

The Sovereign God of History

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Preacher: Joshua Russell

[0 : 00] But let's turn to Daniel chapter 9 and focus on God's precious word. In the first year of Darius, the son of Ahasuerus, by descent Amid, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans, in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely 70 years.

Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. And I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying, O Lord, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments.

We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. We have not listened to your servants, the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us, open shame. As at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery they have committed against you.

To us, O Lord, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by walking in his laws which he set before us by his servants, the prophets.

[1 : 42] All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And the curse and oath that are written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him.

He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us, by bringing upon us a great calamity. For under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what has been done against Jerusalem.

As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us, yet we have not entreated the favor of the Lord our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth.

Therefore the Lord has kept ready the calamity and has brought it upon us. For the Lord our God is righteous in all the works that he has done, and we have not obeyed his voice. And now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and have made a name for yourself as at this day, we have sinned.

We have done wickedly. O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill. Because for our sins and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people have become a byword among all who are around us.

[3 : 03] Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy. And for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary which is desolate.

O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy.

O Lord, hear. O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name.

While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the Lord my God, for the holy hill of my God, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the

time of the evening sacrifice.

He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. At the beginning of your pleas for mercy, a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved.

[4 : 18] Therefore, consider the word and understand the vision. Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.

Know therefore, and understand, that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem, to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks.

Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing.

And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed, and he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week.

And for half of the week, he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the week of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.

[5 : 26] This is the word of the Lord. And thankfully we don't have a question time today. No, we're just, we're having communion.

Why pray when God is sovereign? Because of course God already knows what we're going to pray for, doesn't he? And God already knows what we need, doesn't he?

Jesus says that in the Sermon on the Mount. When you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. But if he knows what we need before we ask him, then why pray at all? Jesus continues, In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus tells his disciples to ask for six things, God's name to be hallowed, God's kingdom to come, etc.

Six requests. And really they are all things that God has already promised will happen. Especially in places like Ezekiel. Remember, Ezekiel was a contemporary of Daniel's.

[6 : 49] He was a prophet living in exile in Babylon. He actually mentioned Daniel a couple of times. Daniel was already famously righteous at the time. And God gave Ezekiel promises concerning the new covenant and the kingdom, when God would finally hallow his name and forgive our sins and cleanse his people and so on.

Jesus picking up on that language and encouraging his disciples to pray in light of Ezekiel and the other prophets that God would do what he promised.

But again, don't you find that a bit confusing? I mean, I do. If God has promised to do these things, then why should we keep praying for them?

I mean, aren't we just pestering God? Isn't he going to do what he promised anyway? Does prayer actually change anything if history is already set in stone?

Couldn't it perhaps be a sign of unbelief to keep asking and asking and asking that God would do these things? I mean, if my children kept asking me for things that I had already promised them, I would be tempted to brush them off.

[7 : 59] Yes, I said I would do that. Didn't I? Don't you believe me? But see, the Bible doesn't use the doctrine of God's sovereignty or his loving fatherhood over our lives in that way.

Of course, it's difficult to wrap our heads around this kind of stuff. And in part, I think it's because there's no relationship quite like it, is there? What analogy can we use to try and comprehend it? We're used to seeing different creatures relate to one another and influence one another. The will of the parent has some influence over the will of the child and vice versa. But of course, there's only one creator.

So his relationship to his creation is unique. He is the potter and we are the clay. His plans and purposes, what God wills, is unstoppable. His control over our lives is absolute.

And yet, what the Bible teaches us is that God's sovereignty doesn't diminish our responsibility or the reality of our wills and choices.

[9 : 07] The reality of our interactions with him day after day when we cry out to him in prayer and he answers us. Likewise, God's promises are not meant to squash us into passivity as if, well, oh,

he's just going to do it anyway or he's going to do what he's going to do.

So I'll sort of sit back and watch history unfold like I'm kind of watching a play. No, in the Bible, God's promises are meant to prompt us to prayer and prompt us to action as they inspire faith and hope.

We know that one day all our prayers are going to be answered. We know that our labor in the Lord is not in vain. How frustrating it is when we work and work only to find that our work comes to nothing.

It's so hard to keep going with no guarantee of success especially when the odds look slim. And so the sure promises of God are meant to motivate us to keep working with energy and joy because we know that our labor is not in vain and to keep praying because we know that we don't work alone or apart from God's sovereignty.

Now, all the time, God is working in and through us fulfilling His purposes in answer to our prayers. We work in dependence upon Him looking to Him to establish the work of our hands.

[10:28] So biblical prayer is not so much about just asking for whatever we want because, of course, by nature we all want all sorts of sinful and foolish things.

Instead, it's about responding to God's promises by trusting Him conforming our thoughts and desires to His will and asking Him to keep His word.

Heavenly Father, I love that You have promised that one day I will be like the Lord Jesus. Please help me to grow more and more like Him every day until I reach that perfect goal.

Amen. You know, that is kind of the classic Christian prayer. Responding to God's promises, looking forward to their fulfillment. And that's exactly what we see here in Daniel chapter 9.

Okay, so the story begins, of course, with Daniel reading his Bible. Daniel chapter 9, verse 1. In the first year of Darius, the son of Ahasuerus, by descent Amid, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans, in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely 70 years.

[11:46] So let me point out a couple of things here. The year is 539 BC. Darius the Mede, I think, is another name for Cyrus the Persian, though that is much debated and not absolutely crucial.

The important thing, though, is that whoever he was, God made him king. God made him king over the realm of the Chaldeans at this point. Daniel's book, remember, is all about God's sovereign rule over the kingdoms of men.

How God appoints whomever he wills to rule each in their time. And in the end, God's kingdom alone will stand and he will appoint his man, the lowliest of men, the son of man, the saints, to rule over the kingdom forever and ever.

Notice also the reference to the books in verse 2. Daniel has been reading the books, which sounds very much like Daniel has a canon of different books that he is reading, that he considers to be scripture.

That canon must at least have included the Torah, the law of Moses. We'll see Daniel mention that later on. And the book of Jeremiah, which is very interesting because Jeremiah was also pretty much a contemporary of Daniel's, just a few decades older than Daniel.

[13:05] In other words, it didn't take generations and generations for God's people to recognize Jeremiah's prophecy as holy scripture. It didn't take a church council or a papal decree.

No, of course not. The church doesn't create or authorize God's word. Quite the opposite. God's word creates and authorizes the church.

we receive and recognize the intrinsic authority of the word that has come to us from God. We don't confer any authority upon it.

This has always been the way and the Roman Catholics have gone astray on this point. And quite possibly, Daniel has in his hands at this point, you know, books like One and Two Kings, One and Two Chronicles, Samuel, Proverbs, Job, etc.

We don't know exactly but it's just very helpful at this point in history to realize that even in this very early stage in history, Daniel clearly has some sense of the books, i.e. the special books, the Holy Bible, a group of set apart, a library of special books that constitute God's revelation to us.

[14:17] And because Daniel was a faithful Israelite, he was reading the books and he perceived in the books the number of years that according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely 70 years.

So Daniel presumably has been reading Jeremiah 25 or Jeremiah 29. I'll just give you chapter 25 just before the exile. Jeremiah wrote, Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, Because you have not obeyed my words, behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the Lord, and for Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all these surrounding nations, I will devote them to destruction and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation.

Moreover, I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon 70 years.

Then after 70 years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the Lord, making the land an everlasting waste. I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations.

For many nations and great kings shall make slaves even of them, and I will recompense them according to their deeds and the work of their hands. So then it's coming up about 70 years.

[15:51] It's hard to know exactly when to start the counting actually. If you start counting from the beginning of the exile in 605 BC until the first year of Darius or Cyrus in 539 BC, then it's about 66 years.

But was Jerusalem really desolate all that time? Or if you start from the destruction of the temple in 586 BC and go until the rebuilding of the temple in 516 BC, then that's almost exactly 70 years.

But Daniel is still 23 years away from that. Of course, on top of that, the number 70 is deeply symbolic. It means a complete time. Notice how Jeremiah keeps talking about everlasting destruction, actually, even while the everlasting destruction is only going to last 70 years.

And that's because 70 years is kind of a symbolic number of a complete period, the perfect amount of time. God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh.

Every seven days the people of Israel were to take a Sabbath. Every seven years the people of Israel were to give their land a Sabbath rest. Every seven sevens of years the people of Israel were to celebrate an extra year of Sabbath, the year of Jubilee.

[17:11] This kind of symbolism just crops up all over the place. Lepers need to get sprinkled seven times in order to get cleansed. Under Joshua, one of my favorites, the people of Israel marched for seven days around the city of Jericho and seven priests blew seven trumpets before the walls came tumbling down.

It just comes up everywhere. It's the same way, actually, I know sometimes we come across this apocalyptic kind of literature idea and we think it's very confusing, but it's really the same way that we use lots of numbers for symbolic reasons.

You know, if I said to you I'm number 007, you know, you know, I'm not using that number mathematically. It's a symbol.

Or if we talked about the first 11 or the first 15, three score and 10, the whole nine yards, 888, the Chinese among us, 42, the readers of Adams.

Well, in the Bible there are lots of numbers with symbolic significance. Right? 40. 12. 7. In this case, I'm not sure it matters that much if Daniel had 70 literal years in mind or not.

[18:22] The timing is about right and as I say, it depends on where you start counting from. You can always make it fit if you keep moving the goal posts. But it all feels rather contrived when you do.

But more importantly, Daniel sees that judgment has come upon the Babylonians and that Israel has suffered enough. You remember how Isaiah puts it in Isaiah 40 speaking about the same moment after the Babylonian exile?

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

It's not that God has overdone the punishment but that it's enough. She's received more than enough, plenty for her sins. And so then, in light of God's word, in light of the period of time being completed, Daniel prays, I turn my face to the Lord God seeking Him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

I pray to the Lord my God and made confession. That fasting, sackcloth and ashes, these things are all symbols of grief. Daniel's prayer is not a jubilant one but a desperately sad one.

[19 : 39] And we're not going to go through it all, I'm afraid, but there are four major themes that I want to highlight from this long prayer. Number one, Daniel confesses his sin and actually he confesses on behalf of the whole nation of Israel.

See verse five, he says, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. Notice how Daniel piles up the vocabulary here to describe the nature of sin from a few different angles.

Do you have, like Daniel, a profound appreciation of sin in all its different aspects? It's good for us to think about, isn't it?

Sin is not a morbid subject we should avoid in sort of a shallow attempt to feel better about ourselves. Sin is something we should look squarely in the face, fess up to as it were, you know, own it for ourselves.

And actually, brothers and sisters, because we know that we have forgiveness and freedom from sin in the Lord Jesus, we don't need to be afraid to look it squarely in the face, to talk openly and honestly about our sins.

[20 : 51] The New Testament encourages us to confess our sins frankly to God and to one another. And in verse 6, Daniel points out that sin is a universal problem. We have not listened to your servants, the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and all the people of the land.

All sin actually stems from unbelief, a failure to heed God's word. We haven't listened to your servants, the prophets. We haven't listened to your voice. The prophets were sent to call people back to faith, back to righteousness and obedience to the covenant.

And God sent His prophets to the people at the very top of society and the people at the very bottom. You know, righteousness could have been a grassroots movement or a top-down movement. In each and every generation, there was an opportunity for the people to turn back to God, but they didn't.

So first of all, Daniel acknowledges his sin or confesses his sin and the sin of the nation. Secondly, Daniel acknowledges or again confesses God's righteousness. Just cast your eye back to verse 4. See how Daniel first addresses God. Oh Lord, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments. And then of course Daniel says, we have sinned and turned aside from your commandments.

[22 : 13] So the covenant was broken, but it wasn't broken because of anything God did or any neglect or unfaithfulness on God's part. Again in verse 7, to you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame.

We'll skip down to verse 13. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us, yet we have not entreated the favor of the Lord our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth.

Therefore the Lord has kept ready the calamity and has brought it upon us. For the Lord our God is righteous in all the works that He has done and we have not obeyed His voice.

See, Daniel doesn't blame God for the calamity that has come upon him and the nation. No, he sees that God is righteous and just in all that He does. He always keeps His word and He was patient.

He warned the people for centuries and centuries not to continue in their rebellion against Him but they would not repent. And so eventually they were overtaken by His wrath, storing up for themselves this calamity.

[23 : 26] It's the same with us, friends. Do you blame God for the state of the world today? Do you blame God for the war, disease and death that plagues us?

The Bible says that we are to blame. God promised to Adam and Eve that if they ate from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that they would bring death into the world and so they did.

And even now, how many wars would end? How many families would be healed if people would just turn and submit to the Lord Jesus, the Prince of Peace, the King of Love?

But we don't. So Daniel confesses his sinfulness and God's righteousness and then Daniel prays and his prayers kind of line up with the two confessions he's just made.

On the one hand, Daniel prays for mercy. You know, what do sinners need? Mercy. So verse 18, Oh my God, incline your ear and hear, open your eyes and see our desolations and the city that is called by your name.

[24 : 34] For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness but because of your great mercy. And on the one hand, Daniel is appealing to God for mercy.

Be compassionate, Lord. Don't give us what we deserve. And on the other hand, Daniel prays for God's glory. Take a look at verse 15 for a moment. Daniel says, And now, O Lord, our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and have made a name for yourself as at this day.

We have sinned. We have done wickedly. Daniel wants God to recall the Exodus, right, when God made a name for himself by rescuing his people from slavery because Daniel wants a new Exodus, another great moment of redemption through which God can glorify his name again.

Verse 16, O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill because for our sins and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people have become a byword among all who are around us.

Think about the pronouns. Daniel wants God to recall that Jerusalem is his city, your city, Daniel calls it, your holy hill. The problem is that your people, O God, have become a byword, right, an object of mockery and a public disgrace.

[26 : 05] Daniel sees that God's glory is tied to the welfare of his people. Verse 19, O Lord, hear, O Lord, forgive, O Lord, pay attention and act, delay not for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name.

I think this is so important to understand because it makes sense of the whole of the history of the world that God's glory is tied to the welfare of his people.

Ever since we were made in God's image, yours and my greatest joy for all eternity will be to behold and share in the glory of God.

If God were to let his own name fall into disgrace, you know, if God somehow failed to protect his own glory and majesty and splendor, then we who are made in God's image would also lose our own glory and joy.

We would be degraded too for we would be made in the image of this shameful thing. That's one of the reasons why it ought to be on our hearts and of utmost importance to us that God's name is hallowed.

[27 : 25] Okay, but that brings us to verse 20 and to the angel's answer. Daniel says, While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and presenting my plea before the Lord my God for the holy hill of my God, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice, he made me understand, speaking with me and saying, O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding.

At the beginning of your pleas for mercy, a word went out and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved. Therefore, consider the word and understand the vision. Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy hill to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin and to atone for your iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and profit and to anoint a most holy place.

Now, before we get into the tricky details of the last few verses, verse 24 is worth lingering on. The word for weeks, right, seventy weeks, you might have a footnote, is literally sevens.

Okay? So, so Gabriel says, seventy sevens are decreed about your people and your holy city. The big picture then is that Daniel has been reading Jeremiah.

He perceives that the exile is only supposed to last for seventy years. But now, God responds, no, Daniel, right, or at least, you know, not quite Daniel.

[29 : 05] it's going to be seventy times seven years before the exile is really over. Right, and then, Gabriel lists six absolutely extraordinary things.

Right, so after the seventy sevens, God is going to, one, finish the transgression, two, put an end to sin, three, atone for iniquity, four, bring in everlasting righteousness, five, seal both vision and prophet, that is, confirm everything he's spoken through the prophets and through visions, and six, anoint a most holy place or a most holy person.

In other words, it's a bit like Isaiah, again, if you're more familiar with Isaiah, which you may not be, that's okay, but hopefully you'll pick it up from this. In the latter half of Isaiah, Isaiah is looking forward to the end of the Babylonian exile, but he ends up promising a whole new creation, a whole new heavens and earth of righteousness and joy and peace, brought about through the atoning death and victorious conquest of the famous servant.

Right, so Isaiah starts with his focus on the exile, but very quickly it gets much bigger than the exile, than Israel's historical return from the exile. And I think the same is happening here.

Daniel is looking forward to the end of the exile, but God wants him to look even further forward to the end of transgression and sin and everything that made the exile necessary.

[30 : 46] And of course, we know, don't we, this sign of Jesus' death and resurrection, that all of these things were fulfilled in him. I'm not going to keep you in any suspense. He is the one who came to put an end to transgression and sin, to make atonement for our sins, to bring in everlasting righteousness.

He is the yes and amen of all God's promises, the one all the prophets, who fulfilled all the prophets had foretold. He is the most holy place and the most holy person, it doesn't exactly matter.

He was the one anointed by the Spirit of God. So, to put it another way, the exile didn't really end when Israel came back from Babylon. And, in a sense, it still hasn't ended, as the Apostle Peter puts it, we are still living in exile now, aren't we?

But, in Jesus, and what he accomplished at the cross, and through his resurrection and ascension, and what he will accomplish at his return, in Jesus, the age of sin and death is finally coming to an end.

No more exiles, no more punishment, no more judgment. The age of everlasting righteousness and eternal life has dawned for God's people. Okay, so that's the big picture, but then, what are we to make of verses 25 to 27?

[32 : 05] These are arguably some of the most difficult and controversial verses in Scripture. We would be here for weeks if I tried to survey everyone's opinions on them and tell you, but, so for what it's worth, I'm just going to try and cut to the chase and tell you what I think and I could be wrong, but, first of all, I think that the numbers are symbolic, right?

We've already talked about that a bit. All the mathematical calculations people do all seem a bit arbitrary and contrived to me and certainly, they have not produced any sort of consensus.

Remember how Jesus said to Peter, Peter asked him, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times? Jesus said to him, I do not say to you seven times, but 77 times.

Are we to take this number literally? Or even approximately? No. It's not about forgiving your brother literally 77 times and no more or thereabouts, you know, 70 or 80 times.

No, it's a symbolic number about completeness. Any and every time your brother sins against you, if he truly repents, you ought to forgive him. Likewise here, Gabriel is not talking about 490 years or weeks or the, you know, then people try and get onto the Jewish calendar to sort of squeeze it down so that it fits 483 years or whatever it is, right?

[33 : 29] But he's not doing that. He's just talking about a very long time until God completes his work of dealing with sin. And then, I think what Gabriel does is he splits the 77s into three periods.

In verse 25, Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven sevens.

Then, for 62 sevens, it shall be built again with squares and moat but in a troubled time. And after the 62 sevens and so on, there's one final seven.

Okay, so in short, you've got three periods. And I've got a bit of a diagram here if you can see it.

Okay, in short, I think you've got these three periods. Gabriel tells Daniel there will be seven sevens followed by 62 sevens followed by one seven adding up to 77s in all.

So far, so good? Right. In verse 25, the first seven sevens will be kicked off by a word that goes out proclaiming that Jerusalem is to be restored and rebuilt.

[34 : 45] There are various suggestions about what that word might be. Again, people often try to do to make the arithmetic work which seems to me to be a mistake but it may be referring to the word from the angel Gabriel that has just come down from heaven to Daniel or the proclamation of Cyrus that the exiles should go home or to the commission of Nehemiah that he can go home and rebuild Jerusalem or to something else or to all of the above.

I prefer that final answer, I think, right? It's not really the point to nail down any one of them. The point is that God's plan for all of history will begin with a word. It will begin with a proclamation, a promise of restoration and there will be a period, a sort of complete period, a sort of snapshot of the whole where at the end of that period an anointed one will come and I take it that this is referring to Zerubbabel or Joshua or Ezra or Nehemiah or all of the above.

At just the right time, God's people will get the spirit-filled leader that they need to lead the new exodus and take them home and begin the rebuilding of the city.

Then, for 62 sevens, Jerusalem will be built again with squares, that is plazas, that threw me for a moment. Anyway, thinking, how's that going to help them rebuild?

That's what they are building. Anyway, I'm stupid. With squares and a moat but in a troubled time. This particularly makes me think of Nehemiah.

[36 : 30] I don't know about you, many other scholars as well. Remember, Nehemiah was commissioned to rebuild Jerusalem, particularly the defences, although a wall, not a moat, really, the infrastructure and the civic life of the city.

And all the while, he faced trouble from those round about him, such that the builders had to work with their swords strapped to their thighs. But again, I don't think this period is specifically referring to Nehemiah or any one man in Israel's history.

And I don't even think the number 62 is very important symbolically. It just represents the long wait between the initial rebuilding phase and the final, short, sharp crisis that completes the 77s.

Okay, so finally, in verse 26, after the 62 sevens, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.

Its end shall come with a flood and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed and he shall make a strong covenant with many for one seven and half of the seven he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering.

[37 : 40] And on the wing of abomination shall come one who makes desolate until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator. So this is the final seven or the final week of years or whatever you want to call it.

After a long time of rebuilding and restoration, an anointed one is going to be killed and the whole city is going to be destroyed. I mean, what a devastating conclusion. And Israel will have labored so long in a troubled time waiting in vain for Jerusalem to be restored to her glory.

And again, I think this has a historical expression in Israel's history. Last week in chapter 8, remember, Daniel was warned about the little horn, Antiochus Epiphanes IV, who would come and destroy the city, the king of bold face.

Next week, we're going to see Antiochus come up again. Right? So I don't think it's too surprising that tucked in the middle here, we haven't changed subject and we're still basically looking at a picture of him.

Antiochus called himself Epiphanes, meaning a manifestation of God. The people called him Epimanes, meaning mad one. In 2 Maccabees chapters 5 and 6, we read about how he defiled the temple and slaughtered men, women, and children.

[39 : 01] He turned the temple into a shrine to Zeus for about three years. Listen to 2 Maccabees chapter 6, verse 3. Harsh and utterly grievous was the onslaught of evil, for the temple was filled with debauchery and reveling by the Gentiles who dallied with prostitutes and had intercourse with women within the sacred precincts and besides brought in things for sacrifice that were unfit, a.k.a. pigs.

The altar was covered with abominable offerings that were forbidden by the laws. People could neither keep the Sabbath nor observe the festivals of their ancestors nor so much as confess themselves to be Jews.

Now this all happened between 167 and 164 B.C. And again, I think in a small way it is the fulfillment, the first fulfillment of this prophecy Daniel received.

After a long wait and a period of rebuilding, there will be a climactic, disastrous conclusion where Jerusalem will be destroyed, although again, Jerusalem wasn't exactly destroyed under Antiochus, but an anointed one will be killed.

People tend to identify Annias III here as a likely candidate. He was a high priest around the time of Antiochus who was usurped by his brother and then assassinated. But again, not all the details fit exactly, and the point is not to make them fit.

[40 : 28] Again, I think this is where people go wrong with this conclusion of chapter 9. The point is not to make them fit. The point is actually to notice that they don't quite. So that when we get to Antiochus Epiphanes IV, the people should still be thinking there must be still a greater, more complete fulfillment to come.

This is not the end of sin, the end of the bringing in of righteousness that we were hoping for. This is how the promises of God keep driving us along towards Jesus in the Old Testament.

So again, to return to our diagram, you could say that the 77s in the first place describe the whole period of history between the return from exile leading up to the abomination that causes desolation under Antiochus Epiphanes IV in 167 BC, the death of Annias the high priest and so on.

But more importantly of course, this is not where God put an end to transgression and sin and made atonement for our iniquity and brought in everlasting righteousness and so on, nor are we still waiting for such a time having reached the cross.

And it's not as if AD 70 is where atonement was made or as if we're still waiting for a final great sacrifice at the end of the world or something like that.

[41 : 50] No, so in my view any interpretation of this passage that doesn't focus on the cross is seriously misguided. And that's why when Jesus preaches his apocalyptic discourse just before the cross in Matthew 24 and 25 in Luke 21 or in Mark 13 I don't think he is primarily talking about AD 70 or his second coming.

He's talking about the abomination of desolation that is about to take place at Golgotha. He's saying you know what the prophet Daniel foretold and what happened when that madman Antiochus desecrated the temple.

Well that's about to happen again and actually this time it's going to be far worse and far more significant because of course Jesus was not just stones and mortar Jesus was everything the temple ever pointed towards.

The true dwelling place between a meeting point between God and man and think about what they did to him. They stripped him naked they ripped the flesh off his bones and they murdered him. What an abomination and of course that is the abomination that has rightly provoked the fierce wrath of God and will lead to the ultimate destruction of the whole nation of Israel and the whole world.

[43 : 22] This time we have gone too far. The end of the world began when we murdered God's only son. Nothing more abominable could ever be done and the desolations that follow will rightly be severe.

And yes I think that AD 70 is part of that desolation and that actually this whole period of history is part of that desolation. We live in difficult days at the end of the world as the judgment of God is upon us.

And for what it's worth I even think the Bible teaches that there will be a particularly difficult time right before the end or something like that. I'm really not all across it but I think you know my reading of 1 Thessalonians and so on something else is coming.

But as I say I think the most important thing to get is that any interpretation of this passage that doesn't focus on the cross is seriously misguided. The cross praise the Lord is where God put an end to sin and brought in everlasting righteousness.

So let me finish this passage by talking about the sovereign God of history the God who made the world and is still ruling over us now. Because God is in control actually that's why we pray to him.

[44 : 43] That's why Daniel prayed to him because we know he hears our prayers and that nothing is too hard for him. He can do anything we ask of him. Even when it looks like all hope is lost when Jerusalem is in ruins as it was in Daniel's day and again in Antiochus' day and again when Jesus was hanging there on the cross.

How it must have looked like all of God's plans and purposes were being crushed. But in spite of present appearances promises, God is in control and will win the victory.

He has promised us that and God always keeps his promises. God has a plan for history and it's still right on track. Thanks to our Lord Jesus.

Let's pray. loving father we thank you for this glorious part of your word that teaches us so much about prayer so much about your your righteousness and goodness your sovereignty over all of history we pray father that you would work in our hearts make us people of faith as we endure these dark and difficult days before the uh before the end thank you for our lord jesus and what he

accomplished on the cross that through his one sacrifice for all he atoned for our sins and through his resurrection and ascension into heaven he has set up a kingdom that will last forever establish the kingdom of righteousness that we get to enjoy through his sacrifice we pray father you keep our eyes fixed on him this week help us to honor and glorify you in everything that we do we ask these things in jesus name amen