

SHARING SCRIPTURE

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From the Stormy Sea to the Clouds of Heaven

For use: Feb 16. - Feb. 22

Texts: Daniel 7; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; Romans 8:1; Mark 13:26; Luke 9:26; Luke 12:8; 1 Timothy 2:5

Ricky Davis walked free for the first time in 15 years last week, thanks to the work of the Northern California Innocence Project. DNA evidence simultaneously exonerated Davis and implicated Michael Green, who is now in police custody. Davis had been imprisoned in 2005 for the murder of newspaper columnist Jane Hylton.

Connie Dahl, who was Davis' girlfriend at the time of the murder, gave evidence implicating Davis under what some have called "aggressive interrogation techniques." Davis wrote to the Innocence Project, who took up his case in 2010. They discovered previously unknown DNA on Hylton's nightgown which eventually led to Davis' release. Innocence Project attorney Melissa O'Connell says, "Ricky never gave up hope that the truth would come out and he would be proven innocent." [1] And now, he's free.

The ultimate message of Daniel 7 is a prophecy about setting God's people free. The book of Daniel now shifts from the collection of inspiring stories in chapters one through six, to the prophecies that are the foundation of our Seventh-day Adventist movement. This chapter covers the grand procession of ruling powers who dominate the world from Daniel's day to the moment when God's people are released from Satan's captivity.

Governments generally provide security and stability to their constituents, but, being made up of people, they often display the darker aspects of human nature through persecution. The lion, Babylon, created the beautiful hanging gardens—one of the seven wonders of the world—and yet Nebuchadnezzar willingly threw three of his faithful servants into a fiery furnace. The Medes and Persians, the bear, established a strong rule of law, and then

violated the principle of that law to throw Daniel into the lion's den. The Greeks, the leopard, exported their culture and civilization across the world via the brutal regime of Alexander the Great. Pagan Rome, the terrifying beast, brought Pax Romana (Roman Peace) to the world, and then crucified the Prince of Peace. Papal Rome, the other leg of iron, spread a form of Christianity through the world while violently crushing the adherents to any teaching which the Church deemed as heresy.

By the end of chapter seven, however, we find the remedy for this era of oppression—"the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High" (verse 22). Jesus proclaims us free from the imprisonment of sin. Though we can still see the dark faults of human rulers in this present age, the day is coming when Jesus will release us from their control and give us the reigns of power. Once the final oppressor is destroyed, we will receive sovereignty and power to rule with the Most High.

~Chuck Burkeen

[1] <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-02-13/a-man-was-found-innocent-after-15-years-in-custody-and-a-new-suspect-was-identified-in-the-decades-old-crime>

For Reflection

Connecting: Imagine you are going to traffic court where you expect to receive a maximum penalty, but the judge instead declares, "all charges are dropped. You are free to go." How would you celebrate this declaration?

Sharing: If God granted the authority described in Daniel 7:27 to Christians living today, how do you think we would exercise that power?

1. As Christians, we would rule with Christ-like humility and wisdom
2. We would probably become the fifth beast—another persecuting power
3. That's a scary thought, and a good reminder that we need a strong wall of separation between church and state
4. Since the prophetic animal symbol for our rule would probably be a dove or a fish, nobody would give us any respect
5. It might work if we personally seek Christ-like humility and wisdom in whatever role we fill as rulers
6. Other:

Applying: Are you aware of a situation where someone is being wrongfully accused or punished? What can you as a group reasonably do to help alleviate the situation?

Valuing: Personally consider if there is someone who wronged you and you have yet to forgive them. Is there any compelling reason why you feel you cannot grant mercy or forgiveness? Pray for God's wisdom in dealing with this situation.

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