

Daniel 9:20-27 – The Seventy Weeks and the Love of God

[Tell the parable of Matt 21:33-46: landlord, vineyard, tenants, sent servants, more servants than His own Son, whom they killed. Jesus asked the elders and priests “what should the Owner do?” and they said He should execute them and give the vineyard to others who will give Him the harvest He deserves]

God gave Daniel an answer (vv 20-23)

When Daniel said he was praying, he talked about confessing his sins and the sins of his people; he prayed for “the holy hill of my God”—the mountain upon which the Temple had stood in Jerusalem, but which had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586BC. He wasn’t able to go and worship at the evening sacrifice, but at that time of evening, he got on his knees and prayed for mercy, prayed for forgiveness, humbly admitted to God the ways in which he and his people had sinned, and called on God as his own God, even by the name, Yahweh, reminding God of the covenant—the Promise He had made to Abraham. And God not only heard Daniel’s prayers, but He loved Daniel for the worship in his heart: We saw last week how Daniel loved God’s righteousness, and reputation, and mercy [read vv20-23].

The “word that went out” is the decree and decision of God to do something: to do what the words of this Seventy Weeks prophecy say God was going to do. Because next, Gabriel tells Daniel to “consider the word and understand the vision”. What came next, what the angel reveals to Daniel, is because God loved Daniel—and because what came next was an expression of God’s love, Daniel is told how important it is for him to really pay attention and understand it. Surely if we love God, and if we love God’s love, then we should do the same: “consider the word and understand the vision”? Because the ultimate way we show how we feel about God is in how we treat Him. He loved us by making His Word known to us, and ultimately by sending His Son, like Jesus’ parable in Matthew 21 reminds us. How should we, then, respond to God when God first loved us?

God gave the Jews final notice (read v24)

Separating this verse into 2 main ideas helps to make it easier to see what Gabriel is telling Daniel: first there is a deadline, a time limit God is giving to the Jews and Jerusalem (“Daniel’s people” and “holy city”). The deadline is “seventy sevens” (sometimes called “seventy weeks” although that can be misleading because the word here is simply “sevens”). The ominous thing as soon as we hear about the seventy sevens, should be the obvious connection with how Daniel started his prayer at the beginning of Daniel 9: learning about the “seventy years prophecy” in Jeremiah 25 and 29. The decree of God seems therefore to be that though the seventy years of punishment was just about over, the people were going to go right back to their old ways. God was giving them seven times as much time to get their act together and humble themselves like Daniel did, confess their sins like Daniel did, worship Him like Daniel did, and cherish the love of God like Daniel did. It’s ominous because God shows here that He knew that the people would not turn from their sin—in fact the time period, “seventy sevens” implies that at the end of this time God was getting ready to enforce the “curse and oath of Moses”, c.f. Lev 26:27-28 (Daniel mentioned in verses 11 and 13!), and that the next and final punishment would be seven times worse than anything that had happened to the Jews before. “But if in spite of this you will not listen to me, but walk contrary to me, then I will walk contrary to you in fury, and I myself will discipline you sevenfold for your sins.” (Lev. 26:27-28 ESV)

Second, there are 5 things that will happen within that deadline. They are listed like bullet-points, rapidly and briefly. But being so brief, they are hard to fully understand until we see them as a sort of

summary of the rest of this passage. So the five goals listed in verse 25 get more explanation in the next verses. But here they are briefly: to finish the transgression, and to finish the sins, and to atone for guilt, and to bring in righteousness that lasts, and to anoint (lit. “the Most Holy”).^{i ii iii} In Matthew 23:18-22, Jesus showed how foolish it was for the religious leaders of Jerusalem to treat things like the Temple as holy but to forget that the Temple is holy because of “the one who dwells in it”. In Matthew 21:12, Jesus went into the Temple and cleaned it out, calling it, “My house”. So let me ask you this, if the Bible calls “Most Holy” everything about the Temple, altars, offerings, and priests (and it does), then what should we call the One who makes it all “holy”? It’s *theoretically possible* that “the Most Holy” to be anointed here is the Temple, or some other part of the Worship of God, but the next verse clarifies that it is Christ here who is called Most Holy, and was to be “anointed”—the verb is *mashach*—from where we get the word, “Messiah”, “Anointed One”, or in Greek, “Christ”.

God gave Jerusalem another chance (read v25)

Two things here Gabriel wants Daniel to understand are these: God’s promises of a coming Messiah are going to be fulfilled soon, and God’s promise in Jeremiah is still good—Jerusalem’s seventy years of desolation are over, but they aren’t going to “live happily ever after”. Verse 25 says when a particular decree is issued, there will be 49 years of rebuilding and relative peace, followed by 434 years of “troubled times” until the “Messiah Prince” comes. Let me show you quickly how I get that: **a) the “sevens” turn out to be fulfilled in years**—so 7 sevens turns out to be 49 years, 62 sevens as 434 years, and the whole “70 sevens” (v24) as 490 years; **b) the decree** that allowed the Jews to start rebuilding and restoring Jerusalem is recorded in Ezra 7:11-26, in 458BC. **c) That 49 years** of rebuilding and restoring Jerusalem takes us right to 409BC, about the end of Nehemiah’s ministry—and of the Old Testament.^{iv} **d) The next 434 years** were hard. Jerusalem was attacked and conquered by various Gentile powers, including the infamous Antiochus IV, and the brutal siege of the city by the Roman ruler, Pompey. The boot of the Roman Empire remained firmly on the neck of Jerusalem even in the time of the New Testament, when first John the Baptist arrived telling people that God was about to visit Israel. Then Gabriel came again this time to Mary and told her she was going to have a son (Luke 2:1). And that’s the next point, **e) that after the “seven sevens” and the “sixty-two sevens”** (483 years from the decree in Ezra 7), Jesus came to Israel announcing that He was their promised Messiah, and the “Son of Man”—the Ruler of Dan 7:13-14, the “Prince of princes” of Dan 8. 483 years measured from that decree in 458 BC comes to 26AD—just before Jesus began His public ministry. One final thing to notice in verse 25 is that Jesus is called “Messiah Ruler” in Hebrew. It’s worth repeating that the word Messiah means “Anointed One”—and verse 24 predicted that the Most Holy would be “anointed”—that’s why the New Testament calls Jesus the “Christ”—it’s the Greek word for “Messiah”.

God gave the Jews an eviction notice (vv26-27)

The next words are sickening: [read v26a] *After* a total of 483 years, Messiah will be “cut off”—meaning excluded, or killed, or both.^v The people of Jerusalem rejected Jesus and when they did that, they rejected both their divine High Priest and their divine High King. That parable in Matthew 21 expressed how offensive it was when the owner of the vineyard, God Himself, sent His own Son to His tenants, but, “...they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him” (Mat 21:39). John 1:11 says, “He came to His own but His own people did not receive Him”. And all four Gospels tell how the Jewish leaders plotted to kill Christ and turned Him over to the Romans to be crucified. Jesus Christ—Yeshua Hamashiah—was cut off and had nothing (v26a). [read v26b] The grammar of the Hebrew word for “destroy” suggest that the people “cause the destruction” of Jerusalem and the sanctuary. The Prince’s

own people would bring destruction upon their own city. The ESV Study Bible notes put it plainly: “The principal cause of the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem in a.d. 70 was the transgression of God's people in rejecting the Messiah that God had sent to them (Luke 19:41–44).”^{vi}

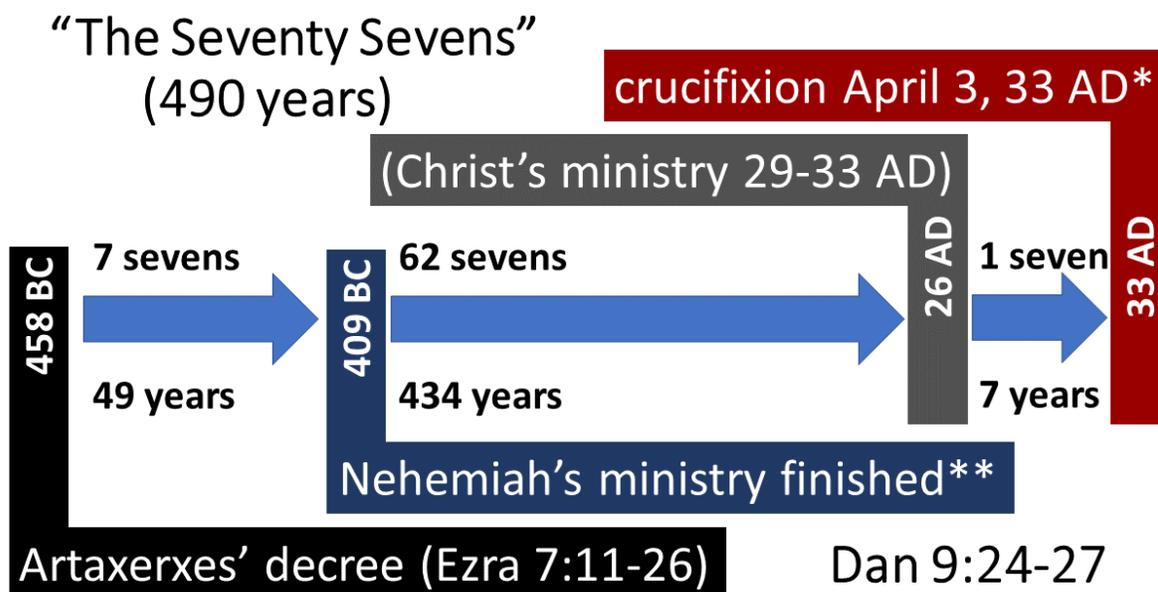
The next 40 years after Christ’s crucifixion brought a flood of troubles, uprisings, crime, Roman crackdowns, riots, famine, and war, as predicted. The historian Josephus tells about those troubling years in his “Wars of the Jews”. Finally the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, and it was estimated that more than a million Jews were killed.^{vii} “Desolations are decreed” said Gabriel. The “desolations” Moses predicted, the “curse and oath” written by Moses that Daniel had read about (9:11, 13), the desolations caused by so much transgression, by a history of unrelenting sin and hostility towards God, the prophets He kept sending, and finally His own divine Son.

This is boiled down in verse 27 into what scholars have called the most difficult verse in the whole Bible to translate.^{viii} So various Bible versions read this quite differently, but the ESV SB notes give a literal translation that, though accurate, is hard to figure out: ““In the middle of that seven, he will put an end to sacrifice and offering, and on account of the extremity... of abominations that cause desolation, until the end that has been decreed, it will be poured out unto desolation.”^{ix} This verse might seem random—but there is a close connection of cause and effect here between the priestly sacrifice of Jesus and the decreed end of Jerusalem and the 19 centuries of desolations that followed. This verse is about what was going to happen after 483 years (the 69 sevens) but before the end of the 490 years (the 70 sevens). During the last half of the last seven years—the Hebrew word often just means “in the midst”—Jesus ministered in Israel, “making a strong covenant with many” (the Gospel of the New Testament). And “in the midst of the week...”^x (the Hebrew word often has that meaning), when Jesus was crucified (“cut off” in the words of verse 26), He “put an end to sacrifice and offering”. How? Hebrews 10:5 says, “...when Christ came into the world, he said ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired but a body you have prepared for me... (7) I have come to do your will O God, as it is written of me...’ (9) He does away with the first in order to establish the second. (10) And by that... we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” The sacrifice of Jesus does away with all other sacrifices, once for all.

That’s why the Gospel is such Good News! God let Israel’s sin just keep piling up until He decreed, “no more.” Even the system of sacrifices and offerings and what the prophets told them about good and evil was not enough to change their hearts and turn them to loving God. He sent them many prophets, gave them many chances, but finally, at the appointed time, He sent His Son, the Messiah Prince, to do for them what they could not—what we could not—do for ourselves. As Hebrews 10 goes on to say, for everyone who depends on Jesus’ sacrifice, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.’ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.” (Heb. 10:17-18 ESV) Every time we gather as a church, we celebrate the sacrifice of Jesus when He said, that His “blood of the covenant was poured out for many” (Mar 14:24). The great High Priest poured out His own life to save everyone who believes, but His own people wanted nothing to do with Him. So God poured out on them the desolations He had decreed. That’s why it says, “on the wings (or on account of the extremities) of abominations that cause desolation, desolation will be poured out until a complete end”: the tenants seized the Owner’s Son, threw Him out of the city, and killed Him; then they spat on His once-for-all sacrifice and kept on offering animals to God as if the Messiah had never come.

God kept His promise and sent us a Saviour

I wonder how many of us will do the same when we leave here today: Act like the Christ had never come? Let me finish by giving you a reason to have confidence in what God can do, and a reason to trust that what God plans is for our good. First, verse 24 listed 5 things—ranging from bringing the Jews’ sin to an end and bringing in permanent righteousness; from wrapping up all the prophecies and visions in the Bible to sending His Son to become the Messiah. Verse 25 told us when to start the stopwatch and approximately when Christ would come. Verse 26 told us that not only would Christ come but that Christ would be killed and rejected by His people. Verse 27 told us that nonetheless, God would make a promise—a covenant with many—that whoever believes will never again have to pay for our own sins. Christ did everything this prophecy predicted, right on time. 500 years after Gabriel appeared to Daniel. And God did what He said He was going to do when the Jews rejected their own Messianic Prince. That’s more than enough reason to believe in what God can do. Second, Israel’s long history of failure to obey and love God should prove to us that we won’t be able to do any better, no matter how much time and how many second chances, God gives us. But what if we don’t have to? What if instead we believed in the kind of God who answered Daniel’s prayers, who assured Daniel he was loved by God, who helped Daniel believe and understand, who pointed Daniel to hope in the Messiah God was sending to save us? Those are really good reasons to believe that God is a good, and kind, and loving God. Especially once we grasp how dangerous it is to reject or ignore Jesus, and how much we need forgiveness for. No wonder when Jesus’ followers asked Him how many times they should forgive someone who wrongs them (seven times?), Jesus reminded them that God had promised to forgive all their sins, once and for all: He said “*seventy times seven*” (Matthew 18:22 NASB).



* See “The Date of Jesus’ Crucifixion” *ESV Study Bible* (Crossway, 2008) pp 1809-1810. **A new governor was in place by 407BC (see Stephen R. Miller, *New American Commentary: Daniel* [Broadman & Holman, 1994], “Daniel 9:25”)

ⁱ Some more modern scholars insist that this phrase, “most holy”, of the dozens of times it shows up in the OT, always refers to a thing or place and never a person. But that’s just not the case: “most holy” is applied in this precise form to 13 parts of the Tabernacle and Temple worship in the OT—including the altars, the tabernacle, the incense, the offerings, Aron and the

priesthood in 1 Chr 13:13, the Temple, and sacred land—in other words, to just about everything God ordained as part of the worship and sacrifices for sin.

ⁱⁱ E.g., See the brief survey of scholarship in the notes on Daniel 9:24 in Stephen R. Miller, *New American Commentary: Daniel* (Broadman & Hollman, 1994), “Daniel 9:24”; and in John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 223.

ⁱⁱⁱ My original study of this phrase relied on a “string search” within the text of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* BHS (Hebrew Bible, Masoretic Text or Hebrew Old Testament), edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph of the Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, Fourth Corrected Edition, Copyright © 1966, 1977, 1983, 1990 by the Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft (German Bible Society), Stuttgart; using the software BibleWorks 6.0.008, Copyright © 2003 BibleWorks, LLC. Search repeated using BBW 10.

^{iv} Stephen Miller, in the NAC, “Daniel 9:25”, writes: “Daniel separated the first sixty-nine sevens into two parts: seven sevens and sixty-two sevens. Evidently something significant was due to occur seven sevens (forty-nine years) after the sevens began. If the decree was given in 458 B.C., the date of this event would be 409 B.C. Since the restoration of the city under Nehemiah and Ezra is specifically alluded to in the latter part of v. 25, the completion of their rebuilding projects apparently marked the end of the first seven sevens or forty-nine years. In the Elephantine Papyri another man is stated to be governor of Judah in 407 B.C., indicating that Nehemiah had passed from the scene by that time. Thus a date of 409 B.C. for the end of Nehemiah's work is possible.”

^v Holladay Lexicon, #3945.

^{vi} ESV Study Bible note on Daniel 9:25-26.

^{vii} Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, VI.9.3.

^{viii} Miller, NAC, “Daniel 9:27”.

^{ix} ESV Study Bible, Crossway Books, note on “Daniel 9:27”.

^x E.g., for the sense of “sometime in between the beginning and the end” c.f. Exodus 12:29; Judges 16:3; Psalm 102:24; Jeremiah 17:11.