

Prayer: God's Declaration of Independence – Part 4
Daniel 9:24-27

*“I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved. Therefore, **consider the word and understand the vision.**”*

Introduction: Today we celebrate one of the most significant dates in our nation's history: *July 4, 1776* and the Declaration of Independence, where 13 colonies explained why they were at war with the Kingdom of Great Britain and why they regarded themselves as 13 independent sovereign states, no longer under British rule. The Revolutionary War began over a year before on **April 19, 1775** with a confrontation between British troops and local militia at Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts, and would actually continue on through **1781 in Yorktown**, ending most of the organized hostilities. However, it was not until **September 3, 1783** with the Treaty of Paris that war officially ended, leading to **Evacuation Day**, November 25, 1783, where the British army, under Sir Guy Carleton, boarded the last of the ships to leave NY City on Manhattan Island that this new nation was truly free to form its own Constitution, enjoy freedom from British oversight, and make its own mistakes. The **Declaration** served to clarify intentions, unite a disparate group, and drive to a conclusion. Declarations can be helpful in the present to move people to future things.

This morning we are going to look at a **declaration, a decree** that God gave to Daniel through the angel Gabriel, and it would lay out the future history for Israel from Daniel's day until the return of Jesus Christ a final time. This was an answer to his **prayer of confession** both for himself and his nation, asking for God to act according to His character in forgiving a sinful people. God not only forgave, but **declared** how they could be forgiven, that they would receive something even greater, and would have a future beyond their initial return to the land of Jerusalem. Now, these **4 verses** are glorious, but admittedly have a myriad of challenges, and what Stephen Miller said are the “four most controversial verses in the Bible.” Before venturing into these waters, it's good to remember a few things:

- 1) **Some Scripture is hard to understand, but when we dig we find nuggets of gold** - God gave us His Word to know Him, understand His plan and will, and to see Jesus and the gospel. Though the Bible can be understood by a child, it was not given to us in a childish way. The Berean church was commended for their daily examination of Scripture (Acts 17:11), and it's Scripture that bears witness of Jesus Himself (John 5:39). We read, study, examine, and apply NOT to earn points, but in order to know and understand. The more I have understood Daniel, the more the Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) have made sense and been a comfort. We believe this foundational truth, that the more we study and understand God's Word, the more we understand God, ourselves, our purpose, God's church, His will, and the future of this world. So we know that digging into hard passages yields fruit, so we welcome brain cramps and spinning heads, knowing that they will produce growth.
- 2) **The Bible gives us what is Real & Historical** - Scripture is not a mystical guide to life nor is it the stuff of legend. It is verifiable in history, explaining the redemptive story of humanity through real people in real space and time. God is precise and consistent in His dealings with us throughout so we can trace the historical parts of Scripture through the history we read in books. Yes, when we have apocalyptic or prophetic language it feels strange, but we've seen even scary visions are ground in history and reality.

- 3) **Literal Interpretation is both challenging and rewarding** - To stay consistent in interpretation is a challenge, and this passage gives one of the greatest challenges. So many want to explain away certain numbers, dates, or years because it can get confusing and seemingly convoluted. Yet, we will always strive to interpret as literally as the text or normal language demands, and what is yielded is a beautiful layout of truth in action throughout history itself.
- 4) **If we are ever going to have some disagreement, it'll be here** - A typical section of Scripture we'd study together will have a few interpretive challenges that require thought, examination, and conclusion, where any disagreement would be minor. However, this section has interpretive challenges in every line and many of its words. That means there may be agreement in one part and disagreement in others. What we will lay out this morning is the result of hours of study, but in no way will we be dogmatic on some conclusions. What we can agree on we will make clear: **Christ making atonement for sin, that He was cut off or died, and that He will return to establish eternal righteousness.** As any family, we can lovingly disagree and even debate some of the finer points, but we can all leave agreeing on the main and thus most important truth realities.

So we strive, like Daniel, to **consider the word and understand the vision.** God has graciously revealed these things to us, thus they are relevant, needed, and able to be understood. So let's dig in and have some fun.

The Scope and Purpose of the Vision Declared:

Daniel 9:24 - "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.

- **The Timeframe of the Future Stated**

Right away, the declaration of God through Gabriel divides many as to the meaning: **70 week are decreed.** Somehow this was the timeframe that unlock the rest of the vision, so it's good to pause to make sure we understand what is meant here. Many have believed this to be an **indistinct amount of time** or used numerology to explain what it means (7 x 7 x 10 signified perfection and completion). But in understanding language and context, we'll see that what are declared is really **70 7's of years, or 490 years.** Why do we say that?

1. **The language issue** - The word "weeks" here simply means "sevens". That means that it can be used for days, weeks, months, years, or even indefinite amount of time depending on the context. It *could mean weeks, but* we must consider the context to make a final call
2. **The context** - Daniel had just asked about the future based on the **70 years of captivity** Israel was just coming out of, so *years, not days or weeks have been the focus.* Also, in Daniel 10:2, Daniel mourned for **three weeks**, with the understanding it was no 21 years but 21 days. Here he added the word "days" in the text to literally say "three sevens of days" to differentiate from chapter 9 and the idea of years.
3. **The overall context** - The reason Israel faced **70 years of captivity** was Israel's refusal to keep the Sabbath of rest for the land (2 Chronicles 36:21). After every six years of working the land, they were to allow their fields to rest on the seventh year (Lev. 25:1-7). This was to express trust in the Lord's provision rather than their own strength like the other nations. Failure to do this would result in them being driven from the land (Lev. 26:33-35; Jer. 34:12-22). They apparently had violated 70 Sabbath years, over 490 years of their nearly 800 years of existence, necessitating 70 years of captivity. Now God decreed 70 7's, or 490 years, for the future. The word

“decreed” means “cut off or cut out”, meaning God had cut out a certain period of time to accomplish His divine purpose for Israel.

- **The Focus of the Future Narrowed**

Notice that the decree was specifically the **people of Israel and the city of Jerusalem**. This is important to keep in mind since Daniel had received visions about the future Gentile rulers of the world, but this vision was specifically geared toward Israel, God’s chosen people, and their future in the land. Despite their sin and rebellion, God would not only bring them back in the land after captivity, but He will do it again in our future. What we, as non-Jewish people, get to enjoy, is access to God through Jesus Christ. ***“This mystery is that the Gentiles (non-Jews) are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*** (Eph. 3:6). We are grafted into Christ, the Vine, just as every Jewish person today (Rom. 11:11-24). But to understand **who is being addressed helps us narrow the scope of the vision given.**

- **The Goal of the Future Revealed**

Gabriel gave a **6 fold** goal or purpose that was to be achieved by God in the future for Israel. The first three are more **negative, dealing with sin**, where the final three are **positive**. What we’ll see is ALL of them have ultimate fulfillment in the future (even our future) yet with some fulfilled in principle in **Christ’s first coming**:

Negative:

- 1) **To end the rebellion** - At the culmination or through the 70 weeks, Israel’s rebellion, apostasy, sin and dispersion will be brought to an end
- 2) **To bring sin to completion** - Sin will be brought to final judgment, will be sealed up, and forgiveness will be offered
- 3) **To atone for iniquity** - The path for ending and completing sin will be **atonement for wickedness**, which means “to make a covering”. The word *kipper* (atone) when used in relation to sin, meant “to cover, wipe out, to make harmless, non-existent, or inoperative”. Since the Garden of Eden when God covered up Adam and Eve after they sinned (Gen. 3:21), and the OT sacrificial system itself (Lev. 16:15-16), God had covered up or atoned for the sin of Israel through the shedding of blood, so that man and God could have a relationship.

Now, it’s good to pause here. All three of these ideas are tied together, and were brought about by the death of Jesus on the cross. **2 Corinthians 5:19** “...that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them.” *Each of these were fulfilled in principle through the cross:* rebellion turned to peace (Col. 1:20), sin to forgiveness (1 Cor. 6:11), and a once for all sacrifice by Christ to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb. 9:26). However, each of these will **ULTIMATELY** be fulfilled in the future, when Christ delivers sin and death into eternal judgment. In other words, we Israel (and us) are still challenged by our sin, we still struggle daily, and still need forgiveness. What these three promises point to is something future yet, when we will live together and worship **without rebellion, sin, or iniquity.**

Positive:

- 1) **Bring in eternal (perpetual) righteousness** - When we come to Christ, we are given Christ’s righteousness, imputed to us. (2 Cor. 5:21). However, it is not lived out perfectly. In the future, Jeremiah stated, “Behold the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and He shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land,. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which He will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’ (Jer. 23:5-6; cf. Isa. 11:2-5).

- 2) **Seal up prophetic vision** - Sealing up either means to close or set a seal of authentication by a king or other official (Jer. 32:10; 1 Kings 21:8). There will be prophecy until the return of Jesus, but when He returns and is present with His own, there will be no need for further prophecy or vision.
- 3) **Anoint a most Holy Place** - Note that this says “anoint”, which means to consecrate for religious service, and points to a place, not a person. This seems to denote a future Temple, most likely the one described by Ezekiel in 40-48. This will be a place, in Jerusalem, where worship of the true God will once again take place.

Again, putting these three together, we can conclude that what God was pointing to for Daniel was not simply a near fulfillment in the person of Jesus, but something yet future where God will bring about full righteousness for His people, no longer prophesying about the future since redemptive history will have been fulfilled, and where worship will perpetuate. Though there may be much debate, we don't want to miss the glorious nature of these six things. This is a sum of exceptional promises God gives His people Israel that will be enjoyed by all who follow Him in Christ: **perfect forgiveness, being rid of sin, no more guilt, perfect righteousness and obedience, no need for knowledge of the future, and holistic worship.** What a promise of the future, one that is based on God's promise and work of Jesus on the cross.

The Sequence of Future Events Presented

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 wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

Last week we said we'd have some fun with this passage, and here we are. What I'll present to you is one possibility of time and dates, but if you disagree and have another/better option, I will not fight you too hard on it. It will be good to think through this but not get too wrapped up in the particulars. However, I know for my personal study, this has been extremely helpful to get the sequence clear in my mind. So let's look at what these have to say:

From the time of Daniel to the Messiah (25)

First off, we need to clarify the translation. The ESV is one of a few major translations that presents a big break between seven weeks and 62 weeks, making it seem disjointed.¹ A better translation is given in the NASB:

“So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be **seven weeks and sixty-two weeks**; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress”

¹ Because of an *athnach* (a major disjunctive punctuation mark) under the ‘seven weeks’ in the Massoretic text it is thought by some commentators that there should be a major break after these words and thus the words “sixty-two weeks’ begin a new sentence. This I seen in the RSV, NEB, and ESV translations. However, most commentators think that the seven weeks and the 62 weeks are successive or continuous, making a total of 69 weeks between the decree to restore Jerusalem and Messiah the Prince - “Chronological Aspects of The life of Christ”, Harold Hoehner, p. 129-130.

In this we see that Messiah, or the anointed One, will come at the conclusion of 7 + 62, or 69 weeks of years. We also are given that here will be a **decree** issued to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, and that re-build will be in a time of distress, and will include a plaza and moat (or a ditch below the wall - not necessarily one filled with water). The next verse (26) tells us of important events following this time, so we must determine what this is talking about. **If the weeks of years are literal, we must make a call as to WHEN that decree was issued (the starting point) and how long this stretch will be.** Again, I will lay out a possibility that I believe is the best option, but admittedly has its own problems, along with every other option.²

When was this decree made? The initial, most logical date to start is **538 BC** when Cyrus made a decree for the Jewish exiles to return to rebuild the Temple. However this decree did not include any re-building of the walls or the city itself. Others believe the start date was **458 BC** with the decree of Artaxerxes to Ezra (Ezra 7:11-26). Again, this decree did not talk about the rebuilding to the city or the wall, but it **DOES** bring the conclusion of 483 years (69 x 7) to about **26-27 AD**, which would put it to a possible date of the start of Jesus' ministry. This has much to commend itself but still falls short. The best option would be the **decree of Artaxerxes to Nehemiah** in Neh. 2:1-8, where he commissions a rebuilding of the city and the wall, in the midst of much distress. This is also the final decree given by Persian kings in regard to the rebuilding of Jerusalem. But there is an admitted problem with this date, because if you add **483 years** to 444 B.C, it brings you to 39-40 AD, which would put it **AFTER** the time Jesus was on earth, His death and resurrection.

Now, I will not spend a ton of time with this next explanation, and if I did, I'd need to grow out a big white beard, start smoking a cigar on stage and have a bunch of white boards, writing out equations in an eccentric way. But here is a possible solution.

In Scripture and in Jewish reckoning, a year would not always be counted as 365 years, but with *prophetic years* of 360 days. In Revelation 11-13, we see that the Tribulation period has timing sequences of **time, and times, and half a time** (12:14, cf. Dan 7:25) which would be 3 1/2 years. Revelation then talks about this time as being **42 months to the midpoint** (11:2, 13:5), or also **1260 days**. In other words, the counting of this 7 year period is based on years of 360 days. (We are really going to Doc Brown it now!). If you take 483 years and multiply it by 360 days, you come up with **173,880 days**.

Now, if you start with Neh. 2:1 and account for an ascension year for Artaxerxes, we have **March 14, 444 B.C.** Walking from this point on, accounting for 115 days for leap years and remembering that from 1 B.C to 1 A.D is one year, not two, after adding 173,880 days, we arrive at **March 29/30, which is Nisan 10, A.D 33**, with Jesus dying on Nisan 14, or April 3, 33 A.D. (rising again on April 5). If these calculations are valid (based also on Robert Anderson's work "*The coming Prince*" 1895), the end of 69 weeks would conclude with Jesus entering into Jerusalem on **Palm Sunday, days before He went to the cross**. Jesus did not do anything haphazardly, but set events in motion to present Himself as Israel's king on the exact date, the exact time that God had prophesied, fulfilling **Zechariah 9:9 and Daniel 9**.

Now, if the math is off, or if you set the date of Jesus' crucifixion at A.D 30, the issue is the same. Messiah the Prince is prophesied to come as a fulfillment of Daniel's prayer, to bring forgiveness of sin. This helps us understand the last 2 verses.

Events following the 69th week (26)

There are 2 key events that follow the 69th week:

- **Anointed one (Messiah) will be cut off and have nothing** - "Cut off" was used literally to cut something or figuratively to remove, eliminate or destroy (Deut. 12:29, Josh 7:9), or "cut off" in death (Gen. 9:11, Exod. 31:14; Jer. 9:21). Here, it refers to the death of Jesus, the crucifixion of Christ who was cut off and would "have nothing".

² This has been largely influenced by Harold Hoehner's work in "Christological Aspects of the Life of Christ", who was a NT scholar (1935-2009) par excellence.

When Jesus died, it seemed like the biggest loss ever, where His disciples left Him, leaders called for His elimination, and seemingly nothing to show for it all. Yet, we know that the point of His greatest defeat was truly the greatest victory, a **declaration of Independence for sinful people**, that if we would look to Jesus, trust in Him, ask for forgiveness, He has the ability and desire to forgive us, bring us to Himself, and reign with Him forever. That is **the true INDEPENDANCE DAY we celebrate, every day.**

- **People of the Prince will destroy the city and sanctuary** - Note that after this, the city would be destroyed, NOT by another prince, but **the people of the Prince**. If you'll remember, the little horn would come out of 10 kingdoms, and an extension of Rome (Dan. 7:8). In **70 A.D**, Titus Vespasian led a siege against Jerusalem, concluding in its utter destruction, along with the razing of the Temple, with Josephus claiming 1.1 million people were killed in the siege.

Future 7 year period still to come (27)

After this, "he" shall make a strong covenant. Who is the "he"? The Prince from whom his people destroyed Jerusalem (the he refers to the closest and last antecedent is to be taken as the subject of the following verb). There is a **70th week**, one that would be AFTER the destruction of Jerusalem (which means it can't be Antiochus Epiphanes or Titus) and will make a covenant with the people of Israel/Jerusalem for **7 years**. He will put an end of sacrifice and offering, which means that somehow those will be restored, and will then pour out abominations of desolations on the people. In Daniel 7:24-26 this pointed to the little horn or Antichrist, and Revelation 11-13 it lays out what these 7 years will look like, with 3 1/2 years of brokered peace, but a dramatic shift at the half-way point when Antichrist breaks the covenant, pushes people to worship him, and begins persecution never seen before. This will culminate in Christ's second coming and establishment of all the promises in verse 24, both in the Millenial Kingdom and Eternal State to come.

That is the point. Not necessarily the dates and math to calculate specific times, although I believe God is precise and gives us the information we need. But the point of Daniel 9 is **Christ the Messiah**. In a world that is in rebellion against God everyday, whether they reject the gender God created them with, or marriage that God created for our good, or sexuality that God created to be enjoyed within marriage alone, or trying to bring about good and change in culture on our own terms and not God's alone, **rebellion leads to true oppression**. We think we have freedom to do what we want, but when we are opposed to God, we put ourselves under His wrath and in a path of misery. **Jesus came as the answer to our prayer of liberation, forgiveness, and freedom**. He was cut off so we could be counted in. He was made nothing so we could have everything. He gave Himself up to death so we could have life. Today is a day we celebrate Independence, not from God but from our sin, to give ourselves completely, freely, to our God through Jesus Christ. That is the point of this prophecy. That is the point of life. That is the point of Scripture itself, to the glory of God.