

# From *the Stormy Sea to the Clouds of Heaven*



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Daniel 7, 2 Thess. 2:1–12, Rom. 8:1, Mark 13:26, Luke 9:26, 12:8, 1 Tim. 2:5.*

**Memory Text:** “Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him” (*Daniel 7:27, NKJV*).

The vision of Daniel 7, our topic for this week, parallels the dream in Daniel 2. But Daniel 7 expands on what was revealed in Daniel 2. First, the vision occurs at night and portrays the sea agitated by the four winds. Darkness and water evoke creation, but here creation appears to be somehow distorted or under attack. Second, the animals in the vision are unclean and hybrid, which represents a violation of the created order. Third, the animals are portrayed as exerting dominion; thus, it appears that the dominion God gave to Adam in the garden has been usurped by these powers. Fourth, with the coming of the Son of man, God's dominion is restored to those to whom it properly belongs. What Adam lost in the garden, the Son of man recovers in the heavenly judgment.

The above description gives a panoramic view of the biblical imagery that runs in the background of this highly symbolic vision. Fortunately, some of the crucial details of the vision are explained by the angel; so, we can understand the main contours of this amazing prophecy.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 22.

## Four Animals

**Read** Daniel 7. What is the essence of what Daniel is shown, and what is the vision about?

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Each animal shown to Daniel corresponds to a section of the statue shown to Nebuchadnezzar, but now more details about each kingdom are given. How interesting that the creatures, symbolizing pagan nations, are all unclean beasts. Also, except for the fourth beast, Daniel describes the animals as resembling some known creatures. So, the animals are not arbitrary symbols, inasmuch as each one bears some characteristics or points to some aspect of the kingdom it represents.

*Lion:* A lion is a most fitting representation of Babylon. Winged lions decorated palace walls and other works of Babylonian art. The lion depicted in the vision eventually has its wings pulled off, is made to stand upright like a man, and receives a human heart. This process symbolizes the Babylonian Empire under its kings.

*Bear:* The bear represents the Medo-Persian Empire. The fact that it is raised up on one side indicates the superiority of the Persians over the Medes. The three ribs between its teeth stand for the three main conquests of the Medo-Persian Empire: Lydia, Babylon, and Egypt.

*Leopard:* The swift leopard represents the Greek Empire established by Alexander the Great. The four wings make this beast even swifter, an apt representation of Alexander, who in a few years brought the entire known world under his dominion.

*The dreadful and terrible animal:* Whereas the previous entities only resemble the animals mentioned, this one is an entity unto itself. That is, the first ones are depicted as “like” a lion or “like” a bear, but this one is not depicted like anything. This multi-horned beast also appears far more cruel and rapacious than the previous ones. As such, it is a fitting representation of pagan Rome, which conquered, ruled, and trampled the world with its feet.

**All these thousands of years of human history have come and gone, just as predicted. How much comfort can you get from knowing that above all the clamor, unrest, and at times utter chaos, God rules? What does this teach us about the trustworthiness of Scripture?**

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## The Little Horn

**Read** Daniel 7:7, 8, 19–25. Who is the little-horn power that arises directly from, and remains part of, the fourth beast?

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Yesterday we learned that the ferocious animal with ten horns ruling the world with utmost cruelty represents pagan Rome. Now we must consider the little horn and the power it represents. As portrayed in the vision, the fourth animal has ten horns, of which three horns were plucked out to make way for a little horn. This horn has human eyes and speaks “pompous words” (*Dan. 7:8, NKJV*). It is clear that the little horn emerges from the entity represented by the terrible animal, which is pagan Rome. In a way, the horn extends or continues some features of pagan Rome. It is just a later stage of the same power.

Daniel sees this other horn making war against the saints. The angel explains to him that this horn is a king who will perform three unlawful actions: (1) speak pompous words against the Most High, (2) persecute the saints of the Most High, (3) intend to change times and law. And as a consequence, the saints would be given into his hand. Next, the angel gives the time frame for the activities of the little horn: *a time and times and half a time*. In this instance of prophetic language, the word *time* means “year,” and so the expression *times* signifies years, a dual form: “two years.” Hence, this is a period of three and a half prophetic years, which, according to the year-day principle, indicates a period of 1,260 years. During this time the little horn will mount an attack against God, persecute the saints, and attempt to change God’s law.

**Read** 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12. What similarities are there between the man of lawlessness and the little horn? What power do we believe that this is talking about—and why? What is the only power that arose out of pagan Rome but remains part of Rome, a power that extends from the time of pagan Rome until the end of the world, meaning that it still exists today?

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## The Court Was Seated

After the vision of the four animals and the activities of the little horn, the prophet sees a scene of judgment in heaven (*Dan. 7:9, 10, 13, 14*). As the court convenes, thrones are put in place and the Ancient of Days takes His seat. As the heavenly scene shows, thousands and thousands of heavenly beings minister before the Ancient of Days, the court is seated, and the books are opened.

What's important to note about this judgment is that it occurs *after* the 1,260-year period of the little horn's activity (A.D. 538–1798; see Friday's study) but *prior* to the establishing of God's final kingdom. In fact, *three times* in the vision the following sequence appears:

*Little-horn phase (538–1798)*  
*Heavenly judgment*  
*God's eternal kingdom*

**Read** Daniel 7:13, 14, 21, 22, 26, 27. In what ways does the judgment benefit God's people?

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The Old Testament describes several acts of judgment from the tabernacle and temple, but the judgment referred to here is different. This is a cosmic judgment that affects not only the little horn but also the saints of the Most High, who will eventually receive the kingdom.

Daniel 7 does not describe the judgment or give details about its beginning and closing. But it implies that the judgment is undertaken in the wake of the little horn's attack against God and His people. The point here, then, is to emphasize the beginning of a judgment of cosmic proportions. From Daniel 8 and 9 (see following weeks), we will learn about the time of judgment's beginning and the fact that this judgment is related to the purification of the heavenly sanctuary on the heavenly Day of Atonement. The lesson here is that we clearly will have a pre-Advent judgment in heaven that will be in favor of God's people (*Dan. 7:22*).

**Why is an understanding of what Jesus accomplished for us at the cross so central to why we can have assurance in the day of judgment? What hope would we have, or even could we have, without the Cross? (See Rom. 8:1.)**

## The Coming of the Son of Man

**Read** Daniel 7:13. Who is the Son of man here, and how do you identify Him? (See also Mark 13:26, Matt. 8:20, 9:6, Luke 9:26, and 12:8.)

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As the judgment unfolds, a most important figure enters the scene: the Son of man. Who is He? First, the Son of man appears as an individual heavenly figure. But as the title implies, He also displays human traits. In other words, He is a divine-human individual who comes to play an active role in judgment. Second, the Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven is a common image of the Second Coming in the New Testament. However, in Daniel 7:13 specifically, the Son of man is not depicted as coming from heaven to earth, but as moving horizontally from one place in heaven to another in order to appear before the Ancient of Days. Third, the depiction of the Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven suggests a visible manifestation of the Lord. But this imagery also is reminiscent of the high priest who, surrounded by a cloud of incense, enters the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement to perform the purification of the sanctuary.

The Son of man also is a royal figure. He receives “dominion and glory and a kingdom” and “all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him” (*Dan. 7:14, NKJV*). The verb “serve” also can be translated as “worship.” It appears nine times in chapters 1–7 (*Dan. 3:12, 14, 17, 18, 28; 6:16, 20; 7:14, 27*) and conveys the idea of paying homage to a deity. So, as a consequence of the attempt to change the law of God, the religious system represented by the little horn corrupts the worship due to God. The judgment portrayed here shows that true worship is eventually restored. The worship system set by the papal system, among other elements, places a fallen human being as a mediator between God and humanity. Daniel shows that the only mediator capable of representing humanity before God is the Son of man. As the Bible says, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (*1 Tim. 2:5, NKJV*).

**From all that we have read in the Bible about the life and character of Jesus, why is it so comforting to know that He is so central to the judgment depicted here?**

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## The Holy Ones of the Most High

**What** happens to God's people according to the following texts? *Dan. 7:18, 21, 22, 25, 27.*

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The “holy ones of the Most High” (*NRSV*) is a designation of God’s people. They are attacked by the power represented by the little horn. Because they insist on remaining faithful to God’s Word, they are persecuted during the times of papal rule. Christians were persecuted during the time of the pagan Roman Empire, too (the fourth beast itself), but the persecution mentioned in Daniel 7:25 is a persecution of the saints by the little horn, which arises only after the pagan phase of Rome ends.

However, God’s people won’t be subjected to oppression by worldly power forever. The kingdom of God will replace the kingdoms of the world. Interestingly, in the actual vision, to the Son of man “was given dominion and glory and a kingdom” (*Dan. 7:14, NKJV*). But in the interpretation offered by the angel, it is the “holy ones” who receive the kingdom (*Dan. 7:18, NRSV*). There is no contradiction here. Because the Son of man is related to God and humanity, His victory is the victory of those He represents.

When the high priest asks if Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus points back to Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13, 14 and says: “I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (*Mark 14:62, NKJV*). Therefore, Jesus is the One who represents us in the heavenly tribunal. He already has defeated the powers of darkness and shares His triumph with those who come close to Him. Therefore, there is no reason to fear. As the apostle Paul so aptly states: “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (*Rom. 8:37–39, NKJV*).

**Look at how accurately Daniel’s vision depicts history, thousands of years in advance. How should this help us learn to trust all of God’s promises for the future?**

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**Further Thought:** A cursory look at history reveals that after the collapse of the Roman Empire, which came about by attacks from barbarians from the north, the bishop of Rome took advantage of the overthrow of three barbarian tribes and established himself as the sole power in Rome as of A.D. 538. In this process, he adopted several institutional and political functions of the Roman emperor. From this emerged the papacy, invested with temporal and religious power until it was deposed by Napoleon in 1798. This did not bring an end to Rome, but only to that specified phase of persecution. The pope not only claimed to be the vicar of Christ but also introduced several doctrines and practices contrary to the Bible. Purgatory, penance, auricular confession, and the change of the Sabbath commandment to Sunday are among many other changes of the “times and law” introduced by the papacy.

“In his own strength, man cannot meet the charges of the enemy. In sin-stained garments, confessing his guilt, he stands before God. But Jesus, our Advocate, presents an effectual plea in behalf of all who by repentance and faith have committed the keeping of their souls to Him. He pleads their cause, and by the mighty arguments of Calvary, vanquishes their accuser. His perfect obedience to God’s law has given Him all power in heaven and in earth, and He claims from His Father mercy and reconciliation for guilty man. To the accuser of His people He declares: ‘The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan. These are the purchase of My blood, brands plucked from the burning.’ And to those who rely on Him in faith, He gives the assurance, ‘Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.’ Zechariah 3:4.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 586, 587.

### Discussion Question:

**1** Look again at all the characteristics of the little-horn power that arises from, and remains part of, the fourth beast, Rome. What power alone arose out of pagan Rome many centuries ago and, besides having persecuted God’s people, remains in existence today? Why should this clear identification help protect us from speculation about its identity, including the idea that the little horn refers to a pagan, Greek king who disappeared from history more than a century and a half before the first advent of Jesus? How should these clear identifying marks also protect us from the belief that the little horn is some future power yet to arise?

## ***Part I: Overview***

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**Key Text:** *Daniel 7:27*

**Study Focus:** *Daniel 7, 2 Thess. 2:1–12, Rom. 8:1, Mark 13:26, Luke 9:26, Luke 12:8, 1 Tim. 2:5.*

**Introduction:** Daniel 7 shows that after a sequence of world powers that govern the world with ruthless dominion, the heavenly tribunal is set, and the Son of man receives the power and the kingdom to rule forever with His people.

### **Lesson Themes:**

- 1. The Little Horn.** Out of the fourth beast with ten horns emerges a little horn that blasphemes God and persecutes His people.
- 2. Heavenly Judgment.** The heavenly judgment condemns the little horn and gives deliverance and salvation to God's people.
- 3. Son of Man.** The Son of man emerges from the heavenly judgment to vindicate His people.
- 4. The Saints of the Most High.** The “saints” suffer persecution but remain faithful to God.

**Life Application:** In spite of so much injustice, persecution, and trial, God's people may look to the future with hope. A look at this prophetic depiction of history shows that human history will culminate with the heavenly judgment and the everlasting kingdom of the Son of man. We long for God's everlasting kingdom to be established soon.

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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Let us look in greater detail at the lesson themes outlined above:

### **1. The Little Horn**

The little horn grows out of, and among, the other horns of the terrible animal that represents the Roman Empire. Indeed, it uproots three of the ten kingdoms that grow out of pagan Rome. The little-horn power is an extension of pagan Rome and thus shares essential characteristics of the former empire. It usurps the prerogatives of Christ, persecutes God's people, supposes to change God's law, speaks against God, and



acts as it pleases for three and a half times (which is 1,260 calendar years). These activities indicate that this entity holds both political and religious power, which fits with the papacy. History shows that the conversion of the emperor Constantine, the official recognition of Sunday as a day of worship, the fall of Rome to barbarians, and the foundation of Constantinople in the East were important factors that favored the rise of the papacy. With the demise of the pagan western Roman Empire, the bishop of Rome filled the power vacuum that was created in Rome with the transfer of the capital of the Roman Empire to Constantinople.

With the decree of emperor Justinian in A.D. 533, made effective only in A.D. 538, declaring the pope the head of all the churches, the door was open for the papacy to implement its rule. Now the bishop of Rome held not only religious authority but also political power. The popes soon began to call themselves pontifex and adopted other customs and laws of the pagan Roman Empire. By means of alliances with temporal powers, the persecuted church became the persecutor. Through the Crusades and the Inquisition, the Roman church inflicted tremendous pain on many who wanted to remain faithful to biblical teachings. So, already during the Middle Ages the pope came to be identified with the Antichrist (*Matthew 24; 2 Thess. 2:3, 4; Rev. 13:1–10*). In 1798, Napoleon put the pope in prison, bringing to an end the 1,260 years of papal rulership.

## 2. Heavenly Judgment

The heavenly court scene of Daniel 7:9–14 depicts the central event of the chapter. The books; the Ancient of Days on the throne; and the Son of man, surrounded by heavenly clouds (*Dan. 7:13*) as He comes into the presence of the Ancient of Days, portray a scene of judgment in heaven. Judgment in the Scriptures conveys both condemnation and vindication. For the little horn, however, the judgment means condemnation and will lead to the horn's eventual obliteration. But for the saints, who have been persecuted by the little horn, the judgment means vindication, salvation, and restoration. As their names are examined in the heavenly judgment, they are declared innocent. They are vindicated and eventually receive the kingdom.

A few aspects of this judgment bear mentioning. First, we should note that this judgment begins after the little horn rises to power and concludes before the saints are rewarded, and the little horn is punished. So, this judgment has been properly designated as the investigative judgment. Ellen G. White mentions the following books in connection with this judgment: (1) the book of life, containing the names of those who have accepted the service of God; (2) the book of remembrance, a record of the good deeds of the saints; and (3) a record of sins (*The Great Controversy*, pp. 480, 481). For the sake of justice and transparency to all those involved in and affected by the

final decision, God must conduct an investigation so that no one could cast doubt upon the rightness of the final decision. Second, because this judgment has a cosmic scope and, according to the prophetic chronology, is taking place right now, some have wondered whether God could begin the judgment of the living any time soon. Such concern prevents full enjoyment of the Christian life. We should bear in mind that the judgment of the living will take place only when the time of probation closes and the seven last plagues begin to be poured on Babylon (*Revelation 15, Revelation 16*). But most important, we must not fear the judgment because the “Son of Man” is our representative in the heavenly tribunal. Thus, rather than condemnation, the heavenly judgment will bring us vindication and deliverance.

### 3. Son of Man

The designation “Son of Man” (*bar ’enash* in Aramaic) links this heavenly being with some important theological and historical realities. First, the Son of man points back to Adam, the father of the human race. Adam was put in charge of the creation and was commanded to exert dominion. So, in contrast to Adam, who exerted temporary dominion—and the kings of the world, who ruled for a time—the Son of man receives an everlasting kingdom. Thus, the Son of man regains what Adam lost. Second, the designation Son of man suggests that He shares common ground with humanity. This expression can be used to designate a human being (*Ezek. 2:1*). Because in Daniel 7 this figure is clearly a heavenly being, the title Son of man points to His bond with humankind.

From the broad context of the Scriptures, we can infer that the Son of man not only represents His people in the heavenly tribunal, but He also can identify with them because He partakes of their human nature (*Heb. 2:14, Heb. 4:15*). We also should note that the Son of man of Daniel 7 must be identified with the Prince of the Host (*Dan. 8:11*), the “man clothed in linen” (*Dan. 10:5*), and Michael (*Dan. 10:13, Dan. 12:1*). To conclude, the Son of man of Daniel 7 is clearly the Messiah Jesus Christ, who comes to the presence of God the Father as a representative of the saints (*1 John 2:1*) on the antitypical day of atonement. This connection will become clearer in the study of Daniel 8.

### 4. The Saints of the Most High

This group is the object of the little horn’s persecution and is described as “the saints” (*Dan. 7:21*), “the saints of the most High” (*Dan. 7:18, 22, 25*), and as “the people of the saints of the most High” (*Dan. 7:27*) as they receive the kingdom. They also are referred to as “holy people” in Daniel 8:24 in the context of the little horn’s attacks against them; and in Daniel

12:7 in a context of persecution. Such designations of God’s people as saints/holy ones echo Exodus 19:6, where God calls Israel to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Thus, the saints of the Most High “are to be identified with God’s faithful followers who constitute His remnant people, who are His chosen ones, set apart from the rest of the nations, persecuted by the power opposing God, but keeping the covenant faith and maintaining their trust and confidence in God from whom they finally receive an everlasting kingdom.”—Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Identity of ‘The Saints of the Most High’ in Daniel 7,” *Biblica* 56, no. 2 (1975): p. 192.

Revelation 12–14 depicts the followers of Christ and shows how they remain faithful during the last crisis. John says that “the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (*Rev. 12:17, NKJV*). Because of the close relationship between the “testimony of Jesus” and prophecy (*Rev. 19:10, Rev. 22:9*), “Seventh-day Adventists thus interpret the passage and believe that the ‘remnant’ will be distinguished by the manifestation of the gift of prophecy in their midst. The ‘testimony of Jesus Christ,’ they believe, is the witness of Jesus in their midst through the medium of the prophetic gift.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 812.

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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God gave Daniel a vision that would enable him to see that, whereas violence and persecution would increase in the world, God is in control. He is the great Judge who will see to it that truth will triumph in the end. Worldly powers, presented in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar as deteriorating in the maintenance of moral standards, are presented to Daniel as increasing in fierceness and violence. The climax of worldly arrogance is seen in the rise of a little horn that speaks “great things.” While terrible things are taking place on earth, a tribunal is being set up in heaven that will judge the things that are happening on the earth according to records that are kept. The arrogant powers of earth will be condemned and destroyed, while the Son of man with the saints will be given an everlasting dominion that will never be destroyed.—G. Arthur Keough, *God and Our Destiny*, Adult Sabbath School Lessons, First Quarter, 1987, p. 63.

- 1. How do you feel about the prospect of a cosmic judgment in which all your thoughts and deeds will be exposed before the heavenly tribunal?**

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2. **What will be the standards by which all are judged? Ask yourself: Do I measure up to these standards? What does your answer tell you about some of the things that you still need to overcome by the grace of God?**

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3. **What difference does it make that Jesus will be my advocate in the heavenly judgment? Explain.**

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4. **Knowing that Jesus is our advocate in the heavenly judgment, how should we live our lives on the earth?**

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