

## THE END TIMES

### Daniel's Seventy "Sevens" Daniel 9:24-27

In a recent article in The Futurist magazine<sup>i</sup>, writer Laura Lee catalogues some of the worst predictions of all time:

- "Inventions have long since reached their limit, and I see no hope for further developments." —Roman engineer Julius Sextus Frontinus, A.D. 100
- "The abdomen, the chest, and the brain will forever be shut from the intrusion of the wise and humane surgeon." —John Eric Ericksen, surgeon to Queen Victoria, 1873
- "It doesn't matter what he does, he will never amount to anything." —Albert Einstein's teacher to Einstein's father, 1895
- "It would appear we have reached the limits of what it is possible to achieve with computer technology." —computer scientist John von Neumann, 1949
- "Before man reaches the moon, your mail will be delivered within hours from New York to Australia by guided missiles. We stand on the threshold of rocket mail." —Arthur Summerfield, U.S. Postmaster General under Eisenhower, 1959
- "I predict the Internet . . . will go spectacularly supernova and in 1996 catastrophically collapse." —Bob Metcalfe, InfoWorld, 1995

Down through the centuries, people have predicted many things and some of the most amazing things. There is a big difference, though, between the misguided predictions I just read, and the precision and accuracy of the biblical prophecy we are going to look at this morning. Daniel 9:24-27 is certainly one of the most amazing prophecies found in the entire Bible. It pinpoints, over 500 years in advance, the exact moment in history when the Jewish Messiah would present himself to the nation of Israel.

"Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. "Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing [of the temple] he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him." Daniel 9:24-27

Daniel was probably 80 or 90 years old when he received this revelation from the angel Gabriel. One thing that tells me is that we are never too old for God to use us significantly or to reveal himself to us in new ways. If you in the retirement years and think the days of ministry or fresh spiritual insight are over, well – think again!

Daniel had been taken captive to Babylon when he was only a teenager. But now, after nearly 70 years in Babylon, Daniel is reading the prophet Jeremiah. In fact, here's the exact passage Daniel was reading. It's found in Jeremiah 25:

This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon *seventy years*. "But when the *seventy years* are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt," declares the LORD, "and will make it desolate forever." Jeremiah 25:11-13

Jeremiah prophecies that Israel would be taken captive by Babylon and spend 70 years as exiles in Babylon. And that's exactly what took place. Daniel now realizes that the 70 years of captivity are nearly over.<sup>ii</sup> Starting in verse 2 Daniel says:

In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, *that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years*. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. Daniel 9:2-3

Daniel himself was a prophet. God spoke to him directly. But this did not keep him from looking to the Bible for insight. Daniel was a student of the Bible and we should follow his example.

Realizing from the passage in Jeremiah that Israel is coming to the end of their captivity in Babylon, Daniel turns to prayer. Daniel has just been reminded from the Bible what God's program was. And now he turns to prayer so that he can be involved in it (Daniel 9:4-19).

At the end of Daniel's prayer, the angel Gabriel appears to the prophet. Notice what he says in verse 23: "As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, *consider the message and understand the vision*." This is a call to Daniel and to you and me to take such prophecies very seriously. God wants us to *consider* and to *understand*. We are not to throw up our hands and say, "This doesn't make any sense! This is all symbolical or allegorical and we could never understand!" No, these prophecies are given *for* our understanding, not our confusion.

Notice first what Gabriel tells Daniel in verse 24 –

"Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.

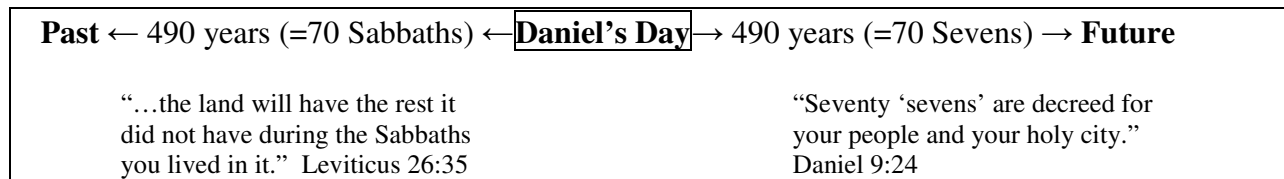
First, there is a very *specific time period* set for the Jewish people: "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city..." What are these "seventy 'sevens' or as the *NLT* puts it, "seventy sets of seven?" Are they days, weeks or years? Remember, Daniel is already thinking in terms of literal years.

We've already pointed out that, at this time, Israel had been in captivity in Babylon for nearly 70 years. But *why* were they there for that exact period of time? One reason is because they had repeatedly disobeyed God's command to give their land sabbatical rests.<sup>iii</sup>

I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins. *Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate* and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. *All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it.* Leviticus 26:33-35

What is a Sabbath year? We know what the Sabbath in a normal week is – it’s the seventh day, a day of rest. And so in Israel, every Sabbath (or seventh) year was also to be a time in which the ground lay fallow, giving a Sabbath rest to the land. Israel’s captivity in Babylon was the result of violating the sabbatical year which was to be observed every seventh year (2 Chronicles 36:21; Leviticus 26:34-35). It seems then that each year of the seventy years in captivity in Babylon represented one seven-year cycle in which the Sabbath (or seventh) year had not been observed.

We can visualize it this way:



Not only is there a specific time period mentioned, but there are *specific objectives* to be accomplished in this time period. These are also listed in verse 24. There are six of them. The first three deal with the work of *salvation from sin*:

- To finish transgression
- To put an end to sin
- To atone for wickedness

But the next three are somewhat different and seem to look far into the distant future:

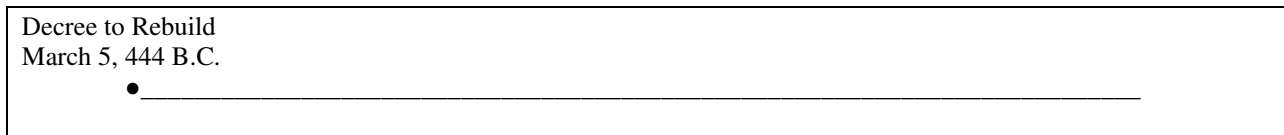
- To bring in everlasting righteousness
- To seal up vision and prophecy
- To anoint the Most Holy Place

To “seal up” something means to stop or make an end to something. In other words, by the end of this period of seventy-sevens or 490 years, there will be no further need of prophecy, for God’s Kingdom will have been established. At this point, the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy Kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” will be a reality.

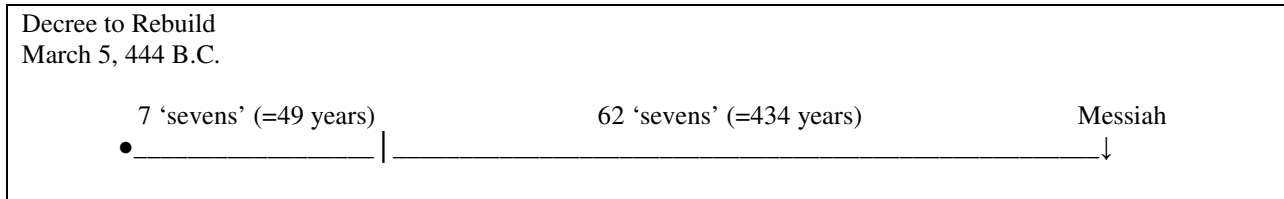
Verse 24 gives us the overview and is the first section of this prophecy. The second section of the prophecy is now found in verses 25-27 where we see that this period of 490 years is first divided into two distinct periods.

“Know and understand this: *From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’* It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.  
Daniel 9:25

The angel Gabriel tells Daniel that there is a definite starting point for the time period spoken of in this prophecy. That starting point is the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. The one decree mentioned both in the Bible and in secular history that fits the description of verse 25 is the decree of King Artaxerxes who, in the year 444 B.C., commissioned Nehemiah to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2).<sup>iv</sup> Thanks to the biblical record as well as secular historians, we even have the exact date of that decree. It is March 5, 444 B.C.<sup>v</sup> This date marks the starting point of Daniel’s prophecy.

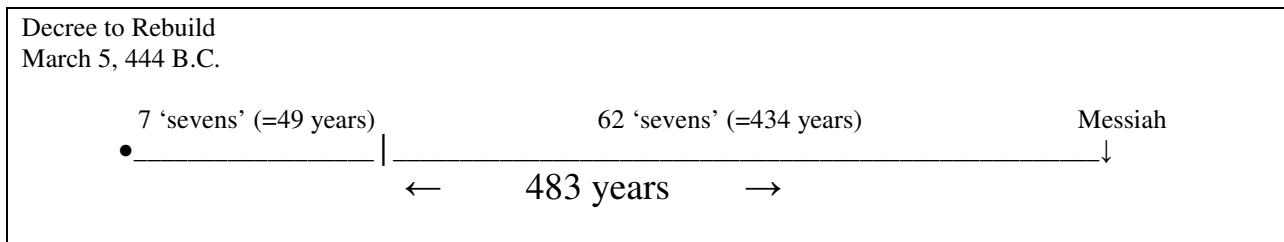


Gabriel then says that from this date “*until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes...*” there will be 7 ‘sevens’ and 62 ‘sevens.’ We can picture it this way:

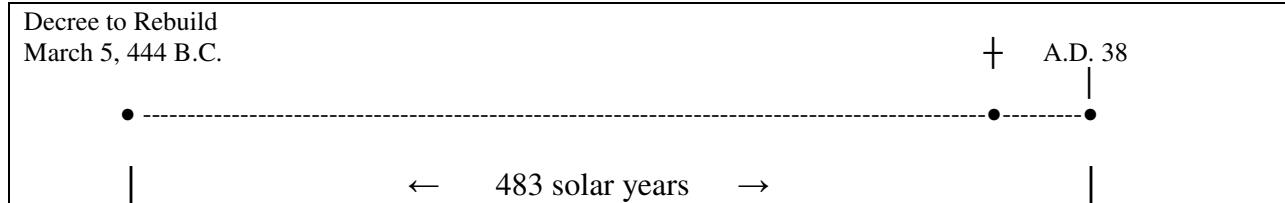


Remember, Daniel is already thinking in terms of “week” of years, or sets of seven years. During this initial period of 7 ‘sevens,’ or 49 years, “it” (the city of Jerusalem) would be “rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble” (verse 25). History tells us that that is exactly what happened. The walls were repaired and the city was restored under Nehemiah’s leadership. This takes us almost to the close of the Old Testament period.

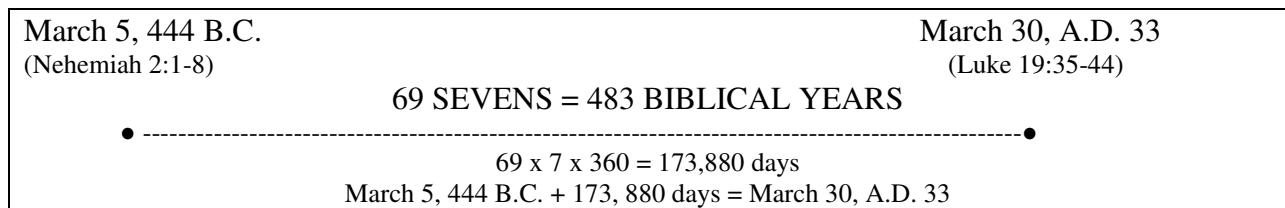
Gabriel tells Daniel that after this first period of 7 ‘sevens’ (or 49 years), there would follow another period of 62 ‘sevens’ (or 434 years) leading up to the time when the “Anointed One, the ruler” comes. The “Anointed One” refers to the Messiah. In other words, from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem issued on March 5, 444 B.C. until the coming of the Messiah, there would be exactly 483 years!



Now that is very precise! Nowhere else in the Bible do you find a more precise prophecy. There is only one problem, however. Using the *standard solar year* (which is our modern terms of measurement consisting of 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, and 45.975 seconds!), we arrive at the date of A.D. 38, five years *after* the death of Christ.



Many of the ancients, however, did not measure time with our modern astronomical standards. Rather, it was quite common at this time to use twelve 30 day months, making a total of exactly 360 days (rather than 365) in the year.<sup>vi</sup> We have examples of this elsewhere in the Bible and in secular history. We'll call this a *biblical year*.



So if you begin on March 5, 444 B.C. and add to that 483 *biblical* years (consisting of 360 days each), this brings you to March 30, A.D. 33. And what is the significance of that date? *It is the very day that Jesus Christ rode into Jerusalem presenting himself as the Messiah to the Jewish nation.* This was called Christ's triumphal entry and is recorded in Luke 19:35-44.<sup>vii</sup>

It's little wonder that Jesus said on that day that he entered Jerusalem and presented himself to the Jewish nation as their Messiah:

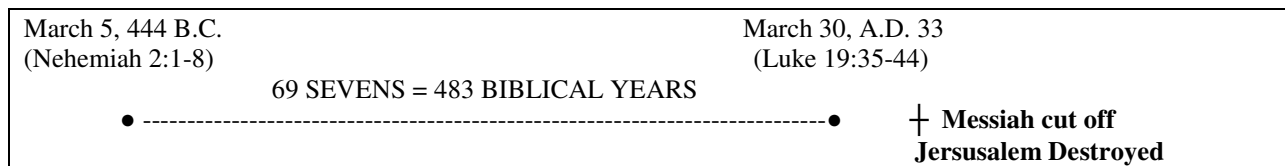
As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "*If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace-but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.*" Luke 19:41-44

What day did they not recognize? The *very day that is prophesied in Daniel 9!* And because the Jewish nation didn't recognize or accept Jesus as their Messiah, the nation was judged. Here, Jesus is referring to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies under Titus which took place in 70 A.D. Amazingly, that is the same topic that Daniel refers to in Daniel 9:26:

After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed.

After the 7 sevens and 62 sevens (483 biblical years), the Messiah will be cut off. This happened at the cross when Jesus, the Messiah, was crucified.<sup>viii</sup> But then, “the people of the ruler who will come,” will destroy the city of Jerusalem and the sanctuary. Who is this “people” and this “ruler?” This “ruler” is *not* the ruler, or prince, mentioned in verse 25 which is the Messiah. Rather, this ruler will be the antichrist who will oppose the Messiah. And the *people* of this ruler are the Romans. Gabriel adds that “the end will come like a flood.” This is exactly what happened when the Roman armies under Titus came in and besieged Jerusalem in AD 70. The historian Josephus was present and describes what he saw as an eyewitness. I read that description the other night as I was going to bed. Let me tell you, it doesn’t make for good nighttime reading. Josephus describes in detail how starvation and famine spread throughout the city streets. Bodies were stacked up in the street and mothers ate their own children to survive. Finally, the walls were breached. The Romans entering the city were so angered by the Jew’s stubborn resistance that they burned the Temple and pried apart the stones of the Temple. Of course, this fulfilled Jesus’ prophecy that not one stone would be left upon another.

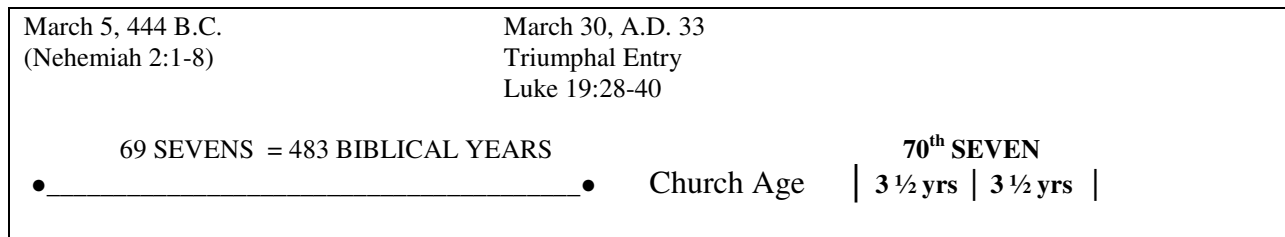
Now all of this – the crucifixion of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem – is history. It happened in that period of time just “*after*” the 69 sevens (verse 26).



But where is the 70<sup>th</sup> “seven” or final period of seven years? This seventieth ‘seven’ has not yet come. So far, there has been a gap of nearly 2000 years. But that last period of seven years is coming and Gabriel talks about it in verse 27 of Daniel 9:

*He* will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’ In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing [of the temple] he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.”  
Daniel 9: 27

We can picture it this way:



But who is this strange individual referred to as “he?” It most naturally refers to the “ruler who is to come” mentioned in verse 26. That “ruler,” which the New Testament identifies as the Antichrist, will make a covenant with the Jewish people for one “seven,” i.e. seven years. But in the middle of that seven year time period, he will break the covenant, setting up in the Jewish Temple what Gabriel calls an “abomination that causes desolation.”

Jesus himself refers to the prophecy when he says:

So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel-let the reader understand- then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now-and never to be equaled again. Matthew 24:15-21

In light of Gabriel's words to Daniel and in view of Jesus' words to his disciples, this last period of seven years is yet future. But it will come! And over the next two Sundays we'll be studying more about that week and what follows as Christ's Kingdom is established on earth.

What can you and I learn from this astounding prophecy of Daniel's "seventy-sevens?" I see this prophecy as being, first of all, a reminder of the accuracy of the Bible as well as the importance of the Bible in our lives as believers. Daniel, being a prophet, received *direct* revelation from God. And yet in was at a time when he was reading God's already revealed Word that he received this prophecy! Are you like Daniel? Does God's Word play that important role in *your* life?

But I also see here another application for you and me. If this first part of this prophecy was fulfilled with such precision in Christ's first coming, don't you think that God will also just a precisely fulfill that last period of seven years leading to the establishment of His Kingdom on earth? Do you live your daily life in light of that hope?

<sup>i</sup> *The Futurist*, (September/October, 2000), p. 20-25.

<sup>ii</sup> Jeremiah 25:11-13 This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. "But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt," declares the LORD, "and will make it desolate forever.

<sup>iii</sup> The land enjoyed its Sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah. 2 Chronicles 36:21

<sup>iv</sup> More specifically, the decree was given in the month of Nisan (March / April), 444 B.C. See Harold W. Hoehner, "Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January – March, 1975), 47-65.

<sup>v</sup> In the Jewish calendar, this date corresponds to Nisan 1, 444 B.C. The historian Herodotus (called the father of history) was a contemporary of King Artaxerxes. Amazingly, both Herodotus and another famous historian of that time period, Thucydides, record the career and dates of Artaxerxes.

<sup>vi</sup> A 360 day year is also used elsewhere in the Bible. For example, the 1,260 days mentioned in Revelation 12:6 and 11:3 equals the 42 months of Revelation 11:2 and 13:5. Each month consists of 30 days and each year of 360 days. Compare also Genesis 7:11, 24; 8:3-4 for another example of 30 day months

<sup>vii</sup> Zechariah 9:9. These calculations can be verified by working backwards with our typical solar year calculations. For example, there are only 476 solar years (rather than 483) between 444 B.C. and A.D. 33. If you multiply 476 X 365.24219879 (the number of days in our solar year) you have 173,855 days. Add to this the number of days between March 5 and March 30 (= 25 days) and you have the exact same number of days: 173,880! See Hoehner, "Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January – March, 1975), 65. What is particularly fascinating about this is that you can verify these calculations by working backwards using the number of days in our modern solar year. For example:

March 5, 444 B.C.  
(Nehemiah 2:1-8)

March 30, A.D. 33  
(Luke 19:35-44)

69 SEVENS = 483 *BIBLICAL YEARS* = 173,880 days

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444 B.C. to A.D. 33 = 476 *SOLAR YEARS*  
476 solar years x 365.24219879 = 173,855 days  
+ days between March 5 and March 30 = 25 days  
Total: 173, 880 days

<sup>viii</sup> The precise date in Jewish reckoning is Friday, Nisan 14, A.D. 33.