LESSON 13 *December 19–25

*(page 104 of Standard Edition)*

# Blessings From *the* Prophetic Word



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *1 Cor. 2:2; John 1:1–5; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Tim. 4:1–5; Isa. 40:1–5; John 17:20–23; 1 Cor. 1:10–13.*

**Memory Text:** **"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"** *(2 Timothy 3:16, 17, NKJV).*

God never asks us to believe blindly. On the contrary, the evidence for His existence is powerful. Nature alone, even after 6,000 years of sin, testifies to the reality not just of a God of incredible creative power (look at photos from the James Webb Space Telescope) but also of a God of love.

And yet there's more. Even after the "voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount," Peter would still write that we "have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts" *(2 Pet. 1:18, 19)*. We might not, as did Peter, hear the voice of God, but we, too, have the "more sure word of prophecy."

God has spoken to us through His prophets, both canonical (writings in the Bible) and noncanonical (writings not in the Bible). The evidence given us is more than abundant. The question remaining is: Are we open to receive it?

Sacred history shows that many were not open. May we, by God's grace, not make the same mistake.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 26.*

# Prophecy Exalts Christ

Prophecy is God's means of communicating with His people and connecting them to God. No wonder, then, that Satan (the dragon) was enraged at the woman (God's church) and went to make war with the remnant of her seed *(see Rev. 12:17).*

What are the distinguishing marks of this remnant of the woman's seed? They keep the commandments and possess the testimony of Jesus. Revelation 19:10 tells us that this testimony is "the spirit of prophecy."

**Read 1 Corinthians 2:2 and Galatians 6:14. How does Paul see the purpose of his life and ministry—the great motivation for which he lived?**

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Besides their own experiences, the apostles accepted Jesus upon the testimony of prophets and righteous men, whose words stretched over a period of many centuries. The Christian world has a full and complete chain of evidence running through both the Old and the New Testaments: in the former, which points to a Savior to come, and in the latter, which reveals Jesus as fulfilling the conditions of the Savior. All this is sufficient to establish the faith of those willing to believe. "The design of God was to leave the race a fair opportunity to develop faith in the power of God and of his Son and in the work of the Holy Spirit."—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 182.

In many ways, the issue of saving faith is not intellectual; it's moral. It's a heart thing, not a head thing. When people close their hearts, their minds, unfortunately, will follow.

**Read John 1:1–5. What do these verses tell us about who Jesus is?**

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If Jesus, the Word of God, pre-existed, was made flesh, and dwelled among us, then it follows that Jesus was integral to the words or messages given by God to His prophets. Even prophets who bore messages that did not explicitly refer to Jesus nevertheless were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

**Consider how vast the cosmos is, and to think that the One who created it, Jesus, is also the One who died for us! What great hope does that offer you?**

# Prophecy Affirms the Bible

The Bible is ultimately the product of the Holy Spirit, through the gift of prophecy. Second Peter 1:21 reveals the process God used: "For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" *(NKJV)*.

**Read 2 Timothy 3:16, 17. How does this passage emphasize both the authority and inspiration of Scripture?**

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Without the Bible, human beings would be left without a way to navigate the pitfalls of a sinful world, and that would be a recipe for destruction. Today the Bible is everywhere and available in multiple formats, but this was not always the case. For instance, during the time of Jesus, only Old Testament scrolls were available to be read, and only priests or rabbis could do so. Common people often had no direct access to Scripture. A word from God was precious in those days.

**Read Luke 24:27. After His resurrection, what did Jesus use to help two despondent disciples understand His unique purpose?**

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Jesus, the greatest Prophet ever—the One who alone is the Word *(John 1:1–3)*—exalted Scripture *(John 7:38)*. Among the most precious blessings of the gift of prophecy is that it affirms the Bible.

"Those who have been impressed by the Holy Scriptures as the voice of God, and desire to follow its teachings, are to be daily learning, daily receiving spiritual fervor and power, which have been provided for every true believer in the gift of the Holy Spirit."—Ellen G. White, in *Signs of the Times*, March 8, 1910. The authentic gift of prophecy always exalts Scripture. It always points men and women back to the Word of God as their only rule of faith and practice.

**Why did Jesus first point the two disciples on the road to Emmaus to the Scriptures before revealing to them who He was? What should that tell us about how foundational the Word must be to us?**

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# Prophecy Is God's Truth Detector

Some scholars estimate that there are more than forty-five thousand Christian denominations in the world today. How could a faith that started with Jesus Christ have mushroomed into so many different systems of belief? The answer lies in the many different interpretations of Scripture developed over time. Obviously, they can't all be correct because, after all, in so many cases, what one church teaches contradicts what others do.

From the start *(see Gen. 2:16, 17; Gen. 3:1–5)*, confusion was one of Satan's greatest ways of leading human beings away from God's truth. As he did with Adam and Eve, Satan mixes just enough truth with error in order to pull men and women under his control. Satan has misled God's people down through time *(2 Chron. 36:14–16)*. He even attempted to mislead Jesus *(Matt. 4:1–11)*, but Jesus met Satan's entreaties with a clear " 'It is written' " *(Matt. 4:4, NKJV)*.

**Read 2 Timothy 4:1–5. What important advice does Paul give Timothy concerning God's Word? Why was he so adamant that Timothy be spiritually prepared for what was to come?**

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With a prophetic eye, Paul foresaw a time that men and women would neither love God's Word nor obey it. Instead, they would go in search of spiritual teachers to tickle their fancies with cunningly devised fables. To such, God sends strong delusions so that they should believe the very lies for which they search. "And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" *(2 Thess. 2:11, 12, NKJV)*.

But to those who were open, Jesus promised that they would "know the truth" *(John 8:32)*. The prophetic gift is God's means of separating truth from error, light from darkness.

In one sense, we can know the truth easily enough amid all these different denominations. If you are not going to give up the biblical seventh-day Sabbath, you have pretty much wiped out 99.5 percent of your options, as the vast majority of churches do not keep the fourth commandment.

If you are not going to believe that the dead either go immediately into heaven to be with Jesus or are burning now in hell and will for eternity, as well—then what?

You have eliminated most, if not all, of the .5 percent left.

To where else but the Seventh-day Adventist Church can you go?

*(page 108 of Standard Edition)*

# Prophecy Comforts God's People

**Read Matthew 11:28, 29. What does Jesus tell us to do? What does He promise all who come to Him?**

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God has always been concerned about the well-being of human beings. Before creating Adam and Eve, God prepared a perfect dwelling for them that would both excite and delight them *(Genesis 1)*. God provided everything needed for their comfort. After the holy pair fell, God came in search of them *(Gen. 3:9)*, prophesied the coming of a Savior *(Gen. 3:15)*, and fashioned clothing to cover their nakedness *(Gen. 3:21)*. God is invested in the well-being of His creatures.

Perhaps no blessing of the gift of prophecy is more overlooked than its function as a source of comfort and renewal for God's people down through time.

**Read Isaiah 40:1–5. What message does God give His prophet for His hurting people? How can we apply that principle to us today?**

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God wanted Judah to know that, although He had to punish them, He would not utterly cast them off. He does not simply give Isaiah a message of encouragement for His broken people. He instructed Isaiah exactly how to deliver the message. The message needed to be delivered with great tenderness, love, and care. God was so concerned about this message of comfort reaching the hearts of His people that He left nothing to chance. Such messages of comfort were repeated throughout the book of Isaiah *(Isa. 12:1, Isa. 49:13, Isa. 51:3, etc.)*.

The apostle Paul warned that those who live godly in Christ Jesus would experience fierce persecution *(2 Tim. 3:12)*. In the difficult times ahead, we will need words of comfort and hope. The gift of prophecy is the means that God will use to soothe and strengthen His people before Jesus returns to take them home.

**In what area of your life do you need to hear a word of comfort and hope? What does God empower us to do after He comforts us?** *(2 Cor. 1:3, 4).*

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# Prophecy Unites the Body in Christ

**Read John 17:20–23 and 1 Corinthians 1:10–13. What core appeal is at the heart of these two passages of Scripture?**

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As Jesus approached the cross, His heart was moved by one overriding desire. He wanted all of His followers to be one, as He and the Father are one in love, purpose, and action. The unity for which Jesus prayed was not some bland uniformity. Jesus prayed a powerful prophecy that will be fulfilled before His return—a rich tapestry of human beings with different backgrounds, ethnicities, and perspectives would all unite in Him and in the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul built on this theme when he pleaded with the Corinthian believers to have the same mind, speak the same truth, and harbor no divisions *(1 Cor. 1:10)*. But why is this prophetic unity so important?

Jesus prayed " 'that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me' " *(John 17:21, NKJV)*.

God desires that all men and women be saved, but before they can be saved, they must believe in Jesus and believe that God sent Him to save the world. When a diverse group of people claim Jesus as their Lord and Savior, loving and serving each other selflessly, then the world will believe that Jesus was who He claimed to be. The unity Jesus craved is both purposeful and powerful. Unfortunately, even from the start, forces threatened that unity. See, for example, Acts 6:1. And Christianity has been radically divided since!

This unity is the work of the Holy Spirit through the gifts that He dispenses. Ephesians 4:11–15 tells us that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to equip believers and edify the body of Christ, "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" *(Eph. 4:13, NKJV)*. The gift of prophecy, one of the signature gifts of the Spirit, is essential to unify God's people, especially as they near the second coming of Jesus, so that they might believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved *(Acts 16:31)*.

**At a time when the Seventh-day Adventist Church is perhaps the most diverse Protestant religious body in the world, how can we exhibit the kind of unity that helps people believe in Jesus? What forces threaten that unity?**

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*(page 110 of Standard Edition)*

# Try It Again

Some years ago, the Kellogg company featured a catchy advertising slogan for its breakfast cereals. In an effort to win back customers who had migrated to other brands, it encouraged them to "taste them again for the very first time." Might this saying also work for Seventh-day Adventists who have spent much time learning *about* the Bible and Ellen G. White and less time "tasting" her writings? Attending seminars about Ellen G. White will give you an idea about her life and ministry, but unless you "taste" for yourself, you will not be truly able to evaluate and experience the spiritual blessing of her prophetic messages. Only those who read her, especially in context, can fully appreciate what God has given us.

As we have noted throughout this quarter, Ellen G. White anchors us to Bible truth and connects us to God. There are certain blessings of reading her prophetic messages.

A survey done by Roger Dudley and Des Cummings Jr. reveals some fascinating facts. Those who regularly read Ellen G. White's writings have a deeper and more intimate relationship with Jesus than those who don't read her; they have a stronger assurance of salvation, more regular family worship, and a desire to witness to others. "Seldom does a research study find the evidence so heavily weighted toward one conclusion," the two researchers wrote. "In the church growth survey, on *every single item* that deals with personal attitudes or practices, the member who regularly studies Ellen G. White's books tends to rank higher than does the member who reads them only occasionally or never. . . . Certainly the implication is that the regular reading of Ellen White's material does make a positive difference in Christian life and witness."—Dudley and Cummings, "Who Reads Ellen White?" *Ministry*, October 1982, p. 12.

During this quarter, we have learned that God communicates through His prophets. Their messages connect us to God and bring a holy and sanctifying influence into all aspects of human life, especially relating to the promise of salvation found in Jesus: "Oh taste and see that the LORD is good" *(Ps. 34:8)*. They call us to holy action, life transformation, personal evangelism, and a life of service to others. This is essential preparation to fulfill our part in the last proclamation to the world as we look for the coming of Jesus.

To discover more, visit https://whiteestate.org/absg/13.

INSIDE *Story*

# Where Are You, God?

*By* HANNELE AMBERLA

I tore open my cousin's letter and began reading. "I've given my life to Jesus," she wrote. *What does that mean?* I wondered. I'd sometimes attended Sunday School, but I'd never heard of someone giving their life to Jesus. I longed for a similar experience with God, but I wasn't sure how to have it. I attended several different churches, but I didn't find what my cousin had described.

After finishing university, I moved to Helsinki, where I met my future husband. I invited him to attend church with me, hoping he would find God and show me how to find Him. But it didn't work.

Our children were born, and life became busy. I had everything I wanted—except God. I continued visiting churches and prayed, "Lord, I can't find You. Please find me."

Our teenage daughter decided to study in Australia for a year. I was worried, and prayed she would find a good family to live with. And she did! We kept in touch by instant messaging and got to know her host family that way. The father of the family was named Greg, and I told him of my search for God. He told me he had drifted away from his childhood church, but suggested I read his favorite book, *The Desire of Ages*. I found it on the internet. It changed my life! I found answers to my questions and had a closer walk with God.

Greg's father had been a missionary and answered my questions about God. He told me he was a Seventh-day Adventist, but I had never heard of them.

Then Greg encouraged me to visit an Adventist church, which I did. When I arrived at the church, I was overwhelmed with the love people showered on me. I was amazed to hear the Bible discussion. These people knew so much about the Bible! I loved the sermon, too. I returned to church the following week.

I fell in love with Jesus, just as my cousin had done so many years earlier. That summer I visited the church's Bible camp, where I studied the Bible deeply and came away spiritually refreshed.

I returned home from camp rejoicing and shared my love for God with my husband. But this time I felt compelled to urge him to make a decision for Jesus. I didn't know it then, but this was our last conversation about religion. Two days later he died in a car accident.

I couldn't understand why God would take away my husband so soon after I had given my life to Him. Now I understand that God gave me a church family to support and pray with me during those difficult days. The Bible texts I had memorized gave me peace, and the Holy Spirit comforted me.

I went to work for the church's Bible correspondence school, where I help others struggling with some of the same issues I have. I met a good man at church, and eventually we married. God has given us a ministry together. As for Greg in Australia, he returned to the Lord, as well. God surely works in mysterious ways!



**Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.**

This year marks the 2,000-year anniversary of Jesus' baptism, when He was anointed as the Messiah. It was at this point, the fulfillment of Daniel's 70-week prophecy *(Dan. 9:24-27),* that Jesus began His earthly ministry.

However much we rejoice in Christ's first coming, our hope is found in His second coming. To keep us from getting discouraged as we wait, we have been given prophecies, which reveal His many divine roles.

In Daniel 2, we see the Jesus of the Second Coming, the One who ends this world and ushers in a new one. In Daniel 7, we see Jesus as "One like the Son of Man" who issues judgment in "favor of the saints" *(NKJV)*. In Daniel 8, we see Jesus as the "prince of the host" in the heavenly sanctuary. In Daniel 9, we see Jesus as the Anointed Messiah who will be "cut off." In Revelation 12, we see Jesus as the child caught up to the throne. Central to all that is revealed is Jesus, who is at the heart of apocalyptic prophecy. It is this same Jesus whose baptism we now commemorate, rejoicing in the hope He offers us in a world that, in and of itself, offers us nothing.

## Lesson 1—Interpreting Apocalyptic Prophecies

**The Week at a Glance:**

SUNDAY: **History at a Glance** *(Dan. 2:38; Dan. 8:20, 21)*
MONDAY: **Jesus' Method of Interpretation** *(Matt. 24:15, 16)*
TUESDAY: **Interpretation of Symbols** *(Rev. 21:6)*
WEDNESDAY: **Paul's View of Prophecy** *(2 Thess. 2:3–8)*
THURSDAY: **Jesus—The Heart of Apocalyptic Prophecy** *(John 5:39)*

**Memory Text—***Daniel 2:27, 28, NIV*

**Sabbath Gem:** One reason we can celebrate the 2,000-year anniversary of Jesus' baptism and anointing as the Messiah is because of the biblical notion of linear time, the idea that time moves in a straight line, from one distinct beginning to one distinct end.

## Lesson 2—Daniel 2 and 7: The ABCs of Apocalyptic Prophecies

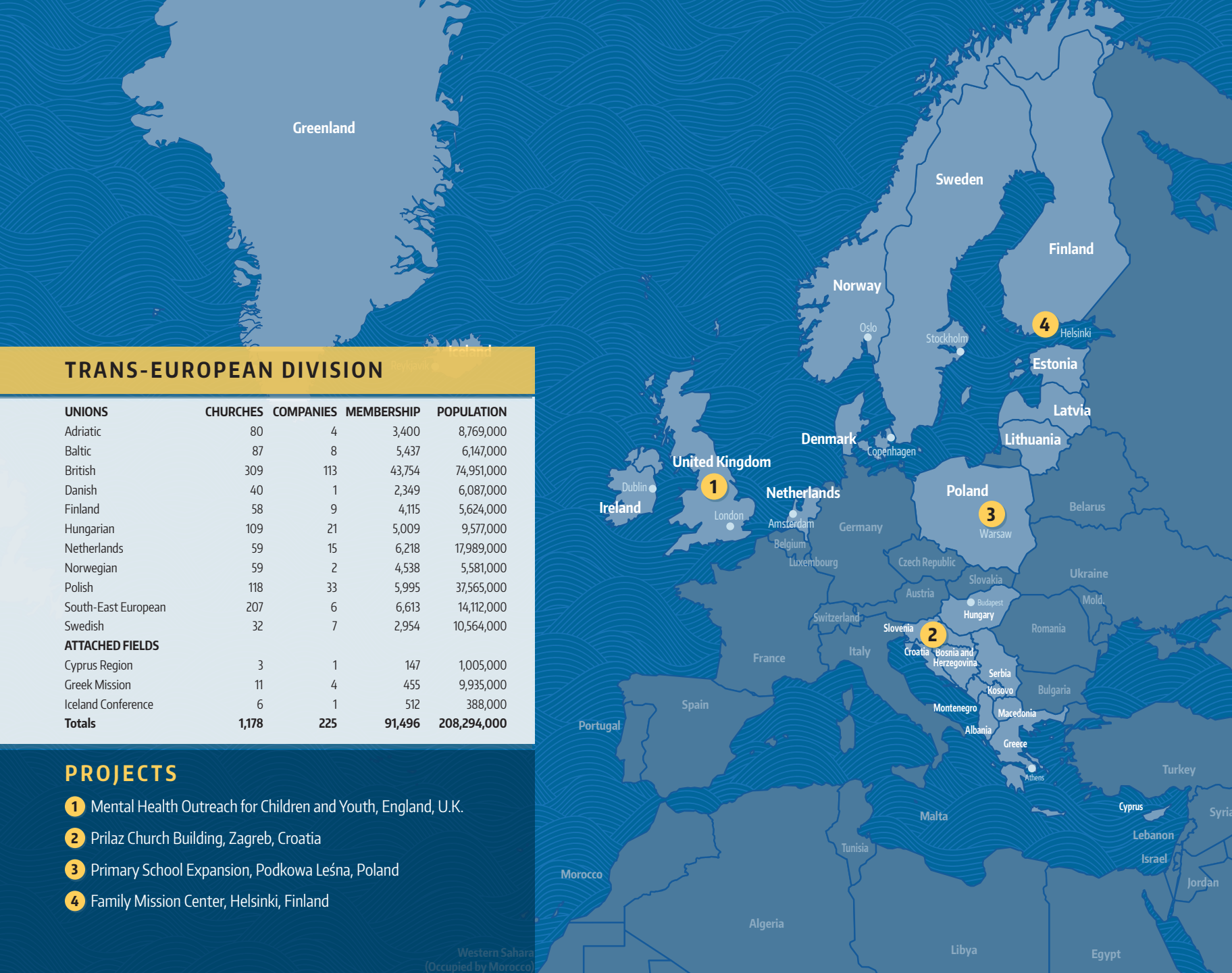
**The Week at a Glance:**

SUNDAY: **Two Parallel Visions** *(Daniel 2, Daniel 7)*
MONDAY: **The Fourth Beast** *(Dan. 2:40, Dan. 7:19)*
TUESDAY: **The Little Horn: Part 1** *(Dan. 7:8, 24)*
WEDNESDAY: **The Little Horn: Part 2** *(Dan. 7:25)*
THURSDAY: **The First Apocalyptic Time Prophecy** *(Dan. 7:25)*

**Memory Text—***Daniel 7:27, NIV*

**Sabbath Gem:** Some of the most incredible faith-building prophecies in all of Scripture appear in Daniel 2 and Daniel 7, both of which climax with Jesus at His second coming.

**Lessons for People Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision:** Christian Record Services offers the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* free of charge in braille, MP3 disc, and online download to people who are blind, have low vision, or cannot hold or focus on standard ink print. Contact Christian Record Services, PO Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981, option 3; email: services@christianrecord.org; website: www.christianrecord.org.




## TRANS-EUROPEAN DIVISION

| UNIONS | CHURCHES | COMPANIES | MEMBERSHIP | POPULATION |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adriatic | 80 | 4 | 3,400 | 8,769,000 |
| Baltic | 87 | 8 | 5,437 | 6,147,000 |
| British | 309 | 113 | 43,754 | 74,951,000 |
| Danish | 40 | 1 | 2,349 | 6,087,000 |
| Finland | 58 | 9 | 4,115 | 5,624,000 |
| Hungarian | 109 | 21 | 5,009 | 9,577,000 |
| Netherlands | 59 | 15 | 6,218 | 17,989,000 |
| Norwegian | 59 | 2 | 4,538 | 5,581,000 |
| Polish | 118 | 33 | 5,995 | 37,565,000 |
| South-East European | 207 | 6 | 6,613 | 14,112,000 |
| Swedish | 32 | 7 | 2,954 | 10,564,000 |
| **ATTACHED FIELDS** | | | | |
| Cyprus Region | 3 | 1 | 147 | 1,005,000 |
| Greek Mission | 11 | 4 | 455 | 9,935,000 |
| Iceland Conference | 6 | 1 | 512 | 388,000 |
| **Totals** | **1,178** | **225** | **91,496** | **208,294,000** |

## PROJECTS

1. Mental Health Outreach for Children and Youth, England, U.K.
2. Prilaz Church Building, Zagreb, Croatia
3. Primary School Expansion, Podkowa Leśna, Poland
4. Family Mission Center, Helsinki, Finland