
THE SEVENTY WEEKS OF DANIEL

Chapter 9 of the book of Daniel describes one of the most important times in the history of Israel and of the world. This period of time is referred to as the Seventy Weeks of Daniel, or the Seventy Sevens.

Daniel 9:24-27

24 *“Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place.*

25 *“So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.*

26 *“Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.*

27 *“And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.” (NAS)*

Bible scholars generally agree that the Seventy Weeks refer to a period of 490 years since 490 days would be too short a time to fulfill the events listed in the verses and because subsequent historical events have clarified this context. In addition to this, the prophetic symbolism of a day equaling a year is revealed in the book of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 4:5

5 *“For I have assigned you a number of days corresponding to the years of their iniquity, three hundred and ninety days; thus you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. (NAS, underlining added)*

Only 483 of the years have transpired so far. The final seven years is yet to come. This final “week” is often called the Seventieth Week of Daniel or the Tribulation.

The Seventy Weeks that are decreed apply to the Jews and Jerusalem. Daniel’s previous two visions pertained to the empires that would make up the “times of the gentiles” spoken of by Jesus in Luke 21:24. The prophet Jeremiah only prophesied through the 70 year exile of Israel to Babylon (*Jeremiah 25:11*). Daniel wanted to know what the future held for his people after they were restored to their homeland at the end of the 70 year exile to Babylon. God sent the archangel Gabriel to answer his prayerful request.

The Seventy Weeks were established “to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring the everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.” (*Daniel 9:24, NIV*) The Hebrew verb for “to finish” means to bring something to an end. Israel’s transgression of rebellion and disobedience will be brought to an end at the Parousia or the Second Coming of Christ. At this time, Israel will repent of their

sins and turn to Jesus as Messiah, Savior, and Lord. The Hebrew meaning of the phrase “put an end to sin” infers that sin will be sealed up or judged. This will happen when God will “atone for wickedness” through His righteous execution of wrath upon the world and through Israel’s acceptance of their Savior and Lord. The Hebrew word for atone means to expiate or to cover over. Jews will understand the atoning work of Christ, just as Christians now do, when they repent and accept Him. “Everlasting righteousness” speaks of Christ establishing the Kingdom of God, or the Millennium, on earth as it is in Heaven. In this time, all prophesy will be completed or sealed up.



**The first decree by
Cyrus, found in a
cuneiform cylinder.**

The decree spoken of in Daniel 9:25 was actually the fourth Persian decree. The first decree was by Cyrus in 538 B.C. (*2 Chronicles 36:22, 23; Ezra 1:1-4;5:13*). This decree allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem. The second decree was given by Darius I in 520 B.C., (*Ezra 6:1; 6-12*) and it only confirmed the first decree. These first two decrees pertained only to the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. The third decree was issued by Artaxerxes in 457 B.C. (*Ezra 7:11-26*). It financed the return to animal sacrifices at the Temple. The fourth and final decree, the one spoken of in Daniel 9, was also given by Artaxerxes and it granted the Jews permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, under Nehemiah, and to complete the resettlement of Israel and bring to an end the effects of the Babylonian exile. The fourth decree was issued on the 1st day of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes’ rule, or as calculated by the Royal Observatory in Great Britain, March 14, 445 B.C. (*Nehemiah 2:1*).



**King Darius, the author of the
Second Decree.**

The time of the Seventy Weeks (490 years) is divided into three parts. The first part is the 7 Sevens, or 49 years. This period of time would bring Israel into the Jubilee Year mandated by the Lord in Leviticus 25:8-16, when each person was to return to his own property. This 49 year period describes the time during which Jerusalem was being resettled and rebuilt. The Last 52 days of the building period completed the walls of the city, as described in the book of Nehemiah. After the 7 Sevens came the 62 Sevens (434 years) after which the “Anointed One”, or Messiah, would be “cut off and will have nothing.” In His Triumphal Entry, Jesus fulfilled the prophesy of Zechariah 9:9, by officially presenting Himself to the nation of Israel as the Messiah. Israel accepted Jesus as Messiah during His Triumphal Entry but He was “cut off”, or stopped, by the people and their leadership. This resulted in Him being denied

His rightful dominion (“will have nothing”) and in His death on the cross. The last Seven Weeks refers to the Tribulation of the end times.

It is important for the Bible student to understand that the Jewish year was based on twelve lunar months, or twelve 30 days months, equaling 360 days, not the 365.25 days of our Gregorian calendar year. Also, there is only one year of time between 1 B.C. and 1 A.D. All this being so, one may calculate the anticipated rejection of Christ based on the date of the fourth decree through the prophesied sixty-nine weeks of years. If the command to restore and build Jerusalem came on March 14, 445 B.C. and the rejection of Christ took place 69 times 7 years later, or 483 years later, we should be able to find the date of Christ’s entry into Jerusalem. Since one Hebrew year (a “prophetic year”) equals 360 days, from the issuing of the fourth decree, Jesus should enter Jerusalem 483 times 360, or 173,880 days later. This would place the date of the Triumphal Entry of Christ on the tenth day of Nisan, April 6, 32 A.D., on a Palm Sunday! Christ was then rejected five days later, crucified, and rose from the dead the Sunday following His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. The calculation of the dates fits the New Testament description of the events and the accuracy of Daniel’s prophesy is proven to a remarkable degree.



Roman sculpture showing the looting of the Jewish Temple after its destruction in 70 A.D. by Titus.

Following sixty-ninth week and the rejection of Christ by the Jews, comes an unspecified period of time during which “wars will continue, and desolations have been decreed.” This is generally called the “gap”. The Jews were to continue to suffer during this unspecified period of time until Christ would establish His Church (*Matthew 16:18*) and then return to earth again to claim His Kingdom for God. This suffering would begin when “the people of the ruler who will come” destroys Jerusalem and the Temple. This took place in 70 A.D. when the Roman general, Titus, burned the city and destroyed the Temple in response to a Jewish rebellion against the Roman Empire. Titus ended the Jewish ceremonial sacrifices and scattered the Jews all over the world (“Diaspora”) so that they would be forced to live as exiles until the re-founding of the nation of Israel in 1948. Although this gap of 1,878 years between the Diaspora and the founding of the modern nation of Israel is not detailed in Daniel, it is predicted by the other prophetic of the Babylonian exile — Ezekiel.

Like Daniel, Ezekiel was carried off into captivity by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar during the Babylonian exile of Israel. He prophesied for about twenty years while living in exile. The Lord appeared to Ezekiel in a vision to give him this prophecy.

Ezekiel 4:3-6

- 3 . . . *This shall be a sign to the house of Israel.*
- 4 *Lie thou also upon thy left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it: according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon it thou shalt bear their iniquity.*
- 5 *For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel.*
- 6 *And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year. (KJV)*

In Ezekiel 4, God gave Ezekiel the total number of years of punishment that He had decreed for Israel to complete her iniquity. According to this prophesy, 390 years were appointed for Israel while 40 years were appointed for Judah bringing a total of 430 years of punishment. This means that after the 70 year Babylonian exile, Israel still had 360 years of discipline prophesied for them by the Ezekiel. Following the 70 years of Babylonian captivity, the great majority of Jews were perfectly content to remain in the gentile Persian empire. Furthermore, there is no historical record that the Jews ever repented of the sins that caused the exile and judgment by God in the first place. In fact, the majority of Jews simply settled down as colonists in the many countries of the world to which they were relocated. A general resettlement of the Jews back to their homeland did not begin to occur until the Nazi holocaust of the mid-twentieth century.

In the book of Leviticus, God clearly warns the Jews that their failure to repent of their sins would cause their discipline to be increased by seven-fold.

Leviticus 26:18

- 18 *If also after these things, you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. (NAS)*

It should be noted that God repeated this warning to Israel four times! (Also see *Leviticus 26:21, 23-24, 27-28*) Since Israel did not repent of her sins, the penalty for her unrighteousness would be increased from Ezekiel's remaining 360 years to 7 times 360 years, or 2,520 Biblical years. Since each Jewish year was 360 days, this would be equivalent to 2,520 years times 360, or 907,200 days of additional penalty for Israel. Flavius Josephus recorded the end of the Babylonian captivity to have occurred in the spring of 536 B.C. Dividing the 907,200 days by the 365.25 days in our calendar year, we find that 2,483.8 calendar years would elapse from the spring of 536 B.C. until the end of unrepentant Israel's discipline by the Lord. It is interesting to note that the nation of Israel was re-established after the Nazi holocaust in the spring of 1948 (May 14, 1948); 2483.8 years after the recorded end of the Babylonian captivity!

Although the nation of Israel was re-established in 1948, Jerusalem itself did not come under Jewish control until 1967. Prior to the famous Six Day War of 1967, the city of Jerusalem was divided by barbed wire cutting off East Jerusalem and the Temple Wall from Jewish access. Within hours of the onset of the Six Day

War, Israeli troops entered East Jerusalem to seize and control the Temple Mount for the first time in 1,897 years. God began His divine movement towards this incredible event 50 years previously when General Edmund Allenby captured the holy city from the Axis powers on December 9, 1917, which was the first day of Chanuka, or the 24th of Chisleu. Fifty years later, during the Year of Jubilee, which was to occur every fifty years, Jerusalem reverted back to Jewish control. This ended over 2,500 years of gentile domination over Jerusalem and brought to an end the “times of the gentiles” spoken of by Jesus.

Luke 21:24

24 *and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. (NAS)*

The end of the “times of the gentiles” has immense prophetic significance since it means that we are the generation that will see the Seventieth Year of Daniel (“the Tribulation”) and the Second Coming of Christ. This was also stated by Christ in the Gospel of Luke.

Luke 21:31-32

31 *“Even so you, too, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near.*

32 *“Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place. (NAS)*

Daniel 9 says that “the people of the ruler to come” would destroy the city and the Temple. Like other prophecies, this one can have multiple fulfillments. The “ruler to come” also refers to the coming “end-times” Antichrist. During the final seven years, the “70th Week of Daniel”, a ruler will arise out of the general geographic area of what was the Roman Empire. This ruler will establish a covenant with Israel and many other nations (“the many”), which will begin the final Seven Years of history, which includes the “Great Tribulation”, the rapture and resurrection, and God’s wrath. This covenant, treaty, or agreement, will allow Israel to re-commence their ceremonial sacrificial system and rebuild their Temple. In the middle of the last seven years of history, the Antichrist will break his covenant with the Jews and will put an end to the re-established sacrifices and offerings. He will then set up the “abomination of desolation” in a wing of the Temple. This “abomination that causes desolation” is probably an idol or image of the Antichrist since he will seek to be worshipped as god. The appearance of this abomination is a sign of the coming end of the age, as prophesied by Jesus.

Matthew 24:15, 16;21, 22;27

15 *“Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),*

16 *then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains;*

21 *for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.*

22 *“And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short.*

27 *“For just as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. (NAS)*

Several points are worthy of emphasis. First, the 70th Week of Daniel, the last 7 years before Christ returns, is NOT the Great Tribulation — but it include the Great Tribulation. Second, tribulation is not the same thing as divine judgment or wrath. The Great Tribulation is a time of Great Testimony for the Church, but is also a time of great persecution and distress. Tribulation is nothing new to the Church. What makes this time of tribulation “Great” is that it will be universal and impossible to escape without divine intervention. Finally, Christ Himself must “cut short” this Great Tribulation to spare the elect from total eradication. This deliverance is clearly taught in Scripture.

“ . . . to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.” 1 Thessalonians 1:10

“For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ . . .” 1 Thessalonians 5:9

“Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.” Romans 5:9

Thus, the Church will be delivered from the Great Tribulation by Christ’s coming for His saints by the resurrection and the rapture. This also spares the Church from God’s divine judgment that follows.

References And Suggested Reading

Jeffrey, Grant, Armageddon, Appointment With Destiny. Toronto, Canada: Frontier Research Publications, 1988.

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