

The Seventy Sevens

Daniel 9:24-27

If you have ever taken a trip with your children to anyplace further than the grocery store, you have probably been asked repeatedly, “are we there yet?”

We have seen in the visions of the book Daniel that the world is moving toward the destination of the eternal kingdom of God. This destination is confirmed by the rest of scripture both in the Old and New Testaments. The question is, “are we there yet?”

That is the question I believe Daniel was dealing with in the ninth chapter of his book. Remember that Daniel concluded after reading Jeremiah the prophet that the 70-year period of Israel’s captivity must be virtually over, and that return of Jews to their own land surely is imminent. With this hope in his heart, Daniel prayed for himself and his people. He confessed his sin and the sins of his people and prayed for the restoration expecting that they were almost there, that God would return His people to their land and establish the kingdom of heaven.

Last time we saw that God immediately sent an answer to Daniel’s prayer through the angel Gabriel. God answers the question, “Are we there yet?” When the angel Gabriel comes with an answer from God, you might assume that the answer would be: “Good news, Daniel. Your prayer has been heard. Your people will be going home soon and the kingdom will commence.” But that is not the case at all. Daniel asked for a small thing (from God’s point of view), but the answer he receives is huge. To use a modern phrase, God answered his prayer and showed him the whole nine yards. Daniel looked to the small issue of Israel returning from Babylon. Because God lives in eternity, he sees the whole picture and says, “Here is what must happen before Israel is completely restored.” The Lord wanted Daniel to know that Israel’s imminent return to the land was not the coming of the kingdom of God.

I. The Meaning and Purpose of the “70 Sevens” (Dan. 7:24)

**24 "Seventy weeks are determined
For your people and for your holy city,
To finish the transgression,
To make an end of sins,
To make reconciliation for iniquity,
To bring in everlasting righteousness,
To seal up vision and prophecy,
And to anoint the Most Holy.**

Last time we saw that the seventy weeks, or literally seventy sevens, clarifies the timing of the coming of God’s kingdom. As we said last time, if we are to take this time frame literally as Daniel takes the 70 years in Jeremiah literally, the “seventy sevens” describe 70 weeks of years. That is, the angel tells Daniel that a period of 490 years will pass before God’s purposes for Israel are completed.

The setting for the seventy sevens as we saw in verse 24 is Israel, **“Seventy weeks are determined For your people and for your holy city.”** So the context for the fulfillment of the 490 years is clear. It pertains to the people of Israel and the city of Jerusalem.

Then we saw that the conditions of the kingdom are spiritual. God’s purposes far transcend the return of the Jews from Babylon. The six phrases in verse 24 describe God’s full intention. He intends to deal once and for all with sin and to establish a state of everlasting righteousness.

The death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ has made these six things possible. But as the New Testament and history has proven, although there is a remnant of believers among the Jews, the majority of the people of Israel remain in sin to this day. Paul says in Romans 9,

31 but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. 32 Why? Because [they did] not [seek it] by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. 33 As it is written: “Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” (Rom 9:31-33)

They stumbled on the rock of Jesus Christ. Israel as a whole has not yet come to their Messiah. They have been blinded to the truth and God has used their unbelief to bring salvation people all over the world. As Paul asks in Romans 11, **“I say then, has God cast away His people?” ... or ... “have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.” ... “And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.””**

I think that we must see that the full application of those blessings of salvation remains in the future for the people of Israel. And though it is a fact that some Jews are coming to Christ in our day, the vast majority of the Jewish people remain in a state of spiritual blindness regarding Jesus Christ. So even though the spiritual conditions have been provided for Israel through Jesus Christ, the ultimate fulfillment of these six things remains future.

What does that mean in terms of the 490 years? It means that the 490 years cannot have been completely fulfilled. They are not over.

But before we can determine when they will finish we should consider when they started.

II. The First 69 “Sevens” (Dan. 7:25-26)

Having laid out the general outline and purpose of the “70 weeks,” the angel now gives more detail.

A. When the 70 sevens begins (Dan. 7:25)

First, he tells us when the 70 weeks of years will begin. It will be tied to a specific point in time.

**25 "Know therefore and understand,
That from the going forth of the command
To restore and build Jerusalem
Until Messiah the Prince,
There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks;
The street shall be built again, and the wall,
Even in troublesome times.**

Many Bible commentaries contain long discussions about which "decree" is intended here. There are at least four decrees concerning the rebuilding of Jerusalem recorded in Scripture:

- (1) the decree of Cyrus to rebuild the temple about 538 B.C. (2 Ch 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4; 6:1-5) which is a remarkable fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 44:28. **"Who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, And he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, 'You shall be built,' And to the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.' ',"**
- (2) the decree of Darius confirming the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 6:6-12);
- (3) the decree of Artaxerxes about 457 B.C. (Ezra 7:11-26);
- (4) the decree of Artaxerxes about 445 B.C. given to Nehemiah authorizing the rebuilding of the city and its wall (Neh 2:1-8).

The first three decrees seem to only authorize the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. The city itself mostly lies in ruins until the decree of Artaxerxes allowing Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem to supervise the rebuilding of the city walls. This decree seems to fit closest with the description in verse 25 saying **"The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times."**

We certainly know from Nehemiah's own account that the rebuilding took place in a time of trouble. So we have a time frame for the beginning of the 490 years.

B. The first seven sevens (v. 25)

You will note that the 70 "seven" of years is broken down into two smaller segments: seven weeks of 49 years and 62 weeks of 434 years. The first 49 years take us from Nehemiah's day to Malachi's prophecy. During this time the city was rebuilt and the Old Testament was completed, approximately 395 BC.

C. The next 62 sevens (v. 25)

The next 62 sevens, or 434 years, take us to the time of the ministry of Christ. Verse 25 says, **"Until Messiah the Prince."**

It is at this point that an important question arises. How precisely should this prophecy be dated? It is clear that Christ (the Messiah or "Anointed One, the Prince") appears sometime near the end of the 69 weeks of years. The first phrase of verse 26 gives us an important clue about the dating: **"And after the**

sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself.” (Daniel 9:26a).

This is crucial because it means that Christ will be born sometime near the end of the 69 weeks but will cut off “after” the 69th week has ended. I believe this clearly refers to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. As Isaiah had prophesied about the Messiah in Isaiah 53:8, **“He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.”**

Jesus died and appeared to have come to nothing. Until He was raised from the dead on the third day.

Now back to the timing of all this. Is there a way to precisely nail this down? About 120 years ago a man named Sir Robert Anderson exhaustively investigated this prophecy and concluded, on the basis of intricate calculations, that the words of Daniel 9 had been fulfilled with remarkable accuracy. He concluded that the 69th year ended on the exact day Jesus made his Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem just a few days before his crucifixion.

In fairness it should be mentioned that finding exact dates in ancient history can be very difficult and there are other ways to figure the first 69 weeks of years. However, all the various theories clearly demonstrate that the 483 years end sometime during the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ in the first century A.D.

The rest of the verse describes other significant event that occurs after the 69th week, the destruction of Jerusalem:

**And the people of the prince who is to come
Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.
The end of it shall be with a flood,
And till the end of the war desolations are determined. (Dan. 7:26b)**

We don’t have to guess the identity of **“the people of prince who is to come.”** It was the Romans under Titus in 70 A.D. that crushed the Jewish revolt that had begun about four years earlier. They destroyed the city of Jerusalem and burned the temple. So we can clearly identify the people of the prince to come, who then is this **“prince who is to come”**?

Daniel was told about this prince in Chapter 7. He is the little horn who arises out of the final stage of Rome, fourth Gentile kingdom. He is the one who will be destroyed when the Son of Man comes to establish His kingdom on the earth. His character and the kinds of things he does are further described in chapter 8 as the little horn of Antiochus Epiphanes points us to the final fulfillment of this **“prince that shall come.”**

We will see that he is also described as the willful king in Daniel 11. In the New Testament he is the “man of sin” of 2 Thessalonians 2. He is the beast of Revelation 13 and the Antichrist of 1 John. He will be the last, worst persecutor of the Jews and believers in Christ.

III. The 70th “Seven”

So far we have accounted for 69 of the 70 “weeks” of years. Verses 25-26 discuss the first 483 years God has ordained for Israel. But what about the last “week” of seven years? Evidently it must be very important because Gabriel singles it out for special discussion in verse 27.

**27 Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week;
But in the middle of the week
He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.
And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate,
Even until the consummation, which is determined,
Is poured out on the desolate."**

The final seven years commences with a covenant made by the prince who shall come. This covenant seems to put men at ease and give them a false sense of confidence and security. In the middle of this time period, however, the “prince” breaks his covenant, putting a stop to the regular sacrifices and offerings. This prince comes “on the wing of abominations” and makes everything he comes into contact with desolate. He will bring about destruction. This destruction comes about by divine permission because it is a part of the divine plan.

In the fewest words possible, Daniel speaks of the sudden destruction of this evil prince. It is a destruction that has been divinely decreed. It is a complete destruction. The “one who makes desolate” is suddenly destroyed.

I would find it hard to confirm that this prophecy has yet taken place in history. And if the first 69 sevens have been fulfilled in this very precise way, then it is reasonable to believe that the final seven years will also be fulfilled in a similar way.

If this interpretation is correct (and certainly not all bible scholars agree on this) then this means there is a significant time between the 69th and 70th weeks, a “gap” that is already about 2000 years long. I don’t think we should be surprised at this since the text itself mentions two events that happen between the 69th and 70th weeks. First, the Messiah must be “cut off,” and second, Jerusalem will be destroyed by the Roman army. The very end of verse 26 says that wars will continue until the end, which seems to imply a long and undefined period.

Where is the church in all of this? From Daniel’s point of view, as in much of the Old Testament, the church is hidden. It falls in the “gap.” Since this prophecy is about the future of the Jewish people, the church is not seen here.

Paul says in Romans 11 that the wild olive branch (the Gentiles) are being grafted into the tree of God’s eternal promise. This has happened because of Israel’s unbelief, but in the end their national blindness will be lifted and all Israel will be saved. The natural olive tree (Israel) will resume its rightful place. All the promises of verse 24 will be completely fulfilled.

This final verse is important because it gives us the framework for the events of the Last Days. The seven-year tribulation wasn't invented by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins or by Hal Lindsey. It comes straight from Daniel 9:27.

From this passage a number of truths emerge:

A) God is sovereign over all the details of history.

Gabriel's words tell us that all history is in God's hands. Nothing happens by accident and all things work together to fulfill the divine purpose God has ordained.

We should not be surprised when we hear of wars in many places. Gabriel said that until the end "**desolations are determined.**" This means that God has ordained the unsettled nature of this present age. There can be no lasting peace until the Prince of Peace Himself returns. This should not lead to pessimism nor should it cause us to give up our efforts to be peacemakers, but it ought keep us from putting our hope and trust in the kingdoms of men.

B) God's Holy Word is absolutely true in every detail.

The critics have attacked this passage but they cannot answer it. Today it stands as a rock upon which all the naturalistic theories must eventually be broken. Most of it has literally been fulfilled. This demonstrates that the Bible is indeed the inspired, inerrant Word of God. And it gives us faith to believe that what has not yet been fulfilled will happen just as the angel predicted 2500 years ago.

Let the unbelievers scoff if they will. The Bible stands. Every word is true because every word comes from God.

E) Knowing Jesus Christ is the most important thing.

This week I read the story of Leopold Cohn who was born in the Orthodox Jewish community of Brezeczna, Hungary in 1862. When he was seven both his parents died and he was left to fend for himself. Feeling a call from God, he set out to become a rabbi and graduated with high marks from the Talmudic academy at the age of 18. Soon he was married and in keeping with the custom of the time moved into the home of his wife's parents. This allowed him a great deal of free time to study the Torah (what we call the Old Testament) and the Talmud, the collected writings of leading rabbis commenting on the Torah.

Every morning he repeated the 12th article of the Jewish creed: "I believe with a perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah, and though he tarry, yet will I wait daily for his coming." As he studied one question burned itself into his mind. "Why does the Messiah tarry? Why has he not come to deliver his people?" The answers he found did not satisfy his mind or his heart. While reading the Talmud, he discovered that other rabbis before him had wrestled with this same question. As he continued to study he realized that the Messiah should have come long ago. Could it be that God had not kept his promise? He decided to study the words of the Hebrew prophets for himself, to see what they said about the coming of Messiah. He paid particular attention to Daniel's prophecy of the "70

weeks” in Daniel 9:24-27. There he discovered truth he had never seen before. It seemed plain to him that Daniel predicted the coming of Messiah some 400-500 years after the prophecy was given. But that was 2500 years ago and the rabbis said that Messiah had not yet come. How could he resolve this contradiction?

He took it upon himself to visit with an older rabbi who served as a kind of mentor. When he posed the question, the older man advised him to drop the subject altogether or he might lose his rabbinical career. Such questions were not to be asked. The older man said he could not discuss the matter without losing his own job. Perhaps, he suggested, Leopold Cohn should go to New York where people were more free to discuss such forbidden topics. Thus emboldened, Leopold Cohn left his family behind and traveled to New York in search of the truth about the Messiah.

Soon after he arrived in 1892 the young rabbi passed by a church in a Jewish section of the city. A small sign advertised “Meetings for Jews.” What could that mean? There he met a Jew like himself, a man also trained in the Talmud. The minister gave Leopold Cohn a copy of the New Testament and urged him to read it. He did so, starting at 11:00 in the morning and finishing at 1:00 a.m. the next day. Although he did not understand everything, he came to the conclusion that Jesus Christ was indeed the promised Messiah. He was the one of whom Daniel had written, the one whose coming was predicted hundreds of years earlier. Not long after that he trusted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

Little did he know the sorrow and travail that would come to him because of his act of faith. He would face years of persecution, hatred, and vicious attacks from his Jewish brethren who felt he had betrayed their ancient faith. Eventually Leopold Cohn set up a storefront mission in the Brownsville section of New York. For the former rabbi life itself had but one purpose—to tell others that the Messiah had already come and that his name is the Lord Jesus Christ. That little mission eventually became the American Board of Missions to the Jews. Later the name was changed to Chosen People Ministries. Many years later a man named Moise Rosen left that ministry to form Jews for Jesus.

The most important thing in the world is knowing Jesus Christ. If you don’t know him, you have missed the very reason for your own existence. He alone is the way to life. He is the promised Messiah of Israel and the Savior of all those who trust in Him.

Do you know him? One day (perhaps not long from now) He will return. Are you ready to meet him? Are you sure? Run to the cross. Lay all your sins on Jesus. He alone can meet your deepest needs. He alone can forgive your sin.

He is the One of whom Daniel spoke. He is the fulfillment of the promises God made in the Old Testament. In the words of the psalmist, taste and see that the Lord is good. Come to Christ, and as you come, He will come to you.