

Daniel's Seventy Weeks

Based on a comprehensive treatment by Dr. Thomas Ice (79 pages in length)

“One of the most important prophecy passages in the whole Bible is that of God’s prophecy given to Daniel in Daniel 9:24-27. This passage constitutes one of the most amazing prophecies in all the Bible. If worked out logically, this text is both seminal and determinative in the outworking of one’s understanding of Bible prophecy. Especially for those of us who believe that prophecy should be understood literally, it is essential that a right understanding of this central text be developed and cultivated.”

REASONS FOR LITERAL NUMBERS

First, chapter 9 opens with Daniel realizing from Jeremiah’s writings that Israel’s captivity would last 70 years. These were literal years. Since the prophecy delivered by Gabriel to Daniel in 9:24-27 is related to the 70-year captivity, it follows that the 70 weeks of years are equally literal.

Second, since definite numbers are used in the prophecy (7, 62, and 1 weeks), it would be strange indeed for such odd numbers to not have literal meaning.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

We know from the beginning of chapter 9 (verse 2) that Daniel had read about “the number of years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.” The two passages which Daniel surely studied were Jeremiah 25:11-12 and 29:10-14. Both texts clearly speak of Israel’s Babylonian captivity as limited to a 70-year period. Both passages also blend into their texts statements that look forward to a time of ultimate fulfillment and blessing for the nation of Israel.

God was not yet ready to bring history to its destined final climax. Thus, He told Daniel that He was going stretch out history by seventy times seven years (i.e., 490 years).

THE MEANING OF “WEEKS” verse 24

That this Hebrew phrase should be rendered as “seventy sevens,” is unanimously agreed upon by representatives of all interpretative schools. There is also great consensus that the “seventy sevens” refers to years, since this is what Daniel was contemplating in Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10-14, as evident in Daniel 9:2. Thus, our Lord has in mind seventy weeks of years, or 490 years.

For whom did God reveal this period of prophetic destiny? The text says that they have been decreed “for your people and your holy city.” Clearly it can only refer to Israel as Daniel’s people and Jerusalem as Daniel’s holy city

THE SIX PROPHETIC PURPOSE CLAUSES

Verse 24 is the general statement from Gabriel, while the final three verses provide a particular explanation of the general point. Thus, verses 25-27 will help us understand the main statement of verse 24.

There are six infinitives that tell us when the seventy weeks that have been decreed for Israel and Jerusalem will be fulfilled in history. These six goals are 1) to finish the transgression, 2) to make an end of sin, 3) to make atonement for iniquity, 4) to bring in everlasting righteousness, 5) to seal up vision and prophecy, and 6) to anoint the most holy place. Usually, when a list appears in Scripture, it is important to see if the items should be grouped in subsets.

I believe that these six items are arranged in two groups of three. The first triad has to do with sin, and interestingly these are the exact words that Daniel used in his prayer in 9:5. God is speaking to Daniel’s prayer through the first three goals. The second set of three goals for the 490 year period have to do with God’s righteousness. This was a matter that Daniel was also inquiring about in his earlier prayer (9:7).

1) TO FINISH THE TRANSGRESSION

The verb “to finish” looks to bring something to its culmination. It has the idea of “to close, shut, restrain.” Here it has the idea of “firmly restraining” the transgression, thus the specific idea of restraint of sin. “Examination of the use of this word shows that it means the forcible cessation of an activity. It always

points to a complete stop, never to a mere hindrance.” I believe that “finish” looks toward the completion of the 70 weeks at the second coming of Christ to set up His millennial kingdom. Gabriel has in mind, in verse 24, more than just sin in general, but a specific sin since the definite article is attached to this word—“the transgression.”

Arnold Fruchtenbaum points out that “when speaking of the basis of the second coming of Christ that there are two facets to this basis: first, there must be the confession of Israel’s national sin (Lev. 26:40-42; Jer. 3:11-18; Hos. 5:15) . . .” The emphasis in this first goal is upon when Israel’s national sin—rejection of her Messiah—will be brought to an end. “This passage assumes, therefore,” notes Cooper, “that the whole nation repents and turns to God for mercy and forgiveness.

2) TO MAKE AN END OF SIN

The second goal to be completed at the end of the 70 weeks is to make an end of sin. In the Hebrew, the word “to make an of” literally means “to shut, close, seal; to hide, to reveal as a secret,” and has the primary meaning of bringing a matter to a conclusion.

Interestingly, the only other uses of this word in Daniel occur in 9:20 (twice). Daniel speaks of “my sin and the sin of my people Israel.” Since this Hebrew word does not have the definite article as did “transgression” in the previous phrase, and since “sin” is plural, it seems refer to the sins in general of the nation..this expression assumes that at the time here foreseen the nation will have turned to the Lord, and that by His Spirit a new heart and spirit will have been given to all the people.” Clearly the scene only after the second coming followed by the installation of the millennial reign of Jesus the Messiah.

3) TO MAKE ATONEMENT FOR INIQUITY

The idea of iniquity is used here to speak of that most aggressive nuance of sin flowing from human willful disobedience. This paints a picture of the worst kind of offense before God.

The significance of this third phrase...is a clear reference to the time when all Israel in genuine penitence shall acknowledge her departure from God and her

national sin. At the same time each individual, of course, will acknowledge his own wrongs and all will call upon God for pardon. Then that which was foreshadowed by the annual atonement will become a reality. At that time the nation will be brought back into fellowship with God and become a blessing in the earth.

SUMMARY

The first three of the six goals in Daniel 9:24 have to do with the sin of Daniel's people, Israel. Leon Wood has an excellent summary of the first three goals.

The first introduces the idea of riddance, saying that the coming 490-year period would see its firm restraint. In other words, God was about to do something to alleviate this basic, serious problem.

The second speaks of the degree of this restraint: sin would be put to an end.

The third indicates how this would be done: by atonement. Though Christ is not mentioned in the verse, the meaning is certain, especially in view of verse twenty-six, that He would be the One making this atonement, which would serve to restrain the sin by bringing it to an end. It is clear that reference in these first three items is mainly to Christ's first coming, when sin was brought to an end in principle. The actuality of sin coming to an end for people, however, comes only when a personal appropriation of the benefit has been made. Since Gabriel was speaking primarily in reference to Jews, rather than Gentiles . . . this fact requires the interpretation to include also Christ's second coming, because only then does Israel as a nation turn to Christ (cf. Jer. 31:33, 34; Ezek. 37:23; Zech. 13:1; Rom. 11:25-27).

The first three clauses had to do with the sin issue in relation to Israel, while the second triad relate to God's righteousness.

4) TO BRING IN EVERLASTING RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Hebrew text has the sense that "everlasting righteousness" will be caused to come in.

The righteousness to be brought in is the same word Daniel uses during his initial prayer in 9:7, where righteousness is said to belong exclusively to the Lord.

The Hebrew Lexicon of Brown, Driver, and Briggs (BDB) says that the Hebrew noun has the core meaning of “long duration, antiquity, futurity,” The Lexicon specifically says that the use in Daniel 9:24 is a plural intensive and thus renders it with the specific sense of “everlastingness, or eternity.”

When, however, the 490 years are completed and the Almighty brings in His great régime of righteousness. I believe that this clause is a prophecy concerning the future time we know as the kingdom or millennial reign of Christ (see Rev. 20:1-9). This means that it is yet future to our own day.

5) TO SEAL UP VISION AND PROPHECY

This triad of Hebrew words commences with the same infinitive used above in the second clause which was “to make an end of sin.” The notion of this Hebrew word “seal up,” carries the idea of completion..

This fifth prophetic declaration, like the previous can only refer to a future time when all prophecy will be fulfilled relating to Israel.

6) TO ANOINT THE MOST HOLY

The sixth and final prophetic clause begins with the Hebrew verb usually translated as “anoint” means to pour oil on something or someone.

The German commentator C. F. Keil notes that the same exact phrase is used in Ezekiel 45:3 of a future temple and concludes that “the reference is to the anointing of a new sanctuary, temple, or most holy place.”In view of these matters, it is highly likely that the phrase refers to the Temple also here, which, in view of the context, must be a future Temple

CONCLUSION OF THE SIX CLAUSES

As we survey the lessons from all six prophetic purpose clauses, we find that none of them have yet to be fulfilled in their entirety. Therefore, we know from the goals that our Lord set for His people (Israel), and for His city (Jerusalem), that there remains a time of future fulfillment. “Therefore, this twenty-fourth verse of

our chapter,” notes David Cooper, “read in the light of the various predictions of the prophets, is obviously a forecast of the establishment of the kingdom of God upon earth in all its glory.”

ISRAEL’S SABBATICAL YEAR

The Lord provides a Divine commentary to the nation on how they were keeping or not keeping His Law in the historical book of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. Thus, the Lord explains why Israel was sent away to Babylon for 70 years in the following passage:

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 (2 Chr. 36:20-21).

What passage in Jeremiah was the statement in Chronicles referring to? The following two references provide the answer.

And this whole land shall be a desolation and a horror, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years (Jer. 25:11).

For thus says the LORD, “When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place” (Jer. 29:10).

Dr. Leon Wood explains this matter as follows:

Since Daniel was here thinking in terms of the seventy-year captivity, he, as a Hebrew, could have easily moved from the idea of one week of years to seventy weeks of years. This follows because, according to 2 Chronicles 36:21, the people had been punished by this Exile so that their land might enjoy the sabbath rests which had not been observed in their prior history (cf. Lev. 26:33-35, Jer. 34:12-22). Knowing this, Daniel would have recognized that the seventy years of the Exile represented seventy sevens of years in which these violations had transpired; and he would have understood Gabriel to be saying, simply, that

another period, similar in length to that which had made the Exile necessary, was coming in the experienced of the people.

THE BEGINNING POINT OF THE SEVENTY WEEKS

Daniel 9:25 provides the starting point for the chronological unfolding of the seventy weeks prophecy.

A Decree to Restore and Rebuild Jerusalem

The text is specific that the countdown will start with “a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.” The decree involves the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, not the Temple. This is important since earlier edicts were issued in relation to the Temple (see 2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4; 5:3-17; 6:3-5). There are at least three different decrees that are considered in an attempt to “know and discern” the beginning of the seventy weeks of Daniel.

First, there was the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:2-4; 6:3-5), issued in 537 B.C., which I will call decree one. Second, the decree of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:11-26) given in 458 B.C., (decree two). Third, a second decree from Artaxerxes (Neh. 2:5-8, 17, 18) given in 444 B.C., at the time of Nehemiah’s return to Jerusalem, (decree three). The third decree is the only one that literally fits the exact words of Daniel 9:25.

Artaxerxes’ Decree

The third decree is surely the starting point for the countdown of Daniel’s seventy weeks. The exact date of this decree can be determined as March 5, 444 B.C.

The terminus ad quem (ending point) of the sixty-ninth week was on the day of Christ's triumphal entry on March 30, A.D. 33.

As predicted in Zechariah 9:9, Christ presented Himself to Israel as Messiah the king for the last time and the multitude of the disciples shouted loudly by quoting from a messianic psalm: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord" (Ps. 118:26; Matt.21:9; Mark 11:10; Luke 19:38; John 12:13). This occurred on Monday, Nisan 10 (March 30) and only four days later on Friday, Nisan 14, April 3, A.D. 33, Jesus was cut off or crucified.

The seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy is yet to be fulfilled. When that is accomplished, Daniel's inquiry will be fully realized for Israel will be back in her homeland with her Messiah.

THE SEVEN WEEKS verse 26

Since the first seven weeks of years (49 years) is segmented from the whole, to what does it refer to? This first of three segments refers to time when “it [Jerusalem] will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress” (Dan. 9:25c).

THE SIXTY-TWO WEEKS

The next segment of time is the sixty-two weeks of years that are said to follow the first seven weeks of years. The total of the two parts equal sixty-nine weeks of years or 483 years. The sixty-two weeks follow consecutively the first seven weeks because there are no textual indicators or historical events that would lead to any other conclusion. The sixty-two weeks will end with the arrival of “Messiah the Prince.” Daniel 9:25 says, “until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks.” Messiah the Prince can be none other than the Jewish Messiah —Jesus the Christ.

I believe that the seventieth week is postponed until a future time we know as the tribulation.

Note what Daniel 9:26 says: Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.

TEXTUAL REASONS FOR A POSTPONEMENT

First of all, the text says, “Then after the sixty-two weeks . . .” In other words, after the seven plus sixty-two weeks, which equals sixty-nine weeks of years (483 years). Robert Culver clearly states the implication of what this text says:

There can be no honest difference of opinion about that: the cutting off of Messiah is ‘after’ the sixty-two weeks. It is not the concluding event of the series

of sixty-two weeks. Neither is it said to be the opening event of the seventieth. It is simply after the seven plus sixty-two weeks.

MESSIAH WILL BE CUT OFF

We have seen thus far that verse 26 begins with the phrase “after the sixty-two weeks.” The text goes on to describe three things that will take place at the end of the sixty-ninth week of years (i.e., 483 years). Therefore, in this installment, I will deal with three important phrases in verse 26. They are: 1) “the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing,” 2) “the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary,” and 3) “its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.”

All evangelical interpreters agree that the cutting off of Messiah certainly refers to the death of Jesus.

The next phrase “and have nothing,” literally means “and shall have nothing.” Dr. Charles Feinberg declares, “it can only mean that He did not receive the Messianic kingdom at that time. When His own people rejected him (John 1:11), He did not receive what rightly belonged to Him.” It is because of Daniel’s people (the Jews) rejection of Jesus as their Messiah that the Kingdom could come in. The coming of the Kingdom requires acceptance of Jesus as Messiah in order for it to be established in Jerusalem. The Kingdom will arrive by the time the final week is brought to fruition.

THE PRINCE WHO IS TO COME

The full statement says the people of this coming prince will destroy the city, clearly a reference to Jerusalem because of the overall context, and also the sanctuary. What sanctuary was there in Jerusalem? It could be nothing else other than the Jewish temple. Has the city and the temple been destroyed? Yes! Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in A. D. 70 by the Romans. This cannot be a reference to a future time, since, as Dr. Walvoord notes, “there is no complete destruction of Jerusalem at the end of the age as Zechariah 14:1-3 indicates that the city is in existence although overtaken by war at the very moment that Christ comes back in power and glory. Accordingly, it is probably better to consider all of verse 26 fulfilled historically.”

The subject of this sentence is “the people,” not “the prince who is to come.” Thus, it is the people of the prince who is to come that destroys the city and the sanctuary. I believe that the prince who is to come is a reference to the yet to come Antichrist. Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost explains, The ruler who will come is that final head of the Roman Empire, the little horn of 7:8. It is significant that the people of the ruler, not the ruler himself, will destroy Jerusalem. Since he will be the final Roman ruler, the people of that ruler must be the Romans themselves.

Dr. Steven Miller observes, “v. 27 makes clear that this ‘ruler’ will be the future persecutor of Israel during the seventieth seven. ‘The people of the rule’ does not mean that the people ‘belong to’ the ruler but rather that the ruler will come from these people.”

ITS END WILL COME WITH A FLOOD

This final sentence of verse 26 also occurs during the interval between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks.

Charles Feinberg explains:

The final words of verse 26 sum up the history of Israel since a.d. 70: “desolations are determined.” Surely the determined wars and desolations have come upon them (cf. Luke 21:24). Such has been the lot of Israel and the city of Jerusalem, and such will be the portion, until the “time of the Gentiles” have been fulfilled.

PROPHETIC POSTPONEMENT

Once again we see that a plain, straightforward reading of the text of the Bible provides a clear and convincing understanding that there is a biblical basis for halting God’s clock between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks.

ANTICHRIST OR CHRIST? verse 27

Our study of Daniel’s seventy weeks prophecy now moves to the final verse in the passage, which also deals with the final week of years.

“He” must refer to “the prince who is to come” in verse 26. He is a “coming” prince, that is, one whom the reader would already know as a prince to come, because he is the same as the “little horn” on the fourth beast of chapter 7.

THE MAKING OF A COVENANT

What is it that “he” will do? The antichrist will “make a firm covenant with the many for one week,” that is seven years.

Since a covenant as described in verse 27 has not yet taken place in reference to the nation of Israel, it must therefore follow that this will be a yet to occur future event. This then, demands a postponement of the seventieth week with a gap of time between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of years.

FOR ONE WEEK

This passage clearly says that the length of the covenant that “he” will make will be for one week or seven years.

The text of this passage supports a gap of time between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks. It is becoming increasingly obvious that the seventieth week is still future to the time in which we now live.

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE WEEK

The final week of years—seven years—is detailed in Daniel 9:27. This verse tells us what will happen during the final week of years, which I believe to be a yet future seven year period often called the tribulation.

Since the week of years is a seven-year period, the middle of a week of years would be three and a half years into the seven-year period. Interestingly, Daniel 7:25 and 12:7 both refer to a three and a half year period (time, times, and half a time). The context of both passages speak of the future time of the antichrist or the beast. This would support a futurist understanding of the seventieth week of Daniel 9:27. Daniel 7:25 says, “And he will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.” While this passage was given to Daniel before he received the revelation of chapter nine, it seems clear that the logic for the chronology of Daniel 7:25 is drawn from the seventy weeks prophecy of chapter nine. Daniel 12:7 reads as follows: “And I heard the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, as he raised his right hand and his left toward heaven, and

swore by Him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time; and as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be completed.” Both Daniel 9:27 and 12:7 speak of the antichrist’s rule coming to an end at the conclusion of the same three and a half year period. This supports the notion that they both refer to a yet future time that we often call the Great Tribulation.

THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

Verse 27 says that in the middle of the week (three and a half years), “on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate.” Here we have a reference to the Antichrist who will do something to desecrate the Temple.

Jesus said in Matthew 24:15, “Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand).” Here we have the interpretation of Jesus concerning the event Gabriel describes to Daniel in 9:27. The event has to be future to the time of Christ, and since nothing like it corresponds to within seven years of His prediction then we have to see this as a yet future event.

A COMPLETE DESTRUCTION

The latter part of verse 27 says, “even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.” It is obvious that these events of verse 27 did not take place at or in conjunction with Christ’s first coming in the first century A.D.

CONCLUSION

I think that sound biblical exegesis of Daniel 9:24-27 must lead to an understanding that the seventieth week is separated from the first sixty-nine weeks of years because of Israel failure to accept Jesus as their promised Messiah. Therefore, God has postponed the final week of years until the start of the seven-year tribulation. Thus, the final week of years will be the yet future seven-year tribulation that will lead to the conversion of all Israel (Roman 11:26). This will lead to a full and literal fulfillment of God’s entire program for His people—Israel. May it happen today! Maranatha!