

Daniel 9:24-27 Daniel's Seventy Weeks

This is a key chapter in the book of Daniel. We learn important lessons on prayer from a man of God as Daniel leads by example. The chorus is right, Daniel was a man of prayer, daily he prayed three times! His prayer is focused - and it sees an unbelievable display of God's power unleashed as it is answered in an unimaginable way that blow the cobwebs from our lives.

We don't have time to go into his prayer this evening but you can browse through it at your leisure. Let me just highlight five things for you to reflect on:

The **promptings** of the prayer in verses 1-2. The timeline is 538BC and Daniel is investigating - he is reading Jeremiah 25:11-12 and he realises that the 70-year captivity will soon end. That drives him to his knees to intercede ...

You can see the **penitence** in the prayer in verse 3 ... then the **particulars** in the prayer in verses 4-14 ... basically, Daniel is occupied with who God is - there's a 5-point confession in verses 5-6 followed by a 5-point affirmation in verses 7-10.

Then we have the **petition** in the prayer in verses 15-19 with lots of staccato type requests ... and that is climaxed with the **power** in the prayer when God comes and does what only he can do!

For Daniel, that proved to be a sweet reality over and over again. God miraculously intervened to save Daniel from the fury of Nebuchadnezzar, the folly of Belshazzar, and the fanaticism of Darius until he performed [in this chapter] the greatest miracle of all in answer to Daniel's prayer.

9:20-23 When God comes

Did you see that? Daniel prays an unfinished prayer. He never did get to the end for God interrupts him mid-sentence. Yes, God heard his prayer! Thankfully, he always does.

The message revolves around the future of Israel when his questions with regard to her survival will be fully answered. God will draw back the curtain and give him a panoramic overview of his plan for his earthly people, the Jewish nation.

The seventy years are hugely significant for Israel's immediate future - they were soon to be going back home, but a vision of seventy sevens (weeks) is of far greater importance for the longer term. Daniel asked God about the past; God was going to tell him about the future.

9:24 A week is a long time in prophecy

Unfortunately, these few verses have over the years generated more heat than light because God's people are unsure what to make of them. For some, this prophecy is as illegible as the handwriting of a medical doctor on your prescription for drugs. Some of it is crystal clear and fairly easy to explain, other parts are more opaque and a tad obscure.

They were chiefly given to Daniel to bolster his faith in answer to his prayer, to encourage him that his God was still reigning on the throne, and to give him a preview of God's big picture especially as it related to his own Jewish people.

A definition of the 70 weeks

The six million dollar question is: How long is a week? The timespan here is for 'seventy sevens' (a literal rendering found in the NIV),

implying a total of four hundred and ninety 'somethings.' These are units of time, but are they days, weeks, months, or years?

The plot thickens when we check out the OT because Jewish people understood this ambiguity between a week of seven days and a week of seven years! Let me explain.

In Exodus 20:8-11 we read of 'a week of days' which is a period of seven days from one Sabbath to another Sabbath. **Then** in Leviticus 25:1-7 there is a reference to 'a week of years' which is a stint of seven years stretching from one sabbatical year to the next sabbatical year.

However, in the tangled love story of Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 29:16-30), both periods of time are used interchangeably. In that instance, one week is the same as seven years.

There is another reference when we read of 'seven sabbaths of years—seven times seven years' (Leviticus 25:8-17) where the forty-nine years are followed by the fiftieth year of Jubilee, when a silver trumpet is blown to herald a year of redemption, release, rejoicing, and restoration.

For us to make any sense of the expression in Daniel's vision, it has to be seen in the context of years. Therefore, seventy weeks is the equivalent of four hundred and ninety years. The seventy weeks are literal years that end with Christ's second coming, but also include his first coming. The first sixty-nine weeks are now past, and the decisive seventieth week is still future.

The details of the 70 weeks

The focal point of the vision is centred on the Jewish people and upon the city of Jerusalem,

hence the reference to your people and your holy city. This is the answer to Daniel's prayer.

It has nothing to do with Gentile nations for they were dealt with in the prophecies given in Daniel 2, 7, and 8. Nor does it apply to the Church for she has no relation to the city of Jerusalem, or to the promises given to Israel with regard to their restoration and repossession of the land.

Daniel is aware of the importance of these few words for they affirm some non-negotiable truths, namely, God has not forgotten, forsaken, or failed his ancient people. Neither has he finished with them (Romans 11:1-10, 25-32).

There are four phases of 'seventy weeks' in Scripture which are affiliated to the Jewish people. Phase one begins with the birth of Abraham and ends with the Exodus. Phase two commences with the Exodus and climaxes with the building of Solomon's Temple. Phase three starts with the dedication of the Temple and finishes at the end of the Babylonian captivity.

Phase four is introduced with the edict of Artaxerxes and culminates at the second advent of Jesus Christ – it is this particular phase which is alluded to in these closing verses of Daniel 9.

A summary of what is entailed is outlined in verse 24 where we discover there are six keynote features, all of which relate to the work of Jesus the Messiah. The first three of these focus on his sacrifice, and the second three home in on his sovereignty.

To finish the transgression – the underlying thought here is of rebellion. This is the root problem with Israel throughout her entire history, and to this day is still the main cause of her

continued rejection of the Lord Jesus. At the Lord's second coming, she will recognise him as the one whom they pierced (Zechariah 12:10), as the one who was wounded and died for her transgression (Isaiah 53:5).

To put an end to sin – this is an all-inclusive term which has the idea of failure, of falling short of a standard, of missing the target or goal (Romans 3:23). It leads to daily sins being committed and these will not end until the second coming of Christ when they repent and find 'a fountain opened to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness' (Zechariah 13:1).

To atone for iniquity – there is coming a day of pardon for the Jewish people who will lament over their twistedness when they see Jesus, the returning King. They will see him as the ultimate fulfilment of Yom Kippur when he became a saviour and scapegoat for sin, and overwhelmed with remorse for their perversion, will turn to him in profound sorrow and grief (Zechariah 12:10).

To bring in everlasting righteousness – with the arrival of the King of kings to this world a new era will be ushered in characterised by moral integrity, justice, godliness, and righteousness. The literal kingdom of God on earth is a millennial and messianic age (Zechariah 9:10). In that day, Israel will come into the blessing of the New Covenant when God's law is indelibly written on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33-40).

To seal both vision and prophet – all of God's predictions and prophecies for the Jewish people and nation will then be a sweet reality. Fulfilled. Mission accomplished.

To anoint a most holy place – this refers to the innermost holy of holies, in the millennial temple as anticipated by the prophet Ezekiel. It will be anointed when the presence or shekinah of God is manifest, and spoken of as Jehovah Shammah, meaning 'the Lord is there' (Ezekiel 48:35).

The first three components are aimed at cleaning up the perennial problem of sin, as is obvious when we consider the words that are used: transgression, sin, and iniquity. All six strands coincide with the second advent of Jesus Christ and will be implemented there and then when his kingdom is openly established.

This is a truly sensational answer to Daniel's prayer. Even though there is the prospect of umpteen overcast days on the horizon, it must have cheered his heart as Gabriel explained the various issues to him. Despite their catalogue of terrible failures, there is at the end a glorious future for his nation and its capital city, Jerusalem. The golden, gilt-edged promises to Abraham and David are not annulled, but simply put on the back burner, until 'Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham' (Matthew 1:1) sits upon his throne in Jerusalem.

9:25-26 The division of the 70 weeks

The mystery is unravelled when we ascertain the starting point at which the divine clock begins to tick. The decree would authorise the restoration and rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and the construction would be carried out in terrifically hard times (Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 4, 6, 9, 13). Another brilliant example of answered prayer. In response to Nehemiah's emergency prayer-enabled request, for he was scared stiff

(Nehemiah 2:4), Artaxerxes approved such legislation when he tabled on the statute books that work could recommence on site. This was in the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of his reign, around March 445 BC.

Not only was Jerusalem rebuilt during that forty-nine year period and the covenant people were home again, the temple was also established, and the canon of the Old Testament completed. The seven weeks of years in which the city was restored concluded in 396 BC.

The finishing point of this period is when Messiah is presented as the prince or the Anointed One. This is a reference to his triumphal entry in April AD 32 into the city of Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday when the jubilant crowds gave their long-awaited Messiah the green carpet treatment and hailed him with loud shouts of 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel!' (Matthew 21:8-11; Mark 11:7-10; Luke 19:35-40; John 12:12-15, NIV).

If Jewish people living in the time of Jesus had read and studied the closing paragraph of Daniel 9, they would surely have realised that prophecy was being fulfilled in front of their eyes. Sadly, the overwhelming majority of locals failed to put two and two together and get four. No wonder Jesus wept (Luke 19:41-44).

Sir Robert Anderson, former AC in the Met, has calculated from the first day to the last day there is a grand total of 173,880 days, based on the Hebrew calendar of 360 days per lunar year. One month equals thirty days; twelve months, one lunar year, equals three hundred and sixty days. Anderson's figure, therefore, of 173,880 days is

equal to four hundred and eighty-three years or sixty-nine weeks. Just as the prophet said it would be.

Shortly after Palm Sunday we read that the anointed one shall be cut off. That is as clear a reference you will find anywhere to Calvary and the death of Jesus on a cross. The words cut off generally refer to the death penalty and are often translated to convey the idea of an extremely violent death (Leviticus 7:20; Nahum 3:15).

The death of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah was both representative and substitutionary (Isaiah 53:8). Jesus died not for his own sin, for he was the perfect, spotless, sinless Lamb of God, but for the sin of others—yours and mine. In this phrase, we are introduced to the gospel according to Daniel.

The expression shall have nothing means exactly what it says. He should have had a royal crown of gold and precious jewels, but all he had was a crown of thorns (Matthew 27:29). He should have had a royal robe, but he was stripped naked of his clothing (John 19:23-24). He should have had a royal throne, but he was given an accursed cross (John 19:17-18). He should have had the acclaim and admiration of his people, but all he knew was rejection and ridicule (John 19:14-15; Matthew 27:39-44). Indeed, he was bereft of everything for he died empty-handed with no dominion, no glory, and no kingdom.

There are ominous signs flashing before our eyes when we read that the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. In short, this is foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem. There were times when Jesus

addressed this matter in the course of his public ministry (Mark 13:1-2; Luke 19:43-44).

AD 70 dawned, but it spelt doom and gloom for the land of Israel and her citizens. It signalled the arrival of General Titus Flavius Vespasianus and the invading Romans. Almost forty years after Calvary the city of Jerusalem was razed to the ground. The population was ravaged and savagely murdered. It was mass devastation and unprecedented horror caused by grossly amoral and ruthless soldiers.

Sixty-five years later in AD 135, during the Bar Kochba rebellion, the mopping up operations were finished, the city was totally eradicated and the site covered with salt. The callous emperor, Hadrian, vowed total genocide and got close to success. Not one stone was left standing, as predicted (Matthew 24:2). They renamed both the country and the city of Jerusalem: one as Syria Palestina, and the other Aelia Capitolina. As a further sign of hostility, they banned all Jewish people from coming anywhere near their beloved land and holy city.

The prince who is to come in verse 26 is the same person referred to in verse 27 where it says he shall do this, that, and the other. He is the 'little horn' of Daniel 7:8, 24-27, the 'man of lawlessness' in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, and the 'beast out of the sea' in Revelation 13:1-8. John speaks of him as 'the antichrist' in 1 John 2:18.

We read at the end of verse 26 that its - his - end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. His days are numbered by the Sovereign Lord and he will get his just deserts when he has ticked all the boxes in verse 27. The word 'flood'

is used in Nahum 1:8 for the outpouring of God's wrath in relation to Nineveh. Something similar is anticipated here when the reservoir of God's fury and anger bursts its banks and cascades down on the man of sin like a raging torrent. Gone.

9:27 A description of the 70th week

Here we are given a glimpse through a relatively small window into life and its attendant adversity and affliction during the last seven years of history on earth, just prior to the coming of God's kingdom in its full and glorious expression.

The pronoun he refers back to the previous verse and the prince who is to come which is like a nom de plume for the antichrist. It seems that he will present himself initially to the Jewish people as the ultimate peace-maker, a messianic figure, as the kind of person who can solve global problems (Daniel 7:8, 20, 23-25).

Foreshadowed by Titus, as the little horn (Daniel 7:8) he comes across as an opportunist politician with loads of charisma who can strike a deal with other nations, like Israel in this instance (John 5:43), who since 1948 have been back in their own land as an independent nation.

Because of who he is and his influence in the corridors of world politics, they will be immensely glad to have him as a powerful ally and will welcome his diplomatic efforts on their behalf. He will offer to sign a seven-year peace pact and will apparently give them an unconditional guarantee as to the security of their land borders.

The government of the day will be delighted with their new-found friend and will see it as a dream come true. God has a rather different impression

for he views this strong covenant as a treaty with hell (Isaiah 28:15-18).

After a while, he will be seen in his true colours as the mask slips and the kid gloves are taken off, only to be replaced by a clenched fist. His plans are not favourable to the Jewish people for he has his own agenda. Halfway through the tenure of the covenant, he tears it up.

From that point onward, it is not worth the vellum it is written on as he assumes control of this last bastion of democracy in the Middle East region. The Jewish people will know all about it as they experience the rigours of great tribulation and a nail-biting time of deprivation and distress when Jerusalem is trampled underfoot (Revelation 11:2). Broken promises. Broken people.

Daniel is certain and clear that this devil-controlled infidel is determined to banish the various sacrifices and offerings along with the annual Jewish feasts and festivals, such as Pesach, Shavuot, and Yom Kippur. He will script a new faith directive focused exclusively on himself and for the sole benefit of stroking his own ego. He further ramps up pressure on a weary population when he sets up a statue of himself in the temple and presents himself to them as one who is god, demanding their adulation in the process (Daniel 11:31, 12:11; 2 Thess. 2:4).

Such a disgustingly vile deed is an affront to the Most High. A despicable act like this is blasphemous to the nth degree and ultimately brings about his downfall when the Judge has his say. His heinous, hellish acts will not go unchallenged.

Three-and-a-half years will seem much too long a time for those who are living at the sharp end of his foul and fiendish programme of persecution (Matthew 24:15-22). It will seem endless as individuals are left teetering on the brink of torment and torture. It will be atrocity heaped upon atrocity. A bloodbath.

What Antiochus did in a small way in the second century BC will become a worldwide persecution of Jewish people. The sovereign Lord will allow these trials and troubles for he has a strategic purpose in it all for he is purging and pruning the nation of Israel and its people.

When the game is up, and the final whistle blown, the Lord as Judge will offload his anger on this satanic scoundrel. He will deal with him in a decisive manner handing down a sentence which sees him consigned to the lake of fire for his war crimes and for his untempered arrogance toward the Lord Jesus Christ (Revelation 20:10).

Eliminated. The desolator is banished to a never-ending eternity of despair and dejection, to a hereafter of misery and memory spent in isolated desolation (Luke 19:25-26).

The king of Egypt could not diminish the Jew, the waters of the Red Sea could not drown him, Balaam could not curse him, the fiery furnace could not devour him, the gallows of Haman could not hang him, nations could not assimilate him, and dictators could not annihilate him. God has preserved their unique identity because one day his plan for his chosen people is going to be fulfilled.

Despite being scattered to the four corners of earth and living in different cultures and eras, the

Jews were never absorbed within their host nation. They were always Jews, so we talk about American Jews, Russian Jews, European Jews, British Jews, or whatever. They survived even when the odds were stacked high against them.

The history of Israel is a miracle, even as Israel is a miracle of history. That cannot be explained.

Neither can it be explained away. And that is the salutary message of Daniel: behind her is the sovereign God of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Daniel wrestled with two big questions as he poured out his heart in prayer: Will Israel survive? Yes, she will. Is there a future for his people? Yes, there is. Why? Because God is God! He has not ditched them, dumped them, duped them, or deserted them.

There are dark days ahead. But out of the inky blackness the Morning Star will shine heralding the prospect of a new day—a day when Jesus returns to earth to rule and reign in splendour; so her future beyond the seventieth week will be as bright as the everlasting promises of God.

Because God is a promise maker, and a promise keeper. Until then, we watch, and work, and wait.

We serve and we hope. The plan is in place.

Heaven's timepiece is ticking. Soon the Anointed One, the Prince, the King of the ages shall come.