

## ***God's Countdown to the Cross (Daniel 9:1-20)***

### **I. When Heaven's Plans Require Earth's Prayer**

**1** These things happened during the first year Darius son of Xerxes was king over Babylon. He was a descendant of the Medes. **2** During his first year of rule, I, Daniel, was studying the Scriptures and noticed that according to the word Yahweh had revealed to the prophet Jeremiah, seventy years must pass while Jerusalem lay in ruins. **3** Then I turned my heart to the Lord God, seeking an answer from him, pleading for mercy with fasting, wearing sackcloth, and sitting among ashes.

**(Daniel 9:1-3 TPT)**

This section marks the beginning of a third heavenly encounter Daniel received toward the end of his life. The first two came as the Babylonian Empire was about to fall. Daniel was shown the coming of *the Son of the Man* as well as the coming of two different leaders from future empires who would aggressively resist God's purposes—and fail.

For this encounter, Persia is now in control. The silver part of Nebuchadnezzar's statue has finally come into power (or the bear with three ribs, or the ram with two horns). Cyrus is the Emperor and King Darius is set in charge over the defeated territory of Babylon.

Daniel is still in his 80s and has recently been promoted to a position of great power in this new administration. We learned this from chapter 6 and the story of Daniel and the lion's den. Daniel has been promoted to one of the top three leadership positions in the nation and will soon face political opposition and persecution.

In this scene, Daniel is engaging with God's Word in prayer, and during this time he will receive one of the most powerful prophetic messages yet. He will be given the most accurate information about the Messiah ever—information so accurate that it is one of the absolute proofs of the inspiration of Scripture...

Daniel is reading the words of Jeremiah:

**11** 'This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. **12** 'Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,' declares the LORD, 'for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation.

**(Jeremiah 25:11-12)**

This all came to pass. King Nebuchadnezzar came to power when Daniel was a young man and now, about 70 years later, Daniel is watching God fulfill his word of bringing Babylon down.

But Daniel keeps reading the scrolls of Jeremiah and discovers a promise which has become a beacon of hope for God's people down through every age:

**10 "For thus says the LORD, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. 11 'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.  
(Jeremiah 29:10-11)**

Daniel is reading this and realizing the time has come for this promise to manifest. But he also understands that heaven's plans require an earthly participation. Daniel is an earthly steward of God's Kingdom. He knows it's part of his calling to pray for heaven's will to be done.

No doubt, this prayer absolutely agitated the powers of darkness and led them to instigate Persian leaders to silence Daniel. Hence, this is the spiritual backdrop of the lion's den story.

- **Note:** Daniel's political adversaries did not care about his prayers. They were just jealous of him and wanted him dead. It was the spiritual powers that cared about Daniel's prayers and simply used jealous people to stop him. This is how the enemy works. The will of hell also needs earthly participation; thus, the enemy uses insecurity and fear in people to inflict damage on their targets.

These leaders incite the king to put a legal stop to any prayers being uttered. Daniel refuses to stop praying and declaring God's promise, even if it means getting killed.

So, the powers of the spiritual realm attempt to stop him, but this very act ends up being turning around against them. Daniel emerges from the lion's den and the jealous anti-Israel leadership around him gets thrown to the lions instead—which most likely helped open the way politically for the people of Israel to start returning to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

We learned all this in chapter six. *Daniel, as an intercessor, becomes part of the very answer he was praying for.*

In the midst of this, he also becomes a sign of the Messiah who went into the pit of death and rolled away the stone in his resurrection, defeating all the powers of hell forever. *This* is the very thing that is going to be revealed to Daniel during this particular heavenly encounter.

## **II. The Shadow of Law, the Light of *Hesed***

Standing on this prophetic promise and understanding the times and seasons of his nation—that it was time for restoration and healing—Daniel begins his prayer:

**4 I prayed to Yahweh, my God, and made this confession: “My Lord, you are the great and awesome God who faithfully keeps your covenant of love with those who love you and keep your commands.**

**(Daniel 9:4 TPT)**

Everything in prayer and in seeing change in the world begins with God’s covenantal love. This is how Daniel starts his prayer (*and it’s why a revival of communion is at the heart of seeing restoration in the nations today*). He remembers God’s covenant of love.

The word for love in Hebrew is *hesed*. This is a word filled with layers of meaning and so it is hard to translate into one English term. It’s often rendered “loving-kindness,” but it also carries the meaning of “trustworthy love” or “unwavering and endless love.”

When King Jehosaphat marched in battle in 2 Chronicles 20, this is what the worshippers were declaring at the beginning of their march: ***God’s hesed endures forever.***

This is the trustworthy and eternal love that was poured out at the cross with the coming of a *New Covenant*. With this New Covenant, we look back and read Daniel’s prayer differently. God doesn’t just keep his covenant with those who love him—he pours out his love even on his enemies.

Daniel and all the prophets of the Old Covenant did not fully understand the love of Israel’s God. Jesus would come and reveal this love. He also *became a covenant* between us and the Father. This means all humanity is forever linked to God through Christ who stands on our behalf. He is the true Intercessor between heaven and earth—so Daniel continues to be a foreshadow of him.

As an intercessor, Daniel takes on the sin of the nation in the prayer. This is him foreshadowing Christ. Daniel identifies with the sin of his people, which is exactly what Jesus did in the New Covenant:

**5 Yet we have sinned, acted wickedly, and done evil; we have rebelled and turned aside from your laws and commands ... 8 Yes, Yahweh, we are all clothed with shame—our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against you. 9 In spite of all that, Lord, our God, you are filled with compassion and overflow with forgiveness, even though we have openly rebelled against you.**

**(Daniel 9:5, 8-9 TPT)**

Again, Daniel is giving us a picture of Christ’s intercession on our behalf. In this particular moment in history, Daniel is also going to war with the powers and principalities who bring destruction to God’s people through accusation. The devil and his angels accuse humanity of breaking the law and inflict damage through our guilt.

Daniel is coming against this by appealing to God's *hesed*—his unwavering and endless love that is greater than our sins. He is calling for mercy to triumph over the destruction that Israel's sin has opened the door to.

In the New Covenant, we understand that God does not steal, kill, and destroy his people—the devil does (John 10:10). God is the author of life, not death. This isn't as clear in the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant mindset looked at God as the One who came in and pillaged Jerusalem, orphaned children, raped women, killed young and old.

Here's an example in Daniel's prayer of the Old Covenant mindset:

**13 As the law of Moses warns, this calamity came upon us in full measure. And even now, Yahweh, we have not sought to please you, our God, by turning away from our wickedness and following your ways of truth. 14 Yahweh, you have waited for the right moment to unleash this calamity upon us. Yahweh, our God, you are just and right in all that you have done, for we defiantly ignored your voice.**

**(Daniel 9:13-14 TPT)**

Daniel is living in the age of the Old Covenant, where we are blessed or cursed based on what we do or do not do. But even still, light is shining through his life, because he is reaching out for mercy.

In the next verse he mentions God's deliverance in Egypt:

**15 "And now, Lord our God, you delivered your people out of the land of Egypt with mighty power...**

**(Daniel 9:15)**

This is when the Passover Lamb was slain to deliver the people from a foreign empire. Now, the people are in Babylon and Daniel is appealing to this same truth. He is appealing to the power of the blood covenant—and the love that it reveals (even though that love wouldn't be fully known until the coming of Messiah).

Then he closes up his prayer with this:

**17 And now, our God, I am your servant and I beg you, please—answer my prayers. Make your face to shine upon your ruined temple so that everyone will know that you are Lord.**

**18 Turn your heart to hear my prayer, O my God. Listen to my cry and please look carefully and see our despair and the devastated city, which bears your name. We bring our requests to you and ask for your mercy, not because we deserve it but because of your extravagant, infinite love.**

**(Daniel 9:17-18 TPT)**

Daniel asks for the face of God to shine down on the ruins of Jerusalem. As an intercessor, he is bearing the sins of the people and calling for mercy to triumph over the enemy's destruction (which is why the enemy hates his prayers and wants him in a lion's den).

In reality, Daniel has no idea how God is going to one day fully answer this prayer. The face of God would be revealed in an infant child who would grow up to bear a cross for the sins of the world. This Anointed One would unveil the meaning of all the blood sacrifices and covenants, fulfilling and completing the entire law and bring the age of the Old Covenant to an end.

This is what will be mysteriously revealed to Daniel next...

### **III. The Prophecy of 70 x 7 and the Finished Work**

In response to this prayer, Daniel has an encounter with an angel:

**20 While I was absorbed in prayer, confessing my sins and the sins of my people Israel and presenting my request before Yahweh, my God, on behalf of Jerusalem, his holy hill—21 Gabriel, whom I had seen in a vision previously, came flying down from heaven. He touched me at the time of the evening sacrifice.**

**22 He gave me understanding and said to me, “Daniel, I have come from heaven to impart insight and understanding concerning this prophecy.**

**23 As soon as you began to pray, God gave you an answer, for you are a precious treasure to God! Now, carefully consider the message and understand the revelation of the vision.”**  
**(Daniel 9:20-23 TPT)**

It seems as though God has come to interrupt Daniel's prayer. (*“While I was absorbed in prayer, confessing my sins and the sins of my people...”*)

This is reminiscent of two different stories in Scripture. First, when the prophet Isaiah had a heavenly encounter before the throne of God where he became overwhelmed by his own inadequacy and brokenness. Isaiah began confessing his sins and the sins of the people around him, when an angel comes and takes a coal from the altar and touches his lips. Isaiah is told: ***“Your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for.” (Isaiah 6:7).***

Isaiah hears this during the Old Covenant, before the coming of Christ. But he is standing before the eternal God who *is* the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13).

The other story is the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. Jesus tells a mixed group of sinners and religious leaders the story of a wayward son who rebelled and left home but ends up realizing his errors and decides to return.

On the way, he prepares a whole speech confessing his wrongs and inadequacies. But before he can get out all the words he prepared, his father sees him, runs to him, and cuts him off with a hug and fully embraces him.

This is all pointing to the eternal, trustworthy *hesed* of God—which is the truth of who he is. This covenantal love outshines and overpowers all our sin and brokenness.

So, Daniel is confessing sin and Gabriel cuts him off, touches him, and says: ***As soon as you began to pray, God gave you an answer, for you are a precious treasure to God!*** This is just like the angel putting a coal on Isaiah's mouth, purifying his lips to speak according to the truth.

Amazingly, this answer from Gabriel comes to him *"at the time of the evening sacrifice."* This is not by accident. The evening sacrifice took place at what was called the ninth hour (3:00pm for us). This is same time the Messiah would die on the cross (Matthew 27:46)

This ushers us into the revelation Gabriel is going to bring Daniel:

**24 "God has decreed for your people and for the holy city a period of seventy times seven for these reasons: to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to cancel guilt, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to confirm the prophetic vision, and to anoint the Most Holy One. (Daniel 9:24 TPT)**

Gabriel says that in a period of time consisting of *seventy times seven*, God will bring forth complete salvation from sin.

The phrase *seventy times seven* means two things. It is literal and spiritual. Spiritually speaking, seven is the number of fullness. "Seventy times seven" is complete and utter fullness. *Complete completion!*

Completion of what? In the New Testament, Peter asks Jesus how often we should forgive someone who sins against us. "Should I do it seven times?" he asks. Jesus answers: "*Seventy times seven*" (Matthew 18:22).

In other words: *Peter, forgive **completely** just like your heavenly Father.*

The New Testament also tells us that Jesus came in **the fullness of time** (Galatians 4:4). The fullness of time is the moment when what was already true in eternity (what Isaiah saw and heard in the heavenly realm) became manifest in time and space. This is when the eternal *hesed* of God—the God who was already the Lamb slain before we ever sinned—would come and incarnate himself into the world and release his perfect love by dying for us in time and space.

Thus, Gabriel is speaking of a fullness of forgiveness—and also a fullness of time. With this, he is speaking of a literal countdown here...

## IV. Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> Week: The World's Redemption

Gabriel—who is the same angel who would announce the birth of Christ to Mary—gives an answer to Daniel that is greater than what he is asking or even imagining.

Daniel has been praying for Israel's own "fullness of time." About seventy years have passed, and it is now time for restoration and hope to come to the nation. Gabriel comes to confirm that this is going to happen; *however*, there is a greater redemption and a greater "fullness of time" yet to come—and it will be in "seventy times seven" years.

In other words, the *Wonderful Numberer* we learned about in chapter 8 is speaking of something greater than the restoration of Jerusalem. He is speaking of God releasing a perfect forgiveness and grace to all humanity, which will manifest in exactly 490 years from a specific starting point:

**25 "So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.  
(Daniel 9:25)**

The seventy weeks are broken up into three parts: seven weeks, sixty-two weeks, and a final week. Over the years, most students of Daniel have understood these "weeks" representing seven-year periods of time. In verse 24, Gabriel said there are seventy weeks until transgression will be finished, sin will be completely atoned for, etc. In verse 25, he says the Messiah will come after a period of "seven weeks" and "sixty-two" weeks.

In other words, at the end of the 69<sup>th</sup> week—beginning of the 70<sup>th</sup> (a final seven-year period)—the Messiah will start his work of redemption.

Gabriel also says Jerusalem will be built again, but it will happen *in times of distress*. So, the angel is affirming that Jerusalem will be restored, but there is a bigger picture unfolding. There will be a lot of persecution and distress along the way. When we read books like Ezra and Nehemiah, we see this prophecy unfold as the nation of Israel began to be restored over many years.

The book of Ezra is especially important as it mentions two formal "decrees" that went out for Jerusalem to be restored. The first was from King Cyrus, the first ruler of Persia. The second was from King Artaxerxes, one of his successors. Gabriel said if you count from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild, there will be 69 weeks (or 483 years) until the Messiah comes. At the end of the last seven years, the 490<sup>th</sup> year, the work of redemption will be finished.

The decree of Artaxerxes to restore Jerusalem was done in 458 BC.<sup>1</sup> The text suggests that this happened in the spring, right before Passover (Ezra 7:9). If we count 490 years forward, we arrive exactly in the spring of 33 AD—the most likely date of Christ’s death and resurrection. (See *Addendum* for further discussion on this.)

The Anointed One was crucified exactly 490 years from the decree of a Persian King to restore Jerusalem. *This is beyond coincidence and one of the great pieces of evidence for the Bible’s inspiration.*

- **Note:** Some will argue that we should count from the first decree of Cyrus, which was the first formal decree for people to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. However, if you start with this decree, the math doesn’t work. Yet, the decree from Artaxerxes is specifically focused on the call for Levites to return to their work in offering sacrifices at the altar in Jerusalem (Ezra 7:11-26). *In this decree, the king specifically asked for a sacrifice to be made for him.* Thus, this decree fits beautifully with the coming of the Anointed One who would become the final sacrifice for all sin.

Gabriel goes on to give some more specific insight, which has spurred much controversy and differing opinions over the years.

**26 "Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.**

**27 "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate."**

**(Daniel 9:26-27)**

This is considered one of the most difficult passages in Scripture to translate. The Messiah is cut off—a clear prophecy about the Anointed One will be killed in the 70<sup>th</sup> week. It also says the city and its sanctuary will be destroyed.

Many people see in this passage a combination of several future things. They see the work of Antiochus IV, Nero/Rome, and the Messiah altogether.

Antiochus IV is the one who put a stop to sacrifice and set up the “abomination” in the temple. The Romans were the ones who put a complete stop to sacrifice by destroying the temple and the entire city. We’ve discussed how these were all connected with *antichrist* agendas.

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<sup>1</sup> Some records indicate the decree might have been issued a year earlier (457 BC), which would place the 490<sup>th</sup> year in AD 32. If true, it remains a remarkable indicator of the time of Christ’s crucifixion.



This could certainly be part of the prophecy as though it's multi-layered. However, the true Christ is the One who would put a pure stop to sacrifice. When Jesus died on the cross, sacrifice was finished as he enacted a new covenant.

One could argue this started 3 ½ years prior when Jesus was baptized by John.<sup>2</sup> Jesus would then minister for 3 ½ years and in the Spring of 33 AD (the end of the 70<sup>th</sup> week if we count from Artaxerxes decree), he would be presented as the Lamb of God on Passover.

Jesus's death was the true "abomination" that brought destruction to the enemy—and set in motion the destruction of Jerusalem 40 years later. The Roman armies entering Jerusalem and burning down the temple would be the abomination as well (see Matthew 24:15).

Despite all the layers of mystery in this prophetic message, it is clear that Gabriel is announcing the finished work of the Messiah. The 70<sup>th</sup> week has come—the fullness of time has already manifested. We are in a new age of righteousness and peace with God!

But we enter into this new Kingdom realm *by faith*. The Old Covenant was an age of works. The New Covenant is an age of faith. (The next age will involve the full unveiling of heavenly realities on earth.)

Those who awaken to the Messiah today take hold of Gabriel's message by faith. We believe:

***Transgression is finished! Our sin has been put to death with Christ's sacrifice. Guilt is cancelled. Everlasting righteousness has come. All the prophecy and visions of the Old Testament have been fulfilled in Christ. He is the Most Holy One who is anointed as the King of the universe!***

We are called to embrace what Isaiah saw and heard in heaven. :

**Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord Almighty,  
The whole earth is full of His glory!  
(Isaiah 6:3)**

This is true reality—heaven's perspective—and we are invited to enter in today.

## **Follow-up Encounter:**

*Make communion extra special. Invite some friends and have a love feast—eat, drink, and celebrate the **complete finished** work of Christ. Set apart time to worship. Read Daniel 9:24 in the*

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<sup>2</sup> Some believe Jesus was baptized on the Day of Atonement in the Fall of 29 AD (which would be halfway through the 70<sup>th</sup> "week"). In this view, Jesus was presented as the perfect sacrifice—this time as the sacrificial goat from the Day of Atonement that went into the wilderness (Leviticus 16:22 & Mark 1:9-12). From heaven's standpoint all sacrifices were declared meaningless at this public appearance of the Messiah. See *Addendum* for further discussion.

*Passion Translation and begin thanking the Lord for accomplishing all these things! Like he did with Isaiah and Daniel, ask the Lord to touch your heart and lips with the coal of revelation-truth.*

## ➤ **Addendum: Further Discussion on Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> Week**

We have put forth a particular interpretation of Daniel's seventy weeks beginning with Artaxerxes' decree recorded in Ezra 7, dated to 458 BC. Unlike Cyrus' earlier command that focused on temple reconstruction, this decree authorized Ezra to re-establish covenantal law and worship in Jerusalem—language that strongly echoes Daniel's vision of a "word going out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem" (Dan. 9:25). This decree was also about restoring sacrifices in Jerusalem, which fits with the sacrificial culmination of Daniel's 70 weeks.

Counting forward 483 years (69 "weeks" of years) from 458 BC brings us to the spring of AD 26, the conclusion of the sixty-ninth week. Remarkably, this timing corresponds with the period when some believe Jesus turned thirty years old—the biblical age of priestly maturity (Numbers 4:3). The timing suggests a divinely appointed readiness for His public ministry.<sup>3</sup>

According to this framework, the seventieth week begins in AD 26. *Halfway through the week—3½ years later, is the fall of AD 29.* Remarkably, this lines up with what some propose as the time of Jesus's baptism. It is believed that this occurred on the Day of Atonement, with profound symbolic resonance: at His baptism He was declared God's beloved Son, and like the scapegoat of Leviticus 16, He was driven into the wilderness to bear the sins of the people. In this way, Christ became the true and final atonement.

The second half of the week stretches another 3 ½ years. This brings us to the *spring of AD 33*, when Jesus was crucified at Passover. The "cutting off" of the Anointed One (Daniel 9:26) aligns with His sacrificial death, which the Gospels note occurred "at the time of the evening sacrifice" (Matt. 27:45–46). Thus, the seventieth week is seen as wholly Christ-centered: inaugurated at His coming of age, marked at its midpoint by His baptism and wilderness testing, and completed by His atoning death.

Other perspectives on Daniel's prophecy exist. Some interpreters prefer to begin the countdown not with Ezra's decree in 458 BC, but with Nehemiah's mission in 445/444 BC, counting "prophetic years" (based on a lunar calendar) of 360 days. This scheme famously places the end of the sixty-ninth week at Jesus' triumphal entry or crucifixion in AD 33.

Others, particularly critical scholars, view the prophecy as fulfilled in the era of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (2nd century BC), with the seventieth week describing the desecration and eventual rededication of the temple. It should also be noted that many dispensational believers feel the

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<sup>3</sup> This timeline connects with theories over Christ's birth in 5 BC. Since Herod died in 4 BC, we know he was most likely born before then. There are also ancient records of a comet appearing in the sky for weeks on end during this time, which could have certainly been the celestial object leading the Magi to their destination.

“70<sup>th</sup> week” is a future time when an antichrist figure will go into a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem and commit an abomination in the Most Holy Place. This will usher in a 3 ½ year period of global tribulation before the second coming of Christ.

Nonetheless, the Ezra 7 timeline offers a uniquely Christ-centered reading: one that not only encompasses Jesus’ ministry years but also highlights the profound correspondence between Daniel’s prophecy, the rhythms of Israel’s calendar, and the climactic events of the Gospel.