

Daniel's Vision Of Chapter 9, Part 5

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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Since it's been a few weeks since we last studied in Daniel, let's take a minute to review what we've learned. Daniel was young when taken captive to Babylon during Nebuchadnezzar's first invasion. This attack on Judah was allowed by the Lord, because His people had fallen into patterns of disobedience to His commandments and failed to share His truth and love with the world. So they were sent into exile as a disciplinary measure, to bring about a change of heart and habits, as well as for the purpose of shedding the light of the Gospel among heathen nations. To understand God's purpose in history is to gain true wisdom. How deeply rich in meaning is the way Daniel opens his book, "The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his (Nebuchadnezzar's) hand." Daniel 1:2.

We followed Daniel through his experience in the court of Babylon during his three-year training and saw how his staunch stand in the matter of diet was rewarded both by God's giving him increased wisdom and the king exalting him to the head of his class when they graduated.

We saw Daniel interpret the king's dream, the great statue of different metals, representing the parade of nations from his day to ours: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rom, followed by the break-up of the Roman empire and the coming of the mighty Stone, the Kingdom of Christ which smashed the image to smithereens. All of this information God has graciously preserved for us, that we might be intelligent as to His control and involvement in the affairs of this life. This world is not just a globe spinning out of control; an unseen Hand is there to guide in all things.

In chapter three, we witnessed the friends of Daniel being faithful to the law of God even if it meant their lives. We witnessed the conversion of proud King Nebuchadnezzar in chapter four. He was reduced to an "animal existence," eating grass in the field like a wild beast, but then "came to himself," recognized and acknowledged the reign of a King mightier than himself.

We saw how this lesson of humility was lost on his grandson Belshazzar, who defiantly resisted the impulses of God's Spirit, "though he knew all this," and at last saw the "handwriting on the wall," spelling the doom of His kingdom and his life.

In chapter six we saw Daniel's fidelity to his God in the face of jealous colleagues, who attempted to get rid of Daniel and have him thrown to the lions' den. But God intervened and spared the life of His servant.

We saw in chapter seven Daniel's dream of the wild beasts, a message similar to the statue dream of chapter two, but more detailed, introducing the power which would rule for centuries during the Middle Ages, making boasts of its equality with God and its ability to change His law. Though persecution and martyrdom would characterize this period of papal domination, eventually the prophet was pointed to the glad time when the kingdom would be given to the saints of the Most High.

We saw in chapter eight another vision given to Daniel, with animals again representing the succession of earthly kingdoms. In this vision a period of time is mentioned in connection with the "end of the trampling," or persecution, a period of 2300 days. The angel Gabriel, one of God's most exalted angels, is commissioned to make Daniel understand the vision. He explains the meaning of the animals and most other details of the vision, except the matter concerning the time period of 2300 days. When Gabriel leaves at the end of that chapter, Daniel confesses, "none understood it."

Thinking that this period of 2300 days represented a lengthening of the captivity, which Daniel understood by the prophecy of his contemporary Jeremiah to be seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11, 12), Daniel turned to the Lord in fasting and prayer for the restoration of his beloved city and sanctuary, now lying in ruins, and for the restoration of the name, the reputation, the glory of God, Whose name had been blasphemed among the nations because of the sins of his people.

When Daniel walked into the banquet hall of Belshazzar, besides the sense of sorrow and disappointment he felt toward Belshazzar, who was toasting his gods of wood and stone with the sacred vessels from Jerusalem's temple, there was the painful consciousness that "all this" *would not have happened* at all had his people, Judah, been faithful to their God. There was some responsibility on the part of his people for this blasphemous feast. Had they been true to Him, the Lord would have fulfilled His promise of protection and covered them like a mother hen does her

chicks, but they rejected Him and drove Him away. This is the clear message of Old Testament prophecy.

In chapter nine, Daniel repents for the sins of his people, wearing the garments of contrition, sackcloth and ashes. He begs God's forgiveness for their wickedness and asks earnestly that the promised restoration of the city and sanctuary not be delayed.

As he is praying and confessing the sins of his people, the angel Gabriel returns to give enlightenment to Daniel concerning what he had not understood in the previous vision, the matter of the 2300 day time period. The many links tying Gabriel's explanation in chapter nine to the vision of chapter eight we've already studied and won't review again, except to note Gabriel's explicit reference, "understand the *vision*" (9:23) using the same word *mareh* that was used in the previous chapter, ("Gabriel, make this man understand the *vision*" 8:16), a word which does not appear in the book of Daniel prior to chapter eight. There can be no question that what Gabriel brings in his explanation of chapter nine bears directly on the vision of chapter eight.

Having come back to give "skill to understand," Gabriel introduced another, shorter period of time, identified as "seventy weeks," during which certain things would come to pass, including the rebuilding of the city and the appearance of the Messiah. A beginning point is established, the "going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem." Daniel 9:25. History tells us there were three commands which commissioned the work of the restoration of Jerusalem. There were three attacks by Babylon which destroyed Jerusalem; there would be three commands by Persia to restore her. These commands were given by Kings Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes. The first two began the process, but there were problems and hindrances. The third one was the one which finally accomplished the purpose.

Notice how Ezra combined the three royal edicts in his report. "So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command (notice that the word is singular) of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia." Ezra 6:14. Ezra went on to say that the temple was built as a result of the command of Darius (6:15), but the wall was not constructed till later, during the reign of Artaxerxes. The royal command recorded in Ezra 7, given in the "seventh year of the king" (7:7), is the beginning point of the great prophecy of the seventy weeks. History tells us that the seventh year of Artaxerxes translates to the year 457 B.C. That

would be the year when the prophetic clock of the seventy weeks would begin to tick.

It is obvious that a period of seventy literal weeks, a little more than one year, is insufficient to encompass the contents of this prophecy, which speaks to the rebuilding of the city as well as the coming of the Messiah. So we are compelled to apply the “day for a year in symbolic prophecy” rule, which has been recognized and applied by Bible students even before the time of Christ. We have then, a period of seventy “prophetic” weeks, or **490 literal years**, which computes perfectly, as we shall see, with the terms of the prophecy.

This was to be a probationary period for the Jews. For over one thousand years, from the call of Abraham, the occupation of the land of Canaan to the time of Daniel, God had cultivated this group as a special people, to preserve the truth about Him and acceptable worship, and to spread this knowledge with the world. Of particular emphasis, especially as the time drew closer, would be the anticipation of the coming of the Promised One, the Messiah. Israel was to be the herald of the coming King. Every Jew; every priest; every scribe and every citizen was privileged to cherish the fond anticipation of the arrival of the world’s Redeemer.

Sad to say, only a few, a scattered handful, looked forward to His birth. Yes, there was Simeon; yes, there was Anna, but the nation as a whole, steered by their obstinate leaders, rejected Him. “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.” John 1:11. Nevertheless, the mission of the Messiah was a complete success and through His death He destroyed the works of the devil, a victory which we are invited to claim personally today.

But, the day of favored blessing for the nation of literal Israel had come to its close. Keep in mind that this is talking about the special position of favor occupied by the *nation of Israel*. This is *not* talking about the opportunity of individual Jews to be saved through Christ. When the nation through their legislative council, the Sanhedrin, pronounced judgment and condemned God’s Son to death; when the Roman governor Pilate pointed to Jesus and asked them, “What shall I do with your King?” and they forcefully responded “We have no king but Caesar;” when they chose the murderer Barabbas to be released to them instead of the Giver of life; when they put the Messenger of the Covenant on a cross, they as a nation, sealed their fate and forfeited their favored position in God’s sight.

As Jesus had spoken in His parable of the vineyard, the “kingdom of God” (that favored position of blessing they had enjoyed for a millennium and a half) would be taken from them and given to “another nation,” that is, the Christian Church. The New Testament is emphatic in announcing that the one who is “in Christ” is a “spiritual Jew,” a “true Israelite,” and an heir to the promises, regardless of his or her natural ancestry. Who is an Israelite in God’s sight according to Romans 2:28, 29? It is the one who has a heart relationship with God. Who today occupies the position of ancient Israel according to I Peter 2:9, 10? It is the Christian Church. Who today are the “heirs” of the promises made to Abraham according to Galatians 3:29? It is the one who belongs to Jesus.

What is the real significance of the term “Israel”? The term “Israel” hearkens back to the experience of “Jacob,” a name which means “cheater,” who became *converted* and was given a new name, that of “Israel,” “prince of God.” God has always been more interested on the “inside” than the “outside.” He has always been searching for the one who would yield his or her heart to Him and allow His Spirit to bring changes so that He can fashion a character like His Son Jesus in our lives. Isn’t that the clear message of the Bible?

Consider this lesson, pertaining to the Jewish nation as God’s people, as it is presented in the messages of the “three trees.” We will now take a look at these three “trees” in the New Testament; the “tree uprooted”; the tree “cut down”; and the “tree cursed.”

When John the Baptist began His preaching ministry, he was fully aware of the timeline of Daniel’s prophecy. His message was, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Matthew 3:1. What did he mean by that? For John, the “kingdom of heaven” meant the coming of the Messiah as the “Lamb of God.” This was happening before their very eyes, and John’s role was to announce the arrival of the Messiah, Whose coming was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel nine. John knew also that that prophecy spoke to their nation in a special way and concerned the period of their probation, the seventy weeks, and that they were now entering its last “week,” or seven years.

So John spoke strong words of reproof to the Jewish leaders. “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, ‘Brood of vipers! Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and 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. And even now the *ax is laid to the root* of the trees.

Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” Matthew 3:7-10.

The language of John is significant, given the imagery used by Jesus later. John’s description of the result of the Jewish nation not turning to God in true repentance is dramatic and final. It’s not talking about trimming a few branches here or there. “The ax is laid to the root of the trees.” It’s not the same as the message given to Nebuchadnezzar five centuries before. Compare this description of the Jewish nation, given by John the Baptist, with that of King Nebuchadnezzar. We saw that Nebuchadnezzar, in the fourth chapter of Daniel, was represented in a dream by a stately tree. This tree was being observed by an unseen Watcher, Who declared that if the proud king did not repent, the tree would be chopped down, but that the stump would remain, bound by an iron clasp. That dream was a picture of how God saw the future of Nebuchadnezzar, wasn’t it? Daniel appealed to the king to “break off his sins by righteousness” and avoid the judgment given in the dream. But Nebuchadnezzar, a year later, voiced his proud expression of self-glory and the judgment was pronounced against him. However, just as the stump remained, Nebuchadnezzar was given another opportunity after his repentance and his throne was restored to him.

Do you see the difference between the two? In Nebuchadnezzar’s case discipline would be rendered to try to bring correction to his character that he might live out God’s purpose for Him, and this was shown by the tree being chopped down, but the stump remaining.

John’s message to the Jews, recipients of God’s special favor for fifteen centuries is radically different. It has a distinctive finality to it. The “tree” will be chopped down at its roots. No more stump. Forever gone. Uprooted and removed. No further opportunity. For centuries God had been bringing Israel encouragement and discipline, so that they could live out His purpose. Now, if genuine reformation did not take place, that special position of favor would be taken from them. In the parable of the wicked vinedressers, Jesus said, “the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to another nation bringing forth the fruits of it.” Matthew 21:43.

“Tree” number two: “He also spoke this parable: a certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?’ But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and

fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But not, after that you can cut it down.” Luke 13:6-9.

The choice of tree in this parable is significant. The fig tree was a national symbol for Israel. It was like the pine to the state of Washington, the cedar to Lebanon. Well suited for the climate of Palestine, with fruit easily preserved, the fig represented Israel perfectly. National prosperity and peace was expressed by the phrase, “every man under his fig tree, and every man under his vine.”

In this case, the fig tree was unproductive. It was not bringing for the “fruit” expected by its owner. After a disappointing examination, a further period of grace is allowed, but “after that,” judgment against the tree is imminent. There can be no question that this parable had a message uniquely designed for the Jewish ear. There would be a limitation of God’s tolerance and mercy toward them. There was a timeline beyond which, if they did not respond by true repentance, they would find themselves, as a nation, no longer the beneficiaries of His grace.

The time period expressed by the parable is interesting. Three years plus one. A total of four years. What might that represent? We know that John the Baptist was six months older than Jesus (Luke 1:36), and that he began his ministry before Jesus began His 3 ½ years of public teaching. If John started preaching when he was 30, which was the age in the Jewish mind when full adulthood was reached, his ministry would have begun six months before Jesus’ baptism, and together with Christ’s ministry would have amounted to about four years.

Tree number three: When Jesus came to Jerusalem Sunday before the crucifixion, He entered the city on the back of a donkey’s foal, the way Israel’s kings did in ancient times. “The next day, when they had come out from Bethany, he was hungry. And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. And when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves.” Mark 11:11, 12.

This tree, pretentious with its spring foliage but lacking in fruit, was a living parable of the Jewish nation. They had all the “leaves” of self-righteous forms and ceremonies of religion, but were completely destitute of the fruit of the Spirit. They tithed mint and cumin, but omitted the weightier matters of the law, love, justice and mercy. They stood on the street corners and raised their voices loudly in prayer “to be seen of men,” but their hearts were far from Him.

Jesus had strong words for the fig tree. It, as a symbol of the Jewish nation, was about to receive the curse of His disapproval. Like the snake in the Garden,

innocent of itself but used by Satan and cursed because of man's sin, so this tree, as representing the nation of Israel was about to reap the pronouncement of judgment by Christ. He said to the tree, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again." Mark 11:14.

The disciples heard what Jesus said, and the next day, Tuesday, "as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter, remembering, said to Him, 'Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away.'" Mark 11:20, 21.

It wasn't that Jesus had a grudge against this one tree. He hoped to use it as an object lesson, teaching that apart from Him there is no life. The nation of Israel had withdrawn from Him, and in so doing was absent of the fruit of righteousness and spiritually withered. The 490 years allotted to the nation as a special time of probation, following a 1000 years previous to that, was fast closing. Soon the sun would set on the day of grace for the nation of Israel.

The message of the three "trees" is unmistakable. God would no longer look to them to be the carriers of His torch of truth. Another entity, the Christian Church, would now be the ones to be the "people of God." Notice how James, under prophetic insight, interprets the promise made to "Israel" by Amos who wrote, "After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen down. I will rebuild its ruins and I will set it up, so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does all these things." Acts 15:16, 17, quoting Amos 9:11, 12.

What is the "rebuilding" of the "tabernacle of David" according to James? It is the establishment of the Christian Church, now proclaiming Christ's message to Gentile believers. James pointed out at the Church's council, "Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree." Acts 15:14, 15. James applies the prophecy of Amos directly to the Christian Church! He interprets the "rebuilding of David's tabernacle" as the erection of the New Testament body of believers in Christ! He sees the Gentiles as the ones now "taken out" and established as a "people for His name." This is a direct reference to ancient Israel, "taken out" of Egypt and established as the "people for God's name."

Why is it important to spend time on this subject, the identification of the "Israel" of the New Testament? It is because grasping this concept is crucial to correctly interpreting the prophecies of the Bible as they may be fulfilled today. It doesn't take a very big key to unlock a large building. But having the proper key means

everything. The understanding that the Christian Church is now in the place of ancient Israel as the “people of God” is the key to accurate interpretation of the Bible’s prophecies given toward Israel. It is the “keystone” of prophetic architecture. The Old Testament prophecies, if fulfilled at all, will be fulfilled toward the Christian Church.

But the same lesson applies to this “tree” as it applied to the others! Let no one think that merely applying the label “Christian” will suffice! Let no one think that merely having ones name on the church rolls is all there is to it! True heart conversion, allowing Him to remake us into the image of Jesus has been and will always be the criteria for the household of “Israel.” Appreciation for His great gift and responding with loving obedience to all His commandments will always be the sign of the true Israelite.