parallels between the chapters. Not only are the nations depicted in parallel to each other, the judgment scene in Daniel 7—which arises after the 1,260 years (A.D. 538–1798) of papal Rome—directly parallels the cleansing of the sanctuary, which in Daniel 8 arises after Rome, as well. In short, this heavenly judgment in Daniel 7—the judgment that leads to the end of the world—is the same thing as the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8. We are given here two different depictions of the same thing, and both occur after the 1,260-year period of persecution perpetrated by the little-horn power.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How does the chart above show us that the cleansing of the sanctuary, the same thing as the judgment in Daniel 7, must occur sometime *after* the 1,260-year prophecy of the little horn—and yet before the establishing of God’s final kingdom?

❷ The prophecy of Daniel 8 depicts history as something violent and full of evil. The two animals, symbolizing two world empires, fight each other (*Dan. 8:8–12*). The little-horn power that arises after them is a violent and persecuting power (*Dan. 8:23–25*). Thus, Scripture here makes no attempt to downplay the reality of suffering in this world. How should this help us learn to trust in God and His goodness, despite the reality of evil we see all around us?

Testimony From the Tomb

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

George Cobb is the man who died twice.

Little is actually known about Cobb, and no photos of him are known to exist.

But his grave has attracted attention for decades because his tombstone in a cemetery in Brunswick in the U.S. state of Maine bears a birthdate and two death dates. It reads:

Born June 10, 1794

Died Nov. 10, 1848

Fell asleep May 9, 1882

In fact, Cobb was baptized on Nov. 10, 1848, and he asked that the date of his conversion be carved on his tombstone after he was laid to rest in the grave on May 9, 1882, at the age of 88.

“This is one of the interesting examples again of the faith and the willingness and the determination of our pioneers to share their faith in whatever means possible, including having something engraved on your tombstone that will share your faith after you have fallen asleep,” said James Nix, director of the Ellen G. White Estate.

The tombstone includes text from the fourth commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.”

Nix has sought to find a photograph of Cobb and to track down his descendants—but without success. “I have looked high and low for a picture of Cobb,” he said. “I have asked up here, ‘Are there descendants of Cobb?’ I would like to know about this man who cared that much to leave instructions and money to carve all that extra text on his tombstone.”

Cobb’s unique witness from the grave has touched the hearts of many people, including church members who have stopped by the cemetery.

“He recognized that he needed to die to self and then he truly could become alive,” said Ted N. C. Wilson, president of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. “So he lived his life in a beautiful demonstration of the contrast between living a life for himself and dying to the old self and becoming a new creature in Christ. What a privilege to see his tombstone.”



Karen Glassford, a third-generation Adventist missionary, who works as education and communication coordinator at the church’s Institute of World Mission, said that when she initially saw the tombstone she suspected that the first death date might refer to Cobb’s baptism.

“His tombstone has become such a witness to other people,” she said. “It has made them curious, ‘Why did he die twice?’ I’m sure there will be people in heaven because of that man’s tombstone.”

From Confession to Consolation



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 9; Jer. 25:11, 12; 29:10; 2 Kings 19:15–19; Matt. 5:16; James 5:16.*

Memory Text: “‘O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name’” (*Daniel 9:19, NKJV*).

Daniel 9 contains one of the great prayers of the Bible. In crucial moments of his life, Daniel resorts to prayer in order to cope with the challenges that lie before him. When Daniel and his colleagues are about to be killed because of the mysterious dream of a pagan king, the prophet approaches God in prayer (*Daniel 2*). And when a royal decree forbids petitions to any God but to the king, Daniel continues to offer his daily prayers toward Jerusalem (*Daniel 6*). Thus, as we consider the prayer in Daniel 9, let us remember that the vision of the 2,300 evenings and mornings in Daniel 8 greatly impacts the prophet. Although the overall contours of that prophecy are explained, Daniel cannot make sense of the time period conveyed by the dialogue between the two heavenly beings: “Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed” (*Dan. 8:14*). It is only now, in chapter 9, that more light is given to the prophet, and this time, too, it is in response to earnest prayer.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 7.*

The Centrality of God's Word

Read Daniel 9:1, 2. Daniel said that he “understood by books” the prophecy he was studying so carefully. What book or books of the Bible did he mean?

As we look into this prayer, it becomes clear that it arises from an in-depth study of God's previous revelation to Moses and the prophets. Having learned from Jeremiah's scroll that his period of captivity will last 70 years (*see Jer. 25:11, 12; 29:10*), Daniel understands the importance of the historical moment in which he is living.

Let us bear in mind that Daniel offers this prayer in 539 B.C., the year that the Persian Empire replaces Babylon. So, almost 70 years have elapsed since Nebuchadnezzar has conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. Therefore, according to the prophecy of Jeremiah, God's people will soon return to their homeland. Trusting the Word of God, Daniel knows that something momentous is about to happen to his people and that, just as God promises in His Word, the exile in Babylon shall soon end and the Jews will return to their home.

From his study of the Scriptures available to him, Daniel also realizes how serious the sins of his people are. Because they have broken the covenant, they have severed their relationship with God; the inevitable consequence is, therefore, the exile (*Lev. 26:14–45*). Thus, it is the study of God's revelation that provides Daniel with an understanding of the times and that gives him a sense of urgency to plead with God on behalf of the people.

As we approach the last days of earth's history, we need more than ever to study and live according to God's Word. Only Scripture can provide us with an authoritative explanation of the world we live in. After all, Scripture tells the story of the great controversy between good and evil, and thus reveals that human history will close with the obliteration of evil and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom. The more we study the Scriptures, the better we can understand the contemporary situation of the world and our place in it, as well as our reasons for hope amid a world that offers none.

How does the Bible help us understand to some degree a world that, in and of itself, can so easily seem to make no sense at all?

An Appeal to Grace

Read Daniel 9:3–19. On what basis does Daniel make his plea for mercy?

We should especially note a few points in this prayer.

First, nowhere in Daniel's prayer is he asking for any kind of explanation for the calamities that happened to the Jewish people. He knows the reason. Indeed, the bulk of the prayer consists of Daniel himself recounting the reason: "We have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in His laws, which He set before us by His servants the prophets" (*Dan. 9:10, NKJV*). The last time we left Daniel having a need to understand something was at the end of Daniel 8, when he says he does not understand the vision of the 2,300 evenings and mornings (*see Dan. 8:27*).

The second point is that this prayer is an appeal to God's grace, to God's willingness to forgive His people even though they have sinned and done evil. In one sense, we see here a powerful illustration of the gospel, of sinful people who have no merit of their own, nevertheless seeking grace that they don't deserve and for forgiveness that they haven't earned. Is this not an example of where each one of us is, individually, before God?

Read Daniel 9:18, 19. What other reason does Daniel give for the Lord to answer his prayer?

Another aspect of Daniel's prayer deserves mention: the appeal to the honor of God's name. That is, the prayer is not motivated by Daniel's personal convenience or that of his people, but for God's own sake (*Dan. 9:17–19*). In other words, the petition must be granted because God's name will be honored.

Read 2 Kings 19:15–19. In what ways does Hezekiah's prayer resemble Daniel's? What does Matthew 5:16 say about how we, too, can glorify God?

The Value of Intercession

Read Daniel 9:5–13. What is significant about the fact that Daniel keeps on saying that “we” have done wrong, thereby including himself in the sins that ultimately have brought such calamity to the nation?

Daniel’s prayer is just one among other significant intercessory prayers contained in the Bible. Such prayers touch God’s heart, staving off judgment and bringing deliverance from enemies instead. When God is ready to destroy the entire Jewish nation, the intercession of Moses stays His hand (*Exod. 32:7–14, Num. 14:10–25*). Even when severe drought is about to consume the land, God answers Elijah’s prayer and pours out rain to revive the land (*1 Kings 18*).

As we pray for family members, friends, and other people or situations, God hears our prayers and can intervene. Sometimes it may take longer for a prayer to be answered, but we can rest assured that God never forgets the needs of His children (*see James 5:16*).

In this case, Daniel plays the role of an intercessor, or mediator, between God and the people. From his study of the Scriptures, the prophet realizes how sinful the people have become as they transgress God’s law and refuse to hear God’s warnings. Thus, recognizing their desperate spiritual condition, Daniel prays for healing and forgiveness. But the prophet also identifies with his people. In some aspects Daniel illustrates the role of Christ as our intercessor (*John 17*). However, there is a radical difference: Christ is “without sin” (*Heb. 4:15*) and therefore has no need to confess personal sin or to offer sacrifices for personal forgiveness (*Heb. 7:26, 27*). But He identifies Himself in a unique way with sinners: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (*2 Cor. 5:21, NIV*).

“If you would gather together everything that is good and holy and noble and lovely in man and then present the subject to the angels of God as acting a part in the salvation of the human soul or in merit, the proposition would be rejected as treason.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 24. What do these words teach us about our need for an Intercessor on our behalf?

The Work of the Messiah

The intercessory prayer of Daniel addresses two main concerns: the sins of the people and the desolation of Jerusalem. Thus, God's response deals with these two petitions. Through the work of the Messiah the people will be redeemed and the sanctuary will be anointed. The two specific petitions, however, are answered in ways that transcend the immediate historical horizon of Daniel: the work of the Messiah will benefit the entire human race.

Read Daniel 9:21–27. What work was to be done within the 70-week period? Why can only Jesus accomplish it?

1. “To finish the transgression.” The Hebrew word for “transgression” (*pesha'*) suggests the willful violations by an inferior against a superior (for example, *Prov. 28:24*). This word also occurs in the Bible with regard to open defiance of God by humans (*Ezek. 2:3*). Through the blood of Jesus, however, rebellion against God is quashed, and humans are offered the merits that flow from Calvary.

2. “To make an end of sins.” The verb carries the meaning of “to seal,” and here it means that sin is forgiven. Since the Fall, the human race has been unable to live up to God's standards, but the Messiah will take care of our failures.

3. “To make reconciliation for iniquity.” As Paul says: “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross” (*Col. 1:19, 20, NKJV*). Here, too, only Jesus can bring about this reality.

4. “To bring in everlasting righteousness.” Christ took our place on the cross and thereby bestowed upon us the blessed condition of “being right” with God. Only by faith can we receive this righteousness that comes from God.

5. “To seal up vision and prophecy.” When Christ offered Himself in sacrifice, the Old Testament prophecies that pointed to His atoning work were sealed up in the sense that they were fulfilled.

6. “And to anoint the Most Holy.” The Most Holy mentioned here is not a person but a place. So, the statement refers to the anointing of the heavenly sanctuary as Christ was inaugurated there as our great High Priest (*Heb. 8:1*).

The Prophetic Calendar

At the end of the vision of the 2,300 evenings and mornings, the prophet is astonished because he cannot understand it (*Dan. 8:27, NKJV*). Ten years later, Gabriel comes to help Daniel “understand” the vision (*Dan. 9:23*). This latter revelation supplies the missing information and reveals that the work of the Messiah is to be accomplished toward the end of a period of 70 weeks. According to the year-day principle and the course of the events predicted, the 70 weeks must be understood as 490 years. And the starting point for this period is the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (*Dan. 9:25*). This command is issued by King Artaxerxes in 457 B.C. It allows the Jews under the leadership of Ezra to rebuild Jerusalem (*Ezra 7*). According to the biblical text, the 70 weeks are “determined,” or “cut off.” This indicates that the time period of 490 years has been cut from a larger time period, that is, from the 2,300 years designated in the vision of chapter 8. It follows from this that the 2,300 years and the 490 years must have the same starting point, namely, 457 B.C.

The prophecy of the 70 weeks is divided into three sections: seven weeks, 62 weeks, and the seventieth week.

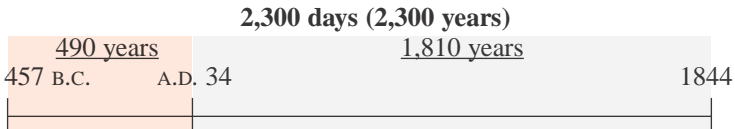
The seven weeks (49 years) most likely refer to the time during which Jerusalem will be rebuilt. After these seven weeks, there will be 62 weeks (434 years) leading to “Messiah the Prince” (*Dan. 9:25*). Thus 483 years after Artaxerxes’s decree, that is, in the year A.D. 27, Jesus the Messiah is baptized and anointed by the Holy Spirit for His Messianic mission.

During the seventieth week, other crucial events will take place: (1) “Messiah shall be cut off” (*Dan. 9:26, NKJV*), which refers to the death of Christ. (2) The Messiah “shall confirm a covenant with many for one week” (*Dan. 9:27, NKJV*). This is the special mission of Jesus and the apostles to the Jewish nation. It is undertaken during the last “week,” from A.D. 27 to 34. (3) “But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering” (*Dan. 9:27, NKJV*). Three and a half years after His baptism (that is, in the middle of the week), Jesus brings the sacrificial system to an end—in the sense that it no longer has any more prophetic significance—by offering Himself as the final and perfect sacrifice of the New Covenant, thus voiding the need for any more animal sacrifices. The last week of the 70-week prophecy ends in A.D. 34, when Stephen is martyred and the gospel message begins to reach not only the Jews but the Gentiles, as well.

Read Daniel 9:24–27. Even amid the great hope and promise of the Messiah, we read about violence, war, and desolation. How can this help assure us that amid the calamities of life, hope still exists?

Further Thought: Below is the chart explaining how the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 ties in with and forms the starting point of the 2,300-year prophecy of Daniel 8:14. If you count 2,300 years from 457 B.C. (remembering to delete the nonexistent zero year), you get 1844; or, if you count the remaining 1,810 years from A.D. 34 (2,300 minus the first 490 years), you come to 1844, as well. Thus, the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14 can be shown to start in 1844.

Notice, too, how the 1844 date fits with what we saw in Daniel 7 and 8. That is, the judgment in Daniel 7, which is the same thing as the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8 (see the last two weeks' lessons), occurs *after* the 1,260 years of persecution (*Dan. 7:25*) and yet *before* the second coming of Jesus and the establishment of His eternal kingdom.



Discussion Questions:

- 1** Scholars have said, and rightly so, that the 2,300-day prophecy and the 70-week prophecy are really just one prophecy. Why would they say that? What evidence can you find to back up that assertion?
- 2** What can we learn from Daniel's intercessory prayer that can help us in our own intercessory prayer life?
- 3** Christ's sacrifice in our behalf is our only hope. How should this help keep us humble and, even more important, make us more loving and forgiving of others? What should Luke 7:40–47 say to all of us?
- 4** Look at how central Scripture is to Daniel's prayer and his hope. After all, the nation has been savagely defeated, the people exiled, their land ravaged, and their capital destroyed. And yet, he has the hope that despite all this, the people will go back home. Where could he have gotten this hope other than from the Bible and God's promises written in it? What should this tell us about the hope we can have, as well, from the promises in the Word?

Angel in Angola's Airport

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Do angels live in airports?

A TAAG Angolan Airlines airplane deposited me late one evening in Angola's capital, Luanda. I had a two-hour layover before catching the next flight to the island nation of São Tomé and Príncipe to collect mission stories.

At the designated time printed on my boarding pass, I joined a long waiting line to the departure area. But when I offered my boarding pass, the airline representative turned me away with a slew of Portuguese words. Seeing my confusion, she summoned a security officer, who explained that I needed to wait 20 minutes.

Twenty minutes later, the airline representative accepted my boarding pass and directed me into a crowded room. I waited 15 minutes.

Then another airline representative called out, "São Tomé!" I joined a crowd waiting to take an escalator down to the departure area on the ground floor. But this airline representative, guarding entry to the escalator, rejected my boarding pass with a fresh slew of Portuguese words. No security officer was present to interpret, and I guessed I would have to wait 20 minutes.

Other passengers streamed down the escalator, and soon only a few people remained in the room. I decided to go. Nobody remained to check my boarding pass. At the bottom of the escalator, I joined a chaotic line of waiting people.

The minutes ticked by, and no bus came to take us to the plane.

Then a young man with brown hair and a tan knapsack slung over his shoulder cut in front of me in line. Idly, I wondered why he hadn't gone to the back of the line. After a few minutes, he looked at me and said, "My English."

I had no idea what he meant. I guessed that he spoke only Portuguese.

The man gestured toward the crowd around us.

"This flight is to Portugal," he said, speaking in slightly accented English. "São Tomé is over there." He pointed down the hall.

"Thank you!" I exclaimed—and ran. Sure enough, a bus stood waiting down the hall, and its doors closed shortly after I boarded.

Seated on the sparsely filled airplane, I thought back to the stranger in the airport. How did he know that I spoke English? I hadn't communicated with anyone. How did he know where I was going? My boarding pass had been tucked in my pocket. Why did he cut in front of me in line and single me out of the crowd?



Arriving in São Tomé, I told my story to local church leader Eliseu R. Xavier. He declared that God had sent an angel. If I had missed the flight, he said, I would have been stranded for three days in Luanda. The airline flies to São Tomé only three times a week.

I have no doubt. Airports are home to angels.

From Battle *to* Victory



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Eph. 6:12, Daniel 10, Ezra 4:1–5, Josh. 5:13–15, Rev. 1:12–18, Col. 2:15, Rom. 8:37–39.*

Memory Text: “‘O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong!’” (*Daniel 10:19, NKJV*).

Daniel 10 introduces the concluding vision of Daniel, which continues in chapters 11 and 12. We are informed at the outset that this vision concerns a “great conflict” (*Dan. 10:1, ESV*). While Daniel 11 fleshes out some details of this conflict, Daniel 10 shows its spiritual dimensions and reveals that behind the scenes of earthly battles rages a spiritual conflict of cosmic proportions. As we study this chapter, we shall see that when we pray, we engage in this cosmic conflict in a way that has profound repercussions. But we are not alone in our struggles; Jesus engages the battle against Satan in our behalf. We shall learn that the ultimate fight we are engaged in is not against earthly human powers but the powers of darkness.

As the apostle Paul put it centuries after Daniel: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (*Eph. 6:12, NKJV*). Ultimately, our success in the conflict rests on Jesus Christ, who alone defeated Satan at the cross.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 14.

Fasting and Prayer, Once Again

Read Daniel 10:1–3. What do we again find Daniel doing?

Daniel does not spell out the reasons for his extended mourning period. But such a fervent intercession is most likely motivated by the situation of the Jews, who have just returned from Babylon to Palestine.

Read Ezra 4:1–5. What challenges are the Jews facing upon their return?

We know from Ezra 4:1–5 that at this time the Jews are facing strong opposition as they attempt to rebuild the temple. The Samaritans send false reports to the Persian court, inciting the king to stop the reconstruction work. In the face of such crises, for three weeks Daniel pleads with God to influence Cyrus to allow the work to continue.

At this point, Daniel is probably close to 90 years of age. He does not think about himself but about his people and the challenges that they face. And he persists in prayer for three full weeks before receiving any answer from God. During this time, the prophet follows a very modest diet, abstaining from choice food and even ointment. He is totally unconcerned about his comfort and appearance, but he is deeply concerned about the welfare of his fellow Jews in Jerusalem a thousand miles away.

As we look into Daniel's prayer life, we learn some valuable lessons. First, we should persist in prayer, even when our petitions are not answered immediately. Second, we should devote time to pray for others. There is something special about intercessory prayers. Remember that "the LORD restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends" (*Job 42:10, NKJV*). Third, prayer prompts God to do something concrete and real. So, let us pray always, all kinds of prayers. In the face of unbearable trials, big problems, and overwhelming challenges, let us take our burdens to God in prayer (*Eph. 6:18*).

Read Daniel 10:12. What does this tell us about prayer as an objective experience that moves God to do something, rather than it being just a subjective experience that makes us feel good about God?

A Vision of the Prince

Read Daniel 10:4–9. What happens to Daniel here?

As Daniel describes his experience, we can hardly imagine the overwhelming splendor of what he sees. That human appearance (*Dan. 10:5, 6*) harks back to the “Son of man” depicted in the vision of the heavenly judgment (*Dan. 7:13*). His linen clothing is reminiscent of priestly garments (*Lev. 16:4*), an aspect that likens this personage to the “Prince of the host” depicted in connection with the heavenly sanctuary (*Daniel 8, NKJV*). Gold also is associated with the priestly regalia as a sign of royal dignity. Last, the likening of this figure to lightning, fire, bronze, and a powerful voice portrays Him as a supernatural being. This is someone invested with priestly, royal, and military attributes. This figure also displays interesting similarities to the heavenly being who appears to Joshua shortly before the battle against Jericho (*Josh. 5:13, 14*). In the vision, Joshua sees the “Commander of the army of the LORD” (*NKJV*). Interestingly, the Hebrew word translated as “commander” (*sar*) here is the same word translated as “prince” in reference to Michael in Daniel 10:21. But a closer parallel occurs between Daniel and John, who received a vision of the risen Lord on the Sabbath day.

What similarities do we find between Daniel’s vision of the Son of God in Daniel 10 and those in Joshua 5:13–15 and Revelation 1:12–18?

According to Daniel, those who are with him are frightened off, and Daniel himself falls weak and frail to the ground. The manifestation of God’s presence simply overwhelms him. Yet, whatever his immediate fears, Daniel’s vision shows that God is in control of history. Indeed, as the vision unfolds, we will see that God provides Daniel with an outline of human history from the times of the prophet to the establishment of God’s kingdom (*Daniel 11 and 12*).

If, as we have seen again and again in Daniel, the Lord can keep human history under control, what can He do for our individual lives?

Touched by an Angel

Read Daniel 10:10–19. What happens each time an angel touches Daniel?

Overwhelmed with the radiance of divine light, the prophet falls. Then an angel appears to touch him and comfort him. As we read the narrative, notice that the angel touches Daniel three times.

The first touch enables the prophet to stand and hear the words of comfort coming from heaven: “ ‘Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words’ ” (*Dan. 10:12, NKJV*). Daniel’s prayer has moved the heavens. For us this comes as an assurance that God hears our prayers, which is a great comfort in times of trouble.

The second touch enables Daniel to speak. The prophet pours out his words before the Lord, expressing his feelings of fear and emotion: “ ‘My lord, because of the vision my sorrows have overwhelmed me, and I have retained no strength. For how can this servant of my lord talk with you, my lord? As for me, no strength remains in me now, nor is any breath left in me’ ” (*Dan. 10:16, 17, NKJV*). So, God does not only speak to us; He wants us to open our mouths so that we can tell Him about our feelings, needs, and aspirations.

The third touch brings him strength. As Daniel recognizes his inadequacy, the angel touches him and comforts him with God’s peace: “ ‘O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong!’ ” (*Dan. 10:19, NKJV*). Remember that the angel has been sent to Daniel in response to his prayers, in order to give him insight and understanding. In other words, the vision that follows in chapter 11 will be one that is intended to encourage Daniel in response to his mourning and meditation over the present situation in Jerusalem. With God on our side, then, we can have peace even as we face affliction. His loving touch enables us to look into the future with hope.

**“To us in the common walks of life, heaven may be very near.”
—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 48. How often do you think about just how closely tied heaven and earth are? How might you live differently if you always kept this truth alive in your heart and mind?**

A Great Conflict

Read Daniel 10:20, 21. What is revealed to Daniel here?

The heavenly messenger pulls the curtain aside and reveals to Daniel the cosmic war that transpires behind the scenes of human history. As soon as Daniel begins to pray, a spiritual battle starts between heaven and earth. Heavenly beings began a struggle with the king of Persia to let the Jews continue the reconstruction of the temple. We know from the opening of Daniel 10 that the king of Persia is Cyrus. However, a human king left by himself cannot offer significant opposition to a heavenly being. This indicates that behind the human king stands a spiritual agent who instigates Cyrus to stop the Jews from rebuilding the temple.

A similar situation occurs in Ezekiel 28, in which the king of Tyre represents Satan, the spiritual power behind the human king of that city. So, it should not be surprising that the kings of Persia against whom Michael comes to fight include Satan and his angels. This shows that the human opposition to the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem has a counterpart in the spiritual realm.

Read Daniel 10:13. What kind of battle is described here?

“While Satan was striving to influence the highest powers in the kingdom of Medo-Persia to show disfavor to God’s people, angels worked in behalf of the exiles. The controversy was one in which all heaven was interested. Through the prophet Daniel, we are given a glimpse of this mighty struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil. For three weeks Gabriel wrestled with the powers of darkness, seeking to counteract the influences at work on the mind of Cyrus; and before the contest closed, Christ Himself came to Gabriel’s aid. ‘The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days,’ Gabriel declares; ‘but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.’ Daniel 10:13. All that heaven could do in behalf of the people of God was done. The victory was finally gained; the forces of the enemy were held in check all the days of Cyrus, and all the days of his son Cambyses, who reigned about seven and a half years.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 571, 572.

A Victorious Prince

The most prominent character in the book of Daniel is the figure initially called “Son of Man” (*Dan. 7:13, NKJV*) or “Prince of the host” (*Dan. 8:11, NKJV*). Eventually we learn that His name is Michael (*Dan. 10:12*), which means “Who is like God?” He comes to help Gabriel in the conflict with the king of Persia (*Dan. 10:13*). The angel refers to this heavenly being as “Michael your prince” (*Dan. 10:21*), namely, the prince of God’s people. Michael appears later in the book of Daniel as the One who stands for God’s people (*Dan. 12:1*). From Jude 9, we learn that Michael, also called an archangel, fights against Satan and resurrects Moses. Revelation 12:7 reveals that Michael stands as the leader of the heavenly army, which defeats Satan and his fallen angels. Thus Michael is none other than Jesus Christ. As the Persian Empire has a supreme commander, a spiritual force who stands behind its human leader, so God’s people have in Michael their Commander in Chief, who steps in to fight and win the cosmic war on their behalf.

Read Colossians 2:15. How has Jesus accomplished victory in the cosmic conflict?

As we face the forces of evil, we can have faith in Jesus our champion. He defeats Satan in the beginning of His public ministry. During His earthly life, He defeats Satan in the desert when assaulted with temptations, He fights demonic hordes, and He sets people free from the power of darkness. Jesus defeats evil even when it is disguised behind Peter’s attempt to dissuade Him from moving toward Calvary. In His final words to the disciples, Jesus speaks of His impending death as a battle, which will culminate in a decisive victory over Satan: “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself” (*John 12:31, 32, NKJV*).

Sometimes we look around, and things look really bad. Violence, immorality, corruption, and diseases crop up everywhere. An enemy, not made of flesh and blood, brutally attacks us from all sides. But no matter how difficult the battles we have to fight, Jesus fights for us and stands as our Prince and High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

Read Romans 8:37–39. How can we make the promise of being conquerors a real experience in our own Christian lives?

Further Thought: “For three weeks Gabriel wrestled with the powers of darkness, seeking to counteract the influences at work on the mind of Cyrus. . . . All that heaven could do in behalf of the people of God was done. The victory was finally gained; the forces of the enemy were held in check all the days of Cyrus, and all the days of his son Cambyses.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 572.

“What great honor is shown to Daniel by the Majesty of heaven! He comforts His trembling servant and assures him that his prayer has been heard in heaven. In answer to that fervent petition the angel Gabriel was sent to affect the heart of the Persian king. The monarch had resisted the impressions of the Spirit of God during the three weeks while Daniel was fasting and praying, but heaven’s Prince, the Archangel, Michael, was sent to turn the heart of the stubborn king to take some decided action to answer the prayer of Daniel.”—Ellen G. White, *The Sanctified Life*, p. 51.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Though we are not the first people in Christian history to see this truth, as Seventh-day Adventists we are strong proponents of the “great controversy” motif, or the idea that the entire universe is part of an epic struggle between Christ and Satan. And we believe that every human being is, indeed, involved in this controversy. Others, even secular people, have talked about the reality of some kind of battle in which we are all immersed. What has been your own experience in the great controversy? How have you seen it manifested in your own life? What have you learned that could help others struggling, as well?
- ❷ Read Ephesians 6:10–18. Notice the overt military imagery that Paul uses. What “battle instructions” are given here for us in the great controversy?
- ❸ In Daniel 10:11, for a second time (see *Dan.* 9:23) Daniel is called *hamudot*—or “beloved.” What does this tell us about the close link, even an emotional link, between heaven and earth? Think about how radically different this reality is when compared to the common atheistic view of much of the modern world. What hope does this Bible view, as seen in this reference to Daniel, offer us?

Fetus Refused to Die

By VICTOR HULBERT

"I'm very sorry," the doctor told Fusae Suzuki. "Your husband is very young but, unfortunately, he will die tonight or at the most in a few days."

The news devastated the young Japanese mother. She went to the river to fetch water and, looking into the water, considered throwing herself in. But then two men in black suits appeared.

"Be patient for just a while," said one.

"Yes, be patient," said the other.

After those words, the men disappeared from her sight.

The encounter pulled Suzuki back from despair, and she returned home to nurse her husband, Mitsuharu, a farmer stricken with tuberculosis.

Soon she was pregnant with her second child. Mitsuharu could not bear the thought of his wife struggling to raise two children on her own. Finally she agreed to his pleas to terminate the pregnancy. The government supported the decision.

The pharmacist prescribed a strong medicine that, she promised, would work without fail.

"Be careful with the medicine, and don't exceed the prescribed dose," she cautioned. "Otherwise, your own life will be in danger."

Suzuki swallowed the first dose, enough to end the pregnancy. Weeping in sorrow, she felt the fetus move. "My baby's still alive!" she cried out.

The next day, she repeated the dose, then again on the third day. Yet, the fetus kept moving inside her. In desperation, she drained the medicine bottle, but still the baby remained alive.

"It's totally unbelievable!" she told her husband.

A healthy baby boy was born. Several months later, she and Mitsuharu attended evangelistic meetings, and they were baptized on Akeri's first birthday.

"Their baptismal date always reminds me that God intervened in my mother's womb to save my life," said Akeri Suzuki, a veteran Japanese pastor who retired after serving as executive secretary of the Adventist Church's Northern Asia-Pacific Division. "My parents became the first Adventist church members in my village."

Akeri was 30 before his mother revealed his origins.

"When I heard the story of my birth from my mother, I was terribly shocked and felt as if I had been struck by powerful lightning," he said. "My whole body trembled."

Overwhelmed by God's tremendous love, he thought, *I am a very precious gift from God.*

He rededicated himself to God at that very moment.

"God intervened in my mother's womb to save my life," he said.



VICTOR HULBERT is communication director for the Trans-European Division.

From North *and* South to the Beautiful Land



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 11; Dan. 8:3–8, 20–22; Isa. 46:9, 10; Dan. 8:9, 23; Matt. 27:33–50.*

Memory Text: “And some of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end; because it is still for the appointed time” (*Daniel 11:35, NKJV*).

As we begin this challenging chapter, a few points should be made at the outset.

First, Daniel 11 stands in parallel overall with the previous prophetic outlines in Daniel. As in chapters 2, 7, 8, and 9, the prophetic message extends from the days of the prophet to the end of time. Second, a succession of world powers emerges, powers that often oppress God's people. Third, each prophetic outline climaxes with a happy ending. In Daniel 2, the stone obliterates the statue; in Daniel 7, the Son of man receives the kingdom; and in Daniel 8 and 9, the heavenly sanctuary is cleansed through the work of the Messiah.

Chapter 11 follows three basic points. First, it begins with the Persian kings and discusses their fates and the time of the end, when the king of the north attacks the holy mountain of God. Second, a succession of battles between the king of the north and that of the south and how they affect God's people is described. Third, it concludes with a happy ending as the king of the North faces his demise by the “glorious holy mountain” (*Dan. 11:45*). Such a positive conclusion signals the end of evil and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 21.

Prophecies About Persia and Greece

Read Daniel 11:1–4. What do we see here that reminds us of some of the previous prophecies we have seen in Daniel?

Gabriel tells Daniel that three kings will still rise from Persia. They will be followed by the fourth king, who will be the richest one of all and will provoke the Greeks. After Cyrus, three successive kings exert dominion over Persia: Cambyses (530–522 B.C.), the False Smerdis (522 B.C.), and Darius I (522–486 B.C.). The fourth king is Xerxes, mentioned in the book of Esther as Ahasuerus. He is very wealthy (*Esther 1:1–7*) and marshals a vast army to invade Greece, as predicted in the prophecy. But, in spite of his power, he is repelled by a smaller force of valiant Greek soldiers.

It is not difficult to recognize Alexander the Great as the mighty king who arises in Daniel 11:3, and who becomes the absolute ruler of the ancient world. He died at age 32 without leaving an heir to rule the empire. So, the kingdom was divided among his four generals: Seleucus over Syria and Mesopotamia, Ptolemy over Egypt, Lysimachus over Thrace and portions of Asia Minor, and Cassander over Macedonia and Greece.

Compare Daniel 11:2–4 with 8:3–8, 20–22. How do these texts together help identify Alexander as the power here?

What can we learn from this assortment of names, dates, places, and historical events? First, we learn that the prophecy is fulfilled as predicted by the divine messenger. God's Word never fails. Second, God is the Lord of history. We may get the impression that the succession of political powers, leaders, and kingdoms is propelled by the ambition of emperors, dictators, and politicians of all stripes. However, the Bible reveals that God is in ultimate control and will move the wheel of history according to His divine purpose, which ultimately will lead to the eradication of evil and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom.

Prophecies of Syria and Egypt

Read Daniel 11:5–14. What is unfolding here?

Upon the death of Alexander the Great, the vast Greek Empire was divided among his four generals. Two of them—Seleucus in Syria (North) and Ptolemy in Egypt (South)—managed to establish dynasties that would fight each other for control of the land.

Most Bible students understand the wars between the king of the North and the king of the South prophesied in Daniel 11:5–14 as referring to the many battles involving these two dynasties. According to the prophecy, an attempt would be made to unite these two dynasties by marriage, but that alliance would be short-lived (*Dan. 11:6*). Historical sources inform us that Antiochus II Theos (261–246 B.C.), grandson of Seleucus I, married Berenice, a daughter of the Egyptian king, Ptolemy II Philadelphus. However, that agreement did not last, and the conflict that directly involved the people of God soon resumed. Thus, Daniel 11 deals with some important events that will touch the lives of God's people during the centuries after the prophet Daniel passes from the scene.

Again, we can ask the question of why the Lord reveals ahead of time all these details about wars involving kingdoms fighting each other for supremacy in that part of the world. The reason is simple: *these wars affect God's people*. So, the Lord announces beforehand the many challenges His people will face in the years to come. Also, God is the Lord of history, and as we compare the prophetic record with the historical events, we can again see that the prophetic word is fulfilled as predicted. The God who predicts the vicissitudes of those Hellenistic kingdoms fighting each other is the God who knows the future. He is worthy of our trust and faith. This is a big God, not an idol manufactured by human imagination. He not only directs the course of historical events, but He also can direct our lives if we allow Him to do so.

Read Isaiah 46:9, 10. How much basic Christian theology is found in these two verses, and what great hope can we take from them? Think about how scary verse 10 would be if God were not kind and loving but vengeful and mean.

Rome and the Prince of the Covenant

Read Daniel 11:16–28. Though the text is difficult, what images can you find that appear elsewhere in Daniel?

A transition in power from the Hellenistic kings to pagan Rome seems to be depicted in Daniel 11:16: “But he who comes against him shall do according to his own will, and no one shall stand against him. He shall stand in the Glorious Land with destruction in his power” (*NKJV*). The Glorious Land is Jerusalem, an area where ancient Israel has existed, and the new power that takes over that area is pagan Rome. The same event also is represented in the horizontal expansion of the little horn, which reaches the Glorious Land (*Dan. 8:9*). So, it seems clear that the power in charge of the world at this point is pagan Rome.

Some additional clues in the biblical text reinforce this perception. For example, the “one who imposes taxes” must refer to Caesar Augustus. It is during his reign that Jesus is born, as Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem for the census (*Dan. 11:20*). Also, according to the prophecy this ruler will be succeeded by a “vile person” (*Dan. 11:21*). As history shows, Augustus was succeeded by Tiberius, an adoptive son of Augustus. Tiberius is known to have been an eccentric and vile person.

Most important, according to the biblical text, it was during the reign of Tiberius that the “prince of the covenant” would be broken (*Dan. 11:22*). This clearly refers to the crucifixion of Christ, also called “Messiah the prince” (*Dan. 9:25*; see also *Matt. 27:33–50*), as He is put to death during the reign of Tiberius. The reference to Jesus here as “the prince of the covenant” is a powerful marker that helps show us the flow of historical events, again giving readers powerful evidence of God’s amazing foreknowledge. God has been right on all that has come before in these prophecies, so we can surely trust Him on what He says will happen in the future.

Even amid all political and historical events, Jesus of Nazareth, “the prince of the covenant,” is revealed in the texts. How does this help show us that, despite all the upheaval and political intrigue, Jesus remains central to Scripture?

The Next Power

Read Daniel 11:29–39. What is this power that arises after pagan Rome?

Daniel 11:29–39 refers to a new power system. Although this system stands in continuation with the pagan Roman Empire and inherits some characteristics of its predecessor, at the same time it seems to be different in some aspects. The biblical text says that “it shall not be like the former or the latter” (*Dan. 11:29, NKJV*). As we look further, we find that it acts as a religious power. It aims its attack mainly at God and His people. Let us look at some of the actions perpetrated by this king.

First, he will act “in rage against the holy covenant” (*Dan. 11:30, NKJV*). This must be a reference to God’s covenant of salvation, which this king opposes.

Second, this king will produce forces that will “defile the sanctuary” and take away the “daily sacrifices” (*Dan. 11:31*). We noted in Daniel 8 that the little horn casts down the foundation of God’s “sanctuary” and takes away the “daily sacrifices” (*Dan. 8:11*). This must be understood as a spiritual attack against Christ’s ministration in the heavenly sanctuary.

Third, as a consequence of his attack on the sanctuary, this power places the “abomination of desolation” (*NKJV*) in God’s temple. The parallel expression “transgression of desolation” points to the acts of apostasy and rebellion by the little horn (*Dan. 8:13*).

Fourth, this power persecutes God’s people: “some of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end” (*Dan. 11:35, NKJV*). This reminds us of the little horn, which cast down some of the host and some of the stars and trampled them (*Dan. 8:10; compare with Dan. 7:25*).

Fifth, this king will “exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods” (*Dan. 11:36, NKJV*). Unsurprisingly, the little horn also speaks “pompous words” (*Dan. 7:8, NKJV*), even against God (*Dan. 7:25*).

Other similarities could be mentioned but, considering what we read in Daniel 7 and 8, who is this power, and why is it so important to us, despite social pressures, to stay firm in our identification of it?

Final Events

Read Daniel 11:40–45. What is happening here?

The following phrases help us understand this text:

Time of the End: The expression “time of the end” appears only in Daniel (*Dan.* 8:17; 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9). Examination of Daniel’s prophecies indicates that the time of the end extends from the fall of the papacy in 1798 to the resurrection of the dead (*Dan.* 12:2).

King of the North: This name first geographically designates the Seleucid dynasty, but then it refers to pagan and finally papal Rome. As such, it does not describe a geographical location but the spiritual enemy of God’s people. In addition, we also should note that the king of the North represents a counterfeit of the true God, who in the Bible is symbolically associated with the North (*Isa.* 14:13).

King of the South: This name at first designates the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt, south of the Holy Land. But as the prophecy unfolds, it acquires a theological dimension, and is associated by some scholars with atheism. As Ellen G. White, commenting on the reference to Egypt in Revelation 11:8, says, “This is atheism.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 269.

The glorious holy mountain: In Old Testament times this expression referred to Zion, the capital and heart of Israel and geographically located in the Promised Land. After the Cross, God’s people are no longer defined along ethnic and geographical lines. Therefore, the holy mountain must be a symbolic designation of God’s people spread throughout the world.

So, perhaps, we can interpret events like this:

(1) The king of the South attacks the king of the North: the French Revolution attempted to eradicate religion and defeat the papacy but failed. (2) The king of the North attacks and defeats the king of the South: the forces of religion headed by the papacy and its allies will eventually overcome the forces of atheism and will form a coalition with the defeated enemy. (3) Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon will escape: some of those not counted among God’s true people will join the fold in the last hour. (4) The king of the North prepares to attack the holy mountain but comes to his end: the forces of evil are destroyed, and God’s kingdom is established.

How can we draw comfort from knowing that, in the end, God and His people will be victorious?

Further Thought: It is interesting that at least in reference to Daniel 11:29–39, Martin Luther identified the abomination of desolation in Daniel 11:31 with the papacy and its doctrines and practices. Thus, the correlation of Daniel 11 with Daniel 7 and 8 reinforces the view of Luther and many other Protestant commentators that the institution of the papacy and its teachings constitute the fulfillment of these prophecies in history. In this connection, Ellen G. White says: “No church within the limits of Romish jurisdiction was long left undisturbed in the enjoyment of freedom of conscience. No sooner had the papacy obtained power than she stretched out her arms to crush all that refused to acknowledge her sway, and one after another the churches submitted to her dominion.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 62.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How can we be sensitive to the feelings of others yet not compromise on what the Bible teaches regarding the role of Rome in the last days?
- ❷ Daniel 11:33 reads: “And those of the people who understand shall instruct many; yet for many days they shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plundering” (NKJV). What does this text say about the fate of some of God’s faithful people? What does the text say, too, about what some of these faithful people are doing before they are martyred? What message is there for us today?
- ❸ Daniel 11:36 reads: “Then the king shall do according to his own will; he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the wrath has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done” (NKJV). Of whom and what does this remind you? (See Isa. 14:12–17; see also 2 Thess. 2:1–4.)
- ❹ Daniel 11:27, 29, and 35 use the phrase *lammo’ed*, “the appointed time” (NKJV). What does that tell us, again, about God’s control of history?

Heart for Mission

By JOYCE

Joyce is a 25-year-old Global Mission pioneer who, with another female Global Mission pioneer, planted a church for young people in a city of 10 million people. Because she lives in a closed country hostile to Christianity, Adventist Mission is not publishing her full name or location. Here's what Joyce said when asked by editor Andrew McChesney, "Why did you decide to be a missionary?"

I have one sister, Sarah, and she was born with a congenital heart defect. My grandmother was very worried, and she looked and looked for the best hospital. But the doctors couldn't help Sarah. So, my grandmother visited our traditional places of worship to ask for help, but no one there could help my sister.

Finally, the doctor told my parents that he could do nothing more.

"Take care of Sarah as best as you can," he said. "If she wants something special to eat or a new toy, give it to her to make her happy."

One day, when Sarah was seven, a Seventh-day Adventist relative came to visit from far away. She saw that my grandmother was worried about Sarah, and she said, "If you believe in Jesus, you will be blessed."

The next Sabbath, my grandmother took me to church. I was three. Church members gathered in a circle around us and prayed for us and for Sarah.

Just a few days later, Sarah was healed! Her heart was perfect! The doctor couldn't believe it. He ran several medical tests, and he couldn't find any problems with Sarah's heart. It was a miracle!

The miracle changed my family. My grandmother and my parents started going to church every Sabbath, and soon they were baptized. Then my parents decided that they wanted to tell other people about Jesus. So, they quit their jobs, received church training, and became Global Mission pioneers. When my sister grew up, she also became a Global Mission pioneer. Last year, I decided to become a Global Mission pioneer.

As a missionary, I give Bible studies, I pray with people, and I preach. I work with a partner, another Global Mission pioneer who is 23, and we just opened a new church for young people in this city.

Relatives who aren't Christians don't understand why I am a missionary. They tell me to look for another job. Sometimes I feel discouraged when I hear such negative words, but my parents pray for me. My mother even fasts and prays for me on Sabbaths. My parents remind me that I am not working for man. I am working for God.



My parents are right. I am working for God. God is so wonderful and powerful in healing my sister. I believe God is leading me every step of the way.

From Dust *to* Stars



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 12; Rom. 8:34; Luke 10:20; Rom. 8:18; Heb. 2:14, 15; John 14:29; Rev. 11:3.*

Memory Text: “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever” (*Daniel 12:3, NKJV*).

The book of Daniel begins with Nebuchadnezzar invading Judea and taking captives to Babylon; the book of Daniel concludes, in contrast, with Michael standing up to deliver God's people from end-time Babylon. That is, as shown all through Daniel, in the end, the *very* end, God works everything out in favor of His people.

As we have seen, too, Daniel and his companions remain faithful to God and display unparalleled wisdom amid the trials and challenges of the exile. Likewise, when facing tribulation, God's end-time people also will remain faithful, especially during “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation” (*Dan. 12:1*). Like Daniel and his friends in Babylon, they will display wisdom and understanding. They will not only experience wisdom as a personal virtue but will be committed, as a consequence of that wisdom, to lead others to righteousness. Some will die or be put to death, and thus, go back to the dust, but they will be raised to eternity. As the biblical text says, “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life” (*Dan. 12:2*).

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 28.*

Michael, Our Prince

Read Daniel 12:1. Who changes the course of history at the end of time? How do Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25 help us understand what this text means?

Every chapter of Daniel so far has begun by mentioning the ruler of a pagan nation. Daniel 12 likewise begins with a ruler, but unlike every other chapter the ruler is a divine prince who rises to deliver God's people from the hands of their enemies.

As we glimpsed in our study of Daniel 10, Michael is the same powerful heavenly being who appears to Daniel at the Tigris River. There He emerges as the heavenly representative of God's people. He also appears elsewhere in Daniel as the Son of man (*Daniel 7*), the Prince of the host (*Daniel 8*), and Messiah the Prince (*Daniel 9*). Thus Michael—whose name means “who is like God?”—must be none other than Jesus Himself.

It is important to note the timing of Michael's intervention. According to Daniel 12:1, it occurs “at that time” (*Dan. 12:1*). This expression refers to the time just mentioned in Daniel 11:40–45. This is the period of time that extends from the fall of the papacy in 1798 to the resurrection at the end of time (*Dan. 12:2*).

Two important aspects of Michael's work can be inferred from the verb “stand” utilized in Daniel 12:1 to describe His action. First, the verb “stand” evokes the rise of kings to conquer and rule. The verb also primarily connotes a military sense. It shows that Michael acts as a military leader who protects His people and leads them in a special way during the last stages of the great controversy.

Second, the verb “stand” also points to a judgment setting. Michael “stands” to act as an advocate in the heavenly tribunal. As the Son of man, He comes before the Ancient of Days to represent God's people during the investigative judgment (*Dan. 7:9–14*). Thus Michael's rising or standing evokes the military and judicial aspects of His work. In other words, He is invested with the power to defeat God's enemies and with the authority to represent God's people in the heavenly tribunal.

Think about what it means to know that Michael stands in our behalf, even now. What hope should that give you, a sinner?

Written in the Book

Daniel 12:1 talks about those who are “found written in the book.” What does that mean?

The time of Michael’s intervention also is described as a time of trouble without parallel. This corresponds to the time when God’s Spirit will be withdrawn from rebellious humankind. Then the seven last plagues, as expressions of God’s wrath upon the nations, will be poured upon the end-time Babylon (*Revelation* 16; 18:20–24), and the powers of darkness will be unleashed upon the world. Ellen G. White writes of this time that “Satan will then plunge the inhabitants of the earth into one great, final trouble. As the angels of God cease to hold in check the fierce winds of human passion, all the elements of strife will be let loose. The whole world will be involved in ruin more terrible than that which came upon Jerusalem of old.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 614.

But God’s people will be delivered during this terrible time because, in the investigative judgment conducted in the heavenly tribunal, they have been vindicated by Jesus, the heavenly High Priest, and their names have been written in the book.

In order to understand the meaning of this book, we should keep in mind that the Bible mentions two kinds of heavenly books. One contains the names of those who belong to the Lord and is sometimes designated as the book of life (*Exod.* 32:32, *Luke* 10:20, *Ps.* 69:28, *Phil.* 4:3, *Rev.* 17:8).

In addition to the book of life, the Scriptures mention books containing the records of human deeds (*Ps.* 56:8, *Mal.* 3:16, *Isa.* 65:6). These are the books used in the heavenly tribunal to determine every person’s commitment to the Lord. These are heavenly records, “databases,” containing the names and deeds of every human being. Some people frown upon the idea of having their names, and especially their deeds, written in heaven. But once we commit our lives to Christ, our names are inscribed in the book of life, and our bad deeds are deleted in the judgment. This heavenly record provides judicial evidence to the entire universe that we belong to Jesus and therefore have the right to be protected during the time of trouble.

Why is it that the righteousness of Christ alone, credited to us, is our only hope of being found “written in the book”? Bring your answer to class for Sabbath.

The Resurrection

Read Daniel 12:2, 3. What event is he talking about here, and why, considering what we understand about death, is this event so important to us?

Daniel makes probably the most explicit reference in the Old Testament to the coming resurrection. And as we reflect on this passage, we can learn some very important truths. First, as the metaphor of “sleep” indicates, no immortal soul inhabits human bodies. Humans are an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit. In death, the person ceases to exist and remains unconscious until the resurrection. Second, our text points to the coming resurrection as a reversal of what happens as a consequence of sin. Indeed, the expression translated as “dust of the earth” in the original language of Daniel 12:2 reads “earth of dust.” This unusual word sequence points back to Genesis 3:19, the only other biblical passage where the word “earth” precedes the word “dust.” This implies that the death pronouncement made at Adam’s fall will be reversed and death will no longer hold sway. As Paul says, “death is swallowed up in victory” (*1 Cor. 15:54*).

Read Romans 8:18 and Hebrews 2:14, 15. For what reasons do we not need to fear death?

Death ruins and ends everything here. But we are offered the promise that death does not hold the last word for faithful believers. Death is a vanquished enemy. When Christ breaks the chains of death and emerges resurrected from the tomb, He deals the fatal blow to death. Now we can look beyond the temporary reality of death to the ultimate reality of the life we receive from God in Christ. Because Michael “stand[s] up” (*see Dan. 12:1*), those who belong to Him also will stand up. They will rise from the “earth of dust” to shine like the stars for ever and ever.

Amid the pains and struggles of life, how can we draw hope and comfort from the promise of the resurrection at the end? Why, in a very real sense, does almost nothing else matter?

The Sealed Book

Read Daniel 12:4 and John 14:29. Why is the book of Daniel to be sealed until the time of the end?

At the conclusion of the last major section of the book (*Dan. 10:1–12:4*), the prophet receives the command to seal the scroll until the time of the end. In the same breath, the angel predicts that “ ‘many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase’ ” (*Dan. 12:4, NKJV*). Although some students of Daniel have taken these words as a prediction of scientific progress, which also could be included in the meaning, the context seems to indicate that running “to and fro” refers to searching the book of Daniel itself. Indeed, as we look back into history, we note that Daniel remained an obscure piece of literature for centuries. It may have been known and studied in some places, but some of its key teachings and prophecies remained mysterious. For example, the prophetic messages related to the purification of the heavenly sanctuary, the judgment, the identity and work of the little horn, along with the time frame related to these prophecies, were far from clear.

But from the Protestant Reformation onward, more and more people began to study the book of Daniel. However, it was only at the time of the end that the book was finally opened and its contents more fully unveiled. As Ellen G. White notes, “Since 1798 the book of Daniel has been unsealed, knowledge of the prophecies has increased, and many have proclaimed the solemn message of the judgment near.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 356. “At the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century a new interest in the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation was awakened in widely separated places of earth. The study of these prophecies led to a widespread belief that the second advent of Christ was near. Numerous expositors in England, Joseph Wolff in the Middle East, Manuel Lacunza in South America, and William Miller in the United States, together with a host of other students of the prophecies, declared, on the basis of their study of the prophecies of Daniel, that the second advent was at hand. Today, this conviction has become the driving force of a worldwide movement.”—*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 879.

Think about the great advantage that we have today to be able to look back on history and see how these historical prophecies of Daniel have been fulfilled. How should this help us trust in all of God’s promises?

The Waiting Time

Read Daniel 12:5–13. How does the book conclude?

Interestingly, this final scene takes place at the “river,” or the Tigris, the place of Daniel’s last major vision (*Dan. 10:4*). However, the word used here is not the common Hebrew word for “river,” but the term *ye’or*, which usually designates “the Nile River.” This reminds us of the Exodus and shows that just as the Lord redeems Israel from Egypt, He will redeem His end-time people.

Three prophetic timetables are given. The first one—“a time, times, and half a time” (*NKJV*)—answers the question—“‘How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?’ ” (*Dan. 12:6, NKJV*). The “wonders” refers to the things depicted in the vision of Daniel 11, which are an elaboration of Daniel 7 and 8. More specifically, this time period was mentioned in Daniel 7:25 and later in Revelation 11:3; 12:6, 14; and 13:5. It also corresponds to the 1,260 years of papal supremacy, which extended from A.D. 538 to 1798. And Daniel 11:32–35 refers to the same persecution without mentioning its duration.

The other two time periods, 1,290 and 1,335 days, answer a question—“what shall be the end of these things?” (*NKJV*)—posed by Daniel himself to the Man clothed in linen. And both begin with the removal of the “daily” and the setting up of the “abomination of desolation.” From the lesson on Daniel 8, we learned that the “daily” refers to the continual intercession of Christ, which was replaced with a counterfeit worship system. Thus, this prophetic period should start in A.D. 508, when Clovis, king of the Franks, converted to the Catholic faith. This important event paved the way for the union between church and state, which held sway throughout the Middle Ages. Hence, 1,290 days ended in 1798, when the pope was arrested by the French emperor Napoleon. And the 1,335 days, the last prophetic period mentioned in Daniel, ended in 1843. This was the time of the Millerite movement and renewed study of the biblical prophecies. It was a time of waiting and hope in the imminent coming of Jesus.

All through Daniel we see two things: God’s people persecuted, and God’s people ultimately vindicated and saved. How can this reality help us seek to stay faithful, regardless of our immediate trials?

Further Thought: “The prophecies present a succession of events leading down to the opening of the judgment. This is especially true of the book of Daniel. But that part of his prophecy which related to the last days, Daniel was bidden to close up and seal ‘to the time of the end.’ Not till we reach this time could a message concerning the judgment be proclaimed, based on the fulfillment of these prophecies. But at the time of the end, says the prophet, ‘many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.’ Daniel 12:4.

“The apostle Paul warned the church not to look for the coming of Christ in his day. ‘That day shall not come,’ he says, ‘except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed.’ 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Not till after the great apostasy, and the long period of the reign of the ‘man of sin,’ can we look for the advent of our Lord. The ‘man of sin,’ which also is styled ‘the mystery of iniquity,’ ‘the son of perdition,’ and ‘that wicked,’ represents the papacy, which, as foretold in prophecy, was to maintain its supremacy for 1260 years. This period ended in 1798. The coming of Christ could not take place before that time. Paul covers with his caution the whole of the Christian dispensation down to the year 1798. It is this side of that time that the message of Christ’s second coming is to be proclaimed.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 356.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What dangers do we face by setting dates for future end-time events? What happens to the faith of many when these predicted events fail to come to pass? What crucial prophetic principle is found in Christ’s words in John 14:29 that should help us understand how to use prophecy to our spiritual advantage and avoid the trap of making or believing in false predictions?
- ❷ What is it about the time we live in now, with instant communication, as well as amazing scientific advances that are not always for our own good, that makes the idea of a “time of trouble such as never was” something not that hard to imagine happening?
- ❸ Discuss your answer to Monday’s final question on why the gospel, the great truth of Christ’s righteousness, is our only hope of being “found written in the book.” Without that, what hope would we have?

“Crying Happy Tears”

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Larissa Madeline Van Bommel, a university student from Canada, was having a bad day in Germany. First, she got lost. Wandering around for a while, she entered an empty church outside Frankfurt. She had struggled with her faith since her mother had died, and she hadn't prayed or visited a church in two years.

“I decided to take a seat and ended up praying and pouring my heart out and crying and crying,” she said. “I asked God for a sign that He is actually out there.”

Drying her tears, Van Bommel managed to find the train station—but then got confused and accidentally disembarked from the train in Bensheim instead of Bensheim-Auerbach. The next train wouldn't come for some time that evening. Tired and thirsty, Van Bommel hunted for water to drink. No vending machines were in sight, and all the shops seemed to be closed.

Some distance from the train station, Van Bommel spotted a bottle of water and several cups on a table outside a building. Desperately thirsty, she peered into the building's window, saw young people eating around a kitchen table, and boldly walked in the front door. “May I buy a glass of water?” she asked.

The people promptly invited Van Bommel to join them for the meal.

Van Bommel had stumbled across a Seventh-day Adventist community center called HopeCenter, a place where people attend educational and religious seminars, participate in healthy cooking classes, or simply relax on a comfortable sofa and enjoy free WiFi. HopeCenters are the brainchild of Stimme der Hoffnung (Voice of Hope), the German affiliate of the Adventist Church's Hope Channel, and the first two centers opened in Germany in 2017. Plans are in the works to open at least 14 more HopeCenters.

After sitting down to eat, Van Bommel noticed a “HopeCenter” sign in the window and asked about it. Her new acquaintances explained that they were Christians and that their Adventist church had opened the HopeCenter as a place to mingle and make friends. Abruptly, Van Bommel remembered her prayer for God to prove His existence. “I immediately started crying and told them how just a couple hours ago I had begged God for a sign, and I knew this was it,” Van Bommel said.



The astonished Adventists praised God. “You will never know how much your kindness touched me,” Van Bommel, now a student in the Netherlands, wrote in a post on HopeCenter's Facebook page. “God bless you, and may many others be blessed by your kindness.” She added: “The HopeCenter is an incredibly beautiful idea and should be spread throughout Germany, as well as Canada and the rest of the world. Thanks to you, I'm crying happy tears now.”