

The 490-Year Prophecy

Background

We have studied Daniel 8 in the previous newsletters. Now it is time for Daniel 9. Our church sees Daniel 9 as referring to Christ's first coming. That will not be disputed in these newsletters – rather confirmed. I love to speak about “Daniel's Messiah.”

There are some details in Daniel 9 that need our attention. One is whether or not the Day-Year Principle should be used. During our study of Daniel 8 I have shown that all prophetic numbers there should be taken literally. SDA theologians have used Daniel 9 to find the starting point for the prophecies in both Daniel 8 and 9. However, if you have read the previous newsletters, you have noticed that a paradigm shift is necessary. We have understood that the 2,300 evenings and mornings pointed to the time of Jesus' ministry. It began when Jesus' declared what He had come to do (Luke 4:18-21) and ended at the cross. So, what can we learn from Daniel 9?

Seventy Years of Captivity

Daniel, a servant and a prophet of God, was taken captive to Babylon when he was a young man, probably a teenager. His career was truly amazing. He ended up as a prime minister of Babylon and later when the Medes took over he continued in a very high political position. We know that Daniel remained faithful to God in prayer but also that he diligently studied the Word of God, Daniel 9:2:

*In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last **seventy years.** (NIV)*

From this we know that the writings of Jeremiah were accessible to Daniel. Jeremiah's writings caught Daniel's attention. It is clear that he found information there that stirred him up. He knew that his people, the Jews, had been unfaithful to the Lord and that was the reason for their captivity in Babylon. By reading Jeremiah Daniel furthermore realized that the captivity would last for “seventy years,” Jeremiah 25:11:

*This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon **seventy years.** (NIV)*

He found a similar statement in Jeremiah 29:10:

*For thus says the Lord: After **seventy years** are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and **cause you to return** to this place. (NKJV)*

This must have been awesome news for Daniel. I am sure it helped him to endure the captivity better. The end of it was in sight. There may also have been a bitter-sweet component here. As a prophet of God he probably knew the conditionality of prophecy. He knew what had happened to the northern ten Tribes of Israel. They had been deported to Assyria more than 100 years before Judah was taken into captivity and had not returned to Israel yet. Why? I am sure Daniel was concerned about what God said in Jeremiah 3:8:

*I gave faithless **Israel** her **certificate of divorce** and sent her away because of all her adulteries. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister **Judah** had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery. (NIV)*

This is probably what Daniel dreaded the most. The ten northern tribes had been given a “certificate of divorce.” They had not ended their rebellion against God and therefore they were still separated from Him.

What about Judah? Had they repented of their rebellion during these 70 years of captivity that now had almost come to an end? Could Daniel be sure that his people had changed their relationship with God? He trusted God, but did he trust his people? As a matter of fact – he did not! That becomes very clear when we read his prayer in Daniel 9:4-19. When he realized that the 70 years were almost over, he began interceding for his people.

Literal Seventy Years

Before we talk about Daniel’s prayer we should consider the following: Daniel read the passages in Jeremiah and thought about the “seventy years” as seventy literal years. He did not consider using what we call “the Day-Year Principle.” We should trust his judgment since he was a prophet of God filled with the Holy Spirit.

Daniel’s Prayer

Then follows one of the most beautiful prayers in the Bible! Daniel is so humble before God. Even if he had been faithful to God, he included himself with the unfaithful. He did not pray for his people in “they” form but used the word “we.” He counted himself just as sinful as anyone else among his people. He did not consider himself spiritually superior. He pleaded with God “in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes,” Daniel 9:3.

At the very end of his humble prayer we find a wonderful statement. The human way would be to think that you have “paid” for your “sin” after enduring the punishment. This would make you *feel* righteous and that you *deserve* to be set free. But not Daniel! He pleads for God’s mercy, Daniel 9:18-19:

We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! (NIV)

In God’s perspective we cannot “pay off” our sins and set ourselves free. This is God’s act and possible only because of what Jesus did on the cross. Daniel pleaded for God’s mercy and received it. God’s grace was given not only to Daniel but also to his people. Without fully understanding it, Daniel actually pleaded for the consequences of the cross.

The Jews experienced God’s wrath. It lasted for seventy literal years – just as predicted. They were allowed to return to Judah not because of their repentance but because of God’s mercy.

Daniel was not only concerned about his people but also about *God’s name and reputation*. That was the reason he prayed to the Lord for the desolate sanctuary in Jerusalem. He wanted of all his heart to worship God and honor His name. Therefore, it was logical for Daniel to think and pray from God’s perspective. This type of prayer is unusual and can only happen, if the praying individual is led by the Holy Spirit and used by God in a special way.

Gabriel Interrupts

God needs people who are willing to “stand in the gap.” I believe Daniel’s intercession for his people was the reason for God’s answer. At this moment something funny happens. While Daniel is praying God’s messenger interrupts him, Daniel 9:20-22:

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—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. He instructed me and said to me, "Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding." (NIV)

When we truly pray from our hearts, it is actually possible that our prayers may be too long? That seems to be the case here with Daniel. He is still praying when Gabriel taps him on the shoulder to give him God's answer.

Insight and Understanding

Gabriel said he had come to give Daniel "insight and understanding." Insight about what? The 2,300 evenings and mornings? I don't believe so. Not a word is mentioned about that in Daniel 9. The whole chapter concerns their sin, Daniel's intercession for his people, the fact that the 70 years are almost over and whether God would forgive them and let them return?

We can summarize Daniel's prayer in two petitions. First Daniel pleaded for his people through God's mercy would remain in His grace and not be separated from the Holy One. He wanted to be sure that a divorce would not take place.

The second issue concerned God's reputation. If His Holy Temple, which had been destroyed, would remain in ruins, the surrounding nations would continue to scorn the God of Israel.

This raises an important issue. Do we have a God who meets us where we are, or does He ignore our questions to pursue His own agenda? The good news is that the rest of Daniel 9 definitely shows that God met Daniel where he was. He answered his questions. When that was done, God introduced some new issues.

God's Answer

God sent the answer with His most frequently used messenger Gabriel. Daniel had met him 12 to 13 years earlier when he needed to understand the vision concerning the 2,300 evenings and mornings. To believe that Gabriel came to give Daniel details of that prophecy 12-13 years later is not God's pattern in the rest of the Book of Daniel. Now Daniel needed insight and understanding in regard to his prayer in Daniel 9. What was God's plan? With this background it is easy to understand that Gabriel begins the prophetic message with the following words, Daniel 9:23:

*As soon as you began to pray, an **answer** was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, **consider the message and understand the vision:**" (NIV)*

God is so good. He meets us where we are. Do you see that the answer concerns what Daniel prayed about in his prayer? Daniel eagerly awaited God's response. Since Daniel was "highly esteemed" by God, the angel said: "Consider the message" that I have come to tell you. I.e. consider how I am about to answer your questions now. Daniel 9:24:

***Seventy "sevens"** are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish 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. (NIV)*

Let's see *how* God is at work. Daniel believed that the Jews needed to repent *before* they would be allowed to return to Jerusalem – but that was not the case. God let them return after the seventy years were completed and on top of that He gave them 490 more years to stop their rebellion. In His grace He multiplied the "seventy years" by seven. It seems like God followed the "prescription" He gave in Matthew 18:22.

Literal Time

Our church uses the Day-Year Principle for this prophecy and claims that one day equals one year. The

translators of the text quoted above used the words “Seventy sevens.” This would imply seventy weeks. That is why we often call it the “70-week Prophecy.”

But please notice the following! The Hebrew text does NOT say “Seventy sevens.” It literally says “Seven seventies!” Thus, God spoke so Daniel would understand. Let me state it again: Daniel was concerned that his people had not repented during the seventy years of captivity. God answered by extending the time of grace. He gave them additional seven “seventy-year-periods.” A literal translation of Daniel 9:24 would be:

Seven seventies are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression...

Consider again Daniel’s study of the Book of Jeremiah, his thinking and prayer. He had read about the seventy years of captivity in Babylon, seventy literal years. He started to seriously intercede for his people. He wanted to make sure that the seventy years would not be prolonged. He wanted to see this time of captivity come to an end so his people would be set free.

Daniel prayed about the seventy years and God’s answer simply refers to this time period. The Hebrew word for “seventy” is the same in Daniel 9:2 and 9:24!

The only thing that has changed as we compare these two verses is that God is very generous. He gracefully multiplies the “seventy years” with “seven.” That is why in Hebrew it is written “seven seventies” and not “seventy sevens.” Doing the math seven times 70 years equals 490 years.

Thus the time prophecy of 490 years is literal and not prophetic!

The passage in chapter 9:24-27 has the answer to both his questions. We have now seen how Daniel’s first question is answered in this prophecy. The message was that the Jews would be allowed to return to Judah when the 70 years ended and that God extended the time of grace. In the next newsletter we will study Daniel’s second issue concerning the desolate sanctuary in Jerusalem.

Summary

- When Daniel studied the book of Jeremiah he understood that the time of captivity in Babylon would be 70 literal years and not prophetic years.
- He realized that his people had not repented as they should and according to Jeremiah 3:8 they consequently were at risk of receiving a certificate of divorce.
- Daniel was also concerned about God’s reputation. As long as the Temple in Jerusalem was in ruins, the surrounding nations would scorn the Name of God.
- Therefore, Daniel pleads for God’s mercy.
- In this newsletter we have seen how God answered Daniel’s first question.

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