Daniel's Seventy Weeks

God's Prophetic Timeline from Captivity to the Coming of Messiah

Primary Scripture: **Daniel 9:1–27** (NKJV)

Imagine an elderly prophet named Daniel sitting in a foreign land, far away from the Jerusalem he had known as a young man. Many years had passed since the Babylonians carried him into captivity. Kingdoms had risen and fallen, kings had come and gone, and Daniel had remained faithful to the God of Israel. Now, in the first year of Darius, Daniel was studying the writings of Jeremiah. As he read, something captured his attention. Jeremiah had prophesied that Jerusalem's desolations would last seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11–12; 29:10). Daniel began to understand that the appointed period of captivity was nearing its completion. But rather than celebrating and putting his Bible away, Daniel turned his face toward God in prayer.

Daniel did not approach God with arrogance or demand that the promises be fulfilled on his schedule. He humbled himself with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. He confessed the sins of his people and acknowledged the righteousness of God. Daniel understood something that every generation of believers needs to learn; knowing God's promises should move us toward prayer, not away from it. He was not simply interested in knowing when Israel would return home. He was concerned about God's covenant, His people, His sanctuary, and His holy city. While Daniel was still praying, Gabriel came to him with understanding. Daniel had been studying seventy years of captivity, but Gabriel was about to reveal a prophetic period of seventy weeks.

In Daniel 9:24, Gabriel announced that seventy weeks were determined for Daniel's people and his holy city. The Hebrew expression translated "seventy weeks" literally describes "seventy sevens." In this prophetic interpretation, these are understood as seventy periods of seven years, giving us a total of 490 years. But before Gabriel explained the timeline, he revealed six purposes God intended to accomplish:

- To finish transgression
- Make an end of sins
- Make reconciliation for iniquity
- Bring in everlasting righteousness
- Seal up vision and prophecy
- Anoint the Most Holy

Notice that God's purpose was much greater than restoring the physical city of Jerusalem. The prophecy concerned sin, atonement, righteousness, and the fulfillment of His redemptive plan. For Christians, the coming and sacrifice of Jesus Christ stand at the center of these promises.

Gabriel then began explaining how the seventy weeks would unfold. In Daniel 9:25, he spoke of a command to restore and build Jerusalem, followed by seven weeks and sixty-two weeks until Messiah the Prince. The first seven weeks represent 49 years, and the following sixty-two weeks

represent 434 years. Together, they total sixty-nine weeks, or 483 years. That leaves one final week of seven years. This is where the mathematics becomes important, but I want you to remember that the numbers serve the message. Gabriel was not merely giving Daniel an interesting calculation. He was revealing that God had appointed a time in His purposes for the coming of Messiah.

Now we must return to the history of Israel. After Babylon fell to Persia, Cyrus authorized the Jewish exiles to return and rebuild the Temple, as recorded in Ezra 1. Later, Artaxerxes issued a decree recorded in Ezra 7, traditionally dated to 457 BC, authorizing Ezra's return and the restoration of religious and judicial order. Still later, in Nehemiah 2, around 445/444 BC, Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah permission to return and rebuild Jerusalem's walls. These events are important because Daniel 9:25 identifies the command to restore and build Jerusalem as the beginning of the prophetic period. Some interpreters begin with Ezra's decree, while others begin with Nehemiah's authorization. We must examine both carefully, because choosing the starting point affects the calculation of the sixty-nine weeks.

Imagine Nehemiah standing before the ruins of Jerusalem. The walls were broken, the gates had been burned, and the people were living under reproach. Yet God had not forgotten His promises. Nehemiah gathered the people, and they began rebuilding despite opposition. Scripture tells us that the wall itself was completed in fifty-two days (Nehemiah 6:15), although the broader restoration of Jerusalem continued beyond that achievement. Daniel had spoken of Jerusalem being rebuilt in troublesome times, and the historical accounts of Ezra and Nehemiah reveal just how difficult that restoration was. What appeared to be a ruined city was becoming the setting for the fulfillment of God's greater promises.

Now the prophecy moves toward its central figure: Messiah the Prince. Daniel 9:25 tells us that the sixty-nine weeks lead toward Messiah. Depending on the starting decree and the method of calculation, interpreters have associated the conclusion of this period with the beginning of Jesus' public ministry or His presentation as King near the end of His earthly ministry. Chuck Missler, following a chronological approach associated with Sir Robert Anderson, emphasizes 173,880 days and connects the endpoint with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. That is a fascinating interpretation, but the exact calculation depends upon historical dates and calendar assumptions that Scripture does not explicitly settle. The central Christian conviction remains that Jesus is the promised Messiah toward whom the prophecy points.

Then Gabriel says something that should cause every student of Scripture to pay attention. Daniel 9:26 declares that after the sixty-two weeks, Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself. The first seven weeks and the following sixty-two weeks have already been described, so the statement places Messiah's being cut off after those sixty-nine weeks. Christians recognize the suffering and death of Jesus Christ in this language. Isaiah 53 describes the suffering Servant bearing the iniquity of others, and the New Testament reveals the saving significance of Christ's sacrifice. Jesus did not die because God's plan had failed. His death was central to God's redemptive purpose.

But Gabriel's prophecy did not end with the death of Messiah. Daniel 9:26 also spoke of the destruction of the city and the sanctuary by the people of a coming prince. In AD 70, Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem and the Second Temple. The prophecy therefore brings together the coming of Messiah, His being cut off, and the destruction of Jerusalem. Notice that Gabriel places these events in verse 26 before describing the final week in verse 27. Futurist interpreters see this as important evidence for an interval between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks. However, the passage does not explicitly state how long such an interval would last, and other Christian interpreters understand the seventieth week as fulfilled in connection with Christ's first coming. This is a point where we must distinguish what the Scripture directly says from how different interpreters connect its events.

Now we arrive at Daniel 9:27, where Gabriel speaks of someone confirming a covenant with many for one week. In the middle of that week, sacrifice and offering are brought to an end, and the passage describes abomination and desolation. In the futurist interpretation, this final week represents a future seven-year period associated with a coming ruler, commonly identified with the Antichrist. The midpoint divides the seven years into two periods of three and a half years. Daniel 7 and 12, Matthew 24, and Revelation 11–13 contain additional prophetic passages that futurist teachers connect with these events. Revelation speaks of forty-two months and 1,260 days, periods corresponding to three and a half years when reckoned by thirty-day months. These connections are important, but we must remember that identifying all these periods as parts of Daniel's future seventieth week is an interpretive conclusion reached by comparing passages.

Other Christian interpreters understand the covenant in Daniel 9:27 as connected with Jesus Christ and His redemptive work. They point to His ministry, His sacrifice, and the fulfillment of the old sacrificial system through His death. Futurist interpreters, however, argue that the covenant-maker is the coming prince associated with the destruction described in verse 26, and that the desolation language points beyond the first century. These differences cannot be settled simply by appealing to a respected teacher. We must examine the grammatical and historical setting, and related Scriptures. The purpose of our study is not to pretend that every question is easy, but to teach students how to investigate the Word faithfully.

And now, as we bring this lesson toward its conclusion, I want you to imagine Daniel once again. He began by reading Jeremiah and seeking understanding concerning seventy years of captivity. God answered him with a prophecy reaching toward Messiah and the fulfillment of His purposes for Israel and Jerusalem. Daniel did not live to see the earthly ministry of Jesus, the crucifixion, or the destruction of the Second Temple. Yet he was given a revelation that generations of believers would continue studying. The same God who spoke through Jeremiah, answered Daniel, and fulfilled His promises concerning the coming of Christ remains faithful today.

The great lesson of Daniel's seventy weeks is not merely that God knows the future. It is that history is not beyond His authority, His promises are not forgotten, and His redemptive purposes are centered in Jesus Christ. We should study prophecy with reverence, careful attention, and humility. We should never be afraid to examine our interpretations, because the truth of Scripture does not depend upon our ability to defend a particular chart. The Word of God

deserves our most careful study, and the people we teach deserve to know the difference between what God has spoken and what we believe His words mean.

> *"We are not studying prophecy merely to discover what happens next. We are studying prophecy to understand what God has spoken."*