

“Seventy Weeks”

Daniel 9

September 16, 2007

I am going to invite you to take at your Bible or the pew Bible in front of you and turn with me to Daniel, chapter 9. I have struggled with this all week and am now going to invite all of you to join me. The only way I can make sense of this passage – and make any kind of relevant comment about how it applies today – is to have you looking at it while we go through it. So, to have any hope of hanging with me on this one, I am urging, exhorting, encouraging you to open the Bible and keep it open.

By the way, that’s probably a pretty good rule of thumb for most things: if you want to know what God is saying, I urge, exhort and encourage you to open your Bible and keep it open.

Before we begin, I want you to know where we are headed, just in case we get lost along the way. There are two parts of this chapter – repentance and restoration – and they are parts of one piece, part of a whole. God’s judgment (here, the exile) is designed to bring the people to repentance. In their repentance, turning around, God restores them.

Daniel 9

The first thing we get is a time reference. “In the first year of Darius”; Darius was the conquering general who took over Babylon after Belshazzar saw the writing on the wall. In Darius’ first year, Daniel was about eighty years old. He had been in exile from Jerusalem for about sixty five years – since he was a teenager.

It is worth taking a step back to that time. Jerusalem, the capitol of Judah, had been living under a series of kings. The Temple was the center of the culture, center of the power, and center of the economic activity. Empires were rising outside of the Promised Land. Israel, the Northern Kingdom, had been taken into captivity by Assyria in 722 B.C. Judah, the Southern Kingdom, acted as if it had a protective bubble around it; in fact, it was confident that nothing would happen because “the Temple, the Temple, the Temple” – in other words, the true living God was in the Temple and would not let anything happen to his chosen people.

The problem is that the people were not faithful to the God upon whom they depended. Jeremiah was a prophet calling the people to account. As God commissions Jeremiah to his prophetic vocation, he provides this insight into what he is doing:

The Lord said to me, “From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land. I am about to summon all the peoples of the northern kingdoms,” declares the Lord. “Their kings will come and set up their thrones in the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem; they will come against all her surrounding walls and against all the towns of Judah. I will pronounce my

judgments on my people because of their wickedness in forsaking me, in burning incense to other gods and in worshiping what their hands have made. (Jeremiah 1:14-16).

Jeremiah was not heeded. We have looked at the rest: Nebuchadnezzar came and God gave Jerusalem into his hands. The conquest of Jerusalem was a statement of judgment against the unfaithfulness of God's people. That is part of the background for Daniel's prayer.

Even though Jeremiah was not heeded, his words were not forgotten. Daniel "perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to the prophet Jeremiah, must be fulfilled for the devastation of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years." Daniel is referring to Jeremiah 25, beginning at verse 8:

Therefore the Lord Almighty says this: "Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon," declares the Lord, "and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

OK, that seems pretty clear. However, Jeremiah goes on,

"But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt," declares the Lord, "and will make it desolate forever. I will bring upon that land all the things I have spoken against it, all that are written in this book and prophesied by Jeremiah against all the nations. They themselves will be enslaved by many nations and great kings; I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands."

In the first year of Darius – the one who defeated the Babylonians – Daniel reflects back on Jeremiah's prophecy. Until then, seventy years seemed like a general statement of time, a period of time Daniel figured he would not see concluded. Yet when Babylon is conquered, Daniel remembers and begins to reflect on the meaning of the disaster that befell Jerusalem.

This is where Daniel's application of Deuteronomy was such a major development. Sorry to jump to the outline of another book of the Bible, but this is important, too:

Deuteronomy is a sermon structured roughly after the ceremony marking the making of a covenant and the ancient world. First, there is an introduction in which the parties are identified. Second, there is a historical remembrance of the relationship of the parties. Third, there is a statement of the terms – here, the law. Fourth, and this is the important

part, there is a statement of the consequences for obeying the terms; rewards where obeyed and consequences where disobeyed. Finally, there are witnesses; the people respond that they will obey God's law.

Returning to Daniel, Daniel's confession focuses on the consequences of the broken covenant; the playing out of the "curses" found in Deuteronomy. Verse 13, "Just as it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us. We did not entreat the favor of the LORD our God, turning from our iniquities and reflecting on his fidelity."

Right there is the key: repenting from human iniquity and remembering God's faithfulness.

Daniel recognizes the failing of God's people, confesses it as "my sin" and prays for deliverance. "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, listen and act and do not delay! For your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people bear your name." Daniel does not ask because he is righteous or because the people have suffered enough; he asks God to act out of God's own righteousness.

Repentance and restoration

Daniel prays, fasts, wears sackcloth and ashes. Repentance is real only if it is real repentance. That sounds circular, but it is important because Daniel was not performing a ritual. He was not making a speech. He was not using empty words trying to manipulate God into relenting. He was not simply telling God what God wanted to hear in a, "There, are you happy?" kind of way.

Daniel's prayer was a profound realization of the wrongness of the people and the horrible consequences that follow breaking God's command.

Repenting our Nation's Sins

The question for you and me is whether we – as a community – have a real sense of the nature of our corporate sin today. We have our struggles, for sure; but it is fair to say that we do not live in a situation of exile, having had our homes destroyed, having been torn apart from our families, having to serve a foreign nation. It is hard for us to realize that those were real consequences for real sin. We live in the expectation that things will be as things are – and that God is blessing us by keeping things the way they are

Would anyone argue that American culture is paying attention and faithful to God's call to holiness? What would it take for us to recognize that "God Bless America" is not a mandate to God? What would it take for us to make a real repentance and not a drive-by repentance?

I confess to you that I am often a drive-by repenter. In short, I object to the speeding ticket I received in Arizona two years ago because I think it was unfair; yet I forget all the other times that I have could have and should have been ticketed. Cursing my luck for getting the ticket is not the same thing as repentance – it has not changed my driving behavior

even though I am sorry I was cited. In American culture, we have the same condition. When we are criticized for worshipping the dollar, for not being good stewards of the environment, for taking advantage of our economic position at the expense of those who are in need, we sort of apologize while justifying it by thinking about all the good things we do. That is not repentance.

Further, we cannot distance ourselves from our culture by saying, “That’s not me. I do not do those things.” Daniel was a young boy when all of Judah was taken into captivity; sixty-five years later, he still confesses his nation’s sins as “my sins” and “we sinned.” So it is with God’s people as we are complicit in the sins of our nation.

Evidence of Repentance

Repentance is one of those things that is evident; a change has taken place. Daniel placed the sins of the people before God and declared them to be sin; in essence, recognizing God’s goodness. This is the hallmark of repentance.

Many of you know that Jen and I grew up in the same neighborhood outside Philadelphia. We have been involved in a football pool – basically for bragging rights – for many years now. It has grown with our families and picks are sent in – literally – from around the world. It is a fun and light-hearted way to keep in touch. I want to share with you the report we received this week:

Congratulations to week 1 winner- Kevin Alton with 15 wins; nosing out John O’Neal with 14 wins and four members with 13 wins. Kevin, who just started three days a week in pre-school, will hopefully be spending more time on his studies and less time watching ESPN and reading the sports pages.

The Sporting Futures Investment Group welcomes three new members:

Shaun DiGiovacchino’s son- Matthew (age 12 as of Oct. 5, 07)

Melissa & Joey Nahama’s son- Drew (age 10, 11 in Dec.)

Jeff Scafaria’s girl friend- Carina Laguzzi (a lawyer, as is Jeff)

(It has been pointed out, that we normally keep the percentage of lawyers in the group at less than five percent. This concern is based on some very bad past experiences with frivolous law suits filed by the notorious “Indianapolis Bob” in the 1990’s. Bob Davis is presently a highly respected Presbyterian Minister (Pastor) residing in Chula Vista, CA and is now technically not considered a practicing lawyer. Consequently, we have waved the rule and amended the By-Laws to allow more than 5 % if the practicing percentage remains below five percent.)

Of course, as with all new members, the first year’s membership is provisional, and subject to renewal at the discretion of THE MANAGEMENT. Too many wins is a typical reason for non-renewal.

Silly as it is, it is a report of repentance and restoration.

Repentance means recognizing and naming the things that are an offense to God, and turning to God to seek His righteousness.

The temptation here is to dwell on this for a while because repentance is important. Even so, we should make note of something identified by many commentators – Daniel’s prayer (English or Hebrew) takes about three minutes. God is looking for real repentance, not a speech.

It is only in the repentance that restoration can take place.

It is in God’s righteousness that he reveals his plan. So, now we turn to the “restoration” and some of the most debated verses in all of Scripture.

Eschatology and the Seventy Sevens

Gabriel, making a repeat visit since the dream regarding the end times, comes and gives Daniel a most elusive revelation. The word-literal translation is seventy “sevens”, which we translate as weeks.

The point of this future is to show that God prevails. You have to read it closely but it is there: all of the things that happen lead up to the time when “the decreed end is poured out upon the desolator.” God’s final judgment is coming and God’s people will be restored.

So, what are the things that are going to happen before the “decreed end”? Gabriel lists six:

1. **To finish the transgression.** Transgression in Hebrew has the sense of a rebellion against authority, and the impression is that God is going to stop the rebellion.
2. **To put an end to sin.** Sin is a much more general term, most often referring to the way in which we deal with each other. God will stop our sinning against each other.
3. **To atone for iniquity.** Atonement involved sprinkling blood on the mercy seat of God in the temple. This is a description of what Christ achieved on the cross.
4. **To bring an everlasting righteousness.** The kingdom of God will be eternal. Remember the opening words of Jesus’ ministry? Jesus said, “The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.”
5. **To seal both vision and prophet.** This means that God will have proved true the prophecies revealing his will and purpose.

6. To anoint the most holy. Blessing the everlasting temple, the holy of holies, from which God on high will rule eternally.

Those things are going to happen in three periods. The first seven sevens will be time in which the word went forward to restore Jerusalem and the time it was fully rebuilt. An anointed priest will be identified. Then, after those seven sevens, there will be sixty-two more sevens (a much longer period of time) at the end of which it is clear that Jerusalem is in turmoil, warfare, and dispute. In the final week or “seven”, the rebellion against God will rage until God puts an end to it.

Over the years four separate constructions have been developed – leading to four completely different timetables – to understand how the seventy sevens correspond to time. We are not going to cover them this morning. The message of the seventy sevens, however, is something to take very seriously. The message is this: the world is God’s world; it is not subject to the authority of any other.

You know, as I mentioned up top: I struggled with this message all week (and weekend). Then, last night, at Adoracion’s “Independence for Jesus” celebration, I listened to a devotional given by Nicasio Rojas. My Spanish is really limited, but I did not need a lot to hear the invitation he gave.

Scripture says there are two kinds of people: those who know Jesus as Lord and Savior and those who do not. Those who do are called to be his disciples, called to seek his face, called to lives of obedience that bring glory to God. Those who do not know him are lost. It is for them that this passage bodes very badly. Those who do not know Jesus have their fate sewn up in a few short words at the conclusion of this passage: “until the decreed end is poured out upon the desolator.”

Repentance and restoration. Judgment is coming. Who do you worship and whom do you serve? The only question will be Jesus’ question, “Who do you say I am?” It all comes down to your answer. What will you say?

That is a simple explanation of Daniel 9. And sometimes, the simplest explanations are the most profound.

Amen? Amen.

8:45 prayer and offering

10:00 offering