

CHAPTER SIX

The Seventy Weeks

We come now to the ninth chapter of Daniel — the chapter which contains perhaps the most wonderful and dramatic prophecy of the book. I believe that we are told the actual year of the Messiah's arrival, together with many details about His work of salvation. We are also given details about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The chapter begins with the following words:

'In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by birth a Mede, who became king over the realm of the Chaldeans — in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years which, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and supplications with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.' (Daniel 9:1-3)

Daniel's prayer

At this point Daniel begins to pray. He confesses the sins of his people and he confesses that they deserve their sufferings — the very sufferings of which God has warned them through Moses. He then prays,

'And now, O Lord our God, who didst bring thy people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast made thee a name, as at this day, we have sinned, we have done wickedly. O Lord, according to all thy righteous acts, let thy anger and thy wrath turn away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy hill; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people have become a byword among all who are round about us. Now therefore, O our God, hearken to the prayer of thy servant and to his supplications, and for thy own sake, O Lord, cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary, which is desolate. O my God, incline thy ear and hear; open thy eyes and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name; for we do not present our supplications before thee on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of thy great mercy. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, give heed and act; delay not, for thy own sake, O my God, because thy city and thy people are called by thy name.' (Daniel 9:15-19)

We must now look at the prophecy of which Daniel is speaking, and understand why it provokes this impassioned prayer.

'Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, says the Lord, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these nations round about; I will utterly destroy them, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting reproach ... This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, says the Lord, making the land an everlasting waste.' (Jeremiah 25:8-12)

'For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfil to you my promise and bring you back to this place.' (Jeremiah 29:10)

Let us make a list of the points we find in these prophecies:

1. Nebuchadnezzar and his people shall come against Judah and the surrounding nations and destroy them and make them a desolation.
2. These nations shall serve the king of Babylon for seventy years.
3. At the end of seventy years the king of Babylon and his people shall be punished. Their land shall become desolate for ever.
4. After the completion of Babylon's seventy years of supremacy, God shall cause the Jews to return to their own land.

Let us now see how these prophecies were fulfilled:

1. In the same year that the prophecy was uttered (605 B.C.), Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem, besieged it and took a number of hostages, including Daniel himself (Daniel 1:1, 2; II Kings 24:1). Jerusalem was again besieged in 597 B.C. and more Jews were exiled (II Kings 24:8-17). Finally Jerusalem was completely destroyed in 587 or 586 B.C. and more Jews were exiled (II Kings 25:1-22). The surrounding nations received similar treatment.

2, 3. Although Judah came under the Babylonian heel in 605 B.C., Babylon's ruling of nations actually dated from the overthrow of Assyria a few years earlier. After the fall of Ninevah in 612 B.C. (to the allied Medes and Babylonians), Ashur-uballit established his government at Harran. This city fell to the Babylonians in 610 B.C., and Assyria was finally obliterated when Ashur-uballit failed to recapture it in 609 B.C. *Seventy years* after she had finally conquered and destroyed Assyria, Babylon herself was conquered by Cyrus in 539 B.C. Since then Babylon has fallen into decay, and for many centuries it has been a desolate waste.

In Jeremiah 29:10 we are told that seventy years would be 'completed for Babylon'. This suggests that the full period of seventy years is to be identified with *Babylon's period of power*. The nations bordering Judah did not serve Babylon for quite the *full* period of seventy years, but there were other peoples who did. Babylon's supremacy lasted a little *more* than seventy years in the eastern part of her empire and a little *less* in the western part. The interval between her final defeat of Assyria and her own defeat by Persia was just about exactly seventy years. It can be seen, therefore, that there are good grounds for maintaining that Jeremiah's prophecy of the 'seventy years' was fulfilled both literally and accurately. But even if we regard the number seventy as an approximate or 'round' figure, we should note that it is still a *literal* seventy — not merely a symbolical seventy.

4. *This* (the fourth point which we noted concerning Jeremiah's prophecies) is the reason why Daniel made his great prayer to God. *God had promised that He would cause the Jews to return to their land after the seventy years ended.* Daniel had 'perceived in the books the number of years ... namely, seventy years' in the first year of Darius the Mede. That is, in 538 B.C., shortly after the completion of the seventy years. Daniel was pleading with God to remember His promise and to fulfil it. He was pleading with God to let the Jews return to their land and rebuild it.

God's response to Daniel's prayer

This is what we read next:

'While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy hill of my God; while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. He came and he said to me, "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you wisdom and understanding. At the beginning of your supplications a word went forth, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly beloved;

therefore consider the word and understand the vision ...” (Daniel 9:20-23)

The R.V. translates verse 23 slightly differently: *‘At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment went forth, and I am come to tell thee; for thou art greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision.’* This translation gives a sense slightly different from that of the R.S.V. It seems to suggest that we have here an answer to Daniel’s prayer — his prayer for the restoration of the temple and city of Jerusalem.

The ‘commandment which went forth’ may well be God’s commandment that the Jews be allowed to return to their land and begin rebuilding. It can be seen that if this is the true meaning, God answered Daniel’s request even before he made it. His action was as good as His word, for that very same year Cyrus issued his edict permitting the Jews to return to their land and rebuild the temple.

The seventy weeks

Gabriel continues,

‘Seventy weeks of years are decreed concerning your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.’ (Daniel 9:24)

Daniel has been assured (if our interpretation of verse 23 is correct) that Jeremiah’s prophecy has been fulfilled; but God now reveals another prophecy which yet again involves the number seventy — and again the prophecy concerns Jerusalem and the Jews.

Now critical scholars deny that this prophecy has anything (except in the vaguest sense) to do with Christ. They believe, quite simply, that it concerns the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. I will consider this view further on in the chapter; but for the time being I will proceed with my own, more orthodox interpretation.

Daniel is told that within ‘seventy weeks’ (‘of years’ is not in the original) sin will be atoned for and true righteousness will be brought in. This surely refers to the wonderful fact of Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross, through which man may receive full forgiveness of sins and may be clothed with the righteousness of Christ. See Hebrews 9:15, 26; II Corinthians 5:19; Romans 3:21, 22.

Daniel is told also that within seventy weeks ‘vision and prophet’ will be sealed — indicating the end of the Old Testament form of divine revelation together with the institution of the prophets, and the coming to pass of the main event for which they were preparing. John the Baptist was the last of the prophets, and the event for which they were preparing was the coming of the Messianic kingdom of Heaven.

‘The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached ...’ (Luke 16:16)

‘Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them ...’ (Matthew 5:17)

Daniel learns also that within seventy weeks ‘the most holy’ (R.V.) will be anointed. This surely refers to the anointing of the divine Messiah (‘the anointed one’). Centuries later Gabriel (the messenger who is speaking to Daniel) tells Mary that ‘the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God’ (Luke 1:35) and Jesus is later hailed as ‘the Holy One of God’ (Mark 1:24; John 6:69), this being one of the titles of the Messiah (Psalm 16:10; Acts 13:35-37). The early church spoke to God of ‘thy *holy* servant Jesus, whom thou didst *anoint*’ (Acts 4:27). On one occasion Jesus opened the book of Isaiah and read, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is

upon me, because he has *anointed* me to preach good news to the poor'. After He had finished reading He closed the book and said, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing' (Luke 4:18-21). We know also that Christ, the divine Messiah, has been anointed prophet, priest and king (Acts 3:20-24; Hebrews 1:8, 9; 5:4, 5, 10).

'Anoint the most holy' can also be understood to mean 'anoint a most holy *place*' (as in the R.S.V.), referring to the Holy of holies, the innermost sanctum of the tabernacle and temple, the place of meeting with God and itself therefore typical of Christ. Christ called His own body a temple (John 2:19-21) and John wrote, 'the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us' (John 1:14, R.V. mg.). God came down and dwelt among men in a 'tabernacle' or 'temple' of flesh. As the old tabernacle was anointed at the beginning (Exodus 40:9), so Christ was anointed as the new Tabernacle and Temple which superseded the tabernacle and temples of the Old Covenant. Now that He is no longer living among us in the flesh, we (those who have accepted Him as Saviour and Lord) are His temple and He dwells in us by His Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 3:16).

Daniel is told that all these things will be accomplished within 'seventy weeks'. Now the word translated 'week' literally means 'seven' and can, in the Bible, mean a seven of days or a seven of years (see Genesis 29:27, 28). In this case it is likely, as the R.S.V. assumes, that weeks of years are meant. If this is so, we are told that 490 years (70 x 7) are decreed upon the Jews and upon Jerusalem. Within this time sin will be atoned for, everlasting righteousness will be brought in, vision and prophet will be sealed and the Most Holy will be anointed. We have seen that in fact all these things had been done by the time Christ finished His work on earth some two thousand years ago.

I take the 'seventy weeks' to mean a literal period of 490 years, and there are at least three good reasons why we should do so. First, Daniel 9 is of a generally literal, straightforward nature — it does not contain the symbolism and imagery of the earlier visions. Second, if Jeremiah's prophecy of the 'seventy years' was fulfilled literally, it is extremely likely that Daniel's prophecy of the 'seventy weeks' was also fulfilled literally. And third, it can be shown that the prophecy of the seventy weeks *was* fulfilled literally!

The commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem

Gabriel continues,

'Know therefore and discern, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the anointed one, the prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: it shall be built again, with street and moat, even in troublous times.'
(Daniel 9:25, R.V.)¹

We learn now that the seventy weeks are dated from 'the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem'. The immediate question is, 'When did this commandment go forth?' To answer this question we shall have to consider just how the Jews returned and how they rebuilt Jerusalem.

These events took place in two main stages. In the first stage a large group of Jews returned under the leadership of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel, probably in 537 B.C. They had specific permission from Cyrus to build the temple in Jerusalem; but more than this, we read that those who returned were those 'whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem' (Ezra 1:5). It was *God's* desire and command that they should rebuild the temple. They commenced building the temple the year after their return and finally completed it twenty years later, just over seventy years after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the first temple. There is no evidence that they tried to rebuild the city itself.

In the second stage, another group of Jews returned to Jerusalem some eighty years later, led by Ezra. The return took place in 458 B.C., the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus, the exiles arriving in Jerusalem towards the end of July. There is considerable controversy over the date of Ezra's return to Jerusalem, and this controversy will be referred to later. But for the time being, we shall assume that as the Bible says, he returned in the seventh year of Artaxerxes I (Ezra 7:7). Ezra carried with him a letter from Artaxerxes which gave him authority to organize the colony in Judah according to Hebrew law and to obtain and carry money and material for the beautification and service of the temple. He did not carry any specific permission to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, but it is apparent from Ezra 4:7-23 that he did in fact begin to do this. In this passage² we learn that the enemies of the Jews sent a letter to Artaxerxes, saying,

'... be it known to the king that the Jews who came up from you to us have gone to Jerusalem. They are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city; they are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations. Now be it known to the king that, if this city is rebuilt and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute, custom, or toll, and the royal revenue will be impaired.' (Ezra 4:12, 13)

Who were these 'Jews who came up from Artaxerxes'? It is clear that they must have come to Jerusalem *before* the coming of Nehemiah — and the only such group we know of is *the group led by Ezra in the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes*. It would appear therefore that the rebuilding of Jerusalem was initiated *by Ezra*.

The writers of the letter (Samaritans and others) went on to claim that Jerusalem had been a rebellious city in the past and therefore it was not safe to allow the Jews to rebuild it. Artaxerxes was convinced by the argument and gave orders that the building should cease. We read that the Samaritans & Co. 'went in haste to the Jews at Jerusalem and by force and power made them cease'. The Samaritans did not have much difficulty in getting Artaxerxes to forbid the rebuilding; and this supports the idea that Ezra's group of Jews were the builders, because even though they had 'come up from' Artaxerxes, they did not have any specific permission to rebuild the city.

We have further evidence that Ezra began to rebuild Jerusalem in a prayer he made to God about four months after his arrival:

'... God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the ruins thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.' (Ezra 9:9, R.V.)

The immediate question is, what did Ezra mean by 'a wall in Jerusalem'? He did not mean just the city wall, as he would have used a different word for that. In this case 'wall' translates *gader*, which is also translated elsewhere as 'fence'. It refers primarily to the sort of protective wall which, for example, surrounds a vineyard. The idea, as indicated in the R.S.V. translation, is that of *protection*. When God 'gave a wall in Jerusalem' He made Jerusalem capable of protecting the Jews. Ezra was obviously speaking of the literal city of Jerusalem, as in the same verse he had just spoken of the literal temple. A Jerusalem capable of protecting the Jews was a Jerusalem which had been *rebuilt*. And Ezra was not talking just about the city wall; he was talking about *the entire city*. We understand the actual word 'wall' in a metaphorical sense, but it implies the literal rebuilding of Jerusalem. This indicates that *Ezra was at least planning to rebuild Jerusalem*. The passage quoted earlier from Ezra 4 seems to show that in fact he did begin this task.

The Jews with Ezra probably began by building within the city, and they started on the wall only at a later stage, nearer the time of Nehemiah. It was then that the Samaritans began to

cause trouble. They caused the rebuilding to cease ‘by force and power’ — and this would obviously include the breaking down of the offending wall. It is probable that this was the news that distressed Nehemiah so much in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, thirteen years after Ezra’s arrival in Jerusalem. He was at Susa, in Persia, when he met some Jews from Judah and asked them how Jerusalem and the people of Judah were faring. They replied that the people were in great trouble and that ‘the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire’ (Nehemiah 1:1-4). Nehemiah quickly obtained permission from Artaxerxes to rebuild the wall, and so came to Jerusalem.

When he arrived there, he found there were only a few people living in the city, and that ‘the houses were not builded’ (7:4, R.V.). Nehemiah 7:3, however, states clearly that there were people living in Jerusalem in their own houses — which does indicate that *some* houses had been built. The rebuilding of the whole city was a task which must have taken many years to complete; so it is not surprising that much work remained to be done. It is likely, furthermore, that the Jews with Ezra had been slow to begin their task — just as a previous generation had been slow to begin work on the temple. They needed a man like Nehemiah to come and chivvy them on, and this is precisely what he did. He exhorted them to rebuild the wall, and despite intense opposition from neighbouring enemies, it was repaired in fifty-two days. Ezra was then called upon to read the Law and the people pledged themselves to observe its commands.

The temple or the city?

Having said all this, we are in a better position to answer our question, ‘When did the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem go forth?’

The first point we need to consider is this. Did the commandment go forth during the reign of Cyrus, when the Jews began rebuilding the temple? Or was it during the reign of Artaxerxes I, when they began rebuilding the city? Does the rebuilding of ‘Jerusalem’ include the rebuilding of the *temple*, or does it mean the later rebuilding of the *city*?

We can answer that the commandment of verse 25 *could* refer to Cyrus’ edict (or rather the commandment of God which caused it) — but not necessarily. The revelation of Daniel 9 was given in response to a prayer made by Daniel. He had prayed, ‘Cause thy face to shine upon thy *sanctuary*, which is desolate ... behold our desolations, and the *city* which is called by thy name’ (vv. 17, 18). Daniel first asked for the restoration of the *temple*, and then he asked for the restoration of the *city*. As Daniel made two requests, so God may have given two answers. The first was, I suggest, the commandment of verse 23 — given in immediate response to Daniel’s prayer — the commandment to build the temple. The second was the commandment of verse 25, then future, the commandment to build the city. As God gave two commandments, so the temple and city were rebuilt in two stages. A group of Jews returned during the reign of Cyrus and rebuilt the *temple*. A second group returned during the reign of Artaxerxes and began rebuilding the *city*.

Daniel does draw a distinction between the temple and the city of Jerusalem, so it is certainly possible, if not probable, that the rebuilding of ‘Jerusalem’ refers to the rebuilding of the *city* which began during the reign of Artaxerxes. It is significant that the seventy weeks are decreed concerning the people and *the city* (9:24) — powerful evidence that the seventy weeks are indeed to be dated from the commandment to rebuild the city.

Ezra or Nehemiah?

So much for the ‘temple’ versus the ‘city’. I shall try now to show that the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem is to be associated with the coming of Ezra, rather than that of

Nehemiah. I have shown already that the Jews began rebuilding the city of Jerusalem *before* Nehemiah's arrival, and that there is good reason to believe that Nehemiah's work was simply a continuation of Ezra's work.

It should be noted that right from the beginning, Nehemiah was in absolutely no doubt that the wall of Jerusalem should be rebuilt immediately. In fact it seems that he was shocked and distressed to hear that it had not been built already. This suggests that as far as Nehemiah was concerned, God's commandment had gone forth already.

Now the seventy weeks are decreed concerning the *people* and the *city* (9:24). This suggests that they are to be dated from the reorganization of the *people* and the rebuilding of the *city* by Ezra when he returned in the seventh year of Artaxerxes. We can say truthfully that *the spiritual and physical rebuilding of the nation began with the return of Ezra*. Apart from the building of the temple, very little seems to have been achieved by the first group of returned exiles — Jerusalem continued to lie in ruins, and both spiritually and physically the people remained at an extremely low ebb. As John Bright says in his book, *A History of Israel*, Ezra emerged as a figure of 'towering importance' who came to be regarded as 'no less than a second Moses'. 'If Moses was Israel's founder, it was Ezra who reconstituted Israel and gave her faith a form in which it could survive through the centuries.'³ The post-exilic theocracy was a new phase in the history of Israel. It began with the work of Ezra and ended (as far as God was concerned) with the work of Christ. We shall see shortly that *this phase of Israel's history lasted precisely 490 years (seventy weeks)*.

As I have shown, the Bible implies very strongly indeed that Ezra not only reconstituted the religious life of the people, but also he initiated the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. It is the only solution which fits all the facts we are given. *The very earliest work of rebuilding the city (as opposed to the temple) that the Old Testament speaks of is the work of rebuilding recorded in Ezra 4:7-23*. The Old Testament clearly indicates that the purposeful rebuilding of the city was initiated by a group of Jews that 'came up from Artaxerxes' before Nehemiah. The only such group that the Old Testament knows of is the band of Jews led by Ezra in the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes I.

It is in fact almost universally accepted by both conservative and critical scholars that the Jews began rebuilding the city of Jerusalem during the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus, before the arrival of Nehemiah, as described in Ezra 4:7-23. Critical scholars actually consider this section to be particularly authentic and reliable. I even remember reading in one critical commentary that the author or editor of the book of Ezra may have 'confused' Ezra's return with that of the Jews mentioned in Ezra 4:12. Many critical scholars believe the Biblical date of Ezra's return to be erroneous (they believe that he came to Jerusalem after Nehemiah); but the aforesaid commentary does at least imply that *some* Jews did return to Jerusalem around 458 B.C., and began rebuilding the city. As for conservative opinion, suffice it to quote a sample from *The New Bible Commentary Revised*, Inter-Varsity Press (p. 401). Ezra 4:12 'is highly important evidence for a migration of Jews in the reign of Artaxerxes. If the traditional dating of Ezra's return (c. 458 B.C.) be accepted, the verse could well indicate the group which returned with him. The cessation of the building, which was unauthorized, may have been that reported to Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:1 ff.). Ezra may have realized that no effective reform could be achieved without the security of a wall, but he had no commission for this, hence the appeal to Nehemiah. Apart from this reconstruction, there is no historically-attested connection for this group.'

It should be mentioned again that certain scholars do not accept that Ezra returned in the seventh year of Artaxerxes I. In fact a very good case can be made out for the Biblical chronology; but as it happens, this controversy is largely irrelevant to our discussion. I am

trying to show that *the Bible* predicted the date of Christ's arrival. I am concerned therefore with the *Biblical* date of Ezra's return. However, it is worth quoting here a point made by *The New Bible Commentary Revised* (p. 397). '... the Chronicler was so close to Ezra and Nehemiah, even allowing a date as late as c. 350 B.C., that a major chronological blunder is unlikely. Indeed, the view that Ezra himself was the Chronicler is maintained by W. F. Albright and other leading scholars.'

To say that the Chronicler could have got such an important historical fact wrong is rather like saying that a modern historian could be confused over whether Queen Victoria reigned before or after Edward VII. The ingenious but inconclusive arguments against Ezra coming to Jerusalem before Nehemiah are all completely overshadowed by the simple fact that *an authority who was actually there at the time (or at least very soon afterwards) says that Ezra did come first.*

But I am digressing. The question we need to ask is not 'When did the Jews begin to rebuild Jerusalem?' It is 'When did the *commandment* to rebuild go forth?' We read in Ezra 7:6 that Artaxerxes 'granted Ezra all that he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was upon him'. Since Ezra was not given specific permission to rebuild Jerusalem and cannot therefore have asked for it, we can take it that when Ezra left for Jerusalem, the commandment for its restoration had not yet 'gone forth' from God. We are told that in the days immediately following the exiles' arrival in late July, they 'aided the people and the *house of God*' (Ezra 8:36). As there is no mention of the city here, we can take it that the commandment must have 'gone forth' some time *after* July, 458 B.C.

Now the aforementioned prayer of Ezra is the only indication we have as to when the commandment did go forth. In the prayer he says that God has extended mercy to the Jews in the sight of the kings of Persia in order 'to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the ruins thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem'. *Ezra clearly believed that it was God's will that Jerusalem should be rebuilt.* Furthermore, he did not speak of the rebuilding as something to come in the future — he spoke of it as something which was, or could be, just as much a present reality as the restoration of the temple.

This is the first time since Daniel that such a statement occurs. Hitherto it has always been the restoration of the temple only. Zechariah 1:16 (written in 520 B.C.) does mention Jerusalem together with the temple, but only in such a way as to confirm that the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem had not yet gone forth.⁴ The command to rebuild the temple was, at that time, very emphatic. By contrast, the clearest reference to the building of the city (Zechariah 1:16) was guarded and somewhat vague — a promise of something to come in the future. Something to look forward to. Ezra's words were much more definite. He clearly believed that God had brought the Jews back to build both the temple and the city of Jerusalem.

It is probable, therefore, that when Ezra prayed this prayer, he had already received the 'go-ahead' from God to rebuild Jerusalem. Doubtless this 'go-ahead' took the form of a deep conviction laid on his heart. It is not difficult to imagine this happening soon after his arrival in Jerusalem — still in ruins eighty years after Cyrus' edict. In fact it is quite possible that when Ezra prayed this prayer, he had already exhorted the Jews to begin rebuilding.

The New Bible Commentary Revised doubts if the building of the wall could have begun so soon after his return. But as explained already, Ezra was not just speaking of the wall — he was speaking of the whole city. There is no reason why some building work within the city (as opposed to the wall) could not have begun at that time. Ezra 4:12, 13 does indicate that the Jews began building both the city and its wall. As mentioned earlier, they probably began by building within the city, and started on the walls only at a later stage, nearer the time of

Nehemiah. It was then that the Samaritans began to cause trouble.

However, whether or not the Jews had begun the actual work of rebuilding when Ezra prayed his prayer, there is good reason to believe that the *commandment* to build had gone forth (from God). And this is what really matters. It need not worry us that only a few houses were built and that the work came to a temporary halt. It was a fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy that the city would be built in 'a troubled time' (9:25), and the Bible compares it with the way in which the building of the temple was delayed also (Ezra 4-6). We need to remember that very little was done about the building of the temple until about eighteen years after Cyrus' edict. In both cases, it would appear, there was a considerable lapse of time between the 'going forth' of God's commandment and an effective response to that commandment. Just as the building of the temple needed the impetus given by Haggai and Zechariah, so the building of the city needed the impetus given by Nehemiah.

Ezra's prayer was made in early December or late November (see Ezra 10); so we can take it that the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem went forth sometime *during the months August to November, 458 B.C.* This, I believe, is the answer the Old Testament supplies to the question 'When did the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem go forth?' The answer has to be sought, but it is there. 'Seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you'.

The Messiah

Daniel is told that 'unto the anointed one [Messiah], the prince' shall be 69 weeks (7 weeks plus 62 weeks). That is, the Messiah will appear 483 years (7 x 69) from the latter part of the year 458 B.C. Remembering that there was no year 0, this brings us to the latter part of the year 26 A.D. *It was about this very time that Jesus Christ began His public ministry.* Astronomical calculations have shown that 7th April, 30 A.D. is one of the two most likely dates for Christ's crucifixion.⁵

It is apparent that His public ministry extended over a period of two to four years, three and a half years being one of the calculated possibilities. We shall see in a few moments that the prophecy of Daniel 9 indicates that it did last exactly three and a half years — and this is in fact the traditional span. (In our final chapter we shall see that evidence for this can be found in the eleventh chapter of Revelation.) If we count back three and a half years from 7th April, 30 A.D., we come to the month of October, 26 A.D. This month is in the latter part (August—November) of the year 26 A.D., *the very time predicted by Daniel's prophecy.* It has been calculated from other evidence too that 26 A.D. is one of the most likely dates for the beginning of Jesus' public ministry (see chapter 7 of *New Testament Times*, by Merrill C. Tenney).

Now it is true that the date of the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem is not immediately obvious. Reasons can be found for identifying it with the year 458 B.C., and other reasons can be found for 538 or 445 B.C. The picture is further obscured by uncertainty over the correct punctuation in verse 25 (we have used the punctuation of A.V., R.V. margin and N.I.V.). The answer is not laid on a plate before us. It is partially hidden, and we have to search for it. But as I wrote in the introductory chapter, all Daniel's prophecies are something of a riddle, and one gets the impression that God made it this way deliberately. The ambiguity may well be intentional.

Because the correct answer to our problem is not crystal clear at the first glance, and because there has been so much disagreement and confusion over this prediction, there are many who declare that it is wrong to look for an exact interpretation. The New Testament plainly indicates, however, that the Old Testament Messianic prophecies were *not* crystal clear in meaning. Jesus often had to explain them before the disciples understood them. Note

also that although Jesus specifically told His disciples that we cannot know the date of the *second* advent, He said no such thing with regard to the *first* advent. Rather, He repeatedly showed them that His first advent had been predicted in great detail by the Old Testament scriptures.

With regard to Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks, we are plainly told that there were to be sixty-nine weeks (if we follow the A.V., R.V. mg. and N.I.V. punctuation in verse 25) from the going forth of the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem to the coming of 'an anointed one, a prince'. We are told also that after the sixty-nine weeks (whichever punctuation we use), 'an anointed one' would be cut off. Ezra 4:7-23 and 7:7 and 9:9 imply very strongly indeed that the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem was initiated by Ezra. And it is an irrefutable fact that there were exactly 483 years (69 weeks) between the Biblical date of Ezra's coming to Jerusalem and 26 A.D., the very year in which Jesus Christ, the Messiah, may well have begun His public ministry. Some prefer to think that this is pure coincidence. To me, a 'coincidence' of this magnitude is most unlikely. It is more reasonable to accept it, partially hidden though it is, as a prediction of the date of Christ's coming.

It is true that there is some uncertainty about the exact dates of Christ's life; but we know that the crucifixion was around 30 A.D., the most likely dates being 7th April, 30 A.D. and 3rd April, 33 A.D. *I suggest that Daniel's prophecy confirms that it was in fact the 30 A.D. date.* However, whether we regard the 'seventy' as a round number or an exact number, and whether we date it from Ezra's work of rebuilding or Nehemiah's (see below), it brings us to the time of Christ, *not the time of Antiochus.*

There are some who maintain that if the date of Christ's coming had really been predicted in this remarkable way, it would have been mentioned in the New Testament. It is true that the 'seventy weeks' are not specifically mentioned, but there can be no doubt that as far as the New Testament is concerned, the prophecy as a whole applies to the time of Christ. This is particularly true of verse 24. Also, on the occasion when Jesus mentioned Daniel by name (Matthew 24:15-21; Mark 13:14-19; Luke 21:20-24), He appeared to link Daniel 9:27 with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. — indicating in a very specific way that 9:24-27 *does* look beyond Antiochus to the time of Christ.

Maybe Christ said a lot more about Daniel after His resurrection, when He showed His disciples 'the things concerning himself in all the scriptures'. Maybe Paul and others did point to this prophecy when they 'argued from the scriptures' to prove that Jesus was the Christ. But perhaps this particular gem of prophecy was left for people of a later age to discover — people who would possess fuller historical information, and for whom exact dates and lengths of time might therefore be more meaningful. But whatever the reason for its not being mentioned in the New Testament, *the prediction is there in the book of Daniel, and it brings us to the time of Christ.* It should be born in mind also that there is much which *could* have been written in the New Testament, but was not (Luke 24:27; John 21:25).

Other conservative views

What about the other explanations of the 'seventy weeks' which one finds in conservative commentaries?

Some conservative scholars believe that the seventy weeks should be dated from the edict of Cyrus. They believe that the prophecy points to Christ; but they have to maintain that the seventy weeks are only symbolical. This is because 490 years from 538 B.C. brings us up to only 48 B.C. But as explained already, there are strong reasons for believing that the seventy weeks are meant to be taken literally.

Other conservatives date the seventy weeks from Nehemiah's commission in 445 B.C. This brings us up to 46 A.D. for the end of the seventy weeks, and 39 A.D. for the appearance of the 'anointed one'. This is certainly much closer to the time of Christ, but it is still not an exact fulfilment. One way of solving this problem is to calculate in 'prophetic' years of 360 days each — and this does bring us to a date which could be the correct one. Other conservatives believe that the seventy weeks date from 445 B.C., but that the 'seventy' is only an approximate or round figure, albeit a literal one.

Perhaps the right way to view the problem is to accept that the 'symbolical' interpretation is correct as far as it goes. But beneath the surface there is 'hidden treasure' — namely, the prediction that Christ would appear in 26 A.D.

The fact that there are 483 years between 458 B.C. and 26 A.D. has been noticed before;⁶ but strangely enough, very little has been made of this fact (so far as I am aware). It provides a fulfilment which is both accurate and literal — not only satisfying and convincing in itself, but also consistent with the accurate, literal fulfilment of the prophecy of the 'seventy years'. Babylon was given literally seventy years, and Jerusalem was given literally seven times seventy years!

The first seven weeks

It remains to be asked, 'Why are the first sixty-nine weeks divided into a period of seven weeks, followed by a period of sixty-two weeks?'

The most likely answer — and this is not difficult to see if we follow the A.V. and R.V. margin punctuation — is that it took forty-nine years (seven weeks) to build the city of Jerusalem.

'... from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the anointed one, the prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: it shall be built again, with street and moat, even in troublous times.' (Daniel 9:25)

An apt description of the difficulties Ezra and Nehemiah had to contend with!

The seventieth week

'And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off, and shall have nothing; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war; desolations are decreed. And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week; and for half of the week⁷ he shall cause sacrifice and offering to cease; and upon the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.' (Daniel 9:26, 27)

We have learned that the Messiah will appear sixty-nine weeks (seven weeks plus sixty-two weeks) after the going forth of the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem. We are told now, in verse 26, that some time after His appearance the Messiah will be 'cut off' and will 'have nothing', indicating that He will be killed, perhaps in the prime of His life, and that He will be utterly forsaken and desolate, certainly not having the earthly kingdom expected by the Jews. In verse 27 we are told that following His manifestation, the Messiah will 'make a strong covenant with many' for the space of seven years (one week). In the middle of this period He will bring to an end the Old Covenant system of sacrifices.

Daniel does not specify directly whether the one who makes the covenant is the 'anointed one' or the destroying 'prince who is to come'. Nevertheless, it is highly probable that the 'he' of verse 27 refers back to the 'anointed one', since He is the principal character in verse 26.

(The word ‘prince’ takes a subordinate position in the verse). Also, Daniel goes on in verse 27 to speak of a desolating ‘one who shall come’, who seems to be a different person from the one who makes the covenant. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that the one who makes the covenant is the ‘anointed one’, and the ‘one who shall come’ is the ‘prince who is to come’.

So let us now try to identify this period of seven years during which the Messiah ‘shall make a strong covenant with many’ — better translated, ‘establish a covenant’ or ‘cause a covenant to prevail’.

The beginning of the period is marked by His appearance — ‘unto Messiah, the prince, shall be sixty-nine weeks’ (see R.V. margin). This, surely, is the time of Christ’s baptism by John, when He was recognized to be both Messiah and King of Israel, and His public life began (John 1:29-49; Luke 3:23; 16:16; Acts 10:36, 37). When Jesus came to be baptized, He was ‘anointed’ with the Holy Spirit. This event marked the beginning of His public life. It was entirely appropriate that the appearance of the Messiah (‘the anointed one’) should be marked by His actual anointing. Moreover, at the very moment of anointing God revealed Jesus’ Messiahship with these words spoken out of Heaven: ‘Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased’ (Mark 1:11; cf. Psalms 2:7; Isaiah 42:1).

In his book *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, James Dunn shows that the anointing of Jesus by the Holy Spirit at the time of His baptism was an event of enormous importance (see chapter 3, ‘The Experience of Jesus at Jordan’). Dunn shows that for Jesus it marked the actual point in time at which the Old Covenant age ended and the new, Messianic age began.

From the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus preached about the kingdom of God — ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand’ (Mark 1:15). And the outcome of His ministry was the establishing of a ‘New Covenant’ (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 22:20). Compare ‘he shall make a strong covenant with many’ (Daniel 9:27) with ‘this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many’ (Matthew 26:28).

The event marking the end of this seven-year period during which Christ ‘established the covenant’ is rather more difficult to identify; but the following solution meets every requirement. Paul, the last chosen of the apostles, wrote,

‘Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.’ (I Corinthians 15:8)

‘For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.’ (Galatians 1:11, 12)

Paul was apparently the last individual to whom Christ appeared in person, and it was to Paul that the gospel of the New Covenant was revealed in its most complete form. Paul was the last of the apostles to be commissioned by Jesus — the apostles being a select band of disciples to whom Christ specially entrusted His message of the New Covenant. In a very striking way, therefore, Paul’s commissioning marked the end of Christ’s work of ‘establishing’ the New Covenant. It is very possible that Paul received his revelation and commission from Christ three and a half years after His crucifixion and seven years after the commencement of His ministry on earth; so this event could well mark the end of the seventieth ‘week’ during which He ‘made a strong covenant with many’.

This is particularly appropriate, because Daniel is told, ‘Seventy weeks are decreed upon thy people and upon thy holy city’ (R.V.). The idea conveyed is one of *judgment* — the Jews and their city have only seventy weeks to go! After the seventy weeks, the Jews will no longer be the special chosen people of God, and Jerusalem will no longer be the special place for the

worship of God. It was to Paul that Christ finally made it clear that ‘there is no distinction between Jew and Greek’ (Romans 10:12). Paul was the apostle specially commissioned by Christ to take the gospel to the Gentiles after it had been rejected by the Jews.⁸

In spite of all this, however, I believe that God has not finished with the Jews. In another sense, they are still very special, and God has a plan and purpose for them. See Romans 11. Jews who receive Jesus as their Messiah are ‘natural’ members of the true Israel, whereas Gentile Christians have been ‘grafted in’ to the true Israel. A translation which conveys the true meaning of Romans 11:11-12 is the NRSV:

‘So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But through their stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their stumbling means riches for the world, and if their defeat means riches for Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!’ (Romans 11:11-12)

In the following pages I refer quite often to the changed status of the Jewish people. But my comments, together with the scriptural passages, need to be read in the light of the words above.

Let us look at one of Jesus’ parables:

‘And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vine-dresser, ‘Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?’ And he answered him, ‘Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’” (Luke 13:6-9)

The context, together with Hosea 9:10 and Joel 1:7, makes it quite certain that the fig tree represents the Jewish nation. Now this nation was the chosen people of God from the time of the covenant made with Abraham until around the time of Paul’s commissioning as apostle to the Gentiles. According to the parable, this period of time was divided into two parts. The first part was three times as long as the second, and this latter part was a time during which God gave the Jews ‘one more chance’. It might be thought that to take these relative lengths of time literally is to read more into the parable than Christ intended. The fact remains, however, that the period during which the Jews were God’s chosen people was divided in just this way. The parable indicates that God looked in vain for fruit during the first period. At the end of it He was almost prepared to cast the Jews off, but He relented and gave them one more chance. At the end of this second period He looked again for fruit, but finding none, He had to reject the Jews from being His chosen people.

Let us suppose that the ‘seventy weeks’ of the post-exilic theocracy was the ‘one more chance’ that God gave the Jews. This would make each of the ‘years’ of Jesus’ parable to represent a period of 490 years, and would mean that the ‘four years’ started in 1928 B.C. *It was at about this very time that Abraham lived.* Abraham was the first member of the race which God singled out to be His chosen nation. It was from the time of Abraham that the Jews were God’s peculiar people. But always they failed to produce the fruit He was looking for. About 1470 years (490 x 3) after the covenant with Abraham, God gave the Jews ‘one more chance’ when He re-made the nation under Ezra. But still they failed to produce the fruit He was looking for. And so it was that 490 years later, in 33 A.D., He had to cut down His fig tree — as predicted by Jesus.

‘... the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it.’ (Matthew 21: 43)

I have said that Paul's commissioning as apostle to the Gentiles marked the end of the period during which the Jews were God's chosen people. This is appropriate also because Paul typified this great change from one dispensation to another in his own life. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, a particularly fanatical believer in the Old Covenant and the privileges of the Jews. However, following his experience with Christ (an event which is given tremendous prominence in the New Testament),⁹ the change was total and complete. Although retaining a great love for his people, he became the most vigorous preacher of the news that the Old Covenant has been superseded by the New, that there is now no distinction between Jew and Gentile. He sternly opposed all attempts to 'Judaize' Christianity. He was the first Christian really to understand that Gentiles do not have to become Jews in order to be members of God's family and that it is possible and desirable for Christians to abandon many of the observances which God required of the Jews under the Old Covenant.

Closely bound up with Paul's conversion and subsequent theology was the martyrdom of Stephen, an event which dramatically demonstrated the Jews' rejection of their Messiah. He had been brought before the Sanhedrin on charges of blasphemy and after surveying the history of Israel, he had attacked the Jews for continuing in the tradition of their fathers by killing the Messiah. This goaded the Jews to fury and when Stephen claimed to see Jesus standing at the right hand of God, they seized him and stoned him to death. Stephen's death resulted in a Jewish persecution, led by Paul, which scattered the Christians abroad. They preached the gospel wherever they went, but only to the Jews. It was not until after the time of Paul's conversion that it was preached to the Gentiles (Acts 11:19). Paul had been present at Stephen's martyrdom, and it was not so very long afterwards that Jesus met him and changed the course of his life and the role of the Jewish people in His dealings with mankind.

The first eight chapters of the book of Acts record the early preaching of the gospel to the Jewish nation. The narrative does not speak of any preaching to pure Gentiles. All were Jewish or partially Jewish by religion — including those converted at Pentecost, the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch. Many individual Jews were converted, but the greater part of the nation rejected Christ. In the ninth chapter we read about Paul's conversion and his activities during the years immediately following that event. After this the narrative probably goes back a few years to tell the story of how Peter arrived at Joppa, where he was found by messengers from the Roman centurion Cornelius. We then read a long account of how Cornelius and his household were converted and how this event showed the church that Gentiles as well as Jews could become Christians. The narrative then goes on to describe the founding of a church of both Jews and Gentiles in Antioch. Because of his experience with Gentiles, Paul was eventually called upon to minister to this church. Up to the time of Paul's conversion, the book of Acts concentrates on the preaching of the gospel to the Jews. Following his conversion, the emphasis switches to the Gentiles.

Now Christ must have given Paul his teaching (with its special emphasis on the new relationship between Jew and Gentile) during the period following his conversion, possibly when he was in Arabia. The seventy weeks may therefore have ended some time after Paul's actual conversion. It could be that the exact point of time was marked by Cornelius' conversion. It was specially revealed to Peter at that time that the Gentiles were no longer 'unclean'. They and the Jews were now equal. The book of Acts represents this event as the opening of the door to the Gentiles. It is possible that Paul's basic theology was fully formed by this time (through special revelation); so it could be that he started preaching to the Gentiles at just about the same time as Peter. According to our calculations, the seventy weeks ended in October, 33 A.D. It is very possible that the doors were opened to the Gentiles at just this time.

Merrill C. Tenney deals very well with New Testament chronology in his book *New*

Testament Times, and I recommend it to the reader if he or she wishes to know how the various dates are worked out. In the chronological table at the end of Tenney's book, the following dates are given as the most probable in the light of the evidence we have at present. Opening of Jesus' ministry, 26 A.D. Crucifixion of Jesus, 30 A.D. Death of Stephen; conversion of Paul, 32/33 A.D. These dates agree precisely with the predictions of Daniel 9: 24-27.

To summarize, therefore, I suggest that the end of the seventy weeks was marked by 1) the completion of Christ's seven-year work of 'establishing' the New Covenant, and 2) the 'taking away of the kingdom of God' from the Jewish nation and the opening of the door to the Gentiles.

The Crucifixion

As noted already, we are told that 'for half of [or 'in the middle of'] the week he [the Messiah] shall cause sacrifice and offering to cease'. 'Half' translates the Hebrew word *chatsi*, which does mean exactly a half. In other words, the Messiah will cause the sacrifice and the offering to cease three and a half years after the commencement of His ministry and halfway through the seven-year period during which He 'establishes the covenant'. We are also told, in the preceding verse, that some time after His appearance, the Messiah will be 'cut off' and will 'have nothing'. Christ's death on the cross is foretold here in the most dramatic and amazing way. We are told when He was to die, how He was to die and why He was to die.

Assuming He commenced His ministry in the latter part of the year 26 A.D., we are now told that He was to die three and a half years later in the early part of the year 30 A.D. As already stated, it is very probable that He did die in early 30 A.D., on 7th April. The Jews would have liked their Messiah to conquer all their earthly enemies and rule the world in omnipotent power from Jerusalem. His reign, they hoped and expected, would be both earthly and everlasting. This prophecy predicted not only that He would die, but that His death would be both abrupt and violent. And in His death He would apparently have nothing — certainly not the kingdom they hoped for. Indeed, while He was on the cross, Jesus did have nothing. Even His Father in Heaven 'forsook' Him.

And now, the reason for and the meaning of His death. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews explains (Hebrews 9:1 — 10: 22) that the sacrifices of the Old Covenant were, in themselves, quite ineffective. They were merely pictures or types of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. By His own sacrifice, 'once offered', Christ abolished and brought to an end the whole Old Covenant system of sacrifices and offerings. They had served their purpose as a temporary substitute and preparation for Christ's perfect and all-sufficient sacrifice; but there was now no further need for them, as signified by the curtain or 'veil' of the temple being 'torn in two, from top to bottom' (Matthew 27:51). Christ's atoning work on the cross is absolutely central to the message of the New Covenant — and this, perhaps, is why He arranged for His crucifixion to occur in the exact middle of the period during which He established the New Covenant.

The wording of Daniel 9:24-27 echoes Isaiah 53, suggesting that the suffering Servant of that chapter is indeed the Messiah, the Anointed One:

'He was despised and rejected by men ... he was cut off out of the land of the living ... he makes himself an offering for sin ... by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous.'

The destruction of Jerusalem

*'And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off, and shall have nothing; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war; desolations are decreed. And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week; and for half of the week he shall cause sacrifice and offering to cease; and upon the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.'*¹⁰ (Daniel 9:26, 27)

Although in God's eyes the Old Covenant system of sacrifices came to an end on the day that Christ was crucified, the outward ritual of sacrifice was not finally discontinued until 70 A.D., when the Roman general Titus terminated the Jewish War with the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. It would seem that by this event God was visibly demonstrating the fact that the Old Covenant had come to an end — the Jews were no longer His special, chosen people and the temple at Jerusalem was no longer the special centre of worship:

'... the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father ... the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.' (John 4:21-23)

Christ taught that the Jewish War was a fulfilment of prophecy (particularly Daniel's) and was God's punishment on the Jews for rejecting and murdering their divine Messiah, the Son of God.

'... he sent his son to them ... And they took him ... and killed him ... When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? ... He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and let out the vineyard to other tenants ... The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner ... the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it.' (Matthew 21:37-43)

'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast; but they would not come ... But they made light of it ... The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city ...' (Matthew 22:2-7)

'... you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? ... all this will come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you ... Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate ...' (Matthew 23:31-38)

'And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying, "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another in you; because you did not know the time of your visitation.'" (Luke 19:41-44)

'But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judaea flee to the mountains and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it; for these are days of vengeance, to fulfil all that is written ... For great distress shall be upon the earth and wrath upon this people; they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led captive among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.' (Luke 21:20-24)

‘When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let him that readeth understand), then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains ... for then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be.’ (Matthew 24:15-21, R.V.)

In Daniel 9:26, 27 it is prophesied that following the work of the Messiah, the people of a prince (the Roman soldiers under the command of Titus) will come and destroy the city and temple of Jerusalem. Its end shall come through a war characterized by a flood of blood, slaughter and desolation. The desolating Roman army will come ‘upon the wing of abominations’. Thus up until the final pre-determined conclusion, God will pour out His wrath upon the desolated Jews and Jerusalem.

This is indeed a graphic description of the Jewish War and siege of Jerusalem. In addition to the terrible slaughter and destruction wrought by the Romans, the Jews themselves were slaughtering each other and perpetrating the most appalling abominations within Jerusalem and the temple itself. *And unlike Antiochus, the Romans utterly destroyed both the city and the temple of Jerusalem.*

Warning His disciples of the coming Jewish War and siege of Jerusalem, Jesus said, ‘When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let him that readeth understand)’ and ‘when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand. Then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains’ (Matthew 24:15; Luke 21:20, 21, R.V.). ‘Let him that readeth understand’, probably inserted by the writer of the gospel, suggests that the fulfilment of Daniel’s prophecy was something within the experience and understanding of the early Christians. They escaped the horrors of the siege of Jerusalem, because they fled from Judaea before it took place, finding refuge in Pella, on the edge of the Arabian deserts. This strongly suggests that they took Christ’s words as a warning of this event. The Jewish War was the pouring out of God’s wrath on the Jews for their rejection of Christ; therefore it would have been entirely inappropriate for the Christians to have suffered with them.

It may be objected that the Jewish War does not fall within the seventy weeks. But then Daniel does not specifically say that it does. He says that Christ was crucified after the sixty-ninth week (verse 26a), in the middle of the seventieth week (verse 27a). This event was *followed* by the Jewish War (verses 26b and 27b) and it seems to be implied that the Jewish War was a direct *result* of the crucifixion. The Jewish War was, however, merely the outward and visible evidence of something which had already taken place several years before — the rejection of the Jews as God’s special, chosen people. This final rejection took place at the end of the seventieth week (‘seventy weeks are decreed upon thy people and upon thy holy city’). Christ witnessed to the Jews during His lifetime; but they rejected Him and crucified Him. He continued to witness after His crucifixion and resurrection; but still they rejected Him. As Christ had predicted, their punishment was the loss of their privileged status.

‘Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures: ‘The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes’? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it.”’ (Matthew 21:42, 43)

Christ’s herald, John the Baptist, had also warned the Jews that their punishment and the end of their privileges was near (Luke 3:7-9).

Thus Christ ‘established the covenant’ for seven years (one week). Half-way through this period he was ‘cut off’, causing ‘the sacrifice and the offering to cease’. Throughout this

period the Jews rejected Him as the Messiah and so finally the Jews themselves were rejected from being God's special, chosen people.

The reader has probably noted that this interpretation indicates that verse 27 goes over much the same ground as verse 26. He may question why there should be this repetition. The reason is that verse 26 is a statement about a logical series of historical events. That is, the Messiah will be cut off and this will be followed by the destruction of Jerusalem. In verse 27, however, we are given the *meaning* of these historical events — i.e. the death of the Messiah is an essential part of the establishing of the New Covenant and results in the cessation of the Old Covenant system of sacrifices.

The translation of the second part of the verse has caused a great deal of difficulty and speculation. It indicates fairly clearly that the resulting destruction of Jerusalem is God's punishment (note the words 'decreed end' and read 'desolate' rather than 'desolator', as in R.V. margin); but there is much confusion over the meaning of '*upon the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate*'. The R.S.V. accurately translates *kanaph* as 'wing'. In fact here the word probably means 'summit' or 'climax' but there may be some very good reason for the choice of the particular word *kanaph*, primarily meaning 'wing'. We must ask ourselves what picture it brings to mind. Surely it suggests some great bird of prey coming from afar and swooping down on its victim and tearing it to pieces. This is precisely what the Roman army did — moreover, its emblem was *the eagle!* We shall see that the 'abominations' probably included the standards or ensigns of the Roman armies. The 'one who makes desolate' must again be Titus, 'the prince who is to come'.

A piece of evidence in favour of this interpretation comes from Deuteronomy 28, where God tells the people of Israel, before they even enter the promised land and some 1200 years before Christ, that He will bless them if they keep His commandments, but curse them if they do not keep them. Daniel has already referred to this curse in his prayer (9:11). In anticipation of the fact that they failed to keep His commandments, the curses occupy a good deal more space than the blessings. Verses 49 to 68 are nothing less than a vivid and accurate account of the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. and the subsequent scattering and sufferings of the Jewish people. The prophecy had a partial fulfilment in the first siege and exile in the time of Nebuchadnezzar. But this fulfilment was only partial. It was a warning which was disregarded; so God had no alternative but to inflict His punishment to the full.

'The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you do not understand, a nation of stern countenance, who shall not regard the person of the old or show favour to the young ... They shall besiege you in all your towns, until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout all your land ... and you shall eat the offspring of your own body, the flesh of your sons and daughters, whom the Lord your God has given you, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemies shall distress you ... and you shall be plucked off the land which you are entering to take possession of it. And the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other ... And among these nations you shall find no ease, and there shall be no rest for the sole of your foot; but the Lord will give you there a trembling heart, and failing eyes, and a languishing soul; your life shall hang in doubt before you; night and day you shall be in dread, and have no assurance, of your life.'
(Deuteronomy 28:49-66)

Here again we have the picture of a great bird of prey¹¹ coming from afar and tearing its victim to pieces. No wonder Christ wept over Jerusalem and told its people to weep for themselves rather than for Him!

Speaking of judgment and destruction falling upon ungodly people, Jesus said, 'Where the

body is, there the eagles will be gathered together' (Luke 17:37). In Matthew's gospel (24:28) these words are inserted at the end of a passage predicting the Jewish War of 70 A.D. (cf. Luke 21:20-24).

It seems clear, therefore, that the 'wing of abominations' has something to do with the Roman armies. However, this is probably not the full explanation, because 'wing' is in the singular — not the plural. *Kanaph* is elsewhere translated as 'uttermost part', 'end', or 'corner' (of the earth) — also 'skirt' and 'border'. It gives the idea of some sort of *extremity*. This would give the phrase the meaning of 'climax, summit or pinnacle of abominations' — it suggests the absolute last word in abominations. This is exactly what the Jews and their religion represented after their rejection of Christ. On top of all the abominations they had committed in the past (stoning the prophets, etc.) they killed the Son of God. The religion they then continued to practise became nothing less than a mockery and an abomination to God. Further, Josephus tells us that during the Jewish War and siege of Jerusalem, the most appalling acts of horror and sacrilege were committed by the Jews within the temple itself. The Roman armies descended upon this pinnacle of abominations and punished it. It has also been suggested that the phrase refers to the pinnacle of the temple in which the Jews were practising their abominations and which the Romans destroyed.

The abomination of desolation

At this point let us see if we can identify 'the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet' referred to by Jesus (Matthew 24:15, R.V.). The term 'abomination of desolation' is strongly reminiscent of Daniel 9:26, 27, but actually it comes from 11:31 and 12:11, where the primary reference is to Antiochus' desecration of the temple in 167 B.C. (cf. I Maccabees 1:54). Jesus was indicating that there would be a *repetition* of this desecration; but He must surely have been thinking of Daniel 9:26, 27 also. The same word *shamem* is used in all four verses, and 9:26, 27 accurately describe the Jewish War. (Note that 9:24-27 was *not* fulfilled in the time of Antiochus.)

There can be little doubt that Jesus was thinking primarily of the Jewish War which culminated in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. — as predicted in Daniel 9:26, 27. He warns those of His disciples who are in Judaea to flee to the mountains when they see the abomination 'standing in the holy place'. In Mark 13:14, R.V., He says, 'standing where he ought not'. In Luke 21:20, 21 He says, 'when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judaea flee to the mountains ... for these are days of vengeance, to fulfil all that is written'.

It seems that when Jesus spoke of the 'abomination of desolation', He was referring either to the desecration of the temple by the Jews, or to the presence on holy soil of the Roman armies — or possibly to both. The desecration of the temple by the Zealots in the winter of 67/68 A.D. was reminiscent of Antiochus Epiphanes' desecration of the temple in 167 B.C., and also it gave the Christians early warning of the coming catastrophe. On the other hand, the alien Romans were reminiscent of the alien Greeks, and the Christians could have guessed that they would desecrate the temple when they saw them approaching the city. Also, Luke 21:20, 21 seems to associate the abomination with Jerusalem being 'surrounded by armies'. 'Standing in the holy place' need not necessarily imply the temple. The R.V. marginal rendering is 'a holy place'. The words could apply generally to the holy city of Jerusalem and its environs. It is quite possible, therefore, that 'the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place' refers to the Roman armies encircling Jerusalem.

The Hebrew *shiqquts*, translated 'abomination', refers in the Old Testament to idols or to customs derived from idolatry. Regarding this it has often been noted that the Roman soldiers

carried standards or ensigns consisting of images of the emperor, eagles and various symbols drawn from paganism. These objects received special reverence from the army and were an 'abomination' to the Jews. Their objection to them was so strong that regiments stationed in Jerusalem normally left them behind at Caesarea. However, they were of course carried by the armies that laid siege to Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Moreover, Josephus records that when the city fell, the Romans 'brought their ensigns to the temple, and set them over against its eastern gate; and there did they offer sacrifices to them'.

Now I mentioned in the introductory chapter that there are superficial similarities between the events of Antiochus' reign and the events described in 9:26, 27. I suggested that part of the explanation is that although these verses refer primarily to the events of 70 A.D., there is some sort of secondary reference to the 'tribulations' which precede the first and second comings of Christ. The reason for my suggestion is this. When Jesus spoke about Daniel's prophecy and the events of 70 A.D., He used a term, 'the abomination of desolation', which is closely connected with Antiochus Epiphanes; and at the same time he seemed to be looking forward to the time of His second advent. Thus Antiochus' persecution, the Jewish War of 67-70 A.D. and the tribulation preceding the second advent seem to be connected with each other in some way — and I suggest the following link-up.

Antiochus desecrated the temple in 167 B.C., and this desecration was repeated in 67-70 A.D. The persecution and blasphemy which preceded the first advent typifies that which will precede the second advent. Antiochus' persecution and the Jewish War of 67-70 A.D. both lasted about three and a half years, and both typify (in the book of Revelation) the suffering of God's people during the present age, particularly during the period preceding the second event. In Daniel 9:26b, 27b (together with 12:7) these different events seem to be superimposed on each other, or telescoped together, in a way that is typical of Biblical prophecy — as explained in the introduction. This will become clearer as we proceed, especially when we come to consider the book of Revelation in the final chapter.

The critical view

Now the critics, of course, believe that Daniel 9:24-27 refers to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. And as we have said, the events described do resemble certain events in the reign of Antiochus. But it is only a superficial resemblance — there are important discrepancies. The critics put these down to ignorance or over-optimism on the part of the author, and they refuse to notice that they (the discrepancies) disappear when the prophecy is applied to the time of Christ. These 'errors' are not errors at all. The prophecy appears to be erroneous *only when applied to the time of Antiochus*. When it is applied to the time of Christ, it fits perfectly.

In what ways, therefore, did the events of Antiochus' reign appear to fulfil the predictions? The 'anointed one' who was 'cut off', it is said, was the murdered high priest, Onias III. The 'prince who is to come' was Antiochus Epiphanes, whose armies partially destroyed Jerusalem and massacred many of its inhabitants. He made a 'covenant' with the Hellenizing Jews and for 'half a week' (three and a half years) he abolished the 'sacrifice and offering'. His crowning 'abomination' was the erection of a heathen altar on the great altar of burnt sacrifice.

And what are the discrepancies? First, there is no way in which seventy weeks of years can be squeezed into the period of time between the rebuilding of Jerusalem and Antiochus Epiphanes. The events of 170-164 B.C. occurred far too early. Second, most of the predictions of verse 24 were not fulfilled around the time of Antiochus. By no stretch of the imagination can it be said that the Maccabees brought in everlasting righteousness or sealed up both vision

and prophet. Nor can it be said (in any adequate sense) that they put an end to sins and atoned for iniquity. Third, verse 26 indicates that the city and temple of Jerusalem were to be destroyed, whereas Antiochus destroyed only part of the city and he did not destroy the temple at all. Fourth, in verse 27 a distinction seems to be made between the one who ‘makes a strong covenant’ and the one who ‘makes desolate’.

The critics deal with the first of these discrepancies by dismissing the seventy weeks as ‘an error of calculation’. As for the unfulfilled predictions in verse 24, these are merely aspects of a noble, but rather over-optimistic, hope. The prediction that the temple would be destroyed is more difficult to explain away, however, and is therefore quietly ignored! (A second century author would have seen with his own eyes that Antiochus did not destroy the temple.)

Of course, if we believe the prophecies were faked and are full of errors, a few discrepancies here and there do not worry us. But if, in the process, we shut our eyes to a perfectly good fulfilment which has no discrepancies, are we not being rather unwise? Especially when Jesus Christ repeatedly endorsed the reliability of the Scriptures, and repeatedly emphasized that they had prophesied all about Him.

I stated in the introductory chapter that there are certain predictions about Christ which appear to refer also to the time of Antiochus — and this is one of them. I emphasized however, that Antiochus fulfilled these predictions *imperfectly*, whereas Christ fulfilled them *perfectly*. I said that a possible (but highly unlikely) explanation is that a second century author *thought* he was writing about his own time only, but guided by the Holy Spirit, he was actually pointing to Christ.

If the book is a work of the sixth century, on the other hand, it may be that God introduced these ambiguities deliberately — partly to allow for a secondary fulfilment (as explained in the preceding section), and partly for much the same reason that Christ taught in parables. This amazing prediction of the date of Christ’s coming has, in a sense, been disguised. But it is there for those who are willing to believe what the New Testament plainly teaches — namely, that His coming was foretold in great detail in the Old Testament.

Summary

To summarize, there can be no doubt, in my mind, that Daniel 9:24-27 looks forward to the time of Christ and that it is one of the most remarkable pieces of predictive prophecy in the Old Testament.

Daniel 9:24-27 was *perfectly fulfilled in every detail* by the coming of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The time of Antiochus, on the other hand, indisputably *failed to provide accurate and complete fulfilment*. Furthermore, Christ Himself indicated very clearly that verses 26 and 27 refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (even though the term ‘abomination of desolation’ was taken from Daniel 11:31 and 12:11). Less specifically, but equally clearly, the New Testament indicates that verse 24 was fully fulfilled by Christ, and Christ alone.

Note that when Christ gave His discourse on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24), He referred to Daniel’s ‘abomination of desolation’ *and* to his vision of the ‘one like a son of man’. Also, when He referred to the ‘stone’ which broke the image, He was clearly thinking of God’s judgment which was soon to fall upon the Jews (Luke 20:9-18). Thus there is a close connection between the visions of chapters 2 and 7 and the prediction of chapter 9 — with regard to Christ’s work of salvation *and* His work of judgment. ‘The coming of the Son of man’ spells salvation to those who receive Him, but judgment to those who reject Him. The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. was an early manifestation of ‘the coming of the Son of

man' in judgment. It was a clear and unmistakable warning that God *will* punish those who reject His Son.

Daniel prayed, '... cause thy face to shine upon thy *sanctuary*, which is desolate ... behold our desolations, and the *city* which is called by thy name' (9:17, 18). God's answer was that Jerusalem would indeed be rebuilt — and that the Messiah would accomplish His work of salvation — but that '*the city and the sanctuary*' (v. 26) would be destroyed yet again.

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1. Various punctuation arrangements are possible in 9:25. We have followed that of A.V., R.V. margin and N.I.V., as this seems to fit the historical facts best.
 2. It should be noted that chronologically verses 7-23 do not belong to the fourth chapter of Ezra. They should come later in the book, but are included in this chapter as an example of opposition to the Jews from neighbouring enemies. They are in Aramaic from verse 8, and are regarded as particularly reliable by critical scholars.
 3. John Bright, *A History of Israel*, (S.C.M. Press, 1960), p. 374.
 4. Zechariah 2:1-5 is even less specific than 1:16. It should be mentioned that some critical scholars believe that passages in Isaiah which refer to the rebuilding of Jerusalem were written as late as about 520 B.C. Likewise, passages involving Cyrus are thought by many to have been written around 545 B.C. The Biblical view (as in John 12:38) seems to be that the whole book was written by Isaiah — who lived long before the time of Daniel.
 5. The other date is 3rd April, 33 A.D. Tenney is one of those who favour the 30 A.D. date. See Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Times* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1965), chapter 7.
 6. See *The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* (1944), p.128.
 7. Or 'in the middle of the week', as in R.V. margin.
 8. Matthew 21:42, 43; Acts 13:44--48; 22:21; 26:17; 28:23-28; Romans 11:7-15; Galatians 1:16; 2:8; Ephesians 3:8; 1 Timothy 2:7; II Timothy 4:17.
 9. Acts 9:1-30; 22:3-21; 26:2-23; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:3-10; Galatians 1:11-2:9.
 10. Or 'the desolate', as in R.V. margin.
 11. The Biblical 'eagle' is sometimes clearly the vulture.

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