

WE AFFIRM A BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE END-TIMES, PART 3

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Today, as part of our distinctive series, we're concluding the examination of the end-times. In the first part together, we recalled the importance of consistently interpreting Scripture with a literal hermeneutic, and then we saw with that an expectation in the Old Testament for a coming, physical, Messianic Kingdom on earth. In the second part, we saw that, instead of contradicting that expectation, Jesus confirmed it, as did the apostles.

Everything we've learned until this point is called premillennialism. This means that Jesus will come again *and then* set up a physical kingdom, His Millennial Reign as recorded in Revelation 20:1-7. After that comes the final state of the new heavens and the new earth (Rv 21-22). So, the eschatological order of events for us as premillennialists is 1.) Jesus's Second Coming, 2.) the Millennium, and 3.) the eternal state.

By way of contrast, a postmillennialist believes that we're in the millennium right now, and when we've accomplished what we need to, Christ comes *afterward* and ushers in the eternal state. Similarly, an amillennialist believes we're in the kingdom right now, looking for Jesus to come again before the eternal state. Both these views allegorize the references and promises to Israel to apply to the church age, but we should note our common ground – we all believe Jesus is coming again.

Of course, the question is what the Bible says and whether we're using a consistent hermeneutic to get there, and we obviously believe premillennialism is consistent with Scripture. To further define our beliefs, we hold to a *futuristic* premillennialism, otherwise called dispensationalism (as we discussed a couple weeks ago). Based on that consistently literal hermeneutic, we interpret Scripture to teach that certain events will precede Christ's Second Coming and the earthly kingdom He'll establish.

I said that I would include a third part to this message in the sermon series if impressed upon, and I have been so impressed. We need an overview of these future events, and the passage we're studying today serves this purpose. This prophecy succinctly reveals what's coming for the Jewish people before the Millennial Reign of Christ.

INTRODUCING THE SEVENTY WEEK PROPHECY

Here we have a pivotal eschatological passage. Jesus refers to it in the Olivet Discourse (Mt 24:15). Paul refers to it when discussing the coming man of lawlessness (2 Thes 2). The account in of the beast's power in Revelation 11-13 rest upon it, as does his defeat.

Back up for a moment, though. In this chapter, we first encounter Daniel in prayer. Why?

God is currently chastising His people with the Babylonian Captivity. Every seven years, they were supposed to allow the farmland to lay, not sowing or reaping, thus giving it a sabbath rest (Lv 25:2-5; 26:34-35, 43). However,

they had been for ignoring the sabbatical-year for 490 years, so the Lord had His people removed by the Babylonians for a period of seventy years (2 Chr 36:21; Jer 25:12; 29:10)—giving the land its accrued rest!

In Daniel 9:2, Daniel said he was reading Jeremiah and knew the seventy years were nearly complete, so he began to petition the Lord (Dn 9:3–19). We could learn a good deal from this prayer, starting with the fact that Daniel prays according to the Scripture and does so continuously. Even so, let's focus on the prayer's answer.

Gabriel comes to Daniel with a prophecy from God while Daniel is interceding for Israel. Of course, Daniel had sought the future for his people, and Gabriel outlines what will befall Daniel's "people" and "holy city" (v. 24). As such, the most natural understanding of his prophecy is that it applies to the Jews and to Jerusalem.

It's broken into "weeks" or "sevens;" specifically, seven weeks and sixty-two and one more, or seventy weeks total (for those pulling out calculators). Now, we Gentile peoples may typically think of weeks only in sets of days, but the Jewish people also had a week of months and a week of years (e.g., the sabbatical year). So, Daniel might have wondered for a moment what kind of seventy sevens or 490 units are declared. You may have already seen the connection: Israel ignored the Lord for 490 years, and a parallel 490 more are declared upon the Jewish nation.

There are revealed here a six-fold goal for the seventy weeks. Namely, they are: to end transgression, to end sin, to make atonement, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place. While the Jews might have expected it, these goals were not achieved at the first coming of Christ. For instance, He atoned for sin but didn't make it *end*. He fulfilled all righteousness, but He didn't bring in the whole of Israel and the world into it yet. Since we know God cannot fail in His Word, we have some future expectations.

THE TIMING OF THE SEVENTY WEEKS

Even though we have those expectations, the prophetic clock seems to have started ticking long ago—the question is when. We read that it begins with decree "to restore and rebuild Jerusalem... with plaza and moat" (v. 25). This catalyst doesn't include the command to rebuild the temple, but the city itself, which remained in ruin since Nebuchadnezzar's time. This decree could only be that of Artaxerxes I Longimanus, given to Nehemiah (Neh 2:1–8).

Seven weeks of years pass, and then, in v. 26, sixty-two more. (So, we could read this verse, "Then after the sixty-nine weeks.") When this happens, we read that "the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing." After the decree and 483 years pass, the Christ will be put to death, which most scholars agree happened to Jesus in AD 30.

Now, what I'm about to discuss may be of limited interest, but it's important in showing the reliability of Scripture. There's some debate on the exact date of the decree of Artaxerxes, with some good scholars placing it at 444 or 445 BC. The problem is that there are not exactly 483 years between that and when Jesus was crucified. However, based on the testimony of the prominent Athenian historian Thucydides who lived in the fifth century BC,¹ a different date emerges—454 BC—precisely 483 years or sixty-nine weeks before AD 30. That means Daniel knew *when* the Messiah would be put to death with mathematical accuracy.

¹ For a detailed discussion on this, see Dr. Floyd Nolen Jones, *Chronology of the Old Testament: A Return to Basics* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2009), 226–36.

Why the oddity here, though—why is it seven and sixty-two weeks, rather than a simple sixty-nine weeks? The text doesn't say. It is interesting to consider that from the decree of Artaxerxes until the time of Malachi, the end of the Old Testament, would have been roughly forty-nine years, or seven weeks of years. Then, from the beginning of that intertestamental period to the crucifixion of Christ would have been the remaining sixty-two weeks of years.

A GAP EXISTS IN THE SEVENTY WEEKS

Whatever the case, this does open us to the interesting question of spans and gaps of time. Read v. 26 again. “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.” In other words, the Messiah will die and the city and sanctuary will be destroyed after the sixty-ninth week. Then, in the next verse, we finally get to seventy weeks or the full 490 years; “he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week” (v. 27).

Here's the problem; the events of v. 26 did happen, but not within a single year. Jesus was crucified in AD 30, but the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple occurred in AD 70. That's a forty-year hole of unaccounted time in the prophecy between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week, extending the prophecy twenty-six years past its terminus. After the prophecy pinpoints the Messiah exactly 483 years later, why seemingly fail to notice forty years?

Such gaps exist in biblical prophecy. For instance, Zechariah 9:9 says the Messiah will ride into Jerusalem “humble, and mounted on a donkey,” obviously fulfilled at Christ's Triumphal Entry. Yet, the next verse says that He will bring in world-wide peace and dominion—something we're expecting in the *Second Coming*. The common explanation for such gaps is the mountain-top analogy: what may appear to be a range of mountains from below the foothills are actually individual mountain peaks separated by miles of valleys.

The valley here in Daniel is wider than forty years, though. As we noted earlier, not all the goals of this prophecy have been fulfilled. Moreover, as we'll see, the events described in v. 27 are yet to be fulfilled. So, presuming the coming fulfillment of all with the seventieth week, the gap is presently 1,988 years long (the year 2018 minus the year of the crucifixion). That's a major interruption!

THE GAP EXPLAINED: THE TIME OF THE GENTILES

To understand this interlude, let's turn to a segment of Christ's Triumphal Entry (Lk 19:41-44). This is days before His crucifixion, 483 years after the decree to rebuild. He condemns the Jewish leadership for not anticipating His arrival, missing something that even the stones would acknowledge (v. 40). As a result, He pronounces blindness upon Israel (v. 41) and reminds them of the coming destruction (vv. 43-44).

Thankfully, as we've noted with previous parts of this study, God would not allow judgment to endure forever against national Israel. In Daniel's case, his prayers were heard and the Babylonian Captivity ended (leading to the reconstruction efforts under Ezra and Nehemiah). Turn a couple of pages to the right to Luke 21:24; Christ's decree of spiritual blindness also has a termination—“Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (v. 24—interestingly, Jerusalem is *still* a source of international dispute). As we read last week, this spiritual malady lasts only until the time of the Gentiles ends (Rm 11:25).

So, like with a chess clock, time currently ticks for the Gentiles, but God promises to push again the button to start the Jewish nation's clock again. Until then, we are in a period called by both Jesus and Paul the "times of the Gentiles." Hence, there's a gap in a prophecy for the Jewish people and Jerusalem.

THE COMING SEVENTIETH WEEK

Daniel 9:27 is what remains. While Jesus prophesies of His return in Matthew 24, He again speaks of a coming desolation *and abomination*, reminding His disciples of Daniel's words (v. 15). (Today, there's not yet a temple in Jerusalem for this to be fulfilled, though many stand ready to build it.) Moreover, this other coming prince will enforce a covenant for one week, breaking it midway through. These are unknown events to history, so it is apparently the enforcement of that seven-year covenant will restart the clock.

THE ANTICHRIST AND THE TRIBULATION

The warnings in Scripture against antichrist are always applicable. The spirit of antichrist is everywhere. "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world" (1 Jn 4:1-3).

The Reformers saw the Pope as antichrist. Modern, Western culture has adopted the spirit of antichrist. It already existed in other cultures that persecuted Christians. That persecution is coming here.

Yet, Scripture speaks of a specific individual, also known in the Book of Daniel as the "little horn." In a journal article linking them, we read, "The prince represents the same ruler as the little horn of chapter 8, as confirmed by three specific points of correspondence. Namely, this individual lives in the end time (8:17; 9:26-27), he stops the sacrifices (8:11-13; 9:27), and he pertains to 'the transgression/abomination that desolates (מנש) (8:13; 9:27).'"²

Many link this figure in Daniel to Antiochus Epiphanes (175-163 BC), and for good reason. He indeed persecuted God's people (8:24), he magnified himself (vv. 11, 25 ["Epiphanies" means "God manifest"]), he started from a place of insignificance (v. 9), he died of natural causes (v. 25), rose to power out of the ranks of Alexander the Great's four generals (v. 9), experienced marginal victory in conquests south, east, and in Israel (v. 9), defiled the temple and interrupted the temple sacrifices (vv. 11-14).

However, there's difficulty with identifying the little horn *exclusively* with Antiochus, as Hassler explains and you can read in his article. I'll add another, glaring difficulty. The little horn/ coming prince doesn't come until *after* the crucifixion of Christ. That fits with what Jesus said in Matthew 24:15—"when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place." This is still future.

Decades later, Paul also saw this as future. In 2 Thessalonians 2, he warns of the "the man of lawlessness... the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes

² Mark A. Hassler, "The Identity of the Little Horn in Daniel 8: Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Rome, or the Antichrist?" *MSJ* 27/1 (Spring 2016) 42. Available online at: <https://www.tms.edu/m/msj27.1.pdf>, accessed August 21, 2018.

his seat in the temple of God” (vv. 3–4). He said Jesus will slay him at His Second Coming (v. 8), harkening back to Daniel 9:27 – “complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.” We might see partial fulfillment in the destruction of the temple by the Romans in AD 70, but obviously the evidence doesn’t all line up for ultimate fulfillment.

Note the timeframe of the antichrist. He confirms a covenant for seven years with “the many” – a reference to the people of Israel – and precisely halfway into it, he turns. That’s 3 ½ years, what we also see in Revelation. We read Jerusalem will be trampled under for forty-two months (Rv 11:2), and in the next chapter, Israel will have to flee for 1,260 days (12:6) – forty-two months (30-day months) or 3 ½ years. Everything in Scripture points to a concrete time frame – just as precise as the prediction of the coming Messiah.

This is not just general tribulation that people endure today, though that can sometimes seem unbearable. In Revelation 6, the first four seals Jesus opens during this period see the Antichrist with false peace, followed by world-war, famine, pestilence, and death, to be followed by cataclysmic earthquakes. The trumpet judgments claim a third of the vegetation, sea life, fresh water sources, and the lights of day and night skies. None of that compares to the further trumpets in chapter nine – demonic locusts released upon the earth to torture mankind and an army slaughtering a third of those who remain. Things only get worse from there. The Old Testament anticipated this unparalleled, apocalyptic scene – but notice its focus.

THE FOCUS OF THE SEVENTIETH WEEK

I do not personally believe that there is an eternal separation between the people of Israel and the church (some dispensationalists of the past might disagree). We all know that the Old Testament saints were saved by grace through faith in the coming Christ as much as we are in the church age. Moreover, there are not two new covenants – one to Israel and one to the church, but one that the Gentiles are brought into in Christ. As such, there are not two brides – Israel and the church – but one people of God. This will be the case in the millennium and the eternal state.

However, it would be incorrect to identify the church as “true Israel;” Israel is Israel. In Romans 9:6, Paul indicates that, among the Jewish people, there is a “true Israel,” those who believe. Even so, as we saw, God intends to also save those from “false Israel” (if you will) during Daniel’s seventieth week.

Jeremiah 30:7 says, “Alas! for that day is great, there is none like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s distress, but he will be saved from it.” Daniel 12:1 says, “Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.” That’s some good news tacked on at the end of both these references.

As we noted last week, salvation for Israel was always the goal. God promises in Zechariah 12:10, “I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.” This is what Jesus said in Luke 13:35, “Behold, your house is left to you desolate; and I say to you, you will not see Me until the time comes when you [not the church, but

unbelieving Israel] say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' " This is also what we read back in Romans 11:25-27: "For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery – so that you will not be wise in your own estimation – that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, 'the Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob. This is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins.' "

The Tribulation is a time of purification for all the nations, but in particular *Jacob*. That's why God elects 144,000 *Jewish* men, 12,000 from each of the *twelve tribes*, to preach the gospel into all the world (Rv 7, 14). When all the people of Israel have received the outpouring of the Spirit, they will mourn over Christ and repent. At the time that they can say, "Blessed is He Who comes," He *will come* to destroy the antichrist and finally set up His kingdom.

We'll get to the kingdom in just a moment. This opens a question: what about the church that exists at the beginning of the Tribulation if the focus is on saving Israel? It seems that, if the church were in the Tribulation, then God would not need to appoint 144,000 Jewish preachers to present the gospel message. Moreover, to comfort the church already in tribulation, Jesus says, "Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (Rv 3:10). Unfortunately, we don't have the time to explore it today, but 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 seems to describe a snatching up or rapture of the present church before this great and terrible day.

AFTER THE SEVENTY WEEKS: THE COMING KINGDOM

With the seventieth week of Daniel finally over, the Lord establishes His kingdom. This is what we've already been thinking about in the previous two parts. In Acts 1:6, after He taught forty days on the kingdom, the disciples were under the impression that Jesus would at some point restore the kingdom to Israel. The righteous will be raised from their graves and they will live with and reign with the Lord on earth for 1,000 years (Rv 20:1-6).

However, there will still remain an "already/not-yet" tension in the *telos* of the prophecy. It will not be until the end of the Millennial Reign - when death, Hades, and the unrighteous are cast into the lake of fire (vv. 14-15), when the new heavens and earth are born (21:1), when all tears, pain, and all first things will be wiped away (v. 4) - that the wondrous state described in this prophecy will be fully realized. It is then all will finally enter that blessed rest.

CONCLUSION

Everything about this world is slouching toward this fateful time, and this should cause us to reflect upon our present state. More than ever do we need to hear 1 John 2:15 – "Do not love the world nor the things in the world" – and 18 – "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared." Let us not love that which the Lord has devoted unto destruction.

Even so, if you have sinned, remember that the Messiah was cut off for His people. Those who repent and trust in Him will find life. They need not fear the future judgment.

On that note, though we didn't get into the rapture, I want us to end with its hope. We're never told to try to identify the antichrist or prepare for the Tribulation, but we are told to look forward to something else. Our Lord says in John 14:1-3, "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also."