

“Understand the Matter”

Daniel 9:20-27

Although we included verses 20-21 in the past study of Daniel 9, we will look at them in more detail here as they are more connected with this text than the previous, which was explained in our study of those previous verses.

The text before us is one of the most controversial in its interpretation as any in the Bible. There seems to be almost as many varied views on this as there are people that write concerning it. The problem seems to stem from one’s preconceived viewpoint of prophecy – their prophetic worldview, if you would. That is a truth that can be said of any passage of Scripture, for that matter, and it truly is a primary factor in how we understand the Bible. Since I, and conservative, fundamental/orthodox, evangelicals like me, interpret the Bible in its literal, historically accurate, contextually relevant manner, the same approach will be taken here. We will look at this text as we would any other, and interpret it in light of its historical context, its relevant scriptural context, and how it fits with the rest of prophetic teachings in the Bible.

All that said, this will by no means be an exhaustive study where we look at all opposing views and dissect every minutia of detail. Our intent in the study of Daniel has been, and will continue to be, how this relates to us today, and what we can do with it to better our walk with Christ, and advance the cause of Christ in the world around us.

Five times in this text the word for “understand” (“understanding,” “informed,” “consider”) is used. This doesn’t necessarily give us a breakdown or

outline of the verses, but it does show how important it was for Daniel (and us) to understand what was happening and what was being said.

There is an important point to make here: God wrote the Bible with the intention of it being understood. He didn't intend for it to be complicated or difficult, but because we are still sinful man in our natural flesh, some of it will be difficult to understand.

There are two Hebrew words translated "understand" in this text. One (vs. 25) is uncommonly translated "understand" – שָׁכַל – while the other one (used four times in various ways) is the more common word for "understand" – בִּין. We will look at these words in their context as we study this passage but the point to be made here in the introduction is that God intended for Daniel to have as clear an understanding based upon the information he had, or could comprehend, as was possible for him at the time. Considering we have "greater light" today, with a finished Scripture, the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer, and millennia of history to sift through, it is even more befitting for the church today to "understand" what is meant in this text and how it applies to our lives and ministry.

I. THE DETAILS PRECEDING THE PROPHECY – VS. 20-22 – THE OCCASION

A. Verse 20-21 point back to the beginning of the prayer Daniel was praying when Gabriel appeared to him with the answer. Some believe there was more to this prayer than what is recorded here (Dr. Walvoord for one) because of the mention of "the evening oblation" in verse 21. I don't think that in and of itself necessitates this prayer being longer

than what is recorded. What the context does show is that Daniel was in a state of meditation that ended in the content of this prayer.

1. "Whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication..." – we looked at most of these points in the previous text in the content of the actual prayer.
 - a) One thing to note is the word "speaking" (used twice in these two verses). The word used here is one that means to say something out loud. Daniel's prayer, as has been mentioned before, was prayed out loud, and for all that wanted to hear.
 - b) This gives us reason to pray in public and to voice our prayers out loud, even in our private devotional times. This isn't a proof text for that, nor is to be true in every case, for Hannah (1 Samuel 1) prayed without saying anything out loud and God heard her prayers. But here, in the situation Daniel was in, praying as a representative for others, praying in an audible voice was necessary.
 - c) Another comment on this portion – "presenting my supplication" is what prayer is.
2. "Before the LORD my God" – again, points to whom it is we are to pray.
 - a) The word for "before" (לְפָנַי) comes from two words, or parts of speech:

(1) *The inseparable preposition לְ and the noun for "face" – פָּנֶה*

(2) *The definition of the preposition is "to, into, for"*

b) Literally, the word means "to the face." In relation to Daniel's prayer, it was done "to the face" of the LORD his God – points to the direction of our prayer, the Person of whose attention one is seeking.

3. "For the holy mountain of my God" – another way of saying Jerusalem – it was the "holy mountain" of which Daniel was referring. As was pointed out earlier in our study of Daniel, he never forgot who he was, where he came from, and who his God was. Daniel referred to it as the "holy mountain" in verse 16 of chapter nine.

Daniel 9:16

¹⁶ O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us.

Zechariah 8:3

³ Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain.

4. "Even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning"

a) "The man Gabriel"

(1) "The man" – אִישׁ – *this is not a generic term as some see it but is specifically male in gender.*

(2) "Gabriel" – from two Hebrew words: גַּבְרִיֵּל, meaning valiant man or warrior, mighty man; and the general word for God – אֱלֹהִים.

(3) So, the mention of who it was that brought Daniel the prophecy is to emphasize the importance of the message as well as the Person from which it came and by whom it was delivered – the man, the mighty man of God.

b) "In the vision at the beginning"

(1) This isn't speaking about the current time or event. Once the prayer is over it is a prophecy that Gabriel gave to Daniel in a real-time, live, in-person, conversation in a woke state.

(2) The word for "beginning" is the issue that needs resolved. Since it isn't speaking of this event then it must be speaking of something else – the "beginning" of what is the question. The only other time Gabriel is mentioned by name in Daniel (in fact, in the entire Old Testament) is in Dan. 8:16 in relation to the ram and rough goat vision that he received some fifteen years prior to this prayer and prophecy.

Daniel 8:15–18

¹⁵ And it came to pass, when I, even

I Daniel, had seen the vision, and sought for the meaning, then, behold, there stood before me as the appearance of a man.

16 And I heard a man's voice between the banks of Ulai, which called, and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision.

17 So he came near where I stood: and when he came, I was afraid, and fell upon my face: but he said unto me, Understand, O son of man: for at the time of the end shall be the vision.

18 Now as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep on my face toward the ground: but he touched me, and set me upright.

(3) *The Hebrew word (בְּתַחֲלֵהָ - תַּחֲלֵהָ), in this context, as the Bishop's Bible and the Geneva Bible have it, is to be understood as an event that happened before, not specifically at the beginning of an event as we would understand it today. The same word is used in verse 23 but there it has a time qualifier that specifies what exactly is referenced.*

(Bishops) Yea, while I was yet speaking in my prayer, the man Gabriel (whom I had seen afore in the vision) came fleeing, & touched me about the time of the evening oblation:

(Geneva) Yea, while I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen before in the vision, came flying, and touched mee about the time of the

evening oblation.

5. "Being caused to fly swiftly" – this is one of the more peculiar phrases in this text and is one of the places in the Bible from which we get the idea that angels have wings and fly (angels other than the cherubim/seraphim since they are defined as having wings).

a) The verb translated here for "being caused to fly" is in the participle form of אָנַח , which means to be weary or faint from exhaustion or exertion; and the noun that follows is the same root word as used for the verb and means the same – to be weary, or utterly weary.

b) The literal translation of this would be "to be weary in weariness." "The expression is an anthropomorphism of sorts to indicate the dramatic swiftness with which Gabriel was sent. His coming is full of significance" (The Preacher's Commentary). "[H]aving an order from the Lord, and being strengthened by him to make quick dispatch to Daniel, which is signified by flying swiftly; and for which reason angels are represented as having wings, to denote their celerity and quick dispatch of business: or "flying with weariness" (m), as some render it; he made such haste as to be weary with it; as he appeared in the form of a man, he looked like one out of breath, and panting for it, occasioned by his swift flight; and which expresses the haste he made, according to his orders, and his eagerness to bring to Daniel the welcome tidings of the coming of the Messiah, and the time of it, which angels desired to look into..." (John Gill)

- c) Some translations have this phrase pointing to Daniel rather than Gabriel, and put it this way:

(BBE)...whom I had seen in the vision at first when my weariness was great...

(MKJV)...touched me in my severe exhaustion...

(CSB)...reached me in my extreme weariness...

(NASB)...came to me in my extreme weariness...

- d) The placement in the sentence structure would seem to point to Gabriel being the one that is spoken of and not Daniel. The Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) has the word as πέτομαι – a word meaning to fly – which would indicate that that’s the application of the word in Hebrew. There is a Hebrew word specifically for “fly” but the issue in the verse under review is the swiftness (and apparent weariness it would show) by which Gabriel came, not just that he “flew.”

6. “Touched me about the time of the evening oblation”

- a) The word for “touched” (participle form of the verb נגַּח) has the primary meaning as it is translated in the KJV as “to touch,” which is how it is meant to be viewed in this context. Daniel was praying, in a state of meditation, when Gabriel came to him and he simply touched him to get his attention.
- b) “Evening oblation” – “[T]he ninth hour,

three o'clock (compare 1Ki_18:36). As formerly, when the temple stood, this hour was devoted to sacrifices, so now to prayer. Daniel, during the whole captivity to the very last, with pious patriotism never forgot God's temple-worship, but speaks of its rites long abolished, as if still in use." (J-F-B)

1 Kings 18:36

³⁶ And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word.

B. Verse 22 continues with the aspect of Gabriel's arrival and what followed, after he got Daniel's attention.

1. "And he informed me"
 - a) This is the first use of the Hebrew word translated in other portions of this text as the word "understand."
 - b) This clause, and the next, are more of a generalization of what was about to be revealed. Gabriel is declaring to Daniel that he was there to help him understand how the fall of Jerusalem, and its restoration seventy years later, fit into what Daniel was about to receive in the prophecy of the Seventy Weeks. He was there to help him understand, or, more specifically, to make him understand.
2. "And talked with me"

- a) The word used – דָּבַר, וַיְדַבֵּר – in its simplest form means to speak, and that's how it is used here.
- b) Again, a generalized statement that Daniel would receive what Gabriel was about to say directly from his mouth to Daniel's ears.
3. "I am now come forth" – the word order shows, again, the urgency and importance of "the matter."
4. "To give thee skill and understanding"
- a) "To give thee skill" - לְהַשְׁכִּילְךָ (hifil infinitive construct with lammed preposition [to, into, for] and the 2ms [you] ending) of שָׁכַל – in this context it means "to cause to consider, give insight, teach" (B-D-B).
- b) "And understand" – literally, "to understand"
- (1) *The definite article הַ is not present in the word for "understand" – it was translated this way because of the implication for it in the text. B-D-B has it as "to instruct thee in knowledge."*
- (2) *The word for "understand" is the noun בִּינָה – a word meaning understanding, comprehension, discernment, etc. It is a common word in the book of Proverbs and is seen there as the ability to put into practice the wisdom and knowledge that one has.*
- (3) *The most literal way of seeing this is helpful – "to make thee skillful of*

understanding” – to be able to apply what he was about to hear in this prophecy.

Conclusion to this point: What is said about Daniel’s prayer life and his urgency in prayer, and the urgency in the Lord’s response to his prayer is still true for us today. It’s the same God that Daniel had that we had. The Lord may not send an angel to talk to us directly, but we have something even better – a finished Scripture and the Holy Spirit (God Himself) indwelling us, guiding us in our life. The problem is we don’t listen. Daniel’s walk with the Lord, and the Lord’s response to him demonstrates for us today how much the Lord wants to fellowship with us and talk with us – why don’t we let Him?

II. THE DETAILS OF THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THE PROPHECY – VS. 23-24 – THE OVERVIEW

III. THE DETAILS OF THE PROCESS OF THE PROPHECY – VS. 25-27 – THE OUTCOME