

A Brief Outline of Things to Come

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Chapter Three -

THE GREAT PROPHECY OF THE SEVENTY WEEKS - H. A. Ironside

THE MOST REMARKABLE time prophecy of the Holy Scriptures is found in chapter 9 of the Book of Daniel.

Sir Edward Denny was perhaps the first prophetic student to designate this chapter "the backbone of prophecy." Although he may have borrowed the term from someone else, I have never found it used by anyone who wrote earlier than he did. The term is well given, for if we understand the outline indicated here, we shall find that all the prophetic Scriptures fall into place so simply and harmoniously as to make it evident that we have here the backbone of the entire prophetic system of the Bible.

Those who have given much study to the Book of Daniel will remember that the chapter begins with an account of Daniel's personal exercises. He tells us that he had been studying the books of some of the prophets who had gone before him. He refers to the Book of Jeremiah for one (29:10-14) and probably the Second Book of Chronicles (36:21) for another. In these books he learned that GOD would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. It had been definitely foretold that following the destruction of the city and the Temple and the enslavement of GOD's earthly people in Babylon, a period of seventy years would elapse before they would be restored to their own land and would be permitted to rebuild the Temple and eventually the city of Jerusalem itself.

Daniel had been carried away in his youth in one of the first campaigns against Palestine. As an old man he realized that the seventy-year cycle must be nearly completed, and it stirred his heart to prayer. This in itself is most suggestive. How often people take up the study of prophecy from a purely intellectual standpoint, yet surely there is nothing that should move our hearts toward GOD like occupation with His marvelous purpose in regard to the coming of His own blessed Son into the world again and the setting up of His glorious kingdom.

Daniel felt in his soul that the people were not in a fit state for restoration, and he took the place of confession before GOD. He himself was perhaps one of the holiest men living at that time; yet as he prostrated himself before the LORD, he identified himself with the sins of his people, crying, "**We have sinned.**" As he poured out his heart in contrition, he counted on GOD to bring about deliverance. In answer to Daniel's prayer a messenger was sent from the throne of GOD, even Gabriel himself, the same glorious being who appeared to him on a later occasion and who at the beginning of New Testament times was chosen to convey to the blessed virgin Mary the wondrous news that she was to be the destined mother of the promised MESSIAH.

The way in which the SPIRIT of GOD directs attention to the time when Gabriel first appeared to Daniel is interesting. We are told that he touched him "**about the time of the evening oblation.**" That was the time when, if things had been right in Israel, the evening sacrifice would have been offered on the altar at Jerusalem; but that altar was cast down, and the Temple was in ruins. No smoke of sacrifice ascended to GOD from that holy place. Yet Daniel never forgot the time when the oblation should have been placed upon the altar.

That offering spoke of the sacrifice of our LORD JESUS, which was yet to take place. GOD Himself saw in every victim placed on Jewish altars a type of the person and work of His own beloved Son. Everything that GOD will yet accomplish for Israel, for the Church, and for the nations will be based upon the finished work of Calvary's cross. Our LORD there "**tasted death for every man.**" The last word is actually in the neuter gender.

Our LORD tasted death for every "thing." The blessing of the entire universe is contingent upon the work which He accomplished on the cross.

GABRIEL'S MESSAGE

Now let us note the message, or the prophecy, that Gabriel brought to Daniel.

"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 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).

Let us weigh carefully just what is revealed here. In the first place, remember that Daniel had understood by books the number of the years in which GOD would accomplish the desolations of Jerusalem. His prayer of confession was given with that in view. GOD meets him by informing him through His angel that not at the expiration of seventy years but at the close of seventy weeks will all of Israel's sorrows come to an end. The word translated "**week**" is recognized by scholars generally as a generic term simply meaning "a seven," It could be used for seven days, seven months, or as is undoubtedly the case here, seven years, since it was of years that Daniel was thinking. Seventy weeks of years, then, would be 490 years.

Now let us observe exactly what the angel says.

"Seventy sevens are determined," or "cut off" (cut off from the entire period of time). These

seventy sevens, or 490 years, are set apart in the divine reckoning for what the angel calls "**thy people and thy holy city**" - that is, Daniel's people, the Jews, and his holy city, Jerusalem, which was the literal capital of the land of Palestine.

What will take place at the expiration of this period of 490 years? The angel adds: "**To finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation [or atonement] for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.**"

Notice carefully each of these expressions.

At the end of 490 years Israel's transgression will be finished, and their sins will be brought to an end, because their MESSIAH will have made reconciliation, or atonement, for iniquity. The long period of Israel's sufferings under the heel of the Gentiles will be completed, and everlasting righteousness will be brought in. This refers clearly to the setting up of Messiah's kingdom. Then the vision and the prophecy will be sealed. All will be fulfilled. Vision and prophecy will no longer be needed.

Finally, "**the most Holy**" will be anointed. This undoubtedly refers to the Shekinah glory's returning to Israel when the people are regathered in their own land and Jehovah's temple is rebuilt. The glory has been missing ever since the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. It was not seen in the temple of Zerubbabel or in the temple of Herod, but it will return when Israel's mourning is ended and when, as a repentant people, they are brought back to GOD. Thus far, then, we have seen the promise of verse 24.

If we can find out just when the 490-year period was to begin, it ought to be an easy thing for us to count 490 years from that point and then to ask ourselves, "Have all these promises been fulfilled?" The starting point is given in the next verse. "**Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem. . . .**" This is clearly the time from which we are to begin to count.

When did a commandment go forth for the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem? In this matter there is a difference of opinion among sober teachers of prophecy.

Some insist that the reference is to the commandment given in the seventh chapter of the Book of Ezra, which was approximately 457 B.C. A careful examination of that decree will make it evident that it did not really have to do with restoring and building the city of Jerusalem at all; it was a confirmation of the earlier decree of Cyrus to rebuild the temple and reinstate the worship of GOD in Israel. It seems far more likely that the commandment referred to is actually that given in the second chapter of the Book of Nehemiah. There we find a commandment given about 445 B.C. for the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem.

We are not told whether the sevens of years are to be counted according to sun time or lunar time, and for our present purpose it is not necessary that we go into the problem. Sir Robert Anderson, in his masterly work, *The Coming Prince*, has taken it up in great detail and has presented a chronological system which seems fully satisfactory, though all are not prepared to accept it. Those who are interested may consult that work at their leisure.

I shall not deal with chronology as such here. I desire only to emphasize that evidently we have in Nehemiah 2 the starting point for this time prophecy.

Let us go on with the quotation of the rest of the verse:

"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." Here, then, there are 69 weeks - not 70. In other words, there are 483 years - not 490. For some reason the angel separates the last week of seven years from the 69 which were to be completed at the coming of MESSIAH the Prince. These 69 weeks are divided into two periods - seven weeks (or 49 years) and 62 weeks (or 434 years). Undoubtedly the division here is made in order that our minds might be prepared for a further division between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks.

"The street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times." The reference is evidently to the seven weeks as distinguished from the threescore and two weeks. The former period is called "the narrow times." During those 49 years the city of Jerusalem was rebuilt and the people were regathered. Those were troublous times, but the reference is evidently not so much to the distress of the people at that time as to the fact that the city was built during the narrow period.

The 62 weeks begin immediately after the expiration of the seven weeks. We are told in verse 26: **"And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself."** If Sir Robert Anderson is correct in his system of chronology, this tremendous event occurred within a literal week after the exact close of the 69 weeks of years. He points out that 69 years of 360 days each expired when our LORD was welcomed into Jerusalem by the children and others who cried, **"Hosanna . . . Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."** However, we are not told that MESSIAH would be cut off at the exact time of the expiration of the 62 weeks; but **"after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off."**

This part of the prophecy has been fulfilled to the letter. **"He came unto his own, and his own received him not."** He presented Himself to Israel as their promised King - MESSIAH. They said, **"We will not have this man to reign over us,"** demanding that He be crucified. Pilate asked, **"Shall I crucify your King?"** They exclaimed, **"We have no king but Caesar."** And so the MESSIAH for whom the nation had waited so long was crucified. Following that, if we are to take the seventieth week as an immediate continuation of the period which ended at the cross, in seven years from the time of the Saviour's crucifixion all the promises made to Israel should have been fulfilled.

But they were not fulfilled. The Israelites did not recognize their MESSIAH. They do not know Him yet as their Sin-bearer. Their transgression has not been finished. An end of sins for them has not been made. They do not yet know anything of atonement for iniquity. Everlasting righteousness has not been brought in. Vision and prophecy have not been sealed. The **"most Holy"** has not been anointed by the return of the Shekinah. Has the prophecy failed?

Has GOD's Word been proved to be false? Impossible! We know that He cannot deny Himself. But it is here that we find one of the most important truths of the Word.

THE GREAT PARENTHESIS

Between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks there is a parenthesis which has lasted for more than nineteen hundred years. The seventieth week has been postponed by GOD Himself, who changes the times and the seasons because of the transgression of the people. The moment the MESSIAH died on the Cross, the prophetic clock stopped.

There has not been a tick from that clock for nineteen centuries. It will not begin to move again until the entire present age has come to an end and Israel has once more been taken up by GOD.

Let us turn again to the prophecy and see definitely what is predicted there. After the declaration to Daniel that MESSIAH would be cut off and would have nothing after the conclusion of the 483-year period, we read: **"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."**

Exactly what is predicted here? MESSIAH was cut off. So far as the kingdom, long promised and expected, was concerned, He had nothing. Shortly after His crucifixion the Roman people came and destroyed the city and the sanctuary. We are not told just when this took place. Actually, it was forty years later. Observe that it is not mentioned here that the prince would come and destroy the city. There is in view a prince who is yet to play a great part in prophecy. However, he has not yet appeared; but his people (the Romans) were used as the scourge of GOD to punish Israel for their sins. They destroyed Jerusalem and the temple of JEHOVAH.

Then we find the present age spoken of in these lines: **"The end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined."** As by an overflowing flood the people of Israel were to be destroyed by their enemies, scattered throughout the world, and until the end (the seventieth week), which remains unfulfilled, there shall be wars and desolations. That is exactly what our Saviour Himself tells us in Matthew 24. Throughout the present age **"ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet."** That end is the seventieth week.

Throughout the Book of Daniel we find the expression, the time of the end. That same expression is found elsewhere in the prophetic Scriptures. The time of the end is the last seven years which GOD has allotted to the Jews, which has not yet begun to run its course. As we continue we shall see what GOD is doing in this intervening period which we have designated "The Great Parenthesis."

When this time of waiting comes to an end, the prince whose people have already appeared will come into view. He is the great Roman leader of the last days, called in Revelation 13 **"the beast,"** because he is the embodiment of every evil principle in all the empires of the world.

When he appears, he will pretend at first to be the friend of the Jews. **"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."

Many have supposed that it was MESSIAH Himself who was to confirm a covenant for one week. But when did He ever make such a covenant? The Blood of the covenant which He shed upon the cross is not to confirm a covenant for seven years, but it is the Blood of the everlasting covenant.

In the last days, when GOD takes up Israel again and is about to bring her into the fullness of blessing, a Roman prince will arise who will make a covenant with the nation for seven years, promising them protection and liberty in religion as they return to their land. For three and one half years he will permit this to go on, but in the midst of the week he will violate the covenant and demand that all worship of JEHOVAH cease.

Then he (the Antichrist) will be manifested in his true character. This will result in what is known in Scripture as the "**time of Jacob's trouble**," or the Great Tribulation. It will go on for three and one-half years, until judgment is visited upon the desolator and GOD's earthly people are delivered.

The greater part of the Book of Revelation, virtually everything from chapter 4 to the end of chapter 19, has to do with events which will take place in Heaven and on earth during this unfulfilled seventieth week of Daniel.

When this is understood, all is in harmony, and the prophetic Scriptures are plain.

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