



THE PROMISE OF PLANNING

In West Texas there is a very unique – and very large – clock: the 10,000 year Long Now Foundation Giant Clock. Funded by Jeff Bezos of *Amazon*, it does what it says on the tin: ticks once a year, chimes once a century, and releases a cuckoo once a millennium (so now you know where all that tax avoidance money has gone to).

Amazing though that clock is, there's another clock that is far bigger, far older: time itself. Because if you think about it, the whole of history is like a huge clock, with certain alarms that God has set to go off at particular points. And the most significant one of all? Well, let's take a look.

Daniel 9:20-27

It's the year 539 BC; the Israelites are in exile; Daniel is praying; and the angel Gabriel appears and gives him a timeframe for the coming of the most important Person who will ever live. He tells him that within a time-period of 70 '7s' *Mashiach Nagid*, Messiah the Prince, would appear, and the sins of the world dealt with (vs24).

What does Gabriel mean by 70 '7s'? He's talking about 70 '7s' of years – in other words, 490 years. And then he breaks the 70 '7s' into 3 bits:

- **7 '7s' (49 years).** In vs25 Gabriel promises that from the decree to rebuild the city of Jerusalem to its completion, there would be a period of 49 years. Now the Jews started to rebuild the city around 458 BC, under

the command of Ezra the priest, so that's when the countdown starts. The city was completed by Nehemiah around 409 BC – exactly 49 years later.

- **62 '7s' (434 years).** Gabriel promises that from Jerusalem's completion to the appearance of the Messiah there would be a period of 434 years. So what do we get if we count on 434 years from 409 BC? The year 26 AD. What's so important about 26 AD? Jesus was baptised in the River Jordan. I.e. Daniel is given the *exact* year of the beginning of Jesus' ministry!
- **1 '7' (7 years).** We're told that the Messiah would make a covenant with Israel for 7 years, and then half-way through He would bring sacrifices to an end. 3½ years after Jesus' baptism what happened? Jesus was crucified, for the sins of the world. 3½ years after that, the Gospel starts to go out to non-Jews, and the gates of the Kingdom are opened ... to all of us!

As a sign that our sins have been dealt with, God would eventually allow the temple to be destroyed by the Romans (vs27), an event that took place in AD 70. So whoever the Messiah was, He had to have turned up circa 26 AD, and been killed circa 30. There's only one possible candidate: Jesus of Nazareth! No wonder Isaac Newton regarded this as definitive proof that Scripture is Scripture!

But what does this tell us about God Himself? 3 things:

1) His Hearing Is Perfect. What does Gabriel tell Daniel in vs23? "As soon as you began to pray ... an answer was given." God was instantly aware of Daniel's prayer – and that prayer made a difference, to the world.

I'd like to suggest the same is true, for us: our prayers can make a difference. 2 Chronicles 7:13-14 says exactly that (and may have inspired the prayer that Daniel prayed). Note the sequence: "When things go wrong / if my people pray / then I will hear." In fact, before every major move of God in Scripture there is a conversation with God. E.g. the Day of Pentecost. In Acts 1, Jesus' followers are praying; in Acts 2, God's Spirit is moving! God has designed the world in such a way that our decisions can have an impact. The same is true of our prayers.

However, what this passage also tells us is that God will never act in a way that is contrary to His will and purpose. His hearing is perfect, but so is His answer. Even so, when our hands are lifted to heaven, things change here.

2) His Timing Is Perfect. According to the angel Gabriel, there would be 70 7s, or 70 'weeks' of years, from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem to the sins of the world being dealt with, in Jesus. I.e. 490 years from 458 BC to 33 AD. And that's exactly what happened.

Now I'm sure Daniel, given a choice, would have wanted everything sorted, right there, right then. I know I would! Like the rest of my generation, I've grown to expect everything yesterday. It's like kids expecting their parents to be able to produce money for this toy or this gadget or this pair of trainers

like they're printing their own – the 'Bank of Mum and Dad'! But the world is not that simple – even for God. God isn't just dealing with you and your situation – He's dealing with millions, no billions, of others. But He knows what He's doing. And He sets the timeframe; He's programmed the clock.

As David says in Psalm 31:15: "My times are in Your hands." Good times and bad. And God's timing is perfect – even when the clock seems to run slower than ours!

3) His Planning Is Perfect. If I'd been Daniel, I might have wondered about a plan that involved the end of a temple that hadn't even been rebuilt yet – but it was to be replaced by something even better. A risen Jesus!

Jesus said it Himself when He said, "A time is coming when it will not matter whether you pray on Mount Zion or Mount Gerizim ... because God is looking for those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21-24). That's why the Bible ends, in the Book of Revelation, with a Jerusalem that is big enough to accommodate the entire human race – and no temple! Why? Because we've got Jesus instead! And that is what Gabriel is promising here. Not just something good - something *better*. And God always wants what's better – always wants what's *best* – for His kids.

So when life takes a route we hadn't expected, or we're wrestling with God over something *we* want to do and He doesn't, we need to remember: God's ways are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:9). And they are the *best* ways.

Learning To Trust

So, like the guys behind the Long Now Foundation Clock, God has a strategy which stretches out over the millennia. And if God can pre-ordain things to *this* degree – and influence the outcomes – then we can trust Him re the details of our own lives, too. To quote singer and actress Jennifer Hudson, "God makes better choices for us than we could ever make for ourselves." We may not always get it; we may sometimes wonder what God is up to (and the age-old question "Why, God?"). But we can trust the God, the Jesus, who has the whole of time and space in His hands.

So will we?