

THE SEVENTY WEEKS

Chapter 9

The main feature of the chapter which is now to occupy our attention is the great prophecy of the seventy weeks. Sir Edward Denny, a noted prophetic student of the last century, used commonly to call this "The back bone of prophecy;" and this title seems well given, for if the seventy weeks be misunderstood then an effort will necessarily be made to bend all the other prophetic scriptures into accord with that misinterpretation. But if we have a correct understanding of the teaching of this chapter, we can then see readily how all prophecy, without any forcing, falls right into place, and is intimately linked up with this the greatest of all time-prophecies.

We will spend a little while first, in noting what led up to the giving of this special revelation. Daniel was himself a prophetic student. He was one who realized deeply in his own soul, though the words had not yet been written, that All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." And so, we see, in the opening verses, this devoted man, in the first year of the reign of Darius, bending over the prophetic word in the Holy Scriptures. He did not have anything like as complete a Bible as we have; but he valued what he had, and searched diligently. In fact, the last book that had been added to the Bible was that of Ezekiel. We do not know for certain that this ever came into his hands, but we do know from this passage that he had, at any rate, the book of Jeremiah. As he studied it carefully, he noticed that twice in that book it was written that God would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

Now as Daniel looked back and reckoned the years he had spent in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, then the days that had followed during the period of Babylon's difficulties, succeeded by the triumph of the Medes and Persians, and counted it all up, he evidently realized that the seventy years must have very nearly run out. Therefore, the day of the deliverance of the Jews must have drawn very near. He could probably look back over almost seven decades himself, for he had been carried away as a captive in the reign of Jehoiakim when he was but a lad, and he had become an old man.

We find that the study of prophecy exercised the heart and the conscience of Daniel; he was not merely interested in it from an intellectual standpoint. The mere computing of times and seasons could not satisfy this devout man of God; but when he learned from his Bible that the time had almost drawn near for the people of Judah to be restored to their land, it stirred him to the very depths of his soul, and brought him down to his knees. He might have said, "If it is God's purpose to restore His people. He will carry that purpose out, whatever their condition, and I need not concern myself about this matter." But no, Daniel realized that when God is about to work, He begins by exercising His people that they may be restored in soul if they have wandered from Him; and thus, blessing would result upon their being brought into the place of self-judgment and humiliation before Him. Happy will it be for us if the study of his book has the same effect upon us that the study of the book of Jeremiah had upon Daniel. If not, I fear it will have a hardening effect, and will leave us in a worse condition than when we began. But if these things we have been going over, all that God has been bringing before us, shall result in casting us down in lowliness before Him, and causing us to cry, "O Lord God, we have sinned,

we have much reason to be before Thee in confession and brokenness, because of the failure of Thy people, the Church of which we form a part:" I say if it has this effect upon us, yea *in* us, it will be indeed for God's glory and our blessing.

And, surely, we have serious cause to be on our knees before God. when we think of all the failure and the sin that has come in to mar our testimony. We will not feel much like finding fault with others, if really before God as to our own shame in all this. Sometimes when I hear people railing against this denomination and that company of Christians, while glorying in their own position and utterly ignoring their true state, I think how little such persons enter into the thoughts and feelings that filled the heart and wrung confession from the lips of this man, Daniel. Notice that he does not begin by accusing the Jews who had acted so badly in. the days gone by, nor his contemporaries at that solemn moment in Israel's history; but he sets his face unto Jehovah, to seek Him in prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes, the outward expression of deep and heartfelt repentance. We are told that he prayed unto the Lord his God and made his confession. He says, " *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. "He owns the righteousness of God in the judgment that had come upon them; yet he dares to plead that to the Lord his God belong mercies and forgiveness, though they had so grievously rebelled against Him. In all His dealings with them, God had but confirmed His own words and made manifest the faithfulness of His testimony through Moses His servant.

How much we may learn from all this! When we look around, and see the failure in the Church, the fleshliness and the worldliness that prevail on every hand, let us not be content to pass our judgment upon them, and lift up our hearts in spiritual pride and say: "Thank God, we are not as others;" but oh, let us remember that we too are part of that Church which has failed. We cannot dissociate ourselves from other Christians; we have to take our place with them, and bow our heads in the presence of God and own that we have sinned. If we could but remember this always, it would cure us of railing against the people of God who have less light than we have, or than we fancy that we have.

I remember a dear servant of God writing to me a number of years ago from a place where he was laboring in the gospel: "Prejudice is very strong here, and I regret to have to feel that in large measure our own dear brethren are to blame for much of it. In times past they have spent so much time stoning what, no doubt, very much deserved to be stoned, but which we have no authority to stone. "God has not raised us up to go around stoning His people. We have not been appointed to be the censors of Christendom. He has said: " Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth."

And so, as we pass on our way, let us be exercised about individual holiness and faithfulness to God; concerned too, about corporate righteousness and freedom from unholy associations; but do not let us seek to sit in judgment upon our fellow-Christians who may not happen to see eye to eye with us, but whose love for the Lord Jesus, and faithfulness to what they do see, might be an example well worthy of our imitation. No, let us rather take Daniel's place of self-abasement and repentance in the presence of God, and throw our arms of love and faith about all His dear people and say: "O God, *we*'— not *they*, —" we have sinned and done this evil in Thy sight."

And when we get into that state, then we can count upon His blessing, and can look to Him expectantly for a measure of recovery. It is this that shines out so beautifully in our prophet. He identifies himself, though a man of unusual faithfulness (perhaps in fact, the most devoted man of his generation), with his failed and failing nation.

In simplicity and faith, he then looks up to God, beseeching Him to let His anger and His fury be turned away from Jerusalem and to cause His face to shine upon the sanctuary that was desolate. Note the earnestness and pathos of verses eighteen and nineteen with which he concludes his touching petition. "O my God, incline Thine ear, and hear; open Thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by Thy name: for we do not present our supplications before Thee for our righteousness's, but for Thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, harken and do; defer not, for Thine own sake, O my God; for Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy name."

Prayer of such a character could not fail of an answer. While he was speaking and making his confession, the angel Gabriel, "being caused to fly swiftly, touched him about the time of the evening oblation," that is at the time when the smoking sacrifice, pointing on to the offering of our Lord Jesus Christ, would have been ascending to God had Jerusalem not been in ruins. Gabriel declares that he has been sent to give Daniel skill and understanding in regard to the times, foreknown of God, of Israel's blessing. I quote his message in full and ask you to note carefully every word.

"Seventy weeks are determined (or, cut off) 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 (or, the Holy of Holies). 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 (or, the strait, or narrow times). And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for Himself (or, and shall have nothing): 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 (or, until the end shall be war and desolations as 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 abomination he shall make it desolate (or, upon the wing of abominations shall come one who maketh desolate), even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate (or, desolator)."

Now in considering this prophecy in detail, it is important, first of all, to notice that the time period of seventy weeks clearly refers to years. Daniel had been learning from the Scriptures, that the Lord would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. But in answer to his prayer God makes known to him that in seventy weeks, or sevens of years, all prophecy in connection with His people Israel will be fulfilled. The word here rendered "weeks " does not necessarily mean weeks of days, but it is a generic term (like our word dozen) a *heptad*, meaning a seven, and may be applied to whatever subject is under consideration. On the chart I have used the word heptad, which is the equivalent, in order to avoid confusion of terms.

It is also important to notice that these seventy sevens or four hundred and ninety years are cut off from the entire period of time for Daniel's people, the Jews, and his holy city, Jerusalem. Therefore, the seventy weeks are *only running on while there is a remnant in Jerusalem owned of God as His people.*

And this brings me to a third point, which many have not noticed; that the cycle of the seventy weeks is divided into three parts. This you can see clearly by referring to the chart. First, we have seven sevens, or 49 years. This is the period called the strait, or narrow, times in which the city and the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt. The second part of the cycle consists of sixty-two weeks, or 434 years, after which Messiah was to be cut off and have nothing. This leaves one week, or seven years, yet to be fulfilled; and which never can be fulfilled until there is again a remnant of Judah in the city of Jerusalem owned by God as His people.

A cycle of 490 years had closed in the Babylonish captivity.¹ Now, God said He was about to give them another period of the same length, at the end of which things would come out differently. Notice how much was to be accomplished ere this period would close. Their transgression would be finished; an end made of sins; reconciliation, or properly, atonement, would be made for iniquity; everlasting righteousness, that is, the millennial kingdom, brought in; vision and prophecy all sealed up because fulfilled; and the Holy of Holies anointed in the future temple at Jerusalem.

Now it is very evident that there is a great deal here which has never yet been accomplished, consequently the 490 years have not yet been completed.

But can we tell definitely when the seventy weeks began? Yes, look at the twenty-fifth verse: "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem, unto the Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks." *Now* the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem is given us in the second chapter of the book of Nehemiah, and there can be no question about the dates. The edict was given in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, a year well known to historians as B.C. 445. Observe the commandment that went forth in the days of Cyrus, of which we have a record in Ezra, chap. 1, is clearly not the starting point referred to here; for that edict had to do alone with the rebuilding of the house of God at Jerusalem, that is, the temple of Zerubbabel. There is nothing said there about rebuilding the city or the wall. It is therefore the order of Artaxerxes that the angel here mentions as the true starting point. Now from the time of this decree to the coming of Messiah the Prince, seven weeks, and sixty-two weeks, were to elapse, making in all sixty-nine weeks, or 483 years. The 49 years are distinguished from the rest because in them the city and the wall were rebuilt, and also, I doubt not, that our attention might be directed to the fact that the 490 years are divided into three series, and do not necessarily run on in direct chronological order. It is true that the sixty-two weeks immediately followed the completion of the seven weeks, but this does not alter the fact that God distinctly separates the sixty-two weeks from the seven that went before; just as the last week, or seven years, is separated from all that preceded. Now able chronologists have shown that the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ occurred immediately after the expiration of 483 prophetic years, of 360 days each, from the time of Artaxerxes' order. By reference to the other time-prophecies of this book it

will become evident at once, I think, that this is the true method of computation. The time, times, and the dividing: of time of chap. 7:25 and 12: 7 (representing exactly three years and a half, as is evident by a comparison with the seven times in which Nebuchadnezzar was driven forth from among men) are clearly identical with the 1260 days of the Apocalypse.

At the expiration of the sixty-nine weeks, therefore, the Messiah for whom Israel had waited so long had actually come, only to be cut off and rejected by the very people who should have hailed His advent with joy. Up to this time, the great prophetic clock had been ticking out the years one after another in fulfilment of what we have in this chapter; but upon the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ the great clock stopped, and there has not been another tick from it since; nor will there be until, in a coming day, the Jews shall be restored to their own land and a remnant be found among them who are ready to own the claims of God's Christ. Because of Jerusalem's rejection of her Prince, He has rejected them; and He prophesied, ere He died, that their city and temple would be thrown down and not one stone left upon another. This is also foretold in the twenty-sixth verse of our chapter. "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 shall be war and desolations as determined." These words briefly describe the history of Palestine from the coming of the Roman armies under Titus to the present time. Jerusalem, and Palestine as a whole, have been trodden down of all nations, and shall be, "until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

Observe that it is not said in verse twenty-six that the prince shall come at that time. In fact, it is distinctly stated that the city shall be destroyed not by the coming prince, but by his people. The prince is that dreadful character yet to arrive upon the scene, who will arrogate to himself supreme power in the days of the ten-kingdom period of the Roman empire, which we have seen is still future. In other words, he is emphatically *the* Beast of Revelation chaps. 13:1 and 17: 3.

He is the one who at once comes to the front in verse 27. *He* shall confirm a covenant with the many for one week. The 70th week will begin when the Jewish people are restored in unbelief to their land and city; and among them will be found a faithful remnant, owning their sin, and seeking Jehovah's face. The many, that is the apostate mass of the people, will enter into covenant relations with the prince whose people formerly were the instruments of the destruction of their city. That is, this great blasphemous Roman leader will guarantee protection and freedom of religious worship to them for seven years, in return for which they will promise allegiance to him as their sovereign. In the midst of the week (that is, after three years and a half) he will violate his part of the covenant, and cause the sacrifices and oblations to Jehovah to cease. Idolatry of the most dreadful kind will be forced upon them. The direct result of which will be to distinguish the remnant from the mass, and thus to bring in the Great Tribulation which will continue for forty-two months, "a time, times, and half a time," or 1260 days.

The last clause we may read either as we have it in the Authorized Version of our Bible as "that determined shall be poured upon the desolate" or, as others read it, "the desolator." That which God has determined shall be poured out upon poor desolate Judah because of their rejection of their rightful King and Saviour; and then, when their cup has been filled to the brim by the dreadful persecutions of the Beast and Antichrist, these arch-enemies of God and His people shall themselves be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the

glory of His power. *We*. Have their doom clearly foretold in the book of Revelation, chap. 19: 20. "And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone." There they are seen a thousand years later, in chap. 20:10, when the devil, the instigator of all iniquity, shall be himself cast into the same fiery pit, "where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever."

It is plain then, from all that we have been going over, that this last week of the seventy has not yet been fulfilled; for if it had been the Jews would now be in their land, a holy, happy people, their temple anointed for divine service, their transgressions finished, and the years of their mourning ended. But God only counts time with Israel while they are owned as His people in the land of Palestine. All the years of their subjection to Gentile rule are looked upon as wasted. In this present age of their rejection, God is taking out from among the Gentiles a people to the name of the Lord Jesus, the Church which will be His body and His bride for all eternity. When this great work is over "He will build again the tabernacle of David that is fallen down," and commence once more to fulfil Old Testament prophecy from the point reached at the cross of Christ. Meantime, the Gentile oppressor stalks haughtily through the land of Palestine, and the poor Jew is despised and hated in most of the lands of his wanderings. The Lord Jesus gives us the history of Palestine in one pregnant sentence when He says, "There shall be wars and rumors of wars, but the end is not yet." This is characteristic of the entire dispensation, and shall be until the end. When will that end be? When the 70th week begins to run, and God once more takes up the nation of Israel and begins to fulfil the promises made through the prophets. He will touch the pendulum of that great prophetic clock, as it were, and set it once more ticking off the years preparatory to ushering in the glorious kingdom of the Son of Man, when Jerusalem shall become the capital city of the world, and Palestine be again the garden of the Lord.

Ere closing I briefly notice a rather peculiar interpretation which is frequently given to the 27th verse. It is said that the Lord Jesus is Himself to be "the prince that shall come" who confirms the covenant for one week. His own crucifixion is supposed to be the event which caused the sacrifice and oblation to cease. But neither chronologically nor doctrinally will this stand for a moment, if examined in the light of other scriptures. With whom did the Lord Jesus ever confirm a covenant for seven years? His precious blood is called "the blood of the everlasting covenant;" not a covenant for one week of years. We may rest assured it is not Messiah, at all, but the blasphemous prince who is yet to come, who will fulfil what is predicted in this verse.

How near this world may be to the actual entering upon all these things no man can say, but it is the part of wisdom to learn from the prophetic Scriptures, and to turn now to Him who alone can save; to own Him as Redeemer and Lord, and thus be certain of being caught up to meet Him when He comes in the clouds, ere the time comes for His righteous judgment to be poured out upon this poor world.