



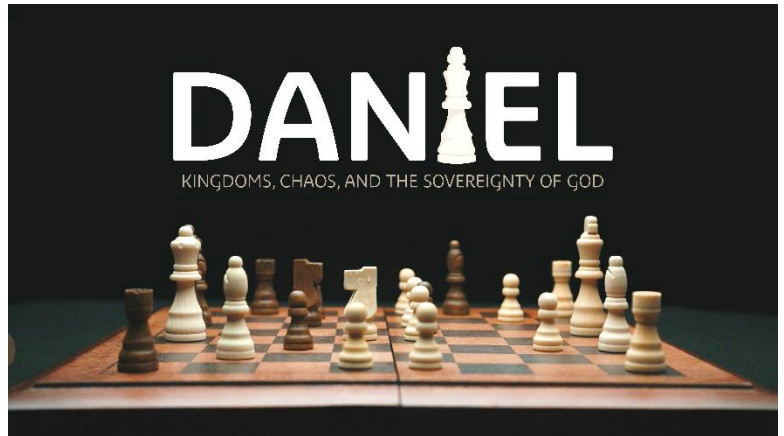
VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

God's Plan for the Ages

DANIEL: Kingdoms, Chaos and the Sovereignty of God

Daniel 9:20–27

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If you have a Bible, please open it to Daniel 9. We're going to be picking up where Pastor Tim left off last week, at the end of Daniel's prayer of confession. Last week Pastor Tim talked about the timeliness of Daniel's prayer. It would be easy for us to see this chapter as a pause in this book and maybe see this prayer as a sidebar in the middle of a book that's mainly about prophecies, strange visions and other things that are hard to understand. But as we learned, this prayer fits into the book in a very timely way. In the heart of this prayer, Daniel is taking God at His word.

Pastor Tim referred us to the writings of the prophet Jeremiah, which Daniel knew well. In particular, Jeremiah spoke of a 70-year period during which Israel would be in captivity. At the end of that time, God would be faithful to revisit His people and bring them back to the land of Israel. The promise actually included more than this. As we learned in Jeremiah 29, God said that when the 70 years were completed, His people would seek Him. They would return to Him and pray to Him, and He would hear their prayers. That was such a wonderful promise, and that's exactly what we'll see happening in the rest of Daniel 9.

Daniel's prayer of confession wasn't lost in some spiritual abyss. It didn't fall on deaf or reluctant ears in heaven. Rather, his prayer was heard by a God Who is faithful to His word. As we'll see today, God responded to Daniel in a very tangible way. Let's look now at the first few verses in our text:

²⁰ While 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, ²¹ while 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. ²² He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. ²³ At 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.

While we haven't gotten to God's response yet, just the fact that there was a response is a confirmation to us today that God is a God of His word. So whatever is revealed next regarding what was coming, the fact that He was hearing and responding to Daniel tells us that He is a God Who can be trusted. This God is one in Whom we can place our confidence and faith because He is faithful. That said, what does God say He's going to do? Let's pick up at the end of verse 23.

^{23b} 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. 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."

Before we dive in, I want to acknowledge a couple quick things about this passage. First of all, this passage has been regarded as the backbone of biblical prophecy. As Ray Pritchard has put it:

If you understand what these verses mean, you will have a good framework for understanding all the Bible has to say about the future. Contained within these few verses are said to be some of the strongest evidences of the divine inspiration of the Bible. Within these verses are some of the most compelling prophecies, demonstrating both God's sovereignty and drawing many people over the years to faith in Jesus Christ.

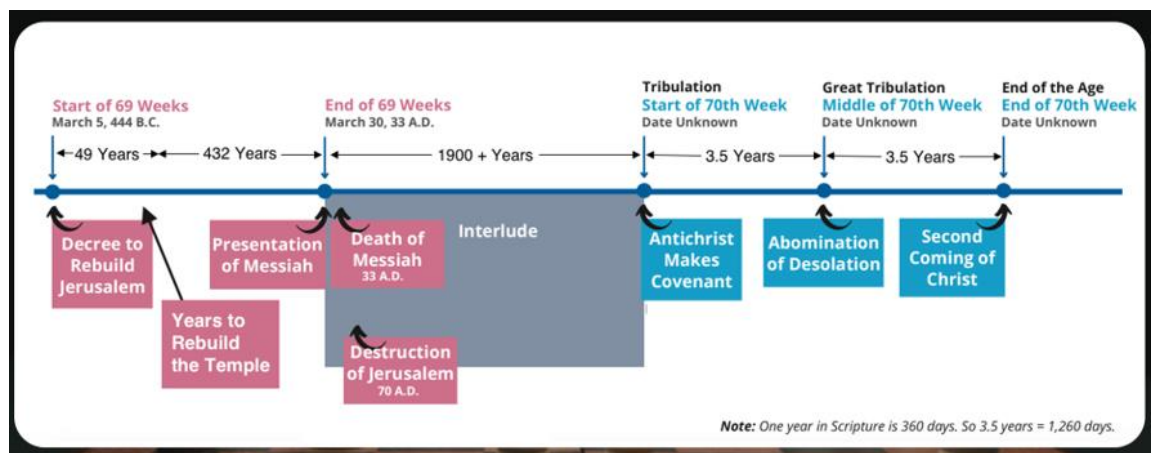
As he said, many Christians over the years have looked at these verses and come to long for Christ's return in greater ways. This passage is indeed filled with wonderful and profound truths, with great promises of the faith that God has given to His people and which we should hold dear. Amidst the wonder of these verses, we realize this short prophecy is also very difficult. The same passage that can be regarded as the backbone of biblical prophecy has also been regarded as perhaps the most widely disputed passage in the Old Testament, if not in the entire Bible. So I'm really glad I'm the one who gets to unpack it for you this morning. Give me some grace; I'll do the best I can.

The difficulties with this passage tend to arise when we start to deal with the seventy weeks—or seventy sevens—that Daniel speaks about. While there are lots of different ways to make sense of this and many details we don't have time to dig into, in general there are two different paths people take as they approach these verses. Basically the question is this: are the seventy weeks and the events described meant to be understood theologically or chronologically? For example, those who would take the approach of looking at Daniel 9 from a theological standpoint would tend to interpret them not as 490 literal years, but rather as symbolic periods of time in which God is working out His plan. Depending on how one looks at these periods of time, they may culminate in the first century A.D., or they may culminate in Christ's second coming in the future. People who hold this view may see the Jewish practice of a sabbatical year—or the Year of Jubilee—as a template or model for how to understand this passage.

If you're not familiar with this, every seven years the Jews had a sabbatical year—a year in which the ground was meant to rest. Then every seven sevens of years, or every 49 years, there would be a Year of Jubilee. In that year, debts were cancelled, slaves were set free and land was returned to its original owners. It was a year of restoration—a kind of reset for God's people—and a time of great celebration. Looking at this prophecy through the theological lens, we might say that the final week, greater than the 49 weeks, would culminate in an ultimate Jubilee, the greatest of Jubilees. That is one way to understand it.

The other way to interpret this passage is to view it chronologically. As a church, this is our position. We do this humbly and interpret these seventy sevens as literal years that can be charted on a calendar, watching them take place in actual history. How does this work?

Just to give you a brief overview, according to the chronological approach as modeled in this diagram, the seventy sevens would be inaugurated by the decree for the Israelites to return and rebuild Jerusalem. That could be Cyrus' decree in 538 B.C., or it could be the decree to Ezra that happened later. Or it could be the decree to Nehemiah who was told to go back and rebuild the city walls in 444 B.C.



From that point, the first seven sevens our passage describes refers to the period of time it took the Israelites to rebuild the temple. The next 62 weeks our passage outlines speaks to the period of time in which Israel was established but was going through a period of great difficulty. Then the culmination of those first 69 weeks lands in the first century A.D. with the anointing of a holy one, a Messiah, most likely happening at the triumphal entry of Jesus Christ. It's so cool to me that we're actually talking about Daniel 9:24-27 and this prophecy on Palm Sunday, the day we commemorate and celebrate Christ's triumphal entry!

Then following this event described in Daniel, there is a prophetic gap or interlude that takes place between the end of the 69th week and the beginning of the 70th week. That final week is still in our future and will mark the beginning of the Tribulation.

Is everyone tracking with this? There's a lot of information and a lot we didn't cover. No matter how you approach this passage, everybody agrees that there is great difficulty in understanding the details. Yet no matter how one approaches it, no matter what interpretation is brought to it, this prophecy contains some divine certainties, things that we all agree on. At the end of the seventy weeks, whether you see them as symbolic, whether you see them as fulfilled in the first century or yet in some future fulfillment, at the end of the seventy weeks, God is going to accomplish some specific things. On that we all agree.

We could say it this way to perhaps make it clearer: We all believe that in this prophecy, God has outlined for us His perfect plan. While we may disagree on the details of how this plan works out, we all agree on its final purposes. So with our remaining time this morning, I don't want to take you into the weeds of the various interpretations. Rather, I want to step back and ask what are God's purposes? What do we believe God will accomplish at the culmination of the seventy weeks?

In Daniel's prayer that we looked at last week, he pleaded with God that God would be merciful, that God would relent of His anger against His people, that He would remember them and the city to which His name was tied. Here in God's response to Daniel, in essence He was saying, "Yes, I will be faithful to My promises. Yes, I will bring My people back to Israel and to Jerusalem. But I have a plan that is bigger than that. There's something more grand that I want you to know about."

As a matter of fact, verse 25 seems to imply that the order to rebuild and restore Jerusalem is the ignition switch that starts this grander plan. He's saying, "When this happens, it's just the beginning of what I'm really trying to accomplish." What Daniel and his people may have viewed as the final fulfillment of God's promise, God is saying, "I have so much more. I have a much bigger plan." So let's not be narrow-minded and miss what He is doing in a greater way.

In God's perfect plan, He will deal with sin.

If we look at these verses through that lens, we will realize that in His perfect plan, at the culmination of the seventy weeks and when the dust settles, God will be dealing with sin. If you're familiar with the Old Testament and have read the book of Judges, you will know that Israel's sin has risen up time and time again. She went through periods of walking faithfully with God, only to wander away in rebellion and sin against Him. When that happened, God brought His hand of discipline against her. This cycle was repeated over and over again, to the point that some of us today may read the Old Testament and think, "How do you keep missing this? Why do you keep going back? Have you not learned your lesson?" God is telling us, "In the end, after all of this, I'm going to do the hard work. I'm going to get to the root of this problem."

With spring trying to break out here, maybe you've seen in your flowerbeds that even the weeds are already popping up. If you have half a green thumb, you know that if you don't deal with the roots, what happens? Those weeds come back again, right? That's why God says, "The difficult job is more than just taking the weed off at the surface; it's getting rid of the root." And that's what He's promising to do.

So in the culmination of these seventy weeks, God is promising to end sin. Verse 24 says, "*Seventy weeks are decreed...to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity.*" This doesn't mean God has not been dealing with sin all along, but it sure seems that He is promising to deal with sin in a more total and complete manner.

From the very beginning God has been dealing with sin, going clear back to Genesis 3. What happened when sin first appeared? God provided a covering for Adam and Eve using what? Animal skin. That was His provision to cover their sin and shame. This tells us from the very start that God's solution for the problem of sin required the shedding of blood through a sacrifice as a means of atoning for, or covering, sin. Hebrews 9:22 summarizes it this way: "*Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.*" God has been dealing with sin all along.

He set up exemplary types of atonement in the law. "My people are going to sin, so when they do, here are the sacrifices you should perform to bring a covering for that sin." The problem was that these sacrifices had to be repeated over and over and over again. Year after year, they were required. Why? Because the sin remained. The law couldn't provide a righteousness that would do away with sin. For instance, Paul wrote in Galatians 2:16, "*We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.*" In Galatians 3:21-22 he added, "*For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would*

indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe."

Righteousness was never meant to be accomplished under the law. Rather, the purpose of the law was to reveal and expose sin, bringing sin to our attention. Righteousness has to come from outside. That's why God is saying in Daniel 9:24, "I'm going to *finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity...*" Then what does he say next? "I am going to *bring in everlasting righteousness.*"

This won't be some temporary walk that we can manage. Rather, righteousness has to be brought in from the outside. Here's God's message to His people: "Israel, eternal righteousness will not come from within the law or from within yourselves. This everlasting righteousness is not found within you. The righteousness that will be everlasting must be brought from the outside to the inside."

In God's perfect plan, He will deploy the Messiah.

So the question then becomes how will God do this? How will God bring an end to sin? How is He going to bring this atonement? How will He put an end to transgression and bring in this everlasting righteousness? The answer we are given is that He will deploy the Messiah. We think of the word 'deploy' probably in a military context, when someone is deployed on a mission. There is an assignment, an objective, that they have been given.

God is saying, "I will send an anointed one, a messiah." Not only will He be sent, we see in verse 26 that this "anointed one" will suffer. It says, "*An anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing.*" In other words, this Anointed One will die. You can almost imagine the confusion this brought. How do you make sense of God sending an Anointed One only to have him killed?

It is through this Anointed One that God works out His purposes. It's through this person that God will bring about the results promised in verse 24. From Daniel's perspective, it was probably hard to understand how that might work, but today, we can look back and say, "I get it. Jesus had to suffer and die. He was the sacrifice that would replace all those sacrifices that had to be repeated year after year."

The book of Hebrews tells us those happened frequently, but Jesus would be offered "once and for all," so that by the breaking of His body and the shedding of His blood, this sacrifice was all that would be needed to finally deal with sin. He became the covering, the atonement. In other words, God didn't exactly do away with sin and just leave a vacuum there. God's plan was to replace the issue of sin with the everlasting righteousness.

Which then begs another question: how did that take place through this Anointed One? The Scriptures confirm over and over again that Jesus is not just the covering for our sin, He's not just the sacrifice that paid the penalty. He has become our very righteousness. In Romans 5: 19 we read, "*For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.*" Then 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" It's not a righteousness of yourself, not a righteousness of society, not a righteousness of the law, but the righteousness of God. He will "*bring in an everlasting righteousness.*" First Corinthians 1:30 tells us that it's because of Him that we are in Christ Jesus, "*whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*"

Guys, the beauty and the wonder of this challenging passage in Daniel 9 is that it is pointing us straight to Jesus. That's what it's about. That's why I think it's so cool that we're dealing with it today of all days. Jesus is the Anointed One that Daniel 9 prophesies. Jesus is that atonement for iniquity. Jesus is the One Who brought about the end of sin and transgression. Jesus is our sacrifice. He is our righteousness. He's it! He's the ticket.

That's what this is saying. The beauty and wonder of God is speaking into human history, saying, "I've got a bigger plan and it includes more than just a place, more than just a temple. I'm going to fulfill all those things in a Person; that Person will be the Anointed One.

Brothers and sisters, here we are today—all these years later—still celebrating, still worshiping, still proclaiming this same One as Lord and Savior. His name is Jesus Christ. That's the wonder of it all. So we celebrate these things, especially at a time like

Holy Week. With Good Friday coming up, then Easter when we celebrate the resurrection, we do this recognizing that when Jesus came, He inaugurated the fulfillment of these prophecies.

In God's perfect plan, He will defeat His enemies.

In His death and in His victory over the grave, He secured for us a victory unlike anything that came before. He defeated His enemies. That's what we still have to look forward to at the end of the seventy weeks. There will come a time when Jesus makes all things right.

We live in a period now when there's still rebellion. People still deny Christ and reject Him as Lord. We read at the end of verse 26, *"Desolations are decreed."* It doesn't say at the end of the 69 weeks, with the anointing and then cutting off of this Messiah, that things are going to be sunny and great. Challenging days will continue. As a matter of fact, verse 27 says, *"And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate."* Again, we believe this is a reference to the future antichrist, one who will absolutely reject God and will powerfully oppose Him. The realization that these difficult days are coming can be very troubling to us, but I don't think God gave us this message just to trouble us. Rather, I think His intention was that we would be encouraged.

After all, verse 27 concludes by saying, *"...until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator."* That means God has marked an end to this. While to us things may well seem to be out of control and there will be chaos as we've discussed, yet God rules sovereignly over it all. Therefore for us as His followers, as citizens of His Kingdom, that should give us confidence. God is in control. Even when others oppose Him in powerful ways, when the difficult days come, God is still in control. So whether you consider the seventy weeks of Daniel 9 to be purely theological and symbolic or you see it as being chronological and tied to actual dates in history, we can all agree on how it ends. At the end of it all, at the end of these seventy weeks, God has promised us that He will deal finally with sin. He will deploy the Messiah Who will defeat His enemies. We look forward to that time of culmination.

Philippians 2:10-11 tells us that *"at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."* Man, if that's not the deep desire of your heart, then you need to get on the program, seeking to bring all people to the place where they will worship Him and give Him the glory He deserves. That's what will conclude the seventy weeks—God's bigger plan. Yet today, brothers and sisters, you and I live in the period and the tension of the "already but not yet."

Looking back and celebrating, as we'll be doing this week, we see how all these things were inaugurated in Christ's first coming. He came and dealt with sin. He went to the cross, paid the penalty, taking the wrath of God upon Himself. In His first coming He went to the grave, but then He triumphed over that grave, bringing about a victory which nobody can defeat. Never again will our Lord taste death. We can even say that when He came the first time, He sealed up the prophets and their visions. Hebrews 1:1 says, *"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."* Even the apostle Paul affirms in 1 Corinthians 13:12 that we now look through a mirror dimly, but then, looking forward, we'll see Him face to face. Now we know in part, but then we will know fully. There's a tension to this. So we live in a time now when we realize that God is doing what He has promised. But in some ways, we can now lament with Paul, *"For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing"* (Romans 7:19). There is a tension and a struggle. But brothers and sisters, we look forward to the day when this promise will be consummated, when it will be brought to its final fulfillment. One day our Lord will return and all these things will be done in their totality. Can our hearts not long for that? Our Lord has told us, "Surely, I'm coming soon." So let the plea of our hearts before God be, "Amen. Come Lord Jesus!"