

Daniel 9:24-25

Introduction

This morning, we come to a passage in Scripture that's been very difficult for Christians to interpret and understand – “Daniel’s seventy weeks.” We may never come to any absolute certainty about some of the details (even some of the more significant details), but we can certainly see and understand the overall big picture. We can come to rejoice and be strengthened in the encouragement that this passage holds for us. Remember how this chapter started out:

I. Daniel 9:1–2 — In the first year of Darius... I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, **namely, seventy years.**

The first thing we should see, here, is that there’s a divine timetable for all of the events in this world – especially as these events are related to God’s saving purposes in this world. On the one hand, this divine timetable is fixed. It can never be altered or changed – certainly not by you or me or by any other human being. On the other hand, this doesn’t lead us to fatalism; it’s rather a call to earnest prayer. When Daniel perceived in the books the number of years that God had unchangeably decreed, he prayed (cf. 9:3). The sovereignty of God, rightly understood, is what frees us to pray earnestly with joy and confidence and hope. In other words, God didn’t fix the seventy years because He knew ahead of time that Daniel would start praying at about the seventy-year mark. God fixed the seventy years, and He also ordained that His servant Daniel should pray and that He would *answer* those prayers (in part) according to His revealed will and promises. And so we also pray earnestly *because* we know that God is sovereign.

Remember the symbolism of that number, “seventy.” God had warned that if His people failed to give the land its Sabbath rests once every seven years, He would enforce that Sabbath rest for the land by removing the people from out of the land and sending them into exile (Lev. 26:34-35). So we read in 2 Chronicles:

➤ 2 Chronicles 36:20–21 — [Nebuchadnezzar] took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him... **until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.**

The point isn’t that Israel had skipped exactly 70 of the approximately 120 sabbath years since the days of Moses. The point is that the number seventy represents the completeness of this Sabbath rest for the land and therefore the completeness of Israel’s exile from the land.¹

Now we also remember that the original goal of creation was for Adam and Eve to one day enter into God’s own eternal Sabbath rest (cf. Gen. 2:1-3; Heb. 3:7-4:13). It was as a constant reminder of this creation goal that Israel’s entire calendar was built around the concept of *sabbat* (Sabbath). The week was structured around the Sabbath, the annual festivals were built around the Sabbath, and even the passing years were oriented around “Sabbath.” Every seventh

¹ Both “seven” and “ten” were numbers representing fullness and completeness. In the same way, “seventy,” as “seven tens” or “ten sevens” represents completeness.

year was a Sabbath year and then every *seventh Sabbath year*—or every seven times seven years—was crowned by the most wonderful and joyful “Sabbath” of all, the year of Jubilee. This was the year that “liberty” was “proclaimed” throughout the land. The Jubilee year began on the Day of Atonement and it was marked by the sounding of a loud trumpet throughout all the land. Are you seeing here, again, a picture of God’s sovereignty over time? Israel’s calendar was always pointing them to that greater and ultimate redemptive calendar, which included even the seventy years of exile – a calendar that, though it might be hidden from them, was still fixed and determined in the eternal and sovereign counsels of God. It’s only in light of this *connection* between Israel’s religious calendar and God’s timetable for all of redemptive history that we can rightly understand not only the “seventy years” of Israel’s exile in Babylon, but also the “seventy weeks” or the “seventy sevens” that are made known to Daniel in answer to his prayer.

Remember that when Daniel prays for the end of exile, he’s praying for more than just a return to the land – to life as it was before. He’s praying for the spiritual renewal and re-creation of God’s people – for the forgiveness of all their sins and the writing of God’s laws upon their hearts. He’s praying for the New Covenant. Daniel was looking for all these things to be fulfilled after the “seventy years” of Israel’s exile. “Delay not!” Daniel had prayed. But now, in answer to his prayer, God sends the angel Gabriel with this message:

II. Daniel 9:24 — **Seventy sevens** 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.

Whatever may be in the immediate future for Daniel’s people and for Jerusalem, the things that Daniel longs for the most—the spiritual gathering and renewing of God’s people—will still be “delayed.” Israel’s return to the land *after seventy years* will only be the preparation for, and a foreshadowing of, that true gathering in of all God’s sheep not after seventy years, but after *seventy “sevens.”*

Now remember, this “seventy sevens” isn’t just something picked out of thin air. We can’t understand “seventy sevens” without understanding Israel’s calendar.² Seventy sevens equals 490, so *if* we were to think of 490 *years*, that would be the equivalent of *ten* Jubilees. That’s *ten* Jubilee cycles (*ten* times 49) culminating in what?—Culminating in the true and everlasting Jubilee and Sabbath rest of God’s people – the original goal of creation.

Do you see how Israel’s **religious calendar** is being “idealized” here and even expanded to “cosmic” proportions (“seventy sevens”) as a way of *picturing* a far greater and more ultimate **redemptive calendar** for accomplishing the salvation of God’s people? And can you see, in turn, what this must mean? God is symbolically revealing the truth and the reality of this calendar—of this divine timetable that He has fixed by His own authority—*without* actually giving to Daniel the calendar itself. In other words, the point of revealing “seventy sevens” is not so Daniel can calculate days and years and predict the date of Messiah’s arrival. There was no one in the years just before Christ’s birth who could have read Daniel chapter nine and then predicted ahead of time the very year that He would be born or that he would begin His public ministry. But today,

² The Hebrew reads “Sevens seventy,” showing that the emphasis is on the idea of “sevens” and therefore on the relationship to Israel’s calendar.

there are many who believe that this is exactly what *we* could have done. Today, there are many well-meaning attempts to calculate years and make them fit with what we know of history. And yet, I haven't personally found any of these attempts convincing. Everywhere else in the Bible this Hebrew word for "seven" (*sa-buah*) always refers to a week of seven *days* (cf. Gen. 29:27-28; Exod. 34:22; Lev. 12:5; Num. 28:26; Deut. 16:9-10, 16; 2 Chron. 8:13; Jer. 5:24; Ezek. 45:21; Dan. 10:2, 3). Only we know that here in Daniel 9 the point can't be literal days or weeks because that would mean all these things were fulfilled in less than two years. It's for this reason, and in light of many of the connections we've just been making, that many people assume this is the one place in all of Scripture where *sa-buah* is referring to seven literal *years*. Only, the text never says "years." Gabriel could easily have said "seventy weeks of years" – but he doesn't (cf. "a week of days" in Ezek. 45:21 and "seven sabbaths of years" in Lev. 25:8). He says only "seventy weeks"—or "seventy sevens"—that's all. The reason, I believe, is that this was not meant to be taken as a timescale that Daniel could calculate literally, but rather as a symbolic representation (rooted in Israel's religious calendar) of a redemptive calendar that was fully known only to God.

The point of these "seventy sevens" was not to allow Daniel to read the calendar but rather to assure Daniel that this redemptive calendar still existed and that in spite of what might feel like "delay," all was still progressing according to plan – according to God's sovereign timetable. So Gabriel goes on to say to Daniel:

III. Daniel 9:25 — Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven sevens, and sixty-two sevens [when] [Jerusalem] shall be built again with square and moat, but in a troubled time.

The first question we need to ask is, When, exactly, did this "word" [*da-bar*] go out to restore and build Jerusalem? Those who believe we need to be calculating exact numbers of years are forced to look for the most obscure and unlikely "start dates" (long after Daniel was already dead³) in order to somehow make 490 years end at the birth of Christ or at His baptism. But the reality is that I believe the Bible is very clear about the true start date.

In verse 23 Gabriel says to Daniel that "a word [*da-bar*] went out" and that he has come to tell it to Daniel. The "word," here, is the word that *God* has spoken. So also in verse 25 the "word" that "goes out" to restore and build Jerusalem is first of all the sovereign "word" and decree not of any man, but of God. But where in history do we see the evidence of this word going out from God? The most obvious and natural answer is in the very year that Daniel prayed this prayer (cf. 1:21). It was in the year 538 BC, in the first year of Cyrus (or Darius) the king of Persia (cf. Dan. 9:1-2), that the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to make this proclamation:

➤ Ezra 1:2–3 (cf. 2 Chron. 36:22-23) — Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven... has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which

³ It would seem natural to assume that Daniel himself would live to see the "start" of this portion of God's redemptive calendar. This would have been an essential part of the "comfort" intended for Daniel and would reflect the fact that he was "greatly loved" (9:20-23).

is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem.

Some people say this can't be the "word" that went out to restore and build Jerusalem because Cyrus only mentions rebuilding the temple – not rebuilding the city. But we can't separate, like this, between the temple and the city. To begin rebuilding the temple *was* to begin rebuilding the city. Notice how Cyrus refers to the "house *at Jerusalem*," commissions the people to "go up to *Jerusalem*," and then mentions the "God who is *in Jerusalem*." The temple was the heart of the city. So we read in Isaiah chapters 44 and 45:

➤ Isaiah 44:28; 45:13 — I am the Lord... **who says** of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose"; **saying** of Jerusalem, "She shall be built," and of the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid" ... I have stirred him up in righteousness, and I will make all his ways level; he shall build my city and set my exiles free.⁴

The most obvious and biblical "starting point" for these "seventy sevens" is the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia in 538 BC when he issued a decree allowing the Jews to return and begin rebuilding the temple and their holy city.

IV. Daniel 9:25 — Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven sevens, and sixty-two sevens [when] it [Jerusalem] shall be built again with square and moat, but in a troubled time.⁵

I'm not going to go into all of the possible ways to translate and interpret this verse, but what I do want to do is give you the most important assumptions that are guiding me along the way.

The first of these assumptions—which we've seen demonstrated repeatedly over the last five weeks—is that these "seventy sevens" have all been fulfilled already in the birth of Christ and His death, burial, and resurrection, and His ascension to sit at the right hand of God. We're not still waiting for the "seventy sevens" to be concluded at the second coming of Christ. Though there is still a very important "not yet," the "seventy sevens" are "formally" fulfilled "*already*."⁶

The second main assumption I make (and which has also been demonstrated repeatedly over the last five weeks) is that the overarching theme of these "seventy sevens" is Christ, God's Anointed, and the final and full salvation that he has accomplished (cf. 9:3-19, 24). This will also be an essential guide for us in our interpretation.

So when I see here in verse 25 "an anointed one," my first and natural assumption is that this "anointed one"—this *ma-siah*, messiah—must be Jesus Christ. I see this "anointed one" as the

⁴ "Josephus reports the contents of Cyrus's letter as follows, 'To those among the Jews dwelling in my country, who so wished, I have given permission to return to their native land and to rebuild the city and build the temple...'" (Greidanus)

⁵ This translation seeks to preserve the force of the *athnach* (disjunctive accent) placed under "seven sevens" by the Masoretic scribes (cf. Steinmann).

⁶ This eliminates Steinmann's translation and interpretation of this verse since he separates between the seven sevens and the sixty-two sevens (cf. ESV; NASB contra NASB; NIV; HCSB; NET; NCV; ASV; NLT; KJV; NKJV) and says that it was the seven sevens that ended at the time of Christ.

same “anointed one” in verse 26 who is “cut off.” I also see this “anointed one” in light of the “anointing” of “a most holy” in verse 24; therefore, I assume that though this anointed one may be an anointed *king*, he must also be an anointed *priest*. Gabriel refers to this personage as *both* “an anointed one” *and* “a prince” – “an anointed one, a prince.”⁷ There’s a solemnness and a grandness here that I believe forbids us from seeing this individual “fulfilled” in anyone other than Jesus. The Hebrew word for “prince” (or “leader”/“ruler”) often refers to the king whom God appointed to rule for Him over His people (17 x’s).

- 2 Samuel 5:2 — The LORD said to [David], “You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.”
- 2 Samuel 7:8 — Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel.

So it seems that what we have here is the office of *priest* and the office of *king*—“an anointed one, a prince”—joined together in the same person. And, of course, we know this can only be fulfilled in Christ.⁸ When Uzziah the king dared to enter the temple to burn incense on the altar, God struck him with leprosy (cf. 2 Chron. 26:16-21). So what an amazing thing to read in the Psalms and then in Zechariah:

- Psalms 110:1–2, 4 — The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! ... The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”
- Zechariah 6:13 — It is he who shall build the temple of the LORD and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

In Christ we see both our great High Priest (who offered Himself up for us and now intercedes for us) and our King (who rules over us and protects us) in the self-same person—our beautiful Savior.

So now let’s read again: “Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem [Cyrus’ decree in 538 BC] to an anointed one, a prince [the Messiah], there shall be seven sevens, and sixty-two sevens [when] [Jerusalem] shall be [or, shall have been⁹] built again with square and moat, but in a troubled time. In other words, from the going out of the word in 538 BC to the coming of the Messiah there would be a *total* of 69 sevens. The city of Jerusalem would be built again and completed by the end of the first seven sevens and would then continue as a city for the next 62 sevens, though in a troubled time. The “troubled time” could refer to the seven sevens and the time of building (cf. Nehemiah), but I think it’s more likely that it refers to the 62 sevens when the city was already rebuilt but was

⁷ This should not be translated “an anointed prince.” If that was the meaning, “prince” should come first in the Hebrew with the noun “anointed one” in apposition to “prince” (a prince, an anointed one; cf. Lev. 4:3, 5, 16).

⁸ This eliminates the interpretation of Greidanus who also separates between the seven sevens and the sixty-two sevens, but argues that the seven sevens were most likely fulfilled with the arrival of Ezra, a priestly leader in Jerusalem.

⁹ Cf. Steinmann

still small and insignificant and often under foreign rule and oppression (cf. Persians, Greeks, Romans).

Now, from Cyrus' decree in 538 BC to the completion of the walls of Jerusalem under Nehemiah in 444 BC was 94 years. We have to take the "seven sevens" at least this far (to the completion of Jerusalem's walls) because Gabriel mentions "square and moat" – which is just an expression for an inhabited and fortified city. The "squares" represent the city being populated with houses and people and the "moat" (or "ditch") represents a city's defensive fortifications (such as gates, and towers, and walls). But now *why* is it that these 94 years (at least) are symbolically represented as "seven sevens" (which, if we were interpreting literally, would really only be forty-nine years)? Remember how the calendar that God gave to Israel was always designed to point them to that far greater and more ultimate redemptive calendar that only God sees and knows. And then remember that what we have here in Daniel chapter nine is the true "fulfillment" of Israel's calendar. What we have here in Daniel chapter nine is the religious calendar that God gave to Israel being "idealized" and even expanded to "cosmic" proportions ("seventy sevens"; ten jubilee cycles) as a beautiful way of picturing for us that far greater redemptive calendar that culminates in Christ – our Jubilee, and our Sabbath rest. So what does "seven sevens" remind us of? It reminds us of the seven weeks (or "sabbaths") of years that was *one* Jubilee cycle on Israel's calendar.

- Leviticus 25:8–11 — You shall count seven weeks [lit. "sabbaths"] of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years. Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you.

So the first period of about 95 years—from the word that went out in the first year of Cyrus to the accomplishing of this word under Nehemiah—is symbolically represented to Daniel as "seven sevens" because the completion of the city with "square and moat" would truly be a sort of "shadowy" redemptive Jubilee for all God's people. In the book of Nehemiah, the completion of Jerusalem's wall (Neh. 6:15-16) is accompanied by a spiritual renewal of the people with "great rejoicing" (Neh. 8:12; cf. 8:1-12; 9:1-10:39), by the celebration of the Feast of Booths with "very great rejoicing" (Neh. 8:17; cf. 8:13-18), by more people gladly relocating to live in Jerusalem (Neh. 11:2; cf. 7:4; 11:1-24) and finally by the dedication of the wall itself with "great joy" (12:27-43). Listen to the description of this dedication in Nehemiah chapter twelve:

- Nehemiah 12:27 — At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres.

We learn that there were two choirs (Neh. 12:31-40) and that there were priests blowing trumpets (Neh. 12:41), and in the end we read:

- Nehemiah 12:43 — They offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.

This celebration of the rebuilding of Jerusalem “with square and moat” may come 95 years after the decree of Cyrus, but can you see, now, how appropriate it is that these 95 years should be pictured as “seven sevens” culminating in that wonderful and joyful—though still shadowy—Jubilee of God’s people? But why still “shadowy”? Because this first Jubilee, as joyful as it was, would be followed not by Messiah’s kingdom, but rather by 62 more “sevens” of “troubled times.” And what’s the symbolic meaning of 62 sevens? There is no symbolic meaning, except that this is the number of sevens that comes *between* the *seventh* seven (a single Jubilee cycle that culminates in Jerusalem rebuilt with square and moat) and the *seventieth* seven, the equivalent of ten Jubilee cycles that culminate in the Messiah Himself who *is* our true and ultimate Jubilee and Sabbath rest.

Conclusion

We’ll come back next week to look at the 70th seven, but for right now, what is it that we learn from all of these “sevens”? The point is not to confuse us with riddles or challenge us to contests of calculating numbers and years. The point is to encourage us and strengthen us with the glory and the beauty and the unchangeable certainty of God’s redemptive calendar (“seventy sevens are *decreed*”). The point of these “seventy sevens” was not to allow Daniel to read the dates on the calendar but rather to assure Daniel that in spite of what might feel like “obstacles” and “delay,” all was still progressing according to plan – according to God’s sovereign timetable. No matter how long the “delay” might feel to Daniel, God will never, ever be late in the accomplishing of His saving purposes.

When Jesus came, He came proclaiming these words:

- Mark 1:15 — **The time is fulfilled**, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.

The Apostle Paul writes:

- Galatians 4:4 — When the **fullness of time** had come, God sent forth his Son...
- Ephesians 1:9–10 — [God made] known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for **the fullness of time**...

“Seventy sevens.” It’s a most beautiful way of picturing for us the ushering in of this “fullness of time” and also of reminding us that God’s redemptive calendar has never been and never can be or will be frustrated or derailed. If God was sovereign over time before the seventy sevens were fulfilled, how much more can we know that He is sovereign over time today when Christ is now ruling and reigning at His right hand. And it’s this wonderful good news that not only gives us perfect peace in whatever times God has called us to live, but that also frees us—and motivates us!—to earnestly *pray*, even as Daniel also *prayed*: “Your kingdom *come*, your will *be done*, on

earth as it is in heaven” (Mat. 6:10). “O Lord... *delay not.*” (Dan. 9:19) Even so, “*Come, Lord Jesus!*” (Rev. 22:20)

“Seventy Sevens”

Daniel 9:24-27

