

# “TIME” MAKES PROPHECY RELEVANT

## (DANIEL 9 – PART 1)

### Thinking about Clocks

Prophetic events are embedded in a framework of time. Daniel 9 is no exception. Beginning with a regnal calendar, it quickly moves to sabbatical year issues, then to the consequences of breaking that sacred time. Without *time* references, prophecy would be meaningless, hope would be delayed and repentance would lose its urgency. Understanding God’s myriad of clocks and how to “tell time” brings balance into our spiritual life. In addition, God identified some timing numbers as sacred! Intriguingly, many prophetic periods are based on fractions or multiples of the number seven. Notice in this study how Daniel is riveted on *numbers*:

**“In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans” (Daniel 9:1).**

The “*first year*” of Darius (Darius the Mede) refers to his first full regnal year (539 B.C.). This helps one to be oriented as to how long the Jewish people have been in captivity. The first attack on Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar occurred in 605 B.C. The designated 70-year captivity was in its 66<sup>th</sup> year. That’s important. Those “chosen of God” would be released to return to Canaan within a three and a half year period. A timeframe of that same duration was also important to the fall of Jerusalem *and* alludes to the same time span of three and a half years called the “appointed time” right at the “time of the end” (Daniel 11:35, 40; 12:4, 7, 9; Revelation 11:2-3, 13:5), when God’s people will be delivered!

**“In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem” (Daniel 9:2).**

**“I Daniel understood by books the number of the years” (vs 2)** is a first person acknowledgment that Daniel grasped a timing prophecy from more than one source. This is intriguing since his last timing missive was in 8:14, which he failed to understand. That message was so emotional that he fainted (8:27). This verse (9:2) is now a refreshing contrast. He understands some prophetic clock.

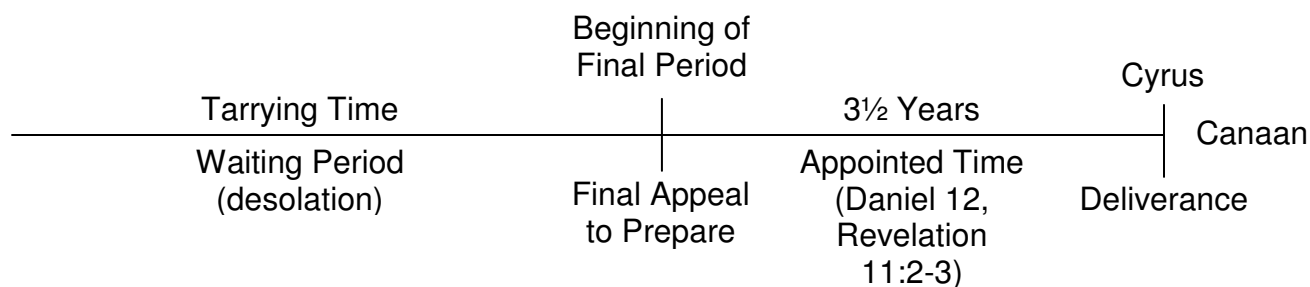
**“whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet,” (vs 2)**

“According to the word of the Lord” (NIV). This is the first time Daniel uses God’s proper name, *Yahweh*. This is God’s covenant name.<sup>1</sup> The captivity was severe and lasted nearly two generations. But *Yahweh* promised that the *number of years* would be specific and limited.

That is an important lesson. Though God warned of dire consequences to Israel’s rebellion, He promised that they would journey back to Canaan after those years ended. That, again, is a metaphor for the end of time:

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<sup>1</sup> Steinmann, Andrew E.; *Daniel* (Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis – 2008), p. 435.



At the end of time, the desolation will come to earth during the three and a half years just before the saints begin their journey upward to Canaan. Daniel elevates the importance of the “*number of years*” in the next phrase.

**“to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem” (vs 2)**

The Old Testament was far from complete at this time. Scrolls up through Isaiah were likely available. Intriguingly, Jeremiah was still writing his “book” when the first captivity occurred in 605 B.C. Daniel was able to obtain at least a copy of this document. Clearly, he recognized it as a sacred, inerrant word from God.

Two passages in Jeremiah were specific to Daniel’s concerns. Jeremiah 25:11-12 was written in Jerusalem shortly **before** the first attack and Daniel’s captivity (likely 609 B.C). There, he notes that the “land would become a devastation” for 70 years. Judah and other captive nations (not listed) would be subjects of Babylonian rule for those 70 years (vss 19-26). The next passage (Jeremiah 29:10) comes when Jeremiah, apparently still in Jerusalem, writes to the captives (approximately 597 B.C.). He urges those exiles in Babylon to seek a normal life, build houses, plant gardens, take wives, have children and acquire real estate. Why? They would be there 70 years.

When writing to them, a covenant promise of restoration was given again with a timing assurance: *“For thus saith the LORD, That after **seventy years be accomplished** at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in **causing you to return** to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to **give you an expected end**”* (Jeremiah 29:10-11).

Daniel’s prayer that follows (Daniel 9:3-19) seeks to rebuild the relationship between the Jewish people and God. He pleads with God to fulfill that promise of restoration. His narrative is based on covenant issues!

“With faith founded on the sure word of prophecy, Daniel pleaded with the Lord for the speedy fulfillment of these promises. He pleaded for the honor of God to be preserved. In his petition he identified himself fully with those who had fallen short of the divine purpose, confessing their sins as his own.”<sup>2</sup>

- Daniel knew the salvic commitment man must make.
- He believed in predictive prophecy.
- He understood the significance of God’s prophetic time pieces.

<sup>2</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 554-555.

- The end of the 70 years was in sight. Urgency in making that spiritual renewal was in order.

Though Daniel does not mention Isaiah, that book was part of the Old Testament canon at that time. It is assumed that he had access to it and knew it well. Within its prophetic narrative were stunning predictions regarding a man named Cyrus.

Cyrus came from the east. Jesus will do the same. Cyrus brought deliverance to the captives, just as our Savior will soon do. Cyrus is a metaphor for Christ!

### Cyrus

My shepherd (Isaiah 44:28)  
 His anointed (Isaiah 45:1)  
 Came from the east (Isaiah 46:11)  
 Set captives free (Isaiah 45:13)  
 Called righteous (Isaiah 45:13)

### Jesus

Good shepherd (John 10:11, Hebrews 13:20)  
 God anointed Him (Acts 10:38)  
 Comes as lightning from the east (Matthew 24:27)  
 Deliverance of captives (Luke 4:16)  
 The Righteous (I John 2:1)<sup>3</sup>

In light of this very specific information given over 100 years before, Daniel had amazing insight as to the hour he was in. On two counts he knew that an amazing prophetic drama was about to occur.

1. Cyrus became king, and he was **the** one who let the Jewish captives receive freedom.
2. The 70-year prophecy was nearly complete (it had to go into the time the Persian kingdom was established – II Chronicles 36:20b). That nation became/is a metaphor for man's final deliverance in prophecy.

One other issue, with deep spiritual significance, must be on Daniel's mind. God had instructed Israel to keep a new Sabbath **when** they entered the land of Canaan. Every seventh year was called a Shemita – a sabbatical year. This was a time when they were to be totally dependent on God. During the sixth year extra crops were divinely provided for food needed during that sacred year and the next year, while waiting to harvest the new crops. The land would rest for a whole solar year (outlined in Leviticus 25).

This was so important that God issued warnings of a seven-fold curse if this instruction wasn't honored.

*"But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments ... And I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths"* (Leviticus 26:14,32-34).

That is exactly why Judah was taken into Babylonian captivity!! They dishonored the Shemita. We are given unique insight into this by the fascinating records of the Chronicles.

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<sup>3</sup> Robertson, Patricia; personal communiqué, 2006.

*“And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years” (II Chronicles 36:20-21).*

Daniel is ready to address, on behalf of his people (symbolizing also the 144,000 at the end), whatever is necessary to bring restoration. His prayer is a confessional of how Israel broke away from a theocracy to a system honoring false gods. That prayer of renewal is outlined beautifully by Steinman:<sup>4</sup>

- Confession of his people’s sins against God (9:3-6)
- Recognizing God’s judgment on Israel’s sin (9:12-14)
- A plea that God would avert His anger on Jerusalem (9:15-16) and
- That God would shine His face on His city and sanctuary

All of the great spiritual themes addressed were based on incredible instruction found in Leviticus 25–26 and Deuteronomy 30. It is important to be aware that dual imagery is embedded within Daniel 9:

	<u>Physical</u>	<u>Spiritual</u>	
Jerusalem	City	God’s people, Israel	(9:12, 16; Isaiah 63:18)
Mt. Zion (holy mountain)	Elevated in Jerusalem	Holy people	(9:16; Psalm 51:18, 87:5; Jeremiah 8:19)
Sanctuary	Temple	God’s church	(9:17)

Confusion reigns with many commentaries regarding what follows. Literalism gets in the way of understanding spiritual restoration. The rebuilding of “Jerusalem” has two prophetic messages: (1) physical assets and (2) spiritual restoration of the theocracy.

To choreograph our understanding, God had designated Cyrus not only to subdue the apostate Babylonian Empire but to decree the restoration of the *physical city* **and** the *temple* in Jerusalem! This was prophesied through Isaiah long before Cyrus was conceived:

*“This is what the LORD says – your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the LORD, who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, ... who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of **Jerusalem**, “**Let it be rebuilt,**” and of the **temple**, “**Let its foundations be laid.**””* (Isaiah 44:24, 28 (NIV).

This orientation is extremely important to grasp so one may understand what follows. God will address the prayer of Daniel – but – the prophetic imperatives and events in Daniel 9 are mainly spiritual. Failure to see this will lead to divergent views, detracting from its redemptive climax.

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<sup>4</sup> Steinmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 436-442 (adapted).

## Heavenly Response

**“And whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God. Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation” (Daniel 9:20-21).**

While Daniel was still praying, heaven responded. This reveals the urgency of Gabriel’s message to Daniel and to all those living after the 2300-year prophecy (8:14). The 490-year and 2300-year prophecies are linked by the word for “vision,” *mareh*. They are part of one prophecy. Heaven seems very eager to talk with Daniel!

Daniel associated his personal tie to God with his personal loyalties to *“my people”* – his confession is to God for himself and his people. His endearing plea reveals the deepest pathos: *“God, remain as my [our] God.”* Then in a fascinating metaphor he says that this all concerns *“the holy mountain of my people.”* (The best translations for this: NET, NIV.)

Daniel has mentioned Jerusalem four times (vss 7, 16, 18 and 19), where Mount Zion is located (cf. Psalms 2:6, 48:2, 99:9). There is more to this phrase than a prayer to restore the city and temple. Though the physical city and temple lay waste, rebellion of a “holy people” and disloyalty to a “holy God” remained the reason for desolation. Holiness was to be restored (8:14) in and through the people!

Dramatic imagery was painted of Satan and from “where” he fell in Ezekiel 28:12-19. He was called the *“anointed cherub”* that *“wast upon the ‘holy mountain of God’”* (vs 14). That was where God resided and the location of His throne (Psalm 48:2) – also called the *“mount of the congregation”* (Isaiah 14:13), where the saints will gather (Revelation 14:1). The name Zion or Mount Zion referred to the literal temple mount where God dwelled among them. Later, the name took on symbolic significance to the Jewish people as encompassing the whole city of Jerusalem (cf. 9:16).

*“The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Selah”* (Psalm 87:2-3).

Daniel pleads for the restoration of the temple (sanctuary – vs 7). Literal rebuilding (restoration of what was made physically desolate) is in view. But – once again – the greater issue is the establishment of God as the theocratic head of that chosen people. Zion or that “holy mount” is used figuratively as “God’s people” (Isaiah 60:14). In the New Testament it means God’s spiritual kingdom (Hebrews 12:22).

Often, within the manuscript of a Biblical author, God has defined the meaning He wants us to see. Daniel is no exception. Within the exposé of the final rise of the antichrist, called the king of the north (Daniel 11:40), comes this insight: *“And he shall plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas in the glorious **holy mountain**”* (Daniel 11:45a).

Literalism would demand that somewhere between the Mediterranean and Red Seas and the Temple Mount the antichrist will set up his world capital. However, figuratively, a vastly different picture emerges. At the end, the antichrist will come between God’s throne, His

church and the people of the world (Revelation 17:15). In that setting, he will be “*sitting in the temple,*” showing himself as if he were God (II Thessalonians 2:4). Jesus said that that would be an abomination that would lead to desolation (Matthew 24:15). The antichrist portrays his authority and role as though he were in God’s temple and on Mount Zion.

Though we have a sixth century B.C. story in Daniel, it is a giant metaphor for the apostasy in the Christian world at the end. More than the temple or city, God wants a holy people, called by His name, standing “*where he dwells.*”

**“Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation.” (vs 21)**

The imagery is stunning. God instructs Gabriel to present a complex prophecy. Apparently, sometime from the onset of Daniel’s prayer to a point before it completely ended, that counsel was given, and this mighty angel was at his side.

- This angel, “*man,*” is identified as Gabriel,
- Whom he saw in a ***previous*** vision (Daniel 8 – confirmed in verse 16).

This reference to a past contact helps to prove the authorship of Daniel – an issue with many scholars. Continuity in the prophetic message is affirmed.

The Hebrew that follows is in some dispute. The growing evidence suggests that the words “*swiftly fly*” actually refer to Daniel’s extreme weariness. This is written in the superlative – he was totally exhausted.<sup>5</sup> Gabriel came to him and touched him at a time of great weakness (from fasting and intense pleading with God).

This angelic gesture appears to give Daniel special strength to be attentive to what follows. Gabriel is seen as a “*man.*” Men don’t have wings.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, again, another metaphor – a “visual metaphor” – is given.

Gabriel comes to Daniel at the time of the evening oblation. This is the usual time of special prayer at 3:00 p.m. This was the “nighttime” period when he usually prayed (6:10-11). This *time* is when the *offering-oblation (minhah)* was usually given. Those meal and drink offerings had not been made for over sixty years. Yet, it is referenced by Daniel as a “*set aside*” time<sup>7</sup> commonly used (Ezra 9:5, Psalm 141:2).

**“And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding.” (vs 22)**

When Gabriel arrived and touched Daniel, he then spoke: “I have come to give you insight and understanding.” This is interesting. When Daniel and his companions came into

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<sup>5</sup> Steinmann, *op. cit.*, p. 444.

<sup>6</sup> Miller, Stephen R.; *The New American Commentary*, vol. 18 (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), pp. 250-251.

<sup>7</sup> Whitcomb, John C.; *Daniel*, p. 127.

Nebuchadnezzar's court, he was given "insight" (1:17), and "understanding" (1:20) was in evidence. These are collectively seen as "wisdom."

This echoes a similar mission of Gabriel in 8:16! There, Christ had just given a timing prophecy of 2300 evenings and mornings. Daniel said that he "*sought for the meaning*" (8:15). Christ ordered Gabriel to help him "*understand*" (8:17). Why does Gabriel come again on a similar mission? Daniel had misinterpreted what Christ had shared in 8:14. Then Gabriel's explanation became so stressful that Daniel fainted (8:27).

It is important to grasp the dynamics of a series of visions Daniel received that brought him and Gabriel to this point.<sup>8</sup>

1. Daniel was first given a vision (*chezev*), described in Aramaic (Daniel 7). He wrote "*my cogitations much troubled me, and my countenance changed in me*" (7:28). He did not understand, and what he did see left him with anxiety.
2. The next vision (*ha hazon*) was written in Hebrew (as was then the rest of the book). It portrayed the ram, he-goat and little horn narrative (8:2-13, 17-26b).
3. Jesus, then, introduced an end-time atonement-language prophecy in 8:14. This would be labeled differently, as the *mareh* vision (8:26a).

Daniel became confused and couldn't decipher between the *ha hazon*, the *mareh*, the 70-year captivity (which was about to end – he thought) and the 2300 years yet ahead. He feared that the captivity of the Jewish people would go on for centuries. That culminated in his fainting – it was too much for him (8:27). Gabriel's last words had combined two timing visions:

1. The evening and the morning is true (*mareh*) (8:26).
2. The vision (*ha hazon*) is for many days (far into the future) (8:26).

This is what led to such an intense prayer by Daniel after reviewing Jeremiah, and likely Isaiah. When Gabriel comes with assurances for skill, insight and understanding, he places his hand on Daniel's shoulder, something additionally reassuring and of comfort. This time *discernment* was to come – *wisdom* from heaven – relative to these prophetic clocks!

**“And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision” (Daniel 9:22-23).**

### **“At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth” (vs 23)**

When Daniel **started** to pray, an **answer** was given. The word for commandment is *dabar*. In this context it means the “word” or “prophecy” (implied) which had come from God (the 9:24-27 revelation).

- Either the answer was not in response to the content of the prayer – OR

<sup>8</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Truth About Angels*, p. 142.

- It was seen in God's foreknowledge as the divine reply to his petition, i.e., it was an answer before the prayer ended!

The latter is assuredly God in action. The amazing probationary and Messianic prophecy that follows is a divine corrective action missive. It is meant to achieve what Daniel was asking – restoration of a people. Just as the Book of Revelation originated from God (Revelation 1:1), that which Gabriel is about to reveal originates from Him.

**“and I am come to show thee;” (vs 23)**

Since Gabriel has come to **explain** the heaven-sent *mareh* vision and to embellish its details, these messages cannot be discerned correctly without this additional divine revelation. A similar theological challenge comes to the students of His Word. Everyone must tap into the same divine inspiration to understand.<sup>9</sup>

**“for thou art greatly beloved;” (vs 23)**

Heaven looked with favor on Daniel. The Hebrew word for “favor” is *hamudot*, meaning “counted precious.”<sup>10</sup> It is plural, thus elevating the expression. These words reveal a stunning bond that heaven has made with one man on sinful earth. Gabriel gives Daniel the most elevated and spectacular salutation any earthling might receive – “God loves you deeply.” Why would he precede the prophecy this way?

Daniel certainly was emotional about the prior messages. God wasn't in a hurry to respond (several years elapsed between chapters 8 and 9). But when He did – “Before we go further, Daniel, you are in great favor to God's heart!” Daniel's prayer won't be answered easily. A revival must come to the heart of his people. Great will be the demands within a time limit on God's patience. Daniel was strengthened and prepared.

Then come these words:

**“therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision” (vs 23)**

**God Gets Specific**

The word here for vision is *mareh*. But it is more than that. Gabriel says “the” *mareh*. Many expositors say that *ha hazon* and *mareh* refer to similar things. If that were so, *ha hazon* of 8:26, which was sealed for the distant future, is now going to be unsealed by Gabriel for Daniel. That would mean that the “distant future” came in a little over two to three years. That is contextually out of character.

Gabriel told Daniel that the *mareh* was “true” – precise – and that it distinctly related to the “evening–morning” *mareh* vision (8:26; cf. 8:14). Then he distinguished that from the *ha hazon* vision by noting that the latter was for the future (the ram, he-goat or little horn). To make clearer this distinction, Daniel affirmed that he later (10:1) understood the *mareh*. That vision was **not** sealed for the distant future – only the *ha hazon* was.

<sup>9</sup> Goldingay, John E.; Daniel – *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 30 (Word Books, Publisher – Dallas, TX), p. 256.

<sup>10</sup> Miller, *Op. cit.*, p. 251.



Gabriel is being sent back to finish a task from Daniel 8 that was incomplete. It was after Daniel 8:14 that Daniel said he saw the *ha hazon* and sought for its meaning (8:15). Gabriel then appeared before him, and suddenly a voice (which was Jesus') from between the banks of the Ulai River asked Gabriel to explain "***the***" *mareh*. Jesus knows that Daniel has not made the prophetic distinction between the two types of prophetic messages. Since Daniel later faints over the uncertainty of the 2300 years, Jesus is gently moving Daniel towards a correct view of Daniel 8:14 – the onset of "***the mareh.***"

At that time Gabriel begins by clarifying exactly what the *ha hazon* was (8:17-25) – then he gives the timing statement that its fulfillment wouldn't occur until the far future (vs 26b). Gabriel never had a chance to complete ***the mareh*** explanation.

Thus – here in 9:23, Gabriel comes in response to Daniel's humble prayer ***and*** to finish what he was unable to finish earlier – explaining the rest of *the mareh* vision in Daniel 8:14 (the "*true*" vision!). We know that Gabriel's mission in Daniel 9 is extremely vital and important because of the speed in which heaven responded to Daniel's petition!

Therefore, at the beginning of Daniel's prayer, though the end of the 70-year captivity is in view, God wants Daniel to address a broader issue: the ***revival*** of those who call themselves God's people. That ***is*** the issue that will bring the captivity to its desired close!

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