

“Daniel’s Seventy Weeks” (part 1)

Daniel 9:20-27

In 1799, Napoleon Bonaparte campaigned in Egypt with the intention of dominating the eastern Mediterranean and threatening the British hold on India. In July 1799, his army found something that is now held to be one of the most significant archeological discoveries in history. What was it that they found? They discovered the ‘Rosetta Stone’ while digging the foundations of an addition to a fort in the Nile River Delta. It had apparently been built into a very old wall. The officer in charge realized the importance of the discovery. Do you know why it was so important?

In the 19th century, the Rosetta Stone helped scholars at long last crack the code of hieroglyphics, the ancient Egyptian writing system. The stone features a decree issued in 196 BC by a group of Egyptian clergy and Egypt’s ruler, Ptolemy V. The decree on the stone is written in three ways: in hieroglyphics, which was used mainly by priests; in ancient Egyptian demotic, used for everyday purposes; and in ancient Greek. The use of hieroglyphics died out after the 4th century and the writing system became an enigma to scholars. When it was discovered, nobody knew how to read ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs. Because the inscriptions say the same thing in three different scripts, and scholars could still read Ancient Greek, the Rosetta Stone became a valuable key to deciphering the hieroglyphs.

Take your Bible and be finding your place once more in the ninth chapter of Daniel. The last four verses of Daniel 9 record what, in many ways, is the ‘Rosetta Stone’ of prophecy, a key to understanding the big picture of God’s plan for the ages. Many have referred to this passage as the ‘backbone’ of Bible prophecy. It is one of the most remarkable and specific passages that are

recorded in Scripture as it relates to the future coming of Christ. Isaac Newton once said, “We could stake the truth of Christianity on this prophecy alone, made five centuries before Christ.”

Keep in mind that this is not the first prophecy concerning the future that Daniel had been shown. The other two very important prophecies came in chapters 2 and 7, both of which concerned the future of Gentile world powers. In the prophecy given in chapter 2, Daniel was shown sort of a broad sweep of human history from his day leading all the way up until the last days. Then in chapter 7, he had been given the same prophecy but with more specific detail that related to the final empire that would be in power during the last days. It contained the element of the ‘little horn’ who would come to power:

Daniel 7:25—“He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.”

The visions that Daniel has had through the end of chapter seven primarily deal with the Gentiles. But from chapter 8 and beyond, the focus turns away from the Gentiles and is turned toward Israel and the Jewish people. The prophecy found in the last four verses of chapter 9 presents us with the plan that God has in mind for Israel’s future.

1—The PRAYER that is involved (9:20-23)

“While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the Lord my God for the holy hill of my God, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight...”

Notice the four verbs there in verse 20—speaking, praying, confessing sin, and presenting his plea. It summarizes the prayer recorded in the previous 19 verses. Well, what was it exactly that he was praying for?

Now, we have already seen that as the chapter opens up, God's people are still in captivity. It was the first year of Darius the Mede, or around 539 BC. By this point, Daniel and the Jews had been in Babylon for 67 years or more. It was in 605 BC that Nebuchadnezzar had carried off a first wave of Jewish captives that included Daniel and his three friends mentioned earlier in the book. The other two waves came a few years later, culminating in the total destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Now, all these years later, Daniel is an old man. He is reading the prophetic scriptures when something in the scroll of Jeremiah got his attention.

Jeremiah had warned the nation of coming judgment and that God's people would be carried away into captivity and would be held there for 70 years. Daniel had lived through almost all of those years. As he is reading, he discovers that the end of those 70 years was close. He read of God's promise to visit His people and restore them to their land at the end of the captivity:

Jeremiah 29:10-11 — “For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you My promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

As he was reading the Word of God, Daniel realized that it was time for God to bring the Jews back to their land, back to Jerusalem, back to what they had been promised. God had said, “For 70 years I am going to allow the Babylonians to

hold you in captivity, but then I'm going to judge them." Daniel had seen it come to pass as Babylon had fallen to the Medes and Persians. He knew that at the end of the 70 years, there would be the destruction of Babylon, which had happened. Yet there would also be a restoration for God's people and He would bring them back home from captivity. That is what Daniel is reading in the books. He knew that time was drawing to a close, and God was going to honor His promises.

And so when Daniel read all of that, it affected him so deep within his spirit that he fell on his knees and began to pray in response. It is his reaction to the truth that he read from God's Word. The truth of Scripture drove Daniel to his knees, and through prayer he seeks the face of God. You can't really grasp the importance of the prophecy itself until you see how it was given in connection to Daniel's prayer.

John Walvoord — *"The long preamble of twenty-three verses leading up to the great revelation of the seventy weeks is, in itself, a testimony to the importance of this revelation."*

Nothing is more important right now than our intercession on behalf of our national scene. What we are witnessing now in our nation is an inward division and animosity that hasn't been seen at such levels since the Civil War. And if ever there were days when the church must be mobilized for prayer, those days are now. Daniel 9 has much to say about how we are to pray for our nation in a specific way, an exact way. That is what Daniel was doing.

Divine interruption (v. 20-21)

He says, "While I was speaking and praying...while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight

at the time of evening sacrifice.” The idea is that as Daniel was in the midst of his prayer, he received a tap on the shoulder from someone with an answer. He is interrupted mid-sentence by the angel Gabriel who had been sent from God with a very important message.

Whenever he shows up in the Scripture, Gabriel is always bringing important news of some kind that involves God’s redemptive plan. Some 500 years later, it would be Gabriel who appears to a priest named Zechariah that he and his wife Elizabeth would have a son who would serve as the forerunner of the Messiah. He then appears to Mary with an announcement that she had been chosen to give birth to that Messiah. When Gabriel shows up, it is always to announce the news that God is up to something as far as redemption is concerned.

What I want you to see here is that even before Daniel had finished praying, Gabriel was there with an answer. He is there at the time of the evening sacrifice, which would have been 3pm, or the ninth hour. It was also a time for prayer. In the days before the captivity, the evening sacrifice was a daily time when a lamb was slain and offered to God as a sacrifice for sin. As its flesh was consumed on the altar, smoke would rise from the temple grounds. Sins would be confessed. The man who brought the lamb would lay his hands on its head as a means of identifying with it, and the lamb would then be killed and offered up.

And even though no sacrifice had been made in the temple for nearly seventy years, Daniel remembered all of that. In fact, there not even been a temple for him to look to. But at the time of the evening sacrifice, Daniel prays and offers up confession of sin to God. Now, other people, having been carried away from their land and temple, were absorbed in a pagan environment and assimilated into the culture and lifestyle of Babylon. Daniel, however, hadn’t forgotten. He

remembered and kept the truth at the forefront of his mind and his way of living. It is an important reminder for us!

Divine insight (v. 22-23)

Why had Gabriel come? Verse 22 says, “He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, ‘Daniel, I have come to give you insight and understanding.’” Gabriel had been sent from the Lord with the task of giving Daniel both insight and understanding. The word ‘insight’ means to cause to have comprehension, or to grasp the truth of something. The word ‘understanding’ refers to perception, to see into something. God gives Daniel some perception that comes only after he had spent time on his knees in prayer. The insight that he receives into his situation comes supernaturally. He looks through eyes of faith and listens with an ear that is tuned to the voice from another world. Now, that is a good word for us in these days!

God has sent Gabriel to Daniel to give him a scheme of future events and to help him grasp the significance of it all. He has come to provide Daniel with a prophetic pattern, a revelation of truth concerning the future. It involves a scheme of events for redemptive history and the future of the people Israel. More than information—it is insight.

It is one thing to hear a word, but it is another thing to truly grasp what it means for your life. The Lord didn’t merely want Daniel to have information, but He wanted him to see the importance of it to him personally. Now, let me tell you, in so many ways today, we are far better off than Daniel was in his time. Why? Because we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives us insight.

John 14:16-17—“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.”

The Holy Spirit puts the pieces into place in our minds and hearts so that the picture becomes clear. Well, this is the kind of insight that Gabriel has come to provide for Daniel. Notice what he tells him there in verse 23:

“At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved.”

Isn't that a wonderful statement? Keep in mind the fact that Daniel has just confessed his sin. He has confessed to the Lord that he belongs to a people who have failed to obey God's law, who have despised God's truth, who have refused to listen to God's prophets. In other words, Daniel says that he is part of the reason that things were in such disarray for his nation. Just in the same way that if you and I are looking for someone to blame for the state of things in our nation, we need to look in the mirror.

And yet despite of this, notice these words of reassurance that are given to Daniel in verse 23. The very moment he began to plead for mercy, a word went out. Gabriel had come with a message, for Daniel was greatly loved. It was mercy and grace for one who had been on his face. Now let me tell you, that is something that you can be confident is yours as someone who is in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3—“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved.”

We don't have to plead for a hearing, because in Christ, we have one. That is why we can come boldly to God's throne of grace as a child can come confidently into his father's presence. Gabriel says, "Daniel, your prayers have been heard. I've come to give you insight, for you are greatly loved." He then says in verse 21:

"Therefore consider the word and understand the vision."

In other words, pay careful attention to what I am about to tell you. So Gabriel has come to Daniel, he has gotten his attention, and he has a message to share with him that concerns the future of God's people. It was important that he listen carefully.

2—The PURPOSE that it involved (9:24)

"Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place."

In verse 24, Gabriel summarizes what the overall purpose is that will be accomplished by God after these 70 weeks have passed. There are some general observations, facts that stand out to us that will aid our understanding.

First of all, notice that he mentions a specific period of time that is marked out by God. He says, "Seventy weeks are decreed." The word 'decreed' there comes from a Hebrew word that means to be cut out or divide. The idea behind it is that the time period has been divided out because God has determined it. He has decreed a block of time in which He will accomplish some things as His

redemptive purpose is concerned. Seventy weeks are ‘decreed’ or cut out by God. The timeline will occur this way because He says so.

Second, the prophecy is directly related to the Jews and to the city of Jerusalem. The angel tells Daniel in verse 24, “Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city.” So this is not Gentile prophecy, unlike previous visions that Daniel received in chapters 2 and 7. This does not have to do with the Babylonians, or the Medo-Persians, or the Greeks, or other Gentile nations. It does not center around events that happen in Babylon, or Rome, or in Washington for that matter. Here, Daniel is being told that God hasn’t forgotten His chosen people, the Jewish nation. He has cut out of the calendar a period of time in which He is going to do something. Through the centuries, there has been much confusion over what God has said concerning the Jew and the Gentile, Israel and the church.

Third, notice the total scene that has been revealed will last seventy weeks. God has decreed these weeks and divides them up into three periods—seven, sixty-two, and one. If you were reading this for the very first time, you would be under the impression that ‘week’ refers to seven days. If someone says to you, “I’ll see you in three weeks,” you will be looking for them to show up in 21 days. However, it is not a ‘week’ in the sense of seven 24-hour days that are being referred to here. Instead, it literally means seventy sevens or seventy ‘seven-year’ time periods. If you find that hard to understand, keep in mind that the context helps establish what the ‘sevens’ refer to. If we go back to verse 2, Daniel had been reading and thinking about the seventy year captivity. 70 years had been determined for Judah’s captivity. Those years represented 490 years of Israel’s failure to observe the Sabbath law that required the land to lay fallow every seventh year.

Leviticus 25:3-4—“For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the LORD.”

The Sabbath day is the seventh day, and the Sabbath year was the seventh year. Mosaic law determined the Jewish people count off seven sabbaths of years, or seven times seven years, and it would be a year of Jubilee. In the year of Jubilee, all debts were forgiven, slaves were freed, and property was returned to those who owned it. The people of Israel had ignored all of this. Thus, there was one year of captivity for every Sabbath year that they had ignored.

2 Chronicles 36:20-21—“He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.”

That part Daniel understood from Scripture. However, he was in for a shock. Because instead of dealing with the 490 years that were in the past, God was about to give him a glimpse into the 490 years that were in the future, and these are broken down into 70 seven-year time periods.

So the ultimate answer to his prayer would come many centuries later. He is given perception into the will of God for the future. At the end of these seventy weeks, there are six objectives that God is going to accomplish. Three are negative and three are positive. What are they? Look at verse 24:

“Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in

everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.”

These six objectives represent the comprehensive nature of God’s redemptive plan. The first three deal with sin and its eradication, while the last three deal with righteousness and its application. Banish all sin, usher in righteousness.

Objective #1—To Finish the Transgression

The word ‘finish’ is used in the sense of bringing something to an end. Walvoord says the most obvious meaning is that Israel’s course of apostasy and sin and dispersion over the face of the earth will be brought to completion within the seventy weeks. Which by the way, that is what Daniel had been so concerned about. That is why he had been confessing the sin of his nation.

Objective #2—To Put an End to Sin

If the first objective has to do with allowing Israel’s sin to run its course, the second means that sin’s power will be broken. Not only to firmly restrain sin in principle, but to break the power of sin specifically, to deal with the sins themselves. It involves the idea of judging those sins and bringing about forgiveness.

Objective #3—To Atone for Iniquity

It refers to reconciliation between God and man. The word ‘atone’ translates the Hebrew word ‘kaphar’ which was the same word used in Genesis for the pitch that Noah used to cover or seal the ark. As one of the most important words in the Old Testament, it means to cover, to expiate, to make an atonement, to wipe out. For man to have a relationship with God, atonement must be made. Gabriel

says that the Lord has determined that this would become reality within these seventy weeks.

Objective #4—To Bring In Everlasting Righteousness

This is a reference to the righteousness of heaven being found on earth, as the governments of man are swallowed up by the righteous government of God.

When we look around at the shape of things as they presently are, we find the imperfection of man everywhere—morally, socially, politically, and economically.

Everlasting righteousness of God may not be found in the halls of government today, but they will one day in the kingdom of God's Son.

Jeremiah 23:5-6—“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and He shall reign as King and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which He will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’”

Objective #5—To Seal Both Vision and Prophet

In other words, during the seventy weeks, all prophetic revelation that is needed will have been given. God will seal up the vision and prophecy, and that will be the end of revelation.

Objective #6—To Anoint a Most Holy Place

Literally, it means that God will anoint a new holy of holies where His presence will reside. Formerly, that had been in the tabernacle in the wilderness and Solomon's temple that had been destroyed by Babylon. But in the future, Daniel learns that God is going to do something altogether new.

And so all of this is the big picture of what God is going to accomplish during the seventy weeks. At the end of those weeks, He will have completely dealt with sin, and He will have totally ushered in everlasting righteousness. I am of the conviction that this is reference to the millennial reign. Yet there is a sense in which all of these realities are true now spiritually because of what Christ has accomplished through His death and resurrection.

3—The PARTICULARS that are involved (9:25-27)

“Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and a moat, but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing.”

Seventy ‘sevens’ are 490 years. In verse 25, Daniel is told when these weeks of years would begin—“from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem.” The majority of Bible scholars agree that this refers to the decree of King Artaxerxes in 445 BC which is recorded in Nehemiah 2. It was issued in the month Nisan, in the king’s twentieth year.

W.A. Criswell—*“The Jewish calendar was based on lunar years, according to the movement of the moon. Our western calendar is based on solar years, according to our movement around the sun. Our calendar has 365 days each year. The Jewish calendar has only 360 days. Every few years, the Jews added an extra month to keep their calendar seasonal.”*

So based on the Jewish calendar of 360 days, 483 years from the king’s decree brings us to 33 AD, to the very day when Jesus rides into the city of Jerusalem as the people are waving palm branches, crying, ‘Hosanna!’

Zechariah 9:9—“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

I want to stop right here for now, and we'll pick back up next week.

I can't help but believe that the preoccupation with so many stories in our day, whether it be movies and cinema, or conspiracy theories, or whatever—it all points to a lack of understanding of where we fit in when it comes to God's great story. There is indeed an evil afoot in this world who seeks to dismantle all that is good. Man's world has been under siege by a dragon, and that dragon has blinded man to his true condition. But there has been a Hero who has stepped onto the scene! And through His own death and resurrection, our Hero has broken the power of the dragon, emptied the grave of its threat, and has brought hope and security to the one who looks to Him in faith.