

How to Interpret the Seventy Weeks of Daniel

Daniel 9:20-24

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The first coronation in over 70 years was realized yesterday in England—Charles III was crowned king of Great Britain. It was watched by millions around the world. But what if the coronation of Charles III had been predicted 500 years before to the very year of his coronation? Now that would have greatly heightened the public’s attention and amazement to even a far greater degree.

But that is what we have here in Daniel 9. The coming of Jesus, Messiah the Prince, was predicted over 500 years before the fact—even that He would pay the debt of sin for His people was specifically declared in Daniel 9. And yet, the world by in large doesn’t care about King Jesus—the King of kings and Lord of lords. The eyes of the world are very much interested in and opened to King Charles III, but are very much disinterested and closed to King Jesus, who reigns over Charles III, President Biden, President Putin, and over all rulers.

The prophetic revelation found in Daniel 9 is especially important in evidencing Scripture to be God’s inspired Word, not only because it declares that King Jesus would come and what He would accomplish, but also because it declares the specific time to the very year when He would accomplish what was prophesied of Him. If that truth does not draw us to embrace the Lord Jesus and His promise of salvation, it reveals that we are not just in the world, but are of the world. These promises in Daniel 9 were not only for the encouragement of the Jews at that time, but for all of us who are united to Christ by faith alone.

The main points from our text are these: (1) The Angelic Messenger Sent to Daniel (Daniel 9:20-23); (2) The Correct Interpretation of the Seventy Weeks (Daniel 9:24).

I. The Angelic Messenger Sent to Daniel (Daniel 9:20-23).

A. Review

1. Daniel (Daniel 9:1-2) had discerned from his reading in the Book of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25:12) that the 70 years of desolation and divine judgment upon Jerusalem for her unfaithfulness to her Heavenly Husband were now accomplished. King Cyrus would soon (538/537 B.C.) issue his decree to set free God’s people from Babylonian captivity to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-3).
2. Daniel (Daniel 9:4-19), having this promise from God’s Word before him, set his heart to pray for himself and God’s people in confessing their sin, repenting, seeking forgiveness, and beseeching the Lord to bring to pass the restoration of the Holy Sanctuary in Jerusalem.

B. In the verses that follow, Daniel’s prayer is answered, even before he completes it by means of an angelic messenger. Though our God may not send a visible angel in response to our prayers (he may do so invisibly and often), He does answer our prayers offered in faith through Christ (yes—no—wait). “God did not answer my prayer.” Yes, He did. It may not have been the answer you wanted, but He hears and answers and always gives you what is good as your loving Father.

1. Daniel notes here that he had not yet finished his prayer and there appeared to him the angel, Gabriel (Daniel 9:20-21). Gabriel is called a “man” because he appeared in human form. Gabriel appears to Daniel not in a vision (as was true in Daniel 8:16), but appears in reality (just like I am speaking to you). Daniel says that Gabriel moved speedily. One moment he was in heaven and the next moment he was in the presence of Daniel. Gabriel was likewise sent to announce the conception/birth of John the Baptist to Zacharias (Luke 1:19) and to announce the miraculous conception of Jesus to Mary (Luke 1:26).

2. Angels are created spirit beings (they may assume bodies, but they are complete as spirits). They were created by God in order to minister on God’s behalf. Those angels that fell away in apostasy from God followed Satan—hell was prepared for them (Matthew 25:41).

3. In Daniel 4, angels are called “watchers” because they continually watch over the providential works of God in the universe He has created—watching without slumber, fatigue, or need of rest. Angels are not mere observers, but are vigilant and watchful to carry out God’s mighty works by God’s power in ministering to God’s people (Genesis 19—two angels rescue Lot; Daniel 6—lion’s den; Acts 12:7—rescued Peter; Hebrews 1:14) and in judging God’s enemies (2 Kings 19:35—slayed the Assyrian army outside Jerusalem; Acts 12:23—destroyed Herod with worms; Revelation 8:6—trumpet judgments; Revelation 16:1—vial judgments). Paul even states that God’s angels come at times disguised as strangers in ministering to God’s people (Hebrews 13:2).

4. The Scripture teaches that we have angels that God sends to specifically watch over us (Matthew 18:10) even a host of angels (as with Elisha in 2 Kings 6). How many times have God’s angels preserved and protected us and our children from so many dangers? Countless times! I dare say that they are even now with us as we gather for worship (1 Corinthians 11—they observe the order/disorder in worship).

5. Angels are not omniscient (1 Peter 1:12). They are not omnipresent. They are not almighty. Elect angels are holy and were created before man in order to serve God. They are quick (not lazy) to do God’s will (as here in Daniel 9:21). They are not to be worshipped or to be prayed to (the Apostle John learned that lesson twice, Revelation 19:10; Revelation 22:8-9).

C. Gabriel then informs Daniel as to why God had sent him to Daniel (Daniel 9:22-23).

1. Gabriel delivers to Daniel the answer to Daniel’s prayer and even much more than Daniel prayed for. For Gabriel not only assures Daniel that Jerusalem (and the temple) will be restored despite the opposition of enemies, but most importantly points Daniel (and all of us) to Jesus Christ, the Son of David, who will come as King to establish His kingdom that shall never end—but will do so through His sacrificial death for His people and His glorious resurrection.

2. Gabriel comforts Daniel with the wondrous words that he is “greatly beloved”. Do not forget that all of you as God’s redeemed are “greatly beloved” in Christ (1 John 4:10-12). That’s our identity.

II. The Correct Interpretation of the Seventy Weeks (Daniel 9:24).

A. As we consider this amazing prophecy given over 500 years before the coming of our glorious Savior and King, let us first begin by considering this prophetic period of time: the 70 weeks that will usher in Messiah, the Prince (Daniel 9:25).

1. Conservative scholarship is divided over how to interpret the 70 weeks—a figurative period of time or a specific period of time.

a. **The 70 weeks are a figurative time period.** These 70 weeks are figurative for shorter or longer periods of time that cannot be reduced to any specific period of time (Daniel 9:25). What is important is not the actual time, but the events to which they point. **Objection:** Daniel has just been reading from Jeremiah’s prophecy that Jerusalem’s desolation for 70 literal years is about to come to an end (the 70 years do not figuratively mean a long time or short time, but 70 specific, calendar years). This contextual fact points to a like fulfillment of the 70 weeks of Daniel which occurs in the same chapter.

b. **The 70 weeks are a specific period of time** that can be documented by a calendar just as the 70 years of Jerusalem’s desolation referred to a specific period of time (Joseph and Moses).

2. Next question about these 70 weeks: Are they 70 weeks of days or 70 weeks of years?

a. **The 70 weeks are 490 literal days.** I know of no conservative scholar who interprets the 70 weeks to mean 490 literal days (1 year and 4 months). Since the prophecy is pointing to the coming of Messiah, the Prince (Daniel 9:25), it is clear that He did not come during any 490 day period of the Old Testament. Only skeptics who do not believe in the inspiration of Scripture interpret the 70 weeks to mean 490 literal days in order to find some alleged error in Scripture.

b. **The 70 weeks are 490 literal years.** Using the biblical day-year principle each of

the 490 days of the 70 weeks stands for 1 year or 490 years (for one day, one year). When we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, we come to see the amazing fulfillment of this prophecy in Jesus Christ 490 years from the time specified by Gabriel.

(1) **Numbers 14:34.** Here we find the Lord judging Israel based upon the Day-Year Principle. The Israelites found themselves upon the borders of Canaan. Spies had been sent out into the Land, where they explored Canaan for 40 days. When they returned, the unbelieving report of the 10 spies (which was the majority report) declared it was impossible to take the Land, while the believing report of Joshua and Caleb (which was the minority report) declared that all things are possible with God, and that God (with whom it is impossible to lie) had promised the Land to Israel. Sadly, the people of Israel (collectively) believed the unfaithful majority report rather than the faithful minority report. The Lord then stated that Israel will bear its sin in the wilderness for 40 years—for the 40 days the spies went throughout the Land, they would spend 40 years in the wilderness, i.e. for each day, one year.

(2) **Ezekiel 4:4-6.** In this prophetic Book, Ezekiel is commanded by God to act out in symbols stated time periods of sin that were perpetrated against the Lord by the Northern Kingdom of Israel and by the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

(a) Ezekiel is first commanded to lie on his left side for 390 days for the sins of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Ezekiel 4:5). Then the Lord commands Ezekiel to lie on his right side for 40 days for the sins of the Southern Kingdom of Judah (Ezekiel 4:6).

(b) But what is significant is what God says the time periods of 390 days and 40 days mean in actual calendar time for the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah in bearing their sin. God says in Ezekiel 4:6, “I have appointed thee each day for a year” (literally in the Hebrew text, “A DAY FOR THE YEAR, A DAY FOR THE YEAR”). Again, we see, the Holy Spirit appoints for one day, one year. And so it is with the seventy weeks of days in Daniel 9:24 (490 days equals 490 years).

3. Next, How are these 490 years to be realized? There are basically two positions posed.

a. The 69 weeks of years (483 years) are to be realized consecutively to the triumphal entry of Christ, but the 70th week or the last 7 years do not immediately follow the previous 69 weeks. The 70th week is yet to be fulfilled at a future time when antichrist appears. This is the position of futurists (dispensationalists). Thus, according to this view (which is very popular at the present time), there have already been nearly 2,000 years between the 69th week and the 70th week. **Objection:** There is no other example in all of Scripture that separates prophesied years one from another so that a gap comes between those prophesied years (whether the 7 years of prosperity and 7 years of famine in Genesis 41; or the 40 years in the wilderness in Numbers 14:33; or the 70 years of Jerusalem’s desolation in Daniel 9; or Christ’s 3 days in the grave in John 2:19). Since Scripture is to interpret Scripture, where is there any such example of a prophecy involving a specific period of time in which the days, months, or years do not follow consecutively one after the other? There is none. This position cannot bear the weight of Scripture.

b. All 70 weeks (490 years) follow consecutively one after the other without any gap or break between the years, stretching from the time when Jerusalem was to be fully restored until events surrounding Christ’s death and shortly thereafter. When such a gap theory is introduced into a prophecy without any corroboration from any other place in Scripture, I submit it should be rejected, and rather we should receive that prophetic interpretation of these 70 weeks (490 years) that follows the pattern that we see in all other specific time periods of prophecy. This position in my judgment is both biblical and is the historic, Protestant interpretation of the 70 weeks found in Daniel 9:24. God willing, next Lord’s Day we will continue in our study of Daniel 9:24 as we consider what Gabriel declared would be accomplished when Messiah the Prince came to earth to fulfill the redemptive plan of the ages for His beloved people.

In conclusion, prophetic time periods in Scripture remind us of a very important truth: God has ordained all our days (Psalm 31:5). We do not live by chance from day to day, but every event in history (and every event in our lives), and even the very number of days that each of us shall live has been ordained by the Lord (Job

14:5). We forget that our days here upon earth are numbered (whether we are young or old). The strength we feel today in these mortal bodies will pass away, and so will all our earthly possessions (Psalm 39:4).

Life for every true Christian is summed up in the words of the Apostle Paul (Philippians 1:21). What is it for you to live? What gives meaning and purpose to your life? If your life is not Christ (but is rather something earthly), you will leave your life behind when you die. But if Christ is your life and your reason for living, at death you will be going to enjoy your life forever and ever with Christ in heaven.

If we would die well with a certain hope, let us live well. Let us not be foolish. Today is the day of salvation, not tomorrow, or the next day. All our days are in God's hands. Let us then live each day as if it were our last day in faith and hope in Christ. It may be as it was for those who died while simply shopping yesterday in Texas. Let us be wise and not foolish.

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