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Daniel's Seventy Weeks

by
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A tentative and explorative study written for the guidance of those students who are seeking an adequate interpretation of this difficult subject

No interpretation of any portion of Scripture is adequate or satisfactory if it ignores any problem or if it fails to take into consideration any pertinent fact. In this study I will attempt to set forth facts which must be faced, questions which must be answered, and problems which must be solved before any adequate interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27 can be worked out.

There are many who feel that the only problems to be solved are (1) what years apply and are a part of the 490 years, (2) whether the first seven weeks (49 years) are to be recognized as a part of the seventy, or (3) where to begin to reckon the seventy weeks. They solve these problems to their own satisfaction, then feel they have the full, definitive interpretation of this passage. But they ignore altogether the greater problems which a penetrating study of this prophecy imposes. Neither do they dare to consider obvious facts revealed in this record. Thus Gabriel's great message is made to fit a scheme of interpretation, rather than a scheme of interpretation being sought for which fits his message.

I do not claim to have an adequate interpretation of this portion of Daniel at the present time. I have nothing in writing upon this subject. This leaves me free to face every fact and to consider honestly every problem that the words of this passage impose upon the honest student. My sole purpose in this study is to examine carefully the message which Gabriel gave to Daniel.

Seventy weeks. I have before me the writings of some who hold that these are “weeks of days“ rather than weeks of years; that is, that the time period dealt with is 490 days instead of 490 years. This material is carefully written and the arguments are logically presented. This has caused me to examine the idea with care; but having done so I find no argument that will stand the test. I believe these are “weeks of years.” In Daniel 10:2,3 the prophet speaks of ”Three sevens of days” (see Hebrew) and the context makes it plain he meant twenty-one days. In Daniel 9:24 the statement is “seventy sevens” in the Hebrew. It is my judgment, carefully arrived at after having considered all evidence available to me, that 490 years are in view here.

Are determined. The Hebrew word here translated “determined” is a hapex (a word occurring only once in Scripture). It is translated “determined” in the *Authorized Version*; “decreed” in the *Revised*; “divided concerning” by Rotherham; “destined for” by Alex R. Gordon; “apportioned out “ by J. N. Darby. *The Companion Bible* notes that, “determined equals cut off: i.e. divided off from all other years. The verb is singular to indicate the unity of the whole period, however it may be divided up.” All these various versions are harmonious. They do not contradict. In my judgment, J. N. Darby comes the nearest to setting forth the full truth here in his translation “apportioned out.”

Here we face a major problem. The solution of this will influence our interpretation of all that follows. What did Gabriel mean by these words? Did he intend that Daniel should understand that beginning with a certain point 490 years would lapse or pass by after which certain things would become true? Or did he mean that these things were to characterize and be true during these 490 years? I will seek to clarify this problem.

If I budget my time for a year and determine upon one month for a vacation, then I have decreed, cut off, or apportioned out this period of time for this purpose. Therefore, this month that I determined upon should be characterized by my vacation. Even though I may spend a half-week traveling to the place where I will spend it, and another half-week in returning, the whole week is characterized by my absence from my daily work and the time is given to a vacation. But, if I say, “In two months I will take a vacation,” that means that two months will elapse before I start.

Or, as another example, a housewife has purchased a five pound roast which she knows will require thirty minutes to the pound to cook. Simple arithmetic

tells her that this means that two-and-a-half hours must be allotted to the cooking of this piece of meat. She determines upon this amount of time, and fixes in her mind a point of beginning, which ordinarily would be two-and-a-half hours before time for dinner. If the roast is not cooking during the entire time determined upon, she will have nothing but raw meat when the hour of dinner is at hand.

The language of Daniel 9:24 is so simple and so forceful that it is impossible for me to believe that it means that 490 years were to elapse or pass by, after which the things destined for Daniel's people and the holy city would begin. In my judgment, no matter what problems it creates, Gabriel's words can mean nothing else but that there would be a 490 year period that would be characterized throughout by six distinctive truths. These we will consider later. The next phrase provides additional proof of this.

Upon thy people and upon the holy city. Note that it was not decreed that seventy weeks would pass by. The seventy weeks are determined upon Daniel's people and the holy city. Daniel's people means Daniel's nation; therefore, Israel. The "holy city" is Jerusalem. Six things are now listed which God has decreed will be true of the nation of Israel and Jerusalem for a 490 year period. The meaning of these six distinctive things is usually passed over lightly by most commentators. Philip Mauro instantly solves all problems to his own satisfaction by declaring:

"If it were possible to fix with certainty only one of the six predictions of Daniel 9:24, that would suffice to locate the entire series. But the indications given to us enable us to identify five of the six with certainty, and the other with a high degree of probability. We have no doubt then that the entire prophecy of verse 24 was fulfilled in the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the coming of the Holy Ghost from heaven." The Seventy Weeks and the Great Tribulation, by Philip Mauro, page 53.

From this it will be seen that Mauro takes the position that 490 years were to pass by, then the six things predicted would be fulfilled. He believes that the 490 years were all fulfilled at the time of the crucifixion of Christ, and that the six great predictions of verse 24 were fulfilled in the Cross and the coming of the Spirit. This does not commend itself to me as containing a grain of truth.

The six great predictions which declare six great characteristics which must be true of Israel and Jerusalem during a determined period of 490 years are as follows:

(1). **To finish the transgression.** What does this mean? Two words stand out –“finish” and “transgression.” Where the A.V. has “finish,” the R.V. also has “finish” with “restrain” in the margin. Rotherham has “put an end to,” and the *Companion Bible* has the same in its notes. This verb occurs 18 times in the Old Testament, and an examination of every occurrence will bring the conviction that it means restrain, keep back, shut up, or stay. See I Sam. 6:10 (shut up); Gen. 8:2 (was restrained); Exodus 36:6 (were restrained); Ezek. 31:15 (were stayed).

The translators are practically unanimous on the rendering of “transgression,” and after carefully checking all of its 93 occurrences in the Hebrew, I see no ground for questioning this translation. Therefore, it appears that this phrase has the meaning of “to shut up the transgression,” meaning to restrain it to such an extent that it no longer flows. The nearest likeness seems to be that of a river slowly freezing until the flow stops.

David probably refers to this transgression (the word is singular) in Psalm 19:13 where he speaks of being free of “the great transgression.” It appears that this transgression began at Mount Sinai and has continued ever since. Their transgression there was that they departed from the living God. Gabriel declared to Daniel that a period of 490 years had been determined upon during which this transgression would no longer be operative. This is not strange. Other Scriptures speak of such a time. See Hosea 2:19. It was the sin of “departing” that Daniel confessed (see Dan. 9:5, 11). Here the angel tells him of a time when this sin will no longer be in evidence. Compare Hosea 1:2 with 2:19.

(2). **To make an end of sins.** The words “make an end” are one word in the Hebrew. The R.V. has the same translation but puts “seal up” in the margin. Rotherham has “and fill up the measure.” This Hebrew word occurs twenty-eight times in the Old Testament. It is translated “seal” twenty-five times; “stopped,” “marked,” and “make an end” one time each. An examination of all occurrences can bring no other conviction than that this word means to “seal up.” See Lev. 15:3 where it is translated “be stopped,” and refers to a running sore being stopped or sealed. See also Daniel 9:24 where it is translated “seal up

the vision.” Also Daniel 12:4 and Daniel 12:9 where it is translated “seal” and “sealed.” From all the evidence this complete phrase means to stop the flow of sins. Isaiah 1:6 is pertinent here. There Israel’s condition is described under the figure of “festering sores” which were open. Gabriel here makes promise to Daniel of a 490 year period in which Israel’s sins will have ceased to flow because they have been “mollified with ointment.”

(3). **And to make reconciliation for iniquity.** The R.V. concurs in this translation, but puts “to purge away iniquity” in the margin. Rotherham says, “to put a propitiatory covering over iniquity.” The *Companion Bible* suggests “make expiation or atonement.” The Hebrew word translated “reconciliation” here is usually translated “atonement.” But “atonement” is a theological word which is as “unstable as water.” No meaning can be fixed upon it, and any meaning one desires may be attached to it. Those who jump at conclusions may determine at once that this prediction can refer only to the work of Christ upon the Cross, but an investigation of all Scriptures bearing upon this theme will not bear out this idea. Concerning this Sir Robert Anderson has said:

“But it may be asked, was not the Cross of Christ the fulfillment of these blessings? A careful study of the Angel’s words will show that not so much as one of them has been thus accomplished...To any whose views of ‘reconciliation’ are not based on the use of the word in Scripture, ‘making reconciliation for iniquity’ will seem an exception. The Hebrew verb caphar (to make atonement or reconciliation) means literally ‘to cover over’ sin (see its use in Genesis 6:14), to do away with a charge against a person by means of bloodshedding, or otherwise (ex.gr. by intercession, Exod. 32:30), so as to secure his reception into divine favor....It will be seen that caphar is never used of the expiation or bloodshedding considered objectively, but of the results accruing from it to the sinner, sometimes immediately upon the victim’s death, sometimes conditional upon the action of the priest who was charged with the function of applying the blood. The sacrifice was not the atonement, but the means by which the atonement was made.” The Coming Prince, pages 79,80.

Israel’s iniquity was not covered at the Cross. Christ did not cover iniquity in His death. Iniquity was removed by His death, not covered. His death

removed the cause of estrangement between Israel and God, so that they can again be received into divine favor. When Israel is received again, then caphar will be a reality. The angel Gabriel promised that this would be the case for a 490 year period. Zech. 13:1 links up with this. “In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.”

(4). **To bring in everlasting righteousness.** This is “eonian righteousness,” and it means a righteousness that springs forth from God, of which God is the author. Isaiah 1:25,26 provides an excellent commentary on the meaning of this passage. Isaiah 61:11 reveals exactly what this righteousness is. “For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations.”

(5). **And to seal up vision and prophecy.** This statement is at present somewhat obscure and I would not underestimate its difficulties. The word “seal up” here is the same Hebrew word as was translated “make an end of” in the second clause. It can mean seal and it is the ordinary word for sealing a letter (1 Kings 21:8), or a purse (Job 14:17). It can also mean “to affix a seal” as in Jeremiah 32:44, thus attesting to or making legal the document.

The word vision is a good translation, but the word “prophecy” should be prophet. This word occurs 315 times, and is translated “prophet” 313 times. It seems that the word “seal” here has the sense of attest (by means of fulfillment). Thus over a 490 year period the visions and prophets of the Old Testament will be attested to daily by the actual fulfillments of their words. “One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts.” Psalm 145:4.

(6). **And to anoint the most Holy.** This is translated in the R.V. margin, “to anoint a most holy;” and by Rotherham, “anoint the holy of holies.” The *Companion Bible* marginal notes concur with Rotherham and declare, “never used of a person.” I can see no other truth in this statement than that Israel and Judah will have an anointed “holy of holies” for a 490 year period. The only qualification of this is that it is desecrated in the last half of the final seven years.

There can be no doubt. These six things set forth six great blessings that are someday to be the portion of Israel and Jerusalem. Or, as Sir Robert Anderson says: “All these words point to practical benefits to be conferred in a practical way upon the people....” From the whole of Daniel 9:24 we know that these blessings are to be the portion of Israel for a determined period of 490 years. These blessings must characterize and be a reality during the entire period. Since Israel never has enjoyed these blessings, and since she is not enjoying them now, the only logical position can be that these 490 years have not yet begun. I readily admit that I am a futurist in regard to Daniel’s seventy weeks. Let us consider the event that marks their beginning.

Daniel 9:25 “Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem.” From this it seems evident that the beginning of the seventy weeks determined was to be marked by the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. There are those who deny this, insisting that the 70 week period is to begin 7 weeks (49 years) after the decree to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem, but I am not able to follow their reasoning in regard to this. Nevertheless, this statement has caused much searching and much controversy as to just when, by whom, etc., this decree was issued. No one so far as I know has ever dared to consider that maybe this decree has not yet gone forth.

Three decrees related to Jerusalem are recorded in Scripture. First, there is the one by Cyrus set forth in 2 Chron. 36:22, 23 and Ezra 1:1-3. He declared that the Lord God had charged him to build Him an house in Jerusalem, and he called for volunteers among the people of Israel to go up and build it. The exact words of his declaration are recorded by the Spirit of God, and the Spirit also declares that his acts were to the end that the word spoken by Jeremiah might be accomplished, not the prophecy of Daniel. Since his proclamation concerned only the temple, the imagination must be stretched to the limit to make his act “a command to restore and to build Jerusalem.”

Then there is the act of Darius, recorded in Ezra 6:3-8. His words concerned only the temple, they did not concern the city, and they in no way fit Gabriel’s words to Daniel.

Finally, there is the decree of Artaxerxes in behalf of Ezra recorded in Ezra 7, and the record of his favors to Nehemiah recorded in Nehemiah 2:1-8. Sir Robert Anderson argues eloquently that the acts of Artaxerxes in behalf of

Nehemiah were in reality a decree to restore and to build Jerusalem. An examination of the record shows that he gave permission, cooperation, and support, but there is no decree recorded that Jerusalem should be restored and rebuilt.

It is my opinion that there is no act of anyone recorded in Scripture that fulfills the words of Gabriel to Daniel concerning “a decree to rebuild and restore Jerusalem.” In view of this, it seems that this is something to be looked for in the future, rather than something to be found in the past. This brings us to consider a very important prophecy recorded in Isaiah 44:28-45:4.

“That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid. Thus saith the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron.

“And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant’s sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.” Isaiah 44:28-45:4.

These words were spoken by Isaiah over 200 years before a king named Cyrus sat upon the Persian throne. Most commentators believe that this prophecy was exhaustively fulfilled in him. I cannot agree with this for it is impossible for me to accept a weak fulfillment of one of the most dramatic prophecies in the Old Testament. Furthermore, we are led to believe by Scripture that while Cyrus did fulfill the word spoken by Jeremiah, there is no statement or hint that he was in any manner related to the prophecy of Isaiah. See 2 Chron. 36:21, 22 and Jeremiah 25:11-12. Therefore, this prophecy of Isaiah stands as an unfulfilled prophecy which another personage by the name of Cyrus must in some future day fulfill to the letter. If there is no room for an event such as this in our tight little systems of prophetic interpretation, then they need to be enlarged.

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. These words state a simple record which is easily understood as long as it does not become involved in our interpretations. From the going forth of the decree to restore and build Jerusalem to one called here “Messiah the Prince” is to be a period of 49 years. During this 49 year period Jerusalem and the temple will be rebuilt and restored. This “Messiah” will begin his rule in a great jubilee year and his rule will continue for 434 years (62 weeks). After this he will be cut off. As impossible as this may seem, as ruinous as it may be to present-day interpretations, I believe this is what this passage tells us. From this it will be evident that I do not hold that “Messiah the Prince” is the Lord Jesus Christ. This will cause some to raise their hands in holy horror, but we had better consider the translation before coming to any conclusions

The word translated “Messiah” here is mashiyach (pronounced maw-SHEE-akh). This word occurs 40 times in the Old Testament and is translated 38 times by the word anointed (a common noun) and twice by the word Messiah (a proper noun). This compares with the celebrated example of the New Testament translators who translated pascha by “passover” twenty-eight times and by “Easter” one time, a translation that could be justified only by the fact that someone wanted to get “Easter” into the Bible. Neither can there be any reason for translating mashiyach by “Messiah” in Daniel 9:25,26 except that the translators thought that Gabriel here spoke of Christ, so they gave an interpretation rather than a translation. A few selected passages will show how the word mashiyach is used:

- Lev. 4:3—the priest that is anointed
- 1 Sam. 24:6—my master, the Lord’s anointed
- 1 Sam26:9—against the Lord’s anointed
- Isaiah 45:1—to His anointed, to Cyrus

The word translated “Prince” here is nagid (pronounced naw-GHEED). It occurs 43 times and is translated ruler, 19 times; prince, 9 times; captain, 6 times; leader, 4 times; and by chief, chief ruler, chief governor, noble, and excellent things, one time each. The word ruler or governor seems to fit best the Hebrew. The passage before us is the only one in which it is made to be a proper noun. There is nothing in the Hebrew to show that this title belongs to the Lord Jesus. And there is no hint or suggestion in the New Testament that says any part of Daniel was fulfilled by the first advent of Christ.

“Who then can this possibly refer to, if not to Christ?” is a question sure to be asked. And this is asked as if we were shut up to only one possibility.

It could refer to the one spoken of in Jeremiah 30:9: “But they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them.”

It could refer to the one set forth in Jeremiah 30:21: “And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me.”

Again it could refer to the one spoken of in Ezekiel 34:23,24: “And I will set up one shepherd over them.”

Or it may refer to that mysterious “prince” set forth in Ezekiel 45 and 46.

Still it may be the person mentioned in Hosea 1:11: “Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head.”

Daniel 9:26 And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself. It is generally held that this speaks of the death of Christ, but I am not convinced of this. In the first place, this statement is hardly a translation of the Hebrew. It is the interpretation of the translators. And even if we translate the last part “shall have nothing,” as apparently it should be, it does not fit the Lord Jesus. See John 17:12.

For more than a dozen years, I have been insisting that no present interpretation of Daniel’s Seventy Weeks is adequate, and that no satisfactory solution would be found until this portion was completely surrounded by other truth. I have likened it to a fortress that would never be taken by direct onslaught. I believe we are now in possession of some of the truth that will in time make clear this passage.

It is my conviction that the day is coming when the salvation of God will return to His people Israel. When our great God determines that this is to be, it will mark the beginning of the work which will result in the enlightenment, conversion, restoration and blessing of Israel. They will be brought under God’s rule; they will be brought into the bond of the covenant; and all who rebel against His work will be purged out from among them. (Ezekiel 20:33-38.) Following their reception by God a great work will begin among the Gentiles

which will result in God's rule being established throughout the earth. God will then plant the world with the sons of the kingdom, and the dream of one world under a benevolent and enlightened governor will be a reality. This ruler, I feel, will be the Cyrus of Isaiah 44:28-45:4. He is God's anointed, and he decrees that Jerusalem and the temple will be rebuilt. It is emphatically declared in Isaiah 60:10 that the Gentiles will build the walls of Jerusalem. It appears that this building requires 49 years and at its completion, Israel's great prince appears. He rules for 434 years, but is deposed and overthrown in the apostasy of the end time. This brings about the amazing final week of Daniel's seventy weeks.

I make no attempt to supply all details. The study is still too new for me to make the claim that I have discovered an adequate interpretation.

The End

POSTSCRIPT. This study was originally prepared as a project for the Scripture Research Fellowship of The Word of Truth Ministry. An insistent demand for help upon this subject led me to issue it in advance of the first issue of the Scripture Research Journal. At some later date this study will be rewritten and printed in The Word of Truth. Your comments, criticisms, and suggestions will be appreciated. It will be impossible for me to enter into correspondence with any concerning this subject. Otis Q. Sellers, 607 South Kenmore Avenue, Los Angeles 5, California, April 8, 1950.