SEVENTY ‘SEVENS’ ARE DECREED

Daniel 9:20-27

Key Verse: 24

“Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vison and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.”

In the last lesson, when Daniel understood from the Scriptures that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years, he turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. He confessed the sins of his people including himself, especially the sin of disobeying God’s commands and laws, admitting that the great disaster that was poured out on them as the result of their disobedience. Then he made a bold and earnest request, “O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, because your city and your people bear your Name.” Daniel’s prayer is an exemplary standard of intercessory prayer. May we learn such intercessory prayer. We pray, “Lord, restore our sanctuary in worship, prayer and 1:1 Bible study.” In today’s passage, Daniel shares his third vision, which was God’s direct answer to the prayer of Daniel. In fact, God answered his prayer in a far greater way. Paul said in Ephesians 3:20 that God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine…” This passage, Daniel 9:20-27, can be considered the most marvelous, precise, and amazing prophecy in all of the Bible. It is in the mind of some writers the single greatest defense of the divine authorship of Scripture. In fact, Sir Isaac Newton once said, “We could stake the truth of Christianity on this prophecy alone, made five centuries before Christ.” What a statement! In this passage the word, “understanding” or “understand” is written three times. According to Jesus, the heart of understanding the word of God is the good heart soil (Mt 13:23), which bears good fruit. Particularly God wants us to understand the prophetic vision of this passage. Lord, give us insight and understanding.

Daniel says in verse 20, “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—” This is the summation of Daniel’s prayer. Daniel continues in verse 21, “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.” In this verse, we see Daniel’s circumstances. The word, “the evening sacrifice” draws our attention. When we read the Old Testament, the morning and evening sacrifice were practiced in the temple. Particularly, it is written in Exodus 29:38-39, “This is what you are able to offer on the altar regularly each day: two lambs a year old. Offer one in the morning and the other at twilight.” It is also written in Numbers 28:3-4, “…This is the offering made by fire that you are to present to the LORD: two lambs a year old without defect, as a regular burnt offering each day. Prepare one lamb in the morning and the other at twilight.” What happened in the morning and evening sacrifices was that human hands were laid on the lambs and their sins were transferred to the lambs, which were slaughtered. Daniel must have seen these sacrifices in his boyhood. However, since the temple was destroyed in 586 BC, the sacrifice must have been gone. Yet, Daniel remembered the evening sacrifice and offered his prayer to God at this time of the evening sacrifice, 3 in the afternoon (Ezra 9:5), confessing his and the sin of his people. What a fitting prayer at a fitting time!

As for the angel Gabriel, he had a form of man so Daniel could notice this angel Gabriel, seeing him the 2nd time. Gabriel came to Daniel in swift flight. We know that angels literally are not omnipresent, only God is. They had to go from somewhere to somewhere. So Gabriel must have travelled from heaven to earth in a very fast speed. We cannot comprehend the spiritual invisible world, but this is a realistic description. He got to where Daniel was praying, before he finished his prayer. The name “Gabriel” is interesting. The last two letters of that word signify the name of God. And literally “el” means “the strong one; God.” And the first part of Gabriel comes from the Hebrew word – basically the word is *geber*. *Geber* means “man”. So Gabriel is man of El, like the strong man of God. And he was the key heavenly messenger.

Verse 22 says, “He instructed me and said to me, ‘Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding.” Daniel was so intensely involved in prayer. No doubt his eyes were closed, his head was bowed, and the angel had to touch him to wake him up, to make him alert to his presence. Daniel’s prayer was not for sight and for understanding. His prayer was for his people’s liberation from the captivity by the very act of God according to his promise. But Gabriel came to instruct and inform him so that Daniel might have insight and understanding of the whole plan of God in fulfillment to all his promises. There would be no question in Daniel’s mind. Gabriel continues in verse 23, “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.”

What is the message? Let’s read verse 24 together: “Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.” This verse can be one of the most important ones in the Bible. Here we see the whole plan of God. Here “decreed” is in other translations “determined.” The Hebrew word for “determined” literally means “to cut off something.” The idea is that in all of human history, God has cut off a segment of time and pulled it out for his own purpose with his people. He has taken a period called “seventy ‘sevens’” and cut it off from the rest of history. It is a period geared to the accomplishment of the deliverance of Israel, which is certainly related to the deliverance of the Gentiles. Notice again in verse 24, “your people and your holy city.” Daniel had prayed in his prayer for the people and for the city, and the answer came, related to both.

We know that the entire theme of the Bible is paradise lost because of sin and paradise restored through the removal of sin. Sin came into this world through one man and death through sin and the whole world became the world of sin and death (Rom 5:12) and all people of the world were under God’s eternal condemnation. But God still loved the world and wanted to save the world through sending his Son. John wrote in 1 John 4:9-10, “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” In John’s gospel, when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him he said in 1:29, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” And when Jesus died on the cross, he said, “It is finished” (Jn 19:30) and with that he gave up his spirit. The author of Hebrews said in 10:26, “…he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself”, and in 10:28, “…he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” Salvation comes through God’s righteousness in Jesus Christ. So in the Scriptures righteousness and salvation often go together. God says in Isaiah 46:13, “I am bringing my righteousness near, it is not far away; and my salvation will not be delayed”, in 51:6, “…my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail”, and in 51:8, “…my righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations.” And it is written in Isaiah 9:6-7, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders…Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.” In short, God’s plan for the world is to establish Christ’s kingdom of righteousness through salvation in Christ Jesus, and his dominion will be everlasting. This will be fulfilled through Christ’s first and second coming, which the prophets of the Old Testament saw as one event, though in fact there is the gap of the church age. In the church age, God has done his salvation work among the Gentiles. And the period from Jesus’ first coming to his second coming is called the last days or the end of the ages as is written in Hebrews 9:26.

This plan of God was revealed to Daniel in the expression, “to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for iniquities, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.” Here, to “seal up vision and prophecy” means no more visions and prophecies, which are not needed in Christ’s kingdom. And to “anoint the most holy or Most Holy Place” can refer to the millennial temple (described in Ezekiel in 40-48 and mentioned in Revelation 11:1) for the millennial kingdom of Christ. The message of putting an end to sin and bringing in everlasting righteousness is consistent in the whole Bible, yet must have been an astounding revelation to Daniel, who had been praying, confessing the sin of his people including himself.

However, here in Daniel’s vision a specific message is “seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and for your holy city.” As we studied in the previous passage, Daniel understood from the Scriptures that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. Here, the angel Gabriel mentions seventy ‘sevens,’ which is in Hebrew “shabua” meaning a period of seven (days, years). The same word “shabua” is used in 10:2, “At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks/shabua.” We know that a week refers to seven days. However, in the case of 9:24, if we consider “shabua” “seven days”, it does not make any sense in this context. Then it should be “seven years.” The Jews had this kind of understanding. God says in Leviticus 25:3-4, “For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a Sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards.” And Exodus 20:9-10 says, “Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God…” and Leviticus 23:3, “There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest…” So a Sabbat of rest can refer to the seventh day or the seventh year. And seven of seven years, in the forty-ninth year, came a year of Jubilee Year. And the land rested, and all the estates returned to their original owners, and all debts were forgiven, and all slaves were freed. A multiple of seven years was very familiar to the Jewish thinking.

Again, the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years, that is seventy of one year. And here seventy ‘sevens”, that seventy of seven years, decreed. God seems to live this kind of word or number play so that Daniel and God’s people may understand clearly. Now wee know that seventy ‘seven years’ are 490 years.

Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed, determined by God. This is God’s determination in history that no one can change. The angel Gabriel continues to speak in verse 25, “Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.” The decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem is related to Nehemiah 2:1, “In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him…” Here King Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah the permission to go to Jerusalem to restore and rebuild the city. Historians tells us that he acceded to the throne in 465 B.C. Then it was the year of 445 BC, on the 14th of March. If we count seven ‘sevens’, that is 49 years from 445 BC, this falls on 396 BC, when the restoration work of the city was completed. We see that his work was done in times of trouble when we read Ezra 9, 10 and Nehemiah 4, chapter 6, chapter 9. In that year also the Old Testament was completed as well. It is as if in that year God established his people in their land, his city and a temple, and his Word. What it means is the city was completed inside and outside. Complete restoration was done in forty-nine years. And from there till the coming of John the Baptist, there was no prophet (from the year, 396 BC). Then we count seven ‘sevens’ and sixty-two ‘sevens’, that is, sixty-nine ‘sevens’ (49 + 434 = 483 years) from 445 BC, that is 173880 days according to the biblical calendar (30 days a month; Ge 7:11, 24; 8:3; Rev 11:2; 360 days a year). And if we divide 173880 by 365.25 (according to the calendar we use a year is 365 or 366 days), it becomes 476.057, that is, nearly 476 years (445 +31). It falls on the year AD 32 (since there is AD 0). Amazingly Jesus entered Jerusalem on 9th of Nisan, AD 32, on Palm Sunday and he would be crucified several days later, on Friday. Some say that it was AD 30. There can be a little discrepancy in human calculation, but we believe that God’s calculation is exact, for God has his numbers and his days. It was 173880 days after the issuing of the decree made on 14 of Nisan on 445 BC. Jesus’ entering into Jerusalem as a ruler/king is written in all four gospels, in Matthew 21:5, “See, your king comes to you…”, in Mark 11:10, “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David” (surely kingdom includes king), in Luke 19:38, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” and in John 12:13, “Blessed is the King of Israel.” He would be the true king, conquering sin and death through his death on the cross and resurrection. And God has not only his days but also his time. It is written in the synoptic gospels that Jesus died at ninth hour, that 3 in the afternoon on Friday in the week called Psalm week. What an amazing fulfillment of the prophecy concerning seventy ‘sevenths’, 490 years, that is, 173880 days.

Jesus’ death on the cross is written in the following verse. Verse 26 says, “After the sixty-two ‘sevens’, the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing.” This refers to the crucifixion of Jesus. “He had nothing” is in KJV, “but not for himself.” The Anointed One, the Messiah, was cut off but not for himself. True. It is for all sinners, not for himself. Gabriel continues in verse 26, “The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary...” Here the ruler, the prince, is Satan, whom Jesus called the prince of this world. We remember the destruction of the temple and the city by a Roman general Titus in AD 70. One night two thousand died. The city was torched. By August of 70, Roman soldiers erected their banners in the sacred places, and began to sacrifice to idols. Murder and plunder followed. It was total devastation, desolation upon desolation. The crusades, in AD 1096 and AD1146 also devasted the Holy Land. Throughout history the Jews went through many sufferings including holocaust under Hitler. We see clearly that is no gap year between seven ‘seven’ and sixty-two ‘sevens’, but there is a gap between the sixty-nine ‘sevens’ and one ‘seven.’ It is the time of desolation to the Jews, probably because they crucified the Son of God and rejected Christ, while it is related the gap of church age. Nobody knows how long the period of the gap of desolation will be. But verse says continually, “The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. Desolations cannot be avoided because it was God’s determination.

Then verse 27 says, “He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven’…” This one ‘seven’ reminds us of seven years of tribulation in Revelation. Here “he” is the last-mentioned prince, the final Antichrist. It is written in Revelation 6:1-2 that he appears riding on a white horse with a bow, yet without an arrow. He rod out as a conqueror bent on conquest. It is the conquest of disguised peace. He will show himself unambiguously in the middle of the seven. So verse 27 says continually, “In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple, he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.” It will happen in the 2nd half of the tribulation, called the great tribulation (Rev 7:14), the period of 42 months, 1260 days, or a time, times and half a time. Apostle also wrote this in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, “He will oppose and will and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself be God.” It is also written in 2 Thessalonians 4:8, “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breadth of his mouth and destroy by the splendour of his coming.” Finally, he will be destroyed by the coming of Christ and that will be the end. Jesus said in Matthew 24:15, “So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand.” Then there will be the full restoration of the nation and all things in at the coming of the Messiah and his kingdom. Paul said in Romans 11:25-26, “…Israel experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved…”

We thank and praise God for his plan to put an end to sin and bring in everlasting righteousness, and that he is working according to his time table that seventy ‘sevens’ are determined, which has been fulfilled and will be fulfilled completely. May we put our hope in the coming kingdom of Christ and come close to God as Daniel did, having a broken heart for his people and offering intercessory prayers for the salvation of souls one after another and for his church.