

# Rome *and* Antiochus



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Isa. 55:11; Matt. 13:10-13; Luke 2:1; Luke 21:20, 21; John 11:48; John 16:12; 2 Pet. 1:19.*

**Memory Text:** “And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed” (*Luke 2:1*).

The subject of the sanctuary was the key that unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844. It opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God's hand had directed the great advent movement and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of His people. As the disciples of Jesus after the terrible night of their anguish and disappointment were ‘glad when they saw the Lord,’ so did those now rejoice who had looked in faith for His second coming.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 423.

Indeed, the 1844 pre-Advent judgment is a crucial doctrine of the Adventist Church; not only does it explain the disappointment of 1844, it helps us understand who we are today and why we exist as a movement. With so much at stake, our enemy is constantly at work to undermine us, and if he can undo our belief in 1844, he will greatly succeed. Thus, it is important that we as Adventists be firmly rooted in this teaching, as well as be prepared to answer challenges against it.

This week we'll continue to look at more Bible texts that will help solidify us in our understanding of this key teaching, which, when properly understood, reveals to us in grander light the wonderful saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in view of what He has done for us at the Cross and is doing for us now in heaven.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 2.*

## Rome in the New Testament

So far, we've been dealing with a span of empires, beginning with Babylon and ending with God's kingdom. We noticed that of the five kingdoms revealed, four were named. The only one not named was Rome, both in its pagan and papal stages, even though in most of the prophecies more time was spent describing Rome than any other kingdom.

Though Rome itself might not have been mentioned by name in the Old Testament, its existence and power dominated the New. The Gospels, the book of Acts, and the Epistles all unfold in a Roman environment. Daniel mentions by name Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and God's final kingdom, while the New Testament openly names Rome, the power that arises after Greece and dominates the world during the time of Christ and afterward.

**Look up these texts** (*Matt. 22:17, Luke 2:1, Luke 3:1, John 11:48, Acts 25:21*). **Which empire is clearly depicted as the dominant power?**

Notice in Luke 2:1 that "all the world" should be taxed. Only a world power could tax all the world. How interesting, too, that Daniel 7:23 says that the fourth beast will "devour the whole earth"; that is, the fourth beast is obviously a world empire, such as Rome.

**Read Matthew 24:15 and Luke 21:20, 21. What event is Jesus talking about here?**

In the context of the destruction of Jerusalem, *by the Romans*, Jesus linked the Roman Empire to the book of Daniel. Jesus, therefore, not only points to Rome but places it within Daniel itself. Phrasing linked to "the abomination of desolation" spoken of by Jesus, in reference to Daniel, occurs three times in Daniel (*Dan. 9:27, 11:31, 12:11*). Thus, Jesus links the Roman Empire to Daniel, making it even more obvious that Rome is that great power that arises in Daniel 2, 7, and 8, after Greece and extends to "the end."

Though Daniel doesn't name Rome, the New Testament does. Thus, following the Protestant formula of the Bible being its own interpreter, we find all four empires depicted in Daniel named in the Bible.

**Look at how clear and unambiguous these prophecies are. How could the Lord have made it any easier for us to believe? And yet, we so often struggle with faith. Why is that so, and what things can you do on a daily basis to help keep away doubt?**

**Key Text:** *Luke 2:1*

### Teachers Aims:

1. To examine what the New Testament teaches us about Rome as a political empire.
2. To consider 1844 in the light of the wonderful saving grace of Jesus Christ, His dying for us on the cross, and His intercession now for us in heaven.

### Lesson Outline:

#### I. The Revelation of Rome (*Luke 2:1*)

- A. The power of the worldly empire described in Luke 2:1 is the same one depicted in Daniel 7:23, implying that Daniel actually referred to Rome.
- B. Jesus Himself refers to Rome in the New Testament, linking it to the book of Daniel.

#### II. The Little Horn (*Daniel 7 and 8*)

- A. The Lord wants us to know exactly what the little horn represents.
- B. The little horn obviously symbolizes an important power in the prophetic history of the world.
- C. Daniel's prophecy does not mention Rome by name. God does not reveal all truth to all people at once. God gives us light in a progressive manner; as our understanding increases, God unfolds more and more truth, according to His perfect timetable.

**Summary:** In understanding prophecy, the Bible is its own interpreter. Thus, we find all four empires named in the Bible.

## COMMENTARY

The prophecies in Daniel 2, 7, and 8 sketch history from Daniel's time to the end time when God will establish His eternal kingdom. The kingdoms shown in each of these prophecies are Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and God's kingdom. But one is not named: Rome, both pagan and papal, the empire that follows Greece and precedes God's kingdom. Pagan Rome succeeds Greece and rules from western Europe to Asia Minor to most of North Africa. Papal Rome involves those prophecies pertaining to the persecution of the saints and the change of the Sabbath.

This particular interpretation is not unique to Seventh-day Adventists. Scholars from the beginning of the Christian church through the Protestant Reformation have advocated this position. But some have provided alternative interpretations to oppose applying the prophecies to papal Rome. One such view still is prominent among Protestant scholars. It suggests that the little-horn power

## The Two Little Horns

In both Daniel 7 and Daniel 8, a little-horn power figures prominently. A comparison of their characteristics not only shows that they are the same power but helps fortify our position on just what that power is. A lot of information is given about these little horns, more details about them than any of the other major kingdoms depicted. This should tell us two things: (1) These little horns obviously symbolize an important power in the prophetic history of the world, and (2) the Lord wants us to know for sure just what power these represent.

**Below** we will look at similarities between the two little horns. As you study these characteristics and similarities, think about how these characteristics help affirm us in our interpretation of this power:

1. Both are depicted by the same symbol, a horn (*Dan. 7:8, 20; 8:9*).
2. Both are persecuting powers (*Dan. 7:21, 25; 8:10, 24*).
3. Both are self-exalting and blasphemous (*Dan. 7:8, 20, 25; 8:10, 11, 25*).
4. Both target God's people (*Dan. 7:25, 8:24*).
5. Both have aspects of their activity delineated by prophetic time (*Dan. 7:25; 8:13, 14*).
6. Both extend until the time of the end (*Dan. 7:25, 26; 8:17, 19*).
7. Both will be supernaturally destroyed (*Dan. 7:11, 26; 8:25*).

When you have two powers represented by the same prophetic symbol and who carry out the same basic actions in the same time slot in the flow of visions, it seems more than obvious that we are talking about the same power. Also, considering the descriptions of this power, the burden of proof lies heavily on those who interpret this power as anything other than Rome.

**What Bible prophecies have been especially helpful in establishing your faith? Why not review them again? The more you go through them, the more they will encourage you. Why not share them with someone who might need some encouragement now?**

refers to Antiochus Epiphanes, a Syrian king who ruled from 175–164 B.C. Why do Adventists reject Antiochus Epiphanes as the little horn? Do the little horns of Daniel 7 and 8 represent the same power?

### **I. The Little Horns of Daniel 7 and 8**

Daniel says more about these little horns than he says about any other power, indicating the significance this prophecy attaches to the power they symbolize in both secular history and the history of the great controversy. In Daniel 7, the little horn comes out of the ten horns of the fourth. The third beast is Greece, so the fourth beast must be a kingdom that came after Greece. History indicates that the fourth great empire following Greece is Rome. The ten horns symbolize the ten divisions into which Rome fell in A.D. 476. Out of these ten horns, one little horn arose whose power and work lasted until God's everlasting kingdom was set up. From the description of its work (*Dan. 7:21-27*), it is clear that it represents a religious power with political authority—the continuation of Rome from its pagan to its papal phase. The little horn of Daniel 8 succeeds the goat, which is described as Greece. This horn also is pictured as a great religious power (*8:19-26*). A comparison of Daniel 7 and 8 reveals that both powers are described as a little horn (*7:8, 20; 8:9*); both are persecuting powers (*7:21, 25; 8:10, 24*); both are religious and blasphemous powers (*7:20, 25; 8:10, 11*); both attack God's people (*7:25, 8:24*); both extend their work until the end time (*7:25, 26; 8:17, 19*); and both will be destroyed by God (*7:11, 26; 8:25*). Thus, we see that the two horns represent the same power, Rome. Daniel 7 deals primarily with papal Rome, while Daniel 8 points to the work of both pagan and papal Rome.

### **II. Why Antiochus Epiphanes Cannot Be the Little Horn**

The Adventist position that Antiochus Epiphanes cannot be the little horn is solid. (1) Antiochus did come out of the Seleucid division of Alexander's empire. He ruled over Syria from 175–163 B.C. But such a short reign cannot come anywhere near the description of the little horn whose power and influence extend to the end of time (*8:17, 19*). (2) In 168 B.C., Antiochus invaded Palestine, massacred thousands of Jews, and attempted to change their culture and religion by desecrating the Jerusalem temple with sacrifices of unclean animals. This resulted in the Maccabean revolt and the rededication of the temple in 164 B.C. The temple itself never was fully destroyed, and the sanctuary system was not abolished for 2,300 years (*8:14*). So, Antiochus cannot be the little horn. (3) The little horn became a great power, standing up against the Prince of princes (*8:25*) and cutting off the Anointed One (*9:26*). Antiochus never became a great power and was not around when the Messiah

## The Rome Factor

However obvious the identification of that final earthly power, the question arises, Why wasn't it named? How much easier it would be and how much futile and false speculation would have been saved had it simply been named as were Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and God's final kingdom. As mentioned earlier (see lesson 3), some claim that Rome wasn't named because Daniel simply recounted history that already happened as opposed to predicting it before it unfolded. In other words, the accounts of the lions' den, the fiery furnace, and the dreams and visions were fables. As we've already seen, that's a false and bankrupt idea.

**Read the following texts** (*Dan. 12:4, 9; Matt. 13:10-13; Luke 10:24; John 16:12; 2 Pet. 1:19*). **What idea is conveyed here about the timing in which the Lord reveals certain truths to His people?**

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As the above texts show, God doesn't reveal all truth to all people at once. Light is often given in a progressive manner; more and more truth unfolds in accordance with God's perfect timetable.

Maybe, then, Rome isn't directly named not because Daniel wasn't able to tell the future but because the Lord knew that Rome would be in sole control of the Scriptures for centuries and that had the leaders in Rome seen the empire distinctly named, *particularly in such a bad light*, they could have destroyed the Scriptures or the book of Daniel. As it was, not sure what it was talking about, they could give the text identities other than itself. Meanwhile, the Lord kept that identity hidden, knowing that He would at the right time raise up people, the Protestant Reformers, who would discover the true identity of the little-horn power. (Daniel does say that his words would be "closed up and sealed till the time of the end" [*Dan. 12:9*].) Many of the Reformers did, indeed, see Rome in that role!

In fact, Jews who lived during the time of the Roman Empire would often interpret these same prophecies like this: Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and—Edom. Why Edom? Because, afraid of the Romans, the Jews hid the interpretation, something that the Lord in His divine providence and foresight did hundreds of years earlier in Daniel itself.

**What lessons can we learn here about how we need to deal delicately with people? In our zeal to be honest, how can we also be prudent and not say things, though perhaps true, that others might not yet be ready to hear?**

came. (4) In 167 B.C., Antiochus invaded Egypt, but when he reached Alexandria, the Roman legate ordered him out. Such a humiliated king cannot represent the mighty, growing, religiopolitical power of the little horn.

### III. Why This Hesitation on Rome?

While most scholars agree in the interpretation of the various

## Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** *Isaiah 55:11; Matthew 13:10-13; Luke 2:1; 21:20, 21; 2 Peter 1:19*

❶ While there are many questions about the Bible that we do not have answers for, there are many places where the Bible intersects with secular history. Scan through the book of Daniel and see how many times the events of the book are anchored to a historical event. How does knowing that there really was a Nebuchadnezzar and a Belshazzar make it easier to believe in Daniel and his prophecies?

❷ Some of our critics say that the Adventist interpretation of the 2,300-day prophecy is an attempt to cover up William Miller's mistaken belief that Jesus would return in 1844. How would you explain that the mistake was in the what, not in the when, of that prophecy? How would your understanding of the 2,300-day prophecy—particularly the 70-week prophecy—figure into your explanation?

❸ Devout believers always have experienced persecution on some level by the enemies of truth. How does that fact explain the use of symbols and mysterious numbers in many significant Bible prophecies?

❹ As we have seen in previous lessons, the great themes of Daniel recur in different ways throughout the book. Read Daniel 7:8, 11; 8:9-12. What common themes help identify the historic power represented by the little horn? In what ways does this power differ from other violent and ruthless world leaders?

❺ Some interpreters, in order to bend Daniel's prophecies to suit their interpretations, make some of the time prophecies of Daniel 8 and 9 symbolic and some of them literal. Why is this not a good idea? What principle of prophetic interpretation is violated as a result?

## The Date of Daniel

“In the third year of the reign of king Belshazzar a vision appeared unto me, even unto me Daniel, after that which appeared unto me at the first” (*Dan. 8:1*).

**According** to the above text, at what time in history did the prophet Daniel live?

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As we’ve seen, the prophecies in Daniel provide powerful evidence not only for the existence of God but for the validity of the Scriptures as God’s Word. Thus, from the earliest days of the Christian church, opponents have sought to undermine, even destroy, confidence in the Scriptures, especially the prophecies. As we said earlier, one attempt was to claim that Daniel was not written in the time frame in which it places itself but many centuries later, a position we as Seventh-day Adventists emphatically reject. Unfortunately, we are among a small number of Christians who do so.

**Read** the following texts: **Daniel 1:1, 2:1, 7:1, 8:1, 9:1**. In what time frame does the book of Daniel date itself? What conclusion can one draw about the position of those who, despite this clear testimony, nevertheless insist that the book of Daniel was written many centuries later? See also *Isa. 55:11, Mark 15:28, John 17:17, Acts 1:16*.

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Directly tied with this attempt to date the book of Daniel centuries after it dates itself is the attempt to link the identity of the little horn in Daniel 8 with an ancient Greek ruler named Antiochus Epiphanes. Most students today accept this interpretation; almost any modern commentary will use that interpretation. As we’ll see, it cannot possibly be correct. Many who accept this interpretation do so not realizing the rationale behind it, which is that Daniel was not written when it says it was but much later. Either way, because this view is prevalent, we need to look at it.

**What are other ways in which our faith in the Scriptures can be undermined, either overtly or subtly? More important, what steps can you take to defend yourself against anything that can, bit by bit, weaken your trust in the veracity and inspiration of the Bible?**



prophecies of Daniel pertaining to Babylon, Media-Persia, and Greece, there has not been agreement on the fourth kingdom as Rome and the little horn as Rome in its pagan and papal phases. Why? The first three kingdoms, although not particularly friendly to the biblical theme of history, occasionally showed their interest in God's people. Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged God (*Dan. 4:34-37*), and Cyrus, the Medo-Persian emperor, reversed the Babylonian captivity. Alexander the Great of Greece was responsible for the translation of the Old Testament in Greek. But Rome had great political and religious aims. Under its political authority, it did everything it could to destroy the Christian church. As a religious power, it established its world dominance, undermined the authority of Scripture, changed the Sabbath, and usurped the priesthood, which is the sole prerogative of the risen Lord. Having done all this, would it not be convenient if people believed this fourth kingdom to be anything else but Rome? And would it not be useful if Daniel's

## Witnessing

Grigori Aleksandrovich Potemkin was romantically linked to Catherine the Great, an empress of Imperial Russia, and helped her seize power. When she toured the Ukraine and the Crimea, he constructed elaborate and impressive façades that made Catherine think her subjects were well off when, in fact, they lived in desperate straits. Today, a Potemkin village is English shorthand for something that looks impressive but actually hides a dismal reality.

Many Bible commentaries and study notes contain their own “Potemkin village” when it comes to Daniel 8. They claim that the “little horn” referred to here is Antiochus Epiphanes, a successor to part of Alexander the Great's empire who defiled the Jewish temple during his reign.

It's a nice-looking picture, but it doesn't hold up to scrutiny. If you are to take a “dispensational” view of prophecy, however, you must hold on to Antiochus like a drowning person grasps a life preserver.

The truth, however, may be a little less pretty, but it's more, well, true: Rome, a political and, ultimately, a religious power, is the little horn that moves against believers. The pieces fit with greater symmetry than the Antiochus argument.

The logic and “connect-the-dots” nature of prophecy, when properly understood, is a powerful witnessing tool. Unlike various doctrines, it can't be subjectively argued: Either prophecy works or it doesn't. That makes it a great way to penetrate even the hardest heart or the greatest skeptic.

## Antiochus

**Read** Daniel 8:5-8, the vision of the he-goat, and then Daniel 8:21, 22, Gabriel’s interpretation of the he-goat. According to the prophecy, what was the fate of the he-goat?

History bears testimony to the amazing accuracy of this prophecy. The he-goat, of course, was ancient Greece, and after the death of Alexander the Great, the empire split apart, for a time, into “four kingdoms” (*Dan.* 8:22) under four generals. One of the kingdoms was the Seleucid, which lasted from about 301 B.C. until about 146 B.C. Among these kings, one was named Antiochus Epiphanes. He was the eighth Seleucid king (175–164 B.C.); twenty more followed after him. Through the conquests of his predecessors, he, for a short while attained control of Judea, defiled the temple in Jerusalem for about three years, and persecuted the Jews. He died, apparently from natural causes, in a later campaign (164 B.C.) after being driven out of Jerusalem. He is the one who most interpreters believe is the little horn.

**1. The Medo-Persian ram became “great” (vs. 4); the Grecian goat “very great” (vs. 8); the little horn became “exceeding great” (vs. 9). How does this description and comparison of empires automatically disqualify Antiochus as the little horn?**

**2. According to Daniel 8:17, 19, 26, the prophecy dealt with end-time things, and the little horn was the last power presented in the vision. Because he died in 164 B.C., why can Antiochus not be the little horn?**

**3. According to Daniel 8:25, the little horn would be “broken without hand,” a phrase we saw earlier that—through parallelism with Daniel 2:34, 45—depicted a supernatural, cataclysmic destruction. Why, given what’s written above about his demise, does Antiochus not fit again?**

**Despite the evidence (and there’s more) against Antiochus, Adventists are almost alone in the Christian world in our position opposed to that interpretation. What does this tell us about our need to stand firm in our beliefs, despite a majority of voices against our position? In what other ways do you have to stand firm for a position that is not popular?**

authority could altogether be minimized by undermining the book's authorship and the date as critical scholars have attempted to do?

## Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** The Bible addresses a broad range of topics. From history and prophecy to parables and lifestyle, God shares with us divine wisdom and truth. Some prophecies are easier to accept and apply than others. The prophecy of the little horn is one of the more difficult ones to accept, for social reasons—despite the overwhelming preponderance of evidence giving it a positive identification. It is not as easy to accept the little horn portrayed in Daniel as a specific church organization, because it is deemed socially unacceptable to stigmatize any group, even if we are dealing only with an organization and the individuals in it. Truth, though, has never been popular; for those who love God and who love truth, we must follow it no matter where it leads us.

### Thought Questions:

❶ Philosophers have sometimes said that human beings, at their core, want to be God. It's the idea that humans want to be their own bosses, their own rulers, and make their own rules. One of the activities of the little horn is that it thinks to change times and laws. We know, historically, what this was all about. How did this action reflect the idea of making our own rules and being our own God?

❷ Tuesday's lesson says: "God doesn't reveal all truth to all people at once. Light is often given in a progressive manner; more and more truth unfolds in accordance with God's perfect timetable." How does knowing and understanding God's truth help in times of confusion and discouragement?

### Application Question:

As Bible-believing Christians, we need to be faithful to what we understand as Bible truth. We must remember, too, that Bible truth includes loving all people, even our "enemies." With this thought in mind, how are we to teach people the important truths regarding the activity of the little-horn power yet do it in a kind and loving manner?

**Further Study:** Another attempt to make the impossible fit of Antiochus centers around the argument concerning the origin of the little horn in Daniel 8:8, 9. “Therefore the he goat waxed very great: and when he was strong, the great horn was broken; and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven. And out of one of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land.” Arguing for Antiochus, some say that the little horn arose from one of the “four notable ones,” meaning the nations that arose after the death of Alexander the Great. That would be, they claim, Antiochus, not Rome.

The argument falls apart on a few grounds. First, the word *them* in the last phrase of verse 8 refers not to “four notable ones” but “four winds of heaven.” Immediately after, the text says that out of “one of them” came forth a little horn. One of what? The closest phrase is “the four winds of heaven,” the obvious choice. (Some argue that horns grow out of horns, not winds, though when was the last time anyone ever saw a horn grow out of another horn?)

Second, Hebrew grammar, with feminine and masculine nouns, works very well linking the “one of them” with the “four winds of heaven”; it doesn’t work at all linking it with the “notable ones.”

Finally, even if that argument about origins had some validity, the other factors would show the impossibility of the Antiochus interpretation.

### Discussion Questions:

❶ Why are these issues so important? What difference does it make? As a class, discuss this point: If, for instance, the little-horn power were Antiochus, then the whole prophecy of Daniel 8 would have been fulfilled and completed about one hundred fifty years before Christ. If so, what would that mean for us, as Seventh-day Adventists? Why do you think that the vast majority of the Christian world today holds to such an erroneous view of the little horn?

❷ Discuss as a class the issue of what it means to hold doctrines that most other Christians don’t accept. Should this bother us? Discuss your answers.