

THE PROPHETIC SEVENTY WEEKS

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We conclude our meditation on the prophetic time element of the Descent of the Lord by examining the prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27. We reproduce the scriptures below, from verse 20, for reader's convenience

20 And whiles I *was* speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God;

21 Yea, whiles I *was* speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation.

22 And he informed *me*, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding.

23 At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to shew *thee*; for thou *art* greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision.

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24 Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.

25 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.

26 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.

27 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

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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.

This prophecy occupies a central place in the times and seasons of God, especially in relation to his dealings with the Old Testament saints. While Daniel was confessing his sins and the sins of the nation of Israel, seeking the Lord concerning the deliverance of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity and the restoration of God's worship and kingdom in Israel, the Lord sent an angel to reveal to him the things that were to befall his people, the Jews in the last days (during the closing period of the Jewish age). Daniel was, evidently, hoping that after the completion of the seventy years of the Babylonian captivity, God would fully return to Israel. The worship and kingdom of God would be fully restored and Israel will be, as a foretime, God's footstool (Ezekiel 43:7). But the angel had another thing to tell Daniel. Though the Jews would be brought back from the Babylonian captivity, all would not be over yet. Many troubles will yet come upon the people. And, from the latter part of Daniel 9 to Daniel 12, God began to reveal the things that were to befall the Jews, the events that would lead to the destruction of the temple and the city and

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the final close of the Jewish age. The prophecies in Daniel 12 went on further to show that there shall be a final and total deliverance and restoration that shall come at the time when Michael stands up. These things were spoken, but the man Daniel understood not.

Bible scholars agree that the seventy weeks mentioned in the above prophecy by the angel answers to a period of four hundred and ninety (490) years. A day in the prophecy is used for a year (Numbers 14:34) and a week for seven years. Seventy weeks will therefore give us (70×7 years) four hundred and ninety years. The angel was telling Daniel that four hundred and ninety years have been appointed by God to the Jews for the full purpose of God in the setting aside of the Jewish age to be realized. Seventy weeks are determined upon *thy people* and upon *thy holy city*, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to anoint the most holy.

In the verses that follow, the angel began to give further details as to the things that shall take place in those seventy weeks. He said, 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

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street shall be built again, and the wall even in troublous times.

Three decrees concerning Jerusalem are recorded in the scriptures. The first is that of Cyrus the Persian king (536 BC). This decree was limited to the restoration of “*the house of the Lord God of Israel*” (2 chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-3). The second was that of Darius, the Medes issued between 521 BC to 468 BC (Ezra 6:3-8). This decree of Darius only re-established and strengthened the decree Cyrus earlier made concerning the house of God (Ezra 6:8). The third was the “*decree*” of the Persian king Artaxerxes which was given around 454 BC (Nehemiah 2:1-8). It was this decree that gave permission for the rebuilding of the city, i.e., Jerusalem.

According to the words of the angels, there was to be sixty nine weeks (four hundred and eighty three years) from the going forth of that commandment unto the Messiah the Prince. The rebuilding of Jerusalem was completed in the first seven weeks (forty-nine years) of the sixty nine weeks, while sixty-two weeks after brings us to about the time the Lord Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit and declared to be the Messiah, the Son of God (Matthew 3:13-17; Acts 10:38).

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The Messiah came to wind up the Old Testament age and to introduce a new covenant. He came to make true and perfect reconciliation for iniquity, to open a way where transgressions and sins can be totally and permanently taken away, a way that will bring in everlasting righteousness. He came to fulfil the vision and prophecies that God has spoken a foretime through the mouth of the prophets. He came to confirm the covenant that God promised to their fathers (Genesis 22:16-18; Luke 1:37-75).

A week of seven years was separated by God specifically for the Jews. God sought during that prophetic week to bring the Jews into the benefits of the covenant the Messiah came to establish. For the first part of the week (a period of three and a half years), the Messiah laboured among the people, ministering the mercies and compassions of God towards them, teaching and speaking freely concerning the kingdom of God. In the midst of the week however, the time came for the Messiah to be crucified. The Messiah, the Prince was to be cut-off, but not for himself. His death was to be for a redemptive purpose. He was cut off by the ordination of God in order that the human race may live. For the transgression of the people was he smitten (Isaiah 53:8).

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The death of the Messiah in the midst of the week brought an end to the Old Testament sacrifices and offerings. By the sacrifice of his own self, he caused the Old Testament sacrifices and offerings, which hitherto were the divinely appointed means of obtaining forgiveness and blessings, to cease. The veil of the temple was torn, and the new and living way into the holiest of all, was made open to all. The perfect sacrifice for the remission of sins, having been made, what remained of the Old Testament offerings amounted to an abomination in the sight of God. As far as God was concerned, an end had been made for those offerings. To continue in them is to overspread abominations.

Some Bible scholars have taught that the prophetic seventy weeks did not run its full course during the Jewish age that it terminated with the appearing of the Messiah in his first advent. It is believed that the last week of the seventy weeks is yet to be fulfilled. We were taught that to make way for the fulfilment, the Jewish temple is to be rebuilt in its former site and the Old Testament sacrifices restored. Then "*the man of sin, the antichrist*" is to make a covenant with the Jewish nation for seven years to protect them and uphold their religious worship. But, after three and half years, in the midst of the week, the antichrist will break that covenant, violently cause the sacrifice

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and offerings to cease, and begin to persecute the Jews thought the latter part of the week.

The above theory is evidently erroneous. The seventeenth week ran its full course during the Jewish age, just like the remaining sixty nine weeks. It was in the midst of the week, exactly three and a half years after his public ministry, that the Messiah, the Prince, by the offering of himself put an end to the Old Testament sacrifices and offerings. He had said earlier at the beginning of the week, at the waters of baptism, that God no longer desired the Old Testament sacrifices and offerings but, instead, had prepared for himself another sacrifice, the sacrifice of Jesus' humanity (Psalm 40:6-8; Hebrews 10:6-10). This new sacrifice was offered in the midst of the week thereby bringing to an end the Old Testament offerings.

In the remaining half of the week, after Messiah's death and resurrection, special favour was still extended to the Jews. For another three and a half years, God dealt with the Jews with mercy, limiting the motivation to share in the blessings of the Kingdom to that race, apart from the four gentiles who received the gospel.

The Jews had ignorantly crucified the Messiah but God still granted them opportunity to repent from

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their sins, receive forgiveness through faith in the shed blood of the Messiah, and enter into the blessings of the new covenant. The Holy Spirit was outpoured to show to them that the Lord Jesus Christ was indeed the Messiah and that he has been raised from the dead and glorified. The gospel was preached with signs and wonders following. Many mighty miracles were wrought in Israel showing God's compassion and the fulfilment of the promised saviour all with the intention of reaching the Jews. God's special dealings have lasted for above a thousand five hundred years and that door of favour was about to be shut. The seventy weeks specially separated for the nation was about to end and many were being implored to repent and receive the promise which God made to them and their children (Acts 3:18-19), to deliver themselves from the wrath to come.

In spite of this, while there was a great harvest of Jewish souls during the last half of the seventy weeks, including a great number of the priests (Acts 6:7), the Jews, as a nation remained stiffnecked. They continued in their abominations and even began to persecute the followers of Jesus Christ. At the end of the seventieth week, the nation sealed her fate by killing Stephen and embarking on a large scale persecution of the church. In the same year, Saul was converted and

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became Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:1-31). Around that same time, the gospel was preached to the house of Cornelius and the Holy Spirit was outpoured upon them. Thus, the seventy weeks ended three and a half years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ with the official rejection by the Jews of the gospel of Christ and the opening of the door of favour and blessing to the gentiles. The desolation that was already upon the nation for their failure to understand the day of their visitation (Matthew 23:38), was now to continue, even unto the consummation. In the fullness of time that which has been determined is to come upon the desolated house of Israel.

The Prince that was to come who was to destroy the Jewish city and sanctuary was the Roman emperor. As at the time the angel was speaking Rome had not come into prominence. The Medo-Persian Empire was still in course. But many things had already been revealed concerning the Roman Empire and how their kings shall desolate the sanctuary of the Jews (Daniel 7). So, when the angel talked about the Prince that was to come, it is in the expectation that Daniel would recall the things that had earlier being revealed to him. In AD 70, some thirty-six years after the completion of the seventy weeks, the Roman army came against Jerusalem, destroying the city

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and the sanctuary, bringing upon the Jews a flood of great tribulation.

So, the prophetic seventy weeks run its full course in relation to the Jews. Why the prophecy was silent concerning the latter part of the seventieth week (the three and a half years that followed the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) is because there was no major event that was to take place in that period. The same silence was exhibited, for the same reason, in relation to the sixty two weeks from the completion of the temple and the city to the appearance of the Messiah. During that time, nothing special in the divine plan happened in Israel. There was silence in heaven, as it were, until when John began his public ministry and the Lord Jesus was declared to be the anointed One, the Most Holy.

Now, we know that prophecy usually has more than one fulfilment. The prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27, like many others, goes beyond the Jews and the last days of the Old Testament age to speak of things concerning the end of the church age when the mysteries of God would be finished. Thus, we are to expect that the prophecy will have some applications to the New Testament church.

As a point of fact, we find a parallel in the scriptures concerning the things that shall

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characterize the closing period of the Jewish age and that of the church age, between the activities of the Lord among the Jews in his first advent, and the activities of the Lord in the midst of the Church during the time of his Second Advent. For the Jewish church, there was a Babylonian captivity that occurred before the appearing of the Messiah. So also, for the New Testament church, there is a Babylonian captivity she is found in before the Second Advent of Christ. There was a work of restoration in relation to the Jews before the coming of the Messiah. In the same token, there is a work of restoration in relation to the New Testament church that begins before the Second Advent of Christ. To the Jewish church, God sent Elijah the prophet to prepare the way of the Messiah and to gather the willing hearted together into him. So also, to the New Testament church, God sends Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord to call the saints out of apostasy, restore truth and gather the willing hearted unto the presence of the Lord. The Jewish age ended in a tribulation, a destruction of the city and the sanctuary. So also, the church age is to end in the tribulation of the holy city.

The captivity of the church began in the fourth century with the leavening activities of the Roman Catholic Church. For over a thousand years, the

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church was in bondage to Rome and her idolatrous doctrines and practices. In the thirteenth century, the wardens' people of Northern Italy revolted from the rule of the Pope, because they believed that salvation comes, not through allegiance to the Romish Pope, but through faith in the finished work of Christ. John Huss picked up the same train of thought a little later. But it was not until in the sixteenth century that the time of reform became ripe. By that time, John Huss was dead and the Waldenes were practically exterminated by the Pope's soldiers in various torturous ways too ugly to describe.

The reformation, under which the basic teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the light of salvation and sanctification, were restored to the church, was sparked off by Martin Luther in 1517. In that year, Luther pinned his ninety-six points of suggested change in the religious order, a Wittenberg Abbey door in Germany. He was followed very shortly by other men of great calibre such as John Knox and Calvin etc., the light of truth and reformation began to spread across Europe like harmattan fire, despite the threatening, and persecutions from Rome. The advent of the printing press by Guttenberg expedited the explosion of knowledge. Copies of the Bible could now be printed and put in the hands of the public (up till that time, they could

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only hear “*the word of God*” from the mouth of the catholic priests). Truth had come to stay and nothing could destroy it. The light of salvation broke the chains of darkness and superstition with which the Romish church had tied the masses. The testimony of Jesus was restored in the earth and a people were raised up bearing and manifesting that testimony.

Thus, we can say very clearly that the divine commandment to restore and to build the New Testament temple and the city of God came sometime before 1517. All attempts before then to break loose from the strangling hold of Papacy met with a brutal defeat. But when it was due in the economy of God for the work of restoration to commence, nothing could stop it. God sovereignly protected Luther and many other servants of truth from the deadly hands of Rome until his purposes were firmly established.

The reformation did not fully accomplish the work of total restoration in the church. According to Daniel 9:24, the work of restoration is to lead eventually to the end of sin, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness and to perfectly fulfil the mysteries of God as He hath declared by the mouth of his servants the prophets. This latter part of the work of total restoration which we can describe as the

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perfection and glorification of the church was not to be fulfilled till the closing period of the seventy weeks when the Lord, the messenger of the covenant appears in his temple (Malachi 3:1; Daniel 12:10). The Lord is to come to take unto himself in glory, a church that he himself has thoroughly washed and refined so that she is without spot or wrinkle or blemish.

Four hundred and ninety years from the turn of the sixteenth century when the reformation began, brings us solidly to the closing period of the twentieth century. When we consider this along with the signs of the Lord's presence that are to be seen in the Jewish nation of Israel, among the gentile nations, and in the church, we come to the unavoidable conclusion that the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ must have set in sometime in the twentieth century. The exact time the Day of the Lord began is not known, but, what is very sure from the light of prophecy is that the Lord Jesus Christ, though invisible, is already present among his people in his Second Advent.

The Lord has already descended from heaven with a shout, with the trump of God. The dead in Christ are already being raised into their inheritance in the Spirit, and the faithful among God's people who are physically alive are already being gathered to the voice of the Lord in

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preparation for their entrance into the fullness of life. The signs of his presence and his activities are already visible in Israel, in the gentile nations and in the kingdom of heaven. These are the days of his power (Psalm 110:3).