

Exploring Daniel's "Seventy Weeks"

by J.L. Haynes

"Seventy sevens are apportioned upon your **people** and **your holy city**,
to finish the transgression,
to seal sins,
to atone for guilt,
to bring in everlasting righteousness,
to seal vision and prophecy and
to anoint the most holy.

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

"Then after the sixty-two sevens
the anointed one will be cut off and have nothing,
and the people
of the prince who is coming
will cause the destruction of the **city and the sanctuary**.
And its end will come with a flood;
even to the end there will be war;
desolations are determined.

"And he will confirm a covenant
with the many one week,
but *after* half the week
he will remove sacrifice and offering;
and on the wing of detestable things
making desolate,
even until a complete destruction,
that is decreed,
is poured out on the desolating."

Dan 9:24-27

(a minimalist, literal translation of the Kethib [written tradition of the] Hebrew text)

How can we begin to make sense of this short but crucial prophecy when so many godly and highly educated scholars have made such a mess of their conflicting and contradicting interpretations of this passage? As always, real understanding can only come when we humbly rely on the Holy Spirit and do our very best to let the Scripture be our guide to interpretation. So let's start with a little biblical history...

^{NASB} Then the people of the land took Joahaz the son of Josiah, and made him king in place of his father in Jerusalem. Joahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. Then the king of Egypt deposed him at Jerusalem, and imposed on the land a fine of one hundred talents of silver and one talent of gold. The king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. But

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Neco took Joahaz his brother and brought him to Egypt. Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and he did evil in the sight of the LORD his God. Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against him and bound him with bronze chains to take him to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar also brought some of the articles of the house of the LORD to Babylon and put them in his temple at Babylon. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim and the abominations which he did, and what was found against him, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah. And Jehoiachin his son became king in his place. Jehoiachin was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem, and he did evil in the sight of the LORD. At the turn of the year King Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him to Babylon with the valuable articles of the house of the LORD, and he made his kinsman Zedekiah king over Judah and Jerusalem. Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. He did evil in the sight of the LORD his God; he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet who spoke for the LORD. He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who had made him swear allegiance by God. But he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD God of Israel. Furthermore, all the officials of the priests and the people were very unfaithful following all the *abominations* of the nations; and they defiled the house of the LORD which He had sanctified in Jerusalem. The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy. Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or infirm; He gave them all into his hand. All the articles of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his officers, he brought them all to Babylon. Then they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all its fortified buildings with fire and destroyed all its valuable articles. Those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its *desolation* it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete.

2Ch 36:1-21

This passage in 2 Chronicles really forms the backdrop of Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9, and the prophecy that was God's answer to that prayer, in verses 24-27. Notice in verse 14, the word, "abominations." And in verse 21, notice the word, "desolation." It was the "abominations" that caused "the desolation". In Daniel 9:1-19, the prophet explains the same thing: the people of Israel had been unfaithful and so they brought these "desolations" (Dan 9:2) on themselves.

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Gabriel's message to Daniel revealed that his people and his city would be restored (Dan 9:25) in answer to his prayer (Dan 9:16-19), but this is accompanied by a further revelation that a new deadline is allotted to the people and the city:

(Daniel 9:24 American Standard Version) Seventy weeks are decreed upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy.

(Daniel 9:24 The English Revised 1833 Webster Update 1995) 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. (While these translations bear differences from my own, they both translate "most holy" literally while refraining from interpreting it as a "place".)

"Seventy sevens" within which period, 1) they must finish or restrain their transgression; 2) their sins would be sealed for their own judgment; 3) atonement would be made for their iniquity, resulting in, 4) the provision of everlasting righteousness for the faithful of Daniel's people (Heb 10:1-18); 5) the sealing, authorizing and consummating, of prophetic revelation entrusted to Daniel's people, and, 6) the anointing of the most holy prince who would be cut off in the middle of the seventieth week, or 486.5 (approx.) years from the issuing of a decree. It seems that the "introduction" of the prophecy of Dan 9:24-27, the "seventy weeks" prophecy, contained in verse 24 is fulfilled in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth.

This is possibly the most difficult and controversial passage in the entire Christian Bible. But as we study these 4 verses honestly, looking carefully to see what we learn from the text itself, we come to some conclusions. The time period, "seventy weeks" (v 24) appears to be a deadline that applies to the Jews and the city of Jerusalem (v 24). Within this deadline six things must either be done by the Jews, or happen in Jerusalem:

1. the Jews must "complete their transgression,"
2. their sins must be sealed for future judgment,
3. their guilt would be atoned for,
4. everlasting righteousness would be provided (doing away with the Old Testament system of sacrifices),
5. the vision and prophecy of the Old Testament would be sealed (fulfilled and finished), and,
6. the Most Holy, Jesus, would be anointed.

The key to the interpretation of this prophecy begins, as always, with the context. In Daniel 9:2, we see that the desire of Daniel's heart, the desire that moved him to offer the prayer the answer to which includes our passage in verses 24-27, concerns the "desolations of Jerusalem". In Daniel 9:4-11, in his prayer to God, Daniel confesses that the "desolations" are the right and proper Divine response to the nation's transgression and rebellion.

(Daniel 9:11) "Indeed all Israel has transgressed Your law and turned aside, not obeying Your voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath

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which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him.

The curse and oath from the Law of Moses that Daniel cites is found in Leviticus 26, the "desolations" are predicted specifically in Lev 26:31. Daniel was certainly familiar with this oath which Moses recorded in that passage. The surprising thing is that Daniel hoped for restoration after 70 years at all. Moses had predicted that the consequence to national rebellion was a complete destruction of the city and a scattering of the people of Israel throughout the earth for a very long time (Lev 26:33-45). Yet Daniel knew that because Jeremiah had prophesied restoration after 70 years of desolation, that God would keep His word (Dan 9:2; Jer 25:11; 29:10). The answer to the prayer that Daniel humbly pours out to God, therefore, answers very precisely these points of Daniel's concern.

Before going on, notice in the translation at the beginning of this study the words that are bold, circled and connected to other words: several key words are semantically related to other key words in the passage. That means that just like the word "runner" (a noun) is closely related in meaning to the word, "running" (a participle) and the word, "to run" (an infinitive verb), closely related words in a difficult passage of Scripture are a good way to zero-in on the meaning of the passage.

- "people" (v 24) is repeated in verse 26;
- "city" and "holy" (v 24) are related and repeated, respectively, to "Jerusalem" (v 25), "city" and, "sanctuary" in verse 26;
- "to finish" (v 24) is related to "complete destruction" in verse 27;
- "to anoint" (v 24) is related to "anointed" or "Messiah" in verses 25 and 26;
- "Prince" (v 25) is repeated in verse 26.

And so, as a result, one of the implications of these relationships among the words in the passage is that, "Most Holy," (v 24) after being anointed, is called "Anointed Prince," (v 25) and, "the Prince who is coming," (v 26). You might find this difficult to see or accept right now, but hold the thought as a possibility while we explore the passage in more depth.

From a theological point of view it is a given that the ultimate transgression of the nation can be placed squarely on the acts of defiling whatever is Most Holy to God. The Mosaic covenant hinges on the right observance of the sacred. And so I find a great deal of insight into the prophetic passage in verses 24-27 in the proper interpretation of the "most holy" in verse 24. The phrase "Most Holy," or, "qodesh qodashim" is claimed by many to be the Temple and so they insert in most modern translations the word, "place" to read, "most holy *place*". But the phrase does not say, "place" in Hebrew. Some claim that this phrase, "most holy" always refers to the Temple, the Holy of Holies, or some other aspect of Temple worship and never to a person. But in 1 Chronicles 23:13, Aaron and his sons forever are set apart by God as "most holy". That Aaron's priesthood is a type of Christ is established beyond debate by the author of Hebrews. So if Aaron is "most holy" certainly that greater Reality which was signified in him is also "Most Holy". I am suggesting that the prediction at the end of verse 24 is regarding the anointing of the person of the Son of God, known here as, "Most Holy".

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Verse 25 refers to Most Holy again, but this time from the perspective that He is now anointed, looking forward to the time when verse 24 is fulfilled and the Most Holy is anointed. Verse 25 predicts the time from a certain decree until "the anointed Prince." In fact this is the basis for the title, "Christ" or "Messiah" in reference to Jesus. Both the Greek and the Hebrew words mean "Anointed One". If in verse 24 someone's anointing is predicted, namely the "Most Holy," then it is appropriate in the next verse that this Most Holy be titled "The Anointed Prince"—remembering, of course, that "prince" in Hebrew does not mean "son of a king" but "ruler," and that "anointing" was most often a condition of "kingship."

This sheds light on the difficult issue of who is "he" in verse 26. Understanding comes when "nagid habbo" (prince who is coming) is seen as the substantive referring to 'ad-mashiach nagid (until the anointed prince). "habbo" (coming) refers in context to the person whose "coming" was just predicted. The "coming" verb in Dan 9:25 is not explicit, to be sure, but by the use of the temporal clause in 25a the anointed Prince's coming is clearly implied. Moreover, as Most Holy, "qodesh qodashim," is predicted to be "anointed", (velimshoach) in 24, verse 25 predicts the timing of His "arrival" having been "anointed" and now described as "Prince", nagid. The word "anointed" connects the Subject of both verses (24-25). In 25-26, the word "prince", nagid, likewise holds the single Subject in view. To put it plainly, "Most Holy" is predicted to be "anointed" in verse 24, He is called the "Anointed Prince" in verse 25, and the "coming Prince" in verse 26. Then the people will CAUSE (the verb is in the hifil stem, which is causative) the city, and that which makes it holy, i.e., the Temple (c.f., "your people and your holy city" v. 24) to be corrupted/destroyed. But whose people? Not just Daniel's people (v 24), but the coming anointed Prince's people (v 26). As much as Daniel cares for and intercedes on behalf of his people, The coming Prince cares for them more; intercedes for them more; and so when THEY reject HIM they become the cause of their own destruction. The Romans are present in this verse only insofar as they are glimpsed as one of the parties who will "war", and as the agents, not the cause, of "desolations". Hence the order of v 27:

1. He, the Anointed Prince, the Most Holy, will "confirm a covenant with the many" (KJV);
 - a. the "many" is a specific term associated with Christ's New Covenant denoting the Jews and Gentiles under one heading—Matthew 20:28; 26:28; Mark 14:24; Romans 5:15, 19; 1 Corinthians 10:33
 - b. This covenant referred to here is not any antichristian covenant, any peace treaty with Israel or any other idea that is read into the text. Rather, when we carefully draw the meaning *out of* the text, we find the covenant is intimately connected with the Most Holy, the Anointed Prince, the Coming Prince, Jesus the Anointed (Christ)—it is the new covenant in His blood, the ransom for many.
 - c. The text does not say that He will confirm the covenant **for one week**, but that He will confirm a covenant with the many **one week**, or translated more freely, "during a certain week He will confirm a covenant with the many". Compare 1 Sam 1:1; 2 Sam 18:10; Est 3:8 for the same use of the number "one" in Hebrew. When it says, "during a certain week" of course

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the certain week intended by the text is the one that fits the context of the preceding verses. Verse 25 gives 7 weeks + 62 weeks until the Anointed Prince comes. Verse 26 says that after that second period of 62 weeks (i.e., after the 69 weeks), the Anointed One, the coming Prince, will be "cut off". *After* the 69 weeks logically indicates a time *during* the 70th week. In verse 27, then, when it says "during a certain week" it means that this confirmation of the covenant to the many will take place during the 70th week.

2. The anointed Prince causes sacrifice and offering to stop.
 - a. See Heb 10:8-9, esp. 9b. Therefore the subsequent temple rituals of the Jews are idolatrous abominations (shiqqutsim) since they took place after the permanent sacrifice of the Son of God had taken place. It is comparable to Abraham going ahead and killing Isaac even after the ram had been provided.
 - b. When exactly does Christ (the Anointed One) cause the sacrifice and offering to stop, or when does He "put an end" to this old order? The text precisely says that this would take place "in the middle of the week." Not "in the middle of a week" but, "in the middle of **the** week", i.e., the seventieth week, the certain week during which Messiah was confirming a covenant with the many. Is it a coincidence that Jesus' public ministry lasted exactly three and a half years—"half a week"? Is it coincidence that it was exactly at the end of His three-and-a-half year ministry that He was crucified, sealing the covenant in His blood and putting an end to sacrifice and offering forever (c.f., Heb 10:9b)? No, this is no coincidence: this is a Messianic prophecy of the highest order.
3. "On the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate" (NASB).
4. "...until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate" (NASB).

The word "sevens" or "weeks" literally means "sabbaths", the way of counting days by sevens. Looking to history, we discover that the actual time period from both the decrees (that are most commonly suggested as the decree mentioned in verse 25), 69 weeks, or 483 days, was fulfilled in real years. The first was from the decree to Ezra in 458 BC (Ezra 7:11ff) and was fulfilled in 486.5 of our solar years until Jesus' crucifixion in 29-30 AD. Verse 26 adds that after the 69th consecutive "week", i.e., sometime after 483 years, the one who is anointed (verse 24, "Messiah") would be killed. The second decree was from the decree to Nehemiah in 444 BC (Neh 2:4-9) and was also fulfilled at the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus in lunar years: the middle of the seventieth week would be 486.5 years, which, dating from from 444 BC, comes to 29 AD, the year of Jesus' crucifixion. Then we are told that His people would be responsible for destroying the city and the temple (literally the city and the "holy"). The whole period after Messiah's death would be filled with an increasing "flood" of destruction (desolations) until the city's ultimate destruction in A.D. 70.

Verse 25 expands on the introduction in verse 24, and verse 27 functions as an explanation of the desolations in verse 26. It tells us why the city would be destroyed; in

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what way the people of Jerusalem were responsible for its destruction. It also gives a more precise time frame. First, in this **specific** week (literally in Hebrew it reads, [Dan 9:27 direct translation] "...and he will strengthen a covenant with the many one week...") Messiah will "strengthen" or "make strong" a covenant with "the many", i.e., the nations and not just the Jews. Then, in the middle of the week Messiah would cause the system of sacrifices and offerings to end—He did this by the permanent, once-and-for-all sacrifice of His death (Hebrews 10:8-12). Hebrews 10:9 even says that He takes away the first system to establish the permanent sacrifice. This means that the apostles understood this fulfillment. The last important idea in verse 27 is that on the "skirts" or "wings" of the "detestable things" or "abominations" of the Jews there would result "desolations" or "appalling horrors" right up until the final destruction of those responsible. The abominations in question are the idolatrous sacrifices and offerings of the Jewish people who rejected God's permanent provision of the sacrifice of the Messiah.

The "abominations" of the Jews, i.e., their idolatrous sacrifices offered in the name of God after He has already provided the final and ultimate Sacrifice in His Son, once again brought "desolation" on their city, Jerusalem, and the temple in AD 70, when the Romans besieged and levelled the city in a massive slaughter. War led up to the final, complete destruction of Jerusalem, in 70. Desolation resulted and continued century after century for most of the subsequent 2000 years. This was the terrible punishment that God had warned Israel about in the second half of Leviticus 26. And so we can see how important this prophecy, in Daniel 9:24-27, really is, when properly interpreted. It explains why the Jewish nation has suffered so much, and for so long, with no country to call their own until 1948 and the re-birth of the State of Israel. It was not the first time God had allowed "desolations" to come upon the people of Israel. But these "desolations" since Israel rejected their Anointed One, their Messiah, their Anointed Prince, their Most Holy One, have turned out to be "a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will [again]" (Mat 24:21). Isn't it amazing how even the most tragic history makes sense, and how the pieces of the puzzle fall into place, when Scripture is carefully studied and allowed to interpret itself?

Finally, this profound prophecy has a Christological focus throughout it. Christ is always the Subject. Christ's atonement is the theological centre of this prophecy and the culmination of the prophets' hopes for the nation of Israel—all "vision and prophecy" are indeed "sealed up" in Him (Dan 9:24). Christ, or Messiah, is also revealed here as the "Most Holy" the ultimate Reality to which the entire Temple system pointed; the "Coming Prince," or Ruler, anointed by God to rule the nations (Dan 7:13-14) and the Agent of God's saving covenant providing "everlasting righteousness" for all who believe. No wonder we call Him, "Jesus"—*Yahweh Saves!*