

7 YEARS A WEEK

DANIEL 9:20-27 MARCH 13, 2019

Daniel 9, starting in verse 20 this evening. Last week we took a look at Daniel's humble prayer of confession. That prayer leads up to our text tonight, which many scholars consider to be one of the most important passages in all the Bible. It's referred to as the "70 Weeks Prophecy" and gives the blueprint for how God would send the Messiah, deal with Israel and wrap up human history on this earth. It's like that scene in any good heist movie, where the characters gather around a table and look at a diagram, then talk through how the plan is going to unfold. Then the plan is set in motion.

The prophecy itself is only 4 verses, but they are *packed* with information, showing the meticulous order of God's program, foretelling the crucifixion, identifying where the Antichrist will come from and what he'll do and it all covers *thousands* of years of history. So, let's dig in.

Daniel 9:20-21 - ²⁰ Now while I was speaking, praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God, ²¹ yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering.

Even though Daniel has been in captivity for more than 60 years, he still thinks about things in his spiritual, Jewish context. He's praying for Zion. He's thinking about the evening offering. An offering that wasn't happening, by the way. The city and the temple were gone. But, Daniel was never one to think God had failed. He was still setting his watch, as it were, by the temple clock, longing for a city that, at that time, didn't exist. He still had faith and hope and trust in the God of Israel. And he thought *idealistically* about what *would* have been going on, had God's people done right.

Now, before we get into the prophecy, we get a little bit of angelology. These interactions are always interesting to examine. We notice first of all that on this second visit of Gabriel, Daniel recognizes him and he isn't afraid. Usually when angels appear to people in the Bible, they get really frightened. That was the case back in chapter 8. When Daniel saw Gabriel, he was afraid and fell on his face. *This* time around, he recognizes him, but seems to remain calm and comforted during their meeting.

Gabriel is referred to as a "man" here, but don't let that confuse you. He's an angel. In fact, Herbert Leupold points out the words mean this: "The servant, the *strong one*, of the strong God."¹

We also note here that, apparently, angels are able to travel at different speeds. In this case, Gabriel had been commanded to "fly swiftly". It's a term that means as fast as possible. I like to think that Gabriel waited in the next room for Daniel to finish his prayer, then popped in.

Daniel 9:22-23 - ²² And he informed *me*, and talked with me, and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand. ²³ At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell *you*, for you *are* greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision:

¹ John Walvoord Daniel: The Key To Prophetic Revelation

It's interesting to think about the obedience of angels. Pretend for a moment you're a supernatural being that can stand in the presence of God, you can travel between time and eternity. You have incredible power and capacity. And the Lord says, "Go spell out a prophecy for this human down there." I imagine it would be kind of like us trying to explain the plot of a movie to our dog. Maybe that's not fair. But it reminds me of the super accomplished IT guy. He went to school and got his computer science degree. He can create amazing programs with lines of code. He's part of pushing the limits of what connectivity means. And then he gets the trouble ticket at work, "Bill down on the 4th floor needs you to show him how to access his email." But Gabriel doesn't complain. He's happy to do whatever the Lord asks him to do, whether it seems to be below his pay grade or not.

Now the prophecy begins, we'll take it in phrases.

Daniel 9:24a - ²⁴"Seventy weeks are determined For your people and for your holy city,

Here we have the scope and the setting of God's plan. Let's start with the setting. God's prophetic plan centers on a *place* and a *people*. The place is *Jerusalem* and the people are the *Jews*. That doesn't mean that the Lord doesn't have other things He's accomplishing in other places and with other people. He does, of course. But the *focus* of Bible prophecy, both past and future, is a particular place: Jerusalem. Not New York. Not Paris. Not Tel Aviv. And it's a particular people: *Daniel's* people, the Jews. Not the Church or all believers in general. In the Church, we have a holy city, but it's not *Jerusalem*, it's the *New Jerusalem*, the city whose Builder and Maker is God. That's what John says in the Revelation. So, the setting is *Jewish*, the epicenter is *Jerusalem*.

Now the *scope*. Gabriel says that "seventy weeks are determined." The word "weeks" in English has a particular meaning attached. But, scholars and linguists are quick to point out that the word here is "heptads" or "sevens." It's like saying "seventy dozens." But, in this case, it's seventy *sevens*. The question is: groups of seven what? Days? Years? Millennia? Naturally, there's a lot of argument, especially coming from those who do *not* interpret Bible prophecy in a literal, futurist sense. But we understand this to be saying that there are 70 sets of 7 years that pertain to God's plan, which has partially unfolded and will ultimately come to pass, no matter what. We identify these sevens as groups of years for *Biblical* reasons and *historical* reasons. First, the Biblical. Remember when Laban tricked Jacob into marrying Leah when he wanted to marry Rachel? Well, in their discussion afterward, Jacob says, "Why did you deceive me?" To which Laban answers:

Genesis 29:26-28a - ²⁶And Laban said, "It must not be done so in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. ²⁷Fulfill her week, and we will give you this one also for the service which you will serve with me still another seven years." ²⁸Then Jacob did so and fulfilled her week.

We also compare the timeline in Daniel 9 with what we learn about the end times in the Olivet Discourse and the Revelation, where we're told about specific lengths of days and months, and it becomes clear that the 70 sevens refer to a total of 490 years which are set apart to accomplish God's plan. So, we're given the panorama, the people and the place. Now Gabriel gives 6 reasons as the *purpose* of this plan. Here are the first 3:

Daniel 9:24b - To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity,

We should remind ourselves that these purposes are primarily directed at Israel, God's special, chosen people, but in making an end of sin and bringing reconciliation for iniquity, it was accomplished for *us* as well. The cross was part of this 70 sevens program. And in that incredible act, the Lord made a way for sin to be permanently atoned for, forgiven and dealt with. It is *finished* and the responsibility for that debt is forever settled for those who have received Jesus as Savior.

Daniel 9:24c - To bring in everlasting righteousness,

Clearly, this has not yet come to pass. Not globally, not personally. Paul lamented in Romans that we still have evil *present* in us. "O wretched man that I am! Who will save me from this body of death?"

The end of God's plan is victory, not defeat. When Christ returns, He will usher in the era of everlasting righteousness. For us, sin will be gone, temptation will be gone, all will be made right not just *around* us, but *in* us.

Daniel 9:24d - To seal up vision and prophecy,

Some interpret this as referring to end of special revelation. Meaning, no *new* Scripture or prophecies that are outside of God's word. Others see this as saying that, by the end of the 70 sevens, all God's promises to Israel will be fully carried out. All His promises to Abraham and to David will be faithfully accomplished. He has not *transferred* them, He has not *cancelled* them. God has put the plan on *hold*, but will finish out this 490 year program once the Church age is over.

Daniel 9:24e - And to anoint the Most Holy.

There's a lot of debate on the meaning of this 6th purpose. Some apply it to Jesus Christ, some apply it to the Temple after Antiochus Epiphanes defiled it. Some ascribe it to the Millennial Temple.

Gabriel continues in verse 25.

Daniel 9:25 - ²⁵"Know therefore and understand, *That from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times.*

The 70 sevens are broken up into 3 groups. A group of 7 sevens, a group of 62 sevens, and then a single seven left over. Here, we're told specifically what event starts the clock on the first 69 sevens. It is the command to restore and build Jerusalem, the city. Note the reference to streets and walls.

We're studying Ezra on Sunday mornings. There are a few different decrees made about Israel and building projects. However, if you read this prophecy literally, it's clear that the starting point of the 70 sevens is *not* the decree to rebuild the *temple* there in Ezra 1. Rather, what we're looking at is in Nehemiah 2, where King Artaxerxes sends Nehemiah to go and build the city and the wall in 445 B.C. It seems that the process of rebuilding the city took 49 years (7 sevens), after which the *next* set of 62 sevens immediately began. We're told that the job of rebuilding was done "in troublesome times". And the book of Nehemiah records just how troublesome it was.

From the time of the decree until the appearing of Messiah the Prince would be a period of 483 years. Sir Robert Anderson was a writer, a theologian and a Scotland Yard official in the 1800s. He wrote a book titled *The Coming Prince*, in which he calculated the *exact* fulfillment of this prophecy,

from the decree of Artaxerxes to the Triumphal Entry of Christ. He tabulated the 69 sevens, 483 years, according to the Jewish calendar, would yield 173,880 days and then goes on to prove how Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a colt on the *exact day*. While his theory *is* debated, Anderson's work is compelling. And, as John Walvoord notes: "*No one today is able dogmatically to declare that Sir Robert Anderson's computations are impossible.*"²

Daniel 9:26a - ²⁶"And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself;

Cut off is legal language. Under the Law of Moses, if someone was "cut off" they were being executed. Jesus did not die of disease or accident. He was executed by the state. And there it says, "but not for Himself." That can have a variety of meanings, all which describe what took place at Calvary. First, the Lord did not die for Himself, but for others. Second, the words can be translated as, "He will have nothing." That was true of our Lord, who had no place to lay His head, no riches. In the end, He didn't even have *clothing*. And third, the words can be translated as, "shall be cut off... appearing to have accomplished nothing." That certainly *seemed* true on Good Friday, but when the sun rose easter Sunday, everything changed.

Daniel 9:26b - And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined.

Some suggest that the prince here is the same as the Prince in verse 25. But this can't be true. First of all, we'll see *this* prince is responsible for the abomination of desolation in the temple. Second, we're told the people of the prince in verse 26 are those who would destroy Jerusalem. The people who destroyed Jerusalem in 70AD were the *Romans*. So, here we see a *second* prince (little p), the counterfeit messiah, the Antichrist.

But notice: It isn't *him* who will destroy Jerusalem, but his *people*. And so, we recognize that, in the future, the Antichrist will preside over a revived Roman empire. When the Romans destroyed the temple and the holy city in 70AD, it was indeed like a flood in its effect, washing all of the Jews out into the Gentile world. But now, after almost 2,000 years, more Jews have been regathered *back* into Israel than live anywhere else in the world.

Daniel 9:27 - ²⁷Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate."

Jesus specifically quoted this verse in Matthew 24, saying that it was a *future* event, which would precede the 2nd coming of the Lord.

In verse 27 we see the final heptad. It's starting point is when the Antichrist makes a seven year peace treaty with Israel, allowing them to once again worship and sacrifice in the temple. But, after three and a half years, he breaks the treaty, enters the temple, demands worship, sets up a blasphemous image and makes war against God's people.

² *ibid.*

This means that we are currently living in a *gap* between the 69th seven and the 70th seven. Gaps in Bible prophecy aren't unusual. Notice how the prophecy is arranged: The first seven is kicked off by a decree. The clock is stopped at the death of the Messiah. And now we wait for that final seven to begin. The starting point is the signing of that false peace, which will set in motion the events of the Great Tribulation. Luckily, we in the Church are not part of the 70th seven. We will be safe and secure in glory, face to face with our Lord.

In the end, despite the Antichrist's power and his desolations, he, the Desolator, will be defeated and destroyed, all Israel shall be saved, and Messiah the Prince will return with power and great glory.

This is God's prophetic program, centered on Jerusalem and the Jews. It's on hold now, as God accomplishes His work in the *Church* age - the time between Pentecost and the Rapture - where God is drawing out individuals from all over the world to be a part of His Bride. Once that work is finished, the Lord will once again take up this prophetic program and start the clock on the final seven. He will do all He has said He will do, just as He said it would happen.

For us tonight as Church Age believers, there's a small devotional application from our passage. And it has to do with prayer. Remember: It was Daniel's prayer that led into this prophecy. And there in verses 20 through 23 his prayer is referred to again.

You've probably heard it said that God answers every prayer with either "yes," "no," or "wait." That may fit on a meme, but it's not exactly how we see things playing out in the Word. This prayer of Daniel is a good example. Daniel is confessing, he's praying about the end of the Babylonian captivity. When Gabriel comes with an "answer", it really has nothing to do with that! In fact, he says, "Actually, Jerusalem is going to be destroyed *again!*" What Daniel received from heaven had very little to do with his particular prayer that day. So, rather than say, "God answers every prayer with yes, no or wait." It seems better to say that we can be sure God *responds* to our prayers. It's clear He's listening. It's clear He desires to reveal Himself and speak to us and give us understanding. But His methods don't fit on a meme.

For Daniel, the response came instantly, but Paul had to pray *3 times* about the thorn in his flesh before he received a response. Samuel's mother Hannah had to wait *years* before she received a response to her prayer. You probably have similar parallels for each of these examples in your own prayer life. But here's what we know to be true: First, God *does* hear. There's never a prayer in the Bible where an angel shows up and says, "What did you say? We weren't really listening." Second, God *responds*. Perhaps not the way we hope or even could anticipate, but we trust Him and know Him to be good and faithful. So keep praying. And third, and this is best of all, here's what's true: You are *precious* to God. What did Gabriel say in verse 23? "I have come to tell you, *for you are greatly beloved.*" That's a term that means the best or most valuable thing available. A precious treasure. That which is *most* costly. That's what God sees when He sees you. That's not just something He thought about *Daniel*. He thinks it about you! We are beloved children in His eyes. And just as He has a plan for this world, He has a plan for you. He listens for you. He responds to you. He loves you more, more, more and has made us His own.