

## **“Daniel’s Seventy Weeks” (part 2)**

Daniel 9:20-27

Take your Bible and be finding your place with me once more in the ninth chapter of Daniel. I want to return to this passage at the close of Daniel 9, a passage that is one of the most important prophecies in all of the Bible. Prophecy is one of the those subjects that we are interested in, but are somewhat nervous to approach. Some people avoid it due to the assumption that it distracts us from the present. If that is so, then there is certainly a whole lot of distraction in the Scriptures! More than 28% of the Old Testament is prophecy, and 22% of the New Testament is prophecy. It adds up to 31,124 total verses in the Bible.

Consider:

- of the 333 prophecies concerning Christ, only 109 were fulfilled by His first coming, leaving 224 yet to be fulfilled in His second coming
- there are over 300 references to the Lord’s coming in the 260 chapters of the NT or 1 out of every 30 verses
- 23 out of 27 NT books mention Christ’s return
- Jesus refers to His second coming at least 21 times
- there are 1,527 OT passages that refer to the second coming
- for every time the Bible the first coming, the second coming is mentioned eight times
- we are exhorted to be ready for the Lord’s return over 50 separate times

Let me tell you, to say that prophecy is not important is to ignore how much prophecy the Bible contains. We see the importance of it reflected in the lives of

godly people in the pages of Scripture, and one of those is Daniel. While he was in Babylon, Daniel was studying prophecy and discerned that Israel's seventy year exile was nearing completion. His time in Scripture took him to his knees in prayer, and the answer that he was given is one of the most important prophecies in the entire Bible. It is a prophecy known as 'the seventy weeks.' Not weeks in the sense of days, but in the sense of years. Literally, seventy 'sevens' or seventy 'seven-year' time periods in which God is going to accomplish some very important things as far as Israel is concerned, and as far as His redemptive plan is concerned.

**Charles Spurgeon** — *“The Lord God appointed a set time for the coming of His Son into the world; nothing was left to chance. Infinite wisdom dictated the hour at which the Messiah should be born, and the moment at which He should be cut off. His advent and His work are the highest point of the purpose of God, the hinge of history, the centre of providence, the crowning of the edifice of grace, and therefore particular care watched over every detail. Once in the end of the world hath the Son of God appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and this is the event before which all other events must bow.”*

Daniel is told that God has a specific plan in which Messiah will come and deal decisively with sin, though it means He is to be 'cut off' in the process. Intense times of trouble will precede and follow His coming. The nation of Israel will, in particular, be targeted and will experience trouble. Yet God has determined how and when the end will come. Daniel is shown that God is in control, and regardless of what would happen in the world around him, God can be trusted. His plan will come to pass just as He has said. The prophecy found in the last four verses of chapter 9 presents us with the plan that God has in mind for Israel's future. Notice several things that are involved:

## **1—The PRAYER that is involved (9:20-23)**

*“While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the Lord my God for the holy hill of my God, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight...”*

Notice the four verbs there in verse 20—speaking, praying, confessing sin, and presenting his plea. It summarizes the prayer recorded in the previous 19 verses. Well, what was it exactly that he was praying for?

Now, we have already seen that as the chapter opens up, God’s people are still in captivity. It was the first year of Darius the Mede, or around 539 BC. By this point, Daniel and the Jews had been in Babylon for 67 years. Now, all these years later, Daniel is an old man. He is reading the prophetic scriptures when something in the scroll of Jeremiah got his attention. It was Jeremiah who warned the nation of coming judgment and that God’s people would be carried away into captivity and would be held there for 70 years. As he is reading, Daniel discovers that the end of those 70 years was close. He read of God’s promise to visit His people and restore them to their land at the end of the captivity:

**Jeremiah 29:10-11 —“For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you My promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”**

As he was reading the Word of God, Daniel realized that it was time for God to bring the Jews back to their land, back to Jerusalem, back to what they had been promised. That is what Daniel is reading in the books. He knew that time was

drawing to a close, and God was going to honor His promises. And so when Daniel read all of that, it affected him so deep within his spirit that he fell on his knees and began to pray in response.

#### Divine interruption (v. 20-21)

He says, “While I was speaking and praying...while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of evening sacrifice.” The idea is that he is interrupted mid-sentence by the angel Gabriel who had been sent from God with a very important message. Whenever he shows up in the Scripture, Gabriel is always bringing important news of some kind that involves God’s redemptive plan, to announce that God is up to something as far as redemption is concerned.

#### Divine insight (v. 22-23)

Why had Gabriel come? Verse 22 says, “He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, ‘Daniel, I have come to give you insight and understanding.’” Gabriel had been sent from the Lord with the task of giving Daniel both insight and understanding. The word ‘insight’ means to cause to have comprehension, or to grasp the truth of something. The word ‘understanding’ refers to perception, to see into something. God gives Daniel some perception that comes only after he had spent time on his knees in prayer. The insight he receives into his situation comes supernaturally. He looks through eyes of faith and listens with an ear that is tuned to the voice from another world. God has sent Gabriel to Daniel to give him a scheme of future events and to help him grasp the significance of it all. He has come to provide Daniel with a prophetic pattern, a revelation of truth concerning the future. It involves a scheme of events for redemptive history and the future of the people Israel.

Gabriel says, “Daniel, your prayers have been heard. I’ve come to give you insight, for you are greatly loved.” He then says in verse 21:

*“Therefore consider the word and understand the vision.”*

In other words, pay careful attention to what I am about to tell you. So Gabriel has come to Daniel, he has gotten his attention, and he has a message to share with him that concerns the future of God’s people. It was important that he listen carefully.

## **2—The PERIOD that it involved (9:24a)**

*“Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.”*

In verse 24, Gabriel summarizes what the overall purpose is that will be accomplished by God after these 70 weeks have passed. There are some general observations, facts that stand out to us that will help our understanding.

First of all, notice that he mentions a specific period of time that is marked out by God. He says, “Seventy weeks are decreed.” The word ‘decreed’ there comes from a Hebrew word that means to be cut out or divide. The idea behind it is that the time period has been divided out because God has determined it. He has decreed a block of time in which He will accomplish some things as His redemptive purpose is concerned. Seventy weeks are ‘decreed’ or cut out by God. The timeline will occur this way because He says so.

Second, the prophecy is directly related to the Jews and to the city of Jerusalem. The angel tells Daniel in verse 24, “Seventy weeks are decreed about your

people and your holy city.” This is a prophecy concerning the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem. So this is not Gentile prophecy, unlike previous visions that Daniel received in chapters 2 and 7. This does not have to do with the Babylonians, or the Medo-Persians, or the Greeks, or other Gentile nations. It does not center around events that happen in Babylon, or Rome, or in Washington for that matter. Here, Daniel is being told that God hasn’t forgotten His chosen people, the Jewish nation. He has cut out of the calendar a period of time in which He is going to do something. It is as if God is saying, “Look, Daniel, I’m not finished with your people yet. I have a plan for you and I want to tell you how it fits in with My plan for the whole world.”

Third, notice the total scene that has been revealed will last seventy weeks. God has decreed these weeks and divides them up into three periods—seven, sixty-two, and one. If you were reading this for the very first time, you would be under the impression that ‘week’ refers to seven days. If someone says to you, “I’ll see you in three weeks,” you will be looking for them to show up in 21 days. However, it is not a ‘week’ in the sense of seven 24-hour days that are being referred to here. Instead, it literally means seventy sevens or seventy ‘seven-year’ time periods. If you find that hard to understand, keep in mind that the context helps establish what the ‘sevens’ refer to. If we go back to verse 2, Daniel had been reading and thinking about the seventy year captivity. 70 years had been determined for Judah’s captivity. Those years represented 490 years of Israel’s failure to observe the Sabbath law that required the land to lay fallow every seventh year.

**Leviticus 25:3-4—“For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the LORD.”**

The Sabbath day is the seventh day, and the Sabbath year was the seventh year. Mosaic law determined the Jewish people count off seven sabbaths of years, or seven times seven years, and it would be a year of Jubilee. In the year of Jubilee, all debts were forgiven, slaves were freed, and property was returned to those who owned it. The people of Israel had ignored all of this. Thus, there was one year of captivity for every Sabbath year that they had ignored.

**2 Chronicles 36:20-21 — “He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment 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 that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.”**

That part Daniel understood from Scripture. However, he was in for a shock. Because instead of dealing with the 490 years that were in the past, God was about to give him a glimpse into the 490 years that were in the future, and these are broken down into 70 seven-year time periods. If the previous 490 years of Israel’s history highlighted their unfaithfulness, the coming 490 years would highlight God’s faithfulness.

### **3—The PURPOSE that is involved (9:24b)**

*Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.”*

So the ultimate answer to his prayer would come many centuries later. He is given perception into the will of God for the future. At the end of these seventy

weeks, there are six objectives that God is going to accomplish. Three are negative and three are positive. What are they? Look at verse 24 again:

*“...to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.”*

These six objectives represent the comprehensive nature of God’s redemptive plan. The first three deal with sin and its eradication, while the last three deal with righteousness and its application. Banish all sin, usher in righteousness.

#### Objective #1—To Finish the Transgression

This is the first item on the list of things that God is going to accomplish during the seventy weeks. The word ‘finish’ is used in the sense of bringing something to an end. The idea is that sin will come under control and will no longer grow and flourish. John Walvoord says the most obvious meaning is that Israel’s course of apostasy and sin and dispersion over the face of the earth will be brought to completion within the seventy weeks. Which by the way, that is what Daniel had been so concerned about. That is why he had been confessing the sin of his nation.

#### Objective #2—To Put an End to Sin

If the first objective has to do with allowing Israel’s sin to run its course, the second means that sin’s power will be broken. Not only to firmly restrain sin in principle, but to break the power of sin specifically, to deal with the sins themselves. It involves the idea of judging those sins and bringing about forgiveness. It points to the time when sin will be eliminated in practice.

#### Objective #3—To Atone for Iniquity

It refers to reconciliation between God and man. The word 'atone' translates the Hebrew word 'kaphar' which was the same word used in Genesis for the pitch that Noah used to cover or seal the ark. As one of the most important words in the Old Testament, it means to cover, to expiate, to make an atonement, to wipe out. For man to have a relationship with God, atonement must be made. Gabriel says that the Lord has determined that this would become reality within these seventy weeks.

And so these first three objectives specifically deal with sin and its eradication. Notice the three words that are used—transgression, sin, iniquity. These are the three ways that the Bible describes man's problem. The word that is used for 'transgression' has to do with revolt or rebellion, it is sin against lawful authority. It illustrates the defiance of sin. The second word used for 'sin' is plural and is a word that means missing the mark. It illustrates the deficiency of sin. It is coming short of God's glory. The third word 'iniquity' is a word that means to be crooked or bent. It illustrates the distortion of sin.

Daniel is told that God is going to deal with the sin problem. And yet that is not all, is it? Sin has to be eliminated, but righteousness also has to be inaugurated. The next three objectives deal with the final realization of the hopes and dreams of the human race.

#### Objective #4—To Bring In Everlasting Righteousness

Everlasting righteousness refers to the establishing of the kingdom of God. It is what Jesus taught us to pray for in the Model Prayer: "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." So this is a reference to the righteousness of heaven being found on earth, as all the imperfect governments of man are swallowed up by the righteous government of God. When we look

around at the shape of things as they presently are, we easily find the imperfection of man everywhere—morally, socially, politically, and economically. Everlasting righteousness of God may not be found in the halls of government today, but they will one day in the kingdom of God's Son.

**Jeremiah 23:5-6—“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and He shall reign as King and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which He will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’”**

Objective #5—To Seal Both Vision and Prophet

The Hebrew phrase ‘to seal’ means to complete something and bring it to an end. This refers to the time in the future when all prophecies will be fulfilled. In other words, during the seventy weeks, all prophetic revelation that is needed will have been given. God will seal both the vision and prophecy, and that will be the end of revelation. And when Jesus establishes His kingdom, all prophecy concerning Him will have become absolute reality.

**Proverbs 30:5—“Every word of God proves true; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.”**

Objective #6—To Anoint a Most Holy Place

Literally, it means that God will anoint a new holy of holies where His presence will reside. Formerly, that had been in the tabernacle in the wilderness and Solomon's temple that had been destroyed by Babylon. But in the future, Daniel learns that God is going to do something altogether new.

Daniel is told that God has determined a time in which sin will be canceled, salvation will be completed, scripture will be confirmed, and a sanctuary will be consecrated. And all of this is the big picture of what God is going to accomplish during the seventy weeks. At the end of those weeks, He will have completely dealt with sin, and He will have totally ushered in everlasting righteousness. Personally, I am of the conviction that this is reference to the millennial reign. Yet there is a sense in which all of these realities are true now spiritually because of what Christ has accomplished through His death and resurrection.

#### **4—The PARTICULARS that are involved (9:25-27)**

*“Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and a moat, but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing.”*

The last three verses of chapter 9 present us with what I am calling the particulars, or the details of the prophecy, just how exactly it will all come about. Daniel is told that ‘seventy weeks are determined for your people and your holy city.’ Seventy ‘sevens’ would represent 490 years of future prophecy. Notice first:

#### When it will begin

In verse 25, Daniel is told when these weeks of years would begin—“from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem.” There would be a legal decree that allowed for the city of Jerusalem to be rebuilt. Historically, it was Cyrus who allowed the Jews to return to their land and begin the work of

rebuilding the temple. But several years later, there was another Persian king who made it known far and wide that the Jews were to rebuild their city.

The majority of Bible scholars agree that this refers to the decree of King Artaxerxes in 445 BC which is recorded in detail in Nehemiah 2. Do you remember Nehemiah? He was the cupbearer for the Persian king. It was Nehemiah who had a burden for the city of Jerusalem because the Jews had returned home, but the city was still in ruins from the days of the captivity. What did he do? Well, he prayed on behalf of his people, just like Daniel before him did. He asked God to give him an opportunity to make his case for Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah 2:7 said that it pleased the king, and he granted Nehemiah's request by having official government documents drawn up that gave him authority. Nehemiah recognized that it was ultimately all by the hand of God. The sovereign hand of God was orchestrating the events. The king's heart was in God's hand, and just like a river, God was directing it in a way that would ultimately accomplish His own purposes.

So the seventy weeks will begin with an official decree to restore and build Jerusalem. Yet Daniel learns in verse 25 that it will be rebuilt from the inside to the outside during a troubled time. Remember all the opposition that Nehemiah faced? The workers who built the wall of the city had to lay bricks with one hand and hold a sword in the other! But the wall was built nevertheless, the city was restored, and the prophetic clock began to tick. Countdown to Christ!

#### How it will continue

From the time that the word went out to rebuild Jerusalem to the coming of an Anointed One will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks. So we have these two periods divided: first, seven weeks, and then sixty-two weeks, adding up to sixty-

nine weeks. The first seven weeks is a 49 year period, beginning in 445 BC, taking us to 396 BC. During that time, not only had the Jews returned home and the city of Jerusalem rebuilt, but it was also the time in which the Old Testament scriptures were completed.

**John MacArthur** — *“It’s as if God established His people in their land, God established His city, God established a temple, and God established His Word. And from there to the coming of John the Baptist, there was no prophet. God had affirmed His people, His city, and His Word.”*

So Daniel is told that from the word to rebuild the city to coming of an Anointed will be seven weeks and then an additional sixty-two weeks. Something to keep in mind:

**W.A. Criswell** — *“The Jewish calendar was based on lunar years, according to the movement of the moon. Our western calendar is based on solar years, according to our movement around the sun. Our calendar has 365 days each year. The Jewish calendar has only 360 days. Every few years, the Jews added an extra month to keep their calendar seasonal.”*

So based on the Jewish calendar of 360 days, 483 years from the king’s decree brings us to 33 AD, to the very day when Jesus rides into the city of Jerusalem on a donkey in His triumphal entry. That also was fulfillment of prophecy:

**Zechariah 9:9**—**“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”**

Luke 19 tells us how it happened. As Jesus rode along, His disciples spread their cloaks on the road. Then:

**Luke 19:37-40—“As He was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of His disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, ‘Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!’ And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, ‘Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.’ He answered, ‘I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.’”**

There was no keeping quiet that day about who He truly was! For this was the day that Jesus was presented to Israel as their true and rightful King, just as Daniel had said it would be. But I want to show you something, and it is so important that you catch this. While the crowd is rejoicing, what is it that Jesus is doing? Listen to what Luke says:

**Luke 19:41-44—“And when He drew near and saw the city, He wept over it, saying, ‘Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.’”**

They did recognize the time in which their King had come. Consider how despite the fact that more than five centuries earlier, God sent Gabriel with the message

that specified to the day when the Messiah would be presented to Israel but they rejected Him.

**John 1:11-12—“He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.”**

How was He rejected? Within a week from His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus was betrayed, condemned, and executed on a cross. When Pilate asked the crowd, “Shall I crucify your King?” the reply was this—“We have no king but Caesar!” Thus, Messiah was ‘cut off’ just as Daniel had foretold.

**“Cut Off”** —*means to be executed and killed; used in the book of Leviticus to describe the penalty for broken law*

Verse 26 says the Anointed One shall be cut off and shall have nothing. Have you ever considered how everything that Jesus used in earthly ministry was borrowed? He made His entrance into the world via a borrowed womb. After His death, He was laid in a borrowed tomb. He said things like this, “Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” Cut off at His crucifixion, all that He left behind were the clothes on His back, which the Roman soldiers wasted no time casting lots for. Messiah shall be cut off and shall have nothing. Other translations say that He will be cut off, but not for Himself. His death is for the sake of others!

Israel rejected her Messiah, but it did not mean that God’s redemptive plan would fail. It had to be this way in order for Christ to achieve the salvation of His bride, the church, which is overwhelmingly made up of Gentiles.

Maybe you're thinking to yourself, "How could the nation of Israel have been so blind?" It is an honest question, but it reveals just how little we understand about the depravity of the human heart.

**John Heywood**—*"There are none so blind as those who will not see."*

Lack of belief never a matter of lack of evidence. Rather it is always because the mind has been darkened by sin. It is why salvation involves new birth and the impartation of spiritual life where there is nothing but deadness within. It is not about turning over a new leaf but is about receiving a new life. And in order for you to be in possession of that brand new life, the Messiah had to forfeit His.

Where it will end

As far as the particulars of the prophecy are concerned, we have seen when it will begin—when the word went out to restore and rebuild the city of Jerusalem. We've seen how it will continue with the death of Messiah, cut off but not for Himself, which brings us to the end of the sixty-ninth week. But where will it end? What are we to know about the final week of the prophecy? I'll deal with that next week.

Before I pray, let me just mention a few reasons why all of this—why prophecy—is very important to you and me.

- A special blessing is promised to the person who pays careful attention to prophecy

**Revelation 1:3—"Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near."**

God does not want us to be in the dark as to what is going on in the world, but has given us a blueprint for the future. And if you are familiar with that prophetic blueprint, you will be blessed indeed.

- Jesus Christ is the subject of prophecy

From beginning to end, it is all about Christ. All prophecy, whether it be Daniel 9 or Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel for that matter—it all gives witness to Jesus Christ and points us to one ultimate reality. Our hearts are groaning for the day when it will finally be said, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever!” (Rev. 11:15)

- God intends for prophecy to give us proper perspective on life and for the sake of ministry

It tells us the end of the story! That way, no matter what is happening in the world around us, we know where we are going. That’s why we can stand firm and take action. It motivates us to live godly lives in anticipation of what is just around the corner.

**2 Peter 3:11-12—“Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming day of God.”**