

The commentaries contain long discussions about which “decree” is intended here, but the most likely candidate is the decree of Artaxerxes in 444 BC which allowed Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem to supervise the rebuilding of the city walls. This decree seems to fit closest with the description of rebuilding the street and digging some sort of defensive moat around the city to protect it from invaders; and we know from Nehemiah’s own account that this rebuilding took place in a time of trouble.

Remember that the 70 “weeks” of years is broken down into two smaller segments: seven weeks of 49 years and 62 weeks of 434 years. The first 49 years take us from Nehemiah’s day down to the end of the Old Testament, approximately 395 BC. The next 434 years take us to the time of the ministry of Jesus, the ‘Anointed One.’ The first phrase of verse 26 gives us an important clue about the dating: *After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing* (9:26a). This is crucial because it means that Christ will be born sometime near the end of the 69 weeks, but he will die (be “cut off”) after the 69th week has ended.

Many years ago a man named Sir Robert Anderson exhaustively investigated Daniel’s vision and he concluded, on the basis of intricate calculations, that the words of Daniel 9 had been fulfilled with remarkable accuracy. He also proposed that the years of Daniel 9 were Jewish lunar years of 360 days each. This evidently corresponds with the various numbers given for the Tribulation period in Revelation (chapters 6-19). Putting it all together he concluded that the 69th year ended on the exact day Jesus made his Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem just a few days before his crucifixion. The rest of the verse describes the sacking of Jerusalem in AD 70 by the Roman armies. *The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed* (9:26b).

So far, Daniel’s vision can be historically dated, and we’ve accounted for 69 of the 70 “weeks” of years. But what about the last “week” of seven years? Evidently it must be very important because Gabriel singles it out for special discussion in verse 27: *[The antichrist] will confirm a covenant with many for one “seven.” 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.* The Antichrist will be the last, worst persecutor of the Jews. He is Satan’s false Christ. He is both “against” Christ and “in place of” Christ.

The Antichrist will rise to power during this 70th “week”: he will make a seven-year treaty with the Jewish people, then break the treaty in the middle by proclaiming himself to be God, setting off three and a half years of terrible persecution and worldwide destruction at the end of which the Antichrist himself will be suddenly destroyed by God. But there is a “gap” between the 69th and 70th weeks, a gap that is at least 2000 years long, because the Antichrist has not yet risen. Why the gap? Because this is *kairos* time, God’s time, a time in the future as yet unknown to us.

It’s not uncommon for us to speak in “gaps” like this. If you asked me about my life, I might tell you that I was raised in New York, went to school in Massachusetts, and have pastored in Minnesota for twelve years. That’s a true statement but it would leave out that the years I lived in Pennsylvania and the years spent pastoring in New Jersey. Gabriel passes over the hundreds of years between the 69th and 70th week because they aren’t relevant to Daniel’s understanding. The angel wanted Daniel to focus on the ultimate victory, not on what happens in-between.

What we know of Daniel’s prophecy is provided in the context of a hurting people who need God’s help. And God does not disappoint. ***God responds swiftly.*** While Daniel was yet praying, the angel Gabriel comes to him in swift flight (v. 21). God is attentive to the cry of God’s people and does not delay care for those who turn to God, even if there is sin in and about them. Yes, God responds swiftly, but everything happens in God’s time. This whole prophecy must have seemed like a dream to Daniel; it must have been hard to believe that his people would soon return home, or that the Anointed One would come, or that an antichrist would arise; but Gabriel’s words tell us that all history is in God’s hands. We live in a *chronos* world of clocks and schedules and deadlines, but God stands outside all that, in *kairos* time, viewing the bigger picture, the cosmic scope of eternity, and orchestrating things according to God’s greater plan. Nothing happens by accident and all things work together to fulfill the divine purpose God has ordained.

Since God is in control, we need not fear the age to come. We should not be surprised when we hear of wars in many places; Gabriel said that “desolations are determined.” God planned the unsettled nature of this present age, and there will be no lasting peace until the Prince of Peace returns. This should not lead to pessimism, nor should it cause us to give up our efforts to be peacemakers, but it ought to encourage our efforts. If God brings us to calamity, God will surely bring us through it into God’s Kingdom. Whatever may come, we must not give up striving for God’s Kingdom – it is surely coming.

God is not finished with us yet. Though today the majority of the world lives in unbelief, questioning God’s existence and pushing God to the sidelines, God has not yet written us off. Visions like Daniel’s, with its historical accuracy is proof that God has written us into the plan for eternity. God showed Daniel a vision of the Anointed One who would come to redeem God’s people and turn them back to the Lord.

God responds sacrificially. God provides atonement for God’s people (v. 24) and God will do this through an Anointed One who will suffer on their behalf (v. 26). God will enter our world of pain and sin personally in order to “put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness” (v. 24). The reason that Daniel is so ready to enter into the sin of his people in order to seek mercy for them is that this is God’s own way of dealing with sinners. Daniel simply reflects the gracious character of God.

Grace made fresh. The message of Daniel 9 is made real for us at The Lord’s Table. We have no basis to stand and no right to be anywhere but last in line for God’s mercy. Before the table of God’s provision, we know that we have stumbled and that our sin is just cause for us to tremble before our Savior. And yet, there are the bread and the cup, the symbols of Christ’s body broken and blood spilled for us. God shared our shame to spare us pain and bore our penalty to free us from guilt.

Prayer. Our Father, it is exciting to consider these ancient words and to realize that part of this prophecy is yet to be fulfilled. So much has been confirmed by history and the rest seems to be coming closer day by day. Forgive us for dabbling in the world when we ought to be living serious lives for you. Grant that we might be filled with joy as we contemplate the soon coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. May we all live to hear the shout and the trumpet call of God when the Lord returns for his own. Until then we pray that you would use us to point many people to Jesus, in whose name we pray, Amen.

A Peek Into God’s Calendar

Sunday, March 15, 2015 9:20-27

The federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Daniel 9:20-27

The Greek language has two words for time: *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* time is clock time, chronological time, time that we can measure and understand. *Kairos* time is God’s time: it stands outside the time-space continuum of human existence and it cannot be measured or understood by us. Daniel’s vision in chapter 9 includes elements of both *chronos* and *kairos* time.

The background is pretty straightforward. In 538 BC, Daniel read the prophet Jeremiah’s words and realized that the exile in Babylon was soon to end. Daniel then prayed a passionate prayer (9:1-19), confessing the sins of his people and asking God to restore them to their homeland. Responding to Daniel’s prayer, the angel Gabriel comes with an answer from God, but it is not the answer Daniel anticipates: Gabriel says that God will answer Daniel’s prayer in God’s own time. God says to Daniel, “Yes, but not yet.” *Chronos* and *kairos*.

Gabriel explains to Daniel that Israel’s peace will not come for 490 more years: *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* (9:24). Specifically there will be 49 years of rebuilding, followed by another 434 years at which time the Anointed One will be cut off, and sometime after that Jerusalem will be sacked and the Temple destroyed. That’s *chronos* time.

We know that this happened, just as Daniel saw it and as Gabriel explained it. Having laid out the general outline and purpose of the “70 weeks,” the angel now gives more detail. Gabriel tells that the beginning of the 70 weeks is tied to a specific point in time. *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 “sevens.” It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble* (9:25).