

## Daniel's Vision Of Chapter Seven VII

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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I was reading from a magazine article this week that described a lecture during which the speaker said, "Prophecy is so closely connected with history as to be almost identical with it." I find myself in agreement with that statement. Quite obviously, the presenter was a believer of the Bible and its prophecies and found that history has confirmed the specifications of prophecy in a way that established his faith. Would it surprise you to learn that this statement was made by a Dr. Harper of Yale University and given to the students of the University of Michigan? Maybe not, if I told you that the magazine I was reading from was dated June 1, 1891! A lot has changed in the last 120 years! I have severe doubts as to whether a speaker from Yale would be delivering a talk on the veracity of Bible prophecy to the students of the University of Michigan in these days.

During the last several weeks we've discussed many things that are brought to light within the seventh chapter of Daniel, but there's one very important part we've not touched on yet. Do you know that that is? We've studied the four ferocious beasts that represented the kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. We've given consideration to the horn power that spoke blasphemous things against God and persecuted the saints. We saw that this horn of Daniel 7 is in parallel with three other pictures in the Bible, Paul's "man of sin," John's "Antichrist" and Revelation's "leopard beast," and that they all represent same entity, the church of the middle ages.

Last week we reviewed the history of how these prophetic symbols have been interpreted, and we saw that the Protestant Reformers were consistent in their application of these prophecies

as applying to the historical papacy. We then noticed that papal Rome engineered a counterattack, led by Jesuit theologians, the intent of which was to divert attention away from the concept that Catholicism was the subject of these messages. Two schools of thought were birthed; *preterism* which sought to identify the Antichrist as having come and gone long before and *futurism*, which looked to the future for the coming of the Antichrist. In either case, the papacy was not to be associated with these prophecies, argued Luis de Alcazar and Robert Bellarmine.

We saw that the introduction of these counter-reformation interpretations served to slow the progress of the Reformation and eventually became more successful than their originators would have ever dreamed, in that Protestantism itself became their champions, abandoning the interpretations held by their spiritual forefathers.

Now today we'll look at a very important part of Daniel seven on which we've not yet focused. "I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; a fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened." Daniel 7:9, 10. What an impressive scene! Daniel was limited by human language in trying to convey what he saw in his vision.

Though we've not devoted significant time to this part of the vision, we should not think that it lacks importance. In fact, everything else we've studied would not have meaning without this part! It is the pivot, the hinge point of the vision. It's what turns disaster and defeat into victory and celebration.

The entire book of Daniel has been centered on judgment.

In chapter *one*, Daniel is examined by the king before he graduates.

In chapter *two* the Stone smites the statue in judgment

In chapter *three* the three Hebrews are judged worthy through the furnace of trial

In chapter *four* Nebuchadnezzar is judged unworthy to reign and is treated like an animal

In chapter *five* Belshazzar is judged unworthy to reign and is slain

In chapter *six* Daniel is examined by his colleagues and found innocent

If you examine the vision of chapter seven from a "structural" point of view, you will see that the enemy, the horn, the agent of Satan, is having its way through much of the vision. It boasts, it persecutes. At each segment, however, it is the judgment that turns the tide. In the sequence of presentation, we find this pendulum of action; the horn power seems to be successful, "but the judgment." We find this transition no less than 5 times in this vision; between verses 8 and 9; between verses 12 and 13; between verses 17 and 18; between verses 21 and 22 and between verses 25 and 26. In all the instances cited we see the horn waging war followed by God's victory facilitated by the judgment.

Those who follow sports closely look for that key play, that momentum swinging moment, when a change occurs that propels one team to victory and another to defeat. Sometimes a whole season will come down to one play. What Boston Red Sox fan will ever forget the Billy Buckner error that cost them the 1986 World Series? What Charger fan will forget this year's missed call by referee Ed Hockley that cost them the game against Denver? In economics, it could be an important announcement by the Federal Reserve Board, in war a decisive victory in a battle that changes the impetus from one side to the other.

In Daniel's prophecy, what shifts the tide from defeat to victory is the judgment. It's the difference-making event that means everything. Daniel gives us a closer look and says, "I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed." Daniel 7:13, 14.

Some have mistakenly thought this described the coming of Christ to this earth in glory, but the language is clear. In this scene, Christ comes not to the earth, but to the Ancient of Days, Who is obviously God the Father, presiding over the court. The scene, which must have challenged Daniel's language skills, portrays God's throne room in judicial session. "The court was seated and the books were opened." The prophet is given the view that in this judgment, there is the gathering of heavenly beings, the opening of books and the presentation of the "kingdom" to the Son.

The teaching of accountability and judgment is not unique to Daniel. The wise man Solomon stated, "God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil." Ecclesiastes 12:14. While on earth, Jesus confirmed the concept of a final judgment and said, The Father "has committed all judgment to the Son." John 5:22. From the top of Mars Hill Paul preached, "He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained." Acts 17:31.

What Daniel brings is vital information. Questions dealing with the "who," "what," "when" and "why" of the judgment are encoded in his vision.

Let's think first of all about "what" of the judgment. What do we know about trials that take place here? We know that there would

never be a trial unless charges are filed by a prosecutor. That's basic criminal law; even if someone has committed a crime, nothing further would happen unless the D.A. submits the paper work that initiates the process. This is true also of heaven's tribunal. This court scene depicted in the vision of Daniel would never have been necessary had not charges been filed. Who filed charges, and against whom?

There is one in the Bible who is identified as the "accuser," and that is the devil. "Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.'" Revelation 12:10. So the devil is the one who brought charges, which have necessitated judicial action.

Whom did he charge? The text just quoted from Revelation indicates that he accuses us, but it goes much deeper than that. Initially he charged God. Before humans were ever created, Satan levied charges against God. He charged God with being unfair, selfish, restrictive, and unloving. In a perfect universe, in which there was not a speck of pain or sorrow, Lucifer, a bright, talented and wise angel, a covering cherub, somehow conceived the idea that he was worthy of the worship due to the Creator God alone. He aspired to exalt his throne above God's. Isaiah 14:12-14. He attempted to gain the sympathy and adoration of God's angels and was successful in deceiving about a third of them into joining his rebellion. Revelation 12:4.

He charged God with being too restrictive with respect to His law. Things would be better if there was no law and angels had "complete freedom," he argued. Those angels who remained loyal to God he ridiculed as being slaves. His resentment grew as he was not given the promotion he thought he deserved. He charged God with being unfair in not allowing him to advance to the position to which he felt he was entitled.

Of course, the fact was that Lucifer, although gifted and beautiful, was nonetheless a creature, not a Creator. He was not and will never be God. But Lucifer came to a way of thinking in which he felt he did deserve to be worshiped and that his way of "freedom" would be an enhancement in the system of the universe.

This was a question that must be settled. Once and for all, it must be decided; Is God the rightful Ruler of the universe? Is His way, founded upon the law of selfless service given freely in love, the best way? Was there not something in Lucifer's challenges that would improve upon the system ordained of God? What awesome and fearful charges! How would God answer the questions brought by Lucifer?

Upon being evicted from heaven, the scene of this great battle was transferred to Planet Earth, where the universe watched to see what would be the decision of God's newly created beings, Adam and Eve. A simple, clear and decisive choice was given them; to obey or not. To believe God's word, or the suggestions of Satan. At the heart of Satan's appeal to Eve were his insinuations against God as being unfair, unloving and too restrictive. His way was better. Imagine it! A talking snake, elevated to the stature of speech through the partaking of the fruit which God has forbidden. What would she do? Whom would she and Adam believe and obey? The universe watched in horror as Eden's pair disobeyed the express command of their Creator God. They chose to believe a talking snake who had done nothing for them rather than the Creator God Who had done everything for them!

God could have dealt with the rebellion of Lucifer in another way. He could have exterminated him and explained to the universe that Lucifer's plan had nothing beneficial to offer; that it would be better if sin were eliminated without further discussion. But that would have left a question in the minds of heavenly beings and God in His wisdom chose not to take the "short-cut" solution. The charges were so serious it would require demonstration rather than peremptory action.

Now, through the history of planet Earth, it would be revealed what were the consequences of sin. Now it would be seen what the effects of Satan's way really were. Now the angels who had remained loyal to God would witness the results of rebellion. They would see that their once beloved commander Lucifer would be metamorphosized into a demon. The one who had joyfully led the angelic hosts in praise to God would now seek to put Him on a cross. Now the character and intent of Lucifer would be fully exposed. Now the character and love of God would be fully revealed. Now the questions and challenges posed by Lucifer would be answered. Now once and for all the "alternative" way proposed by Lucifer would be demonstrated before all the universe to be defective and dangerous.

Many think that the judgment has to do solely with our destinies. It's true that we're involved. But beyond our stake in the judgment is the overriding question first brought by the arch-deceiver against God as the sovereign Monarch of the universe. God's name will be vindicated in the outworking of events on this planet.

But at some point, the demonstration must be curtailed. At some point the evidence will be deemed to have been sufficient. God will not allow sin to continue forever. So there must be a judgment. The purpose of this trial will be first of all to clear God of all charges brought against Him by the accuser. It will be seen that the power of love supersedes the love of power. It will be seen that God's way based on the law of selfless love is superior to Satan's way of self love. The evidence in this court will be available to all beings, heavenly beings depicted in the vision of Daniel seven, and eventually earthly beings both saved and lost, so that complete acknowledgement of God's way will be confessed. "Every knee shall bow," said the apostle.

This judgment also directly concerns those who have lived on this planet. Each one of us must make a decision as to whether we will honor, love and serve God, or subscribe to the platform of Satan. God has already cast His vote in favor of us and our

salvation by sending Jesus to save us from sin. But He generously allows each of His creatures the opportunity to choose for himself or herself which leader will be selected.

The judgment has more than one part to it. In a sense, the whole span of earth's history has been a "judgment." Throughout the panorama of human events there has been opportunity to decide on the issue based on the evidence.

It is also true that in a special way the coming of Christ to this earth gave evidence and an opportunity to decide. Concerning His death on the cross Jesus said, "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out, and I if I am lifted up from the earth will draw all to Myself." John 12:31, 32. Paul said that God sending His Son to live here victoriously was an act of judgment. "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned (or "pronounced judgment against") sin in the flesh." Romans 8:3. Satan's charges were answered by Christ's perfect life and His perfect sacrifice.

But Daniel seven is not highlighting this aspect of the judgment. It's not putting the cross in the spotlight. In this vision books are opened amidst a heavenly tribunal. The Son is not on the cross, but conveyed into the presence of the Father to receive His kingdom.

When does that happen? Two parables of Jesus shed light on the timing of this event. Speaking of Himself as the nobleman in the story, He said, "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return." Luke 19:12.

He also said, "Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning, and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when He comes, will find watching. Therefore

you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." Luke 12:35, 36, 40. The receiving of His kingdom, referred to also by the "wedding," takes place shortly before the return of Christ to this earth in glory.

Notice three separate events in verse 22. Backing up to include verse 21 we read, "I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom." The two "ands" in that verse connect three separate parts of God's plan. The three divisions of verse 22 concern:

1) The coming of the Ancient of Days. This "coming" is not to the earth, but to the heavenly courtroom. This would be the same as what verse 9 speaks about when it says "I watched till thrones were put in place and the Ancient of Days was seated." We read the description of that scene which concludes with the words, "the books were opened." This is the commencement of the great court scene in heaven, when investigation into the books of record takes place. What would be the purpose of "opening the books" if it were not to look into that which has been recorded on them? This happens, according to the language used, before Jesus comes back to this earth. We understand in earthly trials that there is a phase during which testimony is offered and evidence produced before the decision is made.

2) "Judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High." This represents the conclusion of that judicial proceeding, when the decisions have been finalized. This is brought to view in verses 13 and 14 which describe Christ "receiving His kingdom." We see this in parallel with what Jesus said, "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he who is holy, let him be holy still. And behold I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me to give to everyone according to his work." Revelation

22:11, 12. There is a time before the return of Jesus, when all decisions will have been made.

Just as Noah and his family went into the ark and the door was shut before the Flood came, so the finalization as to who are the subjects of Christ's kingdom; who are in the "ark" when the "door is shut," will transpire before He comes.

3) "The time came for the saints to possess the kingdom." This is the third event in that verse and takes place at the glorious coming of our Lord. This is what the angel wanted Daniel to understand foremost, that despite the onslaughts of the enemy, "the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess it forever and ever, even forever and ever." Daniel 7:18. This is the glorious culmination of the Gospel, the great conclusion of God's wonderful plan, that we should be accounted worthy to inherit the kingdom.

Someone might be asking, "Why does God, Who is all-knowing, need books of record?" This question goes to the heart of the matter. It goes to the very core of Who our God is and how He operates. It is absolutely true that He knows everything. He doesn't need books to record the decisions and actions of our lives. He can read our hearts. His wisdom is perfect.

But His creatures can't see what He knows. Angels, whether loyal to God or Satan, can't read hearts. And it is our hearts that are the seat of our decisions. It is the condition of the heart that determines whether we are truly God's or not. The "outward appearance" may fool many people, but not God. And because our gracious God wants the angels in heaven to be absolutely comfortable with the citizens He is bringing to live up there in that perfect environment, He wants them to be able to see what He has already seen.

He is going to return in the clouds to take people to heaven; people who have been sinners, liars, murderers, covetous and proud. The people He's taking to heaven will all be people whose

hearts have been changed. But in some cases, there was not adequate time for the fruits of righteousness to grow before the curtain of life fell and cut short their lives. How would you know if a person was truly converted and would never sin again, never bring a stain into the perfection of heaven, unless you could see the heart as God sees it? So the Lord, being the gracious Person He is, opens to angels the "books" and allows the inhabitants of the universe to see and know that those He's bringing are safe and the universe won't be put in jeopardy by their presence. This is the substance of the judgment depicted in Daniel 7. This is a necessary precursor to the "saints possessing the kingdom." This must be finished before Jesus comes back.

There's good news today about God's judgment for those who put their trust in Jesus. We have nothing to fear about it. Jesus is the Judge. "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son." John 5:22. Jesus is the defense Attorney. "If any man sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." I John 2:1. Jesus is the Witness. He is the "faithful and true Witness." Revelation 3:14. And Jesus, by your giving permission for Him to stand in your place, is the Accused. "He was numbered (or "accounted as") with the transgressors." Isaiah 53:12. When you're in Christ, you can't lose. The Father sees the righteousness of the Son and proclaims you not guilty. Christ confesses your name before the Father and points to His blood as the satisfaction for your sins.

Though we were sinners, our names stand cleared in God's courtroom. More than that, we rejoice that God's name is cleared of all charges brought by the deceiver. We celebrate the victory of His name being exonerated.

Where are we today? I can tell you exactly where we are in this chapter. We're in the first "and" of verse 22. We're after the coming of the Ancient of Days, when the court is seated, but before "judgment was made in favor of the saints." This tribunal has already convened. We'll get into that in the next week or two. The books have been opened, but the decisions have not been

finalized. And our eager expectation is for the time when the possession of the kingdom will be given to the saints.

Are you looking for that great day? Are you placing yourself in the care and keeping of the heavenly Attorney, Jesus? Are you living to honor His name? Are you pleading with Him to strengthen you by His Spirit to overcome the devil so that God will present you, as He did Job long ago, as His exhibit to answer the charges brought by the devil? May the Lord guide us to live for Him this week, is my prayer.