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Introduction

DANIEL, ARISTOTLE, AND THE END

About four hundred years before Jesus, a famous Greek thinker named Aristotle wrote about “the end.” He meant the final purpose of things. He argued that “all things aim” toward a good end. Aristotle pointed out, “The end of medicine is health. The end of shipbuilding is a boat. The end of planning is victory. The end of business is wealth.” Aristotle said that the final purpose or end, of humanity¹ is “happiness.” We look for happiness “always for itself and never for the sake of something else.”

Happiness can be a good end. But happiness does not answer the important questions about the end and purpose of life. This is especially true when life always ends in the grave.

The prophet Daniel, who lived a few hundred years before Aristotle, wrote about “the end” from a very different point of view. For Daniel, the end did not begin with humans. For Daniel, the end was something started by an all-knowing, all-powerful God. God promised that “the end” (meaning the end of this world) was the beginning of a new world. Aristotle believed the end began with humanity. But Daniel and all the other Bible writers believed the end is something that is beyond humanity’s ability. Instead, the end is the responsibility of God, who created humanity.

How thankful we should be that God is responsible for our end. If we were responsible for our end, it would not be worth it for us to try to reach that end. Why bother spending all the energy and pain of leading a hard life if we all just die? But Daniel shows that “the end” is really a new beginning.

One of the great purposes of the Bible is to show us what our end is and how we can reach that end. This quarter we will study the book of Daniel, which helps us reach the end. In the book of Daniel, there are wonderful prophecies. These prophecies help establish a strong foundation (basis) for our faith in God. Through the work of Jesus, God has promised us our end. Our end is eternal² life in a new creation (Isaiah 66:22).

In Daniel, there are stories showing God’s actions in the lives of people. There are also great prophecies showing God’s power and control over the world. The book of Daniel shows God’s presence in our world and helps prove that He is real and active.

The book of Daniel belongs to what is called “apocalyptic” literature. “Apocalyptic” comes from the Greek word *apokalypsis*, meaning “an unveiling” or “a showing.” The apocalyptic prophecies in Daniel and Revelation show important parts of human history through visions, dreams, and symbols. These prophecies also show us the end of all things as they are in this world.

¹humanity—all the people of the world.

²eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

Throughout Christian history, the stories and prophecies of Daniel have inspired poets, artists, and great thinkers. The stories and prophecies of Daniel have given comfort and hope to people who are tired of this life. At the same time, Daniel's stories and prophecies have challenged the minds of historians and theologians.³ The book of Daniel shows that our world is not an iceberg floating toward some unknown end. The book of Daniel also shows that God always is working to bring all things to a wonderful and glorious end.

“As we come to the close of this world's history, Daniel's prophecies require our special attention. Daniel's prophecies speak about the very (actual) time in which we are living.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 547.

Jesus Himself points us to Daniel. He said, “The prophet Daniel spoke about ‘the hated thing that destroys’ [Daniel 9:27; Daniel 11:31; Daniel 12:11]. Someday you will see it [the hated thing] standing in the holy place [the temple]. The reader should understand this” (Matthew 24:15, NIV; also read Mark 13:14).

We know that the book of Daniel is very important. For this reason, we should not be surprised that the enemy (Satan) would hate this book. He has done much to weaken the book's influence. For example, Daniel himself gives the dates for his writing in different chapters. But some Bible scholars⁴ say those dates are not real. These scholars place the book of Daniel hundreds of years later and in events⁵ that do not interest Daniel. By arguing that Daniel wrote *after* the events he described, these scholars weaken the influence of the book and the powerful prophecies within it. As Seventh-day Adventists, we must refuse to accept what these scholars say.

Gerhard Pfandl wrote this quarter's lesson. Dr. Pfandl is an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference. He was born in Austria, where he pastored and taught for almost 20 years. Dr. Pfandl also worked for several years in California and Australia. He is married and has two grown children. A longtime student of Daniel, Dr. Pfandl is qualified to teach us about a book that shows such a powerful and glorious end for us. Even with all of Aristotle's knowledge, Daniel could have never imagined or even dared to hope for such a glorious end.

³theologians—people who study the Bible as their profession.

⁴Bible scholars—people who study the Bible as their profession.

⁵events—things that happen.