

## Daniel and the 70 Times Seven

For all the obscurity in it, Daniel 9:24-27 gives one of the clearest pictures of Christ in the whole Old Testament. But to understand it correctly we must examine it in its context, both historically and scripturally. And, specifically, we must ask why God structured this revelation in a pattern of sevens.

The events recorded in Daniel 9 took place at the end of the Babylonian captivity. From his study of the prophet Jeremiah, Daniel knew that the exile had come to its completion: "In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last 70 years." (Daniel 9:2)

It had begun back in 606/5 BC when a few members of the Jewish nobility, including Daniel, had been taken to Babylon as surety that Judah would remain a vassal of King Nebuchadnezzar. In the course of rebellions and further deportations, Jeremiah the prophet wrote to the captives and told them to settle down in Babylon and be prepared to live out their lives there:

"This is what the LORD says: 'When 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.'" (Jeremiah 29:10)

Why did the Lord tell Jeremiah that the captivity would last 70 years? The answer to this is recorded in 2 Chronicles 36. There we find that the reason was Judah's failure to keep God's covenant, particularly the stipulations regarding the Sabbath years: "The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the 70 years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah." (2 Chronicles 36:21)

The sabbath system was an integral part of the Old Covenant between God and Israel. Not only was one day in seven a day of rest when people could worship God (Exodus 20:8-10; Deuteronomy 5:12-15), but one year in seven was to be a rest year when the land was not to be cultivated (Leviticus 25:4). And after 49 years (seven times seven), at the conclusion of the seventh rest year, came the Year of Jubilee. During this year those who had been reduced to poverty were restored, the property was returned to its hereditary owner, and slaves were set free (Leviticus 25:13, 40-41).

Included in this passage of Scripture describing the decreed system of rest years, were certain blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. Specifically, God warned of desolation and exile for failure to observe this system (Leviticus 26:34). Thus, the years of exile would correspond to the number of rest years that Israel would fail to keep. For example, a year in exile would represent seven years of rebellion. But God delights in mercy more than in judgment, and so he made provisions for Israel to return to the promised land. Immediately following the curse section of Leviticus, God promised Israel, "But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers . . . I will remember my covenant . . . I will remember the land." (Leviticus 26:40-42)

Realizing that the exile was nearly over, Daniel set about to meet the condition for return prescribed in the covenant, confession by Israel: "So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes." (Daniel 9:3) This prayer of

confession is recorded in Daniel 9:4-19, where Daniel describes it as “speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the LORD my God for his holy hill.” (Daniel 9:20)

In response to Daniel’s confession, God sent the angel Gabriel to reveal to Daniel that his prayer had been heard. But the heart of Gabriel’s message has to do not so much with the return from the exile as with the removal of the problem that led to the exile, namely the guilt of the sins of God’s people who had repeatedly broken his covenant.

This fundamental problem would not be settled at the end of the 70 years of Babylonian captivity but would involve 70 times seven times. It would take this period for the Anointed One (the Messiah, the Christ) to come, and in the middle of the last seven he would be “cut off” in a cursed death, thus removing the guilt of sin, and bringing in everlasting righteousness (Daniel 9:24, 26).

Gabriel did not reveal to Daniel how long these sevens were, whether days, weeks, or years. That was not the purpose of these sevens that seem so strange to us. This pattern would not have been strange to one who realized that Israel needed to observe the pattern of sevens revealed in Leviticus 25 and 26.

Daniel knew that seven times seven years led to the wonderful year of redemption, the Jubilee. And the Jubilee had already been used by Isaiah the prophet to describe the days of the Messiah. The Lord Jesus quoted these words from Isaiah 61 when he said, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). Thus, Gabriel revealed to Daniel that it would take the Messiah to bring in the true year of the Lord’s favor, the inaugurated Jubilee: seven times seven for the Jubilee, times ten, representing fulness.

Rebellion against God’s covenant had led to the Babylonian captivity, and unless this transgression of God’s people was dealt with, what hope could the future hold for them? Gabriel came to Daniel to assure him that the Lord would permanently deal with the sin problem. This is the fundamental focus of the prophecy of the 70 “weeks.”

The heart of the prophecy is given in the very first verse: “70 ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.” (Daniel 9:24) Of the six things mentioned in Daniel 9:24, the first three have to do with the problem of sin: “to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness.” This problem was effectively dealt with, once and for all, by our Lord when he died on the cross: “But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26).

Jesus came into this world to do more than remove the guilt of our sins: He perfectly obeyed the law of God that his righteousness might be credited to our account. He came that “God’s righteousness” might be given “to all who believe” (Romans 3:22; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21). This, too, had been revealed to Daniel: The Messiah would come in the seventieth seven “to bring in

everlasting righteousness” (Daniel 9:24). Our Lord finished the work his Father gave him, “having obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12).

The Old Covenant was never meant to be a complete covenant: It pointed to the need of a new and everlasting covenant. Its types needed to be fulfilled; the visions of its prophets had to be realized. The Lord Jesus did not come to destroy the Old Testament, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). God sent his Son “to seal up vision and prophecy” (Daniel 9:24). “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.” (Hebrews 1:1-2)

The sixth thing the Messiah would do would be “to anoint the most holy” (Daniel 9:24). This is difficult, but surely it points to the work of Jesus who was anointed with the Holy Spirit at his baptism (Matthew 3:16), who died on the cross that the Temple rituals might be complete (John 2:19-22; Hebrews 8:1-5; 9:1-10:22), and who anointed his people with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost that they might become the living stones of the Temple of New Covenant (1 Corinthians 3:9-17; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2-5).

These six things are the core of Daniel’s prophecy; if we understand their fulfillment in Jesus Christ, we have understood the heart of the prophecy.

The last three verses expand on this theme. The next verse begins the division of the 70 “sevens” into three segments:

“Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.” (Daniel 9:25)

The first segment, or seven “sevens,” demonstrates how the system of sabbath years, seven of which lead to the Jubilee, are the screen on which the prophecy is to be presented. It is important to keep this in mind in order not to focus on a chronological sequence of literal years, whether they are 365 or 360 days.

This prophecy is not about literal years but a sequence of events that typologically reflect the sabbath and Jubilee pattern.

Therefore, it is not essential dogmatically to determine the exact date of the many that have been put forth for the beginning of this prophecy (Cf., e.g., 605, 587, 539, 521, 458 or 445 BC, John E. Goldingay (1989), *Daniel*, vol. 30, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated), pp. 257–258.)

The first seven “sevens” could easily correspond to the time between Cyrus’ decree in 539/8 BC and the completion of rebuilding the walls of the city under Nehemiah in 444 BC. This would be in times of trouble. All one must do is read Ezra and Nehemiah, or Haggai and Zechariah to see how literally this was fulfilled.

The second segment, or 62 “sevens,” takes us to the time of the Messiah. Thus, the years between 444 BC, when the walls were completed, and late AD 26, when Jesus was baptized and anointed into his Messianic work, is the period of time in view.

The last segment of one “seven,” the seventieth “seven,” is the focus of the prophecy, the time for accomplishing the six Messianic works of 9:24. This segment is covered in the last two verses, 9:26 and 27. These verses parallel each other and may be divided into three sections.

The first part of 9:26 (“After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be cut off”) is parallel to the first part of 9:27. That is to say, during the seventieth “seven” the Messiah would be cut off in death under the divine judgment due for covenant breakers. This circumcision of Christ (Colossians 2:11) had been beautifully and graphically foretold in Isaiah 52:13-53:12, especially 53:4-8.

This aspect of the work of Christ is set forth in the parallel section of Daniel 9:27: “He will confirm a covenant with many for one seven (or “in” or “during”; the translators have simply added the word “for” interpretatively).”

There is only one covenant previously mentioned in Daniel, namely God’s blessed covenant with his people:

“I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: ‘O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands.’” (Daniel 9:4)

Our Lord died on the cross that those blessed promises covenanted to the patriarchs might be made sure to all their descendants (the many, the righteous remnant, or the true Israel): “For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs.” (Romans 15:8)

The next section of Daniel 9:26, while very obscure, “and will have nothing,” is associated with the death of the Messiah.

The parallel section of Daniel 9:27 is very clear: “In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering.” Our Savior did this when he caused the veil of the Temple to be torn open by his crucifixion (Matthew 27:50-51; Hebrews 10:19-22). Thus, he fulfilled the whole system of bloody sacrifices which characterized the earthy Tabernacle and Temple.

The last section of Daniel 9:26 foretells the terrible judgment that God would send on the unbelieving portion of the Jewish people. It is described as a fiery baptism of wrath in the form of a foreign army sent by God:

“The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed.” (Daniel 9:26)

The same idea is mirrored in the concluding section of Daniel 9:27: “And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.”

(Daniel 9:26 a) "Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and after the 62 "weeks" (i.e. during the 70th "week") (the) Anointed One will be cut off (in covenant judgment),	(Daniel 9:27 a) And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, And He will cause (the) covenant to prevail with many (the true Israel, the faithful remnant) (in the) one week,
(Daniel 9:26 b) and have nothing;	(Daniel 9:27 b) but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and in the midst of the week He will put an end to (the) sacrifice and offering;
(Daniel 9:26 c) and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. And the city and the sanctuary, the people of the coming prince will destroy, and its end (is) with a flood and unto (the) end (is) war; desolations determined.	(Daniel 9:27 c) and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate. And upon the pinnacle (of the temple), abominations (idols), a desolating (thing/person, i.e. the Roman army), even until the end (destruction), and what is determined will gush forth on the desolate (place).

The Lord Jesus commented on these scriptures and said that they would be fulfilled after his death in the destruction of Jerusalem. This occurred in AD 70 under the Roman prince, Titus the son of Vespasian (Matthew 24:15 ff; Luke 21:20-24). Thus, the last, or seventieth seven of Daniel is divided into two sections: the earthly ministry of Christ which was terminated by his being cut off on the cross, and the last half of the week which would include the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Gabriel does not tell Daniel when the last half of the week ends. But it is interesting to observe that both Daniel and Revelation refer to a period of time that adds up to one half of seven years.

It is sometimes referred to as 42 months (Revelation 11:2; 13:5), or 1260 days (Revelation 11:3; 12:6), and rather cryptically as “a time, times and half a time” (Daniel 7:25; Revelation 12:14).

This period of time seems to stretch from Christ’s ascension to his second coming (Revelation 12:5; 14:14) but has a particular focus on the time of the manifestation of the Antichrist, the terrible time of persecution just before the Second Coming of Christ.