

# The Gospel in Revelation

however, teaches that no one will ever be saved based on the ratio of their good works to their bad ones. Salvation by grace through faith is the very core of the gospel. Daniel 9 brought that clear message home.

Let's examine the first part of the prophecy: "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression" (Daniel 9:24). The word "finish" here is the Hebrew *kala* (pronounced *kaw law*). It means "to restrain" or "shut up." This same word is used in the Psalms where Christ was prophetically portrayed as suffering God's wrath:

"I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength: free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom Thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from Thy hand. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and Thou hast afflicted me with all Thy waves. Selah. Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; Thou hast made me an abomination unto them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth" (Psalm 88:4-8).

The term "shut up" is *kala* in Hebrew. According to Daniel 9:24, transgression would be "finished," *kala*. According to the prophecy in Psalm 88, Christ was "finished," "shut up," *kala*. This prophecy was fulfilled in Christ because He became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ was identified as the transgressor and was "shut up" and forsaken by the Father (Matthew 27:46).

Now look at the next phrase in the prophecy. Christ not only shut up sin in Himself on the cross, but He "made an end of sins." The book of Hebrews elucidates this wonderful truth when it says, "He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Hebrews 9:26, NAS). Christ fulfilled the sacrificial sin offerings of the earthly sanctuary. His death was the once-and-for-all sacrifice for sin. Just as the morning and evening sacrifice was made before any individual sinner approached the sanctuary with a personal offering, Christ's self-sacrifice was made for all people regardless of their personal repentance or confession.

Earlier in this study we read in Romans 5 a most profound fulfillment of the next phrase in Daniel's 9:24 prophecy, "make reconciliation for iniquity": "For when we were yet without strength, in due time [set or appointed time] Christ died for the ungodly. . . . For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Romans 5:6, 10).

In order to grasp the idea of reconciliation, we might ask, "Who was reconciled to God by the death of His Son?" Paul answered that question in the previous verse and in the following:

"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18-19, NKJV).

Paul's inspired answer to the question, "Who was reconciled by the cross?" is "God's enemies," "the world." By His death, Christ made reconciliation for the sins of the world, for all of us, while we were yet sinners. No sin can be committed for which satisfaction has not been met on Calvary.

Therefore, "While reconciliation involves the experience of restored relations with God, it is first an *objective* event *before* it is subjective. According to 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 and 21, reconciliation is achieved by the cross. This objective

event in the past history of salvation is the presupposition of reconciliation, whereby the possibility for humans to be reconciled with God on the experiential level is made available through the apostolic appeal to "be reconciled to God" (verse 20). In the apostolic preaching the *already-won reconciliation* projects itself toward every person, and seeks lodgment in the experience of those who believe. . . . What the gospel announces, therefore, is that people are to enter the new situation of reconciliation *already existing* 'in Christ Jesus' (Ephesians 2:13), who 'is our peace' (verse 14)" (*Handbook of SDA Theology*, Commentary Reference Series, vol. 12, p. 287; emphasis supplied).

In other words, if reconciliation has already been achieved by the cross, all that is wanting is acceptance by those who would believe it. God's prophecy is totally one-sided. There is no half-and-half work here—no you-do-your-part-and-I-will-do-mine. He has already done it all, every last bit of it. This is New Covenant theology and we need it desperately. Christ's *sacrificial* atonement on the cross is complete. It cannot be diminished by our sins or increased by our works. It stands alone as the only means of our reconciliation to God, awaiting our acceptance. God longs for a faith response to His New Covenant promises.

The next thunderous message in Daniel 9:24 is that the Messiah will "bring in everlasting righteousness." This points to the gospel, in which we find the "righteousness of God" revealed (Romans 1:16-17). If the gospel contains the righteousness of God, then the "everlasting righteousness" in Daniel 9:24 parallels the "everlasting gospel" in Revelation 14:6. Indeed, the summation of this prophecy in Daniel 9 is found in Revelation's glorious proclamation of the everlasting gospel: "Fear God and give glory to Him for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven and earth and the sea and the fountains of waters" (Revelation 14:7).

To "fear God" directs us to trust in His forgiveness and mercy (Psalm 130:3-4; 147:11). To "give glory to Him" is a call to acknowledge before a holy God that Christ is our "righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30-31). The call to worship God in Revelation 14:7 is a direct quotation from the Sabbath commandment (Exodus 20:8-11). It is a reminder to rest in what God has already done for us without us. It is a call to enter into God's eternal purpose, and rest in Christ's life, death and resurrection, trusting in His works for salvation and not our own (Hebrews 4:1-11).

The everlasting gospel of Revelation 14 proposes to do for us what we are powerless to do for ourselves. It lays the glory of man in the dust, placing Christ's righteousness not only as our title, but also as our fitness for heaven.

This, then, is the message of the seven thunders found in Revelation 10. In symbolic terms, the seven thunders represent a message from God that is perfect and complete. It points to Jesus Christ as the consummation of all God's promises and our only hope.

If you are hoping to accumulate enough good deeds to your credit to slip into heaven and enough charity and service for others to overrule your sins, then the seven-thunder message is for you.

Turn from your works to Christ's and appreciate what God in Christ has done for you in spite of your sins. Believe that nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus, and allow the mystery of God to be completed in you (Revelation 10:7). "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for *He* who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23, NKJV). Amen.

# Preludes of Hope

## The Seven Thunders

Tucked away in the book of Revelation we find a message that comes to John in the peel of seven thunders. Curiously, John is told not to write this seven-thunder message, so we might logically assume that this message is not for us to know—or is it? Let's find out as we pick up our study with Revelation 10:1:

"And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: and he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices. And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, 'Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not'" (Revelation 10:1-4).

### Clues in Daniel

The mighty angel that delivers this message fits the description of a messenger that appeared to Daniel (Daniel 10:5-6). This is one of several clues tying the message of the seven thunders in Revelation to the book of Daniel. Actually, a series of prophetic visions in Daniel complement those of Revelation.

A second clue is the description of the "little book" as "open" in the hand of this mighty messenger. Daniel is the only book of the Bible that was ever closed or sealed. Now it is opened in the book of Revelation. Daniel was told this would happen in the time of the end:

"But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase" (Daniel 12:4, NKJV).

Daniel's prophetic book was sealed because, though he was a faithful prophet of God, Daniel did not understand the meaning of his visions. Most of Daniel's prophecies were to reach fulfillment at a time future to when he wrote them. This is verified by the significant heavenly conversations Daniel heard after he was told to seal up his visions:

"Then I Daniel looked, and, behold, there stood other two, the one on this side of the bank of the river, and the other on that side of the bank of the river. And one said to the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, 'How long

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shall it be to the end of these wonders?’ And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and swore by him that liveth forever that it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished. And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, ‘O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?’ And he said, ‘Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end’” (Daniel 12:5-9).

## Understanding the Sealed Book

In Revelation John hears seven thunders in conjunction with Daniel’s now-open book. What do the seven thunders symbolize? The number seven in the Bible has come to represent perfection or completion (Genesis 2:1-3, Exodus 20:8-11). And thunder represents the voice of God. The Bible says, for example, that when God spoke to Jesus in an audible voice, “the crowd standing there heard it and said that it had thundered” (John 12:28-29, RSV; Psalm 18:13).

When we put these two definitions together, we find a Biblical explanation for what John hears when the book of Daniel is opened. He hears a perfect and complete message coming from God—so perfect and complete that, according to verse 10, it will finish the mystery of God, “Christ in us” (Revelation 10:7; Colossians 1:26-28).

This perfect and complete message, spoken with God’s voice, brings instant excitement to John. He is about to write this message, but is stayed by another voice from heaven. “Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not” (Revelation 10:4). Now this makes sense only if what John is about to write has already been written. If this little open book from which the seven thunders utter their voices is indeed the book of Daniel, then there is no need for John to write God’s prophecies again. Instead, John is told to go get the book from the angel and eat it:

“Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth. And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the angel’s hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter. And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings” (Revelation 10:8-11).

In this unusual imagery, God is saying to John and to us: “What I have revealed to you in the seven thunders is already recorded in the book of Daniel. All who would understand My perfect message, the voice of My salvation, need only to study and assimilate (eat, take into yourselves) what has already been given” (Revelation 10:4, 8-9, paraphrase).

So what is this perfect message exactly? Our best clue to understanding the seven thunders is the “little book open” phrase of Revelation 10:2. Since the only book of the Bible ever sealed is the book of Daniel, we must simply know the message of that little book in order to know the message of the seven thunders.

Now, Daniel’s prophecies were not sealed by sticking all the pages together. Their meaning was sealed in the sense that Daniel could not fully understand them: “I, Daniel, was exhausted and lay ill for several days. Then I got up and went about the king’s business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding” (Daniel 8:27, NIV). This was because, as Daniel was informed by the messenger, a portion of Daniel’s visions were about the distant future and events far from his current time and history:

“The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future” (Daniel 8:26, NIV).

At this point, Daniel searched deeply and fasted to seek the Lord for understanding: “In the first year of his [Darius] 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. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes” (Daniel 9:1-3).

And while Daniel was seeking the Lord in prayer, an immediate answer came: “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. 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 shew thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision. Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for Himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And He shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week He shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations He shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate” (Daniel 9:20-27).

These eight verses of Scripture came from heaven in response to Daniel’s heartfelt humility and prayerful appeals. The truth they revealed was the zenith, not only of Daniel’s prophecy, but of the entire Bible. They imparted in prophetic language a specific time line for the coming of the Messiah—to be born, anointed and to die as the Savior of the world.

The language was symbolic, but one thought immediately stands out above the rest: “After threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for Himself.” The Messiah referred to Christ, “the anointed One.” The words “cut off” implied His separation from God. Christ was to be forsaken of the Father, but not for Himself. He would die for “the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6) He would taste death for every man, woman and child who ever lived or ever would live (Hebrews 2:9).

## Seven Salvation Promises

This prophecy unfolded the wonderful gospel promise of a redeemer and everything that God would accomplish through Him for the world He so loves (John 3:16). Before the seventy weeks were over, before the 490 prophetic days were fulfilled, God through Christ would:

- 1) finish transgression
- 2) make an end of sins

- 3) make reconciliation for iniquity
- 4) bring in everlasting righteousness
- 5) seal up the vision
- 6) seal up the prophecy
- 7) and anoint the most Holy.

Could these seven phrases be the seven thunders alluded to in the little book now open in Revelation 10? Let’s consider the verse that follows Daniel 9:24. It promised that Messiah would arrive before the appointed time had ended:

“Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks” (Daniel 9:25).

The first two verbs, “know” and “understand,” tell the whole story—the Jews’ story and our story. *Know* means “perceive, discern, discriminate, recognize,” and *understand* means “give attention to, consider, ponder, have insight, comprehend.” *Know therefore* and *understand*. The “therefore” of this verse pointed the entire thought directly back to what had been said previously. The message then becomes unmistakable:

Based on this promise, God, through the Messiah, would accomplish the seven tasks outlined in verse 24 before the 490 prophetic days were concluded. In the prophecy, the Prince would be anointed after 69 weeks or 483 prophetic days. In precise fulfillment, Jesus was anointed in 27 A.D., with just one prophetic week left. In the midst of that final week Christ cried out, “It is finished!” It was done! He had accomplished what He had come to do—what only He could do—for our salvation. Praise God!

God stated the task, an impossible one for man. Then He assured us of the solution: “My Son, the Prince, the anointed one, will be here. In due time, on time, He will arrive. Christ will accomplish every specification of this prophecy, all that I have pledged.” And God keeps His promises.

The Apostle Paul directed us to this very same truth in Romans 5 when he wrote: “For when we were yet without strength, in due time [set or appointed] Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Romans 5:6-10).

We had no strength, and we have no strength still. Yet this prophecy was not contingent on our ability, but on God’s. Jesus the Messiah made “reconciliation for iniquity.” He accomplished this by His death before the ending of the time prophecy. No one else could or would do what Christ did by His life and death.

## Salvation in Christ

A recent survey completed by Barna Research has found that 50 percent of the Christians in America believe that anyone who is “generally good or who does enough good things for others during their life will earn a place in heaven” (*Adventist Review*, November 21, 2002, p. 21). This type of thinking is no different from Islam, for Muslims openly believe that “God’s going to judge us, [our] good and bad deeds. [If the] bad outweighs the good, you go to hell; if the good outweighs the bad, you go to heaven” (Mohammed Ali, quoted in *Reader’s Digest*, December, 2001). The gospel,