

Daniel's 70 Weeks

July 25, 2021

Daniel 9:20-27

We come today in our study of the book of Daniel to the last part of chapter 9, with the prophecy of the 70 weeks. I admit at the outset that this passage has some baggage for me. My faint memory of childhood includes the perception that our pastor growing up preached nothing but this chapter. I know that's not true, but that was my perception at the time. It seemed to me as a child that he preached the 70 weeks of Daniel for years! So, here I am preaching the 70 weeks of Daniel. But I assure you, this is the ONLY sermon I will preach on it. So, if I leave some questions in your mind, too bad, so sad, I'm not coming back to it!

And yet, the message here in chapter 9 is extremely important, crucial perhaps in understanding the whole message of Daniel, indeed the central message of Scripture. Let's retrace our steps here to see the point. Daniel and his people, the Israelites are enduring life in exile. They are in Babylon. Life is not as it should be. But along the way, Daniel and his people are given a glimpse into the future, that life indeed WILL be better, even if there are still tyrants oppressing them. There will come a kingdom of God's own making which will crush all other human kingdoms. We have seen this message several times in the book.

And here in chapter 9, Daniel is pondering a prophecy in Jeremiah that the exile in Babylon will last 70 years. He adds up and realizes it is very close to that. They need to be ready. They need to show that they have learned their lesson so they can go back to the Promised Land and enjoy life as it should be. He repents on behalf of his people. That is what we studied last week in the first part of chapter 9.

In today's text, we see the response to Daniel's prayer...and it is not what you might think. Yes, his prayer is well received, but the response from heaven takes on a much, much bigger role, revealed here is a much, much bigger picture.

Indeed, it includes the biggest events in all of human history. So, Daniel's hope is that God will forgive His people and they can go back and live life as it should be in the Promised Land...SOON! And the answer is yes, you will go back, yes you will rebuild, but there is something much, much more important to the story that will happen as well. The plan is much, much more encompassing than living in your homeland. At a certain time, a specific time, your Messiah will come and do away with your problem once and for all. The Messiah is coming!

So, here goes, listen to these words from Daniel 9. Receive them as the Word of God which they are. READ Daniel 9:20-27.

Main point: Living in the Promised Land is not the most important issue. Eliminating the problem of sin is, and a Messiah is coming to do just that.

We've seen the whole book building this case. Kingdoms will come and kingdoms will fall. There will ALWAYS be oppressive kingdoms. But there will be (there IS from our perspective) a solution to our problems which goes way beyond our current living conditions. What we really need is a real, lasting, complete solution to our biggest problem, and that is accomplished by the coming of the Messiah. We know His name: Jesus. But even then, when He comes, the way it all comes to pass may tempt you to think that He failed. It will look like He was defeated, left with nothing as it says here. But don't believe the surface impression. He DID accomplish exactly what He set out to do, and will come again to do the part you may have thought He should do. It will all unfold in due time, in 70 weeks, the 70 weeks of Daniel. (2 parts)

I. God answers Daniel's prayer in a grander form than requested. vv. 20-23

Daniel was praying for the forgiveness of his people's sins so they could go back to life in the Promised Land. But God's response was to reveal to him a plan much more grand than his request. A plan was underway to eliminate the problem of sin once and for all!

v.20- 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.

The connection between the prayer (vv. 4-19) and the response is both clear and important. Notice the time stamp: while Daniel was still praying, Gabriel was sent to him. In other words, the response to prayer was instantaneous. We might think that God is lax in answering our prayers, but here we see He is not. Gabriel the angel was sent swiftly at sunset to meet with Daniel and give him the response to his prayer.

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.

Gabriel gave Daniel both understanding of the situation and further insight into future events. He came to assure Daniel of God's love for him and the reception of His prayer for mercy, but he was also there to increase Daniel's knowledge of the future. In other words, here is a proper understanding of your situation, but there is something much bigger going on here. Yes, your people will be going back to the Promised Land, but that is not the big news. There is something much, much more important that is planned.

I see this as instructive of how God operates. We think on one scale, He sees things on a much larger scale. We think the solution to our problems is this big, He knows the solution to our problem is much bigger. We think life would be grand if only this one thing. He knows that the plans He has for us are way beyond our imagination.

Now, I say this not to get you to dream bigger dreams as some sales gimmick. I say this to make the point that when we pray, we are submitting our situation to God. And His answer often greatly exceeds our prayer. His plans, His ways are beyond us. The purpose of the prayer is to reorient our thinking,

declare our dependence on Him. But His response might be far different from our expectations. We must expect His answer to not completely match up with our thinking. We must allow room for Him to serve larger purposes.

II. In a set period of time, the Messiah will come and solve our sin problems, even if it appears that He did not. vv. 24-27

God's plan for the salvation of His people is laid out in an image of 70 weeks. Just so you will know where we are headed before we get there, right now, as we sit here today, we are after week 69 and before week 70. There, I know some of you will be a bit less on edge right now as we consider this text. But the impression of this text for Daniel was that his prayer would be completed in the next 49 years, but the bigger picture would unfold in the next 483 years. That target was much more important than seeing a return to the Promised Land and a rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple.

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.

We have seen this image of weeks or units used before to indicate years. It is quite clear that the unit of measurement in this prophecy is years. The time frame for solving this problem would be 490 years total, 70 times 7. But notice at the outset that the framing of the problem has been greatly increased.

At the end of this time, six things would happen. Let's look at them in order. 1) finish transgression. Several of these are overlapping. The first one though is huge, the crossing of the boundary with God, called sin, would be solved, finished. In other words, Daniel's predicament was that the rebellion, the crossing of the boundary of God's people with God was the issue that sent them into exile. He prayed that God would show them mercy. The answer in return was that this problem would be ended at the appointed, upcoming time. Do you think it was a coincidence that Jesus cried out, "It is finished!" as He died on the cross. The issue of the penalty for sin was solved, finished, ended. 2) to put an end to sin. This is similar to the last one, only in terms of missing the mark,

of sin as failing to hit the target. This problem of all of us missing the mark would be solved with the coming of the Messiah. 3) to atone for iniquity. This is a solution that none of us is capable of doing. Our sin has to be accounted for, paid for. Not only is our problem that we keep sinning, but here, the sins that we have done have to be dealt with, atoned for. And being sinners who sin, there is nothing we can do about it. We need a Savior, One who can die in our place. That day was going to come. 4) to bring in everlasting righteousness. Not only is our sin a problem, but then we have the opposite problem: a lack of the good stuff we need to be right before God. We have to get rid of the sin yes, but we have to replace the sin with the good stuff we need. And here we notice that the solution will be everlasting, meaning be in affect forever. It is not that this gift of righteousness was only for a set period of time, but it was the gift that would keep on giving, without end. Can you already see how much bigger this answer to prayer was than the prayer itself? Daniel wanted to get back home. God is announcing a solution to the world's sin problems! 5) to seal both vision and prophet. This one is a bit harder to nail down, but it seems clear that this means God's eternal plan for mankind would be sealed, finished, completed. All of the prophecy would come to fruition just as promised. 6) to anoint a most holy place. Again, this one is harder. Given that the temple would be completed in the first 49 years, it seems unlikely to me that this is in reference to the temple. It seems much more likely to be connected directly to the Messiah, either to anoint Him, or anoint His work, or anoint the place He has in the plan or some such thing. What we know is that the Messiah ushers in a whole new scenario for sinful mankind. There is a REAL and lasting solution to our biggest problem with the coming of the Messiah.

So, God's answer to Daniel's prayer was that as much of an issue was living at home in the Promised Land, SO much greater was the issue that led them into exile in the first place: sin! God was going to solve their sin problem, our sin problem.

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.

From the starting point that is in the very near future, it will take 49 years (7 sevens) to build Jerusalem. In other words, the very thing that Daniel wished for will be completed in the next 49 years. Then 62 weeks after that the Messiah will come. The wording in the ESV makes this a bit unclear, but that is the sense of the text. So, 49 years to rebuild Jerusalem with its walls and moats. (You can read about it in Nehemiah and Ezra and elsewhere), and then after another 434 years and the anointed one, the Messiah will come. Yes, this will be troubling times, with more oppressive leadership, but it will happen. So, from the time when this clock starts to the coming of the Anointed One will be 483 years total. And guess what? How close do you think this prophecy was? Dead on! That was the year Jesus started His ministry, 27 A.D. Remember, this was written 500 or so years before Jesus began His earthly ministry, and yet it is precisely when it happened, to the year!

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

Then, AFTER the 69th week, (3 years after) the Messiah will be cut off, left with nothing, or as we know put to death, crucified. So the end of the 69th week was followed 3 years later by the crucifixion of the Messiah, and it would appear that He was defeated, that He failed. He would not be the leader who would take over the Roman world, or the Greek world, or the Babylonian world. But He would accomplish something much more important: He would solve our sin problem, our righteousness problem, our atonement problem. His death, His being “cut off” was by plan to save us. And that is the bigger picture point of this text. What you might think of as a defeat was really His victory. If you think only in terms of world empires, you would see Him as a failure. But that was not His mission! Can you see how the whole book of Daniel points to this truth? Kingdoms come and kingdoms go, but the Kingdom of God will defeat them all, as long as you understand what the mission was. Here, Daniel is getting a divine glimpse of the mission.

Then after the end of the 69th week, the oppressive kingdom of that day will come and destroy all that is going to be built in these next 49 years. All of

this work will be destroyed. All that you hope for will be gone, wiped out, gone in an instant. And after that there will be war, more war, and even more war. This city so much in focus will lay in ruins for generation after generation. To a very large extent, this condition continues to this very day. There is no grandeur in Jerusalem, only ruins and bloodshed. Indeed, there sits on the temple site an abomination, a worship space to a foreign god. In your face, O people of God!

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.”

Because of the gap mentioned at the end of v.26, we know that week 70 does not immediately follow week 69. There is an indefinite, yet long gap when oppressive and not ideal conditions reign in Jerusalem. And then we come to this yet to occur 70th week of Daniel when the leader of perhaps this (same?) world power (Rome???) will commit to rebuild and restore or protect Jerusalem while she rebuilds. Yet, in the middle of that 70th week, this ruthless leader shall nullify the agreement and set himself up as God himself, which will culminate in his destruction. He will be destroyed. The destroyer will be destroyed. This is the decree of God Himself concerning those end times.

As we read this, as we study this in conjunction with other texts like the gospels, the letters to the Thessalonians, Revelation, even Ezekiel and Isaiah concerning the same events and issues, it seems clear that this is talking about the 7-year period of tribulation that culminates in the battle of Armageddon. During these 7 years, all of the struggles of the kingdoms vs. God will come to a head. It will end with the wicked kingdoms, kings, and their empowerer of satan will be destroyed by the return of the Son of Man on His white horse, leading His army of saints.

Once more, there is much, much more that could be said on this topic, but this is as far as this text takes us and to study it in depth would take a year's full of sermons. We studied just the book of Revelation on Wednesday nights for what, two years? But I want you to see once more the bigger point. Daniel was praying for God to be merciful to his people. And God answered that He would

be, that He was, that His plans for His people were much bigger than even Daniel's prayer. Daniel would be satisfied with just an assurance that they would return to a right relationship with Him and a life in the Promised Land. God's response was to assure him that His plan was to end the problem of sin once and for all! Yes, there would always be trouble, oppression, kingdoms and kings who are evil. Indeed, the Messiah Himself would be killed by a wicked, oppressive leader. But the plan of God was to defeat them eventually, but to save His people continually from an enemy more pressing, more oppressing, more devastating: sin and the satanic forces behind it. Yes, the Messiah was coming who would save, rescue, solve. And here was the date: 483 years from the time the all clear to go back and begin rebuilding Jerusalem. You can take that to the bank! And it happened just as was written! That was the year Jesus started ministry.

If we believe this passage is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

1) We will be confident that God hears our prayers and responds to them swiftly, even if it doesn't always seem that way, even if the answer is bigger than the prayer.

2) We will see as our most major problem, not wicked leaders who oppress us, but our own wickedness which condemns us.

3) We will trust the work of Christ to solve our sin problem.

4) We will look forward to the end times with realism and yet optimism.