

An End to Sin

Daniel 9:20-27

Daniel: When Kingdoms Collide

Pastor Josh Black

October 18, 2020

Last week, Dirk did a great job of leading us through Daniel's prayer in the first part of chapter 9. Daniel had been reading Jeremiah and knew that the seventy years of exile were coming to an end. But he knew Israel's restoration to the land also required a restoration to the Lord. So, Daniel prayed to God. He confessed the sins of Israel that led to their exile. And he looked to God's mercy to restore Israel.

This week we see an answer to this prayer. But it's an unexpected answer. Although the seventy years had passed, there would be seventy weeks or seventy sevens of years until God's people were truly restored. Their exodus from Babylon was ending. But there was a far greater exodus from a far worse exile yet to come.¹ And that would take much longer!

Daniel 9:20-27²

²⁰While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the LORD my God for the holy hill of my God, ²¹while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. ²²He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. ²³At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved. Therefore consider the word and understand the vision.

²⁴"Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. ²⁵Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. ²⁶And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. ²⁷And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator."

This is the Word of the Lord.

This passage about the seventy weeks is one of the most difficult and contentious passages of prophecy in the Old Testament. There are many disagreements about its meaning. And so many questions without easy answers. Should we take the seventy weeks of years as literal or symbolic? How and when are the six promises of verse 24 fulfilled? Who's the anointed prince in verse 25? Does he come after the first seven weeks or after sixty-nine weeks? Who's the anointed one in verse 26? Is it the same person in verse 25? Who's the prince in verse 26? Are verses 26 and 27 sequential

¹ Robert Fyall and Robin Sydserff, *Teaching Daniel: From Text to Message*

² Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

or are they parallel to one another? Who makes the strong covenant with many in the seventieth week?

I feel like most commentaries and sermons are pretty confident in their answers of these questions. Some churches are so confident in their understanding of this passage and its importance that they include it in their Statement of Faith.

I frankly don't share that level of confidence. And I'm afraid my treatment of these verses will disappoint some of you this morning. Either because I won't defend your particular view or because I won't answer all the questions you have.

I hesitate to even enter the fray and would rather skip over this passage! But it's my responsibility to preach the whole counsel of God and not to simply pick and choose what passages I'll preach and which ones I'll skip. I also believe there's a very important message in this passage for us, if we can look beyond all the controversy.

What I'm going to do this morning is something different than what I normally do and not something I'm a big fan of, but it's the path I've chosen and I hope it will help.

While there are literally dozens of interpretations of this passage, I'm going to lay out three main views. What I call the historicist view, the messianic view, and the futurist view. Then at the end I'm going to try to put forward what I believe the main point of the passage is. A point we can take away regardless of our views of the details.

THE HISTORICIST VIEW

Let's begin with the historicist view.

I think the crux of distinguishing the three views has to do with verse 24. How and when will the promises of verse 24 be fulfilled? Verse 24 tells us that after the seventy weeks are finished six things will be true. The seventy weeks are "to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place."

The historicist view says all that's spoken of in chapter 9 was fulfilled in the second century BC when Antiochus' persecution of the Jews, and his desecration of the temple, was put to an end with the victory of Judas Maccabees and his re-consecration of the temple.³ We talked about the events of the second century in my sermon on Daniel 8. If you missed that sermon, you may want to go back and look at it.

In verse 25 we read about a word that went out to restore Jerusalem and an anointed one, a prince. The historicist believes the word to restore and build Jerusalem was the word of Cyrus in 538 BC. And that the anointed one in verse 25 was Joshua, the high priest during the rebuilding of the temple (cf. Hag. 1:1).

In verse 26, we see another reference to an anointed one who is cut off. They believe this is a different person from the anointed one in verse 25. They believe it's Onias III—the high priest murdered by Antiochus at the beginning of his persecution of the Jews (cf. 2 Macc. 4:23-28). And

³ For what follows see John J. Collins, *Daniel*, Hermeneia.

they believe Antiochus is also the prince who comes with his people and destroys Jerusalem and desecrates the temple (1 Macc. 1:54).

Antiochus is the same person who, in verse 27, makes a covenant or alliance with some of the Hellenistic Jews (1 Macc. 1:11). And cut off sacrifice and offering. But then Judas Maccabees came and put an end to Antiochus' persecution and re-established the temple.

According to this view, the end of sin in verse 24 is not referring to the Jews' sin, but to the sin of Antiochus. We know that Antiochus did all of these things the historicists say he did, but was the restoration of the temple in the second century the fulfillment of all that was promised in verse 24? It seems like a stretch to me.

THE MESSIANIC VIEW

Let's look now at the messianic view.

The historicist sees all that's prophesied in Daniel 9 fulfilled in the second century BC. The messianic view believes all these things were accomplished at the first coming of Christ.⁴

Most who hold to this view see the word that goes out in verse 25 referring to Cyrus' decree to rebuild the temple in 538 BC and the anointed one in verse 25 as a reference to Jesus, the Messiah. So, from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem to the time it was actually rebuilt is seven weeks. Then there would be sixty-two more weeks until the coming of Christ.

Then following the sixty-nine weeks comes the final, seventieth week. This is seen in verses 26-27. During this final week, the anointed one is cut off. This is a reference to the crucifixion of Christ. This is where transgression is finished, where we find an end to sin, and atonement for iniquity. Christ gives us his everlasting righteousness. In Christ all of the prophecies and visions find their fulfillment. And he is seen as the anointed Savior and the new temple.

After the anointed one is cut off, the people of the prince destroy the city and the sanctuary. They believe this is a reference to Titus and the Romans who came in AD 70 and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.⁵

The Messianic view believes that verses 26 and 27 are not sequential; rather, they are parallel with one another. They repeat the same sequence of events. Verse 26 speaks of an anointed one who is cut off. In verse 27, we read of someone who will make a strong covenant with many for one week and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. They believe that through Christ's death he established a new covenant in his blood. And through his sacrifice, he put an end to sacrifices once and for all. Verse 26 speaks of a prince who destroys until the end. Verse 27 speaks of abominations and desolation that continue until they're put to an end. Both of these refer to what happened with Titus in AD 70.

The Messianic view believes Christ accomplished everything verse 24 speaks of at his first coming. But they acknowledge an already, not yet tension. What Christ accomplished at his first coming

⁴ Rodney Stortz and R. Kent Hughes, *Daniel: The Triumph of God's Kingdom*, Preaching the Word

⁵ Sam Storms, *Daniel*, Sam Storms' Biblical Studies

won't be fully consummated until his second coming. And so, for most who hold to this view, they believe the seventieth week spans the time between Christ's first and second coming.

THE FUTURIST VIEW

Let's look finally at the futurist view.⁶

If the historicist sees all in verse 24 is fulfilled in the second century BC, and the messianic view sees it inaugurated in Christ's first coming, then the futurist view believes that most, if not all, of what's promised in verse 24 awaits Christ's return. This view sees a number of things the way the messianic view sees them. They believe the anointed one in verse 25 is Christ. And the cutting off of the anointed one in verse 26 refers to his crucifixion. They also acknowledge that this passage does refer in part to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

The main difference is the way they see verse 27. They don't see verses 26 and 27 as parallel, but sequential and distinct from one another. They believe the crucifixion of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem occur after the sixty-nine weeks, but before the seventieth week. The seventieth week hasn't yet happened; it's still in the future. So, there's a gap between the first sixty-nine weeks and the seventieth week. A gap, to date, of over two thousand years.

The seventieth week refers to the final tribulation. The strong covenant made with many does not refer to the new covenant Christ made. It refers to the covenant the Antichrist will make with Israel. And the second half of that week is when he will bring the abomination that causes desolation. He'll stop the worship of God. The Antichrist will turn on the Jews and those who support them. He will bring a persecution far worse than anything Antiochus or Titus brought. Worse than any persecution the people of God have ever known.

But then Christ will return and defeat the Antichrist, Satan, and all the enemies of God in the battle of Armageddon.

The futurist looks at the promises of verse 24 and says there are things promised here that simply can't happen until the end. Only when Christ returns can sin be finally and fully dealt with. Only when Christ returns can there be an everlasting righteousness. Only when Christ returns can vision and prophet be finally sealed.

So, which view is the right view? I'm not certain. But I do feel confident that the meaning of this passage is reasonably clear and common to all three views, at least the last two. And so, now, I'd like to consider the meaning of this passage.

THE MEANING

I think the message for Daniel, and really the message for us as well, is that there's more to be accomplished in God's plan than what happened in Daniel's day. There's more difficulty coming. And like I said at the beginning, the restoration God's people need is greater than the restoration the Jews experienced when they returned from exile and rebuilt the temple and Jerusalem.

⁶ Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, The New American Commentary and James M. Hamilton, Jr., *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology*, New Studies in Biblical Theology

The main issue is sin. The sin that led to exile still needs dealt with. And God promises in this passage that sin will be dealt with at the end of the seventy weeks. God will deal with the sins of those who oppose him and his people. He will bring judgment on them. But that's not all that is in view here. God also makes it possible for people to be saved from sin and judgment. This passage also looks forward to a Messiah who deals with sin through sacrifice.

If you want to be delivered from sin and judgment, you need to look to God's Messiah in faith and repent of your sin.

Christ has dealt with sin. At his first coming, he paid for our sins on the cross. But at his second coming he will deal with sin through judgment. The enemies of God will be fully and finally defeated. Christ and his saints will be vindicated. And sin will be eradicated. The new heavens and the new earth will come, where there is no more sin. This passage speaks of the inauguration and consummation of God's plans for his people. And these truths are meant to encourage us!

To drive this point home, I want to enter into one more controversial question in this passage. I've evaded the question throughout this sermon. How are we to take the seventy weeks in this passage? Are the seventy weeks of years literal, referring to 490 years? Or are they symbolic?

If you take them as literal, there are many difficulties of lining up the various historical events, but I think there are plausible answers. Under a literal scheme, the first seven weeks are forty-nine years, between the word that went out and the actual rebuilding of Jerusalem. Most literalists would say these forty-nine years span the decree of Artaxerxes to the time of the rebuilding. And the remaining sixty-two weeks would then lead to the death of Christ.

I don't have certainty that the seventy weeks are literally 490 years, but I think it's possible. However, I think it's likely that there's a symbolic meaning to the 490 years. But the symbolic meaning doesn't necessarily conflict with the literal meaning.

Why do I say there's a symbolic meaning to the 490 years? In the old covenant, the land was supposed to receive a sabbatical every seven years. It was to receive rest from planting and harvesting (Lev. 25:1-7). But then at the end of seven sabbatical cycles there would be a Year of Jubilee. This was supposed to happen every forty-nine years. During the Year of Jubilee all property was supposed to return to its original owner, slaves were to be released, debts canceled, and the land was supposed to have rest.

The sabbath years and Jubilee year were literal laws, but also symbolic. They looked back to Egypt. They reminded Israel of her own liberation from slavery in Egypt and their entry into the Land of Promise. But the Year of Jubilee also looked forward to a new exodus from a final exile. It looked forward to the messianic age, which was announced in Isaiah 61, when the Messiah would come and proclaim liberty to the captives.

I don't think it's an accident that Gabriel announces an end to sin and the establishment of an everlasting righteousness after seventy weeks, after 490 years. Four hundred and ninety years is a tenfold Jubilee. There is a decreed time of difficulty that has to pass, but then there will be a new exodus.⁷

⁷ Hamilton and Storms

This all points to Christ. Remember what Jesus said in Luke 4? Jesus went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and read Isaiah 61. He read, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (vv. 18-19). That’s a reference to the final Jubilee. Then after he rolled up the scroll he sat down and said to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (v. 21).

Through Christ the Year of Jubilee has come tenfold. Through Christ there is redemption, restitution, and rest. But what Christ brings is more than the return of property, more than the release of slaves, and the cancellation of debts. Christ brings the ultimate redemption, release, and restoration that God’s people needed. Something far greater than the Jubilee of the old covenant. Something greater than the exodus in Egypt. Greater than the return from exile. He brings an end to sin. And he establishes an everlasting kingdom. This is inaugurated at his first coming. But it will be consummated at his second coming.

In my humble estimation, this is the main message we need to take away from this passage.