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THE PROPHECIES OF DANIEL

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IV. The Seventy Weeks—Chapter 9

Three ninth chapters of Captivity Histories in our Bible record the earnest prayers of God's devoted servants for His people's blessing, mingled with deep gratitude and praise for past mercies and confession of moral and spiritual failure. These are Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9 and Daniel 9. There is no doubt that Daniel's diligent study of the Scriptures, and particularly of Jeremiah's prophecies in Jer. 25:12 and 29:10-14, and his prayer and confession of failure as he acknowledged his people's sins as his own, were a necessary prelude to the important Divine revelation at the end of the chapter. Toward the conclusion of his prayer the seer forged an important link between his confession and what was communicated to him through the angel Gabriel. In his petition Daniel used the terms—"Thy city Jerusalem", "Thy holy mountain" and "Thy people" called by "Thy name" (verses 16, 18); and Gabriel begins by emphasizing that the predictions he was sent to communicate to the "man greatly beloved" had to do with Daniel's holy city and Daniel's people (v. 24).

As the seventy years of captivity predicted by Jeremiah drew to a close, and the remnant of the Jewish exiles were even then preparing to return to Jerusalem to commence the work described in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, Jehovah sends one of His angels to tell of another period in Israel's history about to commence, a period of 'seventy weeks' which, instead of being a fifty-second part of seventy years, as might appear at first sight, was to be seven times as long, namely 490 years. The time of this special prophetic revelation is particularly noted: it was at the hour of the evening oblation, when the evening sacrifice would have been offered in the temple that Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed in a vast conflagration, the temple of Jehovah in His holy city Jerusalem. Though he had been many years in Babylon, Daniel still remembered the prescribed sacrifices and ordinances, and his thoughts turned again to 'the house of the Lord'. The seventy weeks, it is generally agreed, are weeks of years or heptades,

and make a total of 490 years. That fixed and limited period of definite duration was 'determined', or, as the Hebrew implies, decreed or portioned off, from the period covered by the 'times of the Gentiles' with whom it has nothing whatever to do. Neither is it applicable to the Church which our Lord called His own and said He was going to build (Matt. 16:18), and against which all the powers of hell cannot prevail. The whole atmosphere is Jewish, and the prophecy has therefore to do entirely with Israel—called by Gabriel in his address to Daniel 'thy people'—and is centred, not in Babylon, Shushan, Greece or Rome, but in Daniel's holy city, Jerusalem (v. 24). Since the Jewish people and their capital, Jerusalem, are so closely connected at the beginning of the prophecy, we infer that during the whole period of the seventy weeks Israel must be dwelling in their own land. This would rule out that epoch in the world's history when, in the prophetic words of our Lord, 'Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles' (Luke 21:24). The predictions, communicated while the Jews were still in the lands of captivity, envisage the return of the Jews to Jerusalem, the issue of an edict to rebuild their capital city; the coming and cutting off of the expected Messiah, and subsequent desolations reaching right on to the time of the end.

In verses 24 to 27 there are three things clearly outlined with reference to the period apportioned off for Daniel's people and the city of Jerusalem.

(1) The first of these is *The object of the period decreed*. In declaring His sixfold purpose during the time covered by the prophecy, Jehovah takes up the very terms used by Daniel in his confessional prayer,—transgression (v. 11), sins (vs. 5, 15), iniquity (v. 5), righteousness (v. 7), prophet (v. 6) and sanctuary (v. 17). The object of the fixed period was—

(i) *To finish or restrain the transgression of God's earthly people*. Israel's history had been replete with transgressions of the holy law they had received and promised to obey at Sinai:—transgressions in the wilderness recounted in the book of Numbers, in Canaan in the days of the Judges, in the lifetime of Samuel and the Kings, and in the lands of captivity. At the present time,

that transgression continues during their dispersion among the Gentile nations, but will end when the 'King of kings' returns, and 'they shall look on Him Whom they pierced and mourn for Him' (Zech. 12:10).

(ii) *To make an end of sins.* Transgressions are faults of commission, doing what one is commanded not to do; sins are faults of omission, shortcomings, failing to do what one is commanded to do. Both imply the breach of God's holy commandments, whether they have been communicated in the form 'thou shalt not' or 'thou shalt'. Thus there is a time appointed when Israel's rebellious attitude to God will terminate.

(iii) *To make expiation for iniquity.* The Gospel declares that atonement has already been made and that 'Jesus Christ the righteous' is Himself the propitiation for the whole world (1 John 2:2). That is gloriously true, but only the believer has appropriated the blessings of forgiveness, reconciliation and redemption that emanate from the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on the cross. The day is coming when, in fulfilment of this prophecy, the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice on the cross will be applied to the Jewish nation. 'In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness' (Zech. 13:1).

(iv) *To bring in everlasting righteousness* in fulfilment of God's new covenant with Israel in Jer. 31:33-40. Then 'a king shall reign in righteousness and princes shall rule in judgment' (Is. 32:1). What a glorious prospect this is for Daniel's people and Daniel's city!

(v) *To seal up the vision and prophecy* (or prophets—marginal reading). Then 'prophecies shall cease'. There will be no more need for them or for visions, for all will find their fulfilment in the advent of Him Who is Prophet, Priest and King.

(vi) *To anoint the Holy of holies.* The reference here is probably to the inner sanctuary of Ezekiel's temple, the centre of worship during Messiah's Millennial reign. The object of the period decreed is, in short, to bring man's day of sin and transgression to an end and inaugurate the day of Christ and His reign of righteousness.

(2) The second subject for consideration is *The order of the period decreed*. Already we have noted that the 'sevens' are not weeks of days but periods of seven years. Seven was a familiar number with the nation of Israel. Their sabbath was on the seventh day of the week: the sabbath of the land came each seventh year: and in the fiftieth year, after seven sevens of years, came a time of great felicity, for it was Jubilee year. It is not surprising, therefore, that in this prediction God's prophetic programme is mapped out in periods of seven years, since it is concerned with the nation of Israel. The full time, 490 years, is subdivided into three unequal periods (verses 25-26).

The first was to be of seven weeks', or 49 years', duration. Its commencement and character are given in detail, but nothing is said about its close except that it will be followed by a period of 'threescore and two weeks', or 434 years.

Bible students hold divided opinions as to the time indicated by 'the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem'. Some consider it refers to the decree of Cyrus proclaiming liberty to all willing, captive Jews to return to Jerusalem to build the temple (Ezra 1:1-4). Others see a clear reference to the permission accorded by King Artaxerxes to his cupbearer, Nehemiah, to go and build the city of Jerusalem in B.C. 445 (Neh. 2:1-8). While there are scholarly arguments for both dates, the work specified in Dan. 9:25 is clearly the building of the city of Jerusalem, its street and wall: and this definitely connects it with the commission entrusted to Nehemiah. The date is given as B.C. 445 in the first month of the Jewish year called Nisan or Abib. In his book, 'Daniel in the critics' den', Sir Robert Anderson works out the first two specified periods of 69 weeks from 445 B.C. till the date of our Lord's public entry into Jerusalem as 'Messiah the prince'. He writes:

'The edict for the rebuilding of Jerusalem is to be assigned to the 1st Nisan, B.C. 445. From that epoch 'unto Messiah the Prince', was to be sixty-nine sevens of prophetic years. (The prophetic year has 360 days). But 483 years of 360 days contain 173,880 days; and 173,880 days computed from the 1st day of Nisan in the 20th year of Artaxerxes ended on the 10th day of

Nisan in the 18th year of Tiberias Caesar—the day when, in fulfilment of this, and of Zechariah's prophecy, our Lord made His first and only public entry into Jerusalem'.

While it is admittedly extremely difficult to make mathematical calculations of the centuries before Christ or even, because of subsequent changes in our Calendar, to determine exactly when B.C. merged into A.D., Sir Robert Anderson's calculations are worthy of consideration. At any rate, the commencement of the period seems to synchronise with Nehemiah's expedition to rebuild Jerusalem and reconstruct its walls rather than with the earlier edict to rebuild the temple.

The character of those first seven sevens, or 49 years, is also plainly outlined. The times were to be troublous; and even a cursory reading of the book of Nehemiah reveals that the work was accomplished under very great difficulties because of the violent opposition of enemies and the carnal behaviour of many of the Jews. It is significant that forty-nine years from 445 B.C. points to the year 397 or 396 B.C., the time when God was sending out His last messages to His people Israel, speaking through Malachi, the last prophet before He sent His Son (Heb. 1:1).

Nothing is recorded of the commencement or character of the second period of 62 heptades: but its close is marked by three special events—Messiah's appearing as the Prince, Messiah's cutting off, and the destruction of the city and temple. So the first sixty-nine 'weeks'—493 years—terminate in the appearing of Messiah, the Anointed One. This is the equivalent of 'Christ' in Greek. The events mentioned are:

(i) 'Messiah the Prince', fulfilled in His regal entry into His capital, as prophesied by Zechariah (Ch. 9:9) and described in Matt. 21:5.

(ii) After that Messiah is cut off, 'having nothing'. This was fulfilled in Christ's crucifixion when the 'king of the Jews' died, wearing a crown of thorns, and without an earthly kingdom.

(iii) Then followed in 70 A.D. the destruction of the city of Jerusalem by the people of the 'prince that shall come', the Romans, under the Emperor Titus. Note that the prince that was to come at the time of the end is not the one to whom Gabriel

refers as destroyer of Jerusalem, but his people. Therefore the 'prince that shall come' must be a Gentile and a Roman, and can be identified with the little horn of Dan. 7:8, 24, 25, the first beast of Rev. 13, and the eighth head of Rev. 17:11.

Thus the prophecy till the end of the 69th week of years has had its fulfilment. The last seven years are yet to come. Why is there a break in the course of the period decreed? Why does the third section of seven years not follow in unbroken sequence? The reason is that, because of the rejection of their Messiah, the Jews were scattered and Daniel's holy city came under the power of the Gentiles or, as our Lord predicted, was 'trodden down by the Gentiles'. As the Apostle Paul stated so clearly in Rom. 11:25, 'blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in'. During the present period God is calling His people out from among the Jews and Gentiles and forming them into a new Body, the Church, and, until the Church age ends, the last week of the seventy will not commence. The restoration of Israel to the land and of the land and the whole city of Jerusalem to Israel will mark the commencement of the last heptad. This is still future though, we believe, very imminent.

(3) *The outcome of the period decreed* is the final subject to be considered in the Seventy Weeks' prophecy. This is contained in the second half of verse 26 and in verse 27 of Dan. 9. The recurrence of the expression 'the end', and the phrase, 'even until the consummation', in this short passage makes it certain that its reference is to the last days and that it deals with prophecy still unfulfilled. The last seven years is to be divided into two equal periods of $3\frac{1}{2}$ years each, as indicated by the phrase, 'in the midst of the week': and this is the length of time indicated by 'time, times and half a time' (Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 12:14), by the 42 months in Rev. 11:2; 13:5, and by the 1260 days in Rev. 11:3; 12:6. The second half of the last week of seven years is the 'great tribulation' period, the 'time of Jacob's trouble' (Jer. 30:7). The outcome of this entire period of 490 years will therefore be three and a half years of great tribulation for Israel and Jerusalem, leading up to the consummation which is also determined in the counsels of Heaven, and terminated by the return of

the Lord Jesus Christ as King of kings, with His saints, for the salvation of His own people—the Jewish nation—that rejected Him when He came as their Messiah. Five events are connected with this final half-week of the prophecy, namely:

(a) *A Commonwealth of Israel established with its centre in Jerusalem.* This must take shape beforehand in preparation for the transactions that are to follow in the tribulation period. Already a State of 'Israel' exists and each year thousands of Jews from many lands return to Palestine. After the Jewish service which we attended in the synagogue in Cochin recently, the members of the Jewish community there informed us that, owing to depletion of their numbers, their other synagogue in Cochin had been closed, and that their community in that city had been reduced from several thousands to a few hundred Jews who all expected soon to be taken by plane, without any cost to themselves, to the land of Israel.

(b) *A Covenant confirmed* between the majority of Israel's leaders and the Roman prince of that day who is identical with the little horn of Dan. 7. The period covered by the covenant will be the whole seven years. The prophecy in Dan. 9 presents the political aspect of that covenant: its moral implicates are revealed in Is. 28:14-18, where it is called a treaty 'with death and with hell'. The covenant will be disannulled by the direct judgement of God and not by the acts of man.

(c) *A Command to worship the Beast* issued with the threat of terrible penalties for those who refuse. The Antichrist or 'man of sin', the second beast of Rev. 13, will set up an image of the great superman, the first beast,—who is the prince that shall come—in the temple, to be worshipped. This return to idolatry by the nation of Israel is described in Dan. 9:27 as 'the overspreading of abominations' and by our Lord in Matt. 24:15 as 'the abomination of desolations'. The R.V. renders this passage—'and upon the wing of abominations shall come one that maketh desolate'. This desolator will come upon Israel with cruel oppressions because of the nation's return to idolatry. He is clearly one of the oppressors of the Jews at the time of the end

yet distinct from 'the prince that shall come', and is probably identical with 'the king of fierce countenance'—the king of the North—of Dan. 8:23.

(d) The Roman prince, having confirmed the covenant with Israel for 'a week' at the commencement of the seven years, will withdraw his protection after three and a half years, interfere with the Jewish religious rites and compel them to worship his image set up in their temple by the 'man of sin' (Rev. 13:15-16).

Thus *a Cessation of Jewish rites and sacrifices will be enforced*, for 'he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease'. The 'desolate' upon whom wrath is to be poured out is Daniel's people Israel and his city Jerusalem, which are, as we have already noted, the chief concerns of this prophecy. The period of this desolation is limited to $3\frac{1}{2}$ years. Then will come

(e) *The Consummation for Israel and for Israel's oppressors*. The return of the Lord Jesus in power and glory will bring relief and salvation to Daniel's people (Zech. 12:9-10; 14:1-5) and destruction to the enemies of the Lord's Anointed and of His people (Rev. 19:11-21).

(To be continued)

THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

E. G. ASHBY, M.A., B.D.

3. Reformation (chs. 7-12)

Introduction. In the work of God it is not sufficient to make human efforts at reformation and re-organisation, however diligent. There must be a place for the Word of God, and in fact this is normally the primary cause in any move towards reformation, as was the case in the reign of Josiah, and in the great Reformation of the 16th century in Europe. In such cases reformation has some solid basis, being grounded on the promises and purposes of God. But the Word of God is a two-edged sword, and not infrequently first wounds those who seek to wield it. It is equally true that 'by the Law is the knowledge of sin', as that the 'statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart'—hence the mingled joy and sorrow on this occasion.