

# **Daniel**

## **From Reading to Understanding**

Lesson #1 for January 4, 2020

Scriptures: Luke 24:25-27; 2 Peter 3:11-13; Jonah 3:3-10; Numbers 14:34; Daniel 9:23; 10:11-12; Acts 8:30.

1. Seventh-day Adventists have distinguished themselves in the past by their bold interpretations of the book of Daniel. William Miller's discovery of and interpretation of Daniel 8:14 and its related passages in Daniel 9 started the advent movement in New England in the 1820s and 1830s.
2. So, what does or what should the book of Daniel mean to us in 2020? Consider the following points:
  - 1) All of Scripture, including the book of Daniel, is centered on the truth about God and specifically the role of Jesus Christ in the plan of salvation.
  - 2) The organization of the book of Daniel is designed to show the major focus on God's sovereignty and His actions in human lives.
  - 3) In this lesson we will focus on understanding the differences between *classical prophecies* and *apocalyptic prophecies*. The kind of prophecies we see in the books of Daniel and Revelation are known as *apocalyptic prophecies* and are quite different from the prophecies primarily regarding the children of Israel as outlined in places like Isaiah, Amos, and Jeremiah.
  - 4) It should be clear from even a superficial reading of the book of Daniel that it involves long time periods and huge changes in events on this earth. This necessitates understanding the *year-day principle*. (See Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:5-6.)
  - 5) Even though Daniel focuses on major world events, changes in world empires, etc., the total impact has a direct effect on our personal lives, even today.
3. Read Luke 24:25-27; John 5:39; and 2 Corinthians 1:19-20. These three key passages in the New Testament point out very clearly that the truth about God as lived out in the life and death of Jesus Christ is the central focus of the Bible and of the history of salvation.
4. How does that apply to the book of Daniel?

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.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Sunday, December 29.<sup>§</sup>

5. When you think about the book of Daniel, do you think about the miraculous stories of rescue from the burning fiery furnace and lions' den that we teach our children? Or, do you think about statues of different metals and beasts with strange shapes? Is it clear in your mind that all of these teach us something about Jesus Christ?
6. The book of Daniel is written in two different languages. In the days of Daniel, it was expected that any Hebrew would speak his own native language; but, he would also speak the required national language called Aramaic, the language of Nebuchadnezzar and his government. The book of Daniel is divided in the following way: Daniel 1:1-2:4 is in Hebrew. Daniel 2:4-Daniel 7:28 is in Aramaic. Then, Daniel 8-12 is again in Hebrew. Aramaic and Hebrew are sister languages, as are Spanish and Portuguese.
7. Look at the organization of the Aramaic portions of the book of Daniel—in a chiasm:
  - 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*)—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Monday, December 30. [Bold type is in the source.]<sup>‡§</sup>
8. There are many places in Scripture where messages are organized as you see in this chiasm. The most important parts of the messages are in the middle. In modern times, we often save the most important parts of a story for the ending; or in news articles, the important parts are at the beginning. However, that was not what they did in ancient times.
9. So, looking at the chiasm, it is clear that the most important parts of the book of Daniel are the emphasis on God's sovereignty over the empires and kings of this world and His ability to establish them or remove them when necessary.
10. In many ancient languages, a way of emphasizing something was by repeating it. Think of the dreams of Pharaoh that were interpreted by Joseph as recorded in Genesis 41:1-7.
11. So, when we come to the book of Daniel, we find that there are four sets of prophecies that are quite similar, each one repeating portions of the previous one and then adding some details. See the chart below as adapted from *Ibid.*, Monday, December 30.

<i>Daniel 2</i>	<i>Daniel 7</i>	<i>Daniel 8&amp;9</i>	<i>Daniel 10-12</i>
Babylon	Babylon		
Medo-Persia	Medo-Persia	Medo-Persia	Medo-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

12. Does it give you hope to recognize that God has been in charge from ancient times up until our day? Does it give you hope to know that Daniel 2 states that a great stone will be carved out of the mountain and will strike the kingdoms of this earth, completely destroying them and that Jesus Christ will be the future and eternal King of this world? (See Daniel 2:44. Compare Psalm 9:7-12 and 2 Peter 3:11-13.)
13. Let us now look at the differences between *classical prophecy* and *apocalyptic 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.**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Tuesday, December 31.<sup>†§</sup>

14. Consider some examples of classic prophecy. Read Jonah 3:3-10. Clearly, Jonah gave a message to the people of Nineveh; however, it was rescinded by God because they repented. That was a local, classical prophecy.

Contrast **Daniel 7:6**: While I was watching, another beast appeared. It looked like a leopard, but on its back there were four wings, like the wings of a bird, and it had four heads. It had a look of authority about it.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Daniel 7:6).

New York: American Bible Society.

15. Clearly, Daniel 7:6 is a different kind of prophecy than the one that Jonah gave to the people of Nineveh. We can learn several important things by comparing these two types of prophecy:

- 1) God has used many and various ways to communicate to human beings. (Hebrews 1:1)
- 2) Understanding the differences between classical and apocalyptic prophecy will help us to understand not only the complexity of the Bible but also its beauty as well.
- 3) This knowledge will also help us to interpret biblical prophecies consistent with the context in the local setting and also in the entire Bible rightly explaining “the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

16. Some Orthodox Hebrew scholars have warned Jews from reading Daniel 9:24-27 because it clearly pointed to the arrival of the Messiah in A.D. 27.

May the bones of the hands and the bones of the fingers decay, and decompose, of him who turns the pages of the book of Daniel, to find out the time [of Daniel 9:24-27], and may his memory rot from off the face of the earth forever.—*Talmudic Law*.<sup>‡</sup>

17. Many Christian Bible scholars look at places like Hosea 3:4-5; Amos 8:11; Zechariah 9:1; and Zechariah 14:4 and believe that apocalyptic prophecies as seen in the book of Daniel will be fulfilled somewhere in the Middle East; and they think it will be sometime in the near future. Is it clear in your mind that Hosea, Amos, and Zechariah are different types of prophecies from the prophecies in Daniel?

18. One of the biggest problems in interpreting prophecies like the ones in the book of Daniel is the fact that many people approach Scriptures with philosophical preconditions that force them to take different approaches. Consider the following:

*Preterism* is an approach to interpreting all Bible prophecies which limits the prophet and even God from predicting the future. So, all prophecies must somehow be limited to applications in their own day.

*Idealism*—first suggested by the Catholic theologian, Augustine—teaches that apocalyptic prophecies are symbols of general spiritual realities without any specific historical time periods being involved.

*Historicism*, by contrast, holds that in apocalyptic prophecies, God reveals a panoramic sequence of history from the time of the prophet to the end of time. This view does not place limitations on God’s foreknowledge. We believe that we can see in Daniel 2, 7, 8, & 11 prophecies that extended hundreds, even thousands, of years beyond the times of Daniel himself. This was the clear understanding of Adventist pioneers including Ellen White.

19. Another very important aspect of understanding the book of Daniel is to realize that a prophetic day can mean a full calendar year, i.e. the “year-day” principle.

**Numbers 14:34:** You will suffer the consequences of your sin for forty years, **one year for each of the forty days** you spent exploring the land. You will know what it means to have me against you!—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

**Ezekiel 4:6:** When you finish that, turn over on your right side and suffer for the guilt of Judah for forty days—**one day for each year** of their

punishment.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

20. How can we be certain that we should use the year-day principle when interpreting the prophecies of Daniel? The first challenge is to look and see if something important happened 70 literal weeks following the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27. There is nothing to support that idea. *Seventy weeks* must be interpreted as being 490 days which using the biblical year-day principle would mean 490 years. And when we do that, virtually all Christian scholars recognize that it leads down to the days of Jesus Christ: His anointing at His baptism; His death on the cross; and finally, in A.D. 34, the beginning of the terrible persecution of Christians, the stoning of Stephen, and the spread of the gospel to Gentiles.

**Daniel 8:14:** <sup>14</sup> And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.—*The Holy Bible: King James Version*.<sup>\*</sup> (2009). (Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version., Daniel 8:14). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

**Daniel 9:24-27:** <sup>24</sup> Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. <sup>25</sup> Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. <sup>26</sup> And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. <sup>27</sup> And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.—*King James Version*.<sup>\*</sup>

21. There are several things that we need to notice in this context:

(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. [This cannot be a few weeks.]

(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.** *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*<sup>\*</sup> for Wednesday, January 1, 2020.<sup>†‡</sup>

22. If we accept this year-day principle, we recognize that some of Daniel’s prophecies extend 2300 years—all the way down to 1844. There are three very important, overarching lessons we need to learn from the book of Daniel.

(1) No matter how bad things might look at any given time, God is sovereign over events on this earth and our individual lives. Think of the stories of Joseph, Esther, and Daniel. Early in their lives, these young people experienced things that would have been considered to be terrible disasters to them: Joseph was sold by his brothers, Esther lost her parents, and Daniel was taken into Babylonian captivity. Yet, each of these young people remained true and loyal to God and accomplished great things for Him.

(2) God is actively involved in directing the course of history. It may seem like our world is controlled by human pride, greed, and desire for control of others. Ellen White wrote:

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.**—Ellen White, *Education*\* 173.2.†

(3) God provides role models for His people: Think of the role models that Daniel and his three companions provide for young people in our day. Even when their lives were threatened by being thrown into a burning fiery furnace or being thrown into a lions' den, they remained absolutely faithful to the God of heaven. And God stepped in and did what was necessary to make examples of them. Their behavior rocked empires. The vision in Daniel 2 covers from Daniel's time to the end of this earth and beyond.

23. Even when Daniel was confused and worried about some of the visions he had received, God was there watching over His child. Read Daniel 9:23; 10:11-12; and compare Matthew 10:29-31. How would you like to receive a message from an angel, telling you that God loves you? How might that impact your life in the future?

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], 169.3-170.0.

24. Let us be more specific about God's personal care and involvement in our individual lives: God was able to reach down into the mind of a pagan king and give him a vision/dream about the future events in our world, extending all the way down to the end of time. Then, He was able to do the same thing for Daniel, also giving him an interpretation of what he had seen. That is far beyond what a psychiatrist can do! Are you happy that God has that kind of intimate knowledge of your brain and your thinking?

25. There are three points we want to make specifically clear in this lesson:

(1) The entire book of Daniel along with the rest of Scripture is focused on Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself emphasized this point. (See Luke 24:44; John 5:39.)

(2) Apocalyptic literature aims at encouraging God's people in times of crisis and persecution by disclosing God's overarching plans for history and how it will all end: Evil will be eliminated, and God's eternal kingdom will be established. There is no question about the final outcome.

(3) Historicism is by far the best approach to understanding the prophecies of the Bible. It does not limit God's ability to predict the future. More than that, it shows that God is carefully watching over His faithful people from the days of Adam and Eve right on through the second coming, the third coming, and our future lives in eternity.

26. As Ellen White has told us:

**We have nothing to fear for the future except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us and His teaching in our past history.**—Ellen G. White, *Letters and Manuscripts*,\* vol. 7 (1891-1892), Letter 32, 1892, par. 38; *General Conference Bulletin*,\* January 29, 1893, par. 5; *Testimonies to Ministers*\* 31.1; *LDE*\* 72.1.†

27. Let us summarize what we can learn about Jesus from the book of Daniel:

(1) The redemptive-historical progression of the prophecies in Daniel point to a final conclusion when Jesus will be our Lord and King for eternity.

(2) Jesus promised to be our Messiah, the One who called Himself the "Son of man" as first mentioned in Daniel 7 and 9.

(3) Many prophecies in the Bible are revealed in type and anti-type. In the book of Daniel, Jesus is revealed in His role in the sanctuary as the Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

(4) Both Joseph and Daniel went through experiences that were analogous to the later experiences of Jesus Christ. Daniel's friends, for example, were expected to "fall down and worship the gold image" (Daniel 3:5, *NKJV*\*) which is similar in many respects to the Devil's tempting of Jesus: "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." (Matthew 4:9, *NKJV*\*) Even in the face of death, Daniel and his friends were obedient to their God; that was a foretaste of the perfect obedience of Jesus.

28. Review again what we know about apocalyptic literature: In the Bible itself, apocalyptic prophecy appears mainly in Daniel and Revelation. Notice these particularly important elements about apocalyptic prophecy:

(1) A single fulfillment. Apocalyptic prophecy is unconditional and has one single fulfillment. It may have multiple similarities and homiletical applications; however, it points to a single fulfillment. For example, the second coming of Jesus Christ. This fulfillment is a logical consequence of the historicism approach.

(2) Recapitulation: As we have already mentioned, the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation have many repeat applications which are parallel in many respects. Daniel 2 is parallel in many ways to Daniel 7, 8, and 10-12. For example, it has been suggested that Daniel 2 depicts the restoration of the kingdom; Daniel 7, the restoration of the King to His throne in heaven; Daniel 8, the restoration of the sanctuary when it is cleansed; and Daniel 10-12, the restoration of God's people to their place in heaven.

29. In order to nail down the most important fulfillment of a prophecy when it is an apocalyptic prophecy, it is necessary to apply the year-day principle.

30. Historicism, which is essential for our understanding of Daniel and Revelation, must be understood in contrast to preterism, idealism, and futurism. We believe that historicism is the correct way to understand apocalyptic prophecy for the following reasons:

**First**, historicism is the method suggested by the Bible itself. For example, the prophetic chains of Daniel 2, 7, 8, and 9 are explained from a historicist perspective. The sequence of world empires that culminate in the

establishment of God's kingdom span a time period extending from the Babylonian, or Persian, times to the end of the world.

**Second**, the large time periods and the universal scope of apocalyptic prophecies (1,260, 2,300, 490 years), which span kingdoms and ultimately result in the kingdom of God, can be better explained according to the historicist approach.

**Third**, Jesus understood the future destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (*Matt. 24:15-20, Luke 21:20-22*) as a fulfillment of Daniel 9:26, 27. Paul refers to a number of successive prophetic events to be fulfilled within history before the second coming of Christ (*2 Thess. 2:1-12*).

**Fourth**, the historicist approach was used by the early Church Fathers and the Reformers. Augustine began a shift in perspective when he equated the kingdom of God with the Christian church and the millennium with the Christian Era.

**Fifth**, the historicist approach is based on the assumption that God works throughout the centuries of human history to bring the plan of salvation to its consummation. There are no gaps in God's redemptive activities in the scenario depicted in the apocalyptic prophecies.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 16.<sup>†§</sup>

### 31. To conclude:

“Seventh-day Adventists believe that historicism is the right method of prophetic interpretation to be used in the interpretation of the books of Daniel and Revelation. The method is supported by the Scriptures itself and was in use during the early church period. Moreover, they feel that in using this method they are also preserving an important aspect of the Reformers' work of restoration.”—Don F. Neufeld, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1995), s.v. “Historicism.”—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, \* 16].

There is need of a much closer study of the word of God; especially should Daniel and the Revelation have attention as never before.... The light that Daniel received from God was given especially for these last days.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*\* 112.1-113.0.

When the books of Daniel and Revelation are better understood, believers will have an entirely different religious experience.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*\* 114.3.

So, how shall we understand the book of Daniel? Will we be able to put Christ into every aspect of our study? The Seventh-day Adventist movement really got its start from a study of the book of Daniel. Are we prepared to carry that torch forward?

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\*Electronic version. <sup>†</sup>Bold type is added. <sup>‡</sup>Text in brackets is added. <sup>§</sup>Italic type is in source.

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