

Daniel 9

The Seventy Weeks — Daniel 9:24–27

From W. Kelly's *Writings on Prophecy*

Present Truth Publishers, 2001

The Setting: Daniel's Prayer and Gabriel's Answer

The ninth chapter of Daniel is one of the most remarkable and instructive in the whole of the Old Testament. It opens with Daniel's prayer of confession on behalf of his people, followed by the angel Gabriel's communication of the great prophecy of the "seventy weeks." This chapter is transitional, the weeks being in a measure enigmatic; the rest plain language with figures interspersed, as in all the interpretations. The peculiarity of Dan. 11 and 12, like Dan. 9, is in leaving symbolic form for the language of every day on historical matters.

Before examining the prophecy itself, it is important to notice the occasion which gave rise to it. Daniel had been reading the prophecy of Jeremiah, and had understood that seventy years were to be accomplished in the desolations of Jerusalem. He then set himself to seek God in prayer and supplication, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes, confessing the sins of his people and pleading for their restoration. While he was yet speaking in prayer, the angel Gabriel came to him and gave him "skill and understanding," and delivered the great prophecy.

Know therefore and understand that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate {Dan. 9:25-27}.

The Seventy Weeks: Their Division and Meaning

The most central unquestionable prophecy lies in the connection of the destruction of the temple and city with their great sin, the cutting off of Messiah, and that the destruction should be by the people of "the prince that shall come." Now this can only be Rome and the Roman armies under Titus; for they it was who destroyed the city and the sanctuary, long after the Persians and the Greeks had given way to their iron power.

The seventy weeks are divided into three unequal portions. First, seven weeks, or forty-nine years, from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem to a notable epoch in the restoration. Secondly, sixty-two weeks, or four hundred and thirty-four years, from that epoch to Messiah the Prince. Thirdly, one week, the seventieth, which stands apart from all the rest, and is the subject of the last verse.

The first two divisions, seven and sixty-two weeks, make sixty-nine weeks in all, or four hundred and eighty-three years, from the commandment to Messiah the Prince. After the sixty-two weeks -- that is, at the end of the sixty-nine weeks, or four hundred and eighty-three years from the commandment -- Messiah was to be cut off. This was fulfilled in the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is agreed that the central unmistakable prophecy lies in the connection of the destruction of the temple and city with their great sin, the cutting off of Messiah, and that the destruction should be by the people of "the prince that shall come." The death of Messiah broke the chain; but that closing link has yet to be joined, and all will be fulfilled in due season.

The Gap: From Messiah's Death to the Seventieth Week

After the sixty-nine weeks there is an interval, not defined in length, during which two things happened or are to happen: first, the cutting off of Messiah;

secondly, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Roman armies. Both of these have been historically fulfilled -- the first in the crucifixion, the second in the siege of Jerusalem by Titus in A.D. 70.

But there is a gap, of undefined and indefinite length, between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth week. The Roman armies under Titus destroyed the city and the sanctuary in A.D. 70; but the seventieth week has not yet begun. We are now in that gap, which has already extended for nearly two thousand years. It is in this gap that the present dispensation of grace lies, the calling of the church, the preaching of the gospel to all nations.

It is to be well noted that the prophecy does not say that the seventy weeks are continuous. There may be and there must be an interval between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth week. The cutting off of Messiah, and the destruction of the city and the temple by the Roman people, are events that must take place after the sixty-ninth week but before the seventieth. This is confirmed by the whole analogy of prophecy. The Old Testament prophets often spoke of the first and second advents of Christ in close succession, without intimating the long interval between them -- as when Isaiah in ch. 61:1, 2 speaks of preaching the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God, which our Lord showed, in Luke 4:17-21, to be separated by the whole of the present dispensation.

Hence it is plain that, if we suppose a godly Jew of that age to have understood the prophecy of the seventy weeks, he could not expect Messiah to come and be cut off till the expiry of nearly five hundred years. Ignorance might seek the living among the dead, but no believer with intelligence of this divine prediction could possibly look for the arrival and cutting off of the Christ previously to the revealed epoch. It would have been faith in him to have said, "I expect the Messiah after so many years, not before; for so hath the mouth of Jehovah spoken."

The Seventieth Week: The Final Crisis

The seventieth week is yet future. It will begin when "the prince that shall come" -- a Roman prince, the head of the revived Roman empire -- shall confirm a covenant with "the many" -the apostate mass of the Jewish people -- for one week of seven years. In the midst of this week, after three and a half years, he will break his covenant, causing the sacrifice and oblation to cease. Then will follow the abomination of desolation, which our Lord referred to in Matt. 24:15 as yet future, spoken of by Daniel the prophet.

The great desire of Titus, as everybody who knows history must be aware, was to spare the temple; but, as the well-known historian of the Jews tells us, a Roman soldier, in defiance of the orders of his general, threw in the fatal brand. Yet God so ordered it that the prediction was literally fulfilled. This, however, was not the great and final desolation. There is to be yet a worse one, even the abomination of desolation to be set up in the holy place at the close of this age. Our Lord refers to this as yet future when He was on earth.

The prophecy of the seventy weeks is thus the key to the whole prophetic scheme. It shows us that there is a gap between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth week, which gap is the present dispensation; and it shows us that the seventieth week is yet to come, bringing with it the final crisis of Jewish and Gentile history alike, terminating in the second advent of Christ in power and glory. The Roman empire is to be revived; a covenant is to be made and broken; the abomination of desolation is to be set up; great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world is to come; and then the Son of man shall come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

The Attitude of the Church: Unconnected with the Times and Seasons

With the church, on the contrary, the case is wholly different. Her hope is not the times of restitution of all things, but to be with the Lord in heaven as His bride: and as her hope is unearthly, so is it wholly unconnected with the times and seasons which characterised the expectations of Israel. Not that we are ignorant of these dates and epochs; but we know perfectly that the day of Jehovah so comes as a thief in the night -- a day of destruction whence there is no escape. But we are not in darkness that the day should overtake us as a thief. We are already children of that day, and when the day arrives we shall come with the Sun of righteousness who ushers it in. We shall have been with Him before the day breaks; for we know Him as the bright, the Morning Star, and the morning star He will give to him that overcomes.

Certain times and seasons, we are quite aware, must precede the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1). Thus we know that one week remains out of the seventy of Dan. 9, when the prince that shall come -- a Roman prince -- shall confirm covenant with the mass of the Jews for seven years. But, like another traitor and son of perdition, he shall put forth his hands against such as be at peace with him; he shall break his covenant (Psa. 55:20). The covenant with death shall be disannulled (Isa. 28). "In the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease." This is followed by the abomination of desolation for the allotted term, "even until the consummation." "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matt. 24:21).

Supplementary Notes

Short entries from Part Six: Miscellaneous Texts and Subjects, preserved word-for-word.

Translation of Daniel 9:26, 27

Miscellaneous Texts and Subjects, p. 380

There need be no hesitation in accepting the general sense of the A. V., modified by the Revisers. The article of reference is due to "sixty-two weeks," after which Messiah was to be cut off and "have nothing," as the Genevese E. V. had already rightly said. But the force of the next clause is utterly missed by Dr. R. Young. It really means, "And the people of the prince that shall come [in contrast with Messiah the Prince already come and cut off] shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood [or overflow], and even to the end war -- desolations determined. And he [the coming prince] shall confirm a covenant with the many [the apostate mass of the Jew] for one week; and in the midst of the week he shall cause sacrifice and oblation to cease; and because of sheltering [lit. wing of] abominations [or idols] a desolator, [shall be], even until the consumption and that determined shall be poured out upon the desolate."

So in fact the Roman people (not yet their coming prince) did come, and destroy the city and the temple [or holy place], followed by a flood of desolations on the guilty people and on Jerusalem for ages. But the time hastens, when the thread must be resumed and the last or postponed week of the 70 be accomplished. Then the coming Roman prince, in his incipient form, shall confirm covenant with the ungodly majority of the Jews, "the many," but break it by putting down their worship, and protecting idolatry and the Antichrist as we know from elsewhere. This will bring on the closing scenes of the Assyrian, or king of the north (Isa. 10, 28, 29; Dan. 11:40-45), "the desolator"; and the last word of predicted judgment will be accomplished on Jerusalem. The death of Messiah broke the chain; but that closing link has yet to be joined, and all will be fulfilled in due season. The attempt to foist in the gospel is baseless.

The Bible Treasury 20:255, 256.

Daniel 9:27

Miscellaneous Texts and Subjects, p. 381

I believe that it is impossible legitimately to connect the death of the Messiah with the Covenant confirmed with the mass, or many, for one week (i.e. 7 years) in this passage; and that for several reasons. First, the Messiah was already regarded as "cut off" at the close of a previous division of the weeks, viz. after the first $7 + 62 = 69$ weeks = 483 years. Secondly, the disastrous end of the city and the sanctuary is supposed to have come before the seventieth week begins. After the Messiah was cut off and before the last week, there is an interval of indefinite length, filled up by the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and a course of war and desolation which is not yet terminated. Thirdly, after all this, comes the last or seventieth week, which has to do with Antichrist as clearly as the first 69 weeks bring us down to Christ's death, the interruption of the chain being left room for, and supplied in the latter part of verse 26. Fourthly, it is clear that when the Messiah has been cut off, another personage is spoken of as "the prince that shall come," whom it is absurd to confound with the Messiah, because it is His people who ravage the Jewish city and sanctuary: that is, it is a Roman prince, and not the promised Head of Israel. Fifthly, as this future prince of the Romans is the last person spoken of, it is most natural to consider that verse 27 refers to him, and not to the slain Messiah. Sixthly, this is remarkably strengthened by the time for which the covenant is made, namely, for seven years, which has, in my opinion, no sense if applied to anything founded on the Lord's death, but exactly coincides with the two periods of 1,260 days (Rev. 11) and 42 months (Rev. 13), during which the Roman beast acts variously in the Apocalypse. Seventhly, it is yet more fortified by the additional fact that, when half the time of this Covenant expires, "He shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease," just as might be gathered from Rev. 11 and other Scriptures.

Christian Annotator 4:71 (1857).

The Bible Treasury, New Series.