

The Book Of Daniel

*And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.
(Daniel 1:20 ESV)*

*but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.
(Daniel 2:28 ESV)*

*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.
(Daniel 12:2–3 ESV)*

The Vision Of The 70 Sevens

March 8th, 2020

Daniel 9

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Introduction:

Good morning church! I'd like to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to Daniel 9; that's on page 746 in your pew Bibles. I mentioned last week that scholars sometimes say that the Book of Daniel is the playground of fools in the Old Testament. There are strange details and minor features in these visions that CAN BE a source of never-ending distraction and debate for certain types of people – so an argument could be made that it would be better to avoid preaching on this part of the Bible so as not to tempt your people into silliness.

And yet, the Bible says ALL SCRIPTURE is God-breathed AND PROFITABLE for instruction – do you believe that? I believe that too – and therefore I anticipate GREAT BENEFIT for us in this text and also POTENTIAL DISTRACTION. So I'll walk you through the text and by God's grace, I'll try to point the main meaning and also mark off the common pitfalls and then we'll zoom out at the end to make note of the obvious implications and imperatives contained within the text.

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1.

Daniel's Prayer For His People:

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans— 2 in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years...

Now let's just pause here and get our bearings. Daniel says that this vision came to him during the first year of Darius the Mede – we talked about him back in Daniel 6. That means that this vision came to Daniel in the year 539 BC – the year that the greatest Empire in human history collapsed and was defeated and supplanted – in a single day.

This was one of the most significant dates in ancient history.

This would be like saying: “This vision came to me on September 11th, 2001.” Or “This vision came to me on June 6th 1941, a date which shall live in infamy”.

Right?

You get the idea.

This vision came to DANIEL AT THE TURNING OF THE AGES – and it DROVE him DEEPER into the word of Word of God – specifically, it appears to have driven him into Jeremiah 25:11-14. In that passage the prophet says:

“This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and **these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.** 12 Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 25:11–12 ESV)

Daniel is reading that just after it actually happened outside his front door!

Now let's just pause for a second and see that.

It was only AFTER Jeremiah's prophesy became history that DANIEL was able to piece together all the details.

Hear that distractable friends!!!!

This is how you stay out of the playground of fools!

Generally speaking – the minute DETAILS of biblical prophecy only make sense after the prophecy has become history. Here we see Daniel – himself a prophet – just now making sense of the prophecy of Jeremiah BECAUSE IT HAS JUST COME TO PASS OUTSIDE HIS FRONT DOOR!

So don't waste your time trying to figure out all the minute details of biblical prophecy – the main idea is always right on the surface – but there are details you can lose your life and ministry in - that will not become clear until the events themselves have taken place in history – and that's what's happening here.

Jeremiah said that all the nations of this region would be under the power of Babylon for 70 years – but then God would turn and JUDGE BABYLON and do unto HER and she had done to others – and that's what has just happened literally, right outside Daniel's front door.

God raised up Babylon to CLEANSE and PURIFY the whole region – but now, seemingly out of nowhere, Babylon has been thrown down.

So Daniel is seeing the text with new eyes and praying with fresh urgency and understanding. We see that now as we re-enter the story at verse 3:

Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. 4 I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, 5 we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. 6 We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people

of the land. 7 To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. 8 To us, O Lord, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. 9 To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him 10 and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. 11 All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him. 12 He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us, by bringing upon us a great calamity. For under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what has been done against Jerusalem. 13 As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us; yet we have not entreated the favor of the Lord our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth. 14 Therefore the Lord has kept ready the calamity and has brought it upon us, for the Lord our God is righteous in all the works that he has done, and we have not obeyed his voice. 15 And now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and have made a name for yourself, as at this day, we have sinned, we have done wickedly. 16 “O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill, because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people have become a byword among all who are around us. 17 Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. 18 O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. 19 O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name.”

So when PROPHECY BECAME HISTORY Daniel was able to understand the text in a new way. In a sense he was able to locate himself now on the MAP of Scripture. He was able to connect the dots. We're HERE because we took this wrong turn.

You can backwards engineer Daniel's entire thought process. In addition to reading Jeremiah he had obviously been reading Moses. He refers to Moses in his prayer and he talks about the law and the covenant. He clearly had in mind texts like Deuteronomy 28, which says:

“If you are not careful to do all the words of this law that are written in this book... then the Lord will bring on you and your offspring extraordinary afflictions, afflictions severe and lasting ... And the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other”
(Deuteronomy 28:58–64 ESV)

So Daniel has figured out now: this is how we got off track!! And so Daniel begins to repent and pray: “Lord, bring us home!”

That’s what this prayer is! It is a prayer of repentance emerging out of the MAP of Holy Scripture.

And God is pleased with what he’s hearing– so he sends help. We begin to read about that now at verse 20:

A Response From Heaven:

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, 21 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 the evening sacrifice. 22 He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, “O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. 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. Therefore consider the word and understand the vision.

Now let’s just stop here briefly and notice how quickly God responds with help when his people begin to truly repent.

This is like the father in the Prodigal Son story right? As soon as you turn around – as soon as God sees you making your home – he is there! Smothering your story in the strength of his embrace!!!

Daniel started to pray – and immediately help was sent.

Gabriel goes on to say in 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.

Now remember, Daniel has been reading his Bible and he has discovered that the time of the Babylonian oppression will last about 70 years. He is at the end of that time now so he begins to pray for the return from exile. Gabriel shows up and instead of talking about the 70 years that Daniel was focused on he starts talking about 70 7s – the Hebrew word translated as “weeks” just means “7” – so 70 7s – which is a biblical way of referring to a similar but much bigger plan.

That’s what is going on here! The return from Babylonian exile now becomes a type or anticipation of our ultimate redemption through Jesus Christ. Old Testament scholar Ronald S. Wallace says helpfully here:

“In the shape of earlier and smaller events, we can discern the patterns that are going to be manifested in the final events.”¹

So while there is some dispute about the minor details – the main idea here is very clear. Gabriel directs Daniel’s gaze to the BIGGER PICTURE. There is a grander story of redemption that is being written here. And just as God took 70 years to affect this little redemption, so he will devote 70 7s to the great redemption that is still to come – that’s the main idea.

Now listen to what Gabriel says has to get done in order for our REDEMPTION to be secured. This is what the 70 sevens are for. Gabriel mentions 6 things in verse 24:

1. To finish the transgression
2. To put an end to sin
3. To atone for iniquity
4. To bring in everlasting righteousness
5. To seal up vision and prophet
6. To anoint the Most Holy (place or person)

¹ Ronald S. Wallace, *The Lord Is King: The Message of Daniel in The Bible Speaks Today*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 166 as cited in Hill, 175.

Now most of those are self-explanatory – those are all Jesus things!!! Those are things that God did in Christ to secure our redemption. We know most of those things very well; we talk about them every week. Two of them though, probably need a little explanation – I’m thinking of #5 and #6.

What does it mean that God will seal up vision and prophet?

Old Testament scholar Andrew Hill is helpful here, he says:

“To “seal” a document in the ancient world was to authenticate it with one’s own engraved stamp, a type of signature.”²

So to say that during the 70 7s God will SEAL up vision and prophet is to say that during that time he will AUTHENTICATE every single Old Testament prophecy and anticipation – and that is precisely what Jesus does.

Jesus is the STAMP OF GOD upon every promise and prophecy of the Old Testament is he not?

So this is one of the things that God will do during this specified period. In Christ he will sign off on EVERY prophecy of Holy Scripture. And whatever wasn’t crossed off in the first coming of Jesus, you can bet your bottom dollar it will be crossed off and fulfilled entirely in the second of Jesus. That’s what #5 means.

#6 in my Bible comes with a little text note. So in the ESV it says that during this time God will anoint a Holy Place – but then the text note says that this same Hebrew word can mean a holy person. And so – this is one of the details that folks will argue about. Will a holy place be anointed – a sort of new temple? Or will a holy person be anointed?

And of course if you are a Bible reader – you know very well that the two are one and the same!
In the Gospel of John Jesus said:

² Andrew E. Hill, *Daniel* in The Expositor’s Bible Commentary Revised Edition Volume 8, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 170.

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” (John 2:19 ESV)

And then just in case you didn't get it, John adds in verse 21:

“he was speaking about the temple of his body.” (John 2:21 ESV)

So Jesus was a person AND A PLACE – so mark me down for either/or on #6.

These are the things that the Lord will do in Christ to secure our ULTIMATE REDEMPTION – thanks be to God! We jump back into the text at verse 25:

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 moat, but in a troubled time.

Now as I mentioned, most translations use the term “weeks” here but the Hebrew simply means SEVENS – but either way, this is obviously symbolic language. I'm not familiar with anybody who takes this in a WOODENLY LITERALISTIC WAY – as if Gabriel were saying that all of this would take place in 70 actual weeks – or a little under a year and a half. So this is symbolic – it means “in God's perfect timing” – which according to Gabriel will be divided up into 3 different sets or seasons. In the first set, the smaller one, he tells Daniel to expect an anointed prince - not THE ANOINTED PRINCE mind you, but AN anointed prince, who will come and rebuild Jerusalem in troubled times.

This almost certainly refers to Cyrus the Persian. As strange as it sounds, Cyrus is actually referred to as the anointed of the Lord in Holy Scripture – in Isaiah 45:1 it says:

Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed (Isaiah 45:1 ESV)

So Cyrus – a non-Jewish king is an anointed servant of the Lord and Gabriel says that during the first period of the 70 7s God will use Cyrus to rebuild his house in Jerusalem – and as you well know, that is exactly what happened.

We jump back into the story at verse 26:

26 And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing.

This anointed one is Jesus!

So Cyrus is the main agent in the first part of the plan, then after a long delay – many 7s - there is another anointed one and what is said about him sounds like it was lifted directly out of Isaiah 53:

he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people
(Isaiah 53:8 ESV)

So this anointed one is Jesus – the Suffering Servant and the Lamb of God. Verse 26 goes on to say:

And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed....

Now here we meet another of those details about which people disagree. Some see this as referring to the future Army of Antichrist – that’s the standard Dispensational view - but others understand this as referring to the armies of Rome and to Titus who destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70. I think that is the more straight forward understanding and it seems to make better sense of the grammar and the flow of the text. Thus Gabriel is saying that after the Christ is cut off, Rome will destroy the Holy City and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood - as indeed we know it did.

Verse 27:

27 And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.” (Daniel 9:1–27 ESV)

This verse is probably the most disputed verse in the passage. The key question is this: who is the he at the start of verse 27? Some understand the HE as Jesus and they make reference to his putting an end to sacrifice through his death on the cross. Others understand the HE here as the “anti-Christ” and they understand this to mean that he forces people into a false covenant and makes war against the worship and people of God. This will be allowed to go on for a short time but then at the end, he will be judged and decisively thrown down.

The wording of the verse as a whole seems to incline in that direction – meaning that the HE in verse 27 is antichrist. Tremper Longman III for example says here:

“The unspecified “he” confirms a covenant for one “seven”, presumably the seventieth, but in the middle of it he cuts off sacrifice and offering. While it may be possible to construe the latter in some way as positive, the erection of “an abomination that causes desolation” clearly is not. The period of the prophecy ends with the end of this disruptive person.”³

Thus what Gabriel is saying is that God is working a much bigger plan than even the return of Israel from their exile in Babylon. In his perfect timing, the Lord will bring about an absolute end to the ultimate EXILE and ESTRANGEMENT of his people. He will work through various means and agencies. In the first stage of his plan watch for an anointed leader who will rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. In the second stage of his plan watch for a Suffering Servant who will put an end to sin, atone for iniquity, fulfill every prophecy and establish the ultimate meeting place between God and man. But then, near the end of his plan, watch for a demonic opposer who will cut off the worship of God’s people – though only for a season. After he has done his work – a decree will go forth, his chain will be yanked and his kingdom destroyed and made desolate.

Thanks be to God!

That is the end of what may very well be the most remarkable prophecy in all the Bible.

³ Tremper Longman III, *Daniel* in the NIV Application Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 228.

Now what do we do with that?

We're supposed to ask that question – Peter asked it. 2 Peter 3:11 says:

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be (2 Peter 3:11 ESV)

A prophecy like that implies certain practical and spiritual imperatives - so in the time we have left let me see if I can point a few of those out to you.

Implications And Imperatives:

The first one is this. Given what we've seen in the text, it seems pretty clear that:

1. God's people must strive to understand the times and seasons

That's what we see Daniel doing at the start of this story. He WATCHED the collapse of the Babylonian Empire – and it literally DROVE HIM INTO THE TEXT AND INTO PRAYER.

That's exactly what God's people are supposed to do! Jesus criticized the religious leaders of his day for not doing this. He said:

“When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’³ And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.” (Matthew 16:2–3 ESV)

You pay more attention to the WEATHER than you do to the movement of God's purposes in the world.

God's people are supposed to do better than that.

When things happen in the world – we are supposed to go to the text and into the prayer closet so that we can come out with something more valuable than FEAR and FURTHER CHAOS.

So, when a VIRUS HITS – we are not supposed to be the “hide in the basement” people – we are supposed to be the “interpret the signs of the times” people. We’re supposed to be the ones who remember that the bible predicts all manner of shaking and stirring – empires rising and falling, wars breaking out here and there, economic crises and upheavals – plagues even and the ever-present specter of sudden death. These are all MEANS by which God RATTLES OUR CAGE and shatters our slumber and causes us to consider what it is that we are trusting in.

God used plague to shake millions of people out of Roman paganism and into the Kingdom of God – might not that be what God is doing now in Communist China?

You see God’s people read history through the lens of Holy Scripture – and then they pray in accordance with what they see.

2. God’s people must pray in accordance with God’s Word and purpose

That’s our second obvious imperative. God’s people are supposed to SEE HISTORY through SCRIPTURE and then pray. Tremper Longman is worth quoting again here, he says:

“Daniel knows that the end of the Exile does not come automatically, it requires confession and repentance. That is the intention of his prayer.”⁴

Do you see that?

Daniel KNOWS now that God has ordained an end to the exile – but he doesn’t just sit back and say, “ok well looks like God’s got this. I’ll go have a nap.” No! He says – “it looks like God has a plan – so I better go and pray for the success of that plan!”

Daniel understands that God ordains the ends and the means.

⁴ Tremper Longman III, *Daniel* in the NIV Application Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 218.

So KNOWING that God might be working a plan in China is just the start – now you need to pray for the success of that plan. Pray for God’s people to have the courage to march into quarantine zones preaching the Gospel and caring for the sick and abandoned. That’s how Christianity defeated Roman paganism and that’s how Christianity will defeat Chinese communism.

Do you see God doing that?

Then pray that God does that.

That’s how prayer works in the bible.

And then thirdly:

3. God’s people must look to Christ for the ultimate end of their exile and bondage

Daniel was focused on his immediate redemption – and the immediate redemption of his people. God doesn’t rebuke him for that – he just widens out the lens of his concern a little bit. And that is something that God’s people often need. We become obsessed with our immediate bondage. “Lord I am sick! Lord I am poor! Lord I am struggling!!” And God does not rebuke us for those prayers or those longings – rather he speaks to us IN THOSE PRAYERS AND LONGINGS about the ultimate redemption that is ours through the person and work of Christ.

The angel directs Daniel’s attention toward a much bigger plan and the very heart and centre of that plan of course is Jesus. By means of his life, and death and resurrection and ascension and present intercession the people of the Lord are set FREE from their slavery to sin and death and restored to the intimacy and glory for which they were created – thanks be to God!

But.

On the road to glory there lurks a terrible adversary. And that leads us to our final imperative:

4. God’s people must resolve to endure the hatred and harassment of their enemy

The sluggard says, “There is a lion in the road! There is a lion in the streets!”
(Proverbs 26:13 ESV)

You see, the fool in the Bible refuses to go on the journey because of the hazards he might face along the way.

And in our safety obsessed culture – the FOOL seems like a paragon of wisdom. Who goes on a journey when you’ve been told that there is a lion on the side of the road!!

Only an idiot undertakes such a journey.

Or a person who knows that the lion has been chained and who is resolved to walk this narrow way right up to the Gates of the Celestial City. Jesus said:

From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. (Matthew 11:12 ESV)

There are no easy roads to the Celestial City!

There is THIS ROAD – and THIS LION – but beyond that, glory, beauty and JESUS forevermore.

That is the walk of faith. That is the road to heaven. And this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let’s pray together.