

Daniel's Vision Of Chapter Nine, Part 4

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

December 13, 2008

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A few days ago I was reinstalling the baseboard in our living room, entry and family room. After 21 years, the original carpet needed replacement. Having put tile down, it was time to nail the trim back in place. The air compressor being in my shop, it would require an extra length of air hose to be able to reach the areas where I needed to work (what did people do before air tools?).

I have an extra air hose, but I have rarely used it. Ever since I acquired it, abandoned by the side of the road, it has leaked profusely. Maybe someone else got tired of hearing the constant hissing of escaping air and tossed it out. Besides the distraction of the noise of the air, it makes the compressor work harder, so there's additional noise because the motor kicks in more frequently.

Nevertheless, I would have to use it to do what I needed to do. Like always, there was lots of air escaping. I decided that between applications of baseboard I would disconnect the tool from the hose while I wiped the pieces of baseboard down with a fresh coat of stain. At least that would conserve some of the leaking air.

But now when I attempted to attach the hose back to the gun, I was not able to reconnect them! I tried to slide the "quick-connect" fitting over the end of the air gun, but it refused to grab and stay on! Frustration! Then I remembered that when I had started working that morning, I had stepped on a small steel ball, a "bb" like bearing, near where my work began. I began to "put two and two together" and realized, as I gave close examination to the fitting, that there are actually supposed to be four such bearings that act as "holders" when slid over the end of the gun. Now there were none! No wonder it didn't hold!

No doubt from the very beginning of my ownership of this hose, one or two of those bearings were missing, causing the excessive leaking of air. Through time another one dropped out, and now the last one had escaped, resulting in there being no way for the fitting to hold onto the end of the gun. Fortunately, I had a spare fitting, one that had all bearings in place, that I was able to attach instead of the defective one.

The Lord brought a lesson to my mind through all this. I am His tool, like the air gun. His Spirit is like the air which provides the power. (The word Spirit means “wind”.) But if I “lose my bearings” and become “disconnected” with the power Source, I cannot function as His tool. I am powerless. How the devil wants to sever that connection with God! He invents all sorts of activities and duties to prevent us from spending time with Him, Who only can give us strength through His Spirit to live a Christian life! We “lose our bearings” when we don’t realize we’re living in the time of the end and become too involved in the things of this life. We “lose our bearings” when we forget that Jesus is coming soon and all things earthly will pass away. Are you connected to the Savior today? Is His Spirit living within you to make you an effective tool for Him? Do you have a strong hold on the Source of power? Did you spend time with God this morning in His Word and in prayer?

To help prevent us from losing our bearings, God has graciously given through His servants prophetic messages, so that we could know where we are. What we’re studying in Daniel nine right now is one of the greatest of all the Old Testament prophecies. We saw that Daniel had been given a vision in chapter eight concerning a ram, goat and destructive horn. A period of time was also mentioned, 2300 days that had something to do with the end of the “trampling.” An angel, Gabriel, was commissioned to make him understand, but when Gabriel left, Daniel said he didn’t understand.

Gabriel had explained much of the vision. He told Daniel the ram represented Medo-Persia and the goat stood for Greece. He had much to say about the horn power, but nothing was said about the time period, and it was concerning this that Daniel was troubled. He wondered if the 2300 days were a lengthening of the 70 years of captivity prophesied by Jeremiah. So he prayed and confessed the sin of his people in their rebellion against God’s plan, which had brought about the captivity in the first place and pled that God, for the honor of His name, would not delay the promise of restoration.

Gabriel returned and brought further explanations to Daniel in chapter nine. We discussed last week the six links that tie the commentary of Gabriel in chapter nine to the vision of chapter eight. When Gabriel said, “I have now come forth to give you skill to understand; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision” (*mareh* 9:23), which is the same word that is used previously when the Lord told Gabriel, “make this man understand the vision” (*mareh* 8:16), a word which is not used in the book of Daniel until chapter eight, there is indisputable evidence that chapters eight and nine are inseparable.

Seventy Weeks

Gabriel began his explanation with the words, “Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city.” Daniel 9:24. There can be no question that the “day for a year” principle applies to this time period, and it has been understood that way even before the time of Christ. Seven days being in a week, this would amount to 490 prophetic days, or 490 literal years, all of which would be needed to stretch from the beginning point specified to the appearance of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

We talked last week about this being a *period of probation for the Jewish nation*, to see if once and for all, they would walk in step with God’s program. It is critical for us to understand God’s purpose in history. “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever.” Deuteronomy 29:29. Notice where that passage, which might be a familiar one to many, comes from. It was given by Moses at his benedictory address when he encouraged them concerning the duties and blessings of obedience to the covenant, and warned of the results of unfaithfulness. In other words, it is spoken in the context of understanding God’s ways of dealing with His people in history. God wants us to know how He operates.

It is also crucial because our comprehension of many of His prophecies will hinge on the understandings we encounter in this study. We read from the parable of Jesus in which He stated, “last of all He sent His Son,” words pregnant with meaning for the Spirit-led student. The coming of Jesus represented God’s final appeal to the Jewish nation, which He had designed to be His ambassadors to the world. Jesus continued in His parable with the comment that when the tenants killed the Son, the Owner would lease His vineyard out to “another nation,” which would bring forth His fruit.

God’s Plan For Israel

The plan of God for Israel began with the call of Abram from Ur of the Chaldees, who walked the paths of Palestine as a pilgrim because the Amorites’ cup of iniquity was not yet full. Four centuries later, when Israel left Egypt they stopped at Mt. Sinai for about a year while God instructed them and in a special way inaugurated them into being His people.

In a few weeks the United States will inaugurate a new president, Barach Obama. We're told that millions, perhaps up to five million might be at our country's capital for the event, which will feature untold festivities. But what will happen in Washington in January will not in the slightest way compare with what happened at Sinai back then. There may be fireworks that sparkle in the sky on January 21, but back then the whole mountain was on fire! There may be lots of activity a month from now, but back then the earth quaked and rocked! There may be loud music and impressive speeches in a few weeks, but back then the voice of God sounded as a trumpet so loudly that "those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore." Hebrews 12:19. The glory of God was revealed in a way the world had never seen before nor since. "So terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.'" Hebrews 12:21.

God was about to inaugurate the nation of Israel into a unique covenant relationship with Him. His words to them were, "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Exodus 19:5, 6.

In their unique role, He would bless them with material and spiritual blessings, the purpose of which was so that they could share His truth with all peoples of the earth. They were to worship and obey Him as their God and function as His instruments of grace for all mankind.

What does the record of the Old Testament reveal? In large measure, with a few exceptions, the nation rebelled against their God. Unthankful and forgetful of all His goodness, they soon fell into patterns of disobedience. They forsook the God of the covenant and worshiped idols of wood and stone. Though God was their Monarch, they clamored for a visible king.

Repeatedly God sent His messengers to plead with them to return to Him, but invariably they mistreated, abused and often killed the messengers, just as Jesus recounted in His parable. He allowed them to go into captivity at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, hoping that the severe discipline of that experience would impress on their minds the blessings they had forfeited. In Babylon, the nation of Judah was like the prodigal in a far country. God hoped that they would "come to themselves" and return with repentance to the One Who had provided immeasurably for their wellbeing.

A Conditional Relationship

He had promised to allow them to return to their homeland, restore and rebuild the city and temple and give them another opportunity to be the missionary nation He designed them to be. But this would be His last overture toward Israel as a nation. The biggest word in God's inaugural address was "if." "Now therefore, *if* you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people. That word "if" indicates that this relationship was conditional. *God's love is unconditional; His blessings are not*, at least this special blessing given to Israel. His blessings are dependent upon our relationship to Him, as the Bible makes crystal clear. This seventy week period, this 490 year allocation was a time of probation for the Jewish nation. It represented their last opportunity to comply with God's plan. "*Last of all He sent His Son.*"

What does the Bible say? From Jesus' birth to His death the nation refused Him. From cradle to grave they denied Him. The leaders weren't ready for His coming: the angels sang to shepherds and not to priests. The angelic choir appeared above the hillsides of Bethlehem, not the courtyard of the temple. From the first day of His ministry to the cross the Jews sought to undermine His mission. The people of the synagogue in Nazareth, at the outset of His public ministry when He announced to them Who He was, tried to throw Him off a cliff. They lay in wait, trying to catch Him in His words, to find something with which to discredit Him. Would God be able to use these people to tell everyone that His Son had come and as the Lamb of God had died for the sins of the world and to receive Him as Savior and Lord? Unlikely! Would the Jewish nation be ready to herald His triumphal coming from the grave? Hardly! They made up a lie about the disciples stealing His body to explain the empty tomb!

It was Jesus Who guided the nation of Israel from Egypt. It was He Who, as the Rock provided the water for them to survive. He was the One Who provided the manna in the wilderness for them to live. He personally led them into Canaan and had been their Savior. Yet, like the brothers of Joseph, they did not recognize Him. Like the Israelites in Egypt when Moses tried to rescue them, they said, "Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?" Acts 7:27. How true were the words of the Apostle John, "He came to His own, and His own received Him not." John 1:11.

Jesus was their Ruler. He was Israel's King. But they were restless and uncomfortable with that situation, and pined to be like the other nations with a visible leader. It broke the heart of Samuel when they pressed for another arrangement, but the Lord said to the godly prophet, "They have not rejected you,

but Me.” Even when Saul and his successors were crowned, the Lord rarely applied the word “king” to the one who sat on their fallible thrones. More often than not, He used words like “captain,” “head,” or “commander,” for He yet aspired to be their King.

Ultimately on that fateful Friday, the nation announced their rejection of Him. With the words, “We have no king but Caesar,” they declared their renouncement of the divine model. They wanted Pilate to change the wording on the placard he had written so it would not read “King of the Jews,” but “He said He was King of the Jews.” They chose the murderer Barabbas instead of the gentle Jesus.

Christ had foreseen this rebellion building and with tears in His voice a few days previously had uttered the solemn words, “Behold, your house is left to you desolate.” Matthew 23:38. They were at a crucial turning point. Just the day before He said this He had described the temple as God’s house when He had cleansed it of unholy traffic, saying, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer.’” Matthew 21:13. Now He said, “your house,” and applied a frightful adjective, calling it “desolate.”

The word “desolate” is a very important word in our study of Daniel nine. It means empty, abandoned or ruined. It was the word Daniel used in his prayer when he described the condition of the temple in his day, after Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed it, saying, “Cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, *which is desolate.*” Daniel 9:17. It is the word Gabriel used to describe the condition of the sanctuary at the conclusion of the 490 years, predicting what the Romans would do, saying, “And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war *desolations are determined.* And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes *desolate*, even until the consummation, which is determined is poured out on the *desolate.*” Daniel 9:26, 27.

This “abomination of desolation” unquestioningly refers to the destruction of Titus the Roman in A.D. 70. The words of Jesus, recorded by Matthew are, “Therefore when you see the ‘*abomination of desolation,*’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place’ (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.” Matthew 24:15. But notice how the writer Luke, also guided by inspiration, phrases this instruction: “But when you see Jerusalem *surrounded by armies,* then know that its *desolation* is near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains.” Luke 21:20.

Spiritually, the temple was “desolated,” or “made empty” by the withdrawal of God’s presence, brought about by their rejection of Him. God abandoned them to their own devices. Physically, forty years later, the sanctuary was “desolated” by the armies under the command of Titus the Roman.

By the way, this is the same word that is used by Isaiah and Jeremiah to describe the condition of Israel during the 70 years of captivity in passages which also have application to the earth during the period of 1,000 years after our Lord returns and takes His saints to heaven. “The lion (Babylon) has come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of nations is on his way. He has gone forth from his place to make your land desolate. Your cities will be laid waste, without inhabitant.” Jeremiah 4:7.

“For thus says the LORD: ‘The whole land shall be desolate; yet I will not make a full end. For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black, because I have spoken. I have purposed and will not relent, nor will I turn back from it. The whole city shall flee from the noise of the horsemen and bowmen. They shall go into thickets and climb up on the rocks. Every city shall be forsaken, and not a man shall dwell in it.’” Jeremiah 4:27-29.

“Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell in it are desolate.” Isaiah 24:6. “In the city desolation is left, and the gate is stricken with destruction.” Isaiah 24:12. The earth will be empty and ruined, with human inhabitant during that time.

When the Jews put Jesus on the cross, they sealed their destiny as a nation. No longer would they be the people of the covenant, as far as God was concerned. No longer would the temple be the visible token of His presence. What had Jesus said? The “kingdom of God,” that is, the special arrangement between God and man defined by covenantal terms resulting in His special blessing, would be conferred upon “another nation” that would bring forth the fruits of it. What would this “other nation” be?

Without question the “other nation” is the Christian Church. In Eden, the form of Adam lay lifeless until God breathed into that body His breath, which is life. In a similar way, the “body” of the Christian Church lay motionless until the day of Pentecost when His Spirit, the breath of life, breathed into the “body” and brought it to life. This would be the entity to which God would entrust the torch of truth. This would be the “nation” which Christ would send into the world with His Gospel.

Trace the transition recorded in the book of Acts, as the center of activity and mission is changed from the Jews to the Gentiles. Jesus commissioned them to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and into all the world. That sequence is followed by the apostles in the book of Acts. At first, their witness was given to the Jews, as noted in the first few chapters of Acts. But then, as rejection of the message again surfaced, the focus of attention is moved toward non-Jewish groups. In chapter eight of Acts, following the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, Phillip ministers in Samaria and to the Ethiopian on his return trip home. In chapter nine Saul is interrupted on his journey to Damascus and is told he will be a light to the Gentiles. In chapter ten Peter is roused from his stupor by a shocking vision that teaches him he is to call no man common or unclean and immediately is presented with an opportunity to share the Gospel with Cornelius the Italian. Missionary trips are launched by the Church, sending Paul and Barnabas to far-off places in Europe. At every step, the message is given to Jews, but few believe. For the most part, the Jews do all they can to persecute and hinder the spreading of the message of Jesus. The seventy weeks are over. The 490 years of probation are completed. The nation of literal Israel has given clear indication as to its choice of leader. It isn't God.

Peter, the one who struggled mightily to grasp this principle, explains it this way, quoting from the very words of God recorded in Exodus 19. "But you (the Christian Church, the ones who believe in Jesus as the Rock which the builders rejected) are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you (not those who rejected Jesus as the Messiah) may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God." I Peter 2:9, 10. If you were to compare the New Testament Greek with the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament used most frequently by New Testament authors, you would see very clearly that he is quoting the passage of Exodus 19, and thereby placing the Christian Church squarely in the position of ancient Israel.

Are you a Jew? The Bible says that, "If you are Christ's then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Galatians 3:29. Paul declared, "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter." Romans 2:27, 28. To whom did Paul write that counsel? To Jews in Jerusalem? No! It was to the Christian Church in Rome!

To those who had placed so much confidence in their physical heritage as descendants of Abraham John the Baptist had a clear message. "Do not think to say

to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones." Matthew 3:9.

John was trying to make a point, as he preached in the rocky wilderness of Judea. But I would like to believe that his stern indictment is also a beautiful promise. "God is able to make children of Abraham from these stones." There's a Gospel message in what he said! God is able to make obedient believers of those whose hearts are naturally as hard and unreceptive as the rocks of Judea. Do you want to be a son or daughter of Abraham? Do you want to be a joint-heir with Christ? Do you want to receive the covenant blessings promised by a generous God? He can take our stony hearts and make them soft and pliable if we will say, "Yes."