

WALKING OUT HIS WORD EACH DAY
THE 1 THESSALONIANS SERIES

COMMENTARY
ON MESSAGE #10

April 8th, 2018

In this week's sermon (#10 in the series) we began to explore what is meant in I Thessalonians 1:10 where it says "the coming wrath."

Q1: Before reading any further, how well do you think you understand the meaning of this verse?

It is important to remember that for the Thessalonian Christians, Paul's letter was not so much about absorbing new information as it was about remembering and understanding what they had already been given. There are two ways we know this.

1. In Acts 17:1-10 we read about Paul's initial visit to Thessalonica which led to the birth of this new church. He taught in the synagogue for three consecutive Sabbaths (17:2) and then spent more time (3-4 months?) teaching among the Gentiles because many people had been converted to Christianity.
2. When reading I Thessalonians 1-3, which was written 6-9 months after Paul left Thessalonica, one can't help but notice how many times Paul refers back to the time he had spent with them (1:5, 9; 2:1, 5-13; 3:4-8). Then, shortly after writing I Thessalonians, he wrote II Thessalonians.

*"Don't you remember that when I was with you
I used to tell you these things?"*
II Thessalonians 2:5

This verse indicates that Paul's teaching ministry, when he had been physically present in Thessalonica, had included significant instruction about the end times and the return of Christ. Since the New Testament had not been written yet (I Thessalonians was one of the earliest New Testament books to be written), much of Paul's teaching on the end times and **the coming wrath** had been drawn from the Old Testament. It is highly probable that much of Paul's teaching on the coming wrath and the end times was drawn from Daniel 7-12.

Q2: Have you ever studied Daniel? If so, how well do you think you know this book?

Before looking at Daniel's teaching on the coming wrath, let's remember the background. The story of Daniel begins with his being taken captive by the Babylonian Empire as a teenager in about 605 B.C. At that time the Babylonians were intending to conquer Judah (Israel), a process that took nearly twenty years but did end up with Jerusalem and the Temple being destroyed. Daniel's long life would be lived out in Babylonian captivity, but his wisdom, the quality of his character and the gift of prophecy God gave him made Daniel a trusted counselor to the Babylonians and then to the Persians who conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. Daniel's prophecies and his interpretation of the dreams of the Babylonian rulers cover three major topics:

1. The 4 kingdoms that would rise and fall in the coming centuries (Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome). All of these prophecies were fulfilled in precise detail. Much of this material covers the time between the Old and New Testaments.
2. Daniel also prophesied about things that even now are still future events. Chief among these will be the rise of a renewed empire that resembles the Roman Empire and the rise of a world ruler we now recognize to be the Anti-Christ. Daniel is the only Old Testament writer who prophesied extensively about a future Anti-Christ.

Q3: Please read Daniel 11:36-37 and then read II Thessalonians 2:3-5. Does it seem likely that Paul had taught the Thessalonians from this portion of Daniel's prophecies?

3. A timetable for the first coming of the Messiah, Jesus, which in Daniel's day was still over 500 years in the future. But within this timetable there is information given about a 7 year period of tribulation which is still in the future.

For the purposes of this commentary, here is the key passage from Daniel:

“Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.

Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.

After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing.

The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary.

The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’ In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple, he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.”

Daniel 9:24-27

What does all this mean? Let’s start with the seventy “sevens”. These represent years, so there are 70 portions of seven years for a total of 490 years. Today we mark time with decades or ten years. Daniel’s people were familiar with heptads or seven years. The Jews emphasized seven days in a week with the seventh day being the Sabbath. Every seventh year was a Sabbath rest year (Leviticus 25:1-7). Seven “seven years” brought them to the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-12). The sevens we read about in Daniel are periods of seven years.

Notice the things that will come to pass in Daniel’s seventy “sevens”. A decree will be issued which will allow Israel to be rebuilt and then the **Anointed One** will come. This is a reference to Jesus, the Messiah. The decree was issued by the Persians who had conquered the Babylonians and were favorably disposed toward the Jews. References to the decrees of Cyrus can be found in II Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4; 5:13 and of Darius in Ezra 6:1, 6-12, and of Artaxerxes in Ezra 7:11-26. See also the decree to rebuild Jerusalem found in Nehemiah 2:1-8.

Daniel’s prophecy said there would be seven “sevens” and sixty two “sevens” and then the Anointed One (Jesus the Messiah) would be cut off (His crucifixion). This was followed by the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Jesus predicted this very thing in Matthew 24:2 and it was fulfilled in 70 A.D. Remember 69 of the 70 “sevens” are completed by this point. There remains one final seven year period (the

seventieth “seven”). This final seven year period is **the coming wrath** spoken of in I Thessalonians 1:10. For us today, we are living in the age of the church, a lengthy period that exists **between** the first sixty nine “sevens” and the final or seventieth “seven”.

We believe that the church will be removed from earth (the Rapture) and will be taken to Heaven shortly before the final 7 years begin. According to Daniel 9:26-27, “the ruler who will come” (the Anti-Christ) will make a seven year covenant with Israel, guaranteeing their security. But at the mid-point of the seven years he will break the covenant and unleash his fury on Israel. These and other events during the seventieth “seven” or seven year tribulation are described by Jesus in Matthew 24 and by John in Revelation 6-19. Daniel 10 also gives information about this period.

Do not overlook the good news in Daniel’s prophecy of the seventy “sevens”. Daniel 9:24 says that the result will be “to bring in everlasting righteousness”. From a Jewish perspective this means the establishment of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to reign forever on the throne of David. At the end of the seven year tribulation, as the Anti-Christ and his armies surround Israel in one final attempt to destroy her, **the true King of Israel shall return!** He will defeat His enemies by the power of His Word.

What impact should this knowledge about the future have upon our lives? One of the things we must guard against is an attitude of curiosity for the sake of being entertained. For example, Hollywood has made countless movies with the theme of the apocalypse (although usually twisted beyond recognition). Some Christian teachers make the study of the end times the only focus of their ministries. While we often benefit from these ministries, some of them, in order to attract and keep an audience, go beyond Scripture and become far too speculative. Every doctrine of the Bible should point us to Christ. When we make it about something other than Christ we have gone in the wrong direction. The study of eschatology* should have the practical impact of deepening our confidence that God is in control. It should also prompt us to joyfully obey God’s commands as we eagerly await for Jesus to come and fulfill the promise of John 14:2-3 and the heavenly home that awaits us.

★ “eschatology” is the doctrine of the end times. It is based on the Greek word “eschatos” which means “last”. Eschatology is the study of last things.