

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL

### PART NINE – HOW TO ENJOY THE PROMISES OF GOD TO THE FULL

Eleven years had passed since Daniel's last dream. He had continued to serve King Belshazzar. His Jewish people remained in captivity. His next special task had been to explain the mysterious writing on the wall at the king's drunken, blasphemous party. His prophecy had been fulfilled that same night with the overthrow of Babylon and the arrival of Darius, the Mede, and a new regime in which Daniel's qualities had immediately been recognized in a new role. Daniel had survived another attempt by jealous rivals to eliminate him. Now he checked the word of God to know what the Lord might have planned for the Jews.

The answer was clear. The punishment of the people of Jerusalem which began with his own exile in 605 BC was only to last for 70 years.(II Chron.36:21; Jer.25:11,12) Judgement on their Babylonian captors had been promised and had now happened. It was the year 539 BC. There were just three years to go to the promised 70. His own ministry had so far lasted 67 years. It was not time to retire! The Jews needed someone who would listen carefully to God to know what their response was to be if they were to receive the freedom the Lord had promised.(v.1-3)

When the Lord speaks to us, our first step always needs to be to search our own hearts, to acknowledge our sin and to seek God's forgiveness.(II Cor.13:5; I Jn.1:9) Daniel recognized sin in six different ways in verses 5 and 6. Responsibility for failure starts with leaders but moves down to everyone. The Lord's righteousness and man's unfaithfulness are in sharp contrast. We have no excuse. Our only hope lies in His compassion and forgiveness. There is no way we can justify our rebellion. The consequence of our breaking of God's law had been spelled out plainly long before. The Lord was absolutely right to allow Jerusalem to be overthrown.(v.4-14)

The parallel between the present situation in Babylon and the condition of Israel when they were slaves in Egypt was obvious. Moses had been God's instrument in setting Israel free from Egypt and returning them to their own land. What He had done before He could do again. The only grounds for confidence that God would now do this was not the merit of their good behaviour but the Lord's compassion and promise. Daniel on behalf of his Jewish people was seeking God's forgiveness and their restoration to Jerusalem.(v.15-19)

Daniel's prayer for his people was immediately answered by the same angel, Gabriel, who had been sent to give him understanding of his dream in 8:16. Gabriel would 500 years later be sent first to Zacharias and then to Mary with the exciting news of the coming births of John the Baptist and Jesus.(Lk.1:19, 26) The moment we are ready to learn what God's promises mean, the Lord is waiting to explain.(v.20-23)

Having received the answer he wanted to hear, that the Jews would soon be set free, Daniel was now given some intriguing new information about later events. But what did it mean? As with the last few verses of chapters 7 and 8 there were some extraordinary

promises but their exact meaning and timing were only hinted at. It is at this point that we have to be careful not to push our interpretation beyond the clues we are given. The word 'weeks' in this section literally means 'sevens', so seventy sevens is 490 but does it mean days, months, years or what? A number of important events are promised from the time of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. Together they represent the final solution through the coming of Christ to the Jews' sin. The decree was issued according to history in 445 BC in the reign of King Artaxerxes as described in Nehemiah 1 and 2.

To make things more complicated the seventy sevens are divided in 7, 62 and 1 parts. The final seven is further divided into two parts. Messiah is the Hebrew word for Christ. The 'prince who is to come' sounds familiar in the New Testament and appears to describe the Devil's final attempt to prevent God's kingdom being established on earth.(Eph.2:2; Jn.12:31) There are all kinds of theories about this timetable of Daniel's including regarding the final 'seven' as being at the end of history and then again being divided into two at the time of Antichrist and Jesus' return. Neither this passage nor any other confirms that for us.  $69 \times 7 \text{ years} = 483$  which would bring us to 37 AD but Jesus' death and resurrection was probably around 29/30 AD. And why the division between 7 and 62 if they were consecutive? It does seem like God again left Daniel with some unanswered questions about these later events because He did not yet want him to know the timing of these promises for certain.

What God did want Daniel to be confident of was the promise of freedom for the Jews at the end of 70 years. The present not the future was to be his focus. And should be ours!

#### QUESTIONS FOR STUDY ON DANIEL, CHAPTER NINE

Q.1 What can we learn from Daniel's example as he searched the scriptures to understand the present situation of his people? What stands in the way of us enjoying the promises of God to us?

Q.2 How does this chapter help us to understand why bad things happen to us? How can we decide whether adversity is the will of God or actions of the Devil?

Q.3 What are we told here about the coming of Christ and the end of history? Why does God not make future dates and events clear to us?