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## Precursors for Prophecy



During the First Gulf War (1991), a well-known Protestant writer and speaker was convinced that the book of Revelation predicted this conflict. His argument was based on the fact that some of the helicopters in the war looked like the locusts depicted in Revelation 9. “And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. And the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit. Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power” (*Rev. 9:2, 3, NKJV*).

Not exactly the best way to interpret biblical prophecy, is it? Yet, interpretations like this are fairly common. In fact, over the decades multiple books, articles, videos, and now websites, all dedicated to prophecy, have made many predictions, including date setting about final events—usually centered around wars or turmoil in the Middle East.

And, surprise of surprises, in every case those predictions have not come true.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we take a different approach, a Christ-centered approach, in which the focus of prophecy is no longer on a single geographic location in the Middle East and whatever military conflicts unfold there. Instead, we view the prophecies through the lens of the great controversy between Christ and Satan—a worldwide spiritual struggle that will climax when God’s people, Jew and Gentile (*see Rev. 12:17, Rev. 14:12*), face the final crisis, which centers around worshiping the Creator (*see Rev. 14:7*), as opposed to the beast and his image.

A key element in understanding these last-day prophecies is Daniel 2, which contains

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not only the historical outline of the prophecies but the interpretive key to unlocking their meanings, as well.

Daniel 2 depicts four world empires—Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, Rome—followed by God’s establishing His eternal kingdom, “ ‘which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever’ ” (*Dan. 2:44, NKJV*).

The parallel prophecies in Daniel 7 and 8 contain this same basic outline, that of these worldly empires arising and vanishing until God’s kingdom is forever established.

In Daniel 7, the angel interpreter sets it all out for us: “ ‘ Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings which arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever’ ” (*Dan. 7:17, 18, NKJV*).

Four worldly empires (Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome) move in an unbroken succession through history until, after the second coming of Jesus, God establishes His eternal one.

Of course, we are still here, in the time of the division of Rome, the fourth and final earthly kingdom before Christ returns.

With this historical perspective as the foundation for understanding prophecy, we are going to study this quarter the theme of how to interpret Bible prophecy, specifically some of the allusions, stories, images, and metaphors that unlock prophetic truth and final events.

We go from the Genesis Creation account—important for understanding not only prophecy but for what follows, especially the cross and the atoning death of Jesus—to the tower of Babel, to the sanctuary service, to the Psalms, even to some Old Testament marriages. In all these, and more, we can find images, symbols, and metaphors that, when studied prayerfully and with a humble, submissive spirit (if you go to the Bible with a rebellious heart, you are wasting your time), will help make end-time prophecies, specifically in Revelation, come alive.

One quarter is certainly not enough even to begin to study all the stories and images that help unlock prophetic truth. Who knows—we might need eternity for that! Until then, by God’s grace, we will study what we can.

*We can find images, symbols, and metaphors that, when studied prayerfully and with a humble, submissive spirit. . . , will help make end-time prophecies, specifically in Revelation, come alive.*

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# How to Use This Teachers Edition

**“The true teacher is not content with dull thoughts, an indolent mind, or a loose memory. He constantly seeks higher attainments and better methods. His life is one of continual growth. In the work of such a teacher there is a freshness, a quickening power, that awakens and inspires his [class].”**

**—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 103.**

To be a Sabbath School teacher is both a privilege and a responsibility. A privilege because it offers the teacher the unique opportunity to lead and guide in the study and discussion of the week’s lesson so as to enable the class to have both a personal appreciation for God’s Word and a collective experience of spiritual fellowship with class members. When the class concludes, members should leave with a sense of having tasted the goodness of God’s Word and having been strengthened by its enduring power. The responsibility of teaching demands that the teacher is fully aware of the Scripture to be studied, the flow of the lesson through the week, the interlinking of the lessons to the theme of the quarter, and the lesson’s application to life and witness.

This guide is to help teachers to fulfill their responsibility adequately. It has three segments:

- 1. Overview** introduces the lesson topic, key texts, links with the previous lesson, and the lesson’s theme. This segment deals with such questions as Why is this lesson important? What does the Bible say about this subject? What are some major themes covered in the lesson? How does this subject affect my personal life?
- 2. Commentary** is the chief segment in the Teachers Edition. It may have two or more sections, each one dealing with the theme introduced in the Overview segment. The Commentary may include several in-depth discussions that enlarge the themes outlined in the Overview. The Commentary provides an in-depth study of the themes and offers scriptural, exegetic, illustrative discussion material that leads to a better understanding of the themes. The Commentary also may have scriptural word study or exegesis appropriate to the lesson. On a participatory mode, the Commentary segment may have discussion leads, illustrations appropriate to the study, and thought questions.
- 3. Life Application** is the final segment of the Teachers Edition for each lesson. This section leads the class to discuss what was presented in the Commentary segment as it impacts Christian life. The application may involve discussion, further probing of what the lesson under study is all about, or perhaps personal testimony on how one may feel the impact of the lesson on one’s life.

**Final thought:** What is mentioned above is only suggestive of the many possibilities available for presenting the lesson and is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive in its scope. Teaching should not become monotonous, repetitious, or speculative. Good Sabbath School teaching should be Bible-based, Christ-centered, faith-strengthening, and fellowship-building.