

## Lesson 23

This is the first Bible class taught in our new building! And I wonder if it is a coincidence that we have arrived at the hardest part of Daniel for this lesson! In any event, we're off to a good start!

Prayer - new building; truth always taught; truth always lived; truth always loved; Jesus - the way, the truth, the life!

Verse 12 says that the calamity was unlike anything that had ever happened in the world. Is this literal? Yes and no.

Yes, in the sense that this was the first of the three desolations targeted against God's people and Jerusalem - the first by Babylon, the second by Greece, and the third by Rome.

But no, with regard to the literal severity of the destruction. The language simply stresses the extent of the trouble that befell the city. Matthew 24:21 makes a similar statement about the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. The statement here in verse 12 is describing the destruction of the same city, but in 586 BC. A similar description the desolation caused by Babylon is found in Ezekiel.

**Ezekiel 5:9** - And I will do in thee that which I have not done, and whereunto I will not do any more the like, because of all thine abominations.

Notice that Daniel twice reminds God about what God himself had said in the law of Moses (verses 11 and 13).

Is it proper to quote the Bible when we pray? I have heard some answer no. Why? Because, they say, God wrote the Bible, and God already knows what is in it. But if I can tell God only things that God does not already know, then I will not have much left to pray about! If we take Daniel as an example, then I think we can quote the Bible when we pray (although, as with most things, it is possible to go overboard with that).

## Verses 15-19

In verses 15-19 of his prayer, Daniel appeals to God's pity on the exiled nation and the ruined city of Jerusalem. Daniel bases his appeal on God's honor and glory. He asks God in verse 17 to restore the sanctuary for God's own sake.

What is Daniel's primary concern in this prayer? It is not the discomfort of the Jews or his own discomfort. Instead, Daniels' concern is the tarnishing that Daniel and his people have inflicted upon God's image and God's reputation in the eyes of the world. In verse 19 Daniel says:

**|** Delay not, for thy own sake ... because thy city and thy people are called by thy name.

To Daniel, the worst part of the captivity was that someone might look at it and conclude that God was not able to deliver his people. Daniel did not pray, "Get me out of this!" Instead Daniel's primary concern was for God and for God's reputation.

Is this how we look at things? Do we think of God first as Daniel did? What do people think about Christ when they see those who wear the name of Christ wallowing in sin?

**|** **2 Timothy 2:19** - Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

Am I a reflection of Christ, or am I a reflection on Christ?

In verse 19 Daniel asks God to do three things: hear, forgive, and act - and, as we will soon see, it doesn't take long for Daniel to get an answer to that petition.

But notice also that Daniel prayed for the very thing that the Bible had assured him would happen.

Daniel did not sit back, and apathetically say that God will do what God wants to do in God's own time, and there is nothing I can do about it. Que sera, sera. Daniel knew better than that.

Daniel knew that although God certainly works according to his own plans and timetable, God nevertheless works through people - God works in part through their actions and through their prayers.

God's people are not passive observers in the plan of God; they are active participants. We have a role to play, just as Daniel did. And, as Calvin said, "nothing ... can be better for us than to ask for what God has promised."

## Daniel 9:20-21

20 And whiles 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; 21 Yea, whiles 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.

Sometimes God's people have to wait months or even years for God to answer their prayer. Not so with Daniel. While Daniel is still praying, the angel Gabriel comes to him in swift flight.

A first initial point here is that perhaps verse 21 is an indication that angels do, in fact, at least sometimes have wings as they are so often depicted. In any event, this particular angel was "caused to fly swiftly."

A second initial point is that Daniel says that Gabriel was who he "had seen in the vision at the beginning." So perhaps Daniel was in fact only seeing Gabriel in a vision earlier and had not personally seen Gabriel until now. But verse 21 could also just mean that Gabriel was the same angel that Daniel saw at the time of the vision, which makes more sense to me.

A third initial point is that the use of the term "man" in verse 21 does not mean that Gabriel was a man rather than an angel. The Hebrew word "man" here simply means that Gabriel appeared in human-like form.

Now that the initial points are out of the way, let's focus on the main point - the incredible power of Daniel's prayer!

Prayer has been called the world's greatest wireless connection - and perhaps there is no better example of that than what we see here. And that description of prayer is not just a modern illustration from the age of smartphones - a 1908 commentary on this section of Daniel included the subtitle, "The Electric Telegraph of Prayer."

We panic when we lose service on our cellphone and can't communicate with anyone. Would we be in the same panic if we were suddenly unable to pray? Would we even know?

One commentator on verse 21 wryly noted that if Gabriel was going to catch many of us in prayer, he would have to be swift indeed!

The final phrase in verse 21 is touching. The "time of evening oblation (or sacrifice)" just means late

afternoon, so why is it touching? Because no actual sacrifice could have been offered in Babylon (or even in Palestine) without the altar, and the altar had been destroyed long ago along with the rest of the temple. But Daniel was still observing sunrise and sunset as appropriate times for offering praise and worship to God. And soon they would have a temple in Jerusalem in which they could offer the actual sacrifices.

## Daniel 9:22-23

22 And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. 23 At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to shew thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision.

Daniel receives wisdom and understanding in response to his prayer.

But prayer doesn't work like that today. Right? When we pray we never see angels flying swiftly to answer our prayers. Right?

Well, it is right that we don't see them, but because we do not see them as Daniel did, does that mean they are not there? The age of miracles is over, but we know that does not mean God is not at work in this world. We know that God hears and answers our prayers, and he may still use swift angels behind the scenes for that purpose. I like to think that he does.

Notice how eager God was to answer Daniel's prayer. Verse 23 says that "at the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth."

God is more eager to answer than we are to ask. That is the nature of prayer. Not that I am stumbling toward God but that God is running towards me just as the father ran to meet the prodigal son. What we are seeing here is how God responds to his children.

Verse 23 says that Daniel was greatly beloved by God. Why? We have already seen why!

- Because Daniel refused to compromise with the world.
- Because Daniel was faithful and true to God.

- Because Daniel was a man of prayer.
- Because Daniel studied his Bible and knew it was true.
- Because Daniel was a man of great faith.

Do we want to be "greatly beloved" by God as Daniel was? Then Daniel left us an example that we can follow. Daniel grew up in a pagan culture that was hostile to the ways of God and to the people of God. Does that sound familiar? We have much in common with Daniel, and we can learn a lot from how Daniel lived in that pagan world and remained faithful and true to God.

And once again Daniel is about to get an inspired explanation from God about what he had been seeing and praying about. But I think we will have to admit that this inspired explanation could use its own inspired explanation! In any event, let's proceed to study the final four verses of Chapter 9, which may be the most obscure four verses in the Bible!

A final thing we should emphasize is that the decree in the final four verses was given as an answer to the beautiful prayer in the preceding verses. Why is that important? Because that prayer provides the all-important context for the decree. The decree is an answer to Daniel's prayer, and so if our interpretation of the decree doesn't make sense as an answer to Daniel's prayer, then we know for sure that our interpretation is wrong.

Again, there is a parallel here with the book of Revelation. That book does not begin with the vision in Chapter 4. Instead it begins with the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor in Chapters 2 and 3. Not surprisingly, Chapters 2 and 3 are related to Chapters 4-22! In fact, those seven letters provide the all-important context for the rest of the book of Revelation, just as Daniel's prayer provides the context for the decree at the end of Chapter 9. And, as with Daniel 9, if our view of Revelation bears no relation to the letters to the seven churches, then our view of Revelation is wrong. Context is key!

And with that, let's dive into the decree!

## Daniel 9:24

24 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.

As one commentator noted:

Reading commentaries on the last four verses of Daniel 9 is akin to entering a bewildering maze: so many choices of ways to take, so many blind alleys and dead ends; which is the way out?

In AD 400, Jerome simply listed nine conflicting opinions of "the great teachers of the church" and left it "to the reader's judgment as to whose explanation ought to be followed." Another noted:

The history of the exegesis of the 70 Weeks is the Dismal Swamp of Old Testament criticism.

This section of Daniel 9 is one of the most commented upon sections in the entire Bible. It has been called the "backbone" of all prophecy, which we may determine is a bit of an overstatement. Yes, this decree tells us much about the work of Christ, but the beginning and the end of the decree are focused on the Jews and Jerusalem. Isaiah 2 and Isaiah 53 are perhaps closer to being the backbone of all prophecy (if there is such a thing) than is Daniel 9.

So how do we begin with such a difficult text? We begin as we always do, by asking two questions: What is context? What is the timeframe?

### **What is the context?**

We just talked about the context. The context is that Daniel has been reading and praying about a seventy year decree upon the Jews found in Jeremiah. And God uses that decree in Jeremiah as an opportunity to tell Daniel about another decree also regarding the Jews and Jerusalem - a decree, not of seventy years, but of seventy weeks.

As we said, whatever we determine about the meaning of this decree, it needs to make sense in the setting in which it was received. This decree came as a swift response from God to the prayer that began Chapter 9, and we must not forget that fact. If our interpretation of this decree goes adrift from Daniel's prayer about his people and about their sin and their future and their city, then our interpretation is almost certainly wrong.

The decree gets its name from verse 24 - "seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city." Those seventy weeks are divided into three subsets of weeks: Verse 25 will mention seven weeks and 62 weeks, which combined give us 69 weeks. Verse 27 will mention a final week, which then accounts for all 70 weeks. Verse 27 will also cut that final week in half.

The "seventy weeks" in verse 24 is literally "seventy sevens," but all translators agree that the phrase means seventy weeks. In fact, the same word "sevens" is also translated "weeks" in Daniel 10:2 - "in those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks."

But we should not miss the symbolism in the Hebrew word for "seven" being used here to denote a week. When we see "week" in this chapter, we should be thinking "seven." So when we see a week cut in half, what do we see? We see a broken seven, which is a symbol that should already be very familiar to us.

### **What is the timeframe?**

That question is a little harder to see here than in other prophecies, but as with almost all prophecies in the Bible, there is a timeframe here. We just need to dig a bit for it.

Verse 24 is crucial in understanding verses 25-27. Many commentaries rush right past verse 24 in their hurry to get to the events in the following verses, but we must not make that mistake. Why? Two reasons. First, verse 24 gives us the focus of the prophecy, and second, verse 24 gives us the all-important timeframe for the prophecies that follow.

What is the focus of the prophecy? "Thy people" and "thy holy city." That is, the Jews and Jerusalem. Any interpretation of this prophecy in which the Jews and Jerusalem are not the focus is a wrong interpretation.

But how does verse 24 give us a time frame? Because verse 24 gives us a list of six things that are to be accomplished by the seventy weeks decree, so if we can figure out when those things were accomplished, then we will know the time frame for the prophecy.

The six items in verse 24 that are to be accomplished by the decree are listed across the top of your handout:

- To finish the transgression,
- To make an end of sins,
- To make reconciliation for iniquity,

- To bring in everlasting righteousness,
- To seal up the vision and prophecy, and
- To anoint the most Holy.

After reading that list, we should already have a good idea as to the termination point for this vision - but let's take a closer look at each of the six events.

## Event #1: To finish transgression.

This event has two possible meanings.

"To finish transgression" could mean that under this decree the transgression of God's own people would reach its peak or its limit. That is, the transgression of the Jews who rejected Christ (as well as rejecting all of the prophets) would reach its peak and then be punished. We see such descriptions elsewhere.

**Matthew 23:31-32** - Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. **Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.**

**1 Thessalonians 2:14b-16** - For ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: **Who both killed the Lord Jesus**, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, **to fill up their sins alway**: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

But "to finish transgression" could mean something else. It could mean that transgression would be dealt with effectively and finally under this decree, which of course is what occurred at the cross.

**Hebrews 9:15** - And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, **for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament**, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

I lean more toward the first view, but, either way, the first event in our list of six occurred in the first century. And either way, we are looking at something that happened at the cross.

## Event #2: To make an end of sins.

This second event also occurred in the first century, and it was also accomplished at the cross. Jesus made an end of sins.

**Hebrews 9:26** - For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared **to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.**

**Hebrews 10:12-14** - But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. **For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.**

**Romans 8:3** - For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, **condemned sin in the flesh.**

## Event #3: To make reconciliation for iniquity.

Again, with this event we see a first century event, and again, we see an event that occurred at the cross.

**Romans 5:10** - For if, when we were enemies, **we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son**, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

**2 Corinthians 5:19** - To wit, that God was in Christ, **reconciling the world unto himself**, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

## Event #4: To bring in everlasting righteousness.

Again, we see a first century event, and again, we see an event that occurred at the cross.

**Jeremiah 23:5-6** - Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David **a righteous Branch**, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, **THE Lord OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

2 Corinthians 5:21 - For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

**Hebrews 1:8** - But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: **a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.**

**Romans 3:21-22** - **But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested**, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; **Even the righteousness of God** which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe.

**Romans 10:4** - For Christ is the end of the law **for righteousness** to every one that believeth.

## Event #5: To seal up vision and prophecy.

As we saw with the first event, there are two possible meanings for the fifth event.

"To seal up vision and prophecy" could mean that this decree would bring about the fullness of God's revelation, and that afterward there would be no further revelation by visions and prophets.

**Hebrews 1:1-2** - God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake **in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son**, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.

**1 Corinthians 13:9-10** - For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, **then that which is in part shall be done away.**

But, "to seal up vision and prophecy" could also point to the hardening of the Jews that occurred at this time. That is, the prophecy would be sealed to them because they would not understand it due to their hardness of heart.

**Isaiah 29:10-11** - For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. **And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed**, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed.

**Romans 11:7-8** - What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded (According as it is written, **God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;**) unto this day.

2 Corinthians 3:14 - But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ.

Again, I lean toward the first view, but also again, whichever explanation we choose, both happened in the first century.

## Event #6: To anoint the most holy.

If the "most holy" refers to a person, then it must refer to Christ who was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit and with power at his baptism.

**Luke 3:21-22** - Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, **And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him**, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

**Acts 10:38** - **How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power:** who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

**Luke 4:16-21** - And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, **The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor;** he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, **This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.**

The "most holy" could refer instead (or in addition) to the body of Christ, which is the church of Christ

- the new dwelling place of God, which God has also anointed. This view fits well with the context because the decree ends with the desecration and destruction of the **old** dwelling place of God - the Jewish sanctuary.

**2 Corinthians 1:21** - Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, **and hath anointed us**, is God.

1 John 2:27 - But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you.

**Ephesians 2:19-22** - Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for **an habitation of God through the Spirit**.

Here I lean toward the second view, but again, either way, this event occurred in the first century.

## The Verse 24 Time Frame

What we have seen is that all six of the events in verse 24 occurred in the first century. These are the six things that the seventy weeks decree was to accomplish - and they were all accomplished in the first century.

We should always start with verse 24 if anyone ever tells us that the fulfillment of the seventy week decree is yet future. All of the things that decree was intended to accomplish happened 2000 years ago!

### Daniel 9:25-27

25 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. 26 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 thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. 27 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.

## What is our Game Plan?

As we have said, these three verses are some of the most difficult and most commented upon verses in the entire Bible. How are we going to tackle them?

First, can we be dogmatic about the meaning of this prophecy? Yes and no.

There are some fine points about which we can easily differ and remain within the confines of Scripture. But there are some other points about which we must remain firm.

For example, the termination point of this prophecy was in the first century. Why is that important? Isn't it just a timing issue? Yes, it is a timing issue, but it is a very important timing issue.

Why? Because the focus of this prophecy is the people of Daniel, the Jews, and if the termination point of this prophecy is the end of the world, then this prophecy is telling us that God has a special plan of salvation for the Jews under the New Covenant that is different from his plan for non-Jews, which we know is not the case.

Galatians 3:28 - There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Yes, God has a wonderful plan for the Jews, but it is the same wonderful plan that God has for everyone else.

**Romans 1:16** - For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; **to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.**

And note from that verse that the gospel went to the Jew **first**. Premillennialists tell us that the opposite is true; that the gospel will go to the Jew **last**.

Whatever we decide about this decree, we know even before we start that it cannot be telling us that God has a special plan to save the Jews at the end of the world. Now is the day of salvation - for both Jew and Greek!

So what then is our game plan in tackling these difficult verses?

There are nine events in these three verses, and those nine events are shown on your handout next to the eight circled letters A through H. (Event F has two events.)

The seventy weeks are divided into three main divisions: a seven week period, a 62 week period, and a final one week period. That final week is further subdivided into two half weeks.

Our task is to place those nine events in their proper positions within the 70 weeks. Some of those placements are very difficult, some are less difficult, and some are easy. Let's start with an easy one!

## What is Event A?

Let's start by reading the text.

**Verse 25** - "From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem."

This event and the next event are easy to place.

Verse 25 tells us that Event A is the start of a 69 week period (7 weeks + 62 weeks).

"From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem." Our only question is which commandment is in view here.

The natural answer would be the decree of Cyrus in Ezra 1, which led to the first return from exile that occurred shortly after this prophecy was received by Daniel from God.

Some argue that Cyrus's decree was to build the temple rather than to build Jerusalem, and so they argue that this commandment refers to a later return. I think those arguments are wrong, but let's save our discussion of that point until later when we look at some other views about the seventy weeks prophecy.

All we need for our purposes now is to note that Event A occurs at the **beginning** of the 70 weeks, and on this point all commentators are in agreement.

So we have placed our first event onto our timeline.

#daniel