

Seventy Years & Seventy Weeks (Part 3)

Daniel

Daniel 9

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Well, tonight we come again to our study in the book of Daniel. So, I invite you to turn to Daniel chapter 9. When we come to a passage like the one that we do tonight many Christians find themselves intimidated. Frankly, I think it's true to say that many are simply intimidated by prophecy, period—by any prophecy much less one as difficult as the one we come to tonight.

This week I read that Charles Schultz, the cartoonist, once drew a *Peanuts* cartoon in which Linus was trying to interpret a nursery rhyme. And Linus says to Charlie Brown, “The way I see it, ‘the cow jumped over the moon’ indicates rising farm prices.” Linus then asks if Charlie agrees and Charlie's response is this, “I can't say. I don't pretend to be a student of prophetic literature.”

That's how many feel about the prophecy of Daniel's seventy weeks. They feel hopelessly confused frankly, at a loss to even know where to begin to interpret it. The good news is that Daniel himself in this very chapter gives us the hermeneutic or the method of interpretation by which we can interpret this prophecy. You'll remember early in the chapter we looked at when he read Jeremiah's prophecy about the seventy years of the Babylon captivity, Daniel interpreted Jeremiah's prophecy assuming that seventy years should be interpreted as, well, seventy years. That's called a literal grammatical historical hermeneutic or method of interpretation. You interpret the Bible like you do all other normal literature. It means you take it literally unless there is evidence in the context to do otherwise. And so that's exactly how we're going to approach the interpretation of the vision God gave Daniel. We're going to approach it the same way he approached the prophecy God gave Jeremiah and the way he interpreted it in his life.

So, we're looking then at Daniel chapter 9 and in Daniel 9 God reveals this sweeping prophetic timeline of history of Israel's history from the time of Daniel to the very end of the age. Specifically concerning the Jewish people. The chapter unfolds in two parts. First of all, there is a prayer for the end of Israel's captivity. That's verses 1 to 19. We looked at the occasion of the prayer. Verse

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1 says, it was in the first year of Darius or the year 538 BC. The reason for the prayers in verse 2, look at it with me. “In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.” He says I read in Jeremiah, who was a contemporary of his by the way, an older contemporary, that the captivity would only last for seventy years. That was the motivation, the reason behind his prayer. We looked in verse 3 at the attitudes of prayer portrayed in the way Daniel approached his own prayer. And then in verses 4 through 19 we considered the content of the prayer.

It begins with adoration then much of it is the confession of his, of Daniel’s, own sin and the sin of his people. And then in verses 15 to 19 we get to the petition and specifically the petition for forgiveness and restoration. Just to confirm the specific requests that Daniel has of God are, first of all, for the forgiveness of his people and then their restoration—the restoration of Jerusalem, the restoration of the temple. And he gives God six arguments, if you will, six reasons that God should hear and respond to his prayer. I’m not going to go back through them except just to point them out to you again. Daniel says God, You should respond. You should forgive. You should restore Your people because of Your past redemption. Because of Your perfect righteousness. Because of the reproach Your people bear. Because of Your own personal reputation. For Your name’s sake, oh God, act, because of God’s profound compassion. And then Daniel was aware of God’s primary method that God uses means. Daniel understood that God would accomplish His sovereign purpose by answering the prayers of His people as is recorded in Jeremiah and so Daniel prayed. The first half of this chapter then is a prayer for the end of Israel’s captivity. The rest of the chapter beginning in verse 20 through verse 27 is a vision of the rest of Israel’s history. A vision of the rest of Israel’s history.

Now, Daniel first deals with God’s immediate answer to his prayer and that has to do with the arrival of Gabriel. You know, I think we’re prone when we come to prophecy to say, let’s skip all this stuff and let’s get to the prophecy, that’s really interesting stuff. It’s interesting that Daniel spends as much time recording the coming of Gabriel and God’s immediate response to him as he does on the prophecy itself because there are some powerful lessons about God and about ourselves

to be learned here in these four verses. Let's look at them together. Notice first of all verse 20. "Now 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 in behalf of the holy mountain of my God," that is a great summary of Daniel's prayer. In fact, all of the verbs in that verse have been used earlier in this chapter as Daniel was describing his prayer along the way. Verse 21, "while I was still speaking in prayer," Daniel here wants us to get it. He is underscoring that this answer came from God before Daniel even finished praying. Why is that important? Because it tells us so much about our God. It tells us so much about His heart for His people. Daniel says, "while I was still speaking in prayer."

In fact, I have to stop here and draw out a couple of immediate lessons that just jump out at me from this passage. First of all, perfection is not possible in this life. If you think that's where you're going to get in this life, you're going to be sadly disappointed. I mean here is Daniel. Daniel is one of the greatest saints who would ever live. He is 82 years old at this point. And after sixty-five plus years walking with the Lord he still could not say, as Proverbs 20 puts it, I've kept my heart pure; I'm clean and without sin. Perfection is not possible in this life. Perfection is not possible, but it ought to be the direction of your life. It ought to be the pursuit of your life. We talk all the time about the fact that true sanctification, true holiness in this life, is an increasing pattern of righteousness and a decreasing pattern of sin. That's what the Lord expects of us. A decreasing pattern of sin and an increasing pattern of righteousness. Daniel certainly was characterized by that but not by perfection.

There's a second sort of lesson that jumps out at me already in verses 20 and the first part of verse 21 and that is sinlessness is not a condition of answered prayer, but confession is. Let me say that again. Sinlessness is not a condition of answered prayer, but confession of sin is. That's why Isaiah the prophet writes in Isaiah 59:1-2, "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God. And your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear." If you keep unconfessed sin in your life, if you're walking in unconfessed, unrepentant sin then you cannot expect that God will hear your prayers. However, if we confess our sins then God does

hear. Calvin, as he considered Daniel's confession here, wrote this in his commentary. He said, "This then"—I love this— "This, then, is our righteousness, to confess ourselves guilty in order that God may gratuitously absolve us." Let me say that again because that is profound. "This is our righteousness, to confess ourselves guilty in order that God may gratuitously absolve us." Calvin goes on in his commentary to mention the prayer of confession that Christ taught us to pray in the disciple's prayer; it's often called the Lord's Prayer. You remember? Forgive us our, what? Our debts. Forgive us our debts. Lord, forgive us our sins. Calvin comments on that and this is what he says. "For whom did Christ wish to use this petition? Surely all His disciples. If anyone thinks that he has no need of this form of prayer and confession of sin let him depart from the school of Christ and enter into a herd of swine." You get the message.

There's a third lesson here before we go on and that is, and I love this, God is profoundly concerned about the needs of His children and responds to their prayer. I love and it's a verse I go to often in my own mind and as I think about prayer, it's 1 Peter chapter 5 verse 7 where it says, "Cast all your care upon Him." Why? "Because He cares for you." Listen, if it's a concern to you it's a concern to God. These are amazing truths. But let's go on. Verse 21, "While I was still speaking in prayer, then the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision previously, came to me in my extreme weariness." Gabriel here is called a man because he appeared in human masculine form; that's the way angels typically appear to human beings. Daniel reminds us that it was Gabriel who visited him in the vision previously. That's back in chapter 8 verses 15 and 16. And by the way, that was thirteen years before. You know those who think visions and dreams occur all the time, here's a prophet of God. And it was thirteen years between the previous vision and this one that he receives.

Now, in our New American Standard translation, Daniel says, notice, that Gabriel "came to me in my extreme weariness." If you have an ESV, an English Standard Version, you will see that they have another reading. The ESV says, "Gabriel came to me in swift flight." Now, that reading, let me just tell you, is based on conjecture about the Hebrew root verb while the NAS translation is based upon the established meaning of the Hebrew words. In addition, let me just say that Scripture describes two classes of heavenly beings, cherubs, and seraphs, as having wings and flying. But

Scripture nowhere says that all angels have wings. In fact, Daniel here specifically says Gabriel appeared in a form of a man. Men don't typically have wings unless they're in Marvel movies. Literally that the Hebrew says, "having been wearied with weariness." Now, that's obviously not referring to Gabriel. It has to describe Daniel and that makes perfect sense. I mean, remember back in verse 3 Daniel has to be completely exhausted because he's been in an intense ongoing time of prayer and of fasting. Verse 21 says, "The man Gabriel . . . came to me"—notice this— ". . . about the time of the evening offering." The time of the evening offering was about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Daniel was praying at the time of the sacrifice because that was the normal Jewish practice. For example, in Ezra 9:5, "At the evening offering I arose from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe torn, and I fell on my knees and stretched out my hands to the LORD my God." Psalm 141 verse 2 says, "May my prayer be counted as incense before You; the lifting up of my hands as the evening offering." Why was prayer typically offered by the Jewish people in conjunction with sacrifice? You see that even in New Testament times, right, in Acts chapter 3. They go up at the time of the sacrifice to pray. Why are the two conjoined? It's because there is an acknowledgement in it that there really can be no prayer to God without the forgiveness of sins. And so, prayer and sacrifice often went together.

Now, I want you to think again about the timing of Daniel's prayer. It's the time of the evening sacrifice. Does that strike you as strange? I mean think about this for a moment. It's been almost fifty years since the temple has been destroyed and the last evening sacrifice had been made. Fifty years! It's been seventy years since Daniel was able to be at the temple as a young teenager and to worship at the time of the evening sacrifice. And yet seventy years after that experience, fifty years after the temple had been destroyed, Daniel is still commemorating the evening sacrifice. Even though actual sacrifice was impossible, the attitude of Daniel's heart was clear. For seventy years he had observed the hour of sacrifice in his heart. That's absolutely remarkable. And it's also the essence of true biblical faith. It also points out by the way that the blood sacrifices were only symbolical and not in and of themselves efficacious. God saw the heart first and then the sacrifice.

Dale Ralph Davis writes, "At the time of the evening sacrifice' that phrase reveals far more than Daniel's ability to tell time. It is packed with years of yearning and longing and affection for

Yahweh's ordinances; a passion for the means of grace, the true Jerusalem worship." And then he adds this, "Sometimes what may seem incidental reveals a soul thirsting after God." Daniel's praying at the time of the evening sacrifice. And it was at that time that Gabriel came to him. Verse 22, "He [that is Gabriel] gave me instruction and talked with me and said, 'Oh, Daniel, I have now come forth to give you insight with understanding.'" Gabriel had come to help Daniel understand God's plan for His people. Verse 23, "At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued and I have come to tell you for you are highly esteemed."

Everything about that just excites me. I absolutely love that. You know, this opening phrase "at the beginning of your supplication the command was issued" it immediately reminded me when I read it again of the prodigal son. You remember? He's in the distant country. He squandered everything. He rehearses the speech he's going to deliver to the father representing God. And he gets to the father and he starts his speech but immediately the father has an answer. He stops him in the middle of his request and says here's what we're going to do. That's exactly what happens here. At the beginning of his prayer, notice "the command was issued." Obviously, God is the one who issued the command. In otherwise, God's great heart was touched by Daniel's humble, sincere heart even as he began to pray. And of course, God already knew what his request was going to be. Jesus said in Matthew 6:8, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." The fact that Gabriel said, notice verse 23, that he had come, "I have come to tell you" implies that this wasn't just a vision, but that Gabriel actually came this time in person. Think about that. God heard Daniel begin to pray and He immediately sent one of His most powerful angels, Gabriel, whose name means "the mighty one" the mighty one of God, He sends him with an answer. Gabriel explains why he was sent, notice, "For you are highly esteemed." The same expression is used of Daniel in Daniel chapter 10 verses 11 and 19. The Hebrew word "highly" is not in the Hebrew; instead, it's a translation of the fact that the word for esteemed is plural. Hebrew has this thing when it wants to stress something it makes the word plural. And that's what you have here. In other words what he's saying is "Daniel, you are not only esteemed and esteemed; you are esteemed again and again. You're considered to be of great value." This Hebrew term is used of gold in Ezra chapter 8. God considered Daniel to be of great value to Him. Not because he deserved it but because God had set His love upon Daniel and made him an object of His care just as He has

us. One commentator writes, “Daniel was considered to be a very precious treasure to the Lord. As are all of God’s children. He loves them greatly.” Can you let it settle in your soul for a moment? If you’re a follower of Jesus Christ, if you have repented and believed in Him, God the Eternal Creator God, loves you and considers you a great treasure to Himself. In fact, in 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 9, God Himself calls us His own possession. And He doesn’t mean by that you’re like a thing to Him. He means you’re His special treasure. It’s amazing.

And if that weren’t enough to ensure God’s eager response to our prayers, we are His own possession just like Daniel was. We are precious to God. We are His treasure, if that isn’t enough then add this to it: we also have a great high priest, God’s own Son, who intercedes for us in the presence of the Father. Hebrews chapter 7 verse 25 says of Christ, “He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him since He always lives to make intercession for them.” Really, believer, you don’t think God’s going to hear your prayer when you are highly esteemed as Daniel was. Not because of you but because of God’s choice and decision because He set His love upon you, because the Son is there in the presence of the Father pleading on your behalf? You really think that God’s going to ignore you or does ignore you?

Gabriel continues verse 23, “So give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision.” This is a very interesting thing that goes on here. In verse 22 there’s divine responsibility to give insight with understanding. Now in Daniel’s case Gabriel shows up. That doesn’t happen for us. In our case, we depend on God’s written revelation and the Spirit’s illumination of that revelation. So, there’s the divine responsibility to give us written revelation and to give us His Spirit to understand it. But notice in verse 23, Gabriel underscores the human responsibility. “Give heed to the message and gain understanding.” The Hebrew verb there has the main idea of giving one’s full attention to this. Daniel, you’re going to have to give your full attention to this revelation to understand it. Folks, the same thing is true for us. If you want to understand the Bible you must give heed to its message. You have to focus your attention on what it says in order to understand what it means. Even though God has given you the written revelation and He’s given you the Spirit to grant you illumination to understand and grasp it, He’s not going to do that by magic. He’s not going to sprinkle you with some divine hermeneutic dust that enables you to get it. In fact, Dale

Ralph Davis says, I love this, “The gifts of God are not excuses for laziness but demands for sweat.” The gifts of God are not excuses for sloth but demands for sweat. Now notice in verse 23 the message revealed to Daniel is called a vision. As I’ve noted before this is not the same kind of vision he had before where it wasn’t happening to him in real time because this time, Gabriel appeared to him in bodily form so there’s almost universal agreement that it’s better to think of this vision as a prophetic revelation. The word “vision” is used that way in several other Old Testament passages like Obadiah 1, Nahum 1:1, Habakkuk 2:2, other prophets.

Now, the prophecy that follows all of this in verses 24 to 27, it’s very interesting. It doesn’t explicitly answer Daniel’s prayer. It’s not like the prophecy is filled with a direct answer to Daniel’s prayer, forgive Your people and restore the nation. So, what was God’s immediate answer to Daniel’s request? It’s in a passing comment in verse 25. Notice verse 25, “from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.” That’s it. That’s the only part of the prophecy that is a direct answer to Daniel’s prayer. But it was the prophecy that Daniel’s prayer and God’s promise would be accomplished. God would forgive His people. He would ensure that they were free from captivity, that they were returned to their land and that the temple would be rebuilt. And God’s promise, as is always true, was fulfilled. Absolutely and certainly. Turn to Ezra. Ezra chapter 1. By the way, this is how the book of 2 Chronicles ends almost identically. But look at Ezra chapter 1 verse 1:

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put in writing saying: “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, the LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of [Yahweh], the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem. Every

survivor, at whatever place he may live, let the men of that place support him with silver and gold, with goods and cattle, together with a freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.”

Now, this is amazing. How does that happen? Well, the reason we know how that happened is because of what Isaiah wrote in the 720's BC, one hundred and eighty years before Daniel had this vision and before the events of Ezra unfolded. Turn back to Isaiah with me. Let me show you how this happened. It's amazing. Isaiah chapter 45. And look at verse 1: “Thus says the LORD.” Now remember this is in the 720's BC and Cyrus is in the 530's BC so we're talking a long time before Cyrus. “Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His anointed, whom I have taken by the right hand, to subdue nations before him and to loose the loins of kings; to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut.” By the way that's an allusion to the gates of the city of Babylon to be open when Cyrus took it. “I will go before you and make the rough places smooth; I will shatter the doors of bronze, cut through their iron bars.” These are all pictures of what will happen in Babylon.

I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden wealth of secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name. For the sake of Jacob My servant, and Israel My chosen one, I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honor though you have not known Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; that men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.

Now go back to chapter 44 and verse 26. Here's God still speaking. He says,

Confirming the word of His servant and performing the purpose of His messengers [now watch this]. It is I who says of Jerusalem, “She shall be inhabited!” And of

the cities of Judah, “They shall be built.” And I will raise up her ruins again. It is I who says to the depth of the sea, “Be dried up!” and I will make your rivers dry.

Now watch verse 28, “It is I who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.’ And he declares of Jerusalem, ‘She will be built,’ and of the temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid.’” That is incredible.

Now Daniel obviously knew of the prophecy of Isaiah his older contemporary. Jeremiah also knew of the prophecies of Isaiah. Josephus, the Jewish historian, records that Cyrus personally read what we just read from the book of Isaiah. How did Cyrus know about Isaiah’s prophecy, about him? All the evidence points to Daniel showing Isaiah’s prophecy that we just read to Cyrus. So, God—think about this—God used Daniel’s prayer and Daniel showing the prophecy to Cyrus to accomplish God’s sovereign purpose. Listen, folks, don’t let God’s sovereignty keep you from praying. And don’t let God’s sovereignty keep you from acting. God may choose to use both your prayers and your actions as the means to accomplish His sovereign plan as clearly happened in Daniel’s case.

So, we’ve seen God’s immediate answer. Now let’s consider God’s future plan, the vision of seventy weeks. Let me just read back in Daniel chapter 9; let me just read this prophecy to you. Verse 24. Here’s what Gabriel said to Daniel:

Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place. So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations

are determined. And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.

I don't really think we really need to really explain that do you? I mean it's perfectly clear. You got it all? Well, don't feel too intimidated. Leupold, one commentator, says, "This is one of the grandest prophetic passages and yet if there was ever an exegetical crux this is it." St. Jerome was already acquainted with nine interpretations. Miller writes, "These are four of the most controversial verses in the Bible." Baldwin calls this paragraph "the most difficult text in Daniel." J.A. Montgomery calls it a "dismal swamp." That's a little much. And before we look at this paragraph in detail which we will do in coming weeks, I want us to step back and in our remaining time I want to give you the big picture. I want to consider its overall meaning so that as we get into the details it's clearer for you. Now, let me just tell you, don't expect to get everything I'm about to share with you. That's going to require going back into the details and we're going to work our way through it. But this overview I think is important, so you know the different ideas about how to even interpret this prophecy.

So, let's look at it. Verse 24 says "seventy weeks." Seventy weeks are decreed. Now notice the marginal note in your NAS for seventy weeks. It says, "or units of seven." Why does it say that? Because the word "weeks" is not in the Hebrew text. Literally the Hebrew text reads "seventy sevens." "Seventy sevens" or as the NAS puts it, "seventy units of seven." What does that mean? What is this prophecy about? Well obviously, most people agree it has something to do with history. The sweep of history. There are four primary interpretations of this prophecy of Daniel's seventy weeks or Daniel's seventy sevens. Let's look at these four interpretations to get the overview.

There's first of all the interpretation of theological liberals. Theological liberals say that these are literal years, that end with Antiochus Epiphanes, the guy we've been looking at who lived in the

160's who died in the 160's BC, 163 BC. Now why do they do that? This is the preferred view of those who don't believe Daniel wrote Daniel. Because of all the really accurate prophecies that we're going to look at in the remaining chapters they say nobody could have predicted that much detail beforehand. So, it had to have been written afterwards. And so, they put it afterwards and so they make this about what happened before the book was written. Those who reject divine prophecy usually take this view. This view interprets the sevens or the weeks as periods of time of seven years each or a total of four hundred and ninety years, that's seventy times seven, seventy weeks or seventy units times seven years. According to this view the word "decree" and in Hebrew it's the word "word" is Jeremiah's prophecy that was given in 605 BC. It's a little hard to see Jeremiah's prophecy as being a decree but that's how they take it. And the four hundred and ninety years in their view ends with Antiochus's persecution when that ends, either when the temple was cleansed in 164 BC or at his death in 163 BC.

Now, there are several serious problems with this view. First of all, this prophecy says the kingdom of God is going to come after these things are completed, which obviously didn't happen. That would be like a big problem. That would be like the guy who wrote the book, "*88 Reasons Jesus Must Come Back in 1988*." When that didn't happen, the book became really cheap. You can get copies. Trust me. For pennies. The kingdom of God was supposed to come; it didn't happen. Secondly, if you do the math it just doesn't add up. It's not four hundred ninety years it's about four hundred and twenty-five years. So, either Daniel was wrong, or he really struggled with math. A third problem is a decree to rebuild Jerusalem naturally refers to the decree of a king not the prophecy of Jeremiah which, by the way, doesn't refer to the rebuilding of the city at all. Which is exactly what this prophecy says. The decree to rebuild Jerusalem. So, this one just doesn't stand up. Let's look at the second view.

The second view of this prophecy is the amillennial view, that is those who do not believe that there will be a literal thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ on this earth after His second coming. The amillennialist say that the seventy weeks here are symbolic periods of a time that end around, that's a key word, around the time of Christ's first coming, or the incarnation. Typically, those who hold this view, and there are obviously variations, but typically it begins with Cyrus's decree

that allowed the Jewish exiles to return to Israel, we just read about in Ezra chapter 1 which happened in 538 BC. And they say it ends at some point after Christ's earthly ministry but before or some would say, with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. So somewhere between the ending of Christ's ministry and AD 70 is where it ends.

Now, again there are several problems with this view. First of all, no normal hermeneutic would cause you to describe the number seven as an indefinite period of time. If you got a letter saying I'm coming to visit you in seven days, you wouldn't say that person is coming in sixty-three years. That's not a normal hermeneutic. Secondly, this view requires all of the goals, that lofty list of goals in verse 24, to be fulfilled with Christ's first coming and as we will see as we work through them in coming weeks it just doesn't fit. Just doesn't work. Thirdly, this view is extremely subjective because the periods of time marked out by the sevens vary greatly in length. There's no uniformity. It's like you can do whatever you want to with them. You can make them very short. You can stretch them out and make them very long. It's all subjective. And then another problem is this view teaches the destruction of the temple comes after the seventy weeks. But the prophecy says it comes after the sixty-ninth week before the seventieth week. That's a problem. So, that view as we'll see as we go through it in detail doesn't add up either.

There's a third view and I'll spend very little time here because it's one that's out there but it's not as popular. This is the view of the commentator Kyle and others. It says that the seventy weeks are symbolic periods of time that end not with the first coming of Christ but with the second coming, or around the second coming of Christ. Now this really is a prophecy of church history they would say that for them includes both the Old and New Testament church. So, it's a prophecy of church history. It begins with Cyrus's decree in 538 BC; that's a familiar refrain. It lasts until the return of Christ at the end of this age. Now typically those who hold this interpretation say that the first sevens, did you notice verse 25? Gabriel breaks up the first sixty-nine weeks into seven weeks and sixty-two weeks. They would say that first sevens, those are from Cyrus's decree until Christ's first coming, about five hundred and fifty years. The next sixty-two sevens are from Christ to the time of the antichrist at the end of the age at least obviously two thousand years.

Now in between that they would say that during that time, during the time all of this is unfolding—now you’ve got to stay with me here; this is where it gets a little tricky—the city that’s being rebuilt represents spiritual Jerusalem or the church and it is being built in times of distress, i.e., the times we live in. And the expression “the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing” doesn’t mean, as seems obvious, that it’s His death; rather it means that by the end of this age Christ will have no place as the Messiah in the minds of the people of the world. I hate to tell you but that’s already true. Now the problems with this view are again it’s extremely subjective. No meaning to the times. You just sort of pick and choose as you want. In verse 25, and this is a huge one to me, in verse 25, this view changes from a literal hermeneutic, the literal building of the city of Jerusalem under Cyrus’s decree, to a figurative hermeneutic in which the city is the church within the same verse for no exegetical reason. This view holds a very troubling view of church history in which Christ and His church will be defeated almost entirely during the last days. Now I understand; you know, you have those statements of Christ, you know the love of many will grow cold and if the Lord delayed His coming will there be faith on the earth? I understand those passages. But you also have to put that in light of those passages that talk about the massive salvation of people during the tribulation period. So, this view as we walk through, I think you’ll see, doesn’t hold water either.

That brings us to the fourth view and obviously I’ve been leading to it, it’s the one that our church holds, the one I hold, and I think you’ll understand as we work our way through this passage. It’s the pre-millennial’s view. And this view says that the seventy weeks are literal years that end with Christ’s second coming. Now this view teaches that these are literal seven-year periods of time; you have seventy of them times seven units—that’s four hundred years. So, you have a total period of four hundred ninety years. Now the seventy, in this view, the seventy weeks begin with a decree to rebuild Jerusalem. I’m going to give you options as we go through the passage. I’ll tell you which one I believe best represents the evidence and why. I’ll defend it to you. But let me give you the options. This is what’s out there.

It begins with a decree to rebuild Jerusalem. Either the decree made to Ezra which is in year 558 or the decree to Nehemiah made in 445. This view also takes seriously the fact that Gabriel divides

the first sixty-nine weeks into two groups: seven years and weeks, verse 25. Now the seven weeks of seven years or forty-nine years, end with the completion of the work of either Ezra or Nehemiah. Again, it depends on what starting date you choose, right? That's why I'm giving you the two options. And the sixty-two weeks of seven years or four hundred thirty-four years, this second group of weeks, extends from the end of the seven weeks to Christ's first coming. So, it starts at the end of the first period of the end of the weeks of seven years and lasts until Christ's first coming. Now depending on which starting date you choose the sixty-ninth week ends either with Christ's baptism in AD 26 or Christ's triumphal entry in AD 33. Now if you're doing the math and going that's too long a ministry that's because there are two different views of when Christ died: the year 30 and the year 33. We'll talk a little bit about that when we get there. Ok? Again, I've giving you an overview so don't, if you're going oh, you lost me somewhere here. Stay with me. It will all make sense as we walk our way through it. I think it will help you to see the trees if you first see the forest.

Now Gabriel, you say now what's going on with that final week, that seventieth week? Well, this prophecy Gabriel explicitly told Daniel was decreed for your people and your holy city. In other words, it was about the Jewish people. But the Jewish people rejected their Messiah in the first century and their rejection began a gap in this prophecy between the sixty-ninth week and the seventieth week. There are several arguments for that which I will share with you the next time we study this passage together. But right now, again, I'm just giving you an overview of this interpretation. It's as if God hit the pause button on His dealings with Israel after the events of Christ's life, and death, and resurrection unfolded. However, as we saw in Romans 11 and as we'll see in Daniel's prophecy yet to come at the end of the age God will again initiate the fulfillment of His plan and purposes for Israel. And the seventieth week, the final week of seven years in Daniel's prophecy, will begin. And during that final week of seven years there will be great tribulation for Israel and the for the entire world. God will pour out His wrath on this planet but at the same time God will save a vast number of people during those years including the vast majority of the Jewish people who survive the tribulation as we saw in Romans 11. In fact, look at Romans 11 with me again. I just want to remind you.

You remember Romans 11 describes this sort of pause button where you have God saying there has been this transition, verse 11 of chapter 11, “I say then, they did not stumble though so as to fall, did they?” speaking of the Jewish people “May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.” There’s this transition that has happened to the Gentiles. But it’s not going to stay that way. Go back to verse 25, “For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” That’s the period of time that’s going on right now. The Gentiles are being ministered to and there’s coming a time when the fullness of the Gentiles, the full number of Gentiles who are going to be saved, are saved. And then verse 26, “All Israel will be saved; just as it is written, ‘THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB. THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.’” So, understand then that God is going to again return to His plan for the nation and at the end of the seventieth week, after that week of tribulation, on the planet, the Great Tribulation, Messiah will come. He will establish His earthly kingdom and He will reign for a thousand years on this renewed planet. And He’ll destroy the existing universe after that thousand years. He will create a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness is at home, the text says, and He will reign forever and ever. That’s an overview of this great prophecy. And we’re going to look at it in more detail. But as we finish our time tonight, I want to step back and just draw some overarching lessons from this prophecy of the seventy weeks. And I love these. I hope they’ll be an encouragement to you as they have been to me as I’ve meditated on them this week.

First of all, God never forgets His people even in the middle of their darkest times. Verse 24 Gabriel says to Daniel, “Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city.” In spite of their sin God had not forgotten His people and He was still at work on their behalf. I don’t know what your circumstances are. I know there are a lot of people in our church right now who are going through some very difficult times, hard difficult dark times. It can feel in those times like God has forgotten you. The psalms, the prophets are filled with those expressions: Lord, where are You? You need to remember this passage and remember that here is the nation, God’s people,

in Babylonian captivity for seventy years, And Gabriel says God hasn't forgotten it. God hasn't forgotten His promises. He hasn't forgotten you.

Secondly, God always preserves His people even in times of distress as verse 25 puts it. God always preserves His people. The prophecy predicts that God's covenant people will continue to survive even through all of these change in times and seasons, through all of these incredible difficulties and there's only one way to explain their continued existence. Frankly there's only one way to explain the continued existence of the Jewish people. It's God's continuing preservation. And that's exactly what Gabriel says to Daniel. Dale Ralph Davis says this, "Both in the flow and sometimes in the fury of history God keeps His people intact."

Thirdly, God has a plan for human history and it's perfectly on schedule. You know, Christian people can get pretty unsettled by the desperately wicked times we live in. Maybe you're one of them. You read the latest news headlines and you just wonder, it feels like the world is coming apart. I have people tell me the world is coming apart. It's out of control. Daniel wants you to know, God wants you to know, it's not out of control. It's marching perfectly on His plan. El Elyon, God Most High, is still on His throne and every facet, every detail of His eternal plan will and is being worked out. So, relax. Trust God. He has a plan. This prophecy reminds us. This prophecy marches from Daniel's time to the end of the age. And God says this is how it's going to unfold. So just sit back and watch God do what He does.

Number four, in Daniel 9 the victory of the Messiah is implied, and we'll see it as we march through it. But in Daniel's other visions Messiah's victory is declared openly and triumphantly. Look at it with me, look back in Daniel chapter 2. You remember Nebuchadnezzar's vision, his dream. Look at chapter 2 verse 44. Here is Daniel's interpretation:

In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the

iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future.

That stone cut out of the mountain without hands is as we will discover later in Daniel's prophecy our Lord Jesus who crushes the kingdoms of this world. Turn over to chapter 8. Chapter 8 verse 25, in the middle of verse 25 talking about the work of antichrist it says, "He will even oppose the prince of princes"—That's the Messiah—"But he will be broken without human agency." There's again the picture of that stone cut out of the mountain without hands who represents Christ who just crushes antichrist and his kingdom. Turn over to chapter 7. Chapter 7 verse 11, "I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking." This is again antichrist. "I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire." Destroyed! Verse 13:

I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him and to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.

Here is our Lord Jesus Christ taking control of the world as we sang about earlier and He will reign forever. Look at chapter 7 verse 26, "The court will sit for judgement"—in response to antichrist. God will hold court—"and His dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One"—and notice this—"His"—capital "H," referring to the Messiah—"kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him." Christian, be encouraged that God has not forgotten you. In fact, He is preserving and sustaining you along with His people. And here's the good news: our Lord wins and so do you. Let's pray together.

Father, we find such joy and encouragement in the knowledge that You are on Your throne. That this world is not out of control, but it is perfectly within Your control. That not a single event occurs, not the flight of an arrow, not the fall of a bird, apart from Your knowledge and control. And so, Father help us to trust You. Thank You that You have a plan, and that plan is unfolding perfectly. We thank You that You've told us, because You love us, because we, like Daniel, are highly esteemed not because of who we are but because of who You are. That You've told us how the story ends. We win. Your Son wins. And He will reign forever. Lord, help us to be encouraged, help us to live in joy and not fear. Help us to live in trust and not discouragement. And Father, I pray that You would help us to live looking as Paul wrote for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.