

Wars and Peace

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[0 : 0 0] prophecy of Daniel in the middle of chapter 9. Last week we had Daniel's prayer, we looked at it, and this week we're going to see God's explanation and then another prelude to another vision.

I'm guessing that probably looking through Daniel over the last few weeks has probably brought up many questions and some of which can be answered, some cannot. But I want to begin today by hopefully making a distinction clear, and that is to provide an explanation on how I've tried to interpret and apply the passages each week in Daniel.

And in particular, I wanted to make the difference between fulfillment of prophecy and the application that arises from it. Now, fulfillment is commonly associated with specific events being foretold in the Bible coming to pass.

So, for example, in Daniel 7 and 8, we looked at the prophecy regarding the little horn, which was fulfilled in Antiochus IV, who in 167 BC desecrated the temple.

Hence, you recall, we read about the rebellion that causes desolation or the abomination that causes desecration. And so, if you look at my first slide, look in the middle column there, you'll see that the first fulfillment of this in the second row is 167 BC.

[1 : 3 0] But I also said, because I pointed to Jesus referring to this desolation, that there was then a further fulfillment of this prophecy which occurred after Jesus' coming.

And so, this was in AD 70, when Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus, a future emperor of Rome. And then this, I said, was a subsequent fulfillment of that prophecy.

I also said that this little horn that was prophesied in Daniel served as a pattern for future tyrannical rulers across the world, which rise up from time to time to oppose God and persecute his people.

Thus, there may be futures or subsequent fulfillments of this prophecy. And, of course, the final one, the one that's yet to come, is likely to be when Jesus comes again.

Now, on the other hand, I then said that when we apply this prophecy, what we're applying is our response to it. And that is, we are to trust in God's sovereignty because of this prophecy.

[2 : 4 0] We're to take comfort that suffering is only for a defined time. And like Daniel in chapter 8, we are to get on with the business of King Jesus. Now, the next example was in Daniel chapter 9 from last week, where we read that Jeremiah prophesied that Jerusalem will be desolate for 70 years.

And this ended during Daniel's time with the exiles returning to Jerusalem and rebuilding the city after about 70 years. So, that was circa 515 BC.

Now, of course, since that time, Jerusalem has also been rebuilt on multiple occasions. So, in AD 70, when it was destroyed, it was rebuilt. And even current-day Jerusalem, the fact that we have a city standing meant that it has been rebuilt again after subsequent destructions.

And so, Jerusalem is one of those few ancient cities that's still standing in the world today. So, all these are further fulfillment of the prophecy, if you like, even though we don't literally have 70 years of desolation each time.

But if you recall last week, when it came to application, what I looked instead was the principle that Jerusalem is being rebuilt by God because of His name, of God's name.

[4 : 00] Remember, that was Daniel's prayer to God. Hear me, hear my cry, because Jerusalem and your people bear your name.

And so, I applied it not just to physical Jerusalem and to the nation of Israel, but also to the church because the church is God's people. It is the new Jerusalem and it bears the name of Jesus.

And because the church bears the name of Jesus, I said we can apply it that God won't abandon us just as He hasn't abandoned Jerusalem. So, notice though that I'm not saying that chapter 9 is fulfilled in the church.

Daniel's prayer was specifically for the physical Jerusalem and God fulfilled His promise to it in His time. Instead, what I'm applying is the principle or the truth about God's name so that we may be comforted to know that God preserves and restores all who bear His and Jesus' name.

And so, in the Bible, sometimes we can have prophecies that are already fulfilled, but still applying to us the principles today.

[5 : 13] Or, we can have biblical principles that are still to be fulfilled, that is, that are in the future, and yet, knowing that, they can still have application for our lives now.

We don't need to wait for the fulfillment of the prophecy in order for it to apply to us, is what I'm saying. Now, hopefully, you keep this distinction in mind as we keep looking at Daniel.

But now, that brings us to God's answer to Daniel's prayer in chapter 9. But before we look at it again, I want to make some reference to these numbers 70 and 7.

These 7 and multiples of 7, when you look through the Bible, are highly significant and symbolic numbers because they represent creation in Genesis, which God created the world in 6 days and then rested on the 7th.

Thus, we have the concept of a week, which we observe as well in our own sort of rhythm of time. But the week represents the completion of a cycle of time.

[6 : 22] That's what 7 is symbolic of in the Bible. So, for those of you who were with us earlier this year when we look at Leviticus, you will remember that there are festivals that are in the cycle of 7s, right?

Festival of the weeks was observed over 7 weeks, 7 times 7. The year of the Jubilee, where in the 50th year, land is returned to the original owners, well, 50 is 7 times 7 plus 1, right?

Start of a new cycle. So, whenever we see the mention of 70 and 7, especially here in this prophecy, it gives us a clue through deep symbolism in addition to just time markers.

Well, with that said, let's look at this passage in verse 20. So, it reads, Therefore, consider the word of God.

And understand the vision. 77s 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 place.

[8 : 01] So, the first thing I want you to notice is that it's both a word and a vision. In verse 23, A word went out, but then Gabriel adds next, consider the word and understand the vision.

Now, it's not clear if this vision that he's talking about is simply his appearance to Daniel, or there are images that are being conjured by his word. Either way, Daniel receives the vision because he's highly esteemed.

That is, he's precious to God, who has heard his prayers. The second thing to note is that the word years, Y-E-A-R-S, is not actually found in this passage.

We have the phrase 77s, right? And the word seven there is generally accepted to refer to seven years. If you look in the footnotes of your Bible, it actually says weeks.

But we're not to understand it as seven days, but seven years. So, 77s is 70 weeks of years, if you like. 490 years, if you do the calculations.

[9 : 07] A long time. And this time is needed, Gabriel says, to achieve six things with Israel and Jerusalem. Firstly, finish transgression. Secondly, put an end to sin.

And thirdly, atone for wickedness. Bring in everlasting righteousness. Seal up vision and prophecy. And lastly, anoint the most holy place. Now, many of you will know this most holy place is found in the temple, which is God's dwelling place, where righteousness endures, where there is no sin.

But what if the city of God, that is Jerusalem, where the temple was situated, is herself guilty of sin and corruption? And that has been the case, hasn't it, for the city of Jerusalem and for Judah generally, because they had committed idolatry.

And so it's for that reason that God decreed it would be desolate for 70 years. This was the time needed for God, as it were, to purify the city and the people for the sin they had committed.

And yet, we now hear in this response to Daniel's prayer that these 70 years were still not enough to deal completely with sin. Why? Because the people returning to Jerusalem were just like their ancestors, still just as sinful as they were.

[10 : 30] And so the 77s outlined God's plan to deal comprehensively with sin. And what was needed was not just 70 years, but 77s, 490.

And what it would deal with is not just the sin of Israel, but the sin of all humanity. And so you notice the finality of the words chosen, to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to bring in everlasting righteousness.

That is, once all this is done, it will endure forever, across space and time. Now, as we then move now to verses 25 to 27, what we see is this 490 years divided into three distinct segments.

So Gabriel says, Know and understand this. From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the anointed one, the ruler, comes, there will be seven sevens and 62 sevens.

It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After 62 sevens, the anointed one will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary.

[11 : 44] The end will come like a flood. War will continue until the end and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one seven, and in the middle of the seven, he will put an end to sacrifice and offering.

And at the temple, he will set up an abomination that causes desolation until the end that is decreed is poured out on him. Now, I think Gabriel has a bit of a sense of humor here because he says, Know and understand as though, wow, that's so simple, isn't it?

Because ever since then, Jews and Christians alike have been trying to work out just what is going on here. Well, maybe we might succeed finally tonight. No, maybe not.

But to crack that nut, I think the first thing we need to try and understand is whether the 77s, that is the 49 years, 7 sevens, the 62 sevens, 34 years, and then the final seven, seven years, whether all these numbers here are to be treated merely symbolically or it needs to be treated literally in time.

Now, many scholars have tried a literal solution without obvious success, I have to say. But actually, I've come across one particular biblical scholar that has managed to do so with some minor tweaks.

[13:07] All right, so that's the caveat, the tweaks. His name on the slide is J.P. Tanner and he's written a commentary on Daniel from the Evangelical Exegetical Commentary Series.

There's a copy of the book in the Ridley Library if you're interested to borrow. I have put a request on it, so I'll get it first before you if you want to, but after that, you're more than welcome to it.

I think his view, having read it, is defensible, but not entirely proven. So how does he do it? Let me just show you quite quickly. Firstly, the thing to do is that you need to pinpoint the start of this 490 years, right?

The text there says, from the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. So that's the starting point. And Tanner identifies this year as 444 B.C.

On the next slide, it was the year when Artaxas authorized Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem. If you want to read about it, you can read in Nehemiah 2, verse 5 to 8 in particular.

[14:10] So from that time on, 49 years, the first seven sevens, that's roughly the period of reconstruction. Then if you add the 62 sevens, so that will make it 69 sevens, that is 483 years until the anointed one comes and is put to death or cut off.

That, Tanner says, was fulfilled in AD 33, which is the year Jesus, the anointed one, was crucified. And we can actually pretty accurately date Jesus' death to that year.

Now you notice immediately, or maybe not immediately, but those who are good in maths will know immediately that that doesn't add up because 444 B.C. to AD 33 is only 476 years, not 483 as prophesied.

So close, but, you know, no cigar. Now Tanner reconciles this by noting that, and this is true, in Daniel's time, there were various dating systems, right?

Nowadays, it's all based on the sun. 365 and a quarter days to a year. But back in his day, there were some civilizations or some kingdoms that based their calendar on the lunar method.

[15:29] That is 12 months of approximately 30 days. And then they would make adjustments every so often to get it to work with the sun. Now, that means that if you take a lunar year to put 360 days, 483 lunar years does equate approximately to 476 solar years, which is what we currently date our system on.

And looking back in time, when we identify 444 B.C. and 33 AD, that's based on the solar system. So, that sort of, that tweak sort of gets us there.

But then there's one final problem, and that is that the final seven, so if you take it that if the 69th seven occurred at the death of Jesus, there's no indication that the final seven, that the things described in that, in those verses about the final seven, actually occurred in Jerusalem after Jesus' death.

So, there was talk of war and desolations, and really, after Jesus died and rose, those seven years after, there's no real evidence that that occurred. Now, Tanner's view on that, along with others, is that this final seven is actually postponed until the time of Jesus' second coming.

So, in a sense, the 69th seven has ended, we're now living in between, and then, when Jesus' second coming will come again, we'll have the 70th seven.

[17 : 05] And if you look again at the verses, look at verse 26, we can sort of read maybe a bit of a hint of that happening, because in verse 26, it says that the end will come like, not with a flood, but like a flood, and then in the meantime, war will continue, and desolations, which is plural, have been decreed.

And so, this period then, you can read that as the period of postponement. And then in verse 27, when the final seven occurs, he, that is the ruler of verse 26, will come, we will take that to be the final Antichrist, who is modeled after the rule of Antiochus and Titus and all the little horns before him.

Well, he will come and confirm his covenant with many, suggesting that this could perhaps be someone who is Jewish or from God's people, he would masquerade, in any case, as a false messiah.

And like the horn in Daniel 7 and 8, he will put an end to the sacrificial system for three and a half years. That is, in the middle of the seventh, that's what he'll do. And again, if you recall back in chapter 7, that equates to the time, times, and half a time, right?

Three and a half, three and a half. So, what he'll do is, again, what was already said, set up an abomination that causes desolation until the end is decreed, that is decreed, is poured out on him.

[18 : 31] Alright? And there's a finality to that. Now, whichever view you take, whether you choose to stick with the symbolic or the literal, what is clear is that the 490 years that's being presented here is a picture of salvation history.

Now, in our days, you know, we, people in our world, we tend to focus on the specifics of our time as though they were the most important events of the era.

So, you know, the geopolitics between China and the US, the rise of Islam or the role of the UN, we have people, you know, on TV or whatever commenting on that all the time.

But, in God's scheme of things, all of that, all of the stuff that we're seeing on TV now only rates a brief mention in verse 26, that of wars and desolation.

There's not much detail because God is far more concerned, isn't he, with what are the six things that we talked about earlier, to finish transgression, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness.

[19 : 37] And that's when visions and prophecies will finally cease and the most holy place anointed forever. And, of course, we know that the act of the anointing or the accomplishment of that has already occurred and has been achieved once for all because of what Jesus has done on the cross.

He is the perfect and complete sacrifice that will enable the most holy place to be anointed by the most, by the anointed one forever.

So, we know that there will be one more almighty abomination that's yet to occur, but otherwise, the end is secure. And what I've said here tonight is nothing new in the various other chapters we've already looked at in Daniel 7 and 8.

And we've also heard Jesus say that in his teaching in Matthew and Mark. The only new bit here, I think, is the revelation of the anointed one who will atone for sin.

But again, that we already know through the Gospels, isn't it? That it is Jesus who has atoned for our sins. Now, I'll come back to application. So, I've talked about fulfillment.

[20 : 48] I'll come back to application in a while. But what I want to do is look at it after we've looked at chapter 10, which we look at now more quickly. Now, this chapter is really a prelude. It's a sort of a mini vision that precedes the longest and last vision of chapter 11 and 12.

What we're given are the circumstances that lead up to this final vision. So, again, when we read the start of chapter 10, verse 1 to 3, we're given the time of the vision. It occurs in the third year of Cyrus' rule, so a few years later.

And Babylon has fallen by this time. The exiles had started to return to Jerusalem. So, God's prophecy has already been fulfilled from chapter 9.

But, in the midst of this, God now tells Daniel that there is great warfare both in heaven and on earth. Now, the situation is that Daniel himself has been fasting for three weeks as he's been praying and it's after this that the vision is giving.

He finds himself standing at the banks of the Tigris and what he sees initially is in verse 5. That of the son of man or man dressed in linen and a belt of fine gold from Ephes around his waist.

[22 : 05] His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze and his voice like the sound of a multitude.

Now, again, we're not quite sure whether, as I sort of suggested, this is the son of man in Daniel 7 and therefore it's Jesus, the pre-incarnate Jesus or else it's another heavenly being or another angel.

But whatever it is, we are given a glimpse into the going-ons in heaven. Those who are around Daniel hear the voice but they're too afraid so they flee and hide.

So Daniel is left alone to see the vision. Daniel is again confident with the knowledge that he's highly esteemed, precious to God, verse 11. But it's the words in verse 12 to 14 that I want to focus on because here's what the heavenly being says.

Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard and I've come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me 21 days.

[23 : 11] Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Now I've come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future for the vision concerns a time yet to come.

So again, Daniel's desire for understanding and his humility is acknowledged. As a result, God hears and sends a heavenly being to respond to Daniel.

But we're told, or Daniel is told, that this vision relates to the future of his people of a time yet to come. We'll see more of that next week. But what we're seeing here in chapter 10 is similar to what has occurred in Daniel 7 in that what we're seeing is things are playing out in tandem between heaven and on earth.

Because why? This heavenly being is prevented from coming to Daniel for 21 days, which is the exact same time that Daniel has been praying and fasting. So even as Daniel has been wrestling in prayer for his people, the struggle is being played out with this representative of God's people against the prince of Persia.

And it's only when the chief of angels, Michael, comes that this heavenly being is able to come to answer Daniel on earth. Now if you want an analogy, imagine this is some sort of multiplayer online battle arena game, you know, like Defense of the Ancients or something, where the players are the angels, right?

[24 : 44] And we, the humans, are like the characters in the game. Okay? What's going on in heaven is shaping the events on earth. Later on in verse 20, we'll see that another player comes onto the battlefield, a prince of Greece, fighting on behalf or with the armies of Greece.

Now all these forces of Persia and Greece are likely evil forces because they're resisting God's angels. But it does give us a deeper understanding, doesn't it, of that other reading from Paul in Ephesians chapter 6.

There Paul begins in verse 10 of being strong in the Lord. But then he says that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, authorities, powers of the dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm.

Now sometimes I think when we read these verses we can sort of limit the field of battle, can't we? We just think, oh, you know, this is about my spiritual life, the private battles that I have with my inner demons, overcoming sin and temptation or, you know, wrestling with that spirit of my evil boss.

Now, of course, there's an aspect of that to our prayers but actually Paul is saying that we're actually being enlisted and drawn into a much bigger and cosmic battle where King Jesus is at the head of his army.

[26 : 11] And our weapons are not what we think, you know, sort of lightsabers and swords and things like that but the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness. It's our godly witness, God's word and prayer.

And prayer is the thing Paul urges us to do in the spirit, verse 18, because as earthly human beings bound to this earth, that's how we participate in the spiritual battle.

Our prayers, you know, we don't have to pray in very demonstrative or combative ways. All that's needed is for us to pray sincerely with earnestness and humility and trust in God to answer us.

But our simple and feeble prayers have that impact of influencing, if you like, or engaging us in battle in the spiritual realm.

And so whether it's the persecuted church that we pray for, for our brothers and sisters around the world, or someone in our city to become a Christian or brother to repent, our prayers have that impact.

[27 : 25] Because we're asking for God's will to be done, and this is what Jesus taught us with the Lord's Prayer, we're asking for God's will to be done on earth even as it is in heaven.

There's a correspondence, isn't it? Well, let me finish now then by jumping to verse 18 of chapter 9 because there we find one more reason for why these visions are given.

And so we read, again, the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength. Do not be afraid, you are highly esteemed. He said, peace, be strong now, be strong. And when he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, speak my Lord, since you have given me strength.

So he said, do you know why I have come to you? And then he says at the end, I will tell you what is written in the book of truth. So what's being revealed to Daniel is what is in the book of truth.

That is, the book wherein things that will come to pass is being written. That they will come to pass without fail. And why is Daniel being told of this?

[28 : 37] Well, four times we are told that he is being strengthened or asked to be strong. And then once that has occurred, peace is then also declared or given to him.

In other words, God has given us his word to prepare us, to strengthen us, to live in our time, to know his plan and allow that to give us comfort and strength.

Which also gives us peace because once we know what the end will be, our hearts will be settled. We don't have to be afraid of what is going on right now, here and now.

We don't know what the details are exactly leading up to the end, but we know that the end will come. And that end is Jesus being victorious and God's people with him.

And meanwhile, of course, God already says there will be wars and desolation. There will be wickedness. And so even as we pray, let's not give up hope because we know the end is sure.

[29 : 43] But let's not be naive either because even if the war today in the Ukraine should end or the one in the Middle East, Lebanon and Gaza, should come to an end, we mustn't expect then that, oh, okay, now, from now on the world will be such a peaceful or better place.

No, because God has already said that wars are part of what will happen until the end. Desolations are decreed by God.

That's what he says will happen. And that's because as long as the cosmic battle is being played out in heaven, right, the spiritual forces are combating Jesus on the winning side always, it will still spill over into things that are happening in this world.

But let's not be alarmed because as I said, Jesus will be victorious. And because of that, we can know God's peace if we believe in Jesus.

Because when we believe in Jesus, we have our place on his side, the side of victory. And when we pray, we're praying to the God who will secure this victory.

[30 : 57] And so with that comfort, with that knowledge, let's pray to that very God. Let's pray. Father, let our hearts not be troubled by wars or desolation.

Instead, help us to preach peace to all who are seeking it. Not the peace of this world, the peace that only this world can offer, but the peace that comes from Jesus, the Prince of Peace, who has secured this peace by dying for us on the cross, and therefore atoned for all wickedness and brought in everlasting righteousness into his kingdom.

It's in his name, the name of Jesus, that we pray. Amen.