

### Chapter III

## THE SEVENTY WEEKS OF DANIEL

One of the most important portions of prophetic Scripture, concerning the sequence of events leading to the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, is found in the ninth chapter of the book of Daniel. This chapter provides a revelation to Daniel, from the angel Gabriel, of a number of specific events in God's prophetic clock. According to the revelation given to Daniel, all of the events named in the revelation will be fulfilled within a span of *seventy weeks*.

*Weeks* is an unfortunate translation of the Hebrew word *septad*. It means seven. The prophecy is about seventy periods of seven. A consideration of the sevens in the light of history, as well as in the light of the events prophesied, provides that the sevens are periods of seven years: for a total of four hundred and ninety years.

The seventy sevens begin with the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem after seventy years of Jewish captivity in Babylon, and they end when our Lord Jesus Christ shall establish His Kingdom upon this earth. It would be easy to assume the seventy sevens are an

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unending sequence; but, as we shall see, the first sixty-nine sevens, while classified as *seven sevens, and threescore and two sevens*, were an unending sequence, while the seventieth seven is separated from the others by a span of time. This span will be the entire church age.

Let us now consider the events that led to Gabriel's revelation to Daniel of the vision of the seventy weeks. Daniel had been carried into Babylonian captivity by Nebuchadnezzar as a youth. He had been trained for political service, as an advisor to the king, along with his companions Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah: better known by their Babylonian names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abenego. These Jews served their captors faithfully through the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar, Evel-merodach, Nergal-sharezer, Labashi-marduk, Nabonidus, Belshazzar, Darius and Cyrus. (*The Romance of Bible Chronology*, by Martin Anstey, Marshall Brothers, London, 1913, page 231)

We learned, in our study of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Babylon was to fall to Persia at God's appointed time. When Babylon fell to the Persians, in the first year of the reign of Darius the Mede, Daniel and his companions had been in exile from Jerusalem and captives in Babylon for sixty-eight years. (This is determined by a study of Biblical Chronology.)

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; in the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: and I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; we have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this

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day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee.

To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him. And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem. (Daniel 9:1-12)

Upon understanding the prophecy of Jeremiah -- that the Jews were to be in captivity in Babylon for seventy years -- and upon understanding his covenant responsibility to the law of Moses, Daniel, as seen in the above Scripture, confessed his sins and the sins of his people. He appealed to God on the basis of His grace and mercy: *O Lord, hear; 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.*

It was then that the angel Gabriel appeared unto Daniel and *touched* [him] *about the time of the evening oblation* and informed him, *O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding.*

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.

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. 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

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determined.

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 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. (Daniel 9:24-27)

The seventy periods of seven relate to Daniel's people and Daniel's city. These are the Jews and the city of Jerusalem. Therefore the vision speaks of six things that relate both to the city and to the people. These will occur in the span of these seventy sevens. They are: to finish the transgression; to make an end of sins; to make reconciliation for iniquity; to bring in everlasting righteousness; to seal up the vision and the prophecy; and to anoint the most holy. We shall consider each.

First, *to finish the transgression* relates to the apostasy of the nation of Israel. Initially it was to be restricted, but ultimately, with the salvation of the nation, at the end of the great tribulation, it will end. However, restricting the apostasy speaks primarily of the ministries of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, who ministered during the first forty-nine years after the Jews were to return to the land to restore and rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem.

Second, *to make an end of sins* was accomplished at the end of the sixty-ninth week of the vision when our Lord made *one sacrifice for sin forever*. Our Lord told the Jews, *Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled* (Matthew 5:17-18). *Christ is the end of the law for righteous to everyone that believeth* (Romans 10:4). Further the Scripture teaches an identification between sin and the sacrifice for sin. So Paul wrote, *For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we*

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*might be made the righteousness of God in him* (II Corinthians 5:21). Thus Gabriel's statement to Daniel, *to make an end of sins*, prophesied the end of the sacrificial system.

Third, *to make reconciliation for iniquity* speaks of the atonement made by our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. The word translated *reconciliation* is *kaphar*. *Kaphar* means *to cover*. It relates to the day of atonement, or covering, when propitiation, by the sprinkling of the blood upon the mercy seat, was made. *It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; for then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation* (Hebrews 9:23-28).

Fourth, *to bring in everlasting righteousness* has a dual fulfillment. Sinners are declared saints by virtue of their faith in the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Scriptures declare, *when we see Him, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is*. This means that the declared righteousness (in which we are presently viewed of God) will then become (by right of our resurrection, glorification and adoption) the actual righteousness of our Lord. God has the perfect right to do this because of the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in our behalf.

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Thus Righteousness will reign when our Lord reigns in His Kingdom with those whom He has made righteous.

Fifth, *to seal up the vision and the prophecy* speaks of the conclusion of the Old Testament canon of Scripture. This means the last books of the Old Testament Scriptures were written by the prophets of the restoration, who produced the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Zechariah, Haggai and Malachi, during the first forty-nine years following the decree to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem.

Sixth, *to anoint the most Holy* speaks of the anointing of our Lord Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords, when our Lord establishes His Kingdom upon this earth and sits upon the throne of David.

Thus within the span of the seventy weeks of Daniel, counting from the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, these six events shall take place. *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away* (Matthew 24:35).

The seventy weeks of Daniel have set the prophetic clock. It is with respect to this clock that the seven kings of the Roman empire, recorded in Revelation chapter seventeen, are recognized. From the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the crucifixion of Christ, at the end of the sixty-ninth week, three Roman rulers had lived and died. As previously mentioned, they were Julius, Augustus and Tiberius.

Daniel's vision of the seventy-weeks was determined upon his city and his people. So even though the sixty-ninth week ended, Daniel's people had not ended. Thus we continue counting Roman emperors until the destruction of Jerusalem. After Tiberius came Caligula and Claudius;

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but by the time the book of the Revelation was written, they had died and one was alive, with one to come. This takes us to Nero, who died in 68 A.D. He was followed by Vespasian. Under the reign of Vespasian, Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D. Since Israel (as a nation) and the city of Jerusalem were no more, God stopped counting Roman rulers until the revelation of the antichrist, who will be the *eighth, and is of the seven*.

Despite the fact that the Scripture is absolutely clear about the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, there has been a good deal of confusion about which Persian emperor gave the decree. This confusion has been born of secular history and the Ptolemaic chronology. We have already seen, that by the time of Daniel's vision, that the Jews had been in captivity for sixty-eight years. It was in the sixty-eighth year of their captivity that Daniel learned they were to be in captivity for seventy years. Thus the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem had to be forthcoming; and, indeed, it was forthcoming when Cyrus became sole rex, or king of the Persian empire.

It was prophesied by Isaiah (in chapter forty-four) that Cyrus was God's anointed who was to give the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. In addition to this, it is recorded in II Chronicles and in the book of Ezra that Cyrus gave the decree:

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and

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the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem. And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered.

Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods; even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. (Ezra 1:1-8)

In a wonderful work by Martin Anstey, *Romance of Bible Chronology*, in two volumes by Marshall Brothers, London, 1913, and reprinted as *Chronology of the Old Testament*, Kregel Publications, 1973, Reverend Anstey, in a very scholarly manner, compared all of the chronologies of antiquity with Biblical chronology. His conclusion was that Biblical chronology proves the accepted dates of the Ptolemaic chronology to be 82 years longer than the actual span of years. This places the date of the decree of Cyrus at 454 B.C. rather than at the accepted date of 536 B.C.

It is impossible to reconcile the vision of the seventy weeks of Daniel with the erroneous date of 536 B.C. (hence all of the confusion), but the corrected date of 454 B.C. (by Biblical chronology) fits perfectly into the vision of the seventy weeks.

With reference to the decree of Cyrus and the seventy weeks of Daniel, Martin Anstey wrote:

The one great event, and the only one in the history of the Jews which corresponds with the prophecy, is the return of the 42,360 exiles under Zerubbabel and Joshua, the rebuilding of the city and the Sanctuary, and the securing of the safety of the same by the erection of the protecting wall.

None of the Chronologers have been able to adopt this interpretation, because, although they have seen its truth, they have been unable to shake off the tyranny of the Ptolemaic system of Chronology. (Page 278, *The Romance of Bible Chronology*)

As seen in the above statement, commentators on the book of Daniel have been aware that

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the only decree in Scripture that fits the vision of the seventy weeks of Daniel is the decree of Cyrus, but, in the name of scholarship, they have had difficulty reconciling Daniel's prophecy with secular history. History is not the problem, but the dates assigned to history by the Ptolemaic chronology, and an unwillingness to question the Ptolemaic system, are the problem.

Secular history may be used for authority when secular history agrees with Biblical history; but when there is a difference between a secular account and the Biblical account, the Biblical account carries the greater authority: *Let God be true, and every man a liar.*

For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. (I Corinthians 2:11-16)

The weeks of Gabriel's revelation prove to be weeks of years by virtue of the span of years between the decree of Cyrus and the crucifixion of Christ (at the conclusion of the sixty-ninth week of the prophecy). The prophecy is given in three divisions: seven sevens; threescore and two sevens; and one seven, or in literal terms: forty-nine years; four hundred and thirty-four years, and seven years: for a total of four hundred and ninety years.

An important observation, using the key of the seventy weeks of Daniel, should be noted at this time: there are precisely four hundred and eighty-three years (seven sevens plus threescore and two sevens) between the decree of Cyrus in 454 B.C. and the crucifixion of Christ in 29 A.D.

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Then, as implied by the three divisions of forty-nine years, four hundred and thirty-four years, and one year: the counting of the seventy sevens stopped with one period of seven years yet to come.

This is the great tribulation period, *the time of Jacob's trouble*.

In our next chapter, *The Seven Feasts of the Jews*, it will be evident that the church age was to stand between the first advent of our Lord and His second advent. Therefore it is not strange that there has been a gap (to date) of nearly two thousand years between the first advent of our Lord and our expectation of His imminent return to this earth to establish His Kingdom.