

“GOD’S COVENANT: BEGINNING OF THE END”

by Steve Hammond, Sunday, March 31, 2019

Daniel 9:20-27 at NFBC

//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— 21 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. 22 He instructed me and said to me, “Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. 23 As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the word and understand the vision:...//

—Daniel 9:20-23 NIV

Our God is a covenant God. As Holy Week and Easter draw near, I would like us to look at it through an appreciative eye toward the covenant he established with us through the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ. I say “established,” but I could also say fulfilled. Adam broke his covenant with God; Jesus became the new Adam, fixed and fulfilling all that the first Adam left broken and empty. Noah’s Covenant was something like a practice run on Judgment Day and then a rainbow promising no more apocalyptic scale judgments until the final great and terrible Day of the Lord. Jesus brings himself as the ‘Ark’ of salvation prior to that coming big Day.

And by the way, I just have to mention this. Our culture today employs the rainbow in defiance of God, as it is made to represent pride in all things homosexual. But notice, right along with that defiant stance, our culture is obsessed with every type of apocalypse. We fear our own doom in every way, economic, ecological, technological, political and cosmic disaster. From overpopulation to underpopulation, from global cooling to global warming, we fear everything ... except the judgment of God. This is what happens when we reject the covenants of God.

Then there is the covenant God made with Abraham. It was the faith of Abraham God was highlighting in this covenant and the faithfulness of God. In some contrast to the later covenant with Moses, where both parties of God and Israel were equally responsible to keep their half of the covenant, this covenant with Abraham was one where God shouldered all of the burden of work and punishment for failure, while Abraham’s requirement was simply that of faith in God’s word and in what God would do. There was a promised land, a promised nation of people, a promised son and a blessing for all people involved in this covenant. And Abraham, on account of his faith, and God’s faithfulness, would be the father of “all those who would believe,” both Jew and Gentile.

There are also the covenants with Moses and David. And all were to be fulfilled in Jesus. The anointed son of David, the lamb of God who takes away

the sins of the world, and the Son of God who would be sacrificed on the Mountain of God.

I introduce you to this theme of God being a covenant-making God and a covenant-keeping God, but I am not going to take you through them all, one by one, A through Z, in the depth that they deserve. For I am only doing this for the few Sundays leading up through Holy Week and Easter, tying it in to these as well. And there simply wouldn't be time to do all that. Instead I am going to hit the high points. And instead of starting you off in the beginning, I'm going to start you off at the "beginning of the end," here in Daniel, chapter nine.

In our text Daniel is praying for his sins and those of all his people while they are all under the punishment of God known as the 70 year exile. Israel has been conquered, Jerusalem has been destroyed and Daniel and other Jews are living 580 miles away in the pagan capital city of Babylon. About 70 years have gone by and Daniel is familiar with Jeremiah's prophetic word that this "desolation" of Jerusalem is to last 70 years. (see Jeremiah 29:10-14.) So he starts his prayer off with these words: "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands, we have sinned and done wrong." (Daniel 9:4)

In faithfulness to God's covenantal word, the angel Gabriel is sent to Daniel in answer to his prayers in the form of a prophetically fulfilling vision. Here God gives Daniel and all of Israel an outline of God's intentions to bring about the beginning of the End. The end of the 70 year exile; the beginning of rebuilding Jerusalem and Israel. The end of their waiting for a Savior; the coming of the Messiah, the Anointed One. But also new abominations of desolation and conflicts will be upon them. Here is the NIV text, with my emphasis:

24 "Seventy 'sevens'[c] are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish[d] 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 Place.[e]

25 "Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One,[f] 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.

26 After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be put to death [my NIV says "cut off"; Hebrew add: "but not for himself"] and will have nothing.[g] 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. 27 He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.'[h] In the middle of the 'seven'[i] he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple[j] he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.[k]"[l]

--Daniel 9:24-27 (NIV)

(It can also be helpful to look at other translations. If nothing else but to be reminded that not all the pronouns and references are crystal clear.)

This vision is remarkable in its detail and scope, but can be confusing because of its use of “weeks” or “sevens” for time markers. Here one of these units of “weeks” equals 7 years. The grand total is going to be 70 weeks (verse 24 “Seventy ‘sevens’”) or 490 years. This will be broken down in three segments.

First there are 7 ‘sevens’ for the time period for rebuilding Jerusalem.

Secondly there are 62 ‘sevens’ with Jerusalem and the temple all established.

Thirdly, *after* the 7 + 62 ‘sevens’ there is the all important 70th Week, or ‘seven’ of Daniel, making the vision’s completion after a total of 490 years. It is in this week that the Messiah (Messiah means “Anointed One”) and ruler will come and be “cut off,” put to death. And so he will seem to have nothing. No life, no rule, no kingdom, nothing. Also during this 70th Week the city and sanctuary of Jerusalem will be destroyed by “the people of the ruler who will come.” This seems to be a ruler in contrast and conflict with the Messiah/ruler. Where the Messiah now seems to have nothing, this ruler seems to have everything, including the power to destroy God’s city. However, keep in mind how God employed Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Jerusalem the first time. God was punishing his own people for their disobedience to the covenant of Moses. This didn’t mean God liked the Babylonians. He went on to punish them later, for their own evil. This same idea could be at work in this second destruction of Jerusalem. And the verse indeed goes on to describe an “end that is decreed” to destroy this desolator.

So to reiterate this vision verse by verse, without explaining all the sevens.

Verse 24 gives the overview of the 490 year time period. It emphasizes the overall importance of the ending of sin, atoning for wickedness, and establishing a righteousness that lasts.

Verse 25 predicts the decree of Cyrus and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, even spelling out the time it will take to accomplish it (49 years). Then it predicts a much longer time (434 years) where the city and temple are up and working. Together they add up to 483 years.

Verse 26 speaks of what comes after the 483 years. The 70th Week. This is a 7 year period. The Messiah put to death; he seems to have nothing; another ruler destroys the city and temple of God; and various desolations are decreed to take place. As such it would seem this period of time could be open ended (like the 7th Day of Creation) in order for all these things to take place.

Verse 27 goes on to describe “He” going on to confirm a strong covenant in the middle of this 70th Week and he will do so with many people. This will put an end to “sacrifice and offering.” There will also be an “abomination that causes desolation” in regard to the temple, which seems to be the climax before this desolator is himself desolated.

So, how are you doing at taking all this in? I had a terrible time reading others trying to explain this and trying to figure out for myself the time periods of “sevens” and “seven sevens” or “weeks” and the math involved. There’s a lot more to it, too, which I’m sparing you. Just don’t feel like you have to understand everything perfectly before you can rejoice at this vision.

I imagine Daniel had his own troubles discerning the humble way this Messiah would come, or maybe accepting that “cut off” would mean “put to death,” or that there would be such a conflict raging that would destroy Jerusalem all over again! And did he have any idea just how long in time and far in distant lands the effect of this Messiah would spread from Israel to all the world. This, and other visions given to Daniel amount to the Old Testament’s book of ‘Revelation’ as the end of their Old Covenant days are fast approaching. I’m sure he got from it what he needed though. Even though there was surely more there than he could take in completely at the time.

From our time, too, we have some advantages over Daniel in seeing the details of how the Messiah has come. Imagine how Daniel would love to have had a copy of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, the book of Acts and so much more! But we do have these things. We also have two thousand years of church history where we have seen the Gospel explode over the face of the earth in spite of opposition and outright war raging all around. Sure, not everyone believes the Gospel. Many reject it, in fact, and seem to be attracted to a worldly covenant. But still, every *kind* of person believes in Jesus, this Jewish Messiah given over to the whole world. Not just Jew, Samaritan, Greek or Roman, but every tribe and language, every people group is being given opportunity to hear and believe. And from all of these come the testimony that Jesus is Lord and Savior.

I can’t help but get the sense that that 7 year period has too much in it to be just 7 years: the coming Messiah, the cross, the new covenant, resurrection, the antichrist, the desolation and destruction of the temple, and possibly the building of the temple. Though this time it isn’t the shadow made of stone. We are the stones, the people, who will be populating the new Jerusalem which is being constructed in heaven even now during these times of trouble.

When this Holy Week comes upon us, I hope you will be able to see it through the eyes of Daniel, as well as our own. See the satisfaction that comes after 500 years of anticipation. See it as if you’re seeing your book of Revelation fulfilled right before your eyes, as you behold the Last Supper’s new covenant, the victory at the cross, in spite of it appearing to be nothing. See it as everything: the ending of sin, atoning for wickedness, and establishing a righteousness that lasts. See the conflicts it brings as if you’re seeing Armageddon itself taking place outside your window.

See it as the beginning of the End.