

# "Why Prophecy Matters"

## *Daniel 9*

Mentioning the word prophecy to Christians can get as wide a variety of responses from rolling one's eyes to salivating! And I understand. On one spectrum you have those who see predictive prophecy as only causing division, fanciful and full of visions we can't understand. To be honest our lack of interest in prophecy may have resulted from bad teaching like date-setting or fear mongering. That can turn anyone off and just choose to ignore it and say 'I know Jesus is coming back and that's all that matters.' Sounds spiritual but its not a biblical answer.

But making predictive prophecy your sole focus isn't biblical either. We need to be balanced people and most of us would probably rather ignore it then study it. But the Bible is full of predictive prophecy so we can't just ignore it.

A lot of people make the mistake that if they just study Revelation they'll have it all figured out. Wrong. Revelation is the last book of the Bible and the Bible builds on itself over time. God reveals His plan over the course of the writing of Scripture. The only way you can understand the book of Revelation is if you have a foundational understanding of God's plan as He gradually laid out it out in the Old Testament. And then Jesus adds some more in the gospels and Paul and Peter add some more in their letters and then John writes Revelation giving us more details about the end. But if you don't have the basic framework, you don't know how it fits together. If you don't build the outside edge of a puzzle first, you'll have a lot of difficulty figuring where the pieces go.

So why does prophecy matter? What practical wisdom can we gain from it and how does it affect the way we live now? Let me ask you a question: is time going backwards or forwards? Forwards. Is your life moving toward the future? Yes.

When we're commanded in the Bible not to be anxious or afraid, are we commanded not to be afraid or anxious about the past or the future? Every day we live looking forward. Whether its to go to work (or come home from work), whether it's a visit with family or friends, whether its grocery shopping so you can eat in the future, whether it's a vacation, retirement ... whatever it is, we live looking forward all the time. And if God has a forward plan for the world and for us, should we not be living forward for God's plans and purposes? All Scripture is God-breathed and useful to train us so we're better equipped for every good work. So let's pray that our time studying predictive prophecy will help us do just that.

The best way to understand prophecy is to read the text. We keep trying to read into it and not what it actually says. Or we look for some way to generalize it or apply it before we know what it means. Let's allow the text to help us see what God is actually saying. Daniel 9:20-27 is the most important passage in the Bible to help us understand prophecy. Yet it comes to us as an answer to prayer from 9:1-19. Daniel gives the context in vv.1-2,

*In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom—<sup>2</sup> 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.*

Here is perhaps the most crucial point to understand about prophecy:

# The Prophets Believed God's Promises Literally

## (9:1-2)

What's Daniel doing? He's definitely reading Jeremiah and possibly Isaiah also. Why? Because God said through both Jeremiah and Isaiah that first Assyria would capture the Northern tribes of Israel – and they did in 722 BC – and that Babylon would overthrow Assyria – and they did in 611 BC – and that if Judah didn't repent of their sinful disregard for God's Word, Babylon would take them away to Babylon – which they did, three separate times.

The first time in 605 BC, which is where the book of Daniel begins with Daniel and his three friends having recently arrived in Babylon as Nebuchadnezzar's prisoners. Nebuchadnezzar took King Jehoiakim along with the most gifted young people to Babylon where he trained these young men to serve in his government. He sought to change everything about them – even their religion – but Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego remained faithful to God.

And Daniel reads Jeremiah 25 and 29 where God told Jeremiah to tell the Jewish exiles that their time in Babylon will last 70 years. Now it's the 1<sup>st</sup> year of Darius the Mede's reign (538). What happened to Babylon? Dan. 5. Nebuchadnezzar died in 562, his grandson now sits on the throne and in his arrogance throws a party and asks that they use the golden chalices that grandpa stole from the temple praises the gods of gold, silver, bronze, wood, iron and stone. God has had enough of this, and suddenly the fingers of a hand appear and write a message on the palace wall for everyone there to see (thousands) and has a message for Belshazzar and Babylon which reads,

*Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. <sup>27</sup> Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. <sup>28</sup> Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."*

Two verses later we read "That very night Belshazzar was slain and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of 62.

Back in Dan. 2, early in Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that only Daniel can interpret and in the dream Nebuchadnezzar sees a statue with a head of gold, arms of silver, belly of bronze and legs of iron, which Daniel tells him depict consecutive world empires beginning with Babylon as gold, Medes and Persians as the two arms of silver, Greece and then Rome. And then in Ch. 4 Nebuchadnezzar has another dream about an angelic messenger announcing that a large tree (represents himself) be cut down and left on the ground where God says 'He' (Neb) will be drenched on the ground and live like an animal for 7 years until he repents. Daniel explains it, tells Neb to repent now so it won't happen, but he doesn't. One day he's walking around his palace boasting about all that he's accomplished even after the warning from Daniel, the miracle of his 3 friends who he threw in the fire in Ch. 3 and the revealed dream in Ch. 2. And immediately he's on all fours, eating grass like an animal and this lasts for 7 years.

Why do I go over all that? Because Daniel (who is now in his early 80's) believes in the literal promises of God. So, when Darius shows up that night Daniel is seeing the word of God come true because God said in Ch. 2 (and resaid it again in Ch. 7 and 8) that Medes and Persians would defeat Babylon. And he had already witnessed the Word coming true about Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation. And he just saw the hand on the wall and God saying to Belshazzar, you're finished. So Daniel reads Jeremiah where God said Israel's captivity would only last 70 years and he's been marking his calendar and it's year 68. Why? The prophets believed that what God promised would happen, or

how something would happen or when something would happen they took God literally. And guess what, it happened the way and the when God said it would happen.

Is this not a good lesson for all of us who study the Bible and want to know as much as possible about the future promises of God, that what God said will happen and where God said it will happen and when God said it will happen, then it will happen as God said. That's called living by faith. I heard a message in the last year where the speaker was in one of the psalms and the psalm speaks about peace and a future for Israel and he sadly said, 'Well since we don't see this today we know it can't be true.'

No. The message of God to the people of Israel and the church is almost always, 'Yes these things will happen for you in the future even though it looks bad now'. Live by faith believe in the literal promises of God who is able to do immeasurably more abundantly beyond all that we can ask or imagine (Eph. 3:21).

Now, Daniel knew that 70 years was almost up and that the Medes and Persians had overthrown Babylon as God said it would happen, what does he do while waiting for the 70 years to be up?

## **Daniel Prays that God's Promises Would Come True** **(9:3-19)**

Daniel summarized what he was praying about in v.20 "*confessing my sin and the sin of the people Israel and making my request to the LORD my God for His holy hill*" (v.20). Daniel knows that if they are to return to the land of Israel they better be ready and obey God's Word this time. Prophecy isn't meant solely to inform us but to transform us;

### ***We need to be spiritually ready (vv.3-11a)***

We see this everywhere in Scripture. Look at 1 Pet. 4:7-12,

*<sup>7</sup> The end of all things is near. Therefore, be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can **pray**. <sup>8</sup> Above all, **love each other deeply**, because love covers over a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup> Offer **hospitality** to one another without grumbling. <sup>10</sup> Each one should **use whatever gift** he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. <sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

*<sup>12</sup> Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*

Now that's helpful when it comes to future prophecy. Because, as we'll see the next two weeks, prior to God beginning the end time countdown, things are going to get worse before they get better. Want to be spiritually ready for Jesus' return? Walk by faith. Pray for the future to come but pray for people to be ready for the future. Many people don't know the Lord.

And serve the body of Christ more. Why? Well, since many of us are unaware of what future prophecy entails we may not be spiritually mature enough to handle the trials that might come even in our lifetime. Let's help each other mature in Jesus so we're not surprised 'when the painful trials' might come and ask 'Why God?' because we think its strange that bad things should happen to the people of God.

So Daniel prays for Israel's readiness to return to the Lord. He confesses their rebellion and sinfulness which caused their captivity to happen. Which is another reason why we pray to God. Pray we would ...

### ***Understand the negative promises of God as well (vv.11b-14)***

Daniel knows why they went into exile. Because God promised Israel in Deut. 28 that if they follow God He will bless them but if they disobey God He would gradually bring curses on them which ultimately would result in exile.

He prayed in 9:11,

*"Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you. <sup>12</sup> You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing upon us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us, yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth. <sup>14</sup> The LORD did not hesitate to bring the disaster upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him.*

Specifically, Daniel is referring to Deut. 28:49-57. Yes we praise God for His wonderful promises but not all God's promises are positive. Doesn't John 3:16 state a negative promise of God?

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*

Isn't condemnation and eternal separation from God a promise from God to all those who reject Him? Isn't that why we have accepted Jesus because we believe this verse and don't want to perish? Predictive prophecy reminds us that there is a great future awaiting those who trust Christ and there's a terrible future coming on the world for those who reject Him.

Daniel's prayer is focused on the people of Israel's return, the temple being rebuilt and Jerusalem being rebuilt and restored as the place where God chooses His Name to dwell. Daniel's prayer and the promises in vv.24-27 remind us all to keep

### ***Believing that God's plans for Israel will happen (vv.15-19)***

<sup>16</sup> *O Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our fathers have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us.*

<sup>17</sup> *"Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. <sup>18</sup> Give ear, O God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. <sup>19</sup> O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.*

Sadly, it has become a popular teaching to replace God's promises to Israel and say they are for us, the church. The problem with that is you have to spiritualize them all. What God means literally

for Israel in their land means what for us? The nine chapters of detailed description of God's future glorious temple in Ezekiel 40-48 means what for us? God tells us these things for a reason and that reason is, He is not done with Israel. Because if He abandons those promises then His words are not true and He cannot be trusted. What else does He not mean? Maybe He isn't always really with us? Maybe we're not all sealed with the Holy Spirit? Maybe some of will slip through the father's fingers and we'll go to hell? We have to handle Scripture consistently and literally, and literally also means understanding that God uses metaphors and parables and similes to convey his message. To prepare us for the details for vv.24-27 next week, let's finish with this reminder from the lips of Gabriel who stands in the presence of God. Gabriel said to Daniel in vv.20-23,

<sup>20</sup> 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— <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> He instructed me and said to me, "Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. <sup>23</sup> 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:

## **God Wants us to Understand His Promises Not be Confused (9:20-23)**

When Gabriel arrives and speaks to Daniel to instruct him about these very things he says, "Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding." These words mean to have a capacity to understand as a result of proper teaching. Which means God wants us to know His prophetic plan. Only those who know God have the capacity to understand these things since they are spiritual truths and only those with the Spirit can understand spiritual truths (1 Cor. 2:14).

God has not changed His promises for Israel. He wants us to know prophecy. He wants us to have insight and understanding about future things. It's Satan who has deceived many Christians today. He is called the deceiver and the father of lies. One of his most successful campaigns has been to deceive the church into thinking God no longer has a plan for Israel and that prophecy is too complicated so we shouldn't waste our time. That's not what this passage is saying nor is it what God says anywhere in Scripture. If Rev. 1:3 says.

*"Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near."*

Then God will make it so that we can understand as much as we possibly can. And we, who live in 2023 have the capacity to understand more than anyone else who has gone before us.

The Holy Spirit is the teacher of Scripture and when you and I read it and study it consistently he will give us the understanding. God wants us to know prophecy so he actually gives us some specific things to look for, as we'll see.

*Father in heaven, forgive us when we doubt your future promises. There's a lot that hasn't happened yet and want to know as much as Spirit-led possible, but we also want to help a world not ready for Jesus' return to repent of their sins and believe in Jesus the Messiah, the King of the earth. Jesus believed in your literal promises. He even taught us to pray for your kingdom to come. He didn't denounce the Kingdom's reality and coming when the disciples wondered in Acts 1 if now He was restoring the kingdom to Israel. Jesus said it's not for us to know the times and dates that the father*

*has set but instead be His witnessed through the power of the Spirit while we look for His coming. Thank you Lord that we live in an incredible time in earth's history that we could be the final generation before Your Son's return. Even so Lord Jesus, come.*

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please  
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