

DANIEL

Week 26, chapter 9 continued

If there is such a thing as a spiritual Rubik's Cube, it has to be the prophecy of the 70 weeks as contained in the final verses of Daniel chapter 9. The verses are difficult, the great Hebrew sages have never come to a consensus on their meaning, and over the centuries different church authorities have attempted various explanations. And yet, to hear some speak, the matter is settled, the 70 weeks is no longer controversial or mysterious, and we have a clear answer and firm doctrine to go by.

We tend to find that such clear answers usually come from popular prophecy teachers, and such firm doctrines come from various denominational religious authorities because the near-universal Church practice of creating a Systematic Theology demands that there can be only one possible answer to almost every possible Scriptural or Spiritual question than can be asked. And in the realm of Systematic Theology, what we're studying in Daniel 9 about the 70 weeks usually falls within the Systematic Theology category called Eschatology: the study of the future and of the End Times.

However it might surprise you to learn that because different Bible scholars and different Christian denominations have such wide ranging views of the 70 weeks prophecy, some don't even view it as belonging in the Eschatology (the End Times) category of Systematic Theology. And that is because their interpretation of the 70 weeks leads them to believe that everything it portends has already happened; that is, all the 70 weeks of Daniel is in the past and therefore is not at all about our time, the End Times or the future.

Many lessons ago we discussed how there are 3 primary mainstream Christian worldviews about the End Times and what they amount to are essentially different interpretations of the Daniel's 70 weeks prophecy and each has been given a label: they are Amillennialism, Post-Millennialism, and Pre-Millennialism. You can go back to earlier lessons for a greater understanding of these if you are interested. But within each of these 3 categories there are substantial variations and disagreements. There are also many other lesser known and somewhat obscure views on the subject. And whether mainstream or obscure each usually has points of scholarly merit, but each is also invariably skewed by loyalty to some predetermined doctrinal agenda. Some of the viewpoints are nothing less than secular humanist views that are attempting to discredit the Book of Daniel or the Bible in general.

As we study Daniel 9 and the 70 weeks what might be the most difficult thing for you to deal with is your previous Church or Synagogue experience and teaching on End Times issues. The most prevalent view in our day (almost considered gospel) in what could loosely be called the Evangelical or Fundamentalist Church generally falls in line with the Pre-Millennial line of thought. And part of the reason for that is because of highly popularized prophecy teachings

that have come from two main sources: Tim LaHaye and Hal Lindsey. In fact it catches modern Evangelical Believers by surprise when they discover that the expectation of a 7 year Tribulation period, followed by a 1000 year reign of Christ, is the **minority** viewpoint among worldwide Christianity. By no means do I want you to think that I am discrediting LaHaye or Lindsay in what they teach; but the important point to understand is that neither are Bible scholars nor Bible teachers. Their backgrounds are as speakers and writers. Their fame has come about as novelists and as prophecy teachers. They have taken many elements of prophecy and woven them together into a system of thinking about the End Times, much coming from their own interpretation and opinion. And make no mistake: they could turn out to be right about some of it, or even much of it. However the dramatic parts of their teachings that have awed their readers and made them famous are the parts that are based on doctrine and speculation. Anything that is as equally probable to be true from a Scriptural standpoint (and so competitive against their conclusions) is disregarded.

Therefore I want to remind you that we are doing a Bible study of Daniel. We are not studying Revelation and we are not doing a prophecy study. So I'm sorry to say that the issue of the 70 weeks is very complicated. We will go by what the Scriptures say as opposed to adding too much speculation in an attempt to come to some firm and conclusive decisions about exactly what those words mean for the future. And, to some extent, we'll stay within Daniel chapter 9 and not venture to the later chapters in Daniel that indeed add to our understanding (we'll put that together when we arrive at those chapters). The reality is that the Book of Revelation gives us some solid information that helps to eliminate or validate some of the several interpretations of Daniel 9, and the passing of history also confirms or discards other possible interpretations. All that said, I will tell you what I think the preponderance of evidence and the passing of history seems to indicate with the understanding that IF Daniel 9 and the 70 weeks is unfulfilled prophecy then by definition we have to be careful how we handle it, and be humble enough to say "I don't know" about many aspects of it.

I am quite aware that it is human nature to dislike uncertainty and it's no different in the Church. We want our doctrines easy to remember, nothing we have to work hard to defend, and in sound bite format. But for me to give you certainty where none actually exists is not in any of our best interests as earnest seekers of God's truth. What is always most important for me to communicate to you concerning unfulfilled prophecy is the range of likely outcomes. This is because my deepest concern for you and for all the Body of Christ is that when these Biblically prophesied things start to come about, we have enough information to recognize them for what they are, and not miss them because the actual fulfillment doesn't fit a rigid, predetermined mindset that has been taught to us. It happens and we say, 'no, that can't be it'. My concern arises not from the hypothetical but from what actually happened to the Jewish people 2000 years ago when they had their heads filled with all sorts of speculations and teachings by their religious authorities, and their minds made up concerning the nature and works and identification of their hoped-for Messiah. But because the people were trusting in their religious authorities and their doctrines, and they turned out to be so wrong, the bulk of Jewish society wouldn't accept the reality when their Messiah, Yeshua, did arrive. The cost of that folly has been incalculable, and I have no intention of repeating a similar circumstance.

What this means for you, for all of us, is that we're going to have to learn to be less certain of

how these prophecies will come about, and at the same time be more knowledgeable about what the Scriptures say than what a novelist tells us, no matter how many millions of their books have been sold. Well over a decade ago, a well-known and popular Pastor and I were talking in private, and he confidently told me that in his opinion anyone who didn't adhere to the Pre-Millennial viewpoint shouldn't call themselves a Christian. That is how seriously these matters are taken within some denominations, and within many Pastors and Believers' minds; and how dangerous it can be to hold such scripturally unsubstantiated views as unassailable.

So today, and next week, we're going to be navigating a mine field; albeit a fascinating mine field and one that we need to walk through (and not around) because of its enormous effect on our present and future.

With that, let's read the last few verses of Daniel chapter 9.

RE-READ DANIEL 9:20 – end

First, for the sake of clarity, understand that while Daniel's prayer was mainly about inquiring if the 70 year exile of he and his fellow Jews to Babylon was nearly over, this prophecy of the 70 weeks had nothing directly to do with that exile. So the 70 year exile and the prophecy of the 70 weeks are dealing with two entirely different things. They both contain the number 70 and that's where the similarity ends.

While Daniel was still in the midst of his prayer to the Lord, a contrite prayer of petition for mercy and an end to Judah's exile in Babylon, the angel Gabriel arrived unexpectedly. This is the same spiritual being that we heard of in chapter 8 verse 15; we can know this is the case because here in chapter 9 verse 21 Daniel says Gabriel is the one "whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning".

Gabriel says that he came to Daniel for two purposes: 1) to tell Daniel that he was greatly loved and so his prayers were heard On High, and now Gabriel brings God's answer; and 2) to explain to Daniel what is coming and it will be done in the context of the prophecy of the 70 weeks that he is about to tell to Daniel. That's the easy and straightforward part of the passage.

I find it ironic that Gabriel tells Daniel that what he is about to say is in order to clear up matters in Daniel's mind. Well, if Daniel actually understood the 70 weeks prophecy he went to his grave with that clear understanding and certainly didn't bother to tell us. Yet the 1st purpose of Gabriel was to bring a message that Daniel's prayer was heard and God had already formulated an answer. Think on that for a moment. I believe that it is our knee jerk reaction that when we pray, some amount of time will necessarily pass before God's answer becomes apparent. It may even be a long time. Yet here Daniel hasn't even finished his prayer when God's oracle arrives to answer his prayer. I want to tell you the story of a recent event that is fine example of this, and I hope gives you hope.

Moran Rosenblit of Hope for Israel was visiting, and it was time for him to return home to Jerusalem. His schedule was tight, as it always is. We saw him off for the airport, and a few

hours later I got a call from him as he was at the ticket desk at a busy northeastern airport. His flight had been canceled due to a mechanical problem. The challenge was less one of inconvenience and more it was that an Israel tour that Moran was to lead was due to arrive at Tel Aviv at about the same time Moran was scheduled to arrive. The airline he was scheduled to go on had no more flights until the next day; so with little choice he had to try to quickly book on another airline. The problem was that the airline he had been scheduled to go on wasn't very co-operative and he was pretty much on his own to solve the problem. Further, as those who fly very much know, when you just walk up to the ticket counter hat in hand, an hour or so before an International flight, and want a one-way ticket, the price is exorbitant. He called me because the choice was to pay the several thousands of dollars and hope for some future reimbursement by the original airline (an unlikely proposition), or to spend the night in a hotel, take the next flight the original airline offered, and not be with his tour on their first day in Israel. After discussing it on the phone with him, as a minister, it just didn't seem right to spend so much ministry money for this flight with little chance of it being reimbursed. So over the phone we prayed that God would intervene and that Moran would find favor and have peace about the outcome, whatever it was.

15 minutes later Moran called me back to say that moments after we hung up he was paged, and that the new airline said that the old airline called and said they'd pay for everything. Moran was put on his new flight and headed for home in Israel, on time, to meet up with his tour. The point is that in the midst of our prayer God was already answering it. And this is something that while we can't count on it as how God works every time, often He does, so at times where there seems to be no solution, hope can still abound because we have a God who loves us and cares.

We could properly sum up the prophecy of the 70 weeks by saying that it is all about the future development of the Kingdom of God. However understand that "future" only means future to Daniel at the moment this oracle was given to him. And just **how** "future" is essentially what all the various worldviews of how to interpret this prophecy are attempting to determine and why they differ so much. I can do no better than to paraphrase Dr. Kiel in his commentary on Daniel that was written in the mid-1800's; and one reason I love commentaries that are at least 100 years old are because the secular and religious politics about the State of Israel are nowhere present to skew the author's comments, because Israel didn't exist then and there were no signs that it ever would.

Dr. Kiel sums up the 3 main theological views of the 70 weeks without labeling them:

1. Most of the early Church Fathers and the most ancient Christian interpreters (right on up the 16th century) believed that the prophecy of the 70 weeks was entirely about the advent, death, and resurrection of Christ, and generally ended with the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. Thus the 70 weeks terminates in about 70 A.D., over 1900 years ago. So there is no "future" aspect to it whatsoever.
2. Interpreters in Dr. Kiel's day, starting about the Enlightenment Era (1700 A.D. onward), and now almost universally in modern times where liberalism has taken over, say that this entire passage as well as most of the Book of Daniel is code-talk and it actually is speaking about the times of the infamous Antiochus Epiphanies (around 165 B.C.), and

thus the 70 weeks terminates more than 100 years before Christ is born.

3. Some of the early Church Fathers, and several theologians in Dr. Kiel's day, and the modern Conservative Evangelical prophecy teachers of our day, have interpreted Daniel's 70 weeks as prophetic of the End Times, the 2nd coming of Christ, the Millennial Kingdom, and so at least part of the prophecy is yet future to us. In other words the termination of the 70 weeks hasn't happened yet; it's ahead of us but we don't know how far.

Notice what this means: we have a wide range of interpretations of Daniel by credible and brilliant theologians. These interpretations range from concluding that the 70 weeks was fulfilled by the 160's B.C., to them being fulfilled by 70 A.D., to the 70 weeks not yet being fulfilled. And the many scholars who have these different viewpoints lived in various eras, were both secular and religious, and some were conservative and some were liberal. This means that we can't easily determine who is right and who is wrong based only on who they were and what their backgrounds were.

Now let's look at the meaning of the 70 weeks from another aspect: does the 70 weeks literally mean "weeks", or might it mean "years", or might it mean "weeks of years", or might it be nothing more than a symbolic number that doesn't represent any definite period of time at all? As you can imagine, various Bible scholars have taken different views. However a couple of these can be eliminated rather easily for no other reason than the hindsight of history itself shows they cannot be correct.

First, the 70 weeks as meaning a series of 70 seven-day weeks (for a total of 490 days) can't work if no other reason than because in Daniel's time Jerusalem already lay in ruin, so for it to be destroyed again means it first has to be rebuilt. All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Jerusalem back together again in 490 days. And we have an account of the rebuilding of Jerusalem in Ezra and in Nehemiah, and it took a lot longer than 490 days, so we can outright dismiss this as a possibility.

Second, the 70 weeks as meaning 70 years (interpreting a week to mean a solar year) doesn't work well either. Because although Jerusalem and the Temple would be rebuilt, it was going to be many hundreds of years before they were again destroyed. So that can be ruled out.

The Third choice is that it means 70 weeks of years. This is more viable as 490 years allows much to happen. But how can we legitimately convert the term weeks to years? The Hebrew word that is typically translated into English as "weeks" is **shabua**, and **shabua** literally means "sevens". **Shabua** is used in a number of Biblical contexts, and could indicate what we today think of a week, it could indicate any group of 7 things, or it could simply be a multiplier (that is, you multiply some number by 7's). So by all accounts we can't take the term week (**shabua**) to be a 7 day calendar week as is common in modern times. So that leaves only 2 options. Either the term is indicating a group of 7 things (whatever that thing might be), or it is a multiplier of the numeral 7.

Therefore when we hear some interpreters say that this is speaking of 70 weeks of years, it is another way of saying 70 seven's (or as we would say today, 70 times 7). As to whether this is

speaking of years, that is pure speculation. Nothing specifically says that this is referring to years. I readily admit, it certainly seems logical that if this is indeed speaking of a defined period of time, years seems the most likely. And as we'll soon see, years (490 of them) seem to work well within some aspects of this prophecy.

But now that leads us to a 4th option: that the 70 sevens, or 70 weeks, is nothing but an indeterminate, unspecified period of time because the numbers are meant only as symbolic. In fact our Dr. Kiel among others of the finest Conservative Bible scholars takes this viewpoint. I used to dismiss this out of hand as nonsense. But then I remembered that indeed there was something used very similarly in the Bible that we need to look at and see if there is a parallel or a pattern. Listen to familiar passage from the New Testament.

Matthew 18:21-22 CJB

²¹ Then Kefa came up and said to him, "Rabbi, how often can my brother sin against me and I have to forgive him? As many as seven times?"

²² "No, not seven times," answered Yeshua, "but seventy times seven!"

Oh, my. Here we have Yeshua saying to forgive 70 times 7; or in the language of Daniel, 70 sevens or 70 weeks of forgiving. Did Yeshua mean that we are to forgive up to and including exactly 490 times, but upon the 491st time, we are no longer obligated by God to forgive? I'm sure you don't think that, and I'm unaware of any Bible teacher that has taught this 70 times 7 as anything but a symbolic number. So, is it so impossible to accept that Daniel's 70 sevens (490) years is, as Dr. Kiel claims, merely symbolic? And allow me to detour just a moment as well. I have made the claim, and stand firm in it, that the New Testament Gospels' sayings about Yeshua have Him constantly referring to Himself as the Son of Man, and this is precisely Yeshua making the claim that He is Daniel chapter 7's Son of Man. In Matthew 24 we even read this:

Matthew 24:15-16 CJB

¹⁵ "So when you see the abomination that causes devastation spoken about through the prophet Dani'el standing in the Holy Place" (let the reader understand the allusion),

¹⁶ "that will be the time for those in Y'hudah to escape to the hills.

So here we have Yeshua quoting Daniel, by name. We don't have to speculate at Yeshua's knowledge and acceptance of Daniel as true, valid, and God-breathed. And Christ is quoting Daniel telling the Jewish people to believe it, and then what they should do when Daniel's

prophecy happens. Yeshua was a big fan of Daniel, and history and the NT Gospels and the Book of Revelation proves that the Book of Daniel was for Jesus' day the equivalent of the Book of Revelation for modern day Christians; both were seen as books of the latter days. Even the Jews who didn't regularly study the Scriptures, and were the least interested in such matters, had some knowledge of Daniel. So whether Yeshua was speaking to the elite and educated, or the poor and barely educated He used a Daniel theme throughout His earth's ministry when referring to End Times issues, and clearly identified Himself as Daniel's Son of Man who is given a seat of authority next to the Ancient of Days.

So consider this: the use of the phrase 70 times 7 is used only twice in the entire Bible: in the Book of Daniel chapter 9 verse 24, and then later by Christ who constantly identified Himself by using Daniel's prophecies and terminology. Christ didn't just pick that number 70 times 7 (490) out of the air; He quoted Daniel. And in the case of Matthew 24:15, it almost certainly was NOT a precise number but rather symbolic using multiples of the ideal divine number 7.

So, is that what we have in Daniel 9:24 and the 70 weeks (the 70 sevens of years) and thus, as Dr. Kiel and others advocate, the 490 years is merely symbolic and is not meant as a precise number at all? I'll save you the trouble and tell you that I do NOT think it is symbolic and will show you why soon enough; but on the other hand, 490 as a symbolic number cannot and should not be dismissed as impossible because there is too good of a Biblical case in its favor (and I just finished giving you an example). So, here is one possibility for the meaning of the 70 weeks of years (that it is only symbolic) that has to be considered as within the range of possibilities, even if we might consider it less likely than other possibilities. And the other possibility is that the 490 years is 490 real years, and it is an absolute and precise period of time. There are good Biblical arguments for both possibilities.

If we are to follow the flow of the way the passage is written (which is what I generally prefer to do), we need to adjust our course for the time being and study the goals that consists of 6 things that shall be accomplished during this period of 70 sevens of time.

Verse 24 says: ***"Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and for your holy city for putting an end to the transgression, for making an end of sin, for forgiving iniquity, for bringing in everlasting justice, for setting the seal on vision and prophet, and for anointing the Especially Holy Place.***

The goals as listed using the CJB are:

1. Putting an end to the transgression.
2. For making an end of sin.
3. For forgiving iniquity.
4. For bringing in everlasting justice.
5. For setting the seal on vision and prophet.
6. For anointing the Especially Holy Place.

If you consider carefully what is being said, the reality is that this is not at all straightforward.

What does it mean to put an end to transgression? Or to set the seal on vision and prophet? For making an end of sin?

Part of the problem is that the Hebrew wording of verse 24 is quite difficult, and there are some serious ambiguities that arise. As a result, different English words are used in different Bible versions to express each of the 6 goals and they can have substantially different meanings and effects as a result.

I want to stress that this is a critical passage, and it is important to the understanding of the 70 weeks prophecy to try to get at what the goals that take place during this time period mean. Because essentially, the idea is that God has 6 goals that He wants to accomplish, and it is the PURPOSE of the 490 years (if that is what 70 sevens means) to bring these goals to fruition. It seems that the bottom line is that the accomplishment of these 6 goals is mile markers along a journey that when finally completed, we arrive at redemption.

First, let's get to what is probably the biggest problem in verse 24 for so much of institutional Christianity that has adopted some form or another of Replacement Theology. That is the doctrine that all the prophecies about a future Kingdom of God, and about all the blessings that come with redemption, are meant for God's Church (generally meaning the gentile Church). There is little else the modern Church seems to focus on today that a) getting saved in Christ, and then b) the End Times. And so the sense among Christians today is that the End Times is all about the Church. And so it follows that Daniel's vision of the 70 weeks, Armageddon, the New Temple and all else is all about the Church. However that doesn't match with Scripture.

Notice in verse 24 to whom it is that the 70 weeks is decreed for: it is for YOUR people and YOUR holy city. Since Gabriel is speaking this to Daniel, who else are "your" people than the Jews, (Israel)? What else is "your" (Daniel's) holy city but Jerusalem? Let me say that again: the SUBJECT people and place of the 70 weeks are plainly called out as the Jews and as Jewish Jerusalem; not the Church. That is not to say that members of the gentile church don't have a role in this since as St. Paul points out in Romans 11 the Lord has shown us great mercy in that by faith in Christ **gentile** Believers may be grafted into the rich root of Israel (using the famous Olive Tree metaphor to represent Israel). But the point is that gentiles ride the coattails of the Jews, not the other way around. And it is that most certainly the Church will benefit from the 6 listed goals of the 70 weeks; we are not beggars, orphans or 2nd class citizens in the Kingdom of God. However a plain, straightforward reading is that it is the real, physical, tangible Israel that is the focus and is the subject of Daniel's prophecy of the 70 weeks. Gentile Believers have become part of Israel only in the intangible, spiritual sense; not in the flesh, and certainly not as Israel's replacement.

It is hard to sufficiently emphasize what that means for modern Believers. So rather than beat around the bush I'll say it plainly: Fellowship, Church (at least the gentile portion), fellow gentile Believers, we are only secondary players in this prophecy of Daniel's 70 weeks. Further if a Christian sees no importance or relevance in Israel or the Jewish people in our lives and faith journey, then I have no idea why he or she would give a whit about what happens during these 70 weeks of Daniel since Christians are nowhere mentioned. Here, I strongly believe, we have one of the main reasons for the emergence and growth of the

Hebrew Roots movement in modern times. This movement seems to be the result of a pouring out of God's Spirit in the Latter Days to set some things in their rightful order before Messiah returns; and it is built around a long overdue admission by Christians that it is Israel that is the focus of God's plan of redemption, and not the gentile-based Church. I realize that might offend, and hurt some feelings, but this is what occurs naturally when we take the courageous step of studying God's Word and believing what it says, instead of accepting long cherished manmade doctrines that turns Scripture on its head.

Bible scholars from all schools of theology have noticed that the 6 goals for the 70 weeks can be grouped into 2 groups of 3. The first 3 goals (ending transgression, ending sin, forgiving iniquity) regard negative things (transgressions, sin and iniquity). The 2nd 3 goals (bringing in everlasting justice, setting the seal on vision and prophet, and anointing the Especially Holy Place) are about accomplishing positive things (justice, prophecy, and the Holy Place). However most semblance of agreement ends there.

For instance: some scholars that the sense of the 1st goal is NOT putting an end to transgression, but rather it is "retraining" transgression (quite different meanings). And that the 2nd goal that our CJB says is ending sin, is rather "sealing up" sin. Again, different meanings. Goals 3, 4 and 5 (forgiving iniquity, bringing in everlasting justice, and setting the seal on vision and prophet) are generally agreed upon and there's no need for us to get into the minutia of some of these academic debates that seeks to carry things too far.

However the 6th goal (anointing the Especially Holy Place) brings wide disagreement and for good reason. And we'll begin with that subject for our next lesson.