

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:

- 1 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?
- 2 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?
- 3 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.”

