

Daniel 7



SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

Memory Text: “Until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom” (*Daniel 7:22, NIV*).

If Daniel 2 provides powerful, rational evidence not only for God's existence but for His power to control the future, Daniel 7 provides even more. Daniel 7 covers the same ground as does Daniel 2, as well as provides a key element not explicitly expressed in Daniel 2: the great judgment in heaven that leads directly to the second coming of Jesus and the end of this world as we know it. In short, in Daniel 7 we are shown the pre-Advent judgment.

The key to understanding Daniel 7 is found in Daniel 2. “In fact, the two visions [Daniel 2 and 7] follow a parallel development. They cover the same time span, from Babylon to the end of human time, and evoke the same four kingdoms represented symbolically by metals in chapter 2, and by beasts in chapter 7. Such a parallel is more than a unifying factor—it is the key to our method of interpretation. We must read chapter 7 in the light of chapter 2.”—Jacques Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Assoc., 2000), p. 100.

There's so much in Daniel 7 (we will return to it later); for now, we will get a quick overview of this amazing prophecy, with an emphasis on its climactic scene: the heavenly judgment, which leads to the return of Christ and the fulfillment of our great hopes as believers in Jesus.

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

Daniel's Dream

Read Daniel 7:1-14. On the lines below, summarize in your own words the essence of Daniel's dream.

As you read, you've probably noticed a few parallels with Daniel 2, such as (1) the same number of different entities appear, (2) there is emphasis on the last entity (in Daniel 2 it was the iron), and (3) both end with God establishing His eternal kingdom.

Are there any other parallels?

In verses 16 and 17, Daniel is immediately given the basic interpretation of his dream. What is the interpretation, and how does it parallel Daniel 2?

It's obvious that what we have in Daniel 7 is a more detailed depiction of what was revealed in Daniel 2. Though more details are given about these powers, the four beasts in Daniel 7 represent the same four kingdoms as in Daniel 2. Scholars have long recognized them as the following:

Babylon (lion)
Media-Persia (bear)
Greece (leopard)
Rome (fourth beast)
God's final kingdom

Here, again, we are shown that the foundation of the prophecies in Daniel is based on *history*. Daniel sweeps over world history from ancient times right through to ours and beyond. If that point wasn't made clear enough in Daniel 2, it's repeated in Daniel 7.

How blessed we are to know not only that our God is in control but that, regardless of what happens here and now, in the end, He will set up His eternal kingdom.

The establishment of God's final kingdom is assured. What assurance do you have that you will be there when it is? What is your assurance based on?

Key Text: *Daniel 7:22*

Teachers Aims:

1. To affirm a belief in God's existence and in His power to control the future.
2. To examine the significance of the pre-Advent judgment.

Lesson Outline:

I. World Empires (*Dan. 7:3-7, 15-17*)

- A. As in Daniel 2, Daniel 7 presents a scenario that foretells the rise and fall of four successive world empires.
- B. Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome are symbolized by a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a terrible beast, respectively.
- C. With laserlike accuracy, Daniel 7 unfolds the history of the world, spanning over twenty-five hundred years.

II. The Super-Villain (*Dan. 7:8, 24*)

- A. Daniel 7 explicitly reveals the distinctive traits of the "little horn."
- B. The little horn demonstrates the spirit of antichrist depicted in 1 John 4:3.
- C. The little horn represents the Roman Empire, both pagan and papal.
- D. The little horn schemes to destroy God's people.

III. Heavenly Court Session (*Dan. 7:9*)

- A. The heavenly court session leads to the final overthrow of the little-horn power.
- B. The investigative judgment takes place prior to Christ's second coming and the final establishment of God's eternal kingdom.
- C. We are assured of a share in this eternal kingdom through faith in Christ.

Summary: Daniel 7 provides a panoramic view of over twenty-five hundred years of history in advance. From the early neo-Babylonian Empire up to the present, this prophecy penetrates the veil of the future in which God will intervene decisively in the affairs of humankind.

COMMENTARY

Daniel 2 provides an outline of secular history from the time of the prophet to the establishment of God's kingdom. Daniel 7 is almost parallel to Daniel 2, giving more details about the last earthly kingdom as it focuses on that kingdom's religious nature and the claims it makes. That religious nature pictures the severity of the great controversy, the salvation of God's people, and the assurance we

The Fourth Beast

There's an important parallel between Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 that we don't want to miss. In Daniel 2, the iron, the fourth power, arises after Greece (*vss. 32, 33, 39-45*), and, though taking another form, it remains until the end. It was destroyed only when God set up His kingdom.

In Daniel 7, with the fourth beast, the fourth power, the same thing happens. The fourth beast, which arose after Greece (*vss. 6, 7*), remains until the end of time (though taking another form), when it is destroyed at the establishment of God's eternal kingdom (*vss. 19-27*).

Thus, in both Daniel 2 and Daniel 7, the fourth power, the one arising after Greece, remains until the end of the world.

Read Daniel 7:19-27 and then answer the following questions:

What parallels do you see between the description of the fourth beast (*Dan. 7:19*) and that of the fourth power in Daniel 2 (*vs. 40*)?

From where does the little horn arise?

What ultimately brings about the demise of the little-horn power in Daniel 7?

In Daniel 7, more time is spent dealing with this little-horn power than with any of the other powers. Obviously, this little horn, which arose out of the fourth beast, and thus remains part of it, is deemed very serious by the Lord, for so much time is spent on it. This power, though arising out of the fourth beast, exists until the end of time, when—*after the judgment in heaven*—God sets up His earthly kingdom. Only then is it destroyed.

People have often talked about trying to build a kingdom of God on earth here and now. Inevitably, all these have failed. Why? Why is our ultimate hope only in God's supernatural intervention in our behalf, as depicted in this chapter?

have of God's victory. Thus, Daniel 7 also teaches that history is in God's hands, and it moves toward the establishment of His kingdom. We will note this week the parallels between Daniel 2 and 7, the power of Rome, and the judgment in heaven.

I. Daniel 2 and 7

The dream of Daniel 2 was given to Nebuchadnezzar. The dream of Daniel 7 was given to Daniel. While the first dream deals with an image, the second dream provides a more graphic setting. Read Daniel 7:2. Winds symbolize the instability, the ferocious combativeness, and the passions of the ruling powers. The sea perhaps refers to the Mediterranean, which played a crucial role in ancient history for the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. The sea is often used to symbolize Gentile nations. Animals symbolize nations rising in succession only to oppose God's will and purposes (*Isa. 27:1, 51:9, Ezek. 29:3*).

Daniel 2 pictures Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, Rome, and its divided remnants until God intervenes to establish His kingdom. Daniel 7 uses a lion, bear, leopard, and an animal that defies zoological classification, "terrifying, and frightening and very powerful" (*Dan. 7:7, NIV*). The prophet emphasizes this beast's frightening nature. What does this beast represent? If Daniel 2 and 7 are parallel portraits, and if Daniel 2 traces history in terms of Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome, then the beasts in Daniel 7 must represent these same powers. Therefore, the last beast represents Rome.

II. Rome: The Terrifying Power

Daniel was anxious to know "the true meaning of the fourth beast" (*Dan. 7:19, NIV*). While the angel gave his interpretation (*see vs. 23-25*), the most noteworthy point is that this system is identified by what it does religiously. Read Daniel 7:25.

History shows how pagan Rome and the little-horn power of papal Rome fulfill this prophecy. Pagan Rome crucified Christ and for decades persecuted and put to death thousands of early Christians. When pagan Rome gave way to papal Rome, the latter took upon itself not only ecclesiastical power but also political power and for centuries persecuted those who differed from its view. It was also the Roman Church that changed "the set times and the laws" by abolishing the seventh-day Sabbath, introducing Sunday worship, and making way for nonbiblical doctrines, such as Mariolatry, salvation by works, the adoration of the doctrine of idols, and purgatory. This work of the little horn, coming out of pagan Rome, did more to trample down the priorities of God's kingdom than any other organized religious and political power in history.

The Little Horn

Daniel 7 goes from Babylon, Media-Persia, and Greece to pagan Rome, the phase of Rome that arose right after the downfall of Greece. Then, while depicting this Roman power, Daniel 7 describes the rise of the little horn, which is still part of the fourth beast, though another phase of it. Who is this little horn? The Protestant Reformers almost unanimously saw it as papal Rome. Indeed, even before the Reformation, some Jewish scholars also identified the little horn as the papal phase of the fourth beast. It's hard to see how it could be anything else. In fact, it *can't* be anything else. You might need faith to believe in the Second Coming or the resurrection of the dead, but you don't need much faith to see papal Rome as the power depicted here.

Below are some traits of the little horn. Given however much you know about the papacy, how do these descriptions match it?

- 1 The little horn arises from pagan Rome (*Dan. 7:19, 20*).

- 2 The little horn makes war with the saints and prevails against them (*Dan. 7:21, 25*).

- 3 The little horn thinks to change “times and laws” (*Dan. 7:25*).

- 4 The little-horn power is blasphemous (*Dan. 7:25*).

All these attributes have been powerfully and graphically recorded in history. There's no question here regarding the identity of this little-horn power. Though we have to be diplomatic in how we deal with these prophecies and seek to teach them in a way that doesn't hurt other people, we would be unfaithful to our biblical mandate (*see Rev. 13:1-9, 14:6-12*) were we, in the interest of political correctness, to abandon this position in favor of something less controversial.

III. The Heavenly Judgment

The prophecy of Daniel 7 goes beyond the blasphemous, persecuting, and arrogant nature of the little horn. Even as this power marches across history, Daniel reminds us that history is ultimately in God's hand and that the false religious system will come under God's judgment. The description of this judgment is awesome and graphic (see vs. 9, 10, 13, 14). The Ancient of Days (God the Father) is there with a multitude of angels. The court convenes; and the Son of Man (Christ) appears with all His glory, power, and sovereignty. Without the Son, who revealed in His incarnate state the true character of God, the cosmic conflict cannot end. He is the arbiter of history. The Son, who took the form of a man, judges the man of sin, who claims to be the vicar of God. This judgment dooms the entire false religious system. Then the sovereignty and rulership of the universe are restored to their rightful owner (vs. 27).

Inductive Bible Study

Text for Discovery: *Daniel 7*

- 1 The prophecies of Daniel 2 and 7 use different symbols to give the same preview of the rise and fall of earthly kingdoms. Who was the original recipient of the dream in Daniel 2? Who received the vision of Daniel 7? What was the fundamental message God wanted to communicate to Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2? What is the fundamental message of Daniel 7? Are they essentially the same? What else is revealed in Daniel 7 that is not revealed in Daniel 2?
- 2 The first three beasts of Daniel 7 represent the rise and fall of secular kingdoms. The account of the last beast, and particularly the last king, introduces an element previously unmentioned: “the saints of the Most High” (vs. 18, 22, 25, 27). What does this element indicate about the final struggle to take place before God's kingdom is established? What great issues will be at stake in this struggle? How can we prepare for it as individuals, and as a group?
- 3 This week's lesson outlines four characteristics about the little-horn power that identify it as papal Rome. These identifiers are powerful. How we communicate these historical facts, however, can be either persuasive or highly inflammatory. How would Jesus address these facts in a personal or in a public setting? What method would be most persuasive? Is there one right way?

Time, Times, and Dividing of Time

Read Daniel 7:25. What is the time prophecy given there?

Even non-Adventists have recognized that the time, times, and dividing of time here means three and a half years. One study Bible by Thomas Nelson says: “A time, times and the dividing of time . . . is an expression used in Daniel and in Revelation to refer to three and a half years, or 1,260 days, or 42 months (12:7; Rev 11:2; 12:6, 14; 13:5).”

How do the texts in the above quote help you understand why the time prophecy in Daniel 7:25 is the same as 1,260 days?

As others have done, Adventists apply the day-year principle to this prophecy, which means it's dealing with 1,260 years, not 1,260 literal days. Later we will spend a whole week on the day-year principle. For now, we can see that Daniel 7 is full of symbols: a lion with wings, a beast with iron teeth, a little horn that has eyes. Why would a time prophecy, imbedded among these symbols, be anything but symbolic itself?

Thus, we're given a 1,260-year period delineating an aspect of papal Rome, in this case, a period of persecution.

If we date the beginning of papal Rome to the late fifth, early sixth century, 1,260 years later brings us to the late eighteenth, or early nineteenth, century. Again, history bears out that the long period of papal political dominion, which included massive persecution, petered out in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

What happens in the prophecy after the 1,260-year period is depicted? *Dan. 7:25-27 (see also Dan. 7:8-10, 21, 22).*

After the rise of the little horn, which came after all the preceding beasts, the prophecy depicts a great judgment in heaven that leads to the Second Coming.

The crucial point here is that, according to this prophecy, the judgment in heaven comes *after* the 1,260-day prophetic period, sometime *after* that phase of persecution that ended in the late eighteenth, or early nineteenth, century yet before the Second Coming.

Thus, within the interpretation, we are given historical evidence to help us understand the timing of this judgment, which leads to the demise of the little horn and to the end of this world.

One thousand two hundred and sixty years is a long time. What message is there for us, who might die before seeing all our hopes and dreams realized in this life?

Certain factors relating to the scene of this heavenly judgment must be noted. First, it takes place in heaven. Second, it occurs before the establishment of God's kingdom. Third, it deals with the judgment of a false religious system, implying the restoration of truth before God restores His kingdom on earth. Fourth, this restoration will involve the truths trampled down by the little horn, truths such as the Sabbath, the Ten Commandments, salvation by faith, the non-immortality of the soul, etc. Fifth, Christ actively participates in the heavenly judgment before He returns to earth to establish His kingdom. All these show that there is a pre-Second Advent judgment, which will sort out the true followers of Christ from the false.

Witnessing

One of the most popular broadcasters in America is a man named Paul Harvey. As these words are written, Mr. Harvey, at age 86, is still going strong with a daily newscast, as well as a feature called *The Rest of the Story*.

For these features, Mr. Harvey and his writers research an event in history or the life of a personality. They bring out a little-known detail, which can totally change your view of a subject. The broadcasts always conclude: "And now you know the rest of the story."

Daniel 7 is very much like that. It fills in the details of the sweep of history that we read about in Daniel 2. It also tells us that a judgment shall take place and that no one will be exempt. This judgment must happen before God's kingdom can arrive.

If one of the most basic yearnings of the human heart is for justice, then the fact that a judgment is now under way should be, must be, good news for those who seek this ultimate fairness.

Right now, today, in heaven, ten thousand times ten thousand" (*see Dan. 7:10*) are being judged. Those whose sins are covered by the blood of the Lamb, Jesus, are assured of forgiveness. Those hoping to make it on their own merit will sadly learn the rest of their own story.

No radio or television station will have to broadcast the results of this proceeding; they'll be evident on their own. This week, in talking with family, friends, and colleagues, pray to be directed to someone looking for justice, real justice, and let them know it's on the way!

Horn, Judgment, Kingdom

Yesterday we saw that Daniel 7 presented a specific sequence of events: There was the little-horn power, followed by a judgment in heaven, which ended in the establishment of God's kingdom. This sequence is so important it's found three times in the chapter itself.

Read Daniel 7:7-10, 14. How is this specific order—little horn, judgment, God's kingdom—shown there?

Read Daniel 7:19-22. How, again, is that same sequence depicted?

Read Daniel 7:24-27. How, again, is that sequence presented?

Three times in Daniel we are given this sequence:

Little horn
Judgment in heaven
God's kingdom

Obviously, this sequence must be of major importance; otherwise, why would the Lord have given it *three times* in the prophecy? What's fascinating, too, is that with the little horn, we are given our first apocalyptic time prophecy (*apocalyptic* simply means dealing with end-time events), a time prophecy that helps us understand the timing of this judgment, which occurs after the 1,260 years and yet before God's eternal kingdom is established.

Thus, we can express the prophecy like this:

Little horn (late eighteenth, early nineteenth, century)
Judgment in heaven
God's eternal kingdom

What's crucial to understand about this judgment, too, is that though it results in the demise of the little-horn power, it also results in the end of this world. As Daniel 2 showed, everything is going to be swept away and replaced by God's kingdom.

Daniel doesn't depict the end of the world as some sort of compromise: It culminates, instead, in the total victory of good over evil. What lesson is there for us in how we deal with evil in our own lives on a day-by-day basis? Are you compromising with evil now, in any way?

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: “Ancient cultures devoted much time and effort to teaching their children family history. It was thought that the past helps a child understand who he is. Modern society, however, has turned its back on the past. We live in a time of rapid change, a time of progress. We prefer to define ourselves in terms of where we are going, not where we come from. Our ancestors hold no importance for us. They lived in times so different from our own that they are incapable of shedding light on our experience. Man is so much smarter now than he was even ten years ago that anything from the past is outdated and irrelevant to us. Therefore the past, even the relatively recent past, is, in the minds of most of us, enshrouded by mists and only very vaguely perceived. Our ignorance of the past is not the result of a lack of information, but of indifference. We do not believe that history matters.

“But history does matter. It has been said that he who controls the past controls the future. Our view of history shapes the way we view the present, and therefore it dictates what answers we offer for existing problems.”—David Crabtree, “The Importance of History,” The McKenzie Study Center (November 1993), <http://www.mckenziestudycenter.org/society/articles/history.html> (accessed February 22, 2005).

Thought Question:

In Daniel 7, God clearly foretells the fate of great empires spanning hundreds of years, sometimes with amazing clarity and precision. If God is ultimately in control, this leads to the long-debated question of free will. Did these ancient rulers really have freedom of choice? Their rise and fall had already been recorded by Daniel. What, if anything, could they have done to change their fate? How does history help illuminate the character of God?

Application Question:

Tuesday’s study says, “You might need faith to believe in the Second Coming or the resurrection of the dead, but you don’t need much faith to see papal Rome as the power depicted here.” This prophecy doesn’t require much faith at all. It appeals to logic and common sense. Daniel seminars have, for years, been an effective way of bringing people into our church. What are you doing with this incredible witnessing tool? Identify places and opportunities in your life where you can use this prophecy in conjunction with history as a tool of evangelism.

Further Study: Below is all of Daniel 7, with the first apocalyptic time prophecy imbedded in the sequence. What we've added, too, are the approximate times that each of the empires collapsed. Though historians often put specific dates on these events, centering often around decisive military battles, the collapse of one empire and the rise of another usually occurs over many years, not just one (remember, too, that the fourth beast and the little horn that comes out of it are depicted in Scripture as one power):

Babylon

(Ends early mid-sixth century B.C.)

Media-Persia

(From early mid-sixth century to early mid-fourth century B.C.)

Greece

(From early mid-fourth century to mid-second century B.C.)

Pagan Rome

(From mid-second century B.C. to fifth–sixth century A.D.)

Papal Rome

(Persecution from sixth century A.D. to eighteenth–nineteenth century A.D.)

Judgment in heaven

Second Coming

Sure, the papacy didn't end in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, but that's not what the prophecy says. Instead, it says only that persecution would last for this length of time, or at least that phase of that persecution (Revelation 13, of course, talks about a resurgence of papal persecution, but that's another issue).

Thus, what's clear so far from Daniel 7 is that this massive judgment scene in heaven leads to the establishment of God's kingdom and occurs sometime *after* the 1,260 years of papal persecution, sometime after the late eighteenth, or early nineteenth, century but before the Second Coming.

Discussion Questions:

1 Daniel 7:22 says that judgment was given in “favor of the saints” (*NIV*). As a class, discuss what that means. What else in Daniel 7 shows us that the judgment is such good news?

2 Review the evidence that helps give us a positive identification of the little horn. How can we present this teaching in a way that's as least offensive as possible and yet, at the same time, doesn't compromise what the Scripture teaches?