

## **“The Skill to Understand”**

Daniel 9:20-27

Hello friend and welcome to *Hope for Today*. My name is J. Mark Horst; I’m your friend and Bible teacher. The program you’re listening to is produced by Heralds of Hope, an international Gospel radio and literature ministry.

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Throughout history, people have desired to know the future. Human beings want to have a sense of being in control of their own destiny. For those who don’t know God, or reject His existence, they resort to astrology, divination, omens, and other occultic activity. As Paul so aptly stated in Romans 1:25, “[they] worship and serve the creature more than the Creator...”

As Christ followers the details of the future are hidden from us too. But in Holy Scripture we have many predictive prophecies revealing the bigger picture of how God will bring history, as we know it, to its conclusion. Since predictive prophecy makes up about one-quarter of the Scripture, it’s something we can’t afford to ignore.

Yet we hear comments like, “studying prophecy is divisive,” or “prophecy is too hard to understand.” The study of prophecy doesn’t need to be any more divisive than the study of any other Scripture. And yes, there are certainly prophetic portions that are hard to understand.

The study of prophecy is not divisive; it’s people who are divisive. We can hold firmly to our understanding and conviction without being overly dogmatic or judgmental. While we believe there’s only one correct interpretation of Scripture, we should approach the study of prophecy, and all Scripture, with a good dose of humility. However, to those who say the study of prophecy isn’t important, I ask, “who gives you the authority to speak that way about God’s Word?”

Our modern age, with all its conveniences, has fostered biblical illiteracy and left many unable and unwilling to wrestle with difficult texts. We’ve become accustomed to brief “sound bites” and quick 2-minute reads. Too many professing Christians have never been taught how to properly study the Scripture and too many have little or no interest.

Yet, the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote in II Timothy 3:16 and 17. “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*” Did you catch that? ALL Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and ALL Scripture is profitable. That should be sufficient motivation to study the Scriptures, including the prophetic portions.

As we continue our study in the book of Daniel, we’re looking at chapter nine. The first part of the chapter deals with Daniel’s prayer for his people and the nation of Israel. Daniel understood from Jeremiah’s writings that the time of the 70-year captivity in Babylon was drawing to an end. Daniel took Jeremiah’s words literally; he expected God to fulfill His word. He also understood that God’s promises would be realized through prayer. He embraced the need for confession of sin and repentance as a prelude to restoration.

Being extremely weary from his passionate prayers, about 3pm (the time of the evening offering), Daniel is stirred from his drowsiness by Gabriel and his message. Gabriel informed Daniel that his prayer had been heard from the beginning, and that he would now explain the vision Daniel saw in the closing verses of chapter eight. If you recall, this was the vision that troubled Daniel greatly, and the vision which no one understood.

So, let’s turn to the text and read that as we begin our study of “The Skill to Understand.” Here is Daniel **9:20 to 27**.

While this isn’t a long text, it is a very detailed one. I want to humbly share with you what I’ve gleaned from the text, and I hope it will be a blessing.

As we begin our study it’s important to keep several things in mind. The entire prophecy given by Gabriel has to do with Daniel’s city and Daniel’s people; that is, the nation of Israel and the city of Jerusalem (v. 24).

Also, two different *princes* are mentioned. They must not be confused! The first is named *Messiah, the Prince* (v. 25), and the second is *the prince [of the people] who is to come* (v. 26).

The entire time period is exactly specified as 70 weeks (v.24). These 70 weeks are divided into three sections: a period of seven weeks, then a period of 62 weeks, and then a final week (vv. 25, 27). The beginning of this period of 70 weeks is definitely stated to be “*from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem*” (v.25).

The end of the seven weeks, plus the sixty-two weeks, or sixty-nine weeks, will be marked by the appearance of *Messiah, the Prince* (v.25). At a later time, after the 69 weeks, *Messiah, the Prince will be 'cut off'* and Jerusalem will again be *destroyed by the people of another prince who is yet to come* (v. 26).

After these events, we're informed that the 70<sup>th</sup> week will come. The beginning of this final week is clearly marked by the establishing of a *firm covenant* or treaty between the prince who is to come and the Jewish nation for *one week* (v. 27). In the middle of this final week, the prince will break the covenant causing *the sacrifice to cease* and ushering in a time of great wrath (v. 27).

Finally, with the full completion of the *seventy weeks*, there will begin a time of great and unparalleled blessings upon the nation of Israel (v.24).

In this text, Daniel was given by Gabriel the "skill to understand" the extremely important details of this vision.

Some scholars express the opinion that these final verses of chapter nine hold the key that unlock our understanding of a large portion of the prophetic Scriptures. McClain states, "Probably no single prophetic utterance is more crucial in the fields of biblical interpretation, apologetics, and eschatology."

The timing of Gabriel's appearance is significant, the time of the evening oblation. Of course, this daily sacrifice had stopped when Jerusalem was destroyed. But Daniel probably had memories from his childhood of seeing the smoke from this offering rise from the Temple site into the afternoon sky.

The evening offering was a reminder that God accepts sinful man on the basis of a sacrifice offered on their behalf. This sacrifice typified the coming perfect Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, and His sacrifice on the cross for the sin of all humankind. And it's in this context that Gabriel reveals some very specific timing that relates to the first coming of Christ!

In the opening verses of our text, Gabriel informs Daniel that he came to "*give you the skill to understand.*" As we noted earlier in our study of the book, Daniel was gifted by God with "*understanding in all visions and dreams.*" But here was a dream, in the end of chapter eight, that Daniel couldn't unravel, and it left him deeply troubled! Gabriel said, "I've come to show you the

meaning of what was previously unknown.” Praise God, we’re privileged, by divine revelation, to listen in on Gabriel’s interpretation of the vision.

In verse 24, Gabriel tells Daniel that “*seventy weeks* (literally, seventy sevens) *are determined for your people and for your holy city.*” The first challenge of interpretation is right here. What are the *seventy sevens* that Gabriel is talking about?

My friend, I hate to interrupt, but we’re almost out of time for today’s broadcast. Lord willing, we’ll be back in one week to continue this study. If you’d like an audio CD or a printed copy of this complete teaching, just request it by its title, “The Skill to Understand.”

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Now friend, I urge you to tune in next week as we continue our study, “The Skill to Understand” from closing verses of Daniel chapter nine. And until then, keep looking for that blessed HOPE.