



BETHEL  
PRESBYTERIAN

## MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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### Truths for Bitter Providences, Part 13

The book of Revelation begins this way: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:1). John declares to us that he did not write to make us prophets, but rather that our passion and zeal would be “Come, Lord Jesus, come” and “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” If ever we needed to hear that message, it is today.

The book of Daniel was not written to make us prophets either! Yet you’d never know it by the way so many read it with their charts, assertions, and predictions! We would do well to keep in

mind the words of Graeme Goldsworthy on the purpose of the book of Revelation, it is the same for Daniel:

The problem of Christian existence is that we easily allow the tribulation which we experience within the suffering church to obscure the glory that is already ours by faith in Christ. This is the problem that the Book of Revelation sets out to rectify. If only that object and aim of the book were kept in mind we could be spared a lot of speculative interpretation. John's first concern is not to minister to arm-chair prophets in some far-off age, but to the battlers of his own age who struggle to reconcile the fact of their suffering with the fact of Christ's victory over sin, Satan, and death. (Goldsworthy, 2001, p. 267)

Clearly that was the aim of Daniel. If you were a pastoral intern here at Bethel and you were given the assignment to come up with a pastoral word of encouragement from Daniel 9:20-27 that you would give to someone in the hospital struggling with a terminal disease, what would be your word of comfort? That is the purpose of the text before us! The purpose is not to a prophetic feeding frenzy that continues to miss the point of this passage!

### An Important Command

Daniel 9:23b, "At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued, and I have come to tell *you*, for you are highly esteemed; so give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision."

The latter expression would be quite easy to pass over; especially if you are in a hurry to get to vv. 24-27. Yet to do so is to miss an incredible gem and an important exhortation for any and all pilgrims in Christ!

It is the illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit that enables us to understand God's word (v22b). Accordingly, as Christians we continue to seek to understand the word even though we are saved (this in essence is the pursuit of wisdom). Yet we learn here that there is a path which leads to the understanding of God's word.

The text tells us that the path to understanding God's word comes as we give "give heed to the message *and so* gain understanding." If you want to understand God's word, you must first set your heart to live in light of it/to submit to it! Did you get that? Blind submission to God's Word opens closed eyes! This may sound counter-intuitive, yet it isn't.

- What does the knowledge of music theory have to do with learning to play a difficult sheet of music?
- What does lifting weights have to do with any sport?
- What do phonics rules have to do with reading?
- What does submission to God's word have to do with understanding it? Everything!

David said:

Psalms 36:9b, "In Thy light we see light."

Family of God, it is only as we submit to the word of God and so dwell in the light of its glory that we will be able to see and so understand all that God is doing!

Psalms 111:10a, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do *His commandments*..."

Again, blind submission to God and His word opens closed eyes!

John 8:12, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life."

This is an important principle for the people of God in the valley of weeping! Recall, from a limited perspective vv. 24-27 are not good news for a people of God in the valley! In fact, it might be preferable to remain darkened in one's understanding in light of the difficult days predicted by this passage. Yet to refuse to accept the remainder of this prophecy is to live in darkness! Accordingly, Gabriel called Daniel to a life of submission to the Lord, His Word, and so His Will. If he did this, there would be understanding- and the bitterness of vv. 24-27 would give way to incredible hope!

Man's says, "Show me why, and I'll obey!" God says, "Obey, and I'll show you why!" Submission and obedience always is the path to understanding. Accordingly, those who refuse to follow the Lord as He leads and directs in His word will remain spiritual dwarfs! Godliness is forged in the arena of submission! With this principle well-established, the Lord gave Daniel and incredible announcement.

An Incredible Announcement

Daniel 9:24, "Seventy weeks [literally "seventy sevens"] have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy *place*."

To say that there is much confusion and debate as to the meaning of this verse is a gross understatement! As I referenced last time, more has been written about this passage<sup>1</sup> than everything else on Daniel combined. And sadly, because of all the controversy, a glorious message of hope and encouragement is missed. Forget the meaning of the "seventy weeks" for a moment, notice the text again, and speaking to Daniel:

Daniel 9:24, "[A certain duration of time- seventy sevens] has been decreed for your people and your holy city... after this time, sinning will be done!... rebellion will be held in

check!... any and all transgression will be paid for in full!... righteousness will never again be violated!... prophecy and vision will come to an end!... and a holy place or person will be anointed and so commissioned!”

There is small debate as to what each of the phrases mean here, but in the end it doesn't really matter. It should be obvious from the verse that we are talking about the final triumph of God's Kingdom and the end of human history! Talk about fantastic news! To a man burdened by the rebellion of his people, the iniquity of the time in which he lived, and the welfare of that which was most holy and precious to him (Jerusalem), God here tells Daniel that in a certain amount of time, all of these concerns and more will be passé!

Now before you get too excited, we're not going to dwell on this as of yet; next time we'll get into the meat of it. For now however, there is a lot by way of understanding that we need in order to make heads and tails of this passage... beginning with what is meant by “seventy weeks.”

First note that the specific duration of time is not specified here in the Hebrew. The word for “week” (שָׁבִיעַ [šābûa ]) can refer to a literal week, but it can also refer to any number of different time spans. So we are talking here about “seventy sevens [of something]”- days, weeks, months, years, centuries- the text doesn't say! Secondly, it is imperative that we keep in mind a rule of interpretation by which we are bound to translate multiple occurrences of a single word/phrase in a passage the same way unless there is something exegetically in the text that demands us to do otherwise. And so, for example if in a thousand years an archaeologist stumbled upon a love letter that you wrote to someone and they read this:

Chris, I love you. You are gentle, kind, forbearing, and patient. It is clear that you seek to honor Christ in all that you do... I love you!”

Would they be correct to take the first expression of love differently than the second? *“In the 21st century, love could be used for a variety of things, as in ‘I love cake!’ ‘I love watching movies!’ ‘I love my dog!’ It is clear by the first usage of the term ‘love’ the author was expressing that they loved Chris as a husband might love his wife. The second expression denotes the love that one might have for their dog.”* Could that be deduced from this statement? Absolutely not! However we take the first expression of love we must take the second unless there is textual evidence to suggest otherwise. To do anything else would make any document unintelligible, word definitions changing in the middle of a paragraph much less a sentence!

So, for example, in v. 24, of the six descriptions concerning what God is going to do after “seventy sevens,” the second and fifth acts utilize the same Hebrew word, “seal”- the text literally reads this way:

“...to seal up sin... to seal up vision and prophecy.”

In light of this we are bound to interpret each expression the same way unless there is exegetical warrant to do otherwise (which there is not). So whatever Daniel was told about “sin” in the second statement will be true when it comes to the fifth statement and “vision” and “prophecy.”

This means whatever time duration we choose for “weeks” in this passage (whether they be hours, years, or decades) they ALL must be understood the same way. So, the time period specified by “weeks” in v. 24, must be one and the same as the time period specified by “weeks” in vv. 25, 26, and 27. This is important as it will have bearing on how we interpret this text.

Third notice, there are time indicators in this passage which enable us to date at least the beginning of the “seventy sevens.”

Daniel 9:25, “So you are to know and discern *that* from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince *there will be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.”

Historically there really are only two official decrees concerning the rebuilding of the temple and the city walls that could be in reference here. The first was given by Cyrus in 539 BC in which the temple was authorized to be rebuilt (Ezra 1:1–4), and the second was issued by Artaxerxes in 445 BC in which the city was authorized to be rebuilt (Nehemiah 2:5ff). The most obvious choice is the latter since Daniel 9:25 does NOT reference the temple, BUT the city (which as we saw last time clearly was the driving concern of Daniel here, Daniel 9:1-2).

Fourth, if you are at all familiar with the Old Testament notice that “seventy sevens” is reminiscent of a stipulation in the ceremonial law which governed the year of Jubilee. Speaking of the time duration for the year of Jubilee, God told Moses:

Leviticus 25:8, “You are also to count off seven sabbaths of years [lit., “seven sevens”] for yourself, seven times seven years, so that you have the time of the seven sabbaths of years, *namely*, forty-nine years.”

Because of this passage, the mentioning of “seven sevens” to an Old Testament Jew would have raised the expectation of “seven years of sevens”- or 49 years. Now, when God’s promise concerning the exile is taken into consideration, a lot of exegetical fireworks go off. In anticipation of the future nation’s rebellion, God told His people.

Leviticus 26:33-35, “You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste. Then the land will enjoy its sabbaths all the days of the desolation, while you are in your enemies’ land; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. All the days of *its* desolation it will observe the rest which it did not observe on your sabbaths, while you were living on it.”

What “sabbaths” are in reference here? Some believe this is in reference to the years of Jubilee! In fact, they are quick to quote these verses speaking of the exile:

2 Chronicles 36:20-21, “And those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete.”

From this it is believed by some that the time period mentioned in Daniel 9 had to have been in reference to the “seventy years” in which the Year of Jubilee was not observed during the Theocracy of Israel, each year of exile for each year of Jubilee missed (a total of 70). That means that the time element in the “seventy sevens” referenced in Daniel 9:24 would be years: that is  $70 \times 7$ , which is 490 years.

Now, there has been much written about this possibility in which 69 weeks of 7 years (a total of 483 years) predicts to the day the crucifixion of Christ (which obviously is dated from the decree of Artaxerxes in 445 BC). To my knowledge this was first addressed in print by Sir Robert Anderson in his book called “*The Coming Prince*.” - I recommend the study. It is long and detailed, but worth the read if you are interested in this.

### The Problem of Dating this Prophecy to Christ’s Work on the Cross

An enormous amount of discussion has arisen around this passage’s predicting the day of Christ’s Triumphal Entry/Death/Resurrection. However, there are major problems with the work. For example, if we choose the time indicator of 7 years (as opposed to leaving it as an undisclosed amount of time- “seventy sevens” of something- which is my position), then “consistency of use” leads us to the conclusion that Christ was expected to establish the final state 490 years following the decree concerning Jerusalem. Recall verse 24 describes the final triumph of God’s Kingdom and the end of human history!

You say, “Ah, but the description in v. 24 of what is going to happen after ‘seventy sevens’ could reference the work that Christ would accomplish on the cross!”

Yet there is a problem with this! The work of Christ on the cross is NOT referenced in v. 24, BUT vv. 25-26 which places Christ cross work in the 69th week (not the 70th)!

Daniel 9:25-26, “So you are to know and discern *that* from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince *there will be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks [which adds to 69 weeks or 483 years]; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks [which actually is the 69th week- factoring in the first 7 weeks] the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing...”

Yet what is described in v. 24 concerning the final state comes after the 70th week which

therefore could NOT reference Christ's cross work, but something else! Accordingly, consistency of use would imply that 490 years following a decree to rebuild Jerusalem, the final triumph of God's Kingdom would come as well as the end of human history!

## The Gap Theory

Some take this passage and posit a time gap between the 69th and 70th week which they call "The Church Age." This is the Dispensationalist view which and I am representing Dr. John MacArthur's view. He accepts the work of Sir Robert Anderson believing that Christ's cross was accurately predicted by Daniel 9:25-26, but then he posits a gap between the 69h week and the 70th. John MacArthur put it this way:

We have a gap don't we then, between 69 and 70 [weeks]. The gap was at least a few days because it had to be long enough for Christ to be crucified? It was at least a few years; it had to be long enough for 70 A.D. And if it could be that long, it can be undetermined, can't it? You say, 'How long will the gap last?' It will last until Antichrist comes to confirm a covenant with Israel, that's how long it will last. (MacArthur, 1980)

This seems like a little eisegesis because to understand Daniel 9:27 this way one has to posit a gap between vv. 26 and 27! And so rather than allowing the passage to mold the theology, the theology molds the passage. And family of God, you can't do that here! There is absolutely no exegetical reason to posit a gap between Daniel 9:26 and Daniel 9:27. None!

Daniel 9:24, "Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city..."

This passage posits no gap "referencable" in this verse, unless you take the time reference of "seventy sevens" figuratively, which you can't if you take the time references in vv. 25, 26, 27 literally. Again, we are dealing here with "Consistency of Use." Either the numbers in this pericope are literal or they are not. So which is it? If you suggest both — the way Dispensationalist's do — then you've made a major exegetical blunder. In the words of Joyce Baldwin:

...other numbers, such as the number 70, have symbolic significance [meaning they are non-literal], to take one particular number and apply it literally [that is the references to 69, 7, and 1 week] is to take the best of both worlds, and calls in question one's methodology. (Baldwin, 2009, p. 196)

We could go on and on discussing the controversy surrounding this passage because there is a lot more. For example, there are four major camps when it comes to interpreting Daniel 9.

1. **An Inter-testament Interpretation of this passage (b. 2nd Century BC)** This view takes for granted that the weeks, or sevens, are meant to represent years and that the numbers were intended literally. Accordingly, the 'anointed one, a prince' is reckoned as Cyrus by some and as Jeshua (Ezra 3:2; Haggai 1:1; Zechariah 3:1) by others. The

sixty-two sevens cover the period to 171 BC, when the legitimate high priest Onias was murdered, and the last seven represents the short time before the end comes and God vindicates his own. The restoration of the temple in 164 was the symbol of that victory. This is the point of view J. A. Montgomery, E. W. Heaton, N. W. Porteous and F. F. Bruce.

2. **A Qumran Interpretation (taken from the Damascus Rule 1:5–11)** According to the Damascus Rule, it was believed that 390 years was the amount in which Israel would bear its guilt on account of its rebellion. The number 390 most likely was taken from Ezekiel 4:4ff. By adding 20 years of waiting, 40 for the life of the Teacher and 40 to compensate for the time after his death, the 390 years of Ezekiel may have been incorporated into Daniel's 490 years. Few today hold this, although throughout history many Jews clung to this.
3. **Jewish and early Christian interpretation Josephus**, writing his account of the destruction of Jerusalem, made allusion to a double application of Daniel 9:27. Having pointed out that Daniel wrote of the nation's sufferings under Antiochus Epiphanes, he went on to describe further suffering under Rome. He interpreted the fall of Jerusalem as the ending of the seventy sevens of Daniel which was the standard Jewish teaching.

This passed early into Christian exegesis. It was at the end of the second century that Christian scholars began to compute the seventy sevens so as to make them terminate in the coming of Christ. With this view, the time indicators in this passage are taken as undefined periods. This is still a popular view today and is represented by the commentaries of Pusey, C. H. H. Wright, E. J. Young, J. Baldwin, and others.

4. **Dispensational Interpretation** This perspective holds to a gap theory between the 69th and 70th week which they reference as the 'Church age', which forms a 'parenthesis' between the first coming of Christ and the revived Roman empire whose prince will be the Antichrist. According to this view Daniel 9:24 is a program for the future, not a summary of what took place in the work of Christ. Since the rebuilding of the temple and the restoration of Jewish worship is envisaged according to this view, the official establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 has been greeted as heralding the events of the final week. This view makes the final week of Daniel 9:27 not a literal 7 years, but an undesignated period of time. Once again, "consistency of use" is a major problem with this perspective.

We could continue to examine and debate these different approaches yet we would miss the point of the passage; the patient is dying! How it behooves us NOT to get caught up in arguing dates and schemes for this passage. Again, Daniel 9 was not written to make us prophets, but to give a hurting people hope in the midst of a horrible situation. Tremper Longman wrote:

Attempts to correlate these years, understood as 490 years, with the date of Antiochus Epiphanes, Jesus Christ's first coming, his second coming, or any of the countless other special redemptive events that have caught interpreters' attention, have been



unpersuasive to any but a few devoted followers. Such futile efforts work against the purpose of these texts... (Longman, 1999, p. 229)

(*Daniel*, p. 229)

So how are we to view this passage? It is clear from v. 24 that there is going to be a duration of time after which something amazing is going to take place! How long will that be? We don't know... the text doesn't specify! However, what it says is glorious: all the burdens that crush and weigh us down in this life as aliens and strangers someday are going to be removed!

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## End Note

<sup>1</sup> For example, Daniel 9:1-2 generated 4 pages in Keil-Delitzch. Yet Daniel 9:24-27 has generated whole books!