



TRUST THE CLOCKMAKER

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 might have gone).

Timekeeping has been important to the human race for millennia – but perhaps more than we know. Because history itself is a clock, with certain alarms that are set to go off, at particular points.

And the most significant of all?

Daniel 9

The year is 539 BC; the Jews have been in exile for 70 years; and Daniel remembers God's words in Jeremiah 29:10-14. So, he prays – for himself, and his people. Then the angel Gabriel appears. And he tells him that another set of 70 – 70 '7s' – is coming, at the end of which *mashiach nagid*, the anointed ruler, will appear, the sins of the world dealt with, and prophecy fulfilled (vs24).

What does he mean by 70 '7s'? He means 70 '7s' of years, i.e. 490 years. He then breaks them 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 work was completed by Nehemiah around 409 BC – exactly 49 years later.

- **62 '7s' (434 years).** Gabriel then promises that from Jerusalem's completion to the appearance of the Messiah there would be a period of 434 years. What do we get if we count on 434 years from 409 BC? The year 26 AD – a strong candidate for the year Jesus was baptised. I.e. Daniel is given the start-date for Jesus' earthly ministry, over 5 centuries in advance!
- **1 '7' (7 years).** We're then told that the Messiah would make a covenant with Israel for 7 years, and half-way through 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 of God are opened ... to all of us!

But that's not the end of the prophecy. As a result of Israel's rejection of their Messiah, God would eventually allow the temple to be destroyed (vs27), which is what the Romans did in AD 70. So, whoever the Messiah was, He had to have turned up c26 AD, and been killed c30. There's only one viable candidate:

Jesus of Nazareth.

It's an incredible prophecy, isn't it? But what is the *message* here? To Daniel, 6th century BC? To us, 21st century AD? What is God actually saying here?

1) We can trust His hearing. When Gabriel appears (vs23), he says this: "As soon as you began to pray ... an answer was given." God was instantly aware of Daniel – and his prayer made a difference. And so can yours.

2 Chronicles 7:13-14 says something similar to this (and may have actually 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. Think Day of Pentecost. In Acts ch1, Jesus' followers are praying; in Acts ch2, 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.

But what this passage also tells us is that God will never behave in a way that is contrary to His will and purpose. His hearing, and His answers, are perfect. Even so, when hands are lifted to heaven, things can change here.

2) We can trust His timing. According to Gabriel, 70 '7s' or 490 years would pass from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem to the sins of the world being dealt with.

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', as people call it. 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's programmed the clock.

As it 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) We can trust His planning. 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: "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 Revelation 21-22, 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 that's what God offers all of us.

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.

Have Faith

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 world today, and the details of our own lives, too. To quote singer-actress Jennifer Hudson, "God makes better choices for us than we could ever make for ourselves."

He may leave us puzzled sometimes, or even asking the immortal question "Why?" But God has the whole of time and space in His hands.

Question is: will we trust Him with our bit?