Kings and Prophets 17-05-18

This is May the 18th, 2017. We continue our study in Kings and Prophets. We have come to the ninth chapter of the book of Daniel, Daniel chapter 9. People typically have two well-worn creases in their Bible.

One is in Ephesians in the New Testament and the other is Daniel 9 in the Old Testament. It is often visited, often referred to, especially for people who have an interest in future things. And so we have arrived at it and we will take a look at it presently, but as we begin, let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer, dedicate our time and our concentration, ask for the presence and power of God's Spirit.

Shall we pray? Father, how grateful we are for this opportunity to spend time together, searching through the Scriptures to find the truth that You would have implanted in our souls to grow and bear fruit, to lead us and to guide us, to be the voice of the Holy Spirit and Your hand of power on us as we seek to live in a way that pleases You, that brings glory to the Lord Jesus. We pray that as we examine this portion of Your Word and its parallel passages that Your Holy Spirit will be our teacher, that we will find insight and understanding that will motivate us and encourage us as we await the day of the return of the Lord Jesus to gather us to Himself and to take us into that next phase of Your plan and purpose for us. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

Daniel chapter 9, we have recently covered, interestingly enough, Daniel chapter 7 and Daniel chapter 8, and you remember that those were two visions that Daniel received two years apart in the ministry, in the time of the reign of King Belshazzar. And he of course is the last Babylonian regent. He is ruling as second in the kingdom behind Nabonidus, his father who has gone off to ransack libraries and do research and carry on a few petty wars here and there, and he leaves his son, his dissolute son, in charge.

And you'll remember that's why he could only promise Daniel as a reward for reading the handwriting on the wall, that he would be third in the kingdom, unlike Pharaoh who could make Joseph second in the land behind himself. But these prophecies, you'll remember the vision of the four beasts in chapter 7, which was the first year of Belshazzar, the vision of the ram and the goat in the third year of Belshazzar. And as I mentioned last time, this is not just right before the drunken feast and the handwriting on the wall.

Belshazzar is going to continue for a dozen more years before the events that end the Babylonian reign and bring in the Medes and the Persians. And so you remember we talked about Gobriaz as Darius the Mede. Gobriaz the general who is working for Cyrus, achieves the victory, does the clever thing of damming off the river so that they could come under the gates and the defenses.

And we noticed that way back in chapter 6. Flip back to chapter 6 for just one moment. At the

end of chapter 5, the very night Belshazzar king of the Chaldeans was slain, Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about 62 years old. Notice, received the kingdom.

He didn't take the kingdom, he didn't conquer the kingdom, he didn't inherit the kingdom, he received it. It was given to him. He's a good guy and he is rewarded by reigning.

He's an older general and this is sort of his time of glory. He's given the right to rule this conquest and so he sets over these satraps and they become jealous because Daniel is going to be set over the whole thing. And they find a way to wheedle the king into passing a law that gets Daniel in trouble.

Then you have the lion's den. That was chapter 6. Remember all of that, right? Okay, that's going to be important now as we come to chapter 9. Oddly enough, Daniel chapter 9, in the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus of the lineage of the Medes, of the seed of the Medes it says in Hebrew, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans. Once again, he is made king.

He receives the kingdom. In the first year of his reign, I Daniel understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet that he would accomplish 70 years in the desolations of Jerusalem. Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications with fasting sackcloth and ashes.

And I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession and said, O Lord, great and awesome God who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him and with those who keep His commandments, we have sinned and committed iniquity. We have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments. Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land.

O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame of face as it is this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those near and far off in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of the unfaithfulness which they have committed against You. O Lord, to us belongs shame of face, to our kings, our princes and our fathers, because we have sinned against You. To the Lord our God belongs mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him.

We have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God to walk in His laws, which He set before us by His servants, the prophets. We've seen many of those prophets as we've gone through our Kings and Prophets study, right? Yes, all Israel has transgressed Your law and has departed so as not to obey Your voice. Therefore the curse and the oath written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against Him.

You remember we reviewed that back in Deuteronomy. It was predicted back in Deuteronomy chapter 11, I think, maybe verse 29, where God through Moses says, I'm going to send you to

Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim and we're going to have the blessings and the curses. And then later in the book around chapter 27 and 28, those blessings and curses are read from the mountaintops.

And we don't have time to go back and revisit those. We've looked at them a few times since. But you remember God says, if you are obedient, you will be blessed.

If you are disobedient, you will be cursed. Matthew gave us a brief Bible class right before we started the broadcast and that was pretty much the content. Do what you're supposed to do.

Don't do what you're not supposed to do. It's not that hard. But apparently for Israel it was.

And so Daniel at great length here confesses. Notice Daniel himself personally is not necessarily guilty of what he is confessing. What is he confessing? And how can we observe, interpret and apply what Daniel is doing here? Daniel is recognizing that he is a part of a group that is guilty of these things.

He has not personally committed idolatry. He has not personally departed from the commandments of the Lord. Quite the contrary.

He has been a model. He has been a faithful prophet and representative through some very difficult times. But he's confessing anyway.

So what does that mean for us? You remember that an innocent Israelite could end up being defiled and being unclean until evening under the law of Moses through no fault of his own. If a dead thing fell on him and he came in contact with death, if he inadvertently touched something and discovered that it was leaking some kind of bodily fluid or had died or was diseased or was leprous through no fault of his own, he would be rendered defiled. And this wasn't a sin of conscience or a sin of will.

It was an inadvertent contact with sin, with death, with defilement. And yet there was a ritual purification process that ensured that he could be restored to function and fellowship despite the fact that this was an inadvertent sin. There are even sacrifices in the first several chapters of Leviticus talking about if someone sins inadvertently and becomes aware of it, here is what he does.

Well, you can imagine that in our travels through the day, we're trying to watch something on television and something salacious or perverse or unholy is presented to our gaze. It's not what we would choose to see. We would love it if the edit that they used to do for television had been done on this and it wasn't inserted or included, but it is.

As we watch the news, as we traffic in civilized communication of all sorts, whether we hear it or see it or watch it, we come in contact with things that are representative of the lower and the lesser, the unclean, the sinful and the evil. And we can follow Daniel's example here and as we come before the Lord and first examine our hearts and our conscience and confess our known

sins before God, we can also confess in a healthy way what we know to be true about our environment and ask God's forgiveness, ask God's cleansing grace for those things that touch us that are really beyond our control. Daniel hasn't even been in the land.

He was taken at an early age and many of the sins of the land, he was taken in 605 BC and Nebuchadnezzar doesn't finally destroy Jerusalem and the Temple until 586. But he confesses these sins of his fathers, the sins of the leadership. He brings them before the Lord and acknowledges them and recognizes them.

Why would you do this? Why would it be healthy to do this? Wouldn't it be better to just try to ignore that stuff and try to maintain sort of a germ-free bubble in our soul? Why would this be a good thing? Why would Daniel do it? As with so much of our prayer life, looking at circumstances, when we want to intercede and make requests on behalf of others, what is the benefit? Well, here's someone with a health issue. Here's someone with an employment issue. Here's someone with trouble in their education process.

Here's someone with family trouble. Here's someone with various kinds of challenges and as we pray, we can just say, Dear God, bless Susie. Dear God, bless Bob.

Dear God, bless so and so. Bless Uncle Charlie. Bless Aunt Jo or whoever it may be.

I'm making up names. I hope that doesn't hit anybody for real. But we can just shoot sort of a shotgun blast and remember them before the Lord.

There's nothing wrong with that. Many times we don't know enough details to do much more than that. Someone asks us to pray for someone in their periphery and we can remember them before the Lord.

And I think that God honors the fact that we love one another enough to do that. But the most effective prayer is a prayer where we are acquainted with the circumstances and with the person or people involved and we try to pray intelligently and try to pray in line with God's will. If I know someone is facing a long-term health challenge that isn't likely to improve, it is one of those facts of life and rather than importuning the Lord for some sort of miraculous extraordinary healing, I try to think, well, what could God do in and through this situation in the lives of His people and in those who are observing and pray in that light? So in the same way that by entering into and trying to think the way God thinks as we look at different circumstances and as we intercede for one another, Daniel gives us an example of identifying what is evil, identifying what went wrong with the leadership, with the princes, with the kings, and not just saying, well, that's bad.

One of the disappointing things about slang and the very simple language that you hear being used so much in common parlance is that it is not analytical. If something great happens, you say, well, great. Oh, you know, especially if you're texting.

Then it's GR and the number 8. I learned that's a piece of shorthand. It's an interesting exercise,

and I'm not trying to harsh anybody's mellow here, but it's a good mental exercise, I think, this is I, not the Lord, to try to vary and to try to analyze something and say, well, I think this is a good thing. I think this is great.

Why? What is it? Can I think of another adjective than great? It's helpful, it's timely, it's smart, it's clever. What is it about that thing that gives me a positive reaction and response to it? This stimulates us to think and to think analytically. Analytical thinking helps us spiritually.

I know I've done a wrong thing. Oh, Lord, forgive me for bruising my fellow believer. Well, what exactly went wrong there? By thinking more analytically, by confessing more analytically, hopefully we can get at the root of our sins and do a better job of forestalling and preventing them in the future than just, oh, God, forgive me for bad word, bad attitude, impatient this.

Well, why? Why was I impatient? I was impatient because it punctured my ego, because it pulled me away from something that I wanted to selfishly enjoy and I was thinking about myself instead of others. That's why I was impatient. So I say all of this and point all of this out to explain, at least offer a suggestion why Daniel prays this prayer.

He's not really guilty of any of this. Why would he pray the prayer? Why does God put it in His Word and include it for us to look at? Because as we look at the national scene, as we watch the national news, there was a rather notorious case recently where a Tulsa female police officer shot someone. It was caught on video.

It raised a national storm and she was just acquitted by a jury last night. Well, there are people who are angry and there are people who are relieved. Well, if we were all thinking more analytically, especially those who just find the verdict intolerable and there needs to be an appeal, we need to march, we need to burn something down, we need to turn over a car, we need to react and vent our frustration, and we immediately say this is just another in a long line of insults and miscarriages of justice.

If everyone could think analytically and identify if you think something went wrong, well, exactly what went wrong? And to her credit, I heard a lady who is a newscaster say, here is something that is a possible reason why there could be some unhappiness with this verdict. From the time the man was shot, as you watch the video, until someone goes over to check on his health, three and a half minutes go by. No ambulance was called.

He wasn't checked to see if he was dead or alive. Fair. That's a fair observation.

That is thinking. That's looking and analyzing and saying, here is something that could have certainly been done better. Regardless of how or why the man was shot, anybody that gets shot for whatever reason, I think it's fair to say if there are professionals around with radios, somebody should call some medical attention sooner than three and a half minutes after the bullet is fired.

I think that's fair. Regardless of what you think of the verdict or the motivation or good, bad,

ugly, that's a fair analysis of the situation. Daniel is analyzing the situation that put the people into captivity.

Now, here's where it gets really interesting. That's all I'm going to say about that, because he spends a lot of time examining all of what went wrong. Well, this is good.

It's in here for the future. Are these things happening in our nation? Can we expect a similar fate? Going back and reading Deuteronomy, blessings and cursings? Possibly so. But, here's what's pertinent for me as we go back to the beginning of chapter 9 now.

In the first year of Darius, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans, we said, that reminds me of the end of chapter 5, where it says that Darius received the kingdom. Right after that, we have the rest of chapter 6, which is the satraps get all irritable and jealous, concoct this way to get Daniel in trouble, and he's thrown into the lion's den. Right? Well, think about chapter 6 and chapter 9 together.

What was the specific charge in chapter 6? The governors and administrators in verse 7 went to the king and said, we need to establish a royal statute and make a firm decree that whoever petitions any god or man for 30 days, it's not praying per se, oh God, you're a wonderful God, I'm so glad to belong to you, I'm glad you're the God of Israel, I remember Moses, you could pray all day long and not get in trouble under this statute. What was the part of the statute that got him thrown into the lion's den? No petitions, no requests, no seeking the favor and positive response from anybody except the king for 30 days. Right? Petitions.

Flip back over to chapter 9, what does it say? Verse 3, I set my face toward the Lord God to do what? To make request by prayer and supplication with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. A very visible, obvious, notoriously public making of supplication and petition and request with all the visible signs of humility and desire, right? When does Daniel do this? First year. When do the satraps get the decree passed? Right after Darius comes to power.

So, in chapter 6, what is Daniel praying three times a day? This is his prayer. This is the reason he defies the ordinance and does it anyway. This is what's on his heart.

As is his custom, but in this particular case, we know exactly what he's praying out the window. He is making supplication. Now, how and why is he making this supplication? Well, back in verse 2, I Daniel understood by the books.

By the books. The Hebrew word here is sepharim. S-e-p-h-a-r-i-m.

By the books, the number of the years, by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet. Well, this actually is not books. This is book or letter.

Even though it's plural, it's got that eem on the end and you recognize that. It's like Hashemayim, the heavens. It's like the mayim, the waters, but it's one thing that's composed of a lot of stuff.

How do I know this? Well, first of all, turn to Jeremiah chapter 29. We have a copy of what Daniel is referring to here in the book of Jeremiah. Turn to Jeremiah chapter 29.

These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders. Where? Who were carried away captive, the priest, the prophet, and the people. Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon.

The letter was sent, verse 3, by the hand of Elasa the son of Shaphan, and Gamariah the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon, to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. So this thing is sent in the days of Zedekiah. Now, Zedekiah is the king in the 590s BC.

Remember Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah get sent in 605. So Zedekiah is many years later. So Daniel and his three friends are in captivity when this letter from Jeremiah arrives.

By the way, the word there, these are the words of the letter that is sephar in the singular. Sephar, sephar, sepharim. So we're very close, it's just a matter of the em as the difference here, right? Flip over a page to chapter 30.

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, Thus speaks the Lord God of Israel, saying, Write in a book for yourself all the words that I have spoken to you. What do you think the word book is there in Hebrew? Sephar. Same thing.

Now, what is in this letter is what is referred to by Daniel. But Daniel says, well it's books plural. So how do you work that out? Just very quickly turn to 2 Kings chapter 19 verse 14.

And you say, ah, 2 Kings 19, we've already covered that. We've been all the way through 2 Kings, right? So 2 Kings 19 and you look back there and you say, oh, these are the days of Hezekiah. And when the Rabshakeh comes and he's speaking the language that the people understand, they say, oh no, don't talk in that language.

So in chapter 19 verse 14, remember the Rabshakeh sends and says, what are you doing resisting? You need to bow, you need to submit and all that. And he sends this word in the hand of messengers. And so in verse 14, Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it.

Then Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord and he prays. The word translated received the letter in verse 14 is sepharim, sepharim. And the parallel over in Isaiah chapter 37 verse 14, same thing, sepharim.

It's a single letter, but it's voluminous. And so it's referred to here in the plural. So a sephar and a sepharim, when you're talking about a letter that somebody sends with a message, are essentially synonymous.

The plural just means it's important, kind of like the heavens are important or the waters are important. It's a big deal. It's not just a sephar, it's a sepharim.

And so to Daniel now, back in Daniel chapter 9, he understands by the letter. This is the Jeremiah 29 and 30 letter slash book. This is what Daniel has read and this is why he's praying.

So what do those say? Well, flip over again to Jeremiah 29. Let's just skim this real quickly. We can't analyze it in detail or we'll be here until the Lord comes back.

But chapter 29, these are the words Jeremiah wrote in his letter and he sent it to the captives. Verse 4, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who are carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon. Interesting, no? God says, I have caused you to be carried away.

Build houses, verse 5, and dwell in them, plant gardens and eat their fruit. What? We've been carried away captive and you're telling us, make the best of it. Make yourself at home.

Take wives, beget sons and daughters, take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands. What does this tell you? Not only are you going to be there a while, your kids are going to grow up to adulthood there. This is going to be something measured in decades.

He says, get comfortable, you're going to be there a while. And this is captivity under foreign captors. They may bear sons and daughters that you may increase there and not diminish.

If you go there and if you are obedient, you will increase and not diminish. You're going to thrive, you're going to become more numerous. You're not going to be killed, you're not going to be treated the way Pharaoh treated the babies that were being born, killing the male children and all that.

You're going to grow. Look at verse 7, seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive. You be a blessing there.

Don't be subversive, don't start an underground, don't plant bombs, don't undercut and undermine authority. You seek the peace of that city. You be a blessing while you are there.

This is the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet sent in this Sepharim to the captives. Make the best of it and I will bless you. Seek the peace of the city and you're going to prosper.

Pray to the Lord for it. Pray for your enemies. Does this sound familiar? Love your enemies.

Do good to those who hate you. Pray for those that despitefully use you. Ring a bell? For thus says the Lord of hosts, verse 8, the God of Israel, do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed.

God's not sending the dreams. These are people with dreams and visions. They're manufacturing themselves.

They prophesy falsely to you in my name. I have not sent them, says the Lord. For thus, says the Lord, it's going to be 70 years.

70 years. After 70 years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform my good word toward you and cause you to return to this place. It is a set period of time.

You can go there. You can seek peace. You can prosper.

You can multiply. You cannot shorten it. It is what it is.

I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil to give you a future and a hope. I have sent you captives to Babylon so that if you are obedient, I can accomplish my thoughts for you, which are peace, a future, and a hope. Peace, a future, and a hope in a hostile and foreign environment that many are decrying, that many are coming up with dreams and visions saying, this is not going to last.

God's going to redeem us. God's going to restore us. God's going to rescue us.

God's going to send us back a mighty deliverer like Joshua is going to arise. We're going to march back into the land. We'll take it.

God says, no, they are not speaking in my name. I have not sent them. I will give you a future and a hope, verse 12, then you will call upon me and go and pray to me and I will listen to you.

And you will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart. One of our memory verses. You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart.

But what is the context here? What is this captivity going to do for the faithful? They're going to learn to seek God with all their heart. Without the oppression, without the dislocation, without the captivity, without the hardship, without the separation, they're never going to seek God as fully as they will through this process. This is going to give them the opportunity to develop a seeking heart unlike anything they could do without this pressure.

It is a necessary environment for growth. Have you ever seen pruning done by people who know how to garden? If I prune a thing, it will die because I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know which things you can prune and which you can't.

There are things you can cut off and stick them in the ground and that cut off thing will root and grow. You can put them in a glass of water and roots will form. You can wound them and wrap a bag around it and roots will come out the side.

I've seen it done by people who know what they're doing. But it's a wound. It's an insult.

It's a cutting back and yet the plant thrives. It's not so leggy. It doesn't have such long branches that they're going to break in a strong wind.

It is good for the plant to be cared for by somebody who knows how to prune it. I am the vine, you are the branches. Abide in me that you will bear much fruit.

When you're bearing fruit, my Father will come, Jesus says, and prune so that you will bear more fruit. God knows how to prune. But pruning is a destructive process.

It is a chopping and a loss of something. And in the loss, there is benefit. I have put you in captivity.

I have sent you to this city. I want you to pray for the peace of this city. I want you to pray for those that have the rule over you because I have thoughts of peace and not of evil to give you a future and a hope.

You are going to come and call on me and pray to me and you will seek me and find me because you're searching for me with all your heart. Verse 14, I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you to the place from which I caused you to be carried away captive.

Because you have said, the Lord has raised up prophets for us in Babylon, therefore thus says the Lord concerning the king who sits on the throne of David, concerning all the people who dwell in this city and concerning your brethren who have not gone with you into captivity. Now, when he says, the Lord has raised up prophets for us in Babylon, there's two different, you try to figure out, does this belong at the end of what we just read or does it belong at the beginning of what we're starting to read? Are these people who recognize that there are genuine prophets like Daniel and Ezekiel, or are these people who are listening to the false prophets that are not speaking in God's name? Well, as always, the answer is yes. It's one of God's classic double entendres, because you have said this, and He can say it for both groups.

Because some of you are listening to false prophets, here's a message. Because some of you have recognized my true prophets like Ezekiel and Daniel, and remember the words of Jeremiah, and are listening to the letter of Jeremiah, and recognize that God has sent you the word of a prophet even in captivity, He has delivered it to you by means of a messenger, here's what the Lord says. So everybody that thinks they've got their prophet with the right message, pay attention.

So, who's left out? Nobody's left out. Everybody in captivity should pay attention. They've been hooked.

If you believe that God has raised up a prophet for you in Babylon, then pay attention. Well, that's everybody. It's just two different groups, and so this is a two-edged sword.

So, because you've said the Lord has raised up prophets for us in Babylon, thus says the Lord concerning the king, and so on. Verse 17, thus says the Lord of hosts, I will send on them the ones who stayed back, the ones who are still militating and fighting. Remember, Jeremiah had told them, you need to be docile, you need to be compliant.

When Nebuchadnezzar says, go, you'd better go. Don't stay, don't resist, don't hide, don't form

an underground, don't be the resistance. The word of the Lord is, this is from the Lord.

Go, and He'll take care of you in a hostile foreign land. Well, there's people that just can't believe that. Their faith isn't big enough.

Their relationship with God is not strong enough. This can't be good. Lord, I lost something in my life.

I lost a child. I lost a husband. I lost a wife.

I lost a parent. I lost my health. I lost an opportunity.

I lost a relationship. I lost a job. I lost money.

The big crash 10 odd years ago. I lost my security. I lost my expectation.

I lost my hope and my future, whatever it may be. God says, trust me, I know what I'm doing. People who don't trust and who continue to try to make flesh their strength, whose heart departs from the Lord, and they've got a better idea, this is the message.

I will send on them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence. I will make them like rotten figs that cannot be eaten, they are so bad. I will pursue them with the sword, with famine and pestilence.

It's not enough that it hits. If you're in Israel and famine and pestilence hit, go to Moab. Remember that? Remember Maalon and Naomi's family? Well, he says, that's not going to do you any good.

It's going to follow you. It will chase you. You can't get away from it.

I'll pursue them. I will deliver them to trouble among all the nations and kingdoms of the earth to be a curse, an astonishment, a hissing, and a reproach everywhere I've driven them, because, why? Verse 19, they have not heeded my words. God says, bad times are coming, but I'm going to bless you in them.

Hardship is coming, but if you will pursue peace, if you will pray, if you will persevere, if you will wait until the seventy years are completed, you will be blessed like you can't imagine. And you will have a heart that fully and firmly seeks the Lord. You'll pray to me and you'll be found by me.

It will refine you. It will purge out the dross. It will take away the impurities, but it takes a refining fire, and fire is hot, and it burns, and there is loss.

Did you ever think about the fact that when precious metals are refined, there is loss? There's always loss when something is refined. You don't add to it. You take away from it, no matter what you do.

When you purify a thing, there is always something that is removed. Even if you add something, the additive is going to precipitate out, or distill out, or wash away something, and there's going to be less total stuff there than when you started. This is God's process.

Verse 20, Hear the word of the Lord, all you of the captivity whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning Ahab the son of Coliah, Zedekiah the son of Masaiah, who prophesy to you in my name. Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and he will slay them before your eyes.

These false messengers, messengers of prosperity, messengers of, well, if you just do the right thing, prosperity will return immediately. You don't have to wait. Don't listen to Jeremiah.

Don't listen to harbingers of doom and gloom. Be happy. Be prosperous.

Because of them a curse shall be taken up by all the captivity of Judah who are in Babylon, saying, The Lord make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire. If you're not willing to submit to the refining fire of God, you're going to be submitted to the destroying fire of the enemy. Because they have done disgraceful things in Israel, committed adultery with their neighbor's wives, and spoken lying words in my name, which I have not commanded them, I know and am a witness, says the Lord.

Nobody escapes the gaze of the Lord. And it goes on from there. Skip down to chapter 30.

The word that came to Jeremiah, thus says the Lord God of Israel, write it in a book for yourself, all the words I have spoken to you. The days are coming, says the Lord. I will bring back from Cacti my people Israel and Judah.

Now, whoa! Did you notice anything there? What just happened? How's your attention to detail here? What is strange in verse 3? Who did Nebuchadnezzar take captive? Judah. Who's God going to bring back? Israel and Judah. We have just gone wheels up off the runway here, and we're flying into the prophetic future when God is going to bring... Remember the 144,000 servants of God that have a seal on their forehead in Revelation? There's your lost tribes.

Everybody but Simeon, is it? Doesn't show back up. Right? And notice what it says. Well, we don't have time to read all of this.

But it shall come to pass, verse 8, in that day, says the Lord, I will break his yoke from your neck. I will burst your bonds. Foreigners will no longer enslave them.

They shall serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them. Verse 9, David the king is going to be raised up. Now, has that ever happened in the return with Ezra and Nehemiah? Did David the king or anybody like him sit on the throne ever again? We've leaped.

We're in the prophetic future here. Right? Now, back in chapter 29, when did Jeremiah say this

was going to happen? Seventy years are appointed. Right? Seventy years.

Verse 10, 29, 10, after 70 years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform my good word toward you and cause you to return to this place. That's the near term and that's a literal 70 years. Now, you remember when we were thinking last week about the 2300 days? Well, what is the, you know, terminus, ad, quiem, or whatever they go? When do you start counting? When does that begin? Well, was it when the sow was sacrificed? Was it when the last good, legitimate priest was killed? Was it, you know, the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem? And which decree is that? Is that Cyrus' decree? Is it the decree that goes out in the days of Esther and Mordecai, which is my personal favorite, almost unheard of, unknown theory that naturally appeals to me.

But when do you start counting? This dilemma affects Daniel because, turn back now to Daniel chapter 9, we're almost finished for tonight here. Daniel chapter 9, he's got these books out of order backwards, don't we? Jeremiah comes ahead, here's Daniel chapter 9, verse 2, I understood by Jeremiah's letter, the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord, and this is in the first year of Darius. Well, we know exactly when the Babylonian Empire came to an end and the Medes and the Persians took over.

We know the exact year. So the first year of Darius the Mede is not hard to figure out, and it is 538 B.C. 538 B.C. Now, Daniel says that I understand that 70 years go by, and then we're eligible for return to the land, and that's why he starts praying this prayer. So, let's do the math now.

538, let's just add 70 to that, and what do you get? 608, am I right? 608 B.C.? So, we know that the Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem three times. The first was in 605 B.C., that's when Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael all got taken, right? 605. That was the first incursion.

So Daniel says, aha, three years from now could be the first possible end of the 70 years. Do we take it from the first time that Nebuchadnezzar came and carried off the vessels of the temple and took the princes? That was the first real... So he says, well, to be safe, I can start praying now, because it could be as soon as two or three years from now, right? Or it could be from the days of Zedekiah when Jeremiah sent the letter that said 70 years, in which case it would be from 597 or so, 70 years would be 527, Daniel would be praying in 538, so it's like a decade away. But you look at the fervency with which Daniel is praying.

How fervent is it? It's enough to risk the lion's den for. He's not going to stop praying this prayer. That's what he's praying in chapter 6. And nothing is going to dissuade him from going to God and making this petition in sackcloth and ashes, O LORD we have sinned, but I understand from your word that a time of mercy and refreshing and returning and restoration is nigh.

And so he takes no chances. He doesn't say, well, it's ten years away, I don't know if I'm even going to live that long, but no point. He's starting now.

So I would suggest it's possible Daniel didn't exactly know when the 70 year clock began, but he knows that it could have been when he and his friends got taken the first time Nebuchadnezzar came. Because what does the exact text of the scripture say in Jeremiah 29? The time for Babylon is 70 years. Well, that's a little vague.

What do you mean the time? The time that they're dominant over Jerusalem? Well, that started in 605. The time when the king is no longer, you've got the whole Zedekiah thing in 97, or is it not until the destruction in 586, in which case it would be 20 years in the future before the 70 year clock completes. So in the same way that we're trying to figure, well, when did the 2300 days start, and would that be until the 69th weekends, and is it before the tribulation, is it after the tribulation, is it the middle? It's kind of tough to know.

And Jesus said no man knows the day or the hour. And when he says no man, even Daniel didn't know the day or the hour for this prophecy. But what does he know? That the fulfillment is going to come by prayer, by recognition, and by seeking God with a full heart.

And we know, of course, that the rapture is as near and as close to us as our last heartbeat, our last tick of the EEG if we're hooked up. So when should we start petitioning and seeking God with all of our heart, recognizing that our lives here are very similar and are patterned after the Babylonian captivity? What is our time fighting a fallen nature and fighting the world around us and fighting the stratagems of Satan and his minions formally attacking us as we skyline ourselves as believers who are trying to live a life that pleases God? We are in hostile territory. What should we be doing? Exactly what the letter of Jeremiah told the captives to do.

Build your house, raise your kids, seek the peace of your community, and learn the lessons that will enable you to seek God fully. You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart. We turn cursing to blessing.

God is working these things together for our good. And so instead of looking at the glass and saying, that glass is nearly empty, we say, well, look how much water is left in that glass. What can I do with this water? What would God have me do with what I've got left here? As my physical capabilities diminish, as my mental capacities fade, as my opportunities maybe are less, as kids are launched, can't train them anymore, now what do you do? What's left? There's that much more space and time to seek the Lord with all our heart.

As we have established our homes, as we have prayed for the peace of our community, as we have raised our sons and daughters and helped them raise their sons and daughters, as the glass gets emptier and emptier, what does that give us more time and opportunity to do? Seek the Lord with all our heart. Remember that where we are going, He's going to be looking for those who will seek Him and find Him because they are searching for Him with all their heart. It's the letter.

Read Jeremiah 29. That is our Bible. That is our owner's manual for what to do with the time that remains to us in this life.

We are in captivity. We are in a harsh and hostile environment. What are we supposed to do? Redeem the time because the days are evil.

Seek peace. Love our enemies. Do good to those who hate us.

Pray for those that despitefully use us. Look around. Think about the prayer of Daniel as a captive, looking back on his own people and why are we in this situation? We are all fallen.

Let him who is without sin start casting stones. But let those of us who recognize that we are sinful cast prayers and cast them heavenward and intercede on our own behalf and on the behalf of those around us, on the behalf of our nation, on behalf of those who have the rule over us. Look how much time and space Daniel spends on that prayer and he braves the lion's den to do it.

This is the prayer he prayed. This is the occasion on which he prayed it. Why did God give us this information? Because that's what we're doing.

This is our opportunity as well. Well, we haven't even gotten to the content of Daniel 9 yet with all of the 70 weeks and the rest of it, but the occasion of it alone, the prayer that introduces it is a challenge and an opportunity for us as believers to go and do likewise. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

We'll pick up here next week. Father, thank you for the truth of your word, for the power that it confers, that it conveys, that in the hands of the Holy Spirit provides to us enablement, insight, perspective, peace in our souls, even as we absorb the inevitable wrongs that are done, both large and small, both at an environmental level and at a personal level. We thank you for your grace in providing us this wonderful truth, and we pray that God the Holy Spirit will use it to refine us, to purify us, and to make of us those people that reflect your glory and will be useful as servants both now and in the ages to come.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.