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# Seventy Weeks for the Nations

## Daniel 9:24-27

**Introduction** What a mess the world is in:

The financial crises exacerbated by governmental folly and interference...

The horrible genocides across north central African nations...

The rise of terrorism as a tool in the Islamic war of conquest of the west...

The shift of economic power to the Far East with out of control pollution...

The rise of drug and sex-slave trade with its horrific brutalities and destruction of life and living...

The world though has always been in a mess. We just know it earlier and in more excruciating detail. A problem in one area of the world is broadcast to the rest of the world sometimes provoking irrational and unreasonable panic.

So, it all seems out of control. Yet the book of Daniel trumpets the providential control by God moving majestically towards goals and purposes of His design. Daniel's own world was full of turmoil, trouble and travail. Yet, he lives with quiet serenity through regime change, persecution and frightening revelations. This is because he recognizes that God is not only in control, but is going to bring the great and glorious day of His final and ultimate victory.

As we come to a difficult text like the one before us, let us focus our lens on the central person and purpose of redemptive history from Hebrews 9:26-28.

<sup>25</sup> Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, <sup>26</sup> for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. <sup>27</sup> And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, <sup>28</sup> so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

So Jesus came the first time to deal with sin through His own sacrifice. When He comes the second time, He brings the fullness of our salvation with Him. The Lord has planned to bring about both through the program we will be introduced to. As we explore His Word may God encourage our hearts in troubling times.

## Its Sovereign Plan

(v.24a)

As an answer to Daniel's prayer, Gabriel imparts further insight into God's sovereign plan.

<sup>24</sup> "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.

### A Thematic Framework

First, Daniel is shown a thematic framework for God's decreed plan and purpose. Literally, this reads "seventy sevens" are decreed. Rightly, the translators are confident that Daniel hears the sevens as weeks which represent years, particularly in the context of time.

But the focus on seventy sevens arises out of Daniel's reading of Jeremiah and the seventy years of captivity. He is distinctly being told that there is a larger issue of judgment for sin and transgression that will take place. Yes, God will bring the Jews back into the land just as He said He would. However, seventy additional sets of sevens also must transpire to bring about what God has purposed. The seventy years they have spent in captivity have accounted for the seventy creation sabbatical rests that were violated. Now, these seventy sevens will account for the salvation jubilees that were violated. They have been in exile seventy years; now, they will await another 490 years until the purposes of God to judge sin are ended.

### A Covenantal Focus

This time period has a strong covenantal focus. It has been established by God's decrees. Behind all of what flows in time, space and history are the ordaining decrees of God. We have seen this before in the book of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar in his testimony letter set forth a God who does His will and has absolute sway in history. God simply does what He has chosen to do. None can thwart His hand and change His determined course. Just as Nebuchadnezzar's personal judgment led to his individual salvation, so God has ordained a judgment that will produce a general salvation. These seventy weeks then have been established and decreed. Their unfolding is not conditional on other events. These seventy sevens are the central thrust of redemptive history.

These seventy weeks are determined "for your people and your holy city." Certainly, Daniel would have heard this to refer to the Jews and to Jerusalem. His people are those physical sons and daughters of Abraham. It is doubtful that he would have thought "nation" from these references. It is very important for us to remember that the Bible, with increasing clarity through the Old Covenant, distinguishes between the Jews as a people group, Israel as a geographically located nation and then later, a royal lineage as the house of Judah. So, this text must at least, in the minimum, refer to the Jews and to Jerusalem.

However, is that the sum total of what is referred to? Here is where a kind of literal-grammatical interpretation can go astray. It locates the sum intention of the text in the understanding of the immediate audience. In essence, this text cannot mean more than what Daniel could have understood. If he hears, Jews and Jeru-

saalem, then that is its whole referent. Now the question arises, is this the way the rest of the Bible treats the Old Testament? If we say that there may be an intention and meaning imbedded in texts that would have been incomprehensible to the original audience, are we then just allegorizing the text so that we can make it say and mean whatever we want?

I believe not. Several principles have guided my approach to the Bible. I would encourage you, if you are not presently attending Sunday Bible Hour, you should start attending immediately. Dale Evans is working through helping us to get a big picture of redemptive history and a good grasp on how to handle the Bible. Here are some important principles then<sup>17</sup>:

There is a real literal meaning of any text that would have been understandable to the original audience except for where the writer or speaker's intent is to hide meaning.

There is progress in revelation that runs along the trajectory of the unfolding of redemptive history. Abraham's understanding of the covenant God made with him is not exactly the same as David's or Jeremiah's or Jesus' or Paul's understanding of that same covenant.

Early revelation is full of types, shadows and prefigures that point to realities that come later. Their meaning is only fully understood as the realities, the substance, come on the scene.

The incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ are central to understanding the Bible. The glorification and magnification of Jesus Christ is the central purpose of time and eternity.

Later revelation always governs our understanding of earlier revelation. What is fully meant by any text is what later texts interpret it to mean.

By definition, apocalyptic texts are intended to be enigmatic, hiding as much as revealing what they mean. What is meant by apocalyptic texts is often illuminated by the cascade of Biblical revelation.

What does this mean practically when looking at a text like this?

There is a real purpose in the indirect way of speaking of Jews and Jerusalem. Gabriel says and Daniel records that this decreed time is for his people and his holy city. Who and what these are may well be open to larger and wider interpretation as the frame of reference grows through the ever expanding context of more and more revelation. Will a later text understand "his people" to be more than just Jews and "his holy city" to be more than just Jerusalem?

We do not generally teach a replacement eschatology. This text does not establish a time frame and eschatological purposes for Israel which run their course and then Israel is replaced by the church. This replacement hermeneutic posits that Israel as a nation failed to accept the Christ and was replaced in God's plan and purposes by the church.

This text is *not* establishing that God has two parallel purposes in redemptive history. Since the 1800's, many have taught that God has two distinct purposes in redemptive history: one for ethnic Jews in national Israel and the

other for the church in Christ. This dual purpose hermeneutic frames a basic question over many texts: is this text referring primarily to the Jews or to the church? As emphatically and kindly as I know how: I do not agree with any form of dual purposed hermeneutic.

As you listen to prophetic and apocalyptic texts expositied here, you will not hear that question asked or answered. This is the only time I plan to be this specific about such a notion. We teach a *PROMISE-FULFILLMENT HERMENEUTIC*. The Old Covenant(s) are fulfilled in Christ who is also the sum and substance of the New Covenant. The Old Covenant is intended to speak of, to point to, to typify, to indicate, to illustrate and to form the conceptual language for the New Covenant realities. I expect that Old Covenant prophetic texts will require some New Testament explanation and application. As I read and study, that is exactly what I find unfolding.

Many great symphonies and certainly most great movie scores have themes and melodies that are woven through them. They are often intended to represent something. For example, the hobbit theme or the elvish theme from the Lord of the Rings movies are recognizable to anyone who has watched those movies. Sometimes, we know that hobbits are going to appear because their playful theme lilt in the score. Sometimes, we know elves are about because their theme silvers through the dark noise.

As we work through the rest of this text, we are going to recognize the presence of two great themes in the Bible. The music here may be indistinct. The theme may be a line, a flute or oboe interwoven with other themes. We may not even recognize what those melodies are until we get to later in the symphony. But when we do, then we will be able to trace the thread through the whole.

## **Its Salvation Purposes**

**(v.24b)**

<sup>24</sup> "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

Just as the seventy year exile had multiple purposes, so these seventy sevens will also. Six purposes are clearly stated. Some translations use "for" clauses which shift these from purpose to reason clauses. The ESV has it right. Instead of being the "why" of the seventy weeks, these are the "to what" of the seventy weeks. It is what will be accomplished.

While some argue that these purposes were fulfilled in the days of Antiochus Epiphanies, it is evident that these refer to purposes brought about by the life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are probably arranged in the Hebrew chiastic structure, indicated in the outline.

## **A - To finish the transgression**

Something particular is being brought to an end. The transgression is both definite and singular. It may be "the transgression" of Daniel 8:13. Within the time frame of these seventy sevens, the desolating abomination, the transgression of elevating a Satan-filled leader to being recognized as deity will be ended. When the Lord Jesus Christ comes in the incarnation, He will demon-

strate what a true union between the divine and the human will be. So, all false incarnations will be measured against His and found wanting, even that of the dazzling super-man of the last age.

## **B - To put an end to sin**

This simply means what it says. Within the time specified, God has decreed that He will terminate sin. Job 14:17 helps us to understand the phrase here where the idea is "To seal up with a view to punishment." Sin will be brought to a decisive, punishing conclusion through all that God will accomplish during this period of time. The work of Christ as redeemer and as ruler will accomplish this.

## **C - To atone for iniquity**

God has purposed within the seventy sevens to complete the atonement for sin and iniquity. *To atone* is used here to ensure that we make the connection between the Levitical system, the Day of Atonement and the yet future work that will be done. That Old Covenant system points forward in God's plan and purposes to a full and final atoning work done by the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **C - To bring in everlasting righteousness**

Jeremiah 23:5-6 locates this in the Lord Jesus, the righteous branch. Righteousness will fill His rule and characterize His kingdom.

<sup>5</sup> "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. <sup>6</sup> 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.'

But this is not a short-term kingdom of one-thousand years. Note that the righteousness brought by the Branch who Rules is an everlasting righteousness. This text's purpose can only be fulfilled in the kingdom inaugurated in the Lord's first coming and consummated at the Lord's second coming.

Further, there is a personal righteousness in view here where Jesus' righteousness through His obedience is now put to our account as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26.

<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— <sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. <sup>26</sup> It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

So God has purposed to bring in both personal and corporate righteousness within the scope of this time frame.

## **B - To seal both vision and prophet**

This is a seal that authenticates the legitimacy of the vision and the prophet. The unfolding of what God has revealed endorses the message and the messenger. There should be no questioning of their validity. The prophets' messages in their books are Christ-centered. They are looking forward primarily to a person who comes and all is well.

The seal here is one placed on a completed scroll or on a jar whose contents are not to be tampered with. This may be an indication then that one of God's purposes within the scope of the seventy sevens is to complete revelation. The message is seen as finished so it is sealed up as one would set a seal on the envelope or the way a bottle of wine is sealed or a vial of medicine has a sealed cap.

## **A - To anoint a most holy One/thing/place**

God's final purpose is to anoint either a most holy one or thing and place. Anoint means to publicly recognize for office or service. The question here is whether a person or a place and object are in view. Normally in the Bible, only the Temple in Jerusalem or the Messiah are referred to as "most holy". I am inclined to see the fulfillment in the public affirmation and coronation of Jesus as the King and as the fulfillment of the true Temple.

In the chiasmic structure, this is parallel to the great transgression which appears to be the false messiah, indwelt by Satan, elevating himself to the supreme authority, yes even deity and doing so in the Temple. But here is the authentic and true, who is both King and Temple and publicly recognized by God.

So, in God's program, He is going to carry out these six great purposes. The Lord Jesus will come as the true incarnation, bring about an end to sin, complete the atoning sacrifice, be and bring the longed for personal and corporate righteousness, complete Divine revelation and publicly, decisively and with finality put Christ forward as the fulfillment of His promises and purposes.

## **Its Historical Program**

**(v.25-27)**

Finally, Gabriel sets out the actual historical program in which these purposes will be fulfilled.

<sup>25</sup> 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 moat, but in a troubled time. <sup>26</sup> And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. <sup>27</sup> And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator."

## **An Enigmatic Text**

This enigmatic text has caused no little controversy in the church. The way it is handled is often shaped by one's presuppositions and end-times schema. It is not possible to settle what these things refer to just from this text. Even through extensive study, both over the years and certainly over the last weeks, I am still careful in how I approach and what I think is going on here. Let's carefully look at the text here; being sure we understand what it says. Then, for a few minutes, we will look at some New Testament texts that quote from or allude to this one.

## **An Anchor Point**

There is an anchor point for the time span. The seventy sevens will begin when the decree is issued to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. This decree probably was the last of four decrees made by Persian rulers concerning Jews. The first was Cyrus' decree in 538 BC (2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4; 5:13). The second was the decree of Darius I in 520 BC (Ezra 6:1, 6-12) which was a confirmation of the first decree. The third was the decree of Artaxerxes Longimanus in 457 BC (Ezra 7:11-26). The first three decrees relate to the Temple. The first two are in reference to its rebuilding the third relates to financing animal sacrifices. It is unlikely that any of these three decrees is the one that formed the beginning of the seventy sevens.<sup>18</sup> Artaxerxes, issued the fourth decree on March 5, 444 BC (Nehemiah. 2:1-8). On that occasion Artaxerxes granted the Jews permission to rebuild Jerusalem's city walls. This decree is most likely the one referred to here in Daniel 9:25.

## **A Defined Period of Time**

Sixty nine sevens will lapse until the coming of an anointed one, the prince. These sixty-nine weeks are divided into seven sevens and sixty-two sevens. This appears to reflect the length of time it took to completely rebuild Jerusalem after the exile. The walls were completed in less than a year, but much work remained to raise the city inside the walls during troubled times. The sixty two weeks covers the post-exilic monarchy and the second temple Judaism.

At the end or after the sixty two weeks, the anointed one is cut off. This language is intentionally invoking Isaiah 53:8. This is clearly a reference to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ and His death on the cross. He will be executed, not appearing to have accomplished anything. Efforts to locate the end of the sixty-nine weeks at the baptism of Jesus with his being cut off in the middle of the last sevens have not been persuasive.

Note carefully, the people of a yet future prince will come after the sixty-nine weeks and the cutting off of the anointed one. This people will destroy the city and temple once again. This is almost certainly a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem and the rebuilt temple by the Roman general, Titus, in 70 AD.<sup>19</sup> This will be a flood like destruction. It seems to me that this may be alluding to Noah's flood. The destruction will come as a judgment that radically alters things. Jesus' warnings about future coming judgments also employ Noah's flood as do both Peter and Jude. Until the end there will be war. God has decreed desolations for the city and temple.

## A Controversial Phrase

Now comes a very controversial phrase. Who is the “he” of “And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week.” Pages and pages have been inked arguing over this. Is it the anointed prince who was cut off or is it the prince whose people came to destroy Jerusalem? Make no mistake; it makes a huge difference which you say it is.

If it is the Messiah then the time line shifts backward. The sixty-nine weeks are at the baptism of Jesus as the confirming of the covenant with the cutting off, the ending of the sacrifice and offering three and half years later at the cross. Then the last three and half years cover till the initial dispersion of believers from Jerusalem under the Judaism’s persecution led by Saul. Thus, this whole prophecy would be fulfilled by 70 AD. The last sentence is seen as either as referring to the final destruction of the temple or of the growing apostasy of the church.

If this is another Roman prince who comes later, then he will confirm a covenant with a group for seven years. At the end of three and half years, he will cause the sacrifice and offerings to cease. He will commit some great abominable act which has a similar desolating effect as that of Antiochus Epiphanies and Titus. Then, great desolations will take place until God’s decreed destruction of this prince is completed.

Just reading this text, I am inclined to the later interpretation. It seems to be closer to the plain language of the text. Once we get into the New Testament, we will find that in some texts Jesus seems to be implying that this will all be fulfilled in the lifetime of the apostles. In other texts, the fulfillment seems to be out in the distant future. Maybe our two horizons idea will help us then.

## Its New Testament Perspective

The New Testament gives additional perspective and insight into what Daniel is told. We will be preaching on these texts in the future so I won’t expound upon them. Let me key in on two of the most important of these texts.

### From the Prophecy of Jesus

### Matthew 24:1-15

This text is directly referred to in Matthew 24:15. The events surrounding it are expanded upon as well as in Luke 21:5-28. Listen to what Jesus said according to Matthew.

Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. <sup>2</sup> But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?” And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.



"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

"So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

## **From the Preaching of Paul                      2 Thessalonians 2:1-14**

Paul, in quieting the unsettled hearts and minds of the church at Thessalonica encourages them by reminding them what he had taught them before.

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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## **Reflect and Respond**

Complex and enigmatic texts should challenge us to study carefully. But they also should promote humility. We may not figure it all out. But there is much we can know. So let us just depend on God to illuminate His Word to us as we diligently apply ourselves to it.

May we always be willing to subject our systems of theology and eschatology to the authority of the Word of God. May we always have an awareness of when we are manipulating texts to achieve a desired result. As we examine the Word may we examine our grids and change them, adapt them and align them to the Word.

So we are resting in God, trusting His wise providence even when everything seems to falling apart. We are moving toward a great and glorious day. May we be found in Him at His appearing a holy and humble people. May we eagerly long for Him, purifying ourselves in the light of these truths.

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## Notes

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- <sup>17</sup> Please note that I am not presenting an argument for or justification of these principles. I have done so extensively elsewhere. Some of these are substantially different from the literal-grammatical-historical method employed by and yielding a classic dispensational theological schema. There is substantial agreement over how an individual text is read and substantial disagreement over how later texts are to be treated. In varying ways, the literal-grammatical-historical way of handling texts uses the earlier texts to control the meaning and realities of later texts. This is a serious difference that I see no way to reconcile with what we believe. The result is that to some ears it will sound like we are “spiritualizing” or “allegorizing” texts. I don’t believe so – I believe that the later texts do provide broadening interpretation, explanation, application and in some cases, alteration of earlier texts.
- <sup>18</sup> Adapted from *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*. Note that in *Daniel, the Triumph of God’s Kingdom*, the author uses the 457 BC date, not because of textual or historical reasons, but because his schema requires it. I found this often to be true. Note my own hesitancy to be **emphatic** about these dates. It seems to me that Daniel would know the difference between decrees relating to the Temple and those relating to the city of Jerusalem.
- <sup>19</sup> It is important to remember that if you are trying to calculate the exact years to remember that 1BC to 1 AD is one year – there is no 0. Also, the years are probably based on 360 day years. Therefore, the number of leap years by western reckoning have to be taken into account. Frankly, I do not think that level of precision is necessary at this point in the text. The number of days involved only seems to be important in the last seven or week.