

Israel's Future, Part 1

Scripture: Daniel 9:20–24

Code: 27-24

INTRODUCTION

A. The Amazing Prophecy

Some scholars consider Daniel 9:20-27 the single greatest defense of the divine inspiration of the Bible, for it precisely states when the Messiah would come to earth. Sir Isaac Newton, who wrote a discourse on the topic, said we could stake the truth of Christianity on that prophecy alone, made five centuries before Christ.

The prophet Daniel stated, "While I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people, Israel . . . the [angel] Gabriel . . . said, O Daniel, . . . "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know, therefore, and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah, the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself; and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary, and the end of it shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week; and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate. "

B. Its Historical Setting

After the reign of Solomon the kingdom of Israel was divided into two parts: the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. In approximately 722 B. C. the Assyrians took away most of the inhabitants of the northern kingdom. They were dispersed in the Assyrian Empire and few returned.

The inhabitants of southern kingdom of Judah were later taken captive by the Babylonians--the first of four great Gentile world empires: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome (cf. Dan. 7:1-8). That captivity began about 605 B. C. when King Nebuchadnezzar started what became a series of three significant deportations from Judah. In the first deportation Nebuchadnezzar carried away the young men from among the nobles and princes of Judah. Among them were four young men named Daniel, Mishaël, Hananiah, and Azariah. The Babylonians renamed them Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan. 1:6-7). Although a captive, Daniel remained fully committed to the God of Israel. As a result of his commitment and the quality of his character he eventually became the prime minister of Babylon.

At the time the prophecy recorded in Daniel 9 was given, the Babylonian Empire had fallen to the Medo-Persian Empire. A king named Cyrus (also titled Darius) was in power. Although the Jewish exiles were now the captives of the Medo-Persians, Daniel retained his position as prime minister because of his integrity. Some scholars believe Daniel received his revelation in the year 537 B. C., which was just about seventy years after Daniel had been taken captive.

C. The Concern of Daniel

That seventy year mark was important to Daniel: "I . . . understood by books the number of the years, concerning which the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem" (Dan. 9:2). Jeremiah prophesied that the people from Judah would be in captivity for seventy years (Jer. 25:11; 29:10). Daniel knew that if the seventy year period began with the first deportation, it was nearly over (though he didn't know if the seventy years dated from 605, 597, or 586 B. C. --the years of the three significant deportations).

Although Daniel probably knew his advanced age would prevent his return to the land of Judah, we can be sure his heart's desire was for the restoration of his people to their homeland. Because he understood that would soon be coming to pass, we see him in Daniel 9 turning to God in prayer, asking Him to fulfill His Word and restore the Jewish people.

God's response to Daniel in verses 20-27 was a major revelation of the future. It was not the first prophecy given to Daniel: Daniel 2 records a prophecy of four great Gentile empires succeeded by the kingdom of God (vv. 19-45). Daniel 7 records the same vision in a different format that includes the reign of the Antichrist over the final form of the last Gentile world power (vv. 1-28).

From Daniel 8 on the focus of the book turns from the future of the Gentile world powers to the future of Israel. We can see that in the prophecy given to Daniel in chapter 9: "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city" (v. 24, emphasis added).

LESSON

I. THE PRAYER PRECEDING THE REVELATION (v. 20)

"[An answer to my prayer came] while I was speaking, and 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. "

A. Daniel's Commitment to Prayer

Daniel was a man of prayer--verse 20 shows him doing what it was his habit to do. He did not approach God in a superficial fashion: verse 3 records that he came with "supplication, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes. " His custom was to face Jerusalem and pray three times each day (Dan. 6:10). He was so committed to prayer that it was used as a weapon against him by his enemies and

he was thrown into a lions' den (Dan. 6:1-18). Yet God honored his commitment and sustained him for his faithfulness.

B. Daniel's Method of Prayer

Verse 20 tells us that Daniel's prayer consisted of "speaking," "praying," "confessing," and "presenting . . . supplication." We find each of those verbs in verses 3-19. That was the Holy Spirit's way of summarizing Daniel's prayer and indicating it was in the midst of that prayer God's answer arrived.

Daniel's prayer had the proper focus (James 4:3). Most people pray selfishly, seeking only to satisfy their own desires. But Daniel prayed for the sake of "the holy mountain of [his] God" (v. 20) --for Zion, which figuratively represents the glory of God. It grieves me when I hear people say we are to demand things from God and claim what belongs to us. Daniel prayed for God's glory and was rewarded with understanding from God.

As I studied Daniel's prayer I was led to consider my own prayer life. I wondered at the power of such prayer and the reward it brought Daniel. If we were to follow the characteristics of Daniel's prayer, we might be blessed by God with a portion of what Daniel received.

There are a number of characteristics that made Daniel's prayer answerable by God.

1. It was in response to God's Word

The prayer begins, "I, Daniel, understood by books the number of the years, concerning which the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek [Him] by prayer" (vv. 2-3). Daniel apparently read Jeremiah 25-29, which speaks of the seventy-year exile of God's people in Babylon. He understood God's purposes according to His Word and that's what framed the contents of his prayer. The contents of our prayers are to be similar in nature.

2. It was according to God's will

Daniel prayed that God would perform His revealed will. Verses 3-18 form a long preparation for the only request we find in Daniel's prayer: "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do" (v. 19; emphasis added). The apostle John said, "If we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he hear us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him" (1 John 5:14-15; cf. John 14:14). Confidence in prayer requires that we pray in accord with God's will.

3. It was fervent

The phrase "I set my face" in verse 3 is a Hebraism for a resolute and fervent spirit. He prayed "with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes" (v. 3). Some commentators think the angel Gabriel began flying toward Daniel with God's answer when Daniel began to fast (v. 23) --God knew and answered Daniel's request even before he uttered it because of the attitude he displayed.

4. It included self-denial

As part of his prayer Daniel "made [his] confession. " He recognized he was unworthy to enter the presence of God. That's to be our attitude also.

5. It focused on others

In verses 5-11 Daniel makes extensive use of the first person plural. Daniel's prayer was not selfish but a prayer for his people.

6. It included corporate confession of sin

In his prayer Daniel identified with the sins of his people: "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thine ordinances; neither have we hearkened unto thy servants, the prophets" (vv. 5-6).

7. It presupposed dependence on God

In verse 4 Daniel describes God as "the great and awesome God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments. " He recognized all answers to prayer depend on the absolute and unchanging promises of an unchanging God.

8. It glorified God

The ultimate purpose of Daniel's prayer was the glory of God. He said to the Lord that Israel should be restored "for thine own sake, . . . for thy city and thy people are called by thy name" (v. 19).

In verse 21 Daniel says that the angel Gabriel came and touched him "about the time of the evening oblation. " Daniel prayed to God at the special time of day when the evening sacrifice and prayers were offered in the Temple at Jerusalem (cf. Ezra 9:4-5).

Daniel would have remembered that time from his childhood in Jerusalem. A lamb would be brought and the one who brought it would place his hands on it to signify identification with the lamb that symbolically bore his sin. Smoke would rise in the evening sky as the lamb was then slain and offered as a sacrifice for sin. Meal and drink offerings were also made at that time.

No sacrifices had been offered in the Temple since 586 B. C. Doubtless many who were taken into captivity with Daniel forgot all about them. But Daniel remembered and found it a fitting time to confess his sins, making it a part of his tradition of turning to God in prayer every day.

II. THE MESSENGER OF THE REVELATION (vv. 21-23)

"While I was speaking in prayer, even the man, Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplications, the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee; for thou art greatly beloved. Therefore, understand the matter, and consider the vision."
"

A. Who He Was

While Daniel prayed Gabriel arrived--testimony to the speed of an angelic being. There's no doubt Gabriel is an angel though he is described as "even the man, Gabriel" (v. 21). That identifies him as the same Gabriel who appeared to Daniel in human form in Daniel 8:16.

The Hebrew word ish, which describes Gabriel as a man, can also be translated "servant. " Gabriel was a man in the sense that he acted as God's servant.

Apparently Gabriel appeared in human form the second time so Daniel would be able to recognize God's messenger. Gabriel is a supreme messenger angel sent only with messages of importance. If he appeared as a spirit it's possible Daniel wouldn't have recognized him or ascertained the importance God placed on the delivery of His message.

The last two letters of Gabriel's name signify one of the names of God (Heb. , el, "the strong one"). The first part of Gabriel's name is derived from the Hebrew word gabor, which also means "the strong one," but in reference to man. Thus the compound meaning of Gabriel's name is "man, the strong one; God, the strong one" or "the strong man of God. "

B. The Message He Brought

Daniel's praying was so intense--his eyes were probably closed and his head bowed--that it was necessary for Gabriel to alert him of his arrival by touching him. Daniel was not praying for understanding, yet Daniel 9:22 says that Gabriel brought him a message to impart "skill and understanding"--two words that mean virtually the same thing. Nor did Daniel request something for himself or insight into the future. Daniel was concerned with God's plan for His people Israel, and Gabriel was sent to assure Daniel of God's unwavering purpose to fulfill His promises.

C. The Time He Came

As we already noted, some commentators believe Gabriel was sent to Daniel before he began to pray because in verse 23 Gabriel says, "At the beginning of thy supplications, the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee. " Daniel's supplications began with a period of fasting (v. 3) before audible prayer. It was at the beginning of Daniel's process of prayer that the command for an answer to be delivered by Gabriel was issued from the throne of God--the source of all commands given to angels.

D. The Love He Expressed

Gabriel gave Daniel a reason for his being sent with an answer: "Thou art greatly beloved" (v. 23). John, in his gospel, mentioned the other apostles by name, but described himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20). He understood that being known as one beloved by God was far better than being known by one's own name. We too ought to rejoice in being known as God's beloved.

That doesn't mean God loves some more than others: His love is so unrestricted that "he gave his only begotten Son" for the entire world (John 3:16). Jesus said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). So great a love isn't measured out in degrees. But from a human perspective God's love is experienced to the utmost when one's character is what it ought to be. A godly man or woman will experience God's love more fully than others, and Daniel was a godly man.

Jude 20-21 says, "Ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God. " We know from the balance of other Scriptures that Jude didn't mean a Christian can step outside of God's love in an ultimate sense. Rather he was saying that by obedience we maintain the enjoyment of God's love and blessing. To be disobedient is to step outside the sphere of God's love and blessing.

While God didn't love Daniel more than others, Daniel's obedience to the will of God put him in a greater position than most to receive His blessing. Many, because of their ungodly character, are in no such position. But Daniel was in the center of God's will and therefore able to receive the showers of blessing God desires to rain on all. We ought to desire a character like Daniel's that, for one thing, we might receive the blessings he did.

The blessing God poured out on Daniel through Gabriel was revelation. In verse 23 Gabriel tells Daniel that he was to "understand the matter, and consider the vision. " A better way of translating the Hebrew word translated "vision" is "appearance. " That's because Daniel didn't receive a vision but the actual appearance of an angelic messenger.

III. THE CONTENT OF THE REVELATION (vv. 24-27)

"Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know, therefore, and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah, the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself; and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary, and the end of it shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week; and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate. "

That prophecy deals with the nation of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. There are two princes mentioned: the Messiah (who is Christ, v. 25) and another who will come (the Antichrist, v. 26). The time period covered by the prophecy is seventy weeks, divided into three periods: seven weeks, sixty-two weeks, and one week. The time period began "from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem" (v. 25) and will end when Messiah the Prince comes to establish His eternal kingdom.

Verse 24 says, "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people. " Determined tells us God is in control of history and has predetermined its events. The Hebrew word literally means "to cut off. " God has cut off a segment of time and assigned it for the deliverance of His people Israel and the city of Jerusalem. Daniel had prayed for both and God's answer encompassed all Daniel asked for.

A. God's Purpose in History (v. 24)

Verse 24 outlines six purposes that God will accomplish for Israel and Jerusalem. Three are negative and three are positive.

1. Stated in a negative sense

a) "To finish the transgression"

That literally means "to restrain firmly the transgression. " Today sin expresses itself freely, but a day will come when that will not be true. Jesus will rule with a rod of iron (Ps. 2:6-9) and every expression of evil--"transgression"--will be immediately restrained by His divine power.

b) "To make an end of sins"

That means sin will be done away with in general and individually (the plural denotes that individual sins will be dealt with). Some think the Hebrew verb translated "to make an end" might be better translated "to seal up. " It's a word always associated with divine judgment. The idea is that at the end of the seventy weeks God will wipe out sin.

c) "To make reconciliation for iniquity"

"To make reconciliation" translates the Hebrew verb kaphar, which means "to cover. " It speaks of expiation and atonement. This speaks of how God will put an end to transgression and sin: by atoning for sin. That was surely a welcome word to Daniel because it was sin that caused Israel to be taken into captivity.

What Daniel may not have understood was that was speaking of the coming of Christ and His work on the cross. That's where sin was dealt with, though the full effect of that work will be fully realized only when Christ comes again. Thus the first three negative purposes spoken of in verses 24-27 pertain to the cross and its provision for sin.

2. Stated in a positive sense

a) "To bring in everlasting righteousness"

"Righteousness" is stated as a plural in the Hebrew text and refers to an everlasting era of righteousness. The Jewish people didn't use a distinction in the Old Testament between the Messiah's first and second coming, nor did they understand the gap that exists between them--the church age, which is called a "mystery" in the New Testament (cf. Eph. 3:2-6). We see a hint of that time in the transition between this fourth purpose of God and the three that precede it: the first three deal with the work of Christ on the cross (at the end of Daniel's sixty-ninth week) , while this and the following two represent Christ establishing His eternal kingdom of righteousness (at the end of the seventieth week).

b) "To seal up the vision and prophecy"

When the eternal kingdom of Christ is established there will be no need for vision or prophecy. Some think "to seal up the vision and prophecy" speaks of the completion of the New Testament. But that can't be true because Joel 2:28-29 indicates that prophecy and visions will occur at the initiation of the kingdom, which is yet future. Therefore, though an exact chronology for it is not specified, what is spoken of here is the end of prophecies and visions at the inauguration of Christ's kingdom.

c) "To anoint the Most Holy"

The phrase "the Most Holy" occurs thirty-nine times in the Old Testament and always has some reference to the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and Temple. It always refers to a place, indicating that when Christ's kingdom is inaugurated, there will be a Temple: the restored Temple of the millennial kingdom (cf. Ezek. 40-48).

CONCLUSION

The prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 stretches from Daniel's day to the reign of the Messiah on earth. During that time sin would be atoned for (the work of Christ on the cross) , and at its end the kingdom of Christ will be inaugurated. Between those two events (the sixty-ninth and seventieth week) is a gap of unspecified duration. That's an important period of history for us--we're in it now!

Focusing on the Facts

1. How did Daniel come to be in Babylon? Why was he selected as prime minister in both the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires?
2. When the prophecy of Daniel 9 was given, how long had Judah been captive?
3. What was the cause of Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9 (Dan. 9:2).
4. What's the focus of the book of Daniel from chapter 8 on? Support your answer with Scripture.
5. Describe Daniel's commitment to prayer.
6. Compare the focus of most people in prayer and that of Daniel: how do they differ?
7. Daniel understood God's purposes according to His _____ and that's what framed the contents of his _____ .
8. What does "I set my face" (Dan 9:3) tell us about Daniel's attitude (Dan 9:3)?
9. Daniel's prayer was not selfish but a prayer for _____ .
10. What did Daniel recognize that all answers to prayer depend on?
11. In what form did the angel Gabriel appear to Daniel? Why?
12. Does the phrase "thou art greatly beloved" (Dan. 9:23) mean that God loves some more than others? Why or why not?

13. What did Daniel's obedience to the will of God put him in a greater position than most to receive?
14. In the seventy weeks mentioned in Daniel 9:24 God has cut off a segment of time and assigned it for what?
15. How will every expression of evil be immediately restrained by divine power in the future (Ps. 2:6-9)?
16. What do the first three negative purposes spoken of in Daniel 9:24-27 pertain to?
17. What distinction in the Old Testament did the Jewish people not see?
18. Why is the gap that occurs between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week of Daniel important? What is it called in the New Testament (Eph. 3:2-6)?

Pondering the Principles

1. Prayer is the mark of a Christian. How often do you communicate with God through Christ? Christians are to be a prayerful people and the key to prayer can be summed up in two words: Do it! Make time for prayer and then pray. Although you may not receive an immediate answer--or the one you expect--keep praying. God will reward your faithfulness just as He rewarded Daniel. Once prayer is your habit, look for God's answers and respond with gratitude.
2. The six purposes that God will accomplish for Israel and Jerusalem (Dan. 9:24-27; see pp. 10-12) can be reduced to one negative and one positive. God has dealt with man's greatest negative: sin. And He has provided men and women with a great positive: righteousness. That those are His eternal purposes can be seen from reading Ephesians 1. Consider how you might share those two purposes of God with an unsaved person. They may serve as an apt response in a conversation about world problems.

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