

September 21

Daniel 5 & 9

First of all, let me give a big shout out to my oldest son Caleb, whose birthday is today. Happy Birthday, my son! Hope it is a great one!

Things have deteriorated so much in Babylon that Belshazzar does not apparently even know who Daniel is -- though he had been the most honored of all Nebuchadnezzar's advisors. When the heavenly hand writes the mysterious message upon the wall of the palace it is the queen (who may have been Nebuchadnezzar's daughter) who remembers Daniel and urges the king to summon him for help. The faithful prophet is summoned and as was his custom in Nebuchadnezzar's day he finds himself able to interpret a message from God to Babylon's king.

Did you notice that the final straw of God's wrath does not come because of the drunkenness or sensuality of the feast, but because of the sacrilege of using the temple vessels. Using the temple vessels was a foolish and wicked thing to do, but I would have expected the judgment of losing the kingdom to fall with a rather different set of charges like cruelty to people -- disregard of justice -- taking bribes -- things like that. But God's greater concern was the issue of insulting the honor and glory of God himself. For that the kingdom falls. I remember the same sense of mild surprise when reading Ezekiel and finding out that one of the three most heinous sins Judah committed was the desecration of the Sabbath.

Making light of holy things -- ignoring and insulting God is a far greater sin than most people -- even most Christians ever understand.

At this point in the text, the wheels of world history change once again. Did you notice that "Darius the Mede" took over for "Belshazzar, the Babylonian?". God predicts that Belshazzar's time is VERY short -- MENE, MENE. The Medes and Persians are about to take over. So, the book of Daniel, very understatedly, describes the shift of empires from the Middle East being under Babylonian Rule to the Rule of the Medes and Persians (from Iraq to Iran, if you want to know the modern day equivalent.) Daniel stays around in the Medes Empire as an important advisor... From Israel as a young rising star, through 63 years of Babylonian rule, to finish his last few years with Darius. What a career!

The regular discipline of prayer was so important to Daniel that he was willing to risk his very life for it. In chapter 9 we had the high privilege of reading one of Daniel's prayers that has been preserved for us. It is a prayer of confession and of intercession.

Daniel prays a great prayer, worth commentary, but I want to focus on the prediction by Gabriel of Seventy Sevens.

Daniel's prayer began in chapter 9 when the prophet, wrestling with Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the 70 year period Judah would have to spend in exile. Gabriel tells him that from the order to rebuild Jerusalem there will be "69 weeks" (seven sevens and 62 sevens) until the anointed one, the ruler comes. But after the 69th week the anointed ruler will be "cut off." Then the city will be destroyed and the sanctuary. There will be "wars" until the end and then there will be another "week." In the middle of that week, someone in control will end the sacrifices in the temple and place an abomination of desolation on the altar.

Now we already know that Antiochus Epiphanes did that but we also know that Jesus used the same phrase in the Olivet Discourse to describe something that would not happen until the very end of the world. Is Daniel talking about Antiochus Epiphanes or the Antichrist at the end of time? ... or both? ...

The answer to that question, of course, lies in the arithmetic of the 70 weeks. There were actually two decrees to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. One was given by Cyrus in 538 BC, the other came from Artaxerxes in 445BC. That is also mentioned in the Book of Ezra.

So if we begin at March 14, 445 BC and count forward by 69 'weeks' – assuming each week means 7 years, then we will have 483 years. Now, remember, these are years according to the Jewish lunar calendar – 360 days per year – so we need to adjust to that. Also, remember that AD "0" is not a year... so we have to adjust for that as well. You get 476 years.

What was happening at that time? What was going on in March of 32 AD? Jesus was getting nailed to a cross. Some scholars say that the exact day – March 29, 32 AD. –was the day of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem by Jesus and this was exactly 483 lunar years after this prophecy! Jesus trial, conviction and death were the time that Daniel predicted the anointed one would be 'cut off'.

God just keeps showing up in the Scriptures with divine power!

And so, you ask, "What about that 70th week?" The explanation is too long for this accelerator, but let me summarize. The 70th week is Daniel's reference to the end times. A seven year period of time referred to in Matthew 24 and Revelation and known popularly as "The Tribulation".

There will be a covenant of peace at this time, but halfway through, there will be a major desolation in the Temple. Daniel is setting up a framework for what will come to pass in the future of Israel.

And since the Bible has been accurate time after time in the past, we read it very carefully to understand what is coming in the future. May God bless you and bolster your faith as you walk through the Bible!