

God's Timetable



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 9.*

Memory Text: “And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years” (*Jeremiah 25:11*).

Daniel, though “greatly beloved” (*vs. 23*) in heaven, identifies himself with his sinful people and asks God to bless them. He intercedes with the Lord for his countrymen still in Babylon.

While Daniel is praying, Gabriel appears and delivers what has been called “the crown jewels” of Old Testament prophecy. Sir Isaac Newton described Daniel 9:24-27 as “the foundation stone of the Christian religion,” because it predicted almost five hundred years in advance not only the time at which the Messiah would appear but also the duration of His public ministry, as well as His atoning death for sin.

In studying this chapter, it is important to remember the links between Daniel 8 and 9. (1) The same angel revisits Daniel (*Dan. 9:21*). (2) Daniel recalls the former vision (*vs. 21*). (3) The command to Gabriel in Daniel 8:16 to give Daniel understanding of the vision is repeated in Daniel 9:23. (4) The time element not explained in Daniel 8 is now the topic of Daniel 9:24-27.

The Week at a Glance: What is the essence of Daniel's prayer? How does Gabriel link what he says to Daniel with the previous chapter? Why is the day/year principle operating here? What is the starting date for the decree? What is the 70-week prophecy all about? What did Jesus accomplish for us at the Cross?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 11.

Daniel's Prayer (*Dan. 9:1-19*).

The first year of Darius was the year 539/538 B.C. Ten years had passed since the vision of chapter 8. During that time, Babylon, the conqueror of Israel, had fallen to the Medo-Persians, but the Jews were still in exile in Babylon.

Read through Daniel's prayer. Where are all the places in the prayer where we can see the need for obedience? As you read, keep in mind James 2:9 and 1 John 3:4. What does this prayer also tell us about the fruits of disobedience? Is disobedience any less serious today than it was in Daniel's time?

One thing that comes through clearly in Daniel's prayer is that Daniel made no attempt to excuse or hide the sins of his people. His confession didn't seem to water down anything; he expressed it as it was. In fact, the chapter is filled with various Hebrew verbs, all denoting different kinds of sin and rebellion. There's an important lesson there for us regarding our prayer life: We must never downplay the seriousness of sin. Hell will be filled with those who did.

If you read Daniel's prayer, you will see that he is asking earnestly for God's mercy for His people. Does he express anything at all that would indicate that God's people deserve this mercy? If not, on what basis does he ask God for it?

Daniel has nothing to offer the Lord for His mercy and forgiveness. All he can do is plead for it "for the Lord's sake" (*Dan. 9:17*), or because of the Lord's "righteousness" (*vs. 16*). This reminds us of Ellen White's words that "our great need is our only claim on God's mercy."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 317. We have, as sinners, nothing to commend us to God. Our only hope is in mercy and grace, as revealed to us at the Cross. Here, and here alone, is our only hope, that which Christ has wrought out for us by His life and then His death. If we could earn God's mercy, or God's grace, in any way, then Christ wouldn't have had to die in order to save us. We could have worked our way out of the sentence of eternal destruction. His death proves our utter inability to do anything to save ourselves.

Keeping in mind the above paragraph, go back through Daniel's prayer. In what ways do you see the gospel expressed there?

A Heavenly Visitor (*Dan. 9:20-24*).

Before Daniel finishes his prayer, the Lord sends an answer. The angel Gabriel, whom Daniel calls “the man Gabriel” (*vs. 21, NKJV*) because he appeared in human form, makes a second visit to Daniel. He first appeared to him ten years earlier, in Daniel 8:16.

What was Gabriel’s mission at this time? *Dan. 9:22, 23.*

When Gabriel says in verse 23, “ ‘Consider the matter, and understand the vision’ ” (*NKJV*), he does not use the general word *chazon*, which refers to the vision as a whole, as in Daniel 8:1, 13 and in Daniel 9:21. Instead, he uses the verb *mareh*, which is used specifically for the vision of the 2,300 days—the only part of chapter 8 that Daniel did not understand. In chapter 8, Gabriel tells Daniel specifically that the vision, the *mareh*, of the 2,300 days was “true” (*Dan. 8:26*), but Daniel says that he didn’t understand that *mareh* (*vs. 27*), that is, the *mareh* about the 2,300 days. An Orthodox Jewish commentary—referring to Gabriel’s words in Daniel 9:23, *NKJV*, “understand the vision [mareh]”—points right back to Daniel 8:14, saying that “this refers to Daniel’s vision in chapter 8 in which the part which disturbed him so (*v. 14*) is characterized in *vs. 16-26* as a [mareh].”—Hersh Goldwurm, *Daniel* (New York: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1979), p. 258.

“Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city” (*Dan. 9:24*). **How long a time period is indicated through the seventy weeks, and what does the phrase “seventy weeks are determined for your people” mean?**

What we have here is more internal proof of the day/year principle. The command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem occurred many centuries before Christ. If taken as literal time, 70 weeks is just a year and a few months, hardly enough time to reach down to Jesus. Application, however, of the day/year principle solves the problem: It covers the time span from the rebuilding of the city to the first advent of Jesus. In short, Jesus proves the validity of the day/year principle.

Meanwhile, the root meaning of the Hebrew word *chatak*, here translated “determined,” is “to cut” or “divide.” The extended meaning is “to determine” or “allot to.” This is the only occurrence of this root in the Hebrew Bible, though it appears in later Jewish writings predominantly as “to cut off.”

The Purpose of the 70 Weeks (*Dan. 9:24*).

What was to be accomplished in the 490-year period? *Dan. 9:24*.

Six purposes are mentioned in this verse. They describe primarily the results of Christ's life and work here on earth:

1. *To finish the transgression.* Transgression refers to the break in relationship between God and humankind. Through His sacrifice on the cross, Jesus brought to an end the broken relationship and restored us to God.

2. *To make an end of sins.* Gabriel here announces that the Messiah would take care of humankind's failures. He would take their sins on Himself and thereby make an end of them.

3. *To make reconciliation for iniquity.* "Iniquity" is sin as in a perversion of what is right. Through the atoning sacrifice on the cross, Jesus Christ took care of sin in all its forms.

4. *To bring in everlasting righteousness.* Through the Fall, humanity has become unrighteous. The Messiah, says Gabriel, will bring in a righteousness from God that will be everlasting for those who make it their own through faith that results in obedience.

5. *To seal up vision and prophecy.* The idea of sealing here doesn't mean "in the sense of 'shutting up,' but of 'confirming,' or 'ratifying.'" The fulfillment of the predictions connected with the first coming of the Messiah at the time specified in the prophecy gives assurance that the other features of the prophecy, notably the 2300 prophetic days, will be as precisely fulfilled."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 852.

6. *To anoint the Most Holy.* Temples were anointed to inaugurate their services (*see Exod. 40:9*). The anointing foretold in this verse points to the inauguration of Christ's priestly ministry in the heavenly temple after His ascension (*Heb. 9:21*).

Thus, what we see here is clearly a prophecy, not only about the time of Jesus but about what His work will accomplish. And though this is a prophecy about His first coming, and though this prophecy applies in a direct manner to the Jewish nation as a whole, it gives inklings of the Second Coming, as well, because all that Jesus did at the First Coming finds its ultimate fulfillment in the Second. Perhaps that's also why this prophecy is so clearly tied to the cleansing of the sanctuary, an event that leads directly to the second coming of Christ.

Look up the texts below, in light of this prophecy regarding the Cross. What do they, along with Daniel 9:24, teach us about what Jesus has done for us at Calvary? After reading all the texts, write out a paragraph that explains what Christ did for us. *Isa. 53:5; Rom. 5:11, 17; 2 Cor. 5:19; Phil. 3:9; Heb. 2:9.*

Messiah the Prince (*Dan. 9:25*).

Daniel 9:25 states that from the “ ‘decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince’ ” (*NASB*) would be 69 weeks, or 483 years. What date do we apply to this decree, and why?

Various dates have been given for this decree, including 538 B.C., 520 B.C., and 457 B.C. Let's look quickly at all three.

For starters, suppose someone were to accept the 538 B.C. date as the starting point. From the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (538 B.C.) unto Messiah the Prince, Jesus, would be 483 years (we're using the day/year principle, because the text demands it). Going 483 years from 538 B.C. reaches to what? 55 B.C.—a date that in no way fits the time of Christ's earthly ministry.

Try 520 B.C. If that's the starting point of the decree, and we go 483 years later, what date do we arrive at, and why is that date unworkable?

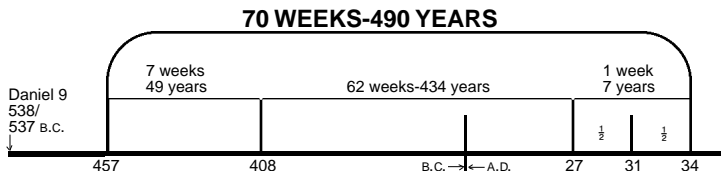
If, however, we go with the 457 B.C. date, the numbers bring us right to the time of Christ. This decree was given by Artaxerxes I, and it provided for the restoration of complete civil, judicial, and religious authority of Jews in their homeland (*see Ezra 7:11-28*).

It's obvious that both the Jews and their enemies understood the decree to mean the rebuilding of the city. In *Ezra 4:7-13* (the events in *Ezra* are not in chronological order), a group of Persian officers wrote to King Artaxerxes, complaining about the Jews who were rebuilding Jerusalem. In the letter, they stated two important points: (1) that the city was being rebuilt (*Ezra 4:12*) and that (2) the Jews who were rebuilding had come there because of the king. Said the letter, “the Jews which came up *from thee* to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city” (*vs. 12, emphasis supplied*). In other words, the Jews who were rebuilding the city had come there because of King Artaxerxes, and the only decree issued by the king that sent the Jews back to Jerusalem was issued in the seventh year of his reign, the one shown in *Ezra 7*, a date that can be established as 457 B.C.

Starting with year 457 B.C., what date will you come to 483 years later? (Remember: There is no such thing as “A.D. zero”! so, when you reach zero in the time line of history, continue counting from A.D. 1.) Answer: A.D. 27. Why is 457 B.C. the only date that works? Dwell on this amazing prophecy. It would be equivalent to someone in the time of Martin Luther predicting the exact year Gerhard Schroder would be elected chancellor of Germany. What does this prophecy tell us about the power of God?

“In the Midst of the Week” (*Dan. 9:24-27*).

Review the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27. Look at the chart below while you study:



From the “ ‘command to restore and build Jerusalem,’ ” (457 B.C.) to “ ‘Messiah the Prince’ ” (*vs. 25, NKJV*) was 483 years, or 69 weeks (7 weeks and 62 weeks; *see verse 25*). This comes out to A.D. 27 (eliminate the year zero, which will extend the number one year later), when Jesus began His earthly ministry.

Thus, this covers 69 of the 70 weeks. All that remains is the 70th week, the final seven years.

Meanwhile, in A.D. 31, “in the midst of the [last] week,” Jesus died, and the veil in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (*Matt. 27:50, 51*), indicating the end of the earthly ceremonial system. All those countless animal sacrifices for all those long centuries, from Adam and Eve onward, now found their complete fulfillment in Jesus (*Heb. 10:4*). Here, in human flesh, the Lord took upon Himself the sins of the world, in order that every human being, no matter how sinful, could find forgiveness, healing, and the promise of eternal life (*Rom. 6:23, 1 John 5:11*).

The prophecy says that the Messiah will “confirm the covenant with many for one week.” What does that mean, and when does it end?

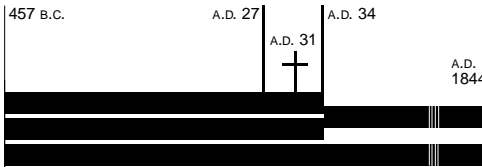
Our basic understanding of this, the end of the final week, is the covenant relationship between the Lord and national Israel. After that week (which comes to A.D. 34, and which we tie to the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7), the new covenant promises (*Jer. 31:31-34*) went to the church, which—composed of Jews (the natural branch) and Gentiles (the wild branch)—became an extension of Israel (*Rom. 11:17-21*) and continued with the work of teaching the world about the true God, the Creator and Redeemer.

The prophecy (*vs. 26*) says that the Messiah shall be cut off, but “not for himself.” For whom, then, was He “cut off,” and how does that answer capture the essence of the gospel?

Further Study: Read the chapter entitled “The Kingdom of God Is at Hand” in Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 231–235.

In Daniel 8, the only part of the vision that Daniel didn’t understand was the *mareh* of the 2,300 days (vs. 26, 27). In Daniel 9, the same angel interpreter who appeared to him in Daniel 8 (vs. 16) appears to him again (*Dan. 9:21*) and promises to give him “skill and understanding” (vs. 22). The last time Daniel needed skill and understanding was in regard to the *mareh* of the 2,300 days (*Dan. 8:26, 27*). Gabriel, then, in Daniel 9:23 says to Daniel: “consider the [*mareh*]”—obviously the *mareh* of the 2,300 days that he didn’t understand. The *mareh*, of course, was a time prophecy, and the first thing that Gabriel gives to Daniel is another time

prophecy, one that is “cut off.” Cut off from what? Obviously the larger time prophecy, the *mareh* of the 2,300 days.



- 457 B.C. Persian King Artaxerxes commands rebuilding of Jerusalem (Daniel 9:25, Ezra 7:11-16).
- A.D. 27 Baptism of Jesus; Jesus begins to preach and teach.
- A.D. 31 Messiah “cut off in the midst of the week” after $3\frac{1}{2}$ years. of ministry (Daniel 9:26, 27, Matthew 27:60, 61, Mark 16:33-39).
- A.D. 34 Stoning of Stephen; Gospel introduced to the Gentiles (Daniel 9:34, Acts 7:54-60, 9:15).
- A.D. 1844 End of the 2,300-year prophecy; Investigative judgment begins.

Thus, we have two time prophecies placed closely together, one larger than the other and the smaller “cut off” from the larger.

With the starting point given in the decree to restore and

rebuild Jerusalem in 457 B.C., we arrive 2,300 years later at 1844.

Discussion Question:

We saw in lesson 8 that the judgment scene in Daniel 7 (which is the same thing as the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8) came after the 1,260-year period of the little-horn persecution. Because the little horn first came to prominence in the sixth century, 1,260 years would come to the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. The judgment would begin after that. How do these numbers fit in with the date 1844, arrived at from Daniel 8 and 9? How does the answer help confirm that our understanding of the prophecy is correct?

Summary: Daniel in his prayer identified himself with his people and petitioned God for them. In response God sent the angel Gabriel, who explained to Daniel that the Messiah would come at a specified time to reconcile humanity with God. How interesting, too, that this—the most crucial prophecy concerning Jesus—is just part of the larger prophecy, the one about the 2,300 years.

Newspaper Editor Finds Peace

Ch. Victor Sam

Abanidas (AH-bah-nee-DAHS) bounced along in the bus from Calcutta to Arambagh (AH-ram-BAHG), India, enjoying the passing scenery. Suddenly, he had an impression that the bus was going to be involved in an accident. He closed his eyes and prayed, “Lord Jesus, please protect us.”

Minutes later the bus collided with another vehicle, throwing passengers out of their seats. When all the passengers were safely out of the bus, Abanidas looked at the weeping, bleeding passengers. Everyone had been hurt except him. He was the only one without a single scratch, cut, bruise, or broken bone. Abanidas whispered a prayer of thanks to the Lord, who had saved him, the God he had just come to know and love a few months earlier.

Abanidas was a newspaper editor living in a village about 100 kilometers (60 miles) north of Calcutta, India. For 32 years he had been a teacher, then he settled down to the quieter life of an editor. However, the change of job did not bring him the peace and satisfaction that he had expected.

“I had many severe difficulties in my life,” says Abanidas. “I had family problems, village problems, political problems, and work problems. I could find no solution to my problems and was in deep distress of mind. I had hoped to find peace, but it eluded me. I felt adrift in an ocean of despair with no hope for the future.”

It was at this time that Abanidas discovered a small group of people worshipping in a nearby house each Saturday morning. He noticed that the worshippers seemed to have a peace about them that he was longing to find for his own life. He began to attend and to listen to the teachings of the Bible.

“Finally, in God’s Word I found the peace and solution to all of my problems,” Abanidas testifies. “I found salvation and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. I decided to keep the Sabbath, be baptized, and to prepare for Christ’s coming.” He was baptized with some 2,000 other new believers in a mass baptism in Calcutta in 1999.

Shortly after his baptism, Abanidas felt called to serve God full time. He resigned his job to become a Global Mission pioneer, and today he is helping others find the peace that he had searched for, the peace that only Jesus Christ can bring.

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