



Strength for the Battle Pilgrim Living in the 21st Century

Daniel 9:24-10:21

David Sunday

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I want you to imagine you're hiking out west in the Rocky Mountains. As you approach a mountain that appears to be the tallest summit in the area, so you decide you're going to climb that particular mountain. As you climb higher and higher and higher, you're unable to imagine any mountain taller than this one. Yet when you reach the peak and look around, you discover on the horizon a vast range of mountains that tower over the one you're standing on now. What you thought was the tallest summit of all is really a preliminary summit, and greater heights lie ahead.

That's the way biblical prophecy often works. There is a range of fulfillments, from the near to the far off. As we read our Bibles and come to these prophetic sections, it's helpful to keep a certain phrase in mind: already but not yet. That can be a key to understanding a lot of the way the Bible talks about future things.

For instance, when we read the prophetic sections of Old Testament, we often find a fulfillment that was near at hand but which was actually a preliminary fulfillment, because there was to be more to come in the life of Christ in the New Testament. And then in the New Testament, we see fulfillment of prophecy, but yet more fulfillment awaits us in the future, the already and the not yet. That certainly is the case here in Daniel 9.

It's important to remember where we were last week. The first part of chapter nine is a prayer of repentance from Daniel for the sins of the people of Israel—God's people. What prompted this prayer of repentance was Daniel's Bible reading. We saw that he had been reading the prophet Jeremiah and perceived that the time of the exile was about to end.

Remember, Daniel is with the Jewish people in exile in Babylon, far removed from their homeland. Jeremiah had prophesied that the exile would only last 70 years. Now in his 80s, Daniel had been in exile since he was a teenager. He realized that God's promise would soon be fulfilled. Daniel also read passages in Jeremiah about a new covenant, which speaks of the work God would do in transforming the hearts of the people by acts of great mercy.

In response to what he reads, Daniel repents of his and the people's sins, and is now waiting for God to act with mercy on behalf of His people. He ends the prayer in verse 19, "*O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name.*" Daniel is longing for real restoration and revival among God's people in fulfillment of the merciful promises He made through the prophet Jeremiah.

Daniel is also longing for a swift reply—and he gets it. We read in verse 20 that while he was speaking and praying, the angel Gabriel flies to him swiftly with an answer at the time of the evening sacrifice. Look at verse 22. "[Gabriel] *made me understand, speaking with me and saying, 'O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding.'*" In other words, "I'm going to reveal something to you that you should take to heart and understand. I'm not here in response to your prayer to make you more confused. I'm here to bring some clarity and understanding."

Verse 23: "*At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out.*" As soon as you were praying, God was listening and acting, "*and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved.*" Those precious words that every believer longs to hear from God: "You are greatly loved." And believer, that is true of you today. God greatly loves you, and His speaking to you in His Word today is part of His love for you. He is showing you Himself through His Word.

The angel ends in verse 23, "*Consider the word and understand the vision.*" This vision is not here to confuse or perplex us or to keep us in the dark, but that doesn't mean it's going to be easy for us to understand either. It means it's worth considering. It means we shouldn't throw up our hands when we come to what we're about to read and say, "That is way over my head. I'm checking out. I'm not even going to listen to this sermon."

You have to listen to this sermon today, because you had an extra hour of sleep last night, so there are no excuses here for dozing off! We need to pay attention even through the difficult parts of the Bible, believing that God has them here to give us hope. I realize I've had many, many hours to think about this this week, and I'm telling you—I still don't fully understand the end of Daniel 9. One godly interpreter I read called it a "dismal swamp for biblical interpretation." That's not very encouraging.

But what I want to do is read this vision, and then after we look at some observations about this vision we're going to turn to chapter ten and see how things like this should be affecting our hearts. So let's read verses 24-27, and please approach God's Word with an expectation of gaining insight and understanding to live more confidently for Him in this world.

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. ²⁵ Know 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. ²⁶ And 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. ²⁷ And 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 God's Word. Thanks be to God. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we bow in Your presence. We ask that Your Spirit would be our Teacher, Your Word our only rule, and Your greater glory our supreme concern. For the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.

Now, since the word "seven" shows up several times in these verses, let me give you seven simple points that I hope will help you get a better understanding of this vision. We'll go through them one by one, rather like a Sunday School lecture, and then we'll come to chapter ten and see how these should affect our hearts. I of course present these to you not as the final word, but as my best understanding of this passage at this present time. If you have a different interpretation, that's okay. The only thing that's not okay is for us to throw up our hands and say, "I give up," or "I don't really care."

1. Instead of thinking of a week, think in terms of seventy periods of seven.

If you have an English Standard Version Study Bible, notice the footnote that says, "or sevens." I think that's the preferable translation. The NIV translates it "*seventy sevens are decreed.*" The New Living Translation has "*a period of seventy sets of seven has been decreed for your people in your holy city.*"

So Daniel has been focusing on 70 years of exile in Babylon, and God is lifting Daniel's face upward, showing him that He has plans for His people that stretch far beyond what Daniel can see. It's like God is saying, "Daniel, forget about this 70 years. Don't just focus on that.

Think in terms of 70 times seven. I've got way bigger purposes in store." That's observation number one.

2. Focus on the theological significance of the numbers

Observation number two is that it's better to focus on the theological significance of these numbers rather than on a chronological timeline. Seventy is a number in the Bible that's very symbolic. As you read apocalyptic literature in the Bible, you know that numbers are often used in a symbolic sense. In fact, that's primarily how they're used in this kind of literature. Seventy is a number that symbolizes comprehensiveness or completion.

Think back to the creation story. When you think of the story of creation, what does the number seven remind you of there? Sabbath, right? What did God do on the seventh day? He rested from His labors—why? Because His work was complete.

Then think in the Old Testament how that concept of Sabbath gets worked out. Every seven years, what were they to do? They were to give the land a Sabbath rest. They were to let the land lie fallow. Then there was another cycle after seven cycles of seven years. What's seven times seven? Forty-nine. After the 49th year, what was to happen in the 50th year? Jubilee, when all debts would be forgiven, when all slaves would be set free. It was a great celebration of the freedom God brings to all His people.

So 70 times seven gives you 490. I'm saying this symbolizes the completeness of God's plan, the comprehensiveness of God's plan. At the end of this period of 70 sets of seven, we are right at the cusp of the eternal jubilee of God's people, when the creation itself will enjoy the liberation of the children of God that we read of in Romans 8, when all the results of sin will be done away with and complete freedom will be enjoyed by God's people forever and ever in God's place.

Seventy times seven—where else have you heard that in the Bible? Peter, "Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother? Seven times?" You know Peter. He's probably thinking, "I'm at about six and a half right now." But Jesus says, "Peter, not seven times, but 70 times seven." Seventy times seven. And Peter's thinking, "Oh, great—490 times. I can't wait 'til the 491st offense, because I'm really going to come down." Jesus of course is not saying that. He is saying, "Your willingness to forgive should be as comprehensive as God's forgiveness of you has been." Without limit, a complete willingness to forgive: 70 times seven.

So instead of trying to pin down precise dates or a timeline—I think we really go down rabbit trails and get lost in the weeds if we do that with this passage. I believe it's speaking of the

comprehensive plan of God for the fulfillment and complete consummation of His new covenant in the new creation. Think of this theological significance—that's point number two.

3. Verse 24 is a magnificent summary of God's plan for His people.

We find here a magnificent summary of what God has planned for His people in the new covenant. When we come to the Lord's Table this is what we are celebrating: Our transgression will be finished. Sin will be put to an end. Iniquity will be atoned for. We will be saved to sin no more.

There's virtually nothing that gets me more excited than to think that one day I'm not going to have any more temptation to sin. Sin will be put to an end—atonement complete. The beautiful thing is that Jesus has already done this on the cross. What did Jesus mean when He said, "It is finished"? He meant transgression is finished. Sin is put to an end. Iniquity is atoned for and paid in full. One day we are going to fully experience that it is finished, when we're finally glorified in Jesus' presence.

Another thing God speaks of in verse 24 is that He's going to bring in everlasting righteousness. Ah, we're going to be clothed in the robes of righteousness. We're going to shine like the sun in the Kingdom of our Father. We're going to be found in His presence faultless and with great joy. And we're going to be just as righteous in His sight as Jesus is.

Do you know that if you are a believer right now, this is true for you through the priceless gift of justification? God has saved you so much, it's just as if you'd never sinned and just as if you've always obeyed. You are clothed in everlasting righteousness. And one day what is true of us legally and positionally in God's eyes is going to be obvious for all the world to see. An everlasting righteousness is going to be established.

What about the phrase in verse 24, "*...to seal both vision and prophet*"? Well, Jesus is God's final word. The book of Hebrews, "*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...*" (1:1-2). He is God's final word. What does God say through Paul in 2 Corinthians? No matter how many promises God has made, they are all "yes" and "amen" in Jesus. They all find their fulfillment in Him. Jesus is the seal of authenticity upon all that the prophets have spoken, and He's the One Who confirms their worth.

Then that last phrase of 9:24 states, "*...to anoint a most holy place.*" This does not have to refer to another temple in the future. In fact, it was not common, I believe, for temples to be anointed. Priests and kings were. You'll notice the ESV footnote says, "or thing, or one." So it's referring, I believe, to the anointing of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who becomes God's temple in our

midst. The Word becomes flesh and dwells among us, tabernacles among us (John 1:14). He's God's temple in our midst, and we behold His glory, full of grace and truth.

In the final consummation of all things, what does Revelation 21:3 say? *“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”* So verse 24 is a great summary of all that God is going to accomplish in Christ for His people.

4. God's great plan is carried out in phases. Phase one is the decree for God's people to return to Jerusalem.

Then in verses 25-27 we find a description of how God's great plan that was summarized in verse 24 is carried out in history in phases. Phase one contains seven of the 70s, roughly a tenth of the plan. Verse 25, *“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.”* This is pointing us to the divine word that was spoken through Jeremiah that Jerusalem would be restored and rebuilt. In history a decree was issued by Cyrus that God's people should return. So that's part of the fulfillment. It was the most immediate fulfillment Daniel would be looking forward to, as it started to happen in his lifetime.

5. Phase two involves God preserving His people in times of trouble as they wait for the Messiah.

We see at the end of verse 25: then for 62 sets of seven, *“it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time.”* This is describing the time when the people are back in Jerusalem, the temple is rebuilt and life goes on. There are trials and troubles for God's people throughout this time. Look at Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Malachi for examples. It's not an easy time, but God's saints are being preserved, and they're waiting for the Messiah. That's what characterizes this phase at the end of verse 25. It's the time of waiting for Messiah. There's trouble and longing.

Can you think of anyone in the New Testament who represents this period better than Anna and Simeon in the temple, waiting until their old age for the coming of the Messiah? And I wonder if this portion at the end of Daniel is part of what inspired them to wait and be so eager for the Messiah to come.

6. Phase three (the 69th “seven”) is when the Messiah is “cut off” and Jerusalem is destroyed (A.D. 70).

Point six takes us to verse 26. This is when storm clouds gather, says Dale Davis. It’s the 69th period of seven, and the key event in this time is what we read in verse 26: *“After the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off...”* What does Isaiah 53:8 say about the Messiah? *“He was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people.”* We have in verse 26 a very clear prophecy of the coming of the Messiah and His crucifixion in Jerusalem.

Then right after that we read, *“...[He] shall have nothing.”* All is taken from Him. His life is taken, but we know there is a resurrection. Then in the second part of verse 26 we read of *“the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.”* I believe this is referring to the destruction of Jerusalem that happened within a generation of Jesus’ death in 70 A.D. All the sacrifices in the temple have come to an end, and there’s great desolation in Jerusalem. From that period on, there have been wars, rumors of wars and difficulties, as we’re living in the last times—and have been so from the first century.

7. The final phase: the Enemy’s doom is sure.

That brings us finally to verse 27, the seventh and last observation. This is a difficult verse to interpret. Just look at it for a minute. There are many godly people who would say that what’s going on in verses 26 and 27 is what we call poetic parallelism. So what is said in verse 26 is reiterated in verse 27, and they would see the One Who makes a strong covenant with many as Jesus Who makes the new covenant. And then the end to sacrifice and offering happens when He dies on the cross. Then the abominations that follow could be 70 A.D.

²⁶ And 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. ²⁷ And 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.

Others look at this verse—and I’m more inclined to this view—and see it as looking forward to the great arch-enemy of God’s people who arises at the end, namely the antichrist spoken of in 2 Thessalonians, who will ultimately be put down and destroyed.

However you interpret this, the bottom line is that satan's doom is sure. Don't we sing about that? "Though his doom is sure. One little word shall fell him."

A summary of verses 24-27.

Here's how I would summarize these verses. Daniel is looking forward to the fulfillment of the new covenant. He's looking forward to the return from exile. God is saying, "Look further ahead, Daniel. I have more mercy in store for My people than you could even ask or imagine. My plan is so vast, so great, you should be astonished."

God's people are going to go through trouble. We will need to be enduring through difficulty. But we will be sustained by God Who will carry out His perfect plan until all His foes are destroyed. Up until the last enemy—all will be destroyed. God will be victorious. That's my best attempt to describe those difficult verses.

Let me give you an illustration that might help drive this home. This is from an editorial written by Mona Charen, who writes about February 20, 2008—just eight years ago—when the USS Lake Erie, an Aegis class cruiser, was out in the troubled seas west of Hawaii. It was parked out there, or whatever they do with a ship. Do you park a ship? It's sitting out there in the ocean, in troubled seas, and it has a specific mission.

There is a huge satellite, the size of a school bus, tumbling toward the earth's atmosphere. Once it breaks through the atmosphere, if it's not brought down, it's going to go out of control and could land in a populated area and it's full of noxious fumes and toxic fuels that could damage the health of many, many people.

So on February 20, 2008, at 10:30 p.m. Eastern time, the USS Lake Erie has a 30-second window to bring down that satellite. It has to be precise. They fire an SM-3 missile 150 miles into space, and score a direct hit on a target that's moving 17,000 miles an hour. It was precise timing. Perfect accuracy. Complete destruction. All of it had to be calculated down to the most minute detail ahead of time.

The angel Gabriel is telling us, through Daniel, that God has that kind of plan for history. All the calculations have been made. The mission is already in progress, and everything is going according to plan. The time has been set for God's arch enemy to be utterly destroyed, and not one detail is going to be overlooked by our sovereign God. He will reign forever and ever. And we will share in His victory. That's our future. That's good news.

But the truth of the matter is, a lot of times we read these things about end times and what God has in store for the future, and it fails to move us. It fails to penetrate our hearts,

because we're more concerned about what's going to happen in Tuesday's election. Or we're worried so much about something that's going on in our lives right now.

So what if this vision of the future seems far off? What if you're more troubled and afraid and distressed by the trials you're facing right now—the times of trouble that lie ahead in the near future? Daniel can help us with that. Turn to Daniel 10. By the time this chapter starts, Daniel is still in Babylon, but the decree has been issued. Phase one is in progress. Many Jews are now returning to Israel.

So picture Daniel—this really old man. By chapter 10 he's around 90. He's still in Babylon, he's said goodbye to many of his friends, and he's never going back to Jerusalem. He's too old for that. He's staying in Babylon and he's in great distress. He's going to get another vision, recorded in chapters 10-12, that underscore what we just read: that there's going to be great conflict, as we see in Daniel 10:1. There's going to be trouble ahead. There are going to be wars.

The effect this has on Daniel's mind is profound, because here he's been reading Jeremiah and looking forward to the return of the Jews to Jerusalem. He's looking forward to good times—and now he's been told it's going to get even worse. There's still more trouble. So Daniel is in mourning in verses two and three. Look at what he says: *"In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks. I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the full three weeks."*

He said, "God, what are You doing? What are Your purposes? When are You going to bring the fulfillment of Your plans for Your people? How long, O Lord?" This is the kind of thing going on in his heart. So Daniel is given another vision to strengthen him. Look at what he sees in verse four. He remembers the particular day: *"On the twenty-fourth day of the first month..."* He knows where he was standing, *"on the bank of the great river (that is, the Tigris),"* a river that's about a mile wide there. Verse five:

I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.

God is showing His greatness to Daniel here to give him strength for the battle that lies ahead. This description also reminds us of the Son of Man that we read of in Daniel 7—and interestingly, it's very similar to the way John describes Jesus in Revelation 1. I can't say for sure if this is a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ, but I can say this: it sure sounds

like Jesus when we read this description. At least it's someone who embodies the power and majesty of God Himself.

Why is God giving Daniel this vision? Simon Manchester says, ““Daniel is being equipped to see that the heavenly powers are sufficient for the earthly challenges.” Don't we need to see that today? Two days before our nation is deciding who will lead us over next four years—as we experience at times conflicts and turmoil and wars and corruption and things that knock the wind out of us—we want to know what's happening with our world.

This is what we need to know. The heavenly powers are sufficient for the earthly challenges. We need to get our eyes above the fray of what we're going through right now and see and be overwhelmed by the One Who's high and lifted up, Who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Look at Daniel's response to his majesty and glory in verses eight and nine, after all his friends left to hide themselves:

So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me. My radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. Then I heard the sound of his words, and as I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in deep sleep with my face to the ground.

He goes into a spiritual coma; he's so in awe of this sight, this heavenly messenger. I don't know what you think it would be like to encounter the majesty of God. Maybe you think of it like, “Hey, I could handle that.” Like a guy who waited in line after a conference to tell John MacArthur, “I see the Lord all the time. I have visions of Him, and Jesus talks with me often. In fact, He'll come and speak to me while I'm shaving.” And John MacArthur said, “I have just one question for you. Do you stop shaving? Or do you just go on like it's nothing big to encounter the majesty of God?”

Daniel falls to the ground, trembling—and he's a holy man. But trembling is a typical response to a revelation of God. There's nothing trivial about it. No strength is left. The color drains from his face. He's on the ground. And I love the first thing we read in verse ten, “*And behold, a hand touched me.*” Three times we read that in this chapter, “He touched me! He touched me! He touched me!” How do we find strength for the battle when we feel like we cannot stand? He touches us.

Daniel gets up on his hands and knees, still trembling. Not up on his feet yet, just on his hands and knees. Look at verse 11: “*He said to me, ‘O Daniel, man greatly loved...’*” There it is again. Oh, God wants you to know He loves you, dear ones. “*Understand the words that I speak*

to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you.” So Daniel stands up trembling, and he says to him, “Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words.”

God gives grace to the humble. The humble cry and He hears their voice. “The fervent, effectual prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16). “I have come because of your words, Daniel. While you were praying in humiliation, God was hearing—and He was acting. And I’m here because He loves you.”

Then he opens Daniel’s eyes to see what’s going on behind the scenes—what we cannot see. He helps him see that the real powers at work in the world are not the people who are sitting on the thrones or working in the offices in Washington, DC, or Moscow or Beijing. The real power, the real battle, is going on in the heavenlies. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood. We do not *“wrestle against them, but against rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm,”* Paul tells us in Ephesians 6. Do you believe that? Do you believe that what’s happening in the heavenlies is real? That there are spiritual forces of wickedness? That that’s where the real battle is—in an unseen world?

He describes the battle in verses 13 and 14. This is speaking of a spiritual force here. *“The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me (an angel) “twenty-one days, but Michael (who’s often described as the arch angel protecting God’s people), “one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia, and came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come.”*

Sometimes people look at that and say, “Well, this can’t be Jesus, because Jesus has all that power in verse seven, and He wouldn’t ever be withstood by another angel or need the help of an angel.” But remember Jesus in the wilderness being tempted by the devil, how the angels came and ministered to Him (Luke 4)? Do you remember Jesus hanging on the cross in weakness, looking as if He were defeated? What do we make of this spiritual battle? Our God has the power to destroy His enemies instantaneously. I found this quote very helpful. “The God Who is sovereign over all works His purposes out through a fight.” He works His purposes out through a fight, as the cross shows us so eloquently.

How do we find strength? We’re trembling. We’re weak. The color is drained from our faces. We can’t speak. How do we find strength for the battle? It’s in those words: He touched me. He touched me and made me stand. Look at verse 15: *“When he had spoken to me*

according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground and was mute. And behold, one in the likeness of the children of man touched my lips.” Then he could speak—just like Isaiah in the temple (Isaiah 6:7).

Look at verse 18: *“Again one having the appearance of a man touched me and strengthened me.”* And He’s here, friends, to touch you and to strengthen you at this Communion Table. As we approach this Table, God is not saying to you, “Come and eat, then go away. Your sins are forgiven. You can go now.” God is saying to you, “Friend, I want you to come to Me. I want you to get close to Me. You’re My friend. I want you to come to My table. I want to touch you. I want this bread in your mouth to nourish you. I want this cup in your mouth to strengthen you. I want to touch you afresh today. I want you to experience fellowship with Me here at this Table, so that you can find strength for the battle that wages out in this world. I want to touch you.” And when He touches us, this is what He says: *“O man, greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage”* (10:19).

Let’s pray.

God, we come to You today as those who need strength for the battle we face. Sometimes the way is long, the road seems unclear, the path gets dreary and we feel very weak. We forget that what’s going on here on earth is not the biggest thing. There’s a battle in the heavenlies and You are the Victor.

Thank You that the battle belongs to You, Lord. We thank You that You’re a mighty fortress for us. As we come to Your Communion Table, we plead for Your touch upon our lives, enabling us to stand in the evil day, enabling us to speak for You in a world that needs to hear Your voice, and strengthening us so that we will not be afraid, but full of peace, knowing that we are greatly loved by You. Amen.

New Covenant Bible Church

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ www.newcbc.org

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