

SESSION TWENTY-TWO

DANIEL

The "Seventy Weeks" Prophecy

INTRODUCTION

In Dan 9:24-27, God revealed some very specific things about Israel's future that would be accomplished over a long period of time. Among other things, this revelation included the following:

1. The actual date when Messiah Jesus would come, the One whom Daniel had seen in vision in Dan 7 as the "Son of Man."
2. The prediction that the Messiah would suffer violently (be "cut off") before He would be granted His kingdom.
3. The fact that the Antichrist (revealed as the "little horn" in Dan 7) would enter into a unique covenant arrangement with Israel prior to his own judgment.

One should keep in mind that these extraordinary revelations in Dan 9:24-27 came as a result of the prayers of Daniel recorded in the first part of the chapter. Daniel 9:1-19 is a record of the prayers of Daniel in response to what he studied in Jer 25:9-12 and 29:10-14, namely, that Judah would serve the king of Babylon 70 years (note Dan 9:2). Since Daniel 9 is dated about 539-538 BC (see 9:1), Daniel would have known that the 70 years of exile were nearing completion. His prayers (motivated by this insight) are based upon Deut 30:1-10, in which *repentance* was stipulated as a precondition of restoration.¹

In view of Daniel's faithful prayers on behalf of the nation, God was pleased to reveal even more to him. Gabriel announced that Daniel was to be given "insight with understanding" (9:22). However, these new revelations were meant to clarify that the past 70 years of captivity were not sufficient for the completion of Jerusalem's desolations (cf. Jer 25:11). The time was still not ripe for the advent of Messiah and His kingdom. The 70 years of the Babylonian exile had put an end to the idolatry of the nation, but a further period of 70 "weeks" was needed to completely deal with all Israel's sin and iniquity. This would allow for the "times of the Gentiles" to run its course before Israel's *final restoration* would be complete.

THE MEANING OF "70 WEEKS" (9:24)

Certain things were to be accomplished in regard to Israel over a period described as "seventy weeks" (NIV = "seventy sevens"). The Hebrew word שָׁבָעִים means a "unit of seven," which (depending on

¹I am not suggesting that Deut 30:1-10 was fulfilled at the time of Daniel. I would see Deut 30:1-10 as a *principle* by which God deals with the nation. This has a *partial fulfillment* in Daniel's day when Israel is restored to the land after the Babylonian exile, but a greater and more complete fulfillment at the end of the present age when Israel is delivered (at the time of Christ's Second Coming).

the context) could refer to days, months or years. In this case, the seventy is in regard to years. Seventy periods of seven years (a total of 490) would be needed to accomplish God's purposes.²

Many reasons could be given in defense of this interpretation, among which could be mentioned:

1. It is simply not possible for all these purposes of God to be fulfilled in 490 days or even 490 months.
2. Daniel had been thinking in terms of years (cf. Dan 9:1-2).
3. The 70 years of captivity was a judgment for 490 years of failure to keep the sabbatical years. So, 490 years are assigned for the completion of Israel's desolations. Feinberg notes,

The most convincing reason is that Daniel had been thinking about seventy years of captivity (Jer. 25:11; 29:10). Every year of exile represented a cycle of seven years in which the seventh year, the sabbatical year, had not been observed. Thus, the 70 years of captivity were the result of having violated seventy sabbatical years. This would have been done over a period of 490 years. Daniel now is given a prophecy of units of seven concerning 490 years (2 Chron. 36:21; cf. Lev. 26:33-35; Jer. 34:12-22).³

4. Although not used elsewhere in the Bible for "years," the term שְׁבַע־שָׁנָה does mean *seven years* in other Jewish literature. In the Mishnah, we find the term שְׁבַע־שָׁנָה clearly meaning seven years: "The Sanhedrin that puts to death one person in seven years (בְּשִׁבְעֵי שָׁנָה) is termed tyrannical."⁴

The question may come up as to why the author did not simply say *490 years* if that is what he had in mind. Why say "seventy seven-year periods"? As explained in point 3 above, Israel's discipline is related to the sabbatical year period of seven years which they had been violating. Furthermore, if he had said 490 years, that would have implied 490 *successive* years. By saying *seventy sevens of years*, that gives more flexibility in the way things work out. As we will see momentarily, these will not be 490 successive years.

THE THINGS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED IN SEVENTY "SEVEN YEAR PERIODS"

According to Dan 9:24, at least six things are to be accomplished during this period. Note, by the way, that these pertain to Daniel's people (i.e., the Jews) and the "holy city" (i.e., Jerusalem). So, I take it that these things relate primarily to God's future program for Israel. These are:

1. "to finish the transgression" - The *transgression* refers to Israel's apostasy and sin against the LORD, including her wandering over the face of the earth in discipline.

²For discussion of "weeks" as meaning *seven years*, see John C. Whitcomb, "Daniel's Great Seventy-Weeks Prophecy: An Exegetical Insight," *Grace Theological Journal* 2:2 (Fall 1981): 259-63; Harold Hoehner, "Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ; Part VI: Daniel's Seventy Weeks and New Testament Chronology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (Jan-Mar 1975): 47-65; and Paul D. Feinberg, "An Exegetical and Theological Study of Daniel 9:24-27," in *Tradition and Testament*, ed. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981).

³Feinberg, 209.

⁴Mishnah 4 (גזירות), Makkoth (מכות) 1:10.

2. "to make an end of sin" - Because Christ was punished for sin, Israel will eventually be cleansed of sin at the Second Coming (Ezek 37:23; Zech 5; Rom 11:20-27).
3. "to make atonement for iniquity" - This looks at the atoning work of Christ on the cross, as well as the application to Israel as a nation at the Second Coming (Zech 3:8-9; 13:1).
4. "to bring in everlasting righteousness" - Righteousness will be made manifest upon earth during the Messianic kingdom following the Second Coming (Jer 23:5-6; Isa 11:2-5; 60:21).
5. "to seal up vision and prophecy" - While many OT prophecies have already found fulfillment, much prophecy concerns Israel's ultimate restoration in Messiah's kingdom. This looks at the full realization of what God said He would do in fulfilling His covenant promises with Israel in the millennial kingdom.
6. "to anoint the most Holy place" - The "most holy" (קֹדֶשׁ קְדוֹשִׁים) are technical words in the OT for the "holy of holies." This phrase anticipates the rebuilding and reinstatement of the temple. While this may look partially at Zerubbabel's temple (516 BC), ultimately this looks to the millennial temple when Christ comes again to reign on earth (cf. Ezek 40-48).

THE TIME OF MESSIAH'S COMING (9:25)

Dan 9:25 states specifically when Messiah will come. He will come after 69 *seven-year periods* (7 + 62), i.e., after 483 years. Note, however, that the time begins at the point when a decree is given to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. Why is the time expressed as "7 + 62" rather than simply "69"? From the time of the issuing of the decree, it would take seven *seven-year periods* (= 49 years) for the city to be properly rebuilt (with fortification walls, etc.). Then another 62 *seven-year periods* (= 434 years) would pass before Messiah would come.

The Determination Of The Decree That Daniel Refers To

To be more exact about the date of Messiah's coming, we must first determine *what* decree is being referred to and *when* it was made. Three primary suggestions have been given:

1. The decree of Cyrus in 538 BC (see Ezra 1:1-4; 6:3-5) - So Keil, Leupold, Young, and Baldwin.
2. The decree of Artaxerxes to Ezra about 457 BC (see Ezra 7:11-26) - So J. Barton Payne, Gleason Archer, and Leon Wood.
3. The authorization of Artaxerxes permitting Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem in 444 BC (Neh 1-2) - So Walvoord, Ryrie, Hoehner, J. D. Pentecost, and D. Campbell.

Although all these positions are worthy of consideration, I am personally inclined to favor the final one, i.e., the authorization made to Nehemiah in 444 BC. Here are my reasons:

1. In regard to view #1, Cyrus' decree in 538 concerned the Temple, not the rebuilding of the city (but see Isa 44:28; 45:13). We should note that the city was not substantially rebuilt within 49 years of Cyrus' decree (i.e., by 489 BC). Furthermore, 69 "weeks" (483 years) from 538 BC would only be 55-54 BC, quite short of the lifetime of Jesus.

2. View #2 is more possible. Advocates of this view (basing their calculations on solar years), calculate the conclusion of 69 "weeks" as AD 26/27, certainly within the lifetime of Jesus and what some would regard as the commencement of Christ's public ministry. This assumes the year of crucifixion to be AD 30. The problem with this view is that the decree associated with the return under Ezra did not concern the rebuilding of the city (only the adorning of the temple). Furthermore, Harold Hoehner has made a good case that the public ministry of Christ did not commence until AD 29 (based on Lk 3:1-3, the 15th year of Tiberius).⁵
3. The concern in Nehemiah was specifically over the dilapidation of the city (Neh 1), a point which argues in favor of view #3. In fact, Nehemiah's request before the King was specifically to rebuild the city (Neh 2:5), and the decree was for that purpose (Neh 2:7-8).
4. The Book of Nehemiah indicates that the restoration was done in the most distressing circumstances (cf. Ezra 4:7-23), a fact that harmonizes well with Dan 9:25 ("it will be built again . . . even in times of distress").

Therefore, the calculation for Messiah's coming is most likely based on the authorization granted by Artaxerxes to Nehemiah. This can be shown to be Nisan of 444 BC.⁶

Dating Christ's Ministry

Before attempting to calculate the time of the 69 "weeks" from the starting point of Nisan 444 BC, it would be helpful to clarify the dates of Christ's ministry and death. Admittedly, there is difference of opinion on this matter, but Harold Hoehner has built a good case that Jesus' crucifixion was in AD 33.⁷

1. The year of crucifixion must be when Passover (14th Nisan) was on a Friday (note Mt 27:62; Mk 15:42; Lk 23:54).
2. Based on astronomical data, the 14th of Nisan only fell on Friday in the years AD 27, 30, and 33 (during the general period of AD 26-34).⁸
3. Of these three possibilities, Christ's crucifixion must have occurred in the year AD 33 based on other data.

⁵H. Hoehner, "Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ; Part II: The Commencement of Christ's Ministry," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 131 (Jan-Mar 1974): 41-54.

⁶Neh 2:1 gives the date as the month Nisan in the 20th year of Artaxerxes. Comparing this to Neh 1:1, the author must be using the Tishri-to-Tishri dating system (rather than the Persian system of Nisan-to-Nisan). Since the father of Artaxerxes (i.e., Xerxes) died shortly after Dec 17, 465 BC (cf. S. H. Horn and L. H. Wood, "The Fifth-Century Calendar at Elephantine," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 13 [Jan 1954], 9), the accession year of Artaxerxes would be Dec 465 to Nisan 464 BC. Consequently, Artaxerxes' first regnal year would be Nisan 464 to Nisan 463 according to the Persian system (or Tishri 464 to Tishri 463 by the Jewish system). Hence, the decree in the 20th year would be Nisan of 444 BC according to the Jewish system of Tishri-to-Tishri.

⁷Harold W. Hoehner, "Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ; Part IV: The Day of Christ's Crucifixion," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 131:523 (Jul-Sep 1974): 241-264.

⁸Cf. J. K. Fotheringham, "The Evidence of Astronomy and Technical Chronology for the Date of the Crucifixion," *Journal of Theological Studies* 35 (April 1934): 142-162; and Herman H. Goldstine, *New and Full Moons 1001 B.C. to A.D. 1651* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1973).

This is determined on the basis of Christ's cleansing of the temple on the 1st Passover of His public ministry (Jn 2:20), in which a comment is made about 46 years of the Temple. Taking this as the temple *edifice* (ναός) and using the date supplied by Josephus (18/17 BC), Hoehner concludes that the 1st Passover of Christ's public ministry would be AD 29 or 30.⁹ Hence, the crucifixion would have to be in AD 33.¹⁰

If Christ died in the year AD 33, then His triumphal entry was on the 10th of Nisan, i.e., March 30 (recall that in Ex 12 this was the day the lamb was selected for the Passover). Christ died a few days later on Friday, April 3, AD 33.

The Calculation Of The "69 Weeks"

1. In order to make our calculation, we need to *assume* that "prophetic years" of 360 days are meant.¹¹

$$69 \text{ "weeks"} \times 7 \text{ yrs/wk} \times 360 \text{ days/yr} = 173,880 \text{ days}$$

2. The number of days can now be converted to *solar years*

$$173,880 \text{ days} \times 1 \text{ yr}/365.242 \text{ days} = 476.0679 \text{ solar years}$$

This would be 476 solar years plus 25 days.¹²

3. Now we can calculate the time from the date of the decree to Nehemiah

- a. Decree: March 5, 444 BC¹³

- b. Add 476 years + 25 days [reminder: 1 BC to AD 1 = 1 year]

- c. Result: March 30 of AD 33

⁹Josephus specifies that Herod began the temple project in the 18th year of his reign (*Antiquities*, xv.11.1-6), although the temple edifice was completed in one year and six months (*Antiquities*, xv.11.6). Hoehner argues that the 18th year of Herod's reign would have been 18/17 BC.

¹⁰Harold Hoehner, "Chronological Aspects; Part V: The Year of Christ's Crucifixion," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 131:524 (Oct-Dec 1974): 332-48. Much of this discussion is quite technical, and does require him taking the verb in Jn 2:20 (οἰκοδομηθη) as an "effective" (or "perfective") aorist, with the idea "has been built . . . for 46 years."

¹¹Several lines of reasoning could be offered for using prophetic years: (1) several ancient countries had calendar systems based on a 360 day year (12 x 30) with some device to correct the lacking days (cf. P. Van Der Meer, *Chronology of Ancient Western Asia and Egypt* [Leiden: Brill, 1963]); (2) both Daniel and Revelation make use of 360 day prophetic years, and there seems to be a correlation between Dan 9:27 and the 360 day year in light of Dan 7:24-25; Rev 11:2-3; 12:6,14; and 13:5; and (3) a 30 day month is also used in Genesis (Gen 7:11; 8:4; comp. Gen 7:24; 8:3). On the other hand, those who advocate the prophetic year have to acknowledge that the Jewish calendar was tied to the seasons with methods for periodic correction (cf. Kings and Chronicles where OT authors used true solar years).

¹²J. Dwight Pentecost (*Bible Knowledge Comm.*, 1363) and John Walvoord (*The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, 254) use a similar method to Hoehner. Rather than using the decimal equivalent for the days of a solar year (as Hoehner does), Pentecost and Walvoord simply use 365. But then they add in 116 days for the leap years involved and allot 24 days for March 5 to March 30 (note that for the latter, Hoehner allots 25 days!).

¹³According to Nehemiah 2:1, the decree was in Nisan of that year (Mar-Apr). Hoehner bases his calculation on the *assumption* of Nisan 1, although the text does not state the exact day of the month.

This would be the very day that Jesus rode into Jerusalem at the triumphal entry! When Daniel predicted that it would be 69 *weeks of years* until Messiah, this prophecy would calculate to be the day that Jesus rode into Jerusalem for the last time. If the prophecy is meant to be this exact, it does have a lot of significance, for this event marked His formal presentation to the nation as the Messiah and evaluation by the Sanhedrin.

- (1) In Zechariah 9:9, we have the prediction that Israel's king would come mounted on a donkey, the fulfillment of which was March 30, AD 33.
- (2) Note Lk 19:41-44! Jesus commented on Israel's failure to discern the significance of this occasion.

TRAGEDIES TO FOLLOW THE 69TH WEEK (Dan 9:26)

1. "the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing"

This refers to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. "The 'cutting off' of Messiah indicates a violent death. The Hebrew word is used of making a covenant, involving the death of a sacrificial animal (Gen 15:10,18). The word is used of the death penalty (Lev 7:20) and always of an unnatural violent death (cf. Isa 53:8)."¹⁴

What does the text mean by "have nothing"? Earlier in Daniel, the expectation had been given that the Messiah *Son of Man* would inherit the kingdom (Dan 7:14; cf. Ps 2:8) and take up His Messianic rule over the nations. In light of Israel's rejection and the crucifixion of her Messiah, the kingdom was not established fully at the time of His first coming. Of course, there are certainly other valuable *riches* that He does have: (1) first of all, He is now glorified and sitting at the right hand of God the Father; and (2) He has many *brethren* (i.e., the Church) who worship Him.

2. "the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary"

Although the city of Jerusalem would be rebuilt within the first seven *weeks of years* (i.e., 49 years), it would be destroyed again after Messiah's coming and being "cut off." This, of course, is a prophecy of the tragic destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70 by the Romans under Titus. Notice carefully, however, that it is not the "prince who is to come" that destroys Jerusalem. Rather, it is the "people of the prince who is to come." The *people* obviously refers to the Romans, but who is "the prince who is to come"? In Dan 9:25, the Messiah was called "Messiah the Prince," but these are not the same. The second prince mentioned in 9:26 must be different, because he is related to the Romans that destroyed Jerusalem (Jesus was Jewish!). Hence, the "prince who is to come" is connected to the Roman Empire, as was the "little horn" in Dan 7, and thus the broader context of Daniel suggests that these are one and the same. The "prince who is to come" is none other than the "little horn" of Dan 7, i.e., the Antichrist.

THE FINAL WEEK: A COVENANT WITH ISRAEL (Dan 9:27)

Verse 27 discusses the 70th and final week of the series. At this point, we must decide whether the 70th week immediately follows the first 69, or whether there is a gap of time between the 69th and

¹⁴Feinberg, 202.

70th. Some scholars assume that the 70th week immediately follows the previous ones, but this is very unlikely. If that were the case, then the 70th week would be AD 33-40. This is not possible:

1. There is no broken covenant that made an end to sacrifice and grain offerings during this period. The sacrificial system remained intact until the Romans destroyed the temple in AD 70.

Some scholars, however, (who do not wish to see a time gap) argue that the covenant referred to in 9:27 is the New Covenant which Jesus founded by His death on the cross. They suggest that from *God's perspective*, He (the Lord Jesus) put an end to the sacrificial system. This view, however, is not likely. The text says that although "he" makes a covenant for one *week* (i.e., seven years), "he" stops the sacrifices in the middle of the *week*, i.e., after 3 1/2 years. How can the New Covenant be thought of as being made for seven years, in the middle of which Christ stops the sacrifices? A far better interpretation comes when we accurately determine who the "he" at the beginning of 9:27 refers to. Is this Jesus? No. The near antecedent is "the prince who is to come" in 9:26, i.e., the Antichrist. Hence, it is the Antichrist who makes the covenant mentioned in Dan 9:27.

2. Dan 9:26 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, about 37 years after the crucifixion of Christ. The verse implies by the words "who is to come" that this *prince* is not only related to the Romans who destroyed Jerusalem, but that he does not come until after this event. If he does not come until after AD 70, and according to 9:27 he has a part in the *final week*, then it stands to reason that the 70th week of Daniel's prophecy does not immediately follow the first sixty-nine.

When, then, does the 70th and final *week* occur? If the "prince who is to come" is the same as the one who makes the covenant in Dan 9:27 and is also the same as the "little horn" of Dan 7 (see above), then we can look to chapter 7 for clues as to the time of the final week. In Dan 7, the "little horn" is *in power* just prior to the kingdom of the Son of Man (see Dan 7:26-27). Hence, the "little horn" has his time of power just prior to the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ. This is confirmed by the use that the Book of Revelation makes of the Daniel 7 imagery. The "little horn" of Daniel 7 is the same as the "beast" of Revelation (see Rev 13). In Revelation, the "beast" (= Antichrist) is slain at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (see Rev 19). Hence, the 70th week of Daniel is a seven-year period just prior to the return of Jesus Christ (see supplemental chart to this session). [That does not have to mean, however, that the Tribulation is seven years!]

What then is the "covenant" of Dan 9:27? Rather than referring to the New Covenant, the covenant of Dan 9:27 is a covenant that the Antichrist makes with the nation of Israel during the final *week* (7 years).¹⁵ After the first three and a half years, however, he breaks this covenant with Israel and attempts to put an end to their sacrificial system. Although the Antichrist will attempt to "make desolate" Israel and her religious system, he will not succeed in doing so. According to 9:27, a *complete destruction* will be poured out on him (an allusion to his destruction personally by Jesus Christ [Rev 19:20]).

This interpretation correlates well with what we know from other parts of Scripture. First of all, Dan 7:25 indicated that the "little horn" would have power for "time, times, and half a time," which I suggested in the study of Dan 7 refers to 3 1/2 years. Dan 9:27 indicates the breaking of a covenant in

¹⁵Dan 9:27 says he makes the covenant with "the many," but keep in mind that Dan 9:24 said that Daniel's vision pertained to "your people," i.e., the Jews.

the middle of the seven years. Thus, the 3 1/2 years mentioned in Dan 7:25 are most likely the latter half of Daniel's "70th week," after he has broken his covenant with Israel. According to 2 Thess 2:3-4, the Antichrist (= "the man of lawlessness") will take his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as God. Since Dan 9:27 mentions the sacrificial system, we can assume that the Jews will rebuild a temple before the return of Christ. At first, the Antichrist will be on friendly terms with Israel (for he makes a covenant with them), but then breaks this covenant. The breaking of this covenant probably corresponds to the time when he enters their temple and proclaims himself as God. [Keep in mind that his goal is to gain world-wide worship for himself. Rev 13:8 states, "And all who dwell on earth will worship him," except for those who worship the Lamb.] What he does in the temple, however, is the most defiling thing he could do in the eyes of the Jews. This is probably what Jesus was referring to in Matthew 24 when He said, "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), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Mt 24:15-16). Christ went on to say in the same context, "then there will be a great tribulation" (24:21). This suggests that the latter half of Daniel's 70th week is the Great Tribulation!

A LESSON FOR OUR LIFE

The "Seventy Weeks Prophecy" is a marvelous revelation from God. In Dan 9:22, the angel Gabriel appeared to Daniel with the words, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you insight with understanding." When you stop and think about it, God could have given this revelation to someone other than Daniel. Why then was Daniel chosen? A clue is found in vs 23—"for you are highly esteemed." From the context, there are several reasons why Daniel was *highly esteemed* before God: (1) he was a man of the Word [note vs 2]; (2) he was a man of prayer; and (3) he was a man who was broken over sin and intense about confession before God (i.e., he regarded God as a *holy God*). Do you want to be a man (or woman) of God? It was not Daniel's status in the world that made him *esteemed* in God's sight (though he was a high official in the Babylonian court). It was not his personal wealth that made him esteemed (though he was undoubtedly well off—cf. 2:48). It was not his scholarly knowledge either (and surely he was a man of great wisdom). Who cares how we appear to mankind, if we are not *highly esteemed* before God? Be careful today that you don't try to impress others with your worldly credentials, when what really matters are the things by which we are *esteemed* in God's sight. These are the spiritual characteristics of a godly man (or woman)! Are these the things that others see in you? Are these the things that you are pursuing?