

Daniel's 70 Weeks and the Glorious Work of Messiah Jesus

Daniel 9:20-27

Introduction: 1) My friend Alistair Begg playfully but wisely says of Daniel 9:24-27, “this is my interpretation this morning. However, I reserve the right to change my mind tonight. Further, I reserve the right to change my mind tomorrow, next week, next month, next year and any other time.” After spending dozens and dozens of hours studying this text, I fully understand his position. Joyce Baldwin says, “the last four verses [of Daniel 9] present the most difficult text in the book...” (*Daniel*, TOTC, 163). Stephen Miller says Daniel 9:24-27, “are four of the most controversial verses in the Bible” (*Daniel*, NAC, 252). J. A. Montgomery is perhaps the most colorful when he writes, “the history of the exegesis of the 70 Weeks of Daniel is the Dismal Swamp of Old Testament criticism (quoted in Andrew Hill, *Daniel*, EBC, vol. 8, 168).

2) There is, without question, difficulty in the details. However, we must not let that reality distract us from the big picture that is clear and plain for all to see. Charles Spurgeon lays out God's divine plan for us with his wonderful gift of words:

“The Lord God appointed a set time for the coming of his Son into the world; nothing was left to chance. Infinite wisdom dictated the

hour at which the Messiah should be born, and the moment at which he should be cut off. His advent and his work are the highest point of the purpose of God, the hinge of history, the centre of providence, the crowning of the edifice of grace, and therefore peculiar care watched over every detail. Once in the end of the world hath the Son of God appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and this is the event before which all other events must bow. The studious mind will be delighted to search out the reasons why the Messiah came not before, and why he did not tarry till yet later ages. Prophecies declared the date; but long before infallible wisdom had settled it for profoundest reasons. It was well that the Redeemer came: it was well that he came in what Scripture calls the fullness of time, even in these last days.

Note again, that the Lord told his people somewhat darkly, but still with a fair measure of clearness, when the Christ would come.”

(Sermons on the Book of Daniel, 121).

3) So, God has a specific plan in which Messiah will come and deal decisively with sin, though He will be executed in the process, and many troubles will precede and follow that coming. Israel, in particular, will suffer, but God has decreed how and when the end will come. Regardless of where we are or what we

are experiencing, we can trust Him. He is in control. His plan will come to pass just as He has planned.

4) Daniel is praying for his people Israel (9:4-19). His prayer is one of deep repentance and heartfelt confession. Deuteronomy 4 and 28 said that Israel would sin, be scattered from their land, seek God [which Daniel is doing on their behalf] and return to the Lord (see Deut. 4:25-31). Jeremiah 25:1-14 and 29:10-14 tell us that this particular exile in Babylon would last 70 years. Daniel understood these verses literally and recognized the exile was coming to an end. Interestingly, when King Solomon voiced his prayer of dedication for the temple in 1 Kings 8:22-53, he said that if and when Israel was sent into exile for her sin, they should seek God in prayer and repentance and He would forgive and rescue them. Daniel is doing exactly what Solomon prayed almost 500 years earlier.

Our passage can be divided into two parts: 1) Daniel's prayers (9:20-23) and 2) God's prophecy (9:24-27). Prepare yourself for a hermeneutical rollercoaster!

I. God hears the passionate prayer of His beloved children 9:20-23

James 4:3 has a stern warning when it comes to prayer. There the brother of Jesus says, "You ask [in prayer] and do not receive, because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions" [*HCSB*, "evil desires", *KJV*, "lusts"]. Who we pray to, what we

pray for, and how we pray are all important to God. The prophet Daniel provides a marvelous example of a man whose prayer life met all the criteria to receive an answer from God.

1) Daniel prayed to God 9:20-21

- Daniel 9:20-27 follows the lengthy prayer of 9:1-19. I believe it describes that prayer and indicates that Daniel was still praying! He is still “speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the Lord (*Yahweh*) my God for the holy hill of my God” (v. 20). He is praying to the right person with the right posture, something that always characterizes real and authentic praying.
- While he is praying the angel Gabriel suddenly appears in the form of a man. Daniel notes it is the same angel he had seen in a vision in 8:15-17. Gabriel means “God is my strength.” He is mentioned twice in Daniel in chapters 8-9. In the Gospel of Luke he appears to Zechariah and Mary announcing the births of John the Baptist and Jesus (Luke 1:11-38). Some believe he is an archangel though the Bible never calls him one. Daniel says he “came to me in swift flight,” teaching us that angels are not omnipresent but that they can move quickly. Daniel also said he came “at the time of the evening sacrifice.” That’s interesting. There

had been no evening sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem since 586 B.C. when it was destroyed. Nevertheless, Daniel still tells time according to his religious calendar. “He still functions on ‘Jerusalem time’” (Davis, *Daniel*, BST, 124). Daniel at 80 plus years has not lost his spiritual identity. *Yahweh’s* clock is his clock!

2) God answered the prayer of Daniel 9:21-23

- God sent his angel Gabriel while Daniel was praying (v.21). He is there to help Daniel understand, “to give [him] insight and understanding” (v.22). While some make a connection here to the vision of chapter 8, I believe it is better to see Gabriel answering Daniel’s prayer in chapter 9 and providing an explanation of Israel’s exile and her future, things that were the concerns of Daniel’s prayer.
- In verse 23 Gabriel tells Daniel that the moment he began praying (“At the beginning of your pleas for mercy”) “a word went out and I have come to tell it to you.” Daniel prayed → God heard → God sent out a word of command to give him an answer → Gabriel got the command, flew swiftly and here he is to give an answer to his prayer. Why? The text tells us: “for you are greatly loved” (HCSB, “for you are treasured by God”).

- Those that the Lord greatly loves he hears. Those that are greatly loved our God honors. Daniel is precious in the sight of God and therefore so are his prayers. God values the prayers of his faithful and righteous saints. He treasures them. Gabriel has been sent directly by God with an answer to Daniel's prayer. Therefore, he should carefully "consider the message and understand the vision," through the appearance and words of Gabriel. Daniel is about to receive one of the greatest and most important visions and revelations in all of the Bible. His alertness and readiness is a must.

II. God has a prophetic plan to bring about our salvation

9:24-27

- Verses 24-27 address the "70 weeks" prophecy of Daniel, better the "70 sevens" of Daniel. Virtually all scholars agree that the "sevens" represent years not weeks. The word "seven" is like our English word "dozens." It can refer to seven days, weeks, months, or years. God is telling Daniel that Israel's exile will not last 70 years. It will last 70 x 7 years or 490 years. The Hebrews would have readily understood this. Not only did they celebrate the Sabbath every 7 days, they were also supposed to celebrate a "Sabbath year" every 7 years according to Leviticus 25:1-7. Unfortunately, they had disobeyed the command and that was one of the reasons they were exiled for 70 years (cf. Lev. 26:33-35; 2 Chron. 36:21).

- Now, we should note that four major views are held by various scholars today on how to understand the 70 sevens. I will quickly note them, and then move into our verses defending the view I think is the best understanding at the time I am writing this! I am following Stephen Miller and his fine work on Daniel (pgs. 253-57).

- 1) The seventy 7's are literal years that run from either 605 or 586 B.C. to the reign of Antiochus (Epiphanes) in 167-64 B.C. The dates, however, simply do not work and this view does not fit well with what Daniel 9:24-27 actually says. This is a view usually advocated by more liberal scholars.
- 2) The seventy 7's are symbolic periods of time culminating in the 1st century A. D. The view also struggles with dates and the content of the prophecy.
- 3) The seventy 7's are symbolic periods of time ending with the 2nd coming of Christ. "The seventy 7's are a prophecy of church history (both the Old Testament and the New Testament church) from Cyrus' decree in 538 B.C. until the return of Christ at the end of the age" (Miller, 255). I find this view unconvincing as well.
- 4) The seventy 7's are literal years that end with Christ second coming but also include his 1st coming. And, there is an important prophetic

gap between the 69th and 70th week. The first 69 weeks are now past. The climatic 70th week is still future. Miller lays this scenario out and it is the one I find the most convincing overall.

“The first seven sevens (forty-nine years) commence with a command to rebuild Jerusalem (either the decree to Ezra in 458 B. C. or the decree to Nehemiah in 445 B. C.) and terminate with the completion of the work of Ezra and Nehemiah about forty-nine years later (either ca. 409 B.C. or ca. 396 B.C.). The next sixty-two sevens (434 years) extend from the end of the first group of sevens to Christ’s first coming (either his baptism in c. A. D. 26 or Christ’s presentation of himself to the people as Messiah on Palm Sunday in A. D. 32/33)” (257).

The 70th week is separated in time from the 69. Daniel 9:26b-27 looks both to the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70 and the coming of Antichrist at the end of the age. Titus, the Roman general, is a forerunner and type of Antichrist. The destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70 foreshadows an end time persecution that will exceed anything the world has ever known. I believe this is the understanding of Jesus according to his teaching in the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 (notes especially verses 15-28).

- Let's walk through these four verses humbly and carefully. I will note what we can be more sure of. I will again remind us that we should tread softly where angels fear to go!

1) In His time God deals with sin 9:24

Gabriel tells Daniel “Seventy sevens” (lit. rendering) “are decreed about your people [Israel] and your holy city” [Jerusalem]. Fyall notes, “Behind all biblical uses of seven lie the seven days of creation. Thus the return from Exile is not simply a new Exodus, but a new creation and thus foreshadows the End time” (*Daniel*, 142). During the seventy sevens, six things will occur:

- 1) Transgressions will be finished.
- 2) An end to sin is made.
- 3) Atonement for iniquity will take place.
- 4) Everlasting righteousness is to be brought in.
- 5) Vision and prophecy will be sealed up.
- 6) The most Holy Place or Holy One will be anointed.

A small child, with only a limited knowledge and understanding of the Bible, could read this and immediately respond, “this is talking about Jesus and what He did for us.” And, he or she would be right. During the seventy weeks, sin is dealt with once and for all by means of

atonement when “the anointed prince” is cut off, crucified after 69 weeks (v. 25). His atoning sacrifice is God’s final word and will usher in everlasting righteousness through the anointing of the most holy place (perhaps a future temple like that described in Ezk. 40-48) or the Holy One Jesus who constitutes a new Temple Himself (a most holy place) and in His body the Church (John 2:18-21; 1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:19-21). Regardless, sin is coming to an end! The Anointed Prince and His work of atonement will see to it!

2) In His time God sends Messiah Jesus 9:25-26

- Daniel 9:25-27 focuses on three events that take place during the 490 years: 1) the rebuilding of Jerusalem (v.25) during the first 7 weeks or 49 years; 2) the coming and death of Messiah (v.26) during the 7 and 62 weeks or 483 years; and 3) the persecution by Antichrist (the prince of the people) and his defeat (v.27) in the final or 70th week.
- In verse 25 Daniel is told to know and understand that “from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed prince there shall be seven weeks” (or 49 years). This word “going out” is probably a reference to the decree of Artaxerxes I to Ezra in 458 B.C. or a second decree of Artaxerxes

I to Nehemiah in 445/444 B. C. Though dogmatism is unwarranted, I favor the date of 458 B. C. as the correct beginning point for the seventy sevens. The temple, city and walls would be rebuilt but troubles would accompany the rebuilding every step of the way, especially during the first 49 years as the book of Nehemiah makes clear.

Verse 26 then informs us that after the 62 weeks (plus the prior 7 equaling 69 weeks or 483 years) the Anointed Prince, the Messiah would “be cut off and have nothing.” If 458 B.C. is correct, 483 years brings us to c. A. D. 26-27 and the time of Christ and the beginning of his public ministry. This is a remarkable prediction and fulfillment! What amazing accuracy.

- Then, sometime after the 69th week, probably a very short time, Messiah is cut off and left with nothing (v. 26a). He is put to death and appears “to be cut off out of the land of the living” (Isa. 53:8). James Boice summarizes well our text at this point, “By whatever set of calculations one makes, the point is that by the end of the sixty-nine weeks of years [or shortly after] the great work of the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ for sin should be completed” (*Daniel*, 101).

3) In His time God judges His people 9:26-27

Messiah has been rejected. Judgment follows from what Gabriel calls “the people of the prince who is to come.” I believe the Romans and General Titus were typical of this prophecy in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70. The end of Israel indeed was like a flood and it was a tragic and horrible war. Indeed, “Desolations are decreed” (v. 26b). But this is not the end. There is a common prophetic gap between the 69th and 70th week. Robert Gundy says it well, “The possibility of gap between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks is established by the well accepted Old Testament phenomenon of prophetic perspective, in which gaps such as that between the first and second advents were not perceived” (quoted in Miller, *Daniel*, 269). Messiah is cut off at the end or shortly after the end of the 69th week. Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed after the 69th week but before the 70th week. There is a prophetic gap that is undetermined in terms of years.

4) In His time God will destroy His enemies 9:27

Verse 27 deals with the 70th week, the last 7 years of history prior to the coming of God’s kingdom in its full and glorious manifestation. It

begins when he, the ruler or prince of v. 26, “makes a strong covenant with many for one week.” Typified by Titus, this is Antichrist, the little horn of Daniel 7:8. He is a deceiver and persecutor of God’s people. Antichrist, or the prince who is to come, makes this “strong covenant” (firm agreement) with many. This is probably a reference to the Jewish people (though some think it is specifically unbelieving Jews or even true believers). At the midpoint, (3½ years) he apparently breaks the covenant and puts an end to sacrifice and offering. Worship of the true God, or any gods, other than him is outlawed and forbidden (see Rev. 13). The phrase “On the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate” most likely speaks of the spreading of abominations in the context of idolatry. This will continue, but not forever. It will continue “until the decreed end is poured out on the desolations,” until God stops it and in the process pours out his judgment and wrath on Antichrist. Miller handles these difficult verses as well as anyone I have read:

“Antichrist’s incredible atrocities against his fellow human beings and his attacks upon God himself (cf. 7:21-25) will include even the idolatrous claim that he is deity with an attempt at forced worship of himself (cf. 2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:8. 14-17).

“One who causes desolation” (similar to NASB) refers to Antichrist, who will forbid worship and thereby make the temple area desolate (empty). Rather than being an object that desolates in this context, it appears to be the Antichrist himself who desolates. This person’s terrible atrocities (“abominations”) and the fact he causes the temple to be desolate (because of religious persecution) results in the judgment announced in the latter part of the verse.

This will be a terrible period in the world’s history, but the Lord has “decreed” that these atrocities will not continue forever. Antichrist’s wickedness will last only “until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.” “Poured out” picturesquely describes the flood of judgment that will overtake the Antichrist (cf. 7:9-11, 26; 2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 19:19-21). “On him” is literally “on the desolating one” (“desolator,” NRSV; Heb. šōmēn), a reference to Antichrist, which will cause the temple to become desolate” (Miller, *Daniel*, 273). Davis succinctly adds, “A final ruler then exalts himself, imposes his authority, forbids true worship, instigates idolatrous worship and runs into the meat-grinder of God’s decree. Predetermined. On target. Certain” (*Daniel*, BST, 137-38).

Conclusion: How does this text point to Christ?

1) Daniel sees from Jeremiah that exile will last 70 years. Therefore, he prays a prayer of repentance and confession to ready the people for a return home, and he pleads with God to act mercifully for His glory in rescuing his people from their sin and exile (9:1-19). God answers Daniel by sending Gabriel to give a prophetic revelation. Gabriel tells Daniel that exile will actually last 70 x 7 years, or 490 years, and exile will not end until the Messiah comes and is crucified (that is when sin will finally be dealt with and righteousness will be brought in). After that, in the final “week” of human history, the Antichrist will come bringing in the Great Tribulation and desecrating the holy city. But, he will be defeated like Daniel 7 and 9 prophesy. There is an already/not yet reality in this prophecy. There is significant mystery, but there are also divine certainties we can all agree on.

2) H.C. Leupold calls Daniel 9 “the divine program for the ages” (*Exposition of Daniel*, 406). On that he is correct because it points to and revolves all around the Anointed Prince, Messiah Jesus. The text predicts the coming of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, who will abolish sin and establish everlasting righteousness by being cut off, executed on a Roman cross. And, he will come exactly when God promised He would in one of the most amazing prophecies in all of the Bible. Following His death, the city of Jerusalem and the temple will be destroyed; which it was in A.D. 70 under the Roman General Titus. As Jesus taught in the Olivet

Discourse of Matthew 24, this tragic event anticipates and typifies the end of this present evil age and the arrival of a prince who is to come, the Antichrist. He will persecute God's people and devastate God's land, but his end will come like a flood when the Anointed Prince returns and destroys him. All who long for and love the Anointed Prince, King Jesus, will experience, in all its fullness, the salvation blessings of 9:24. Until then, we work and we wait. We serve and we hope. The plan is in place. The clock is ticking. The Anointed Prince is on the way!