

Main Idea: There are two benefits we can derive from looking back to Daniel's experience recorded in Daniel 9:20-27.

- I. By looking back to Daniel, we learn about prayer (20-23).
 - A. He prayed a specific prayer (20).
 1. It was a prayer of confession.
 2. It was a prayer of supplication.
 - B. He received a specific answer (21-23).
 1. God hears us when we pray.
 2. God responds to us when we seek His honor.
 3. God desires persistence in prayer.
- II. By looking back to Daniel, we learn about the future (24-27).
 - A. God revealed His plan (24).
 1. He operates with a time-frame in mind.
 2. He operates with a goal in mind.
 - His aim is to remove sin.
 - His aim is to restore righteousness.
 - B. God revealed the particulars of His plan (25-27).
 1. There will be 69 'sevens' from the decree to the Messiah (25).
 2. After 62 'sevens', tragedy will occur (26).
 - The Messiah will be cut off.
 - The temple will be destroyed.
 3. In the seventieth 'seven,' a Rival will come.
 - He will confirm a covenant with many.
 - He will violate the covenant.
 - He will be dealt with according to God's decree.

Implication: We must line up our lives with God's plan.

As I mention the words Egypt, Libya, Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Israel, what comes to mind? How about the words *powder keg*? Without question, there is tension in the world these days, particularly in the Middle East. But that's not a new problem, for sure. Will the tension always exist? Will it ever go away? How will lasting peace be achieved?

The Bible addresses those questions. In fact, the Bible addresses them very specifically in various places, like Mark 13 and Matthew 24-25, and in an Old Testament book that we're going to investigate in a moment.

But first, a question. What would you do if a man walked into the room where you were with your family, grabbed your daughter's arm, and started bending her fingers against the joints? What would you do if the man continued to aggravate your daughter's hand to the point that she winced in pain? Would you rush to your child's aid, and rescue her from the man's grasp?

I had that very experience several years ago. I must confess to you that while the man was bending my daughter's fingers, and while my daughter was grimacing in pain, I didn't try to stop him. I just watched. The reason I didn't do anything was because I loved my daughter.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ This message has been adapted from earlier messages given at WBC on 7/28/96 and 8/20/06.

Lest you misunderstand, allow me to clarify something. The man who entered the room was an orthopedic specialist, and the girl was my daughter, Julie, who broke her arm eight weeks prior to that visit. The room was the physician's office in Columbus, and the reason for the pain-causing, finger-bending was my daughter's recovery.

In the midst of the examination, Dr. Torch (who acknowledged that his patients often referred to him as Dr. *Torture!*) made the statement, "I regret the pain, Julie, but pain is part of the healing process. As has been said, 'No pain, no gain.'"

I would never allow some guy off the street to inflict pain on one of my children, nor would you, but I accept it from the wise hands of a physician. What makes the difference? Two things. One, Dr. Torch was a specialist who had helped thousands of people in the past. And two, he had a plan, and though his plan involved pain, his desired end was the good of his patient.

God's people are not immune from pain. Right now, God's people are suffering in this world. In fact, 200,000 followers of Christ will enter heaven this year as martyrs—that's one brother in Christ dying *every three minutes* all year long.

"Why doesn't God do something? What's He up to?" you ask. Good question. The fact is, He IS up to something, as we'll see beginning this evening. We're going to learn about God's future plan by looking to the past. I want us to see three important texts in the book of Daniel...

Tonight: Daniel 9:20-27

Next week: Daniel 11:36-45

July 24: Daniel 12:1-13

August (possibly): Mark 13

Our text today is Daniel 9. Pain was no abstract concept for Daniel. When he was a young boy, he watched his home be ransacked by cruel soldiers (around 605 B.C.). Then, along with several of his Jewish peers, he was separated from his parents and hauled off to exile in Babylon, hundreds of miles away from Jerusalem. For more than the next six decades, he felt the pain of being removed from his beloved homeland.

Why would God allow godly people like Daniel to experience such pain? It's because, as Daniel learned and shared in chapter 9, God has a plan for His people. God, Who is like a wise physician-specialist, has a plan to restore broken, sinful people to wholeness and holiness. His plan involves pain, but it's pain with a purpose.

Why did God chastise the Israelites in the 6th century B.C.? Yes, because they had disobeyed Him, but what was the purpose of the pain? The desired results were the good of God's people and the glory of God.

With that perspective in mind, let's turn our attention to the final section of Daniel 9 where we discover one of the most incredible prophecies found anywhere in the Bible. By looking back to Daniel's experience recorded in Daniel 9:20-27, we can gain valuable insight concerning two subjects.

I. By looking back to Daniel, we learn about prayer (20-23).

The first 19 verses of Daniel 9 record Daniel's prayer. Daniel was perplexed by a problem that moved him to pray. His people had been in captivity nearly 70 years. While reading the book recorded by Jeremiah the prophet, Daniel learned that God predicted He

would restore His people to their homeland after 70 years. The time was nearly up, so Daniel hit his knees. We observe two things about Daniel's prayer in verses 20-23.

A. He prayed a specific prayer (20). The actual prayer ends in verse 19 and is followed by this explanation of Daniel in verse 20, "While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the LORD my God for his holy hill..."

Prayer was no rote ritual for Daniel. When he spoke with God, it was not a mechanical recitation, but a heart-felt conversation with God. If you doubt that, just notice the words Daniel uses here to describe his activity in his prayer closet. He says he was "speaking," "praying," "confessing," and "making my request to the LORD." Rather than engage in vague small-talk with God, Daniel prayed a specific prayer marked by two ingredients.

1. *It was a prayer of confession.* What is confession? The truth is we all sin, and we don't have the ability to rewind the video and undo our shameful past. Is there hope? Yes, God forgives sin if we will do what Daniel did. Confess sin. To confess means to acknowledge a fact, whether good or bad. To confess is to admit the truth about what we've done and what we deserve. That's exactly what Daniel did in his prayer. Four times he admitted (5, 8, 11, 15), "We have sinned."

2. *It was a prayer of supplication.* Daniel asked God for something. No, his request wasn't for himself, but for what? You'll see the focus of his petition at the end of verse 20, "For his holy hill" [KJV "For the holy mountain of God"]. The truth is, Daniel was pleading with God for Jerusalem, God's holy mountain.

Jerusalem was in shambles. The city was an embarrassment to God's reputation. It wasn't personal pleasure or whim that framed Daniel's prayer, as sadly it is too often for us. For Daniel, it was God's Word and God's reputation that moved him to pray a specific prayer. Guess what happened next?

B. He received a specific answer (21-23). In verse 21, Daniel reveals that his prayer was interrupted, "While I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice." Notice that—"while I was still in prayer"—Daniel wasn't even finished with his prayer when a guest touched him.

The visitor was the angel Gabriel. Daniel refers to him as "the man," not to deny that he was an angel but so as to identify his guest as the person he met in his earlier vision recorded in chapter 8 (8:15-16). It's interesting that though the angel flew swiftly, he did not arrive until the end of Daniel's prayer.

Don't miss the time-indicator in verse 21. What time of day was Daniel praying? He says Gabriel arrived at the time of the evening sacrifice. But wait a minute. Wasn't the temple in shambles? Yes. Hadn't the sacrificial system lie dormant for decades? Yes. Yet still Daniel thinks of it.

When he was a boy, Daniel had seen the smoke rise from the temple into the afternoon sky, a sight which reminded him that God accepts sinful people on the basis of a sacrifice offered in their behalf. The evening sacrifice usually began around 3 P.M. (Walvoord, 215), and that was the time when Daniel prayed. And when God answered.

Here's what Gabriel told him (22-23), "He instructed me and said to me, 'Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, an

answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision.” We discover three lessons about prayer from this exchange.

1. *God hears us when we pray.* I'm fascinated by what the angel told Daniel. When did God give Daniel an answer to his prayer? As soon as he *began* to pray! Wow! God, Who is sovereign, hears and knows our prayers *before* we even finish. He hears us!

2. *God responds to us when we seek His honor.* Why did the angel say that God answered Daniel's request? Verse 23 [KJV] "For thou art greatly beloved." The NIV puts it this way, "For you are highly esteemed."

The fact is that God doesn't respond to everyone's prayer the way he did to Daniel's. On another occasion, God turned a deaf ear to Jewish prayers, and Isaiah reveals why in Isaiah 59:1-2, "Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. ² But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear."

But God responded to Daniel's prayer because Daniel sought God's honor.

3. *God desires persistence in prayer.* I've been pondering a question. If God sent Gabriel to give Daniel an answer as soon as he began to pray, and apparently Gabriel didn't arrive until the end of his prayer, why the delay? I'm not sure, but the angel's later comment in 10:12-13 indicates that delays may be due to a spiritual battle.

We must be persistent in prayer. Prior to Jesus' parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18, Luke recorded this preface in verse 1, "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up." God desires persistence. He rewards those who diligently seek Him (Heb 11:6). Too often, however, we lack persistence.

Andrew Murray once wrote, "Our great danger, in this school of the answers delayed, is the temptation to think that, after all, it may not be God's will to give us what we ask. If our prayer be according to God's Word, and under the leading of the Spirit, let us not give way to these fears. Let us learn to give God time."

Are you praying for an unsaved spouse or child or parent? Are you asking God to bless a ministry you're seeking to do for His glory. Don't stop. The answer may already be on the way. Be persistent in praying for God to bring honor to Himself.

That's the first subject about which we learn from Daniel. *Prayer.* Here's the second...

II. By looking back to Daniel, we learn about the future (that is, prophecy; 24-27).

Have you ever leaned over a drinking fountain with great anticipation for a cool drink, pressed the button, and got drenched by the unexpected spray? You got more than you bargained for! Daniel must have felt that way after what happened to him in Daniel 9.

When Daniel prayed that day, he was perplexed by a specific issue: How long would it be until God restored the exiled Jews to their homeland? When God sent His answer through Gabriel, He gave Daniel that and a whole lot more! In fact, God revealed two things to Daniel.

A. God revealed His plan (24). In verse 24, God shared with Daniel His prophetic schedule for the nation of Israel, "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your

holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy."

Walvoord and others suggest that the final four verses in Daniel 9 contain one of the most important prophecies in the Old Testament. The problem for us is that there are at least *five* different interpretations of what the prophecy means! Which is right? My primary objective is to help you to see what the text says, not to use the text to support a pre-conceived system. Theological systems have their place, but they must always be subordinate to the text of Scripture. Verse 24 indicates two things about God's plan.

1. *He operates with a time-frame in mind.* The text says [KJV], "Seventy weeks are determined." The verb is passive. Who determined ['decreed' NIV] the seventy weeks? The implied subject is *God*. God did. God told Daniel that His plan for Israel would involve seventy 'weeks' [seventy 'sevens'] of future events.

Actually, the term "weeks" is simply a unit of measure which refers to seven things. We use the word "dozen" in the same way to designate a collection of twelve things. The term doesn't stand alone. If you went to the store and told the cashier, "Give me a dozen," he would reply, "A dozen of what?" So it is in verse 24 (Strauss, 268).

When Gabriel told Daniel, "Seventy sevens are decreed," the natural question is, "Seventy sevens of what?" Clearly the prophecy is dealing with time, but how much time? Seventy seconds, days, months, or years? The context of verse 2, which states that Daniel had just finished reading Jeremiah's prophecy dealing with seventy *years*, indicates that the seventy sevens have to do with years.

God's time-frame for Israel would involve "seventy sevens" of years, or 490 years (divided as we'll see in a moment into 3 sections). Lehman Strauss puts it this way (270), "Daniel had been reading in Jeremiah of the seventy years' captivity in Babylon. Then it is as though God said, 'Yes, Daniel, you have discovered rightly that the seventy years captivity recorded by Jeremiah are coming to their end. But now I want to show you another *seventy*, a time period within which I shall accomplish all My plans for My people and My holy city."

So in His plan, God operates with a time-frame in mind—490 years of future activity for Israel. By the way, note there is no mention that these are 490 consecutive years.

You say, "Why the time-frame? What does God have in mind for these 490 years?"

2. *He operates with a goal in mind.* To be specific, He mentions six goals in the text. These six goals can be grouped into two categories. God wanted Daniel (and us) to know that He had a bigger goal for the Jews than merely to get them back to the Promised Land. He spells out here two divine aims in His prophetic plan.

- His aim is to remove sin. Notice the first three things that Gabriel predicted God would accomplish in the 490 years: "To finish transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for wickedness." A holy God must eliminate sin from His universe. It's an offense to Him. And He will do so. But getting rid of sin is only half the battle.

- His aim also is to restore righteousness. The final three purpose clauses state: "To bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy." Note the clauses one by one...

To bring in everlasting righteousness—God is committed to establishing righteousness in His world, to bring it in (for it is not presently being displayed).

To seal up vision and prophecy—Until fulfilled, prophecies are ‘unsealed.’² Many prophecies that God has given through the prophets are yet ‘unsealed’ and awaiting fulfillment. But in time God will fulfill *every* prediction He ever made. He will ‘seal up’ vision and prophecy.

And to anoint the most holy—The ‘most holy’ could refer to a place or a person. It could refer to the anointing of ‘the most holy place’ in the rebuilt millennial temple that Ezekiel predicted in his prophecy (Ezek. 40-48). It may also refer to the anointing of ‘the Most Holy person,’ that of course referring to the anointing of the Messiah, the One who will restore righteousness when He establishes His kingdom on earth.

My friends, these are God's goals for the world—simply put, to deal with sin, and to produce righteousness. Ever since Adam fell in the garden, God's goal has been to get rid of sin, and restore righteousness.

May I ask you a question? Do your goals line up with His? Is it your goal to remove sin and see it replaced with righteousness in *your* life? Is that your goal for *your* family? Is it really? Jesus said if your hand is causing you to sin, cut it off—that is, take whatever drastic action it takes to get rid of sin. We can't forsake sin and still fondle it.

Are you holding on to some sin right now? I talked with a man some time ago who was involved with a woman who was not his wife. As I tried to share Christ with him, he felt very uncomfortable because he knew the gospel required him to leave his life of sin. And he didn't want to. Is there some habit of sin you need to abandon in order to please God?

You say, "I want to change, but how can I?" The answer is, you can't. But God can. In fact, Daniel 9, reveals that getting rid of sin and restoring righteousness is what God said *He* would do. When? It's quite obvious that Gabriel is looking beyond the return of the Jews in the 6th century to the time when God would once and for all deal with sin.

When was that? We find the answer in verses 25-27.

B. God revealed the particulars of His plan (25-27). Three particulars.

1. *There will be 69 'sevens' from the decree to the Messiah (25).* Verse 25 states, “Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.” This is an incredible prophecy, even though some of the details might confuse us.

The basic thrust of the prophecy, as Daniel heard it, was quite remarkable. Here's how the *Living Bible* paraphrased verse 25, "Now listen! It will be 49 years plus 434 years from the time the command is given to rebuild Jerusalem, until the Anointed One comes!"

Wow! Gabriel told Daniel exactly when the Messiah was coming! The Messiah will come in 483 years. That part is clear, but 483 years from when? The debated question is, "When would the stop-watch start ticking?"

Gabriel said, "The clock starts 49 years [‘seven sevens’] plus 434 years [‘sixty-two sevens’], that's a total of 483 years, from the going forth of the commandment to restore and rebuild Jerusalem."

² *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 1363.

Which raises the question, when did that command occur? There were at least three decrees given which had to do with the restoration of Jerusalem and the temple. The first was by king Cyrus in 538 B.C., but it had to do primarily with rebuilding the temple, not the city itself. A second was made by Darius in 517 B.C., but again had to do primarily with the Temple renovation. A third decree was issued by Artaxerxes in 445 B.C. It was at that time, under the leadership of Nehemiah, that the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt.

Let's assume for a moment that the clock started ticking in 445 B.C. Gabriel said there would be "seven sevens" (49 years) and "sixty-two sevens" (434 years). Why the two-fold breakdown? Walvoord suggests because after the decree in 445, it took a whole generation (49 years) to clear out the debris and restore a thriving city in Jerusalem. The clock would stop ticking 434 years later when the Messiah arrived.

Here's where the scholars debate the fine print. Did Gabriel have in mind solar years or lunar years? Did he account for leap years or not? We could easily miss the obvious in looking at the fine print. For the sake of illustration, if you calculate using 360 days to the year (based on a Jewish calendar), and add extra days for leap years, the 483 year clock stops around the year A.D. 30. What happened that year? That's the year that Jesus Christ was crucified and raised from the dead!

That's amazing! Listen to Gabriel's prediction again, "From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.'" What God's Word predicted happened right on schedule!

But that's not all. Gabriel revealed a second particular.

2. *After 62 'sevens', tragedy will occur (26).* It's described in verse 26, "After the sixty-two sevens, the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed."

God told Daniel that after the second period of 434 years, two tragedies would occur.

- The Messiah will be cut off. Indeed He was. Followed by another tragedy.
- The temple will be destroyed. Notice the text merely says that "after" the sixty-two sevens (434 years) this would happen. It didn't predict how soon after the 434 years the city and temple would be destroyed, but just said "after." History tells us it didn't take long. Forty years after the Messiah was cut off, in the year A.D. 70, the Romans under Titus completely obliterated Jerusalem. The temple was eliminated, and the Jewish nation ceased to exist for the next 19 centuries, until 1948.

3. *In the seventieth 'seven,' a Rival will come.* God told Daniel that He was going to use 490 years to accomplish His purpose with Israel. He didn't say the years would necessarily be consecutive years. In fact, it appears that the prophecy of "seventy sevens" is like a telescope that contains a "gap."

The first 69 sevens have already happened. We are living in a parenthesis between the sixty-ninth seven and the seventieth seven. Remember, God told Daniel that the 70 sevens pertained to His future dealings with Israel (verse 24 "for *your* people"). But Israel has been on the shelf for the past 1900+ years during this 'time of the Gentiles' (as Jesus referred to it in Luke 21:24). This period of time that began when Jesus returned to heaven is the age of the Church. Paul referred to this time period in God's plan as a

"mystery" (Col 1:26-27), something not clearly spelled out in the Old Testament. God is now working primarily with Gentiles as He forms a people for His glory.

But that doesn't mean He is finished with the Jews (remember His goals stated in verse 24). God will bring a final seven year period in which He will allow a Rival to come (we know him from other scriptures as the Anti-Christ). This Rival will rear his defiant head during a period the Bible calls the Tribulation.

Verse 27 identifies 3 activities of the Rival.

- He will confirm a covenant with many. Particularly with the Jews. Verse 27 begins, "He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.'" Gabriel says the coming Rival will enter a promise-pact, a covenant, with Daniel's people. It will apparently be a promise of peace for the Jews, a guarantee of safety and protection. This implies that the Jews will once again be in their land, but vulnerable to the attacks of surrounding enemies. When the Rival offers his peace plan, Israel gladly accepts. The Rival will confirm the covenant. However, in a matter of time...

- He will violate the covenant. As verse 27 predicts, "In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him." This coming powerful dictator will break his promise to the Israeli nation. Right in the middle of the seven year period he will turn on the Jews.

Jesus affirmed this prediction (as we'll see in a few weeks when we return to Mark 13) when He offered this warning, "When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains (Mark 13:14)."³

Fear not, however, for God will have the final word with this coming Rival.

- He will be dealt with according to God's decree. Daniel's prophecy makes it very clear that this Rival's days are numbered. He will set up the abomination that causes desolation... "until the end that is decreed is poured out on him (27)."

We began this message with a question. In light of the pain and conflict in the world, why doesn't God do something? I hope you now realize He *is doing something!* He is doing exactly what He predicted in Daniel's day 550 years before Christ.

He sent Messiah Jesus right on schedule. He allowed the temple to be destroyed, again, right on schedule. The first 69 sevens that God predicted have happened just like God said they would. You can count on it that the seventieth seven will happen, too. Maybe soon. Are you ready for the future? "How do we get ready?" you ask. By doing this...

Implication: We must line up our lives with God's plan.

Responding to God's Word:

God has a plan, and His Son, Jesus Christ, is the agent of that plan. The five verses of the song we're about to sing review the accomplishments of our Savior, from the cross to His second coming. There is but one word that is an appropriate response to what He has done—*Hallelujah!* Before we sing, let's pray...

³ In Matthew's parallel account we learn that Jesus offered another detail: "When you shall see the abomination of desolation, *spoken of by Daniel the prophet...* (Matthew 24:15)."

Prayer of Response

We are going to sing TWO hymns of response this evening. Here is the first...

Hymn of Response: #175 "Hallelujah, What a Savior!"

We have been thinking about the plan of God this evening. In His plan, God's goal is to get rid of sin and produce a righteous people. The reason God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, was to accomplish this goal. All who will repent of their sins and trust in Him will be declared righteous by God. Let's bow our heads and consider some questions:

1. *God's goal is to remove sin.* Do you desire to see that happen in your life? Is there some pet sin in your life that God wants to remove? Perhaps an ungodly habit, or an unforgiving spirit towards someone. Maybe a vicious tongue or involvement in pornography. Confess it to God right now. Repent of it, and choose to forsake it.

2. *God's goal is to restore righteousness.* He wants to change you to be like His righteous Son. Is that what you want? If it is, tell Him. Are there some steps you need to take today to become Christ-like? Have you ever received Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? Have you ever testified to that publicly by being baptized? Are you filling your life with the tools the Holy Spirit wants to use to make you righteous in character as you are in position? Tools like daily Bible study, prayer, faithful church attendance, choosing godly friends. Today is the day to choose to line up your life with God's plan.

As God's people, we live with two perspectives. We look back, and we look ahead. We look back to Christ's first coming, and we look ahead to His second coming. Are you ready to see Him?

As we prepare to leave from this time of worship, we want to leave with God's plan fixed in our minds. The Messiah, Jesus, is coming again. When He comes, He will rid the world of death and sin. When He comes, heaven and earth at last will sing. Our final song is a prayer-song in which we invite Him to come.

Worship through Singing: #243 "O Come, Messiah, Come Again"