

How to Interpret Scripture

The Bible and Prophecy

Lesson #11 for June 13, 2020

Scriptures: Daniel 2:27-45; 7:1-25; 8:14; John 14:29; Numbers 14:34; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13.

1. In previous lessons we have repeatedly stated that one of the ways that the true God distinguishes Himself from all other so-called gods is His ability to predict the future far in advance; the other is His ability to create out of nothing. Thus, Bible prophecy is essential in our identity and mission in support of our belief in the true God. (See Isaiah 40-55.)
2. It has been estimated that up to 30% of the Bible's contents have some prophetic application. John 14:29; 13:19; 16:4 make it clear that the purpose of prophecy is so that when events that had been prophesied actually take place, we can recognize them and acknowledge God's power. Prophecy was not given so that we can write tomorrow's newspapers.
3. Can we be sure that we are interpreting prophecy correctly? One of the great questions in dealing with interpretation of prophecy is the question of which method you are going to use: (1) The historicist method, (2) The preterist method, or (3) The futurist method.
4. Up until the times of the Counter-Reformation conducted by the Roman Catholic Church in response to the Protestant Reformation, interpreters of Daniel and Revelation consistently used the historicist method. The historicist method teaches that history is linear. It began with the conflict in heaven, (Revelation 12:7-12) and came to this earth in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve believed the snake instead of God and ate the fruit. (Genesis 3) It progressed consistently forward, step-by-step, until the second coming of Jesus and, then, after a thousand years, the third coming when God will reestablish His kingdom on this earth. So, what are the main reasons why we believe in the historicist method?

We are to see in history the fulfillment of prophecy, to study the workings of Providence in the great reformatory movements, and to understand the progress of events in the marshalling of the nations for the final conflict of the great controversy.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 8, 307.2.

5. The most impressive time prophecies in the Bible are found in Daniel 2, 7, 8, and Revelation 13.
6. Read Daniel 2:27-45. Nebuchadnezzar's dream as interpreted by Daniel in Daniel 2 is well known. Only God could have shared that dream. Clearly, the head of gold, the arms and chest of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the legs of iron, the feet of iron and clay, and the stone cut out without hands suggest a continuous, uninterrupted progression in world history.
7. In Daniel 7&8, we see a different set of images. There are beasts, each one symbolizing a different empire from the days of Babylon until the second coming of Jesus.
8. From our vantage point near the end of this world's history, it should be easy for us to recognize the truthfulness of those prophecies.
9. One of the keys necessary for interpreting how these prophecies are laid out in the history of our world is what is known as 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!—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Numbers 14:34). New York:

American Bible Society.†

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*.*†

10. In these two verses, it is clear that God Himself has used the year-day principle on more than one occasion in the Bible itself.
11. So, on what basis do we use the year-day principle in interpreting these long time periods of prophecy? See Daniel 7:25; 8:14; and Revelation 11:2-3; 12:6,14; 13:5 where three equivalent time periods are mentioned: 3½ years, 42 months, and 1260 days.
12. We need to recognize that the ancient Mesopotamians had a 360-day calendar and each month was 30 days in length. So, we can see a clear equivalence between the 3½ years, 42 months, and 1260 days in these prophecies.

Three other elements support the year-day principle in these prophecies of Daniel and Revelation: the use of symbols, long time periods, and peculiar expressions.

First, **the symbolic nature of the beasts and horns representing kingdoms suggests that the time expressions also should be understood as symbolic.** The beasts and horns are not to be taken literally. They are symbols for something else. Hence, because the rest of the prophecy is symbolic, not literal, why should we take the time prophecies alone as literal? The answer, of course, is that we shouldn't.

Second, many of the events and kingdoms depicted in the prophecies cover a time span of many centuries, which would be impossible if the time prophecies depicting them were taken literally. Once the year-day principle is applied, the time fits the events in a remarkably accurate way, something that would be impossible if the time prophecies were taken literally.

Finally, the peculiar expressions used to designate these time periods suggest a symbolic interpretation. In other words, the ways in which time is expressed in these prophecies (for example, the "2,300 evenings and mornings" of Daniel 8:14, NIV) are not the normal ways to express time, showing us that the time periods depicted are to be taken symbolically, not literally.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Monday, June 8.†

13. But, there is another, perhaps more compelling reason why we need to use the year-day principle. Daniel 9:25 tells us that "the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince" would be 69 weeks. If this is literal time, it would be one year, four months, and one week. Obviously, that is completely impossible. But, if we use the year-day principle, we calculate to 490 years later and discover that the prophecy was incredibly accurate, historically dating down to the time of Christ's baptism in A.D. 27.
14. The Seventh-day Adventist interpretation of prophecies fits so perfectly with historical events that it is amazing that not everyone who is a Bible student sees it. Of course, if you see it clearly, then you must understand the significance of 1844, and you will probably need to become a Seventh-day Adventist!
15. Read Daniel 7:1-25 and 8:1-13. In Daniel 2, Daniel clearly identified the head of gold as Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar. That fits with the lion in Daniel 7 which was a very good representation of Babylon. In Daniel 8, we find the second and third animals/kingdoms identified as Medo-Persia and Greece. Unless one absolutely refuses to accept the idea that God can predict the future, the next obvious kingdom would have to be Rome. There was no

break in history between Greece and Rome.

16. The next major interpretive challenge regards the *little horns* in Daniel 7&8. Are these two separate entities? Or, might they be describing the same entity?

There are seven common characteristics between the little horns of Daniel 7 and Daniel 8:

- (1) both are described as a horn;
- (2) both are persecuting powers (*Dan. 7:21, 25; Dan. 8:10, 24*);
- (3) both are self-exalting and blasphemous (*Dan. 7:8, 20, 25; Dan. 8:10, 11, 25*);
- (4) both target God's people (*Dan. 7:25, Dan. 8:24*);
- (5) both have aspects of their activity delineated by prophetic time (*Dan. 7:25; Dan. 8:13, 14*);
- (6) both extend until the end of time (*Dan. 7:25, 26; Dan. 8:17, 19*); and
- (7) both are to be supernaturally destroyed (*Dan. 7:11, 26; Dan. 8:25*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, June 9.[§]

17. It is interesting to note that the head of gold ends and the chest and arms begin. The same is true of the belly and thighs of brass and then the legs of iron. But, when we get down to the feet, the iron never ends; it continues, although mixed with clay right into the toes. Then, comes the kingdom of God. There is no other power that could possibly fit this description of iron except Rome.

18. Out of Rome comes that little horn which tears out three other horns from that terrifying beast. And who could the *little horn* represent? Up until the times of the Protestant Reformation and even up until the 1800s, all serious biblical scholars interpreted that *little horn* as representing the papacy. Look at the following chart adapted from *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Wednesday, June 10:

Daniel 7	Daniel 8
Babylon (lion)	
Media-Persia (bear)	Media-Persia (ram)
Greece (leopard)	Greece (he-goat)
Pagan Rome (fourth beast)	Pagan Rome
Papal Rome (little horn)	Papal Rome (538 A.D.)

19. So, what happens after the feet of iron and clay? The rock carved without hands from the mountain completely destroys all the kingdoms, leaving them nothing but powder blown away by the evening breeze. That rock expands until it encompasses the entire world; it clearly represents the kingdom of God.
20. But, before we come to that final stage, we notice in Daniel 7:9-14 that there is a judgment scene. Millions of beings surround the throne of God where the Father is administering judgment while Satan accuses God's people and Christ defends them. (Zechariah 3:1-5)
21. But, when we line up Daniel 7 and Daniel 8, it seems clear that the pre-advent judgment predicted in Daniel 7 lines up with the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14. Of course, the idea of the cleansing of the sanctuary comes out of the ideas taught about the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16. How are these two events related?
22. So, how do we determine the starting point for these two long time prophecies? Daniel 9:24

tells us that the prophecy of 70 weeks or 490 years regarding the Jewish nation is “cut off” from the vision of 2300 days of Daniel 8:14. Can we determine when these two prophecies began—at the same time? Ezra 7:7 tells us that the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem occurred in the seventh year of Artaxerxes. That would be 457 B.C. Counting forward 2300 years, we come to 1844 since there was no “Year 0.” Interestingly enough, that came shortly after the apparent demise of the Roman Catholic Church when the pope was arrested by General Berthier in 1798 and imprisoned where he died shortly thereafter.

23. We need to notice several other things about biblical prophecy. Apocalyptic prophecies such as those we are studying in Daniel and Revelation have one single fulfillment. We should not expect to find a type and antitype in these prophecies. Furthermore, Daniel clearly named three of those major kingdoms in his prophecies. Line up the evidence.
24. The only safe way to determine that a prophecy has a type and an antitype is to see it spelled out by a New Testament writer himself.
25. Can we give an example of that? Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. In these verses Paul clearly referred back to the historical reality of the exodus and told us that Israel’s problems while in the wilderness are examples for us. We need not make the mistakes they made.
26. Notice some other examples of type and antitype prophecies: Matthew 12:40; John 19:36; 3:14-15; 1:29; and Romans 5:14. The types and antitypes are quite obvious to anyone familiar with the Bible.
27. Many Christians today think the Old Testament has little, if any, of value to say to us. But, in the book of Hebrews in the New Testament we find that it is very much based on the Old Testament sanctuary system, especially the high priestly ministry of Jesus Christ.
28. Some interpreters have gone all out in interpreting every little detail of that system. The sanctuary system does have an important relationship to the plan of salvation. But, we need to remember:

Hebrews 10:1-4: ¹ **The Jewish Law is not a full and faithful model of the real things; it is only a faint outline of the good things to come.** The same sacrifices are offered for ever, year after year. How can the Law, then, by means of these sacrifices make perfect the people who come to God? ²If the people worshipping God had really been purified from their sins, they would not feel guilty of sin any more, and all sacrifices would stop. ³As it is, however, the sacrifices serve year after year to remind people of their sins. ⁴**For the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sins.**—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

29. Given what we know about the cleansing of the sanctuary which will take place on the antitypical day of atonement, is it clear how that relates to the judgment scene portrayed in Daniel 7:9-14? Sins were/are dealt with on both the typical Day of Atonement and the antitypical day of atonement.
30. Considering how well all these historical events match the prophecies, why do you think so many Christians today reject the historicist interpretation? Is your trust in the historicist method of interpretation established more firmly by what we have seen in this lesson?
31. How well do you understand the details of the prophecies of 70 weeks and 2300 years-days? The precision of the dates and how they fit together exactly with New Testament history, which can be confirmed from extra-biblical sources, is truly amazing!
32. Another very important thing to remember which is an encouragement to true believers in the prophecies in Daniel is found in Daniel 7:18,21-22,25,27.

Daniel 7:18,21-22,25,27: ¹⁸ “And the people of the Supreme God will receive royal power and keep it for ever and ever”.... ²¹ While I was looking, that horn made

war on God's people and conquered them. ²²Then the one who had been living for ever came and pronounced judgement in favour of the people of the Supreme God. The time had arrived for God's people to receive royal power....
²⁵ "He [the little horn power] will speak against the Supreme God and oppress God's people. He will try to change their religious laws and festivals, and God's people will be under his power for three and a half years.... ²⁷The power and greatness of all the kingdoms on earth will be given to the people of the Supreme God. Their royal power will never end and all rulers on earth will serve and obey them."—Good News Bible.*†

33. The Protestant Reformation saw a revival of Bible study under the impetus of *sola Scriptura*. It was easy for the scholars of the Bible in Reformation times such as Wycliffe, Luther, Zwingli, Knox, and others to see the historicist accuracy of Daniel 7&8. And they clearly believed that the little horn power represented the Roman Catholic Church, the papal power. This, of course, made them a direct target of the Roman Catholic hierarchy's wrath. And during those years, thousands, even millions, of people were killed for their Protestant beliefs. But, once again, all of that was predicted in Revelation 12:13-17. Do Protestants remember this?
34. Fortunately for Protestants, about that same time as the persecution, the new nation known as the United States of America was arising across the ocean, somewhat removed from the influence of the Roman Catholic Church. Professors from Harvard, Yale, and Princeton trained ministers in the true understanding of biblical prophecy.
35. But, you can be sure that Rome was not asleep.

Preterism was developed by the Spanish Jesuit, Luis de Alcazar (1554-1613), who interpreted prophecies in the Bible as simply communicating events that happened in the past [in John's day]. Preterists largely denied the possibility of *predictive* prophecy. De Alcazar projected the antichrist power into the past, identifying it with the Roman Emperor Nero.

Another Spanish Jesuit, Francisco Ribera (1537-1591), published a 500-page commentary on the book of Revelation, teaching that the majority of prophecy was to be fulfilled at the very end of time in a brief three-and-a-half-year period. *Futurism* went the opposite direction from that of de Alcazar, placing the emphasis of prophecy far into the future and leaving the papal church of the Middle Ages outside of the prophetic time frame altogether.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 146.§†

36. These two views known as *preterism* and *futurism* at first received little attention. But, in the 19th century with the rise of the historical-critical approach to Scripture, and later, the heavy influence of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, people were led to adopt these other forms of interpretation. Now we see that Seventh-day Adventists alone are maintaining their historicist understanding of Scripture.
37. But, Seventh-day Adventists have been warned and after carefully studying the Scriptures have recognized the fallacies in preterism and futurism.

Preterism redates the prophet Daniel to the second century, after Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece come on the scene. Further, preterism reinterprets the little-horn power as a Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. (Futurism also tends to interpret the little horn as Antiochus IV but then suggests a future antichrist to appear at the end of time.) **But this identification does not fit, for several reasons.** (1) *The Origin of the Little Horn*. The little horn came "out of one of them" (*Dan. 8:9*). Preterists argue that the little horn came out of one of the four horns (the generals Lysimachus, Cassander, Ptolemy, and Seleucus and their successors as heads of the four

Macedonian kingdoms into which Alexander's empire was divided). But the grammatical, contextual, and syntactical evidence points to the conclusion that the little horn came out of one of "the four winds" or compass points, an expression that immediately precedes the phrase. (2) *The Progression of Power in Kingdoms*. The Medo-Persian ram "magnified himself" (*Dan. 8:4, RSV*), the Greek he-goat "magnified himself exceedingly" (*Dan. 8:8, RSV*), the little horn "magnified itself, even up to the Prince of the host" (*Dan. 8:10, 11, RSV*). But this magnification of power cannot be attributed to a single, weak ruler such as Antiochus IV. (3) *The Placement of Order*. Antiochus IV ruled in the middle of the Seleucid dynasty, the seventh in a series of twenty-seven kings. The little-horn power appears "at the latter end of their rule" (*Dan. 8:23, RSV*). Rome appears at the latter part of the Greek Empire, but Antiochus IV does not. (4) *The Direction of Conquest*. The little-horn power was to conquer toward the east, the south, and toward "the Beautiful Land" (*Dan. 8:9, NASB*); that is, from the direction of the west. But Antiochus IV was responsible for losing Judea, the "Beautiful Land," not conquering it, and he had only limited success in the south (Egypt). (5) *The Abomination of Desolation*. Scholars believe that Antiochus IV caused the desolation of the sanctuary, but **Jesus, quoting from Daniel, refers to this desolation as still in the future in His day (Matt. 24:15)**, and Antiochus IV already had been dead for two centuries. (6) *The Evening/Morning "Days."* The 2,300 evening-mornings are interpreted as the sacrifices that ceased during Antiochus IV's desecration of the temple. Thus, to accommodate the Antiochus interpretation, the number is reduced to 1,150 literal days. But the phrase *'ereb bōqer* is very similar to the designation used in Genesis 1 to refer to the 24-hour day. The morning and evening sacrifices associated with the earthly sanctuary are referred to in a different order, however; thus, the desolation mentioned in Daniel 8:13 does not refer to the stopping of the earthly sanctuary services during the time of Antiochus. (7) *The Prophetic Close of the Prophecy*. The close relation between Daniel 2 and 7 indicates that there is a glorious conclusion. But if Judas Maccabeus, the Jew, defeated Antiochus IV, how does Judas come in the clouds of heaven, like the Son of man (*Dan. 7:13*), and how is his kingdom eternal (*Dan. 7:14*)? (Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: The Church and the Last Things* [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2016], pp. 713-717). **Neither the preterist nor the futurist interpretation matches the criteria in the text or the testimony of Jesus.** Thus, for these reasons, and others, the Antiochus interpretation for Daniel 8 is untenable. It is only the historicist interpretation of prophecy that identifies accurately the last 2,600 years [605 B.C. to the present time] of history in prophetic, sequential perspective.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 147-148.^{†§} [The comment in brackets about 2,600 years is added.][‡]

38. It is important for us to recognize that both preterism and futurism were developed by Roman Catholic scholars as a direct counter to the *sola Scriptura* interpretation of Reformation Protestants. Why then should modern Protestant churches have adopted these ideas?
39. At least one thing should be understood clearly: There is a desperate need for the three angels' messages calling for us to announce the day of God's judgment and to come out of Babylon. Who is supposed to be doing that? Are we doing it?

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