

Daniel 9:24 (Part II)

I. Daniel 9:24 (Part I) — Seventy sevens... to make an end of the transgression... [and] to bring in everlasting righteousness...

In answer to Daniel's pleas for mercy on behalf of God's covenant people, the angel Gabriel was sent to him with this message:

“Seventy sevens are decreed with regard to your people and your holy city...”
to make an end of the *transgression*,
to SEAL up *sin*,
and to atone for *iniquity*,
to bring in everlasting righteousness,
to SEAL both vision and prophet,
and to anoint a most holy.

These six realities, Gabriel says, will all be accomplished within the seventy sevens. And so there's a sense in which understanding these six realities is the key to helping us rightly understand the seventy sevens. That's one reason we're turning this one verse into three topical messages. The other reason is because it's entirely worth it for our own spiritual comfort, and assurance, and joy.

Last week, we looked at the first matching set of “negative” and “positive”: “To make an **end** of the transgression... and to bring in **everlasting** righteousness.” That's saying a lot. In fact, it's saying so much that many of us might think this could only be fulfilled in the eternal state – when Christ has already returned and even the presence of sin has been abolished and the whole world is filled with righteousness. But that's not true. We saw last week that the specific “transgression” the angel Gabriel is talking about is the transgression of God's own covenant people – the transgression of covenant-breaking. So the question is: *When* will the “*covenant breaking*” of God's covenant people come to an end? The prophet Jeremiah said that this would happen when God made a *new* covenant with His people.

□ Jeremiah 31:31–33 — Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, **my covenant that they broke**, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD.

Today, we know that the transgression of God's people has come to an “*end*” because the New Covenant—with its perfect and complete provision for our salvation—has been established (cf. Lk. 22:19-20; Heb. 8:7-13). The seventy sevens have been fulfilled. We are no longer

covenant-breakers, as Israel was under the Old Covenant, but covenant-keepers. And that's not because we're better than they were. It's the blood of the covenant itself that infallibly secures our repentance and faith in Christ until the end – thus making an end of the transgression.

Notice what we just said about the blood of the covenant securing our repentance and faith in Christ *until the end*. Isn't that the same thing as saying "everlasting righteousness"? In place of the transgression that's been *ended* there *must be* a righteousness that's everlasting. In other words, we don't keep the covenant for a time, and then find ourselves in danger again of breaking it and suffering God's curse. No, we will keep the covenant forever because the covenant is, by its very nature, an eternal and unbreakable covenant (Heb. 13:20; cf. Jer. 32:39-40; 50:4-5; Ezek. 16:59-63; 37:24-28). The covenant itself has actually secured for us an everlasting righteousness – first of all the meritorious righteousness of Christ imputed to us as a free gift and second of all a repentance and faith in which we ourselves will persevere until the end. And so we see again that the seventy sevens have been fulfilled. When Gabriel speaks these words to Daniel, "To make an end of the transgression... and to bring in everlasting righteousness," we might at first think this is so wonderful it could only be true in the eternal state. But are we seeing, now, how wonderful are these days in which we're already living – these days of true Jubilee (liberty) and Sabbath rest?

II. The "elephant in the room"

It's a wonderful thing to say I'm *no longer* a covenant-breaker; *Now* I'm one who keeps covenant with God. But if that's all I could say, wouldn't there still be a huge "elephant in the room," as it were? What about all the guilt of my past rebellion against God, when I was still dead in my sins (Eph. 2:1)? What about all the guilt of that sin that *I* have already committed and that clings permanently to me like a stain I can never wash away? We can easily have this idea that the further away we get (in time) from the sin we've committed the less serious it is and the less it should require any punishment. As my former sins fade in my own memory and consciousness, I can make the mistake of supposing that the sin and guilt itself is also fading away. But the reality is that no amount of the passage of time can ever lessen my guilt. And no amount of obedience today can ever blunt the condemning power of that guilt. And it's not just about our *past* sins, is it? Even as those who keep the covenant, we still sin – in our innermost thoughts and motives which God sees with perfect clarity, in our attitudes, in the expressions on our face, in the words we speak and write, in our actions. Don't we all still feel, acutely, this reality of our sin—past, and present... and even future? And yet at the same time, can we acknowledge that much of our sin still remains hidden from us because of our self-deception and self-justification?

We know from what we saw last week that this doesn't turn us into covenant-breakers, but it does mean that we're still *sinners*. How can that be? If the sin I commit today is just as deserving of God's righteous judgment as any other sin I've ever committed in any past life, and if the guilt of all my past sin can never be blunted by the passing of time or offset by any of my obedience today, then how can I not *still* be called a covenant-breaker who deserves to die? That's the question. And on our ability to answer this question hangs all our enjoyment of the true assurance of our salvation. So I'll ask you: Are you able to give an answer to this question? On

the one hand, it's an answer that a little child could give. On the other hand, it's an answer that a person might study all his life and yet still be growing in understanding until the day he dies.

III. Daniel 9:24 — Seventy sevens are decreed with regard to your people and your holy city, to make an end of the transgression, **to seal up sin, and to atone for iniquity**...

Last week we started, in a sense at the end, with the results; now, this week, we're backing up a little to the things that make that end and those results possible. The end of the transgression and the bringing in of everlasting righteousness *assumes* and *requires* another, even more basic reality – the sealing up of sin and the atoning for iniquity. I just want to point out right now that this is wisdom you won't learn anywhere else in the world, in any other religion or any other philosophy of men—but only in the Scriptures. So I encourage you to daily take up the Scriptures and read them, and learn this true wisdom.

The words “sin” (*ha-ta*) and “iniquity” (*a-wah*) take us back to Daniel's prayer where he used those two words repeatedly (cf. 9:5, 8, 11, 13, 15, 16, 20). In fact, almost the very first words of his prayer were these: “We have sinned (*ha-ta*) and committed iniquity (*a-wah*; 9:5).” Notice how Daniel says “*we*.” In verse 20 he says:

□ Daniel 9:20 — While I was speaking and praying, confessing *my* sin *and* the sin of my people Israel...

Let's think about that for a minute. On the one hand, Daniel is confessing the persistent, rebellious covenant-breaking of God's covenant people as a whole – the covenant-breaking that landed them all in exile. But Daniel was a faithful Israelite; he was a righteous man; he was a covenant-keeper by faith (cf. Ezek. 14:14, 20; Heb. 11:32-33). So how can Daniel associate himself with the rebellious covenant-breakers in Israel when the reality is that if they had been as faithful as Daniel there wouldn't have been any exile? The simple answer is that even though Daniel was not a covenant-breaker because he lived by faith and trusted God's promises, yet he was still a sinner and so he was still conscious of the guilt of his sin. Daniel could see that the exile and “death” of his nation—and even his own personal experience of that exile—was a picture (a type) of the eternal death that his own sin was crying out for. On the one hand, the rebellious covenant people needed to be transformed and recreated with a new covenant. On the other hand, even the believing remnant (even the “Daniel's” in Israel) still needed to have the guilt of their sin taken away – the stain of their sin that clung to them and condemned them washed away.

Before an end can be made of the covenant-breaking of God's people, sin itself must be “sealed up.” Before an everlasting righteousness can be brought in to take the place of that constant covenant-breaking, the guilt of all the sins of God's people—past, present, and even still future—must be “atoned” for.

Today, there can be such a big emphasis in the church on “felt needs.” The problem is that what we feel we need may not be what we truly need or what we need most. The Bible teaches us that the greatest need that we should all feel we have is the need to have our sin—and so the *guilt* of

that sin—taken away; sealed up, as it were, and atoned for forever. What we need to see clearly, here, is that to speak of sin is the same thing as to speak of guilt, and this guilt isn't a feeling we have—it's not feeling ashamed, it's not weeping and tears. This guilt is simply an objective fact that stems from the reality that *I* have broken God's holy law. Some of us might worry that we don't have sufficient feelings of guilt and shame or that we haven't shed enough tears over our sin. The problem, here, is that very often we can even have a man-centered approach to our "guilt." We focus on our own "feelings" of guilt and completely miss the reality that according to the Word of God we are "legally" and objectively guilty before God—the holy Judge—whether we feel like it or not. This is the consciousness of our sin and guilt that we most need, and that will then produce in us a fear and trembling—and yes, even a sense of shame and grief—that leads us to cry out with the Philippian jailor, "What must I do to be saved?"

The answer to your greatest need and to my greatest need, whether we have hitherto felt it to be so or not, is summed up in these words of the angel Gabriel to Daniel: "Seventy sevens... to seal up sin, and to atone for iniquity." Think for a moment about the reality that these two things were not yet accomplished in the days of Daniel. The sin of Daniel had not been sealed up. The iniquity of Daniel had not been atoned for. What did this mean for Daniel? The Apostle Paul tells us that under the Old Covenant God, in His *divine forbearance*, *passed over* the sins of the faithful remnant (all the Daniel's) among His people (Rom. 3:25). And yet the guilt of their sin was still crying out for justice and still demanding satisfaction. The writer of Hebrews says:

□ Hebrews 10:1-2 — Since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshippers, having once been cleansed, *would no longer have any consciousness of sins*?

The point here isn't that God's people would have been sinless, but that they would no longer have been *conscious* of their sin still crying out for satisfaction, and demanding God's righteous judgment. That's not to say that God's people under the Old Covenant lived in constant fear and doubt. They didn't. They knew the assurance of the forgiveness of their sins based on faith in the promise of God (Ps. 32; Isa. 6:5-7). And yet that consciousness of the unsatisfied guilt of their sin still couldn't go away – hence the constantly repeated sacrifices and offerings for sin. The writer of Hebrews says that *in* the sacrifices that they "*continually* offered every year" there was "*a reminder of sins* every year" (Heb. 10:3). Can you see what that means, now? This isn't just a reminder that they were sinners, but a reminder of the guilt of their sin that still demanded satisfaction because though it had been passed over, it had not yet in actual historical reality been taken away. Are you beginning to see again the awesome advantage that we have over Daniel as those living when the seventy sevens have all been fulfilled?—When all our sins, past, present, and future have been sealed up and all our iniquities atoned for?

IV. "To seal up sin..."

We could think of this "sealing" in two ways. We could picture all our sins—past, present, and future—sealed up in a bag so that they're removed from all sight, forever – even from the sight

of God. And who other than God Himself could seal up sin in any bag so that it's hidden even from His own sight? Job says:

- Job 14:16–17 (cf. Clines, WBC; Alden, NAC) — Then... you would not keep watch over my sin; my transgression would be sealed up in a bag, and you would cover over my iniquity.

In another place, Job says that God is the one who “seals up the stars” so that they're no longer visible in the sky (Job 9:7). In the same way, God is the one who removes all our transgressions *even from His own view* – who treads all our iniquities underfoot and who casts all our sins into the depths of the sea (Mic. 7:18-29).

That's one way of picturing the sealing up of sin; but there's also another way that could be the one intended here in Daniel 9. Think of all your sins being written down and recorded in an open book or a scroll all rolled out on the table. The point, here, isn't just our embarrassment at such a thing. It's way more serious than that. This official, legal record of our sins would be constantly accusing us and reminding us of our guilt, demanding satisfaction and calling out for God's righteous judgment. And now picture, if you will, this book being closed, or the scroll rolled up and then sealed so that it can never, ever, ever be opened again. The prophet Isaiah uses an analogy like this:

- Isaiah 29:11 (cf. Dan. 12:4, 9) — The vision of all this has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed. When men give it to one who can read, saying, “Read this,” he says, “I cannot, for it is sealed.”

All the guilt of all our sins—past, present, and future—is now in a closed and sealed book so even if Satan himself were to give it to God saying, “Read this,” God would answer him, “I cannot, for it is sealed” (cf. Rev. 12:10). There are some things that God “cannot” do. He cannot lie. He cannot tempt anyone with evil. He “cannot” and will not ever open that book that He Himself has closed and sealed. Do you know the wonderful joy of this objective fact and reality? Do you know the weight lifted, the peace with God, the guilt removed? Do you know what it is to no longer have any consciousness of sin because the guilt of your sin has been taken away?

V. “...to seal up sin and to atone for iniquity”

It's true that we *have* sinned, and that we *still* sin, but the guilt of all our sin—past, present, and future—no longer cries out for God's righteous judgment because that judgment has already been poured out on the one who took all our sins—past, present, and future—on Himself and then poured out His own soul unto death (Isa. 53:12). That's what atonement is. It's the **removal** and the **taking away** of all the **guilt of my sin** through the **satisfaction** offered by a **fit and perfect substitute** (cf. Rom. 3:23-26). And so the writer of Hebrews says:

- Hebrews 9:26 (cf. 10:1-2, 11-14) — [Christ] has appeared once for all at the end of the ages [the fulfillment of the seventy sevens] **to put away sin** [sealed up] **by the sacrifice of himself** [atonement].

To this point we've pictured a book containing the record of all our sins sealed up so that it can never, ever again be opened. But the Apostle Paul takes this picture one step further.

- Colossians 2:13–14 — And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, *having* forgiven us *all* our trespasses [past, present, and future], **by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands**. This he set aside [sealing the record forever], [and] nailing it to the cross.

Brothers and sisters, the accuser of the brethren has been thrown down because the record of our guilt has been irrevocably shut, sealed, and nailed to the cross. Therefore, whenever our own hearts would accuse us and condemn us, whenever we're distressed by the sin that still clings so closely (Heb. 12:1), let us go back again, and again, and again to the cross and *behold* and *see* there the record of all our sins, with all of its legal demands, cancelled—nailed to that cross in the person of our perfect substitute, Jesus Christ (cf. Gal. 3:1).

Conclusion

“What, then, shall we say? Are we to continue in sin that [this] grace may abound?” “May it *never* be.” Can you imagine anything in all the world more perverse or more impossible than this (Rom. 6:1-23)? The more we understand and grasp this reality of our sins sealed up and our iniquities atoned for—the more we behold the record of all our sin and guilt nailed to the cross—the more unattractive and abhorrent sin will be to us, and the more desirable will be a true life of holiness. Listen to what the Apostle Paul says to Timothy:

- 2 Timothy 3:14–15 — As for you, *continue* in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Have you become wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus? Are you continuing, day by day, in what you have learned and have firmly believed? Here is wisdom simple enough for a little child and profound enough that it will be studied and wondered at for all eternity.

- Psalms 111:2 — Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them.

The Lord's Supper

Remember how the writer of Hebrews says that *in* the sacrifices that God's Old Covenant people “*continually* offered” there was “a *reminder* of *sins* every year” (Heb. 10:3). How different it is today when we take the Lord's Supper. Here is not a reminder that the guilt of our sin still remains—demanding justice, but a reminder that the guilt of our sin has been taken away. Here is the answer to that question of how we can still be sinners and yet also be covenant-keepers by grace through faith. The guilt of all our sin—past, present, and future—has been sealed up. Full atonement has been made. And so we read in Hebrews ten:

- Hebrews 10:11–18 — Every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,” then he adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.