

Good Word Schedule
Allusions, Images, Symbols
April, May, June, 2025

1. **Some Principles of Prophecy**—*March 29-April 4*
2. **The Genesis Foundation**—*April 5-11*
3. **Images from Marriage**—*April 12-18*
4. **The Nations: Part 1**—*April 19-25*
5. **The Nations: Part 2**—*April 26-May 2*
6. **Understanding Sacrifice**—*May 3-9*
7. **Foundations for Prophecy**—*May 10-16*
8. **In the Psalms: Part 1**—*May 17-23*
9. **In the Psalms: Part 2**—*May 24-30*
10. **Upon Whom the Ends Have Come**—*May 31-June 6*
11. **Ruth and Esther**—*June 7-13*
12. **Precursors**—*June 14-20*
13. **Images of the End**—*June 21-27*

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Allusions, Images, Symbols: How to Study Bible Prophecy

General Introduction

This study guide is meant to accompany the Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath School lesson for the 2nd Quarter of 2025. The format of this guide follows a similar pattern for each week's lesson: an introduction to the topic, a short discussion on several verses or a bullet list of concepts for a passage, followed by questions in bold type. Please read through the Biblical passages, and then prayerfully consider the bolded questions. Perhaps you'll find better questions that should be asked, and answered!

From the inception of the Advent movement, disciples of Jesus Christ have found challenge and hope, warning and encouragement in the prophetic messages of Jewish and Christian scriptures. But we are not the first. Jews in Jesus' day looked for the prophesied Messiah. The early church heeded Jesus' prophetic warnings in Matthew 24 to leave Jerusalem. Centuries later, the Protestant Reformation, in its hermeneutical (interpretive) revolution, began mining Daniel and Revelation, yielding treasures that had not been understood before. And just because some prophecies—sealed up at the time of the writer and beyond—were only to be fully comprehended at a later time does not mean the first century apostles and disciples were without prophetic hope. They built their entire theological framework around Jesus as a fulfillment of their historical and literary forefathers, both functioning as foreshadows of salvation.

It could be argued that prophecy began with the very opening words of the Bible: “in the beginning.” If there is a beginning, perhaps there is to be an end. Just a few verses later in Genesis 3, after *the fall*, we read a foretaste of what God would do to defeat the deceiver, and its deathly effects in our new world: He would send an offspring of the woman to crush the serpent's head! The irony is that such violent imagery finds fulfillment in the actual work of atonement—Jesus' self-sacrifice—at the cross and beyond in His ongoing ministry for us today from a throne of grace, and in the future when He sits on His glorious throne, God having put all things under His feet. The terrible results of sin and death are always accompanied by the hope-filled strains of a gloriously renewed, eternal future.

In our chaotic, fragile world, properly understanding the role of prophecy, its various contexts and genres, and applying consistent principles of interpretation are vital. Adventists know well from our history the disappointment associated with incorrect conclusions. The Christian world is rife with teachers of prophecy, many looking at events in the tumultuous Middle East as a direct fulfillment of final events before the 2nd Coming of Jesus (or “the rapture”). Three times in Matthew 24 we're told to beware the deceptive power of false Christs and false teachers. It behooves us to study humbly, expectantly, and diligently that which God has revealed to us. Be prepared to learn new things, to relinquish any faulty views, and to strengthen those that comport with the Truth. With new insights come new responsibilities and obedience to our Creator.

I pray that your study this quarter will take you well beyond the Adventist Quarterly. Let us remember that whatever illumination it might provide is always derived from the source of life: Christ Himself, understood through Scripture and the Spirit's presence in study.

Brant Berglin
Date...

Week 1: Some Principles of Prophecy Good Word, 2025

For March 29-April 4

Prepared by Brant Berglin, WWU School of Theology

Opening Question

If you believe in a God who knows the future, is that comforting to you? Why or why not

Introduction

The lesson this week introduces the idea of God's foreknowledge as the basis for prophetic messages. Christian doctrine often includes as part of *theology* proper (the study of "God,") a belief in God's omniscience. If God knows everything, then He knows the future as well. God's knowledge of the future is fairly standard orthodox belief in most Christian denominations. However, there are some scholars who believe the future is unknowable, and thus God cannot know it. Also, questions of free will are seen at times to conflict with a knowable (and thus determined?) future.

There are indications in both Old and New Testaments that God knows the future, at least what He will do in reaction to human choices. Then, the lesson moves into some basic rules or principles of prophetic interpretation.

Understood or "Known"

The lesson asks us to read verses like Matthew 24:15, Revelation 1:3, Matthew 11:29, and Jeremiah 9:23, 24 and implies they're all speaking about God wishing to be understood by what He says in the Bible. These verses do not exactly say what the author supposes; perhaps the very warnings he gives in this lesson might be better heeded throughout the quarterly!

To what degree does God make Himself known throughout scripture? Through the stories? Through the laws given to Israel in Leviticus and Deuteronomy? How does Deut. 29:29 contribute to our understanding of God's revelation?

Reading the "Whole Bible" on a Topic

The Lesson invites us to compare scripture with scripture. Instead of just taking a Bible verse out of context, we should see what the whole Bible has to say about a given topic. This is an important part of Biblical interpretation, but it skips several vital steps that safeguard the verse's meaning in the first place.

1. Immediate Context: Reading the whole book and section around our verse is essential. A Bible verse does not have meaning outside its original context. If, for instance, one reads Revelation 13:2-3 and sees an amalgamated beast made up of lion, bear, leopard and other components such as horns and crowns, we may be immediately drawn back to Daniel 7. And while the beast-allusion is certainly from there, Revelation is also telling a story, too. How is this beast in ch. 13 related to the Dragon's work in ch. 12? How is this beast going to be mimicked by the 2nd beast in ch. 13? What is the beast's role in Revelation's narrative? This is the first step—the immediate context!

2. Genre: know the style of literature of the passage we're investigating. Is it apocalyptic prophecy? Classic prophecy? Is it poetry? Law? Narrative? This may have an impact on meaning. When Abraham offered his son Isaac in Genesis 22, the narrative gives no obvious evidence that the story would be prophetic or typological in nature. Instead, it teaches us about Abraham's faithfulness and God's willingness to provide what Abraham needed most. But as time goes on, and God reveals more of Himself and His plan of Salvation, the narrative takes on extended meaning such that Jesus "fulfills" the historical narrative of Isaac's "binding." Also, interpretations that align within a given genre should be considered first. Revelation's ties to Daniel provide stronger links than would the writings of Paul.
3. *Toto Scriptura*: we read the rest of the Bible. The whole Bible does indeed give us clues, and should be used to interpret ideas, but only after the first two steps are done.

What are the dangers of ignoring these steps? What can happen if we jump too quickly from one verse or symbol to a different book without considering the immediate context? On the other hand, what happens if readers never consider the rest of the Biblical material?

Why Symbols?

Without question, God uses symbols. There are many reasons for this. First, symbols are like pictures, and as such, they are easily remembered and paint 1,000 words. Second, symbols require both sides of the brain to work, and like parables (extended symbolism), require thought and consideration. Also, as the lesson notes, the material in Daniel and Revelation addresses the rise and fall of kingdoms, powers, and nations, making it possibly politically seditious to leaders protective of their power. Again, like the parables of Jesus, they are intended to be understood by "insiders," but a mystery to those on the outside.

Identifying Symbols

While many symbols are obvious in prophetic material, not all readers are agreed. Many evangelicals attempt to read apocalyptic as literally as possible, and often require symbols to be interpreted as *physically* as possible. The locusts in Rev. 9 are seen as helicopters, the horses are tanks, and the beast in ch. 13 is a single literal person, the antichrist himself, rather than a system, power, kingdom or principality.

But Adventists have frequently interpreted the Holy City in Rev. 21-22 as a literal city as described with gold and gems. But what if it is also symbolic, or at the least has symbolic features? Why would a modern city with no evil need a city wall? And why the specific dimensions related to the 144,000 from ch. 7, just larger? And a city as tall as it is wide? This seems more symbolic than literal, yet many Christians still hope for streets of gold.

What is the danger of misidentifying the symbols in prophetic material? Which is more detrimental, to miss a symbol or to symbolize what should be literal?

Closing Comments

Throughout the quarter, we'll continue to examine tools and steps of interpretation.

Opening Question

How might the beginning of God's story in the Genesis hint at how the Bible ends with Revelation?

Introduction

Commentators have frequently noted Revelation's allusions to Genesis and the rest of the Torah (books of Moses). But provides much more than simply ideas for John to use in the apocalypse; it provides the context and origin from which the rest of the Bible's farthest reaching and deepest issues are developed and concluded. Every major topic in theology has its roots here. Themes (systematic categories) such as God, Man, Creation, Marriage, Sabbath, the Fall, Sin, Death, Judgment, Destruction of Wicked, Prophecy, Covenant, Atonement, Salvation, Mission, Great Controversy, and others all start here. For this reason, much of the Genesis naturally finds conclusion in Revelation. They two books function as book-ends on the story of God's dealing with human sin and frailty.

Genesis

The Quarterly points out the principle of "first mention." Based on the idea that inspiration builds on previous material, and thus is progressive, this may at first seem like a false premise or overstated approach to scripture. Later revelation unveils new ideas, and the fullest revelation comes later, not first.

However, later revelation was always to *be tested* by the first, later prophets were to be judged by what was *previously* revealed. Isaiah 8:20 conforms this principle when addressing the potential of false prophets and spiritual mediums: "19 When they say to you, "Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter," should not a people consult their God? *Should they consult* the dead on behalf of the living? 20 To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn." (NASB) There had to be a standard to gauge or authenticate prophetic pronouncements because false prophets would (and did) arise; inspiration's foundation cannot just be "because I say it is inspired."

What is the value of a standard (such as units of measure) when accounting, cooking, doing chemistry experiments, or driving on the highway? How can we use the earlier stories as foundations for the later ones in the Bible?

Genesis Doctrines and Teachings

As noted above, it has been noted by Biblical scholars that there is no significant Christian doctrine that is not introduced in Gen 1-11, with many outlined in chs. 1-3 alone. This week's lesson highlights several of them, especially some that influence Revelation directly.

God – Genesis assumes the existence of the divine before any humans appear or any of the material universe we apprehend with our senses. This God exists in "the beginning."

Creation – Genesis 1-3 demonstrates the fundamental act of God – creation out of nothing, and the pinnacle of creation, humans. Made in His image (with ability for male-female

to create new individual life as well), Genesis indicates all was “very good.” Humankind’s origins are in the mind of a benevolent, creative, caring maker; any hint of long ages of predation and cycles of death and life are absent from Genesis 1-3, and the rest of the Biblical account for that matter. And the God who creates wants a *relationship* with His creatures—very cool!

Evil – The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not simply an attempt by God to keep humans from good knowledge, but a lesson that not all knowledge is worth knowing, and some brings the worst kind of pain. Behind that evil is also a face, multiple faces, in an *accuser* and his fallen comrades. He is depicted in Genesis as the “serpent” but identified in later Revelation 12 as also the Devil (*diabolos*) and Satan.

The Fall – The *fall* quickly reveals the reason for human misery and woe—a curse, mentioned again in Revelation 22:3 that comes as a result of human faithlessness. Curses on nature is reversed in Revelation and the curse on the serpent ends with his demise. Revelation reverses the fall, where humans were removed from the garden, they are now admitted freely to the holy city.

Death – The first death (Abel), as the quarterly notes, parallels that of Jesus Christ, and later the saints in Revelation. All of these die at the hands of their own family; those who “were their own,” but like Judas, betray them to death. Revelation 21 says that the former things such as death, pain, mourning, and weeping all find their end in the world made new.

What parts of the human knowledge-void does the creation account seek to fill? How does it compare with secular or naturalistic accounts of origins? Do you find the Genesis 1-3 stories convincing as a means of explaining human origins and evil? How do naturalistic explanations of *evil* stack up?

Other Doctrines Originating in Genesis

Other spiritual, social, physical and great-controversy worldview issues that arise include: sin, judgment, final state of man, covenant, salvation (atonement and sacrifice), eschatology (final or last-day events), Sabbath, family/marriage, re-creation/restoration, etc.

Genesis lays out through the stories of the death of Abel, the lineages before the flood, the Noahic Covenant, the tower of Babel, and the call of Abraham the broad plan of God to redeem His faithful ones in the face of evil.

Why are these stories so moving for us? Some argue against their historicity and seek only a *meta-narrative* behind them. Can these stories be both arch-typal stories while also being anchored in history? What value might they lose if they are not historical events, especially when later Biblical narratives assume their authenticity via historical event?

Closing Comments

The Old Testament, far from being primitive or merely arch-typal myth, roots itself in time and place as an anchor for later stories. It becomes hard to believe in God at all if one takes Genesis as primitive myth. Who would be to say if the “god” figure there wasn’t just a symbol of something else, like “reality” or other abstract concept. Rather, the personal, approachable God of creation who can both speak into existence but also gets hands dirty making people is the God we want and need!

Opening Question

What use is there for “marriage” outside of a Judeo-Christian worldview? Why would anyone want such a commitment in our western world?

Introduction

Genesis 1-2 introduces God making humankind according to His own image. Reading Genesis 1:26-31 we find that image is contained in a male-female relationship with the possibility of producing offspring to fulfill God’s command to “be fruitful and multiply. Thus, the image of God is found in this special bond. Not surprisingly, it is also one of the most parodied, mocked and attacked social institutions of our society. But just what is being attacked? It’s not just humanity...

Marriage as Covenant

Hook-up culture is prevalent in western society (with some irony, some argue it is a “developed” or “advanced” society) where casual sexual relationships rarely lead to lasting covenantal commitment. And the Hebrew and Christian scriptures are replete with examples of people wanting the same—sexual experience or gratification outside of a “man leaving his father and mother and being joined to his wife.”

Our modern culture assigns marriage legality or legitimacy to the state. This creates the awkward condition for Christians in that their bond is now defined, recognized, and given certain privileges by the secular governing bodies rather than by God who originate it. No-fault divorce has not always been possible but is now more the rule than the exception.

Read Mark 10:1-12 and compare it with Matthew 19:1-12.

How are these passages similar and where are they different? How does Matthew provide a caveat to “no divorce”? How do the disciples feel about Jesus’ teaching on marriage being a life-long covenant?

God’s Marriage and Divorce

Throughout the Bible, the very visible and experiential marriage relationship is used as a metaphor or symbol for a spiritual relationship—hard to see physically—between God and His people. We see pictures of God’s own “marriage experience” with Israel in Ezekiel 16. Because of Israel’s spiritual idolatry (see also the book of Hosea), God describes His pain as would a jealous lover whose bride sleeps around. We also see, graphically portrayed, the sexual harlotry of Israel and Judah, both Samaria in the North and Jerusalem in the South, in Ezekiel 23:1.

Read Malachi 2:13-17 further describes God's feelings about faithless marriages and divorce.

Why does God portray His relationship with His people using covenant, marriage and sexual terms? What do Ezekiel and Malachi tell us about God's own pain and experience with a broken marriage? How does God's story bring comfort to those who have experienced a divorce because of an unfaithful spouse or just rejection?

Christ and His Church

The imagery of marriage and sexual immorality is applied in Revelation to the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira (Rev. 2), to "those who dwell on the earth" (Rev. 9:21), and to Babylon the Great (Rev. 14:8, 17:1-4, 18:1-9 and 19:1-2). The idea of sexual immorality (Greek: *porneia*) throughout the Biblical texts always means sexual acts outside of marriage. Revelation uses the word adultery in 2:22 for the church of Thyatira as well. Throughout ch. 17, the woman (God's people, typically) and the beast (like the sea-beast in ch. 13, like the apostate church-state power of Rom) have an illicit relationship. The Kings of the earth are also involved.

It is in this context that the New Testament people of God are also to be considered Christ's bride. Ephesians 5 is clear that husband-wife relationships in Christian homes are to exemplify Christ and His church.

Read Revelation 19:6-9. There are two suppers in Revelation 19: the first is the marriage supper of the Lamb, who is a symbol for Christ in Revelation; the second is the great supper of God where the wicked are pictured as being destroyed and fed as carrion to the birds of heaven.

Throughout Revelation, God's people reminded to have faith and trust in God's goodness and justice, even when they cannot always see evidence for it. How does Revelation 19-21 picture their relationship being "consummated"? How do the best earthly marriages give us a glimpse of what awaits us when Jesus returns?

Though controversial in some circles, it is important to also discuss sexuality and marriage. God made love-making a beautiful, bonding and life-creating experience. What can we learn about the unity God wants to have with us from sexual, emotional, physical, and mental unity between loving marriage partners? How much better could our unity with God be than the best marital intimacy?

Closing Comments

Marriage today is often seen in society as outdated, and fewer and fewer people are covenanting themselves to one another, and thus the very image of God is broken. God's people have a tremendous opportunity to restore the beauty of marriage, and to show how the 2nd coming of Jesus as a groom to get His beloved has been symbolized in the daily lives of married couples, and even portrayed in the endings of the best types of books and novels where the hero saves his bride-to-be from the clutches of the evil dragon, and they live happily ever after!

Opening Question

Do we ever see God working in obvious ways through the nations of the world or in secular governments?

Introduction

While every human is individually accountable to and beloved by God, we also see larger groups of people become the object of God's regard or judgement, nations through which He can work, show His power, or choose as His special possession; or nations that reap the results of God's wrath for their iniquity. The lesson this week explores the role that the Babylonians played in later prophetic literature, and how the call of and covenant blessings to Abraham finds fulfillment in Christ. For this study guide, we will consider more closely the relationship between Daniel and King Nebuchadnezzar as evidence of God's working in and through the nations, through the rise and fall of kingdoms.

Israel vs. Babylon

Read Daniel 1:1-3. The language is that of territorial warfare where regional gods spar. The unique aspect of this battle, however, is that the loser (Judah) writes about their defeat, yet ascribes it to their God's will. History is typically written by the victors, and thus few defeats are experienced by the historian's own people.

The backstory for these verses takes us back to the Deuteronomy 28-29, but more recently, the promise made by Isaiah to Hezekiah in Isaiah 39, "then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, 'Hear the word of the LORD of hosts, ⁶ 'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left,' says the LORD. ⁷ 'And *some* of your sons who will issue from you, whom you will beget, will be taken away, and they will become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon.'" ⁸ Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good." For he thought, "For there will be peace and truth in my days." (vs. 5-8).

The story of Jehoiakim (also known as Eliakim) and his failures is found in 2 Kings 22-23. We find that as goes the King of Israel, so goes the nation. Israel's desire for a human monarch was both a blow to God's heart as their King, and yet used to foreshadow the Messiah's kingly work. Ultimately, Israel is captured by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians.

How does the city of Babylon here in Daniel foreshadow Babylon the Great in Revelation 14-19? Why does God use Babylon for His purposes when they are a pagan nation? (see Jeremiah 25)

Nations and God's will

As Daniel spends more time in the pagan city and nation of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar is privileged to see more and more miracles and signs of Yahweh's power. We can track these stories in chs. 1-4.

1. He finds Daniel and his friends fitter and more intelligent than his other trainees.
2. He witnesses Yahweh give a dream, tell him the dream, and provide an interpretation of the future. Daniel's God is a "god of gods, and a Lord of kings."
3. Yahweh delivers his faithful servants from the furnace and the King's own decree. Nebuchadnezzar responds with a hate-speech law.
4. This chapter is a testimony by the king himself. Another dream, this time Nebuchadnezzar experiences a fall from his arrogance, and humbly recognizes the God of heaven as sovereign, accepting Him as his own God.

If we remember the story of Israel, as goes the king, so goes the nation. Without question, Nebuchadnezzar's conversion led to changes in Babylonian belief systems. His son-in-law Nabonidus may have worked to reverse some of these changes.

Did God put Israel in Babylon for a purpose greater than simply their own chastisement/punishment and reform/repentance? (see Daniel's prayer in ch. 9)

Revelation describes a two-fold call that Babylon has fallen (14:8 and 18:2), and in ch. 18, it goes even further calling God's people out of Babylon! What are they doing there? In Daniel, they were sent by God Himself. God's purpose went far beyond Israel's conversion; it included being a witness to the nations. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all (the nations) would come to repentance.

However, there was also a time to leave Babylon. God's people read the prophecies of Jeremiah 29, they were to live in Babylon in peace for a time, but after 70 years, they would return to the land of promise. This occurred under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. Revelation portrays a similar story where Babylon falls (see the 5th and 6th plagues in Rev. 16) because of the drying up of the Euphrates to prepare the way for the kings from the East. In Revelation, the fall of Babylon and exodus of God's people lead the way for the final kingdom of God and the reign of Christ in the promised land.

Have we been called to proclaim to modern-day "Babylon" the wonders of our God? Are we *in* Babylon today, or do we believe we are outside of it? Who are those called to "come out of her, my people"?

The visions of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2 and 4) and Daniel (chs. 7-12) reveal the rise and fall of sequential nations from Daniel's day until the end. God is working with His people and the nations simultaneously. Paul admits that God uses both Jews and Gentiles for His ultimate purpose, to save as many as possible.

Closing Comments

God loves people and works through the nations. Maybe an important question for us today is this: how do we live as citizens of heaven first, while also living as faithful citizens of our own nations? Can we be patriots of earthly kingdoms and heavenly witnesses simultaneously?

