

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

Second Quarter 2025: Allusions, Images, Symbols: How to Study Bible Prophecy

Lesson 13 *“Images of the End”*

Read for this week’s study

Matthew 12:38–42; Jonah 3:5–10; Revelation 18:4; Daniel 5:1–31; Revelation 16:12–19; 2 Chronicles 36:22, 23.

Memory Text

“So he said to them, ‘I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land’ ” (Jonah 1:9, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. The Reluctant Prophet
- III. A Work of Repentance
- IV. Belshazzar’s Feast
- V. The Drying of the Euphrates
- VI. Cyrus, the Anointed
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “This week will be our final look at accounts that help elucidate our understanding of last-day events. This time we will look at the mission of Jonah to Nineveh; the fall of Babylon; and the rise of Cyrus, the Persian king who liberated God’s people and enabled them to return to the land of promise.” (Sabbath Afternoon)
2. “We must remember one thing for all these stories that appear to foreshadow last-day events: we must be careful to look at broad themes and allusions and not try to parse every detail to the point of creating prophetic absurdities. [...] We should not milk every detail in hopes of finding some hidden truth. Instead, we should look for the principles; and from these we can discover elements relevant for the last days.” (Sabbath Afternoon) How do you know when your interpretation is “present truth” and when you are just “milking irrelevant details”?
3. Which parts of the story of Jonah does Jesus refer to as He addresses his contemporaries (Matthew 12:38–42)? (Sunday’s lesson) Why do you think Jonah was a reluctant prophet and unwilling to go to Nineveh (cf. Nahum 3:1.3.19)? What

- are the similarities and differences between Jonah’s preaching to Nineveh and our preaching to spiritual Babylon (Revelation 18:4)?
4. Monday’s lesson focuses on the repentance of the people of Nineveh (3:5-10). Can we expect something similar in the last days, with the final message to the fallen world?
 5. Jonah obviously did not preach his best sermon in Nineveh (only five words in Hebrew, eight in English). It is almost as though he was trying to ensure their destruction, as there was no effort on his part. Yet the king of Nineveh and the entire city, including their cows, all repented in sorrow and ashes. For the second time in the book, the “evil pagans” show themselves to be more responsive and humble than God’s own prophet. What is the “present truth” lesson for us living in the last days?
 6. Tuesday’s lesson discusses Belshazzar’s feast, and that ignoring the events from Nebuchadnezzar’s life brought about his downfall (Daniel 5:22). Belshazzar commits sacrilege by desecrating the ‘temple vessels’. What are the equivalents of the ‘temple vessels’ in our own time? Daniel denounces Belshazzar for praising gods who ‘do not see or hear or know.’ What are the equivalents of such gods in our own secular age?
 7. How does Revelation 16:12–19 use Daniel 5:18–31 as a type for the fall of eschatological Babylon? (Wednesday’s lesson) Both Belshazzar in the past, and the end-time world population, are not caught by surprise merely because of ignorance of what God has predicted. The surprise is because they have chosen to disbelieve what God has said would happen. How can we avoid that in our lives?
 8. Because Cyrus permitted the Jews to return to their land and rebuild the temple, God calls him “His anointed” (Isa. 45:1, NKJV). (Thursday’s lesson) If God could use an imperfect pagan king in such a marked manner to do His will that he calls him his Messiah, what does it teach us about God using you and me in these last days?
 9. In what sense was Jesus greater than Jonah and Solomon (Matthew 12:38-42)? Jonah claims that he knew that God was compassionate and would find a way to forgive the Ninevites. You can almost hear the disgust in Jonah’s voice before he cuts off the conversation and prays that God would just kill him on the spot (Jonah 4:2-3). He would rather die than live with a God who forgives his enemies.
 10. When God speaks the final words of the book, he asks Jonah if humans are not more valuable than a plant. If God feels the same emotional intensity and concern for the city of Nineveh, full of thousands of people who have lost their way, is there anything wrong about it? The book ends with God asking Jonah for permission to show mercy to his enemies and their cows. But we do not know Jonah’s response.
 11. The purpose of the book of Jonah is to hold up a mirror to its readers. In Jonah, we see the worst parts of ourselves, which should generate humility and gratitude that God does love his enemies and puts up with the “Jonah” in all of us. Every time we

speaking about the prophecies, or judgment, it must be a message of good news about the wideness of God's love, which challenges us to the core.

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Maybe more seriously, sometimes God's incredible graciousness has even been an embarrassment to some of His people. Do you remember when the prophet Jonah was asked by God to go and give a serious message of warning to Nineveh? At first he ran away. Later, under considerable pressure, he went and delivered his message, hardly a "missionary volunteer." Think of the pressure the Lord had to put on Jonah to get him to go up there to Nineveh and deliver a very serious message, and to a very dangerous people, to be sure. Jonah walked the streets and said, "Forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed."

Then he went out and sat down on a hillside nearby to watch the city come to its end. But it didn't. The people of Nineveh repented, and the city was not destroyed. And Jonah complained angrily to God. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #19, "How Soon Will the Conflict Be Over?" recorded June 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:*

<http://pkp.cc/19MMCAG>

Have you seen, very recently, those dates put up, or is it an embarrassment to us? Are we embarrassed that God would wait so long? Or are we proud of Him for doing so? Is He not this kind of a God? Are we more concerned about our reputation than we are about His? You see, the longer He waits, the better He looks. Now, we may not, especially if we have contributed to the delay. But so what if we are humbled by this thing! So, what's wrong with that? Nobody's saved by having faith in us. It's God who is to be trusted. If only we could make the shift—the good news is not about us. The good news is about God. And Paul says, "I'm very proud of that good news."

Now, true, indirectly we ought to be some good news, but ultimately we are all sinners, and we continue to come short. The good news is about God. And one of the best parts of the good news about Him is that He is not willing that any should perish. But He waits, and this kindness of God is meant to lead us to repentance, not to shame. So we ought to put the signs up, because if we put the signs and the dates up, who'd look good? We wouldn't, but He would. Are we willing to be embarrassed, that He might look good, or are we ashamed of this thing? Some are even wondering if maybe we've been looking at the wrong signs. Are we trying to save our own reputation? I think that's the impressive thing here. Jonah was more concerned about his own reputation than about God's. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series,

The Picture of God in All 66 – Obediah, Jonah, & Micah, recorded March 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

*Audio links to the West Covina series recorded in 1984:

<http://pkp.cc/45MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/46MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

But now, when we speak of freedom, look at Daniel 10. What about this trying to force Cyrus to let the people go? That doesn't sound like freedom, does it? What did you do with that passage? In 10:13, 14, does that sound like freedom? In 13:

“The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days [says Gabriel. “I’ve been trying to persuade Cyrus for twenty-one days to let the people go, and he won’t let them go.”], but Michael [and you know the evidence that Michael is Christ. Michael], one of the chief princes, came to help me, so I left him there with the prince of the kingdom of Persia, and came to make you understand what is to befall your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come.” [And having explained this, in verse 20 he says,] “Do you know why I have come to you? But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I am through with him, lo, the prince of Greece will come.”

Why, what kind of a man was Cyrus that he could resist Gabriel, the first of the angels, and he could almost resist the Son of God; but between the two of them, they twisted his arm enough so that finally he let the people go. That Cyrus was some man! Does this suggest that when the time has come, God will force us to fulfill His predictions? Well, was not Cyrus described earlier as the one who would let the people go? How do you understand that passage? If you take it literally to suggest that God will force people to do His will, He will force people to fulfill His prophecies when the time comes, then you have the interesting question of how little Cyrus could resist Gabriel, with all the power of the universe, as far as force is concerned, for God had authorized his coming. And Gabriel says, “Help: I cannot twist this man’s arm enough!” And God Himself, the Son of God, Michael, comes and helps Gabriel. What a man!

Why, this doesn't make any sense at all. There must be somebody else in there who has great persuasiveness and power. And guess who that would be. Would you understand this to mean that Satan, who all along had wanted to put God in a bad light, one of the best things he could do is to thwart God's purposes. And when, say, the seventy years are up, to try to block the fulfillment. Because if Israel had not gone home at the end of the seventy years, Satan could say, “Look! I told you so. He couldn't pull it off, could He?” That's what the heathen had been thinking—He couldn't protect His people, and now He can't get them home at the end of the seventy years. Who do you suppose was dedicated to keeping the people from going home?

Now, we know the great Controversy involves these powerful figures. Lucifer, the first of all the angels, is seeking to persuade Cyrus to vote no. And Satan *will* use force and deception. All these evil methods he will use. God will only use persuasion. Is it rather here that the forces of heaven were required to protect Cyrus from the forceful deception and power of the adversary, so that Cyrus would remain free, in the highest sense of freedom, to cast his own vote; yes, they may go home. How do you understand that passage? It's rather significant, I think, as we understand how God persuades. It looks like force, doesn't it? But if you take it literally, it makes quite some person out of Cyrus.

It would seem here that we have another occasion, when God is about to make His next move, and Satan is moving to oppose God. And once again Christ and Satan meet, in the Great Controversy. It's time for the people to go home, for the next event in the life of God's people. And as Satan tried to block their leaving Egypt, tried to block the birth of the Messiah by killing the boys in Egypt and by killing the boys in Bethlehem, and the death decree in the days of Esther. He has been doing this kind of thing. Now he's trying to block their going home. And even the Son of God, who is his primary opponent, comes down to protect Cyrus from the adversary, who uses all his power to overwhelm him, and leave Cyrus free to decide. Or, what do you think about that? How do you understand that? Anybody who's worked on this through the years? I think it's a passage one needs to reckon with. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in All 66 – Daniel, recorded February 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

*Audio links to the West Covina series recorded in 1984:

<http://pkp.cc/39MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/40MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Further Study with Ellen White

All who consecrate soul, body, and spirit to God will be constantly receiving a new endowment of physical and mental power. The inexhaustible supplies of heaven are at their command. Christ gives them the breath of His own spirit, the life of His own life. The Holy Spirit puts forth its highest energies to work in heart and mind. The grace of God enlarges and multiplies their faculties, and every perfection of the divine nature comes to their assistance in the work of saving souls. Through co-operation with Christ they are complete in Him, and in their human weakness they are enabled to do the deeds of Omnipotence. {DA 827.3}

The Lord Jesus is our efficiency in all things; His Spirit is to be our inspiration; and as we place ourselves in His hands to be channels of light, our means of doing good will never be exhausted, for the resources of the power of Jesus Christ are to be at our command. We may draw upon His fullness and receive of that grace which has no limit. The Captain of our salvation at every

step would teach us that almighty power is at the demand of living faith. He says, “Without me ye can do nothing;” but again declares that “greater works than these shall ye do; because I go unto my Father.” {HP 319.4}

It is a wonderful thought that human beings can speak the Word of God, in simple words of comfort and encouragement. The humblest instruments will be used of God to sow the seeds of truth, which may spring up and bear fruit, because the one in whose heart they were sown needed help—a kind thought, a kind word, made effective by the One who has said, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”—Letter 329a, Nov. 16, 1905, to her 19-year-old granddaughter Mabel. {TDG 329.6}

The Holy Spirit will not compel men to take a certain course of action. We are free moral agents; and when sufficient evidence has been given us as to our duty it is left with us to decide our course. {RH, July 17, 1888 par. 4}

Jesus employed no miraculous agency to compel men to believe in him. They were left to choose or reject him, of their own free will. No direct power was to force them into obedience, and destroy the free moral agency that God has given to man. {4Red 86.3}

The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all created beings depended upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love—homage that springs from an intelligent appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced allegiance, and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service. {GC 493.2}

Our will is not to be forced into co-operation with divine agencies, but it must be voluntarily submitted. Were it possible to force upon you with a hundredfold greater intensity the influence of the Spirit of God, it would not make you a Christian, a fit subject for heaven. {MB 142.1}

It is not the plan of God to compel men to yield their wicked unbelief. Before them are light and darkness, truth and error. It is for them to decide which to accept. The human mind is endowed with power to discriminate between right and wrong. God designs that men shall not decide from impulse, but from weight of evidence, carefully comparing scripture with scripture (*Redemption: or the Miracles of Christ*, pp. 112, 113). {1BC 1120.5}

Determined to efface the image of God in man, Satan works with an intensity of effort to hide God from view. Not openly does he work, but secretly, mingling the human and the divine, the spurious and the genuine, so seeking to bring confusion and distress. But in proportionate power divine mercy is revealed to counteract this wicked working, and bring to light the enemy’s hidden purposes. {TDG 308.5}

These things were not written merely that we might read and wonder, but that the same faith which wrought in God's servants of old might work in us. In no less marked a manner than He wrought then will He work now wherever there are hearts of faith to be channels of His power. {CG 43.1}

Those upon whose actions hang the destinies of nations, are watched over with a vigilance that knows no relaxation by Him who "giveth salvation unto kings," to whom belong "the shields of the earth" (RH March 28, 1907). {4BC 1170.3}