

# 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*).

**O**ur 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?

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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?**

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## 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?

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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?**

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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.”

