

The Seventy Weeks

***“Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city.”
—Daniel 9:24***

THE VISION GIVEN TO

Daniel, in answer to his prayer for the forgiveness of his people, was in reality an important time prophecy. ‘Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people,’ said Gabriel to Daniel, ‘and upon thy holy city.’ In verses twenty-five through twenty-seven, these seventy weeks are divided into three periods—“seven weeks” plus “threescore and two weeks” were to reach “unto the Messiah the Prince.” This prophetic time measurement was to begin from “the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem.” Not only did Gabriel assure Daniel that his prayer had been heard, but from this he would know that it was to be favorably answered. The closing words of Daniel’s prayer were, “O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.”—Dan. 9:19

‘For thy city’—Jerusalem had been destroyed at the beginning of Israel’s captivity in Babylon. But now Daniel was told that a decree would go forth authorizing it to be rebuilt. This meant that the captivity would end, as God had promised, and that ‘seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks’ from the time authority would be given to rebuild Jerusalem, the Messiah would come.

Most students of prophecy agree, and it is confirmed by secular history, that Israel’s seventy years of captivity in Babylon began in 606 b.c., ending in 536 b.c. Even those who hold to other dates for the period of the captivity vary by only a very few years. It is certain, therefore, that there was to be a lapse of hundreds of years between the decree to rebuild Jerusalem and the coming of the Messiah.

SYMBOLIC TIME

Confronted by this fact, we are forced to the realization that the seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks must be a symbolic time measurement, for sixty-nine literal weeks would be a period of only about sixteen months. But if the ‘weeks’ of this prophecy are not units of seven literal days, how can we determine how long they really are? Through the Prophet Ezekiel, the Lord reveals that in symbolic time he considers each day to represent a year. (Ezek. 4:6) Sixty-nine weeks on this basis would, therefore, be 483 symbolic days, or 483 literal years.

We can see at a glance that 483 years come very near to bridging the gap between the conclusion of Israel’s captivity and the coming of Christ.

However, there are two other factors to be taken into consideration before we can appreciate how minutely accurate this time prophecy really is. First it reaches to 'Messiah the Prince.' Jesus was not Messiah the prince when he was born. The word Messiah means 'Anointed One,' and Jesus was not anointed with the Holy Spirit until he was thirty years of age.—Luke 3:21-23

It was in the fall of a.d. 29 that Jesus received the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and thus became Messiah the prince. Subtracting these twenty-nine years from the seven weeks and threescore and two symbolic weeks would leave 454 years, which would be the b.c. date established by this prophecy. But this is eighty-two years short of the 536 b.c. date we have seen marked the end of Israel's captivity. This means that there is another factor that needs to be taken into consideration before we have the full truth on this wonderful prophecy.

Gabriel told Daniel that this time measurement would begin 'from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem.' At the end of the seventy years' captivity, King Cyrus issued a decree authorizing the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, but said nothing about rebuilding the city itself, or its walls. See Ezra 1:1-4. Some have concluded that this is the decree referred to in the prophecy of the sixty-nine weeks, but it is not.

REBUILDING THE TEMPLE

Under the authority of the decree issued by Cyrus, work was begun on rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. But there were enemies in the land who opposed the project. They dispatched a letter to

King Artaxerxes, which stated, "Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations."—Ezra 4:12

This was largely a misrepresentation, for actually it was the Temple that was being rebuilt, not the city and the walls. But these enemies of the Jews were clever enough to know that no authority had been given to rebuild the city and its walls, and on the basis of this they hoped that they could induce the king to place a ban on all work of reconstruction, which he did, temporarily.

The king sent back a letter, which in part read, "Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me." (vs. 21) Later, on the basis of this letter, Israel's enemies succeeded in stopping reconstruction work on the Temple, but only temporarily. "It ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia."—vs. 24

Then a letter was sent by the Jews to Darius asking him to have the records searched for the decree of Cyrus authorizing the rebuilding of the Temple. Darius honored this request, and the decree of Cyrus pertaining to the Temple was found, and the work was permitted to go on until it was completed.—Ezra 5:4-17

Now this may seem like much detail, but it is important, for it establishes without question the fact that the time measurement of seven weeks, threescore and two weeks did not have its beginning with the decree of Cyrus which was issued at the close of the captivity. So far as his decree was

concerned, the city and walls of Jerusalem could not have been rebuilt, for Artaxerxes directed that the work cease until he gave commandment for it to continue.

Persia had two kings named Artaxerxes of interest to Bible students, and it was the first of these who commanded that the walls and city of Jerusalem not be rebuilt. Apparently he reigned only eight months, and historians are inclined to the view that he was an impostor. But, impostor or not, his command halted the work of reconstruction of the city and walls of Jerusalem.

It was not until the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes II that this ban was lifted. It came about through the zeal of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was a faithful Jew living in Persia, serving as cup-bearer to Artaxerxes. In this position he had opportunity to appear daily before the king.

Certain Jews of Jerusalem had come to visit him. He “asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.” Their report saddened Nehemiah, as well it might. He wrote, “They said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept.”—Neh. 1:2-4

NEHEMIAH SEEKS GOD'S HELP

Then Nehemiah prayed earnestly to the Lord for direction and help in connection with an appeal he decided to make to the king. So, as Nehemiah

reports it, "I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence." But Nehemiah was sad this time, which was noticed by the king, who asked concerning the cause. Nehemiah explained that it was the lamentable condition of his people, and the fact that the city of his fathers' sepulchres "lieth waste." The king realized that Nehemiah was building up to the point of asking a favor, and said, "For what dost thou make request?"—Neh. 2:1-4

Nehemiah was straightforward with his request—"If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it." And then Nehemiah adds, "The king said unto me, For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time."—vss. 5,6

Here, then is the decree, or authority, that was given for rebuilding the city and walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah asked to be sent to Judah for this purpose, and it pleased the king to send him. Historians have set the date of Nehemiah's mission to be 454 b.c. Seven weeks and threescore and two weeks, or 483 years from this date, bring us to a.d. 29. This is the date that, as we have seen, Jesus became Messiah the prince.

FIRST TO REDEEM

Here, then, is a time prophecy of the First Advent of Jesus. Notice how clearly it states the main objective of his first coming. It was "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.”—Dan. 9:24

Much of the work thus described was accomplished by the death of Jesus. It is his shed blood that constitutes the basis for reconciliation with God. It was his death that opened the way to ‘everlasting righteousness,’ rather than the mere temporary and partial righteousness made possible by the typical sacrifices of “bulls and of goats.” (Heb. 10:4) His coming as the Messiah exactly at the time foretold sealed ‘the vision and prophecy.’ The anointing of the ‘most Holy’ is perhaps a reference to the work of selecting the saintly ones of this age to be his partners in the kingdom, beginning with the holy remnant of the Jewish nation. This work was authorized by him by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the waiting disciples at Pentecost. This is where the anointing that came upon him began to reach his followers, constituting them the anointed class.

JESUS’ MINISTRY

This was to be accomplished at the end of the seventy symbolic weeks. It was at the close of the sixty-ninth of these weeks that Jesus began his ministry. It was after this, according to the prophecy that Messiah was to be “cut off, but not for himself.” He was cut off in death for the sins of the world. (Dan. 9:26) Verse twenty-seven states that “in the midst of the week”—that is, of the seventieth week—“he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease.” This seems to be a reference to

ending the typical sacrifices offered year by year by Israel's priests. There would be no need for these after the death of Jesus as the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."—John 1:29,36

The prophecy states that Messiah should "confirm the covenant with many for one week." (Dan. 9:27) This also is a reference to the seventieth week, which began with the baptism of Jesus. God had made a special covenant with Israel. He had promised, "If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation."—Exod. 19:5,6

ABRAHAM'S SEED

This was but a further statement of the promise made to Abraham that through his "seed" all the families of the earth would be blessed. (Gen. 22:18) His natural descendants were exclusively entitled to be the 'seed' of blessing under this promise. As later revealed, there were to be two parts to this seed, the earthly and the heavenly; although not until the coming of Christ was anything understood concerning the heavenly seed. However, all the truly faithful ones down through the centuries before he came, qualified to be of the earthly seed. They will, as "princes in all the earth," share in the foretold work of blessing.—Isa. 1:26; Ps. 45:16

The exclusiveness of God's promise concerning Israel was conditional—"If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant." The captivity in Babylon was due to a failure on the part of the nation as a whole to meet this condition. Daniel

was told that seventy symbolic weeks, or four-hundred-ninety years, had been determined upon his people, at the end of which the 'transgression' would be finished, and an end made of sin. He was assured, that the 'covenant' would be confirmed, or continued operative until the full end of the seventieth week.

The expression, 'to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins,' is comparable to the one found in Ezekiel 21:25, which was made to Judah's last king, Zedekiah—"Thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end." This simply meant that the Lord would no longer tolerate the nation's iniquity in the sense of permitting them to continue as a free nation with their own king. But he did continue his exclusive covenant with them in the sense that the opportunity to become fellow heirs with Jesus was not then extended to the Gentiles.

It was the conclusion of this covenant that was to take place at the end of the seventy weeks. Jesus conducted his ministry during the first half of this symbolic week. He understood that his Father's promise to Israel thus confined his ministry, and the ministry of his disciples, to this one nation. He warned the people, however, what to expect. He said that the kingdom would be taken from them and "given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."—Matt. 21:43

JESUS' HOUR HAD COME

The prophecy states that Jesus was to be cut off "in the midst of the week." (Dan. 9:27) Undoubtedly

Jesus understood this time prophecy. This is why he knew when his “hour” had come. (John 17:1) This is why Paul could write that “in due time Christ died for the ungodly.”—Rom. 5:6

After his resurrection, Jesus also knew that there was but a short time left—half a symbolic week, or three and one-half years—before the full end of God’s exclusive covenant with Israel would end, and that then it would be in harmony with the Divine plan for the Gospel to go to the Gentiles. So, when he met with his disciples for the last time, he commissioned them to be his witnesses “in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”—Acts 1:8

Jesus realized that if his disciples began their work in Jerusalem, and then expanded it into Judea and Samaria, it would be three and a half years before the Gentiles were reached. Cornelius was the first Gentile convert, and although historians find it difficult to establish the exact date of his conversion, there is little doubt that it occurred in the fall of a.d. 36, which would be the full end of the seventieth week. How fitting it is that the Lord calls special attention to this conversion, as recorded in Acts, chapter ten.

The completeness of the seventy weeks time prophecy given to Daniel is remarkable. Not only did it foretell the exact time when the Messiah would begin his ministry, and explain that he would die for the sins of the people, but it also mentions the destruction of Jerusalem and the desolation that would come upon Israel as a result of the nation’s failure to accept their king.

