

Understanding Daniel's Seventy Weeks (Daniel 9:24-27)

9:24. Daniel was first informed that God's program would be consummated in **70 "sevens."** Since Daniel had been thinking of God's program in terms of years (v. 1; cf. Jer. 25:11-12; 2 Chron. 36:21), it would be most natural for him to understand these "sevens" as years. Whereas people today think in units of tens (e.g., decades), Daniel's **people** thought in terms of sevens (heptads). Seven days are in one week. Every seventh year was a sabbath rest year (Lev. 25:1-7). Seven "sevens" brought them to the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:8-12). Seventy "sevens," then, is a span of 490 years. The 490 could not designate *days* (about 1 1/3 years) for that would not be enough time for the events prophesied in Daniel 9:24-27 to occur. The same is true of 490 weeks of seven days each (i.e., 3,430 days, about 9 1/2 years). Also if days were intended one would expect Daniel to have added "of days" after "70 sevens" for in 10:2-3 he wrote literally, "three sevens of days" (NIV, "three weeks").

Also since Israel and Judah had failed to keep the sabbatical years (every seventh year the land was to lie fallow, Lev. 25:1-7) throughout her history, the Lord enforced on the land 70 "sabbaths" (cf. Lev. 26:34-35). Thus 490 years would be required to complete 70 sabbatical years with one occurring every seventh year.

This span of time was decreed for Daniel's people (cf. "your people" in Dan. 10:14; 11:14) and the Holy City (cf. 9:16, 24). This prophecy, then, is concerned not with world history or church history, but with the history of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. By the time these 490 years run their course, God will have completed six things for Israel. The first three have to do with sin, and the second three with the kingdom. The basis for the first three was provided in the work of Christ on the cross, but all six will be realized by Israel at the Second Advent of Christ.

1. At the end of the 490 years God will **finish** the **transgression** of Israel. The verb "to finish" (*kālā*) means "to bring something to an end." Israel's sin of disobedience will be brought to an end at Christ's second coming when she repents and turns to Him as her Messiah and Savior. Then she will be restored to the land and blessed, in answer to Daniel's prayer.

In Old Testament days the highpoint in Israel's festival calendar was the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). On that day the nation assembled before God, acknowledged her sin, and offered blood sacrifices to cover that sin. Though that sacrifice covered Israel's sin for 12 months, it did not permanently remove that sin (Heb. 10:1-3). It was necessary that a sacrifice be offered God that would permanently remove all the accumulated sins. This sacrifice was offered by Jesus Christ who by His death made payment for all sins that had not been removed in the past (cf. Rom. 3:25). So His atoning work on the cross has made possible His future "finishing" of Israel's transgression.

2. God will **put an end to sin**. The verb *hātam* has the idea of sealing up. Here the thought is sealing something up with a view to punishment (cf. Deut. 32:34; Job 14:17). This emphasized that Israel's sin which had gone unpunished would be punished—in or through Jesus Christ, her substitute, who would bear the sins of the world on the cross. Then at Christ's second coming he will remove Israel's sin (Ezek. 37:23; Rom. 11:20-27).

3. God will **atone for wickedness**. The verb "to atone" (*kāpar*) means "to cover or expiate." This too relates to God's final atonement of Israel when she repents at Christ's second coming, as the provision for that atonement has already been made at the cross. Israel's day of atonement should be kept in view here too, as in the first of these six accomplishments. On that day God

provided a just basis on which He would deal with a guilty people. The blood applied to the mercy seat (“the atonement cover,” Lev. 16:14) over the ark of the covenant enabled Him to dwell among his sinful people. Similarly Daniel’s prophecy promised that because of Christ’s blood shed on the cross God would deal with sinners, and here in particular, with sinners in Israel.

Being propitiated (i.e., satisfied) by Christ’s blood, God can atone for or expiate sin. The Greek words for “atonement cover” (*hilasmos*; KJV, “mercy seat”) and “propitiate” (*hilaskomai*) are related.

4. The second three accomplishments deal with positive aspects of God’s program. Being satisfied by the death of Christ, God will **bring in everlasting righteousness**. The form of the verb “bring in” here means “to cause to come in.” The word “everlasting” (here pl. in Heb.) means ages. Thus this phrase (lit., “to bring in righteousness of ages”) is a prophecy that God will establish an age characterized by righteousness. This is a reference to the Millennial kingdom (Isa. 60:21; Jer. 23:5-6).

5. God will **seal up vision and prophecy**. All that God through the prophets said He would do in fulfilling His covenant with Israel will be fully realized in the millennial kingdom. Until they are fulfilled, prophecies are “unsealed.” (“Seal” translates the same verb, *hātam*, used in the second of these six accomplishments.)

6. God will **anoint the most holy**. This may refer to the dedication of the Most Holy place in the millennial temple, described in Ezekiel 41-46. Or it may refer not to a holy place, but to the Holy One, Christ. If so, this speaks of the enthronement of Christ, “the Anointed One” (Dan. 7:25-27) as King of kings and Lord of lords in the Millennium.

These six accomplishments, then, anticipate the establishment of Israel’s covenanted millennial kingdom under the authority of her promised King. The six summarize God’s whole program to bring the nation Israel the blessings He promised through His covenants (Gen. 15:18-21; 2 Sam. 7:16; Jer. 31:31-34).

c. *The divisions of the 70 “sevens” (9:25-27)*

The 483 Years in the Jewish and Gregorian Calendars

Jewish Calendar (360 days per year *)

$(7 \times 7) + (62 \times 7)$ years = 483 years

483 years

× 360 days

173,880 days

Gregorian Calendar (365 days a year)

444 B.C. to A.D. 33 = 476 years

476 years

× 365 days

173,740 days

+ 116 days in leap years

+ 24 days (March 5–March 30)

173,880 days

9:25. Important revelation was then given Daniel about the inception of this important time period and its divisions. The 70 “sevens” would begin, Gabriel said, with **the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem**. This decree was the fourth of four decrees made by Persian rulers in reference to the Jews. The first was Cyrus’ decree in 538 B.C. (2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4; 5:13). The second was the decree of Darius I (522-486) in 520 B.C. (Ezra 6:1, 6-12). This decree actually was a confirmation of the first decree. The third was the decree of Artaxerxes Longimanus (464-424) in 457 B.C. (Ezra 7:11-26). The first two decrees pertain to the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem and the third relates to finances for animal sacrifices at the temple. These three say nothing about the rebuilding of the city itself. Since an unwalled city was no threat to a military power, a religious temple could be rebuilt without jeopardizing the military authority of those granting permission to rebuild it. No one of these three decrees, then, was the decree that formed the beginning of the 70 sevens.

The fourth decree was also by Artaxerxes Longimanus, issued on March 5, 444 B.C. (Neh. 2:1-8). On that occasion Artaxerxes granted the Jews permission to rebuild Jerusalem’s city walls. This decree is the one referred to in Daniel 9:25.

The end or goal of the prophecy is the appearance of **the Anointed One, the Ruler**. This refers to Christ Himself. God the Father anointed Christ with the Spirit at the time of His water baptism (Acts 10:38), but the anointing referred to here is the anointing of Christ as the Ruler in His kingdom (cf. comments on “anoint the Most Holy” in Dan. 9:24). This prophecy of the 70 sevens, then, ends not with the First Advent of Christ, as some suggest, but rather with the Second Advent and the establishing of the millennial kingdom.

This 490-year period is divided into three segments; (a) 7 “sevens” (49 years), (b) 62 “sevens” (434 years), and (c) 1 “seven” (v. 27; 7 years). The first period of 49 years may refer to the time in which the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, permitted by Artaxerxes’ decree, was completed (444-395 B.C.). Though Nehemiah’s wall construction project took only 52 days, many years may have been needed to remove the city’s debris (after being desolate for many decades), to build adequate housing, and to rebuild the **streets and a trench**.

9:26a. **The 62 “sevens”** (434 years) extend up to the introduction of the Messiah to the nation Israel. This second period concluded on the day of the Triumphal Entry just before Christ was **cut off**, that is, crucified. In His Triumphal Entry, Christ, in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9, officially presented Himself to the nation of Israel as the Messiah. He was evidently familiar with Daniel’s prophecy when on that occasion He said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes” (Luke 19:42).

Thus the first two segments of the important time period—the 7 sevens (49 years) and the 62 sevens (434 years)—ran consecutively with no time between them. They totaled 483 years and extended from March 5, 444 B.C. to March 30, A.D. 33. How can 444 B.C. to A.D. 33 equal 483 years? For an answer see the chart “The 483 Years in the Jewish and Gregorian Calendars.” (For more details see Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977, and Alva J. McClain, *Daniel’s Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969.)

According to Daniel 9:26 **the Anointed One** was not “cut off” *in* the 70th “seven”; He was cut off **after** the 7 and 62 “sevens” had run their course. This means that there is an interval between the 69th and 70th “sevens.” Christ’s crucifixion, then, was in that interval, right after His Triumphant Entry, which concluded the 69th “seven.” This interval was anticipated by Christ when He prophesied the establishing of the church (Matt. 16:18). This necessitated the setting aside of the nation Israel for a season in order that His new program for the church might be instituted. Christ predicted the setting aside of the nation (Matt. 21:42-43). The present Church Age is the interval between the 69th and 70th “sevens.”

Amillennarians teach that Christ’s First Advent ministry was in the 70th “seven,” that there was no interval between the 69th and 70th “sevens,” and that the six actions predicted in Daniel 9:24 are being fulfilled today in the church. This view, however, (a) ignores the fact that verse 26 says “*after* the 62 -sevens, ‘not’ *in* the 70th -seven, ‘’ (b) overlooks the fact that Christ’s ministry on earth was three and one-half years in length, not seven, and (c) ignores the fact that God’s six actions pertain to Daniel’s “people” (Israel) and His “Holy City” (Jerusalem), not the church.

When the Anointed One would be cut off, Daniel was told, he would **have nothing**. The word translated “cut off” is used of executing the death penalty on a criminal. Thus the prophecy clearly points to the crucifixion of Christ. At His crucifixion He would “have nothing” in the sense that Israel had rejected Him and the kingdom could not be instituted at that time. Therefore He did not then receive the royal glory as the King on David’s throne over Israel. John referred to this when he wrote, “He came to that which was His own [i.e., the throne to which He had been appointed by the Father] but His own [i.e., His own people] did not receive Him” (John 1:11). Daniel’s prophecy, then, anticipated Christ’s offer of Himself to the nation Israel as her Messiah, the nation’s rejection of Him as Messiah, and His crucifixion.

9:26b. The prophecy continues with a description of the judgment that would **come** on the generation that rejected the Messiah. **The city** which contains **the sanctuary**, that is, Jerusalem, would be destroyed by **the people of the ruler who will come**. The ruler who will come is that final head of the Roman Empire, the little horn of 7:8. It is significant that the *people* of the ruler, not the ruler himself, will destroy Jerusalem. Since he will be the final Roman ruler, the people of that ruler must be the Romans themselves. This, then, is a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem about which Christ spoke in His ministry.

When the leaders of the nation registered their rejection of Christ by attributing His power to Beelzebub, the prince of the demons (Matt. 12:24), Christ warned that if they persisted in that view they would be guilty of sin for which there would be no forgiveness (Matt. 12:31-32). He also warned the nation that Jerusalem would be destroyed by Gentiles (Luke 21:24), that it would be desolate (Matt. 23:38), and that the destruction would be so complete that not one stone would be left on another (Matt. 24:2). This destruction was accomplished by Titus in A.D. 70 when he destroyed the city of Jerusalem and killed thousands of Jews. But that invasion, awesome as it was, did not end the nation’s sufferings, for **war**, Gabriel said, would **continue until the end**. Even though Israel was to be set aside, she would continue to suffer until the prophecies of the 70 “sevens” were completely fulfilled. Her sufferings span the entire period from the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 to Jerusalem’s deliverance from Gentile dominion at the Second Advent of Christ.

9:27a. This verse unveils what will occur in the 70th seven years. This seven-year period will begin after the Rapture of the church (which will consummate God’s program in this present Age). The 70th “**seven**” will continue till the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. Because Jesus

said this will be a time of “great distress” (Matt. 24:21), this period is often called the Tribulation.

A significant event that will mark the beginning of this seven-year period is the confirming of **a covenant**. This covenant will be made **with many**, that is, with Daniel’s people, the nation Israel. “The ruler who will come” (Dan. 9:26) will be this covenant-maker, for that person is the antecedent of the word **he** in verse 27. As a yet-future ruler he will be the final head of the fourth empire (the little horn of the fourth beast, 7:8).

The covenant he will make will evidently be a peace covenant, in which he will guarantee Israel’s safety in the land. This suggests that Israel will be in her land but will be unable to defend herself for she will have lost any support she may have had previously. Therefore she will need and welcome the peacemaking role of this head of the confederation of 10 European (Roman) nations. In offering this covenant, this ruler will pose as a prince of peace, and Israel will accept his authority. **But then in the middle of that “seven,”** after three and one-half years, **he will** break the covenant. According to 11:45, he will then move from Europe into the land of Israel.

This ruler will **end ... sacrifice and offering**. This expression refers to the entire Levitical system, which suggests that Israel will have restored that system in the first half of the 70th “seven.” After this ruler gains worldwide political power, he will assume power in the religious realm as well and will cause the world to worship him (2 Thes. 2:4; Rev. 13:8). To receive such worship, he will terminate all organized religions. Posing as the world’s rightful king and god and as Israel’s prince of peace, he will then turn against Israel and become her destroyer and defiler.

9:27b. Daniel was told that “the ruler who will come” (v. 26) **will place abominations on a wing of the temple**. Christ referred to this incident: “You [will] see standing in the holy place the abomination that causes desolation” (Matt. 24:15). John wrote that the false prophet will set up an image to this ruler and that the world will be compelled to worship it (Rev. 13:14-15). But then his end will come (**the end that is decreed is poured out on him**). With his false prophet he will be cast into the lake of fire when Christ returns to the earth (Rev. 19:20; cf. Dan. 7:11, 26).

This covenant could not have been made or confirmed by Christ at His First Advent, as amillenarians teach, because: (a) His ministry did not last seven years, (b) His death did not stop sacrifices and offerings, (c) He did not set up “the abomination that causes desolation” (Matt. 24:15). Amillenarians suggest that Christ confirmed (in the sense of fulfilling) the Abrahamic Covenant but the Gospels give no indication He did that in His First Advent.

As stated, the Antichrist will break his covenant with Israel at the beginning of the second half of the 70th “seven,” that is, it will be broken for three and one-half years. This is called “a time, times, and half a time” (Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 12:14). The fact that this is the same as the three and one-half years, which in turn are equated with 1,260 days (Rev. 11:3; 12:6) and with 42 months (Rev. 11:2; 13:5), means that in Jewish reckoning each month has 30 days and each year 360 days. This confirms the 360-day Jewish year used in the calculations in the chart, “The 483 Years in the Jewish and Gregorian Calendars” (near Dan. 9:26a). Since the events in the 69 sevens (vv. 24-26) were fulfilled literally, the 70th “seven,” yet unfulfilled, must likewise be fulfilled literally.¹

¹ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Da 9:24–27). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

