

## Sermon – 25/11/2007 pm

### Seventy Sevens

Study Text: Daniel 9:20–27

Daniel was at prayer as was his custom. It was at the time of the evening sacrifice. He was stirred to pray after reading in his Bible of God's promise through the prophet Jeremiah to bring the exile to an end after seventy years. Daniel did not consider prayer a waste of time as so many do these days.

#### Greatly Beloved

Seeking the face of God in earnest, he confessed his sin and *the sin my people Israel* (9:20). He also brought his supplications/requests to God believing that God was faithful to his promises. In particular he prayed for *the holy mountain of my God*, or in other words for Jerusalem. He prayed for the restoration of the temple where he and his people once worshipped God.

As Daniel prayed an angel suddenly appeared before him. The angel Gabriel flew swiftly to reach him as he prayed. You may not have had an angel visit you in prayer – but then again have you been in such earnest prayer as Daniel? Even if you have not had a heavenly visitor while praying be assured that the Lord hears your prayers immediately. That is why Gabriel came to Daniel.

When Daniel fell on his knees before the Lord the word went out in Babylon that Daniel was disobeying the king's decree. But here we see that the word went out in heaven also – Daniel is praying (9:23). How often does the word go out in heaven that you are praying? While men hated him praying the Lord was very pleased. He sent Gabriel to tell Daniel *you are greatly beloved* or highly esteemed (9:23).

Why does God hear and answer our prayers? Is it because we deserve his blessings? Daniel was a faithful servant of God but he did not come boasting of his faith or his works. He came humbly before the Lord, and we see in this message from the Lord that he was heard because of grace. Daniel was heard because God loved him.

*Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God* (I John 3:1). Do you remember how much God loves you when you come to him in prayer? Do you remember that Jesus went to the Cross to die for you when you come to God in prayer? We know and feel God's love most acutely when we draw near to him in prayer. While Daniel was praying God's answer came in a very real way. While Jesus was earnestly praying in Gethsemane God sent an angel to strengthen him (Luke 22:43).

#### Seventy Sevens

Gabriel had more to tell Daniel than that he was loved by God. He had come to help him *understand the vision* (9:23). What vision? The vision about to be revealed to Daniel. Daniel's prayer was stimulated by the prophetic word of Jeremiah that the desolation of Jerusalem would last 70 years (9:2). The time was almost complete. Jerusalem and its temple would be rebuilt. The new king of the empire issued a decree to this effect in his first year, 538BC.

Was this vision told by Gabriel about returning to Jerusalem after the exile? It was related but this vision is much greater. It is a Messianic vision. 'The Lord wanted his faithful servant to see those seventy years (of exile) in a new and sharper focus'. He was telling Daniel of a much greater ingathering of the people of God.

Daniel was to understand not only the 70 years of exile in Babylon but the *seventy sevens* leading to an end of sins, to reconciliation, and the coming of everlasting righteousness (9:24). For seventy years there had been no sacrifices in the temple. Why did the Jews make sacrifices? To atone for sin. Without the shedding of blood there is not forgiveness. They thought these sacrifices would go on for ever. But here Daniel is told after *seventy sevens* there would be an end of sins – and presumably an end of sacrifices required to atone for sin.

This ‘seventy sevens’ vision of Daniel 9 is one of the most difficult portions of the Bible to understand, and also one of the most disputed portions. It has been called the dismal swamp of Old Testament criticism. You may not wish to enter into this criticism but many do. You may not have heard of the seventieth week of Daniel, the Great Tribulation and the Millennium but for many it is a central doctrine.

What will you say when confronted with this doctrine? Will you join those heading off to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and start animal sacrifices again? Such people have very convincing arguments taken from this very passage.

*Seventy sevens are determined* (9:24). This is the overriding declaration of this vision. ‘Sevens’ is often translated ‘weeks’ (seven days), as you will see in the NKJ Bible or as sabbatical years (every seven years). Seventy sevens would be 490 years. The big questions are ‘when does this period start’ and ‘are we to take the numbers literally’. Before we tackle these questions let us look at the content of this verse 24.

What was to happen at the end of this period of 490 years? It was something to do with the Jews, the people of God, and the holy city, the temple city of Jerusalem. Six things are listed here. The first three refer to the removal of sin.

- To finish transgression/rebellion (sin)
- To make an end of sins
- To make reconciliation for iniquity (sin)/ atone for wickedness.

The second three refer to the establishment of righteousness.

- To establish everlasting righteousness.
- To seal up vision and prophecy
- To anoint the most holy/ holy of holies.

From a New Testament perspective all these things clearly point to the Cross of Jesus Christ – the Messiah. The New Testament teaches that now *at the end of the ages (Christ) has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself* (Hebrews 9:26). In Christ we are reconciled to God (II Corinthians 5:18f). Jesus came to fulfill all that the Holy of Holies represented. In Christ all the Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled or sealed up. God has spoken fully and finally in his Son. *Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes* (Romans 10:4). It is clear that the end of the ‘seventy sevens’ points to the coming of Messiah and all that he achieved through his death and resurrection.

What about the next verse? *Know and understand* Daniel was told. He is given more detail with the seventy sevens being divided up into seven sevens and sixty-two sevens (total 69). From the going forth of the command/word to rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince will be these two periods.

Messiah means ‘anointed one’. Isaiah (45:1) refers to Cyrus as the Lord’s anointed, so some think that this Messiah in 9:26 is Cyrus. But in the light of the previous verse, and the most common reference of this word we must see Messiah as Jesus Christ. Jesus is Messiah. The anointed deliver is also Prince, a royal title (Psalm 110).

The word to rebuild Jerusalem (9:25) probably refers to that which Jeremiah spoke in 594BC, although Cyrus the Persian actually made the decree to rebuild Jerusalem in his first year (Ezra 1:1 – 538BC). The temple was rededicated in the sixth year of Darius or 515BC (Ezra 6:15). It was rebuilt with much opposition and distraction as Nehemiah and Ezra both record.

It is this question of when the command went forth that leads to great differences in interpretation. Dispensationalists in a strict literal interpretation take it to be a later decree of Ezra when he returned in 455BC. This conveniently brings the year of the Cross within the frame of 490 years. They hold that the Messiah here is Christ, but take their own view on the *one week* of the next verse (9:27).

## Seventieth Seven

*After sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off* (9:26). To be cut off is to be killed as in Isaiah 53:8. This refers to the death of Jesus at the end of the seventy weeks. But then some say the one week of verse 27, the seventieth week does not occur until the second coming of Jesus. It is the seven-year period of the great Tribulation before the Millennium. There is a gap or ‘breach’ between weeks 69 and 70 a gap of almost 2000 years so far.

But it will not be for much longer according to this view. ‘The minute the prince of the revived Roman Empire affixes his signature to a treaty with the government of Israel, confirming the covenant, the 70th week will begin. Since 1948 there have been numerous attempts to bring peace between Israel and the surrounding Arab nations, but to date all such attempts have failed’. They hold that the temple will be rebuilt and sacrifices restored and then antichrist will come. It is somewhat strange that in their strict literal interpretation they can insert a gap of 2000 years (so far).

This seventieth week should be understood as continuous with the sixty-ninth – the vision began with this overriding declaration of *seventy sevens* without gaps. The last week is of course most important, for all that was spoken of in verse 25 is accomplished in it. After the sixty-two weeks (total of 69 weeks) Messiah shall be cut off or killed. He was cut off not for himself but for others. He was killed not for his own sin but for others.

During this same period, the last week, they shall destroy the city and sanctuary (9:26). Jesus effectively ended the function of the temple. The curtain into the most holy place was torn as he died. His was the last sacrifice. It was some 35 years later that the Romans actually destroyed the temple and the Jews were scattered. There is nothing in the Bible to indicate that this temple will be rebuilt. Moreover, Jesus has won the war against the devil and antichrist (9:26, Hebrews 2:14).

The one week of 9:27, the ‘seventieth week’ about which volumes have been written, is divided in half. In the middle *he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering*. He shall confirm/‘cause to prevail’ a covenant with many (not *make* a covenant), *and on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate*. This latter point is very difficult but the picture of this one week is clear. It extends from the birth of Jesus 1(AD) to the Cross in 33AD and to the destruction of the temple in AD70 (cf. Matthew 24:15). There is no compelling reason to extend this vision beyond the first coming of Jesus.

What a wonderful vision this proved to be for Daniel. No wonder Gabriel wanted him to understand. Oh that we would understand it today. This is a vision of the glorious Messiah. Daniel was told what God would do after some 500 years. The Messiah would bring an end to sins, a reconciliation of man with God, and the giving of righteousness to all who believe. He did all this, bringing an end to all sacrifice by his own once-for-all sacrifice on the Cross.

*Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon*