

A Study in Daniel 9:17–27

Daniel's Prayer, Gabriel's Message, and the Seventy Weeks

We are reading tonight in Daniel chapter 9, taking up at verse 17.

"And now, our God, hearken to the prayer of thy servant and to his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake."

"Incline thine ear, O my God, and hear. Open thine eyes and behold our desolations and the city that is called by thy name. For we do not present our supplications before thee because of our righteousnesses, but because of thy manifold mercies."

"Lord, hear. Lord, forgive. Lord, hearken and do. Defer not, for thine own sake, O my God, for thy city and thy people are called by thy name."

"And whilst I was speaking and praying and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before Jehovah my God for the holy mountain of my God — whilst I was yet speaking in prayer — the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, flying swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me and talked with me and said, Daniel, I am now come forth to make thee skillful of understanding."

"At the beginning of thy supplications the word went forth, and I am come to declare it, for thou art one greatly beloved. Therefore consider the word and have understanding in the vision."

"Seventy weeks are apportioned out upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to close the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make expiation for iniquity, and to bring in the righteousness of the ages, and to seal the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Holy of Holies."

"Know therefore and understand: from the going forth of the word to restore and to build Jerusalem unto Messiah the Prince are seven weeks and sixty-two weeks. The street and the moat shall be built again, even in troublous times."

"And after the sixty-two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary, and the end thereof shall be with an overflow, and unto the end, war — the desolations determined."

"And he shall confirm a covenant with the many for one week, and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease. And because of the protection of abominations there shall be a desolator, even until that the consumption and what is determined shall be poured out upon the desolate."

Daniel's Prayer of Confession

We may remember from last time that the key characteristic of this chapter is that it is a prayer of confession by Daniel. We remarked then that Daniel himself was not really guilty of the sins he confesses on behalf of his people, because Daniel was subject to the authority of God and to the place God had appointed for Israel. He was one of the captives in Babylon — which is precisely what the prophets had warned Israel would come — and Daniel submitted to that. He was not a freedom fighter back in Jerusalem.

We hear a great deal today about the moral goodness of freedom fighters. But the role of a believer is to be subject to God, and when God has imposed His government we are to submit to it. That is really what faithful Daniel was. God's government came upon Israel justly — they had been warned by many prophets, and finally that government fell upon them. Daniel submits to it.

Yet, as we remarked last time, Daniel did not say — as the Pharisee might — "I thank God that I am not like other men." He could have prayed that way: God, I, faithful Daniel, want to beseech You for the rebels back in Jerusalem. But no — he identifies himself with God's people. He is one of them, and he takes upon himself the sin of that people.

This is the moral posture the main part of the chapter sets before us. We likened it to children caught doing something wrong — and the instinct of each is to point the finger at the other. That was not Daniel. Daniel was the one who steps up and says, "We sinned" — even though he was not the one who did it.

This is an example to us as believers. We are not to look at ourselves as sitting in a clean corner of Christendom where everything is fine, while everywhere else is not so good. The example of Daniel is: I am part of Israel, I am guilty and deserving of this punishment that God has for His people. So every one of us, whatever our personal walk may be, must recognize that God has a people here — comprised of all believers — which we call the church, the body of Christ. We enter that body when we are indwelt of the Holy Spirit, and we become part of it. All of God's dealings with the church are God's dealings with me. Whether the church has a good testimony before the world, or whether the church is in a divided state as we see today — I am part of all of that, regardless of whether I think I am walking according to God's precepts.

Daniel's Appeal — Not on the Basis of Righteousness

What proceeds from Daniel's confession? He has an appeal to God. And is that appeal based on: "Well, I have made everything right — now may I have something"? That is not Daniel's posture at all. We notice in verse 17 and again in verse 20 the basis of his appeal. In verse 17 he says "upon thy sanctuary," and in verse 20, "for the holy mountain of my God." He is appealing to God for the things that are precious to God — not on the basis of any righteousness of his own.

This is an important thing to lay hold of with respect to prayer. When we are in God's presence seeking something from Him, what we ought to be seeking is what He wants. That is really what Daniel's prayer is — it is focused on what God wants and what is precious to Him. Daniel is a vessel that prays for those things on behalf of God's people Israel.

We have remarked before that in James we read about faithful Elijah, who prayed a prayer of faith that it would not rain — and it did not rain. And he prayed again that it would rain — and it did. But that is not cause and effect. Elijah was in communion with God and understood what God had for His people Israel — that they were going to be put through a trial because of their unfaithfulness. So he prayed for exactly what God planned to do. He was not carrying out Elijah's will; he was carrying out God's will. As a prophet, he was reflecting what God was specifically directing him to say and to do. That is a parallel to what Daniel is doing here. These were not new and novel things he was praying to God. He was entering into God's ways — because he was a faithful man who had submitted himself to the government of God.

Notice how he opens in verse 17: "And now, our God, hearken to the prayer of thy servant." Then in verse 18: "Incline thine ear, O my God." There is an interesting distinction. The expression our God speaks of God in His relationship to the whole nation — the mixed multitude, all of ethnic Israel, all the descendants of Abraham. But when he makes his personal supplication, he says, "O my God" — and that seems to bring before us the difference between the nation as a whole and the faithful remnant, as typified in Daniel. It is the remnant that God is most occupied with — those who went ahead into the captivity, as opposed to those who stayed behind.

Notice too that his request, right from the opening of verse 17, is not: "Cause thy face to shine upon thy people who are in captivity." He enters into God's heart. God loved His people, but first and foremost Daniel says: "Thy sanctuary that is desolate." Nebuchadnezzar had also taken away many of the sacred vessels, so there was real desolation there — they potentially could not even perform the required worship. But Daniel's occupation was not with himself, nor first with the people in captivity. His opening concern, the right moral order, is the sanctuary of God.

And how beautifully he states it in verse 18: "We do not present our supplications before thee because of our righteousnesses, but because of thy manifold mercies." It calls to mind the New Testament verse:

herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us (1 John 4).

In verse 19, the repeated cry is: "Lord, hear. Lord, forgive. Lord, hearken and do." The word Lord brings before us both the responsibility we have and the authority that God holds as our Lord. The Lord Jesus said on one occasion, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?" Lord implies submission. Daniel takes that very ground of submission. And then, "Defer not, for thine own sake, O my God" — the appeal to His omnipotence and His ability to perform it — "for thy city and thy people are called by thy name."

It is worth contrasting this with verse 24, where Gabriel speaks and says, "Seventy weeks are apportioned out upon thy people and upon thy holy city." In verse 19, God is acknowledging Daniel as being in the place of an intercessor by saying thy city and thy people. In verse 24, Gabriel says thy people and thy holy city — meaning Daniel's — and in so doing does not acknowledge them as God's own at that point, because Lo-Ammi had already been pronounced historically. God was not able to own them as His people at that moment. The same kind of language appears in Exodus — when Israel made the golden calf at Sinai, God said to Moses, "Go, get thee down; for thy people have corrupted themselves." There is a carefulness in Gabriel's wording, so as not to blur what the prophet had already declared about Israel being set aside for a time under God's government.

Gabriel's Appearance — The Evening Oblation

In verse 21, Gabriel appears to Daniel at the time of the evening oblation. He does not say about the time he was going to bed, or around supper time. It is a specifically Jewish reference, and that gives us an important clue: these things are not a prophecy about Gentiles, and they are not a prophecy with something hidden in them about the church. This is a particularly Jewish prophecy — and that is why the reference to the time of the evening oblation is there. The evening oblation was the time when the evening sacrifice was made ceremonially for the sins of the people. What an appropriate moment for one who has been praying a prayer of confession — and at that very time, Gabriel comes to explain to him something about God's timetable having to do with His purposes on earth.

Regarding the reference to Gabriel as "the man Gabriel": we understand him to be an angel. And there are two small but interesting details in verse 21 — the words flying and touched. Both of these are also found in Isaiah chapter 6, where the seraphim and cherubim attend the holiness of God. There they fly, and it is the touch — the coal from the altar touching Isaiah's lips — that has to do with expiation. Here, Daniel is engaged in confession and identification with the sins of Israel, and we see something of the same thought: Jehovah coming in and dealing with Daniel, with an echo of expiation as in Isaiah 6.

Gabriel says to Daniel in verse 23: "At the beginning of thy supplications the word went forth, and I am come to declare it." God was not sitting waiting to see just how well Daniel's prayer was before

deciding to respond. He was not being reactive. At the very beginning — before Daniel had said all the things he said in his prayer — God had already decreed that Daniel would be brought into understanding. We never want to think of God as responding to the eloquence or completeness of our prayers.

And then: "For thou art one greatly beloved." What an expression. Do we think of ourselves as greatly beloved? Every believer is. The Lord Jesus died for each one of us personally, and when God the Father looks at us, He looks through the Lord Jesus — He sees His Son. So He says, in effect, "There is one greatly beloved, because I see my Son." That is how every one of His own is viewed before God. It recalls the apostle John describing himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved — not as a claim of superiority, but as someone who was in the good of what the Lord's love toward him meant. That is the difference: not the fact of the love, but the enjoyment of it.

A Word on Iniquity and Transgression

Before proceeding to the message Gabriel brings, it may be helpful to clarify the distinction between iniquity and transgression, which arose in an earlier discussion.

Iniquity is the fundamental expression of the sin nature consequent upon the fall in the garden. It speaks of a crookedness, a fundamental unfitness for the purpose for which God made man — a ruinedness at the root.

Transgression, by contrast, is the breaking of express commandments, whether one is aware of them or not.

These are distinct, and the distinction matters as we read the language of verse 24.

Gabriel's Message — The Seventy Weeks (Verse 24)

The message Gabriel brings starting at verse 24 is, if we may put it that way, a message of hope. He explains to Daniel that there is a timeline, and that at the end of it something wonderful is to happen. God has it all completely mapped out.

Seventy weeks are apportioned — and those are weeks of years, so 70 times 7 gives us 490 years. These are real years, just as the 70 years of captivity were real years. The overarching purpose declared here is: to close the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make expiation for iniquity, to bring in the righteousness of the ages, to seal the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Holy of Holies. All of this has to do with God's dealings with His people Israel, and with how He is going to bring them to repentance and restore them.

It is also important to note that there is nothing in the passage that says these 70 weeks will unfold contiguously — without any gap whatsoever. A view called preterism insists that the 490 years must have unfolded in one unbroken sequence and therefore must all be in the past. But the scripture does not say that. We must be careful to recognize what scripture says and what it does not say — especially in matters of prophecy, which is fertile ground for the imagination of men. Our minds must be subject to exactly what the Word says, and nothing more.

There is a chart that may be helpful here. What we are most interested in is the portion showing the 69 weeks and the 70th week, marked in red. Do not be distracted by all the surrounding detail — just note the 69 weeks and what follows. These things were derived directly from the passage before us.

The Sixty-Nine Weeks — From Cyrus to Messiah the Prince

Verse 25 tells us: "From the going forth of the word to restore and to build Jerusalem unto Messiah the Prince are seven weeks and sixty-two weeks" — that is, 69 weeks of years, or 483 years.

When did that word go forth? Turn to Ezra chapter 1, verses 1 and 2:

"In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of Jehovah by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, Jehovah stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, and he made a proclamation throughout his kingdom and also in writing, saying: Thus says Cyrus king of Persia — all the kingdoms of the earth has Jehovah the God of heavens given to me, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah."

That is when the clock starts ticking — the decree of Cyrus that Jerusalem was to be restored and rebuilt. The events of Ezra and Nehemiah followed from that declaration. This was still future when revealed to Daniel, but we know it happened exactly as stated.

Now, 483 years after the decree of Cyrus, Messiah the Prince was to appear. When did Messiah appear as such in the New Testament? Not at His birth — but consider John 12, verses 12 and 13:

"On the morrow, a great crowd who came to the feast, having heard that Jesus is coming unto Jerusalem, took branches of palms and went out to meet him, and cried: Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord — the King of Israel!"

This is the entry of Messiah the Prince — 483 years after Cyrus made his declaration, exactly as Daniel said. It all seemed so promising in John 12: Israel ready to receive their Messiah. Yet we know it was not long after this that He was crucified.

Verse 26: "After the sixty-two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, and shall have nothing." He was cut off — crucified — and received no kingdom when He was here on earth. That is precisely what the Messiah was to have received, but He was cut off and had nothing. This is exact. Daniel, writing almost 500 years earlier, stated that Messiah the Prince would come and would be cut off. Do we suppose it was an accident that the Lord was crucified? No — it was in God's purposes all along, and He told Daniel what was going to happen.

More than anything, what we want to understand from these things is that everything is going exactly according to what God has said. There are no mistakes, no variance — it is all working just as He declared.

The People of the Prince — An Historic Event (Verse 26)

Verse 26 continues: "And the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary, and the end thereof shall be with an overflow, and unto the end war — the desolations determined."

This requires careful reading. The people of the prince in verse 26 and the prince himself in verse 27 are two distinct entities. The people of the prince is not the same as the prince. There is a coming prince — the head of the revived Roman Empire, the one we sometimes refer to as the antichrist — and he is spoken of in verse 27. But in verse 26, it is his people who are in view: the invading Roman armies. This is in fact an historical event — General Titus and the Roman armies who came in and destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70. Was Titus the antichrist? Of course not. But he was a Roman general acting under the Roman Empire — the people of that coming prince who will one day be the head of a revived form of that same empire.

Some of Daniel's prophecies are entirely fulfilled in history. Others begin in history and have a future aspect still waiting. This is one of the latter: the first part — the destruction of the city and sanctuary — is already historical; the second part will happen at the end of the 70 weeks, which are not yet fulfilled.

The Gap — Lo-Ammi and the Church

On the chart, there is a significant gap between the end of the 69th week and the beginning of the 70th. This gap corresponds to the present age. Near the bottom of the chart, in orange, is the word Lo-Ammi, taken from Hosea 1:9 — the period during which God declared through the prophet: "They are not my people." This is a prophetic statement that God would leave Israel in a condition where they would not have the hedge about them that they had when He was actively their God and they were actively His people. Some have said this means God has cast Israel aside entirely, and it is now only Gentiles and

salvation by grace. But Romans 11 addresses this directly — and if we follow these things in scripture, there is coming a time when the glory cloud appears again and God declares Israel His people once more. That is what is brought before us in Daniel 9: these 70 weeks, all of them, have to do with God's ways with Israel.

Where do Christians fit in? We are His heavenly people. We come in during that gap between the 69th week and the 70th. In the New Testament, the mystery of Christ and the church is revealed — hidden from previous generations, made known through the apostle Paul. We are the bride of Christ. Israel is not the bride of Christ; their promises and hopes are earthly, because that is what was promised to Abraham, and God will bring those promises to pass. He is not going to say, "Abraham, I was merely illustrating something — my heavenly people will receive your promises instead." No — Abraham's seed will receive those promises, and God will establish a kingdom here on earth after the 70 weeks are fulfilled.

But before the tribulation period begins — before the 70th week — the Lord calls His heavenly people home. The day of grace ends. When the Lord gives that shout spoken of in 1 Thessalonians 4, and the dead in Christ rise first, the clock starts ticking again for His earthly people. We will have entered into eternity with the Lord — time ends for us the moment He takes us home. We will be in a constant state of praise and worship with the Lord Jesus, and from that vantage we will see His purposes unfold on earth. We will know as we are known, and we will enter into all that God is doing — with even more reason to praise Him.

The Seventieth Week and the Coming Prince (Verse 27)

Verse 27: "And he shall confirm a covenant with the many for one week, and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease; and because of the protection of abominations there shall be a desolator, even until that the consumption and what is determined shall be poured out upon the desolate."

He here refers to the prince that shall come from verse 26 — the head of the revived Roman Empire, the antichrist. He is the one who confirms a covenant for the final week, the 70th — a period of seven real years, just as the 483 were real years. In the middle of that week he causes the sacrifice and oblation to cease, and puts himself forward as worthy of worship in their place. He shuts down what belongs to the Lord and takes that place for himself. He becomes the occasion of the abomination — the idolatrous center — in the midst of Israel.

It is because of those abominations, and the protection afforded to them, that the desolator is able to come in and desolate. The desolator is not the antichrist himself — it is another. This is likely the Assyrian, the king of the north, who comes in as the final enemy of Israel before the Lord intervenes

directly.

And finally: "that the consumption and what is determined shall be poured out upon the desolate." This is the consummation of the judgment upon Israel for their idolatry — the finalization of that judgment. But who is determining what is poured out? Not the Assyrian. He is only the rod. The one holding the rod, the one whose indignation it is, is God. The Assyrian is called in Isaiah "the rod of mine indignation" — and when God is done with that rod, He will break it. The indignation belongs to God, and He is the one who determines when the judgment is complete. At that point, it is spent.

What we should take away from this entire chapter is that everything here is accounted for. Daniel prophesied that the word would go out to rebuild Jerusalem — it happened. He prophesied that Messiah would come and be cut off — it happened, to the very year. And now he has prophesied that there is a future thing still to come. Those 70 weeks — all 70 of them — have to do with Israel. And at the end, God's purposes for His earthly people will be accomplished, the transgression will be closed, and He will restore and be glorified among His people.

Lord willing, we will take up Daniel chapter 10 next time.