



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 13 Issue 43

November 2, 2014

Truths for Bitter Providences, Part 14

J. I. Packer in the introduction to his very popular book, *Knowing God*, references John Mackay's story of a couple of people sitting on the balcony of a house watching travelers go by on the road below:

The 'balconers' can overhear the travellers' talk and chat with them; they may comment critically on the way that the travellers walk; or they may discuss questions about the road, how it can exist at all or lead anywhere, what might be seen from different points along it,

and so forth; but they are onlookers, and their problems are theoretical only. The travellers, by contrast, face problems which, though they have their theoretical angle, are essentially practical- problems of the 'which-way-to-go' and 'how-to-make-it' type, problems which call not merely for comprehension but for decision and action too. Balconers and travellers may think over the same area, yet their problems differ. Thus (for instance) in relation to *evil*, the balconer's problem is to find a theoretical explanation of how evil can consist with God's sovereignty and goodness, but the travellers' problem is how to master evil and bring good out of it. Or again, in relation to *sin*, the balconer asks whether racial sinfulness and personal perversity are really credible, while the traveller, knowing sin from within, asks what hope there is of deliverance. Or take the problem of the *Godhead*; while the balconer is asking how one God can conceivably be three, what sort of unity three could have, and how three who make one can be persons, the traveller wants to know how to show proper honour, love and trust towards the three persons who are now together at work to bring him out of sin to glory. (Packer, 1993, pp. 5-6)

If there is a section of Daniel that will differentiate between the "balconer" and a "traveler" it is Daniel 9. Daniel was written to encourage the child of God living in the valley of weeping. It was a deposit that God gave His exiled people to help them reconcile the fact of their suffering with the fact of His triumph over sin, Satan, and death. As ones who had entered into the valley of the shadow of death, what was there to encourage the child of God to remain faithful to the Lord? What was there to help the child of God to purpose within their heart NOT to compromise their service of Christ? Daniel answers these questions with a series of anecdotes which proclaim the sovereignty, goodness, grace, and eternal purpose of God. For example, listen to the incredible announcement proclaimed in Daniel 9:

Daniel 9:24, "Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy *place*."

What an incredible promise! It indicates to us:

- There is a limit to the suffering and misery that we are going to experience in this life!
- Someday, God is going to deal out the death blow to sin and its consequences!
- In the end, we and God win!

Yet this same promise in the hands of a balconer has generated volumes upon volumes of debate concerning prophecy and the end times! And please hear me, I do believe there is a place for the debate, but whatever you say and however long you say it, in the end you have been given this passage to minister to those with a troubled heart.

- How does speculation over the dating of the triumphal entry from this text sooth the conscience of the dying saint?
- How does the speculation encourage the weak and hurting to keep going in the face of

deprivation or tragedy?

If we walk away from this passage unable to comfort those with a troubled heart we have not read the passage!

An Incredible Announcement

Daniel 9:24-27, “Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy *place*. 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. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end *will come* with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate...”

This passage contains what would have been incredible news to an exile as well as a shocking message of doom! Notice first that the good news is that the Temple will be rebuilt.

Daniel 9:25, “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.”

This section began in Daniel 9:1-2 and is a reference to Jeremiah 29:10 where God promised to restore the city of Jerusalem after God’s people were in exile for seventy years! “Jerusalem” and the “temple” had major theological significance for the people of God both in the Old Testament and New Testament eras. When David conquered this Jebusite city and established it as the capital of Israel (2 Samuel 5:6–10; 1 Chronicles 11:4–9), Jerusalem became the central focus of God’s people! Accordingly one of David’s earliest royal acts was to bring the Ark of the Covenant, the footstool of God (1 Chronicles 28:2), to reside in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:17). By doing this, David established Jerusalem as the center of Jewish religious life! Accordingly, Jerusalem would eventually house the Temple (2 Chronicles 3:1–17; 1 Kings 6:1–38)!

As a result, “Jerusalem” became so prominent in the thinking of the Israelites that it came to serve as a title for the nation as a whole (Isaiah 2:2; Amos 2:5; Micah 4:1)! This no doubt is why the destruction of Jerusalem symbolized the rejection of Israel (2 Kings 23:27).

Israel’s hope for restoration from exile was expressed by the image of a restored Jerusalem- which again no doubt is why the focus of the returning Israelites to their land in 536 BC was on the rebuilding of the city and its temple (2 Chronicles 36:23; Nehemiah 2:5, 18; 6:15–16)! And

it was this passion for Jerusalem and its temple that ultimately led the Jewish leaders in Christ's day to execute their Messiah after it was falsely reported that Christ said He would destroy it:

Matthew 26:65-66, "Then the high priest tore his robes, saying, 'He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; what do you think?' They answered and said, 'He is deserving of death!'"

Stephen would suffer a similar fate for his words against the temple (cf. Acts 7:47-53)! And from all of this it is clear that the city of Jerusalem had become sacramental; a seal/proof of the favor of God! Accordingly, God's people lived in exile burdened by the destruction of the holy city... *if only it could be rebuilt they would know God's favor and compassion had been returned!* As such, the announcement of Daniel 9:25 would have been received by Daniel as the best of news! Jerusalem was going to be rebuilt! Hope soon would be restored!

And sure enough, the city was rebuilt along with its "plaza and moat" during the time of Nehemiah (445 BC)! By way of note, the word for "moat" is not used anywhere else in the Old Testament and so we really have no idea what this means. It is however found in the Dead Sea Scrolls with the meaning of "conduit" which could very well be the idea here in reference to Hezekiah's tunnel. Regardless, Daniel at this time received the glorious news from the Lord that in short time, the city of God would be rebuilt! Yet whatever excitement that may have generated in Daniel's heart would have been dashed by the next announcement, the bad news, the Temple would be devastated and it would look incredibly bleak for the Christ.

Daniel 9:26-27, "Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end *will come* with a flood [IOW, it will be shocking, quick, and devastating]; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. And he [the prince] will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate..."

There is little debate as to the identity of the "Messiah" and the "prince" in this passage. While the term "anointed one" in Daniel's day was NOT exclusively a messianic title (recall priests as well as kings were anointed), nevertheless as this passage speaks of the end time it is almost universally accepted as a description of the rejection and death of Christ. Furthermore, the reference to a "destroyed city and sanctuary" once again is generally accepted as a description of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. If that is correct, then the title "the prince" of this text would be Satan and/or the anti-Christ figure promised in the last days (which you will recall began when Christ rose from the dead).

Therefore, there would come a time when an anti-Christ figure would "make a firm covenant" the word is גָּבַר (*gābar*) which is an obscure term translated as "prevail," "mighty," or "have strength." The idea is the forcing of an agreement by means of superior strength. This would result in "the sacrificial offerings being forcefully stopped" which did occur in 70 A.D.

The reference, “on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate” is also obscure. E. J. Young pointed out that the “pinnacle” of the temple (Matthew 4:5) is literally “little wing” in the Greek (πτερύγιον [*pterugion*]) and so argued that the “wing” was the summit of the temple. Regardless, it is viewed by most as a reference to a location on the temple mount at which “abominations” (a reference to something filthy or loathsome, Hos. 9:10; Nah. 3:6) would take place! From Daniel’s perspective and even from ours, what is prophesied here is rather obscure. Yet the point is not! There would come a time in the future when Jerusalem, its temple, and its people once again would be the object of attack. The consequence will be “war and desolation” and the destruction of Jerusalem! But herein is the relevancy of what Gabriel told Daniel.

Daniel 9:23, “...so give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision.”

Daniel ought NOT to get caught up in the awful news of the full and final destruction of his most precious hope, Jerusalem. As painful as the message may be, Daniel must let go of all earthly hopes. Truly, they/it will be destroyed! Yet if he would submit to the message and accept it, he would “gain a glorious understanding” as it relates to God’s kingdom! What specifically is it that Daniel would gain? He would gain an understanding of the vindication of God’s glory, the triumph of His grace, and the full and final reconciliation of God’s people to Himself!

An Incredible Consolation

Daniel once again, speaking of the antichrist figure wrote:

Daniel 9:27, “And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate, even [“that is”] until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.”- it is the significance of this latter statement that would break through Daniel’s gloom as a ray of sunshine on a dark day! Don’t Miss It! Satan, his people, and his kingdom eventually will be “destroyed!”

Literally “*they will be brought to completion.*” In other words, their day in the sun will be over; their time as rebels against God and His people will be complete! In fact notice, this ultimate destruction is “decreed” which refers to a decision that cannot be changed! From this passage, we derive at least two conclusions:

1. Whatever ill we as God’s people face someday will come to an end!
2. From the foundation of the world God has set a day and a time when sin and sinful beings will be condemned.

As glorious as this is, we must see that this was not a pie-in-the-sky promise. It was rooted and grounded in the glorious news that already had been revealed to Daniel. Recall the prophesy

God gave Nebuchadnezzar about the kingdom of God:

Daniel 2:44, "And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and *that* kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever."

Do you understand that God has deigned to make this the believer's confidence and hope? That is what the prophecy in Daniel 2 was all about! It is Christ, His Kingdom, His victory! In the end, HE and IT will win out over all things and we with Him! Notice further what already has been revealed to Daniel and all exiles as a glorious consolation:

Daniel 7:13-14, "I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and *men of every* language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed."

In Christ we have become citizens of that Kingdom! In the words of Martin Luther in *A Mighty Fortress*:

...let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also; the body they may kill: God's truth abideth still; His kingdom is forever! (Great Commission Publications, 1990, p. 92)

Daniel 7:27, "Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of *all* the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom *will be* an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him!"

When we examined this we were confronted with a most amazing truth:

1. Most treatments on the Second Coming of Christ focus on HIS glory and HIS vindication- and that rightly so!
2. Yet this passage clarifies the glorious description as it indicates that not only will Christ overcome the earthly kingdoms of this age, but so also will we- such that we personally will receive "the greatness" of any and all earthly kingdoms!

At this time, what is going to happen?

Daniel 9:24, "Seventy [sevens] have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place."

What an incredible promise! At the end when Satan and His followers are finally dealt with,

notice what God has planned for us! He will “finish the transgression” the word for “transgression” (עֲשָׂוָה [peša ‘]) denotes a rejection of God’s authority, specifically as expressed in His covenant. The idea is covenant rebellion in which God’s claim and authority is cast off in favor of autonomy. Recall, it was this that God’s people were guilty of at the time of Daniel. It was this that the prophet lamented (cf. Daniel 9:5)!

The time is coming when all covenant rebellion will be “finished”! The word is כָּלָה (kālâ) which denotes the bringing of something to completion. Do you understand that there will come a time of completion in your life when covenant rebellion will be no more! You will love God with a love untainted by sin! At this time, God further will “make an end of sin.” The word for “sin” is חָטָא (hātā) which is the most common word in the Old Testament that is used to denote sin. It is from this that the idea of “missing the mark” comes from (Judges 20:16). And thus here it refers to any falling short of THE standard and so THE glory of God.

Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

This as well someday is going to be “brought to an end.” The expression is the same as “sealing something up” (חָתַם [hātam])- as in prison (Daniel 6:18). The idea is NOT bringing something to an end, BUT shutting it up such that it is guarded, sealed, held under lock- *never again to be seen!* What a glorious thought. Not only will all covenant rebellion be finished, but all sin will be removed/sealed up from the sight of God, never to be seen again!

To appreciate this we need only consider Adam, in the garden, in a perfect state, he rebelled against God! So what makes you think that when we get to heaven, another perfect state, that we won’t likewise rebel? Answer: because it is God’s plan in the last day to “make an end of sin!” That means it will never again be possible! So get this; heaven will be a place where we will not be able to sin!

The Messiah will also “make atonement for iniquity.” The word for “iniquity”- אָוֶה (‘āwâ)- is a strong word meaning “to bend, twist, distort, or pervert.” It refers both to a twisted deed as well as its consequence (which is punishment). Housed in this word is both a judgment as well as a sentencing. The idea is reflected in Paul’s words in Romans 1.

Romans 1:32, “Although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”

Such is the case for any and all who commit “iniquity.” What they do is heinous in God’s eye and so understood to be condemned. Now we might think that such blatant rebellion could only be met with punishment; that is what is behind the sinner who says gazing at their sin, “*God could never forgive me; what I have done is too awful!*” Yet based on this text it was for this type of sinning Christ died on the cross and so gave His life!

Notice the word for “atonement” (כִּפּוּר [kāpar]) from which we get the expression Yom KIPPUR references the paying of a price or a ransom. In the context of Judaism the ransom price was the life of an innocent being and so its blood (Leviticus 17:11). Christ gave His life NOT simply for the “acceptable” sins we might commit, BUT the unacceptable, that which societally is heinous and unforgiveable! God also will bring in “everlasting righteousness.” The word for “righteousness” צְדָקָה (sedeq) refers to the moral standard of right that is set on account of God’s character. Daniel pictures a time when this standard of right will “ever and always” (that is the idea behind “everlasting”- עוֹלָם [‘ôlām]) be maintained and so upheld. In other words, there will come a time in Redemptive History when righteousness will forever be maintained. Never again will there be sin and so its consequences like sorrow, sickness, suffering, and death.

Daniel was ordered to “seal up vision and prophecy.” The idea is that this form of revelation, where visions are given to prophets who then foretell the future someday will be removed from sight never again to be seen. Recall this word is one and the same as in the second statement, “make an end of sin.” Come the Last Day, God will “seal” up prophecy and remove it from His redemptive program. That means in glory we no longer will need prophets nor will we violate their word (cf. Daniel 9:6). Why? We will commune/dialogue with God face to face!

Daniel further wrote “anoint the most holy.” Many Bible translations read, “...anoint the most holy place,” but that is an interpretation on the part of the Bible translation. The Hebrew literally reads, “...anoint the most holy.” The “most holy” what? The object is not stated and so could refer to a “holy place” (as translated)- like Jerusalem or the Temple. And initially that makes sense since at the start Daniel was burdened by the welfare of the holy city of Jerusalem (Daniel 9:1-2). Yet it is important to note that while Daniel was most concerned about Jerusalem, God clearly was not! As we just saw, the future of this holy city was not bright! In fact, the contrast of this text is between the city of Jerusalem and the Messiah! In light of this, our verse actually references a changing of the guard in which the type, Jerusalem, is replaced by its substance, Christ! Accordingly, this passage looks forward to the day when Christ is anointed and so set apart/designated as the place of God’s divine approval! It will be at this time that “...every knee shall bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...” (Philippians 2:10, 11)! Sinclair Ferguson put it this way:

It was right that [Daniel] should long to see the people delivered from captivity; it was right that he should long to see Jerusalem rebuilt and the temple worship reinstated. Yet the Lord wanted Daniel to see beyond these things to what they foreshadowed, however painful that might be. God’s ultimate purpose was not a temple made with hands and a holy place entered but once each year. His Son was the place in which men were to approach God; His sacrifice was the one which would bring forgiveness. (Ferguson, 1988, p. 188)

Do you see the incredible future that awaits us all in Christ? Yes, the things of this life which

give us security and hope will all be removed- parents, loved-one, our strength, our wits! The future and fate of “Jerusalem” (whatever that may be in your life) is not a good one! But if we will release our grip on these things, we will see that our security and hope is ever and only in Christ! From this I hope you see that God’s purpose and plan for all things are realized in Christ!

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