

The Seventy Weeks Prophecy

Daniel 9:24-25: *“Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.*

Seventy Weeks: In the language of Jewish prophecy, the weeks refer not to weeks of days but of years, which is to say, four hundred and ninety years, each day being accounted a year (see Leviticus 25:8: *“And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years”*).

Genesis 29:27: *“Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years.”* Jacob had wanted to marry Rachel, but Laban, the father, had switched Leah for Rachel. Jacob discovers the fraud. He could have walked away during the wedding week, which would have scandalized Leah. Instead, Jacob agrees to fulfill the week, or to follow through with the marriage to Leah, and Laban, in turn, promises that if Jacob provides him another seven years of service, Jacob can marry Rachel also. Bigamy is contrary to the law of God, and the bigamy here is the result of Laban’s manipulation and the social pressure upon Jacob to fulfill his wedding week with Leah notwithstanding his love for another woman. Thus, the bigamy here is a compounded sin: the sins of fraud and manipulation have compounded to become the sin of bigamy. And yet, God is able to work through man’s sin in a way as to fulfill His greater purpose, namely, the marriage of Jacob and Rachel. As the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, Rachel is the mother of God’s chosen people, which is the line that leads eventually to Jesus Christ. The sins of fraud and manipulation are referenced in “weeks,” in this case, the

fulfillment of the wedding week with Leah. The triumph of grace is referenced in “years,” in this case, the seven years of added service to Laban which leads to Jacob’s marriage to Rachel.

Therefore, the “weeks as years” references going forward indicate that God’s sovereignty will triumph in due time over the evil machinations of the present time. The immanence of sin now (sin measured in “weeks,” a relatively small period) is countered, and in time defeated, by the transcendence of grace (God’s plan measured in “weeks as years,” a greater, but also definable, period). The idea of “weeks as years” suggests the interplay of chronological time as we know it with God’s sovereign eternity, which when inserted into our chronological time turns time upon its head like the upturning of the moneychanger’s table. Without God, the chronological beat of time is an inexorable step by step movement from sin to the grave. With God interceding for us in our time, the chronological beat of time is caught up into God’s grace. It is no longer a steady metronome beat to the grave. From our limited perspective, this new time is “weeks as years.”

Numbers 14:34: *“After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.”* Because of their disbelief that God would protect them, the Israelites sent spies into Canaan to get the lay of the land. God visits their disbelief by stating that they shall suffer one year in the desert for every day they had had spies in Canaan.

The interplay of days for years suggests how God balances justice with mercy. There is a just punishment in wandering the desert for forty years for forty days of disbelief. And yet, it is a determined period. Though the generation that committed the infraction will not live to enter the Promised Land, there is hope, for their children and children’s children will survive after the imposed sentence. When interpreted in the context of Genesis 29:27, we see then that God’s sovereign eternity, which inserted into our chronological time to upend time as we know it, is guided always by God’s perfect justice and mercy. “Weeks as Years” may be unsettling from our vantage point, if only because it is a different manner of counting years and as such suggests a

radical break from the metronome beat to the grave, but we can have hope in the course of the prophetic upturning of chronological time that God's perfect justice and mercy is in effect here.

To Finish the Transgression: Daniel 9:24 connects the "Seventy Weeks" of prophetic time to the finishing of the transgression.

Benson Commentary: *"In a prophecy of such moment, we cannot suppose a mere co-acervation of synonymous terms, but each word is emphatic, and proper to its subject. The appropriate sense of each may be investigated, from their use and significance in other passages of Holy Scripture. Accordingly, by the word transgression, we here understand man's first disobedience, with its direful effects, the depravation and mortality of human nature. And by finishing this transgression we understand cancelling the primeval guilt of Adam's apostacy, and reversing the sentence of mortality then passed on all the human race. In other words, we may properly understand by the expression, the abolishing the guilt and fatal effects of that disobedience, in such a manner that no man shall perish eternally merely on account of the sin of our first parents, or the depravity entailed upon us thereby; to counteract the influence of which, sufficient grace is procured for us, and offered to us in the gospel of Christ."*

"Weeks as Years" indicates God's insertion of His sovereign, eternal will into our time for the purpose of upturning the moneychanger's table, so to speak. God works through grace, which is experienced by us as the transformation of our history, our culture, our time, even our most basic modality of life, to take the familiar immanence of sin and transform it into that which is good. That which is good is that which is in sync with God's will. The metronome to the grave is transfigured into the time of grace, a time different from what is familiar to us, a time where by our limited perspective weeks are measured as years. Thus, the "Seventy Weeks" prophecy is a way of telling us that God Himself will effectuate the undoing of the first transgression. God is going "to finish the transgression" by breaking into our time and upending the universe as we know it.

To Make Reconciliation for Iniquity: Remember that while “the wages of sin” is death, there is a natural corollary to this death in the breakdown of community

Genesis 11:7-9: *“Let us go down and confound their language that they may not understand one another's speech. And so, the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.”* Notice that the attempt to ascend to Heaven by building the Tower of Babel is in the context of building a city. Man’s iniquity is manifest not only in assuming he can reach Heaven by his own merits. It is manifest in developing a greater city of community premised on this iniquity. Man is not just committing sin. He is establishing civilization defined by sin where the predilection to sin will be reinforced by family life, cultic worship, etc., rather than these institutions serving the aim of a more Godfearing population.

Thus, reconciliation is not just about reestablishing a forgiven sinner’s relationship with God. It is also about reestablishing a civilization that is Godfearing. We are reconciled with God, and we are reconciled with one another. The Summary of the Law is not just an exposition on love. It is a most radical reorientation of civic and religious polity.

To Bring In Everlasting Righteousness: Man’s transgression has changed his fundamental nature to one that is in rebellion to God’s will and seeks separation from his neighbors. Without grace, we are prone toward everlasting damnation. With grace, the prophetic upturning of history and time, we are transformed in Christ Jesus into creatures of righteousness. Contrary to Calvinism, salvation is inseparable from sanctification, or theosis, for we cannot be *in Christ* without also in that fact being *transformed into Christ*. To be in “the Body of Christ” is not to bring Him down to us, but for us to be brought up into Him.

Benson Commentary: *“To speak more distinctly: to bring in everlasting righteousness, according to the gospel, evidently includes three things: 1st, To bring in Christ’s righteousness, or his*

obedience unto death, as the ground of our justification and title to eternal life, he being the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth. 2d, To bring holiness, the divine nature, or the Spirit of God, with his various graces, into our souls, making us conformable to his image, as our meetness for that future felicity. And, 3d, For our direction in the way that leads to it; to lay before us, for our observation, a complete rule of life and manners."

To Seal Up the Vision and Prophecy: God's Prophetic Word as spoken in the Law and by the Prophets will be fulfilled. Sealing Up is a reference to consummation, as in closing the tent at the end of the wedding feast for the couple to be together as husband and wife. Fulfilling the Prophetic Word of God is not just seeing that what has been prophesied actually takes place within history. It means history being transfigured by this actually taking place. Again, we see why the "Seventy Weeks" Prophecy is utilized here, for God is inserting Himself into the history and the time of Man to make that history and time conform with His will. We can understand this best as a kind of consummation, a resting on the Seventh Day, as the wedding feast week (the Six Days of Creation) reaches its consummation (the Seventh Day) in the coming of Christ.

And to Anoint the Most Holy: The Holy of Holies in the Temple is now identified with the Man to be Anointed as Messiah. This Messiah will replace the physical Temple with his flesh, and so he will be anointed as "Most Holy."

To Restore and to Build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince: When Ezra and Nehemiah are allowed to return with some Jews to Judea, they initially only have permission to construct that which comes to be known as the Second Temple. Later, they are allowed to restore walls unto Jerusalem. The date that the Babylonian King, Artaxerxes, gives permission to Nehemiah to do this is 457 B.C. If we add 490 years to that date, we come to 33 A.D., the year when Jesus dies on the Cross and is resurrected unto eternal life. The rebuilding of Jerusalem is finished in the year 33 A.D. with Our Lord's triumph over sin and death. That the rebuilding of a city should be identified with the life, death, and resurrection of a man makes sense given that the Messiah is

the One who will be “anointed the Most Holy.” He will be the new Temple, the fulfillment of all of God’s promises unto Judea, the New Jerusalem.

Eschatological Implications of the Seventy Weeks Prophecy

Daniel 9:26-27: “And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week, he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.”

Shall Messiah be cut off: In the context of Jewish prophecy, to be “cut off” means literally to be uprooted from the land. On a surface level, this is a reference to death, since an uprooted plant cannot long survive. More deeply, this is a reference to the desolation of the plant and the land. Uprooting is the opposite of the planting in the Garden of Eden. While Eden is planted to be for Adam and his wife a kind of Tabernacle, uprooting results in separation, removal from the godly Tabernacle to wander in the outer wilderness. The Cry of Desolation is suggested here: My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me? In other words, the Messiah will be cast into Hell, and the Messiah will experience all the desolations of Hell. He is not going down to Hell to be a tourist, like a tour through a prison, but rather to be a prisoner Himself in the darkest corners that Hell can provide. This is a fate much worse than the ostracism of the Greek forced out of his beloved city state for maintaining ideas out of sync with the establishment, for the end of ostracism is a physical death, yes, and yet the ostracized philosopher can die out there maintaining fidelity to his principles. The prisoner in Hell is tagged with all the rebuke warranted an unholy thing. He is not allowed the clear mind of dying for what he considers to be a good cause. He is confronted instead with the fullness of his badness. This is closer to the fate of Cain when banished due to murdering his brother. Christ Jesus fulfills what is first foreshadowed by Abel. He is the innocent

murdered for having done what is pleasing to God. What is seen here is that, in being “cut off,” Christ Jesus is also fulfilling what is foreshadowed by Cain. He is forced out into the emptiness of absolute isolation, removal from family and home, where he can have no friend but his own guilty conscience. In the case of Cain, he is guilty. In the case of the Messiah, He is not guilty in Himself, but He takes on the guiltiness of others. He experiences the guilt that they would have to experience in everlasting Hell themselves but for His substitutionary sacrifice.

But not for himself: The Messiah is “cut off,” but not “for himself,” because he is not guilty. This phrase is a prophetic sign of the substitutionary aspect of Christ Jesus’ sacrifice. The implication is that the people from whom the Messiah is “cut off” are the ones who deserve to be “cut off.” Otherwise, he would be “cut off” for himself.

Isaiah 53:8: *“He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.”*

Gill’s Bible Exposition: *He was taken from prison, and from judgment.... After he had suffered and died, and made satisfaction to divine justice...he was taken in a very little time from the prison of the grave where he lay, and from the state of condemnation into which he was brought, and was acquitted, justified, and declared righteous, and his people in him; and a messenger was sent from heaven to roll away the stone, and set him free...He was taken by distress and judgment; that is, his life was taken away in a violent manner, under a pretense of justice; whereas the utmost injustice was done him; a wrong charge was brought against him, false witnesses were suborned, and his life was taken away with wicked hands; which sense seems to be favored by the quotation in Acts 8:32: “in his humiliation his judgment was taken away.”*

Thus, when we review the “cut off, but not for himself” reference in light of “cut off” in Isaiah 53:8, we see the substitutionary sacrifice in the context of being “taken from prison and from

judgment.” The sacrifice involves taking on a charge that is wrong, undergoing the rebuke of false witnesses, experiencing an unjust punishment, etc. Christ Jesus makes a perfectly clean sacrifice, but the mechanism by which this happens is unclean, for he is absorbing thereby into his perfect sacrifice all of the uncleanness not only of the mechanism by which he is sacrificed but of sin generally. Notice the dichotomies: The Messiah is cut off – but not for himself (which is to say, not on account of himself). The Messiah makes a perfectly clean sacrifice – but all the mechanisms by which this sacrifice occurs are unclean. The Messiah dies and is cast into Hell in an existentially real sense (which is to say, he is not just a “tourist” in Hell) – but he is taken up from his prison, set free, and fully acquitted, justified, and declared righteous in short order. In the dichotomies, we see the interplay of God and man, eternity and temporality, grace and sin carried up into grace.

The people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary: The prince is a temporal reference to Rome, for a generation after the Crucifixion, the Romans will destroy the Temple and much of the city of Jerusalem (the remainder of the city being destroyed, and Jews forced into the diaspora, in the early Second Century AD). The prince is also a reference to Satan, the Prince of the World, who is defeated by the Resurrection on Easter Sunday and yet sets out to destroy what he can until the final resolution of all things. With this phrase, we see then that the Messiah’s substitutionary sacrifice is eschatological. It sets off “the End Times.” In a way, we are now, and have been since the first Easter Sunday, in “the End Times.” Between the sacrifice of the Messiah, and the final resolution of all things, there will be no other historical transitions from one epoch to another. There will be no further development of the Holy Bible – the Canon of the New Testament being set with the ending of the Apostolic generation. Similarly, no other Bibles will be from God, no other Holy Church but the Holy Church that is bequeathed by Christ Jesus unto the Apostles and their successors will be the Holy Church, and no other Messiah but this Messiah will be forthcoming. The destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem, and the forced diaspora of the Jews, end the Judean period of history that had led to the Messiah. For since He has come, the Judean period of history has been fulfilled and subsumed into His life. Also, these events are signs that history has entered “the

End Times.” Thus, in these events, the fulfillment of the past and the sign of the future are one and the same. This is a hint of the later developed Christian theological teaching of “Realized and Future Eschatology.” In Christ Jesus, all has been already fulfilled, and in Christ Jesus, we see the clearest sign of what has yet to be fulfilled. This is illogical on its face but for the overlapping of God’s time with our time. To the extent eternity has assumed our temporal world into itself, we see “Realized Eschatology.” To the extent there is still a temporal world out of sync with eternity, we see “Future Eschatology.” This points to a dichotomy at the heart of Christian salvation: The die has been cast, and there is free will. Many theologians have attempted to explain this dichotomy by preferring one side over the other. So, the Calvinist focuses on the die having been cast to the end that there is no free will. We are, and have been from the start, predestined either for grace or for damnation. Other theologians will focus on free will to the near exclusion of the die having been cast already. For them, the die is not really cast, for Jesus is not necessary for our salvation, which means that we men, and how we exercise our free will, are the real arbiters of our own salvation. This is the heart of the aged old heresy of Pelagius, the exact opposite of Calvin, which sees Jesus as little more than an icon of our own good works by which we earn our own place into Heaven. The only way to avoid the error of affirming one idea (the die has been cast already) by refuting the other idea (we retain our free will) is in accepting in faith the dichotomous (and, therefore, to us mysterious) nature of the Incarnation of God. Christ Jesus only resolves this dichotomy of Realized Eschatology and Future Eschatology because of *who He is*. This is another hint of the Messiah being the one time in history of the God-Man.

The end thereof shall be with a flood: We recall from the Story of Noah’s Ark that the flood both destroys all sin and wipes clean the slate for a new creation. The eschatological implications for all humanity of the Messiah being “cut off, but not for himself” is the destruction of all sin and a new creation. Thus, we are not only living already in “the End Times.” In Christ Jesus, we are the citizens already of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is here (Realized Eschatology), and also, it will come with the descent of the New Jerusalem (Future Eschatology).

And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week:

Gill's Bible Exposition: Sixty nine of the seventy weeks being accounted for, and the several events observed to be fulfilled in them; the angel proceeds to take notice of the remaining "one" week, or seven years, and what should be done within that space of time: a covenant should be confirmed with many; which is not to be understood of the Messiah's confirming the covenant of grace with many, or on account of all his people, by fulfilling the conditions of it, and by his blood and sacrifice, through which all the blessings of it come to them; for this is not for one week only, but for ever; but this is to be interpreted of the Roman people, spoken of in the latter part of the preceding verse; who, in order to accomplish their design to destroy the city and temple of Jerusalem, made peace with many nations, entered into covenant and alliance with them, particularly the Medes, Parthians, and Armenians, for the space of one week, or seven years; as it appears they did at the beginning of this week.

Again, we are seeing a prophetic reference to the alliances that Rome will make when it sets out to isolate and to destroy Jerusalem. From this politics will come the cessation of the old sacrificial system, the destruction of the Temple, for the promise of God is now firmly within the life of the Messiah. Those who refuse to be in Christ Jesus have relegated themselves unto the affairs of Caesar. They have cast their lot with him and will suffer the consequences thus.