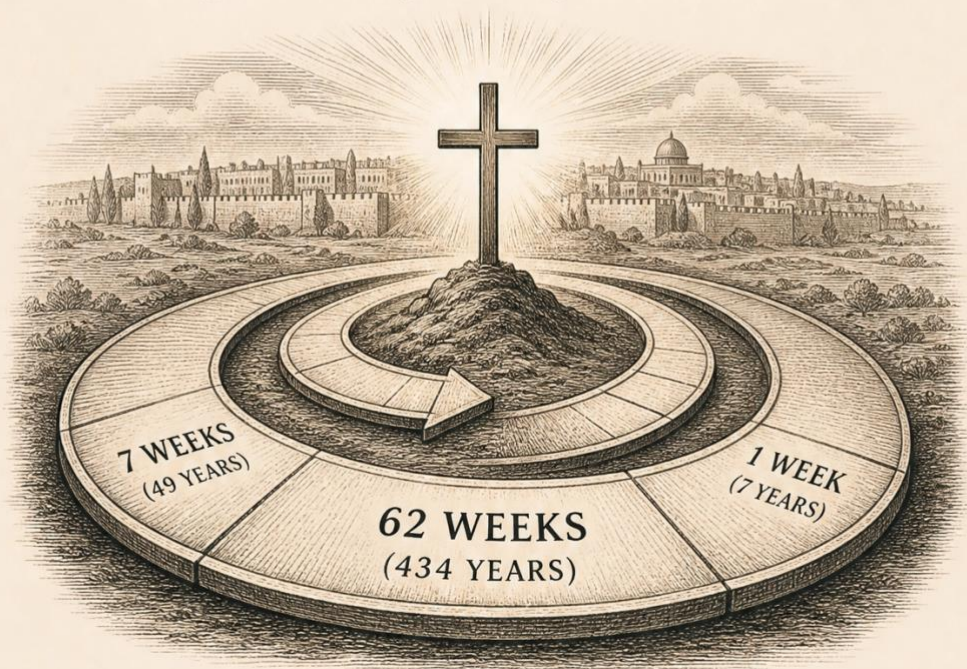


The
SEVENTY
WEEKS
of
DANIEL

*Prophecy, Purpose, and the
Progressive Fulfilment of Daniel 9:24-27*



Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar

Pastor Emeritus, Th.B., A.B., D.D

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A Study in Biblical Prophecy and Eschatology

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The Seventy Weeks of Daniel

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DEDICATION

*“He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness,
and the light dwells with him.”*

— Daniel 2:22

*To those who search the Scriptures diligently,
knowing that they testify of Christ.*

Soli Deo gloria.

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Preface

The prophecy of the Seventy Weeks in Daniel 9:24–27 is among the most debated and most misunderstood passages in all of Holy Scripture. Millennialists, dispensationalists, and preterists have each claimed it in support of their respective systems. I make no claim to novelty in these pages. I claim only fidelity: fidelity to the text as it stands within the whole counsel of God, read in the light of its New Testament fulfilment.

The conviction that drives every chapter is this: Daniel 9:24–27 is the key to all prophecy in both the Old and New Testaments. Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah, Matthew 24–25, Luke 21, the Thessalonian letters, 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation 2–22 must all be read and interpreted in the light of this foundational passage. When the key is lost or bent, the whole house of prophecy becomes a maze of speculation. When the key is rightly turned, one door after another opens onto the same room, and in that room stands Jesus Christ.

The interpretation offered here is that of *progressive parallel fulfilment*, by which I mean that the seventy weeks unfold not in three separated historical episodes, with centuries or millennia between them, but in overlapping and deepening movements that find their centre in Christ. The same pattern governs the book of Revelation, where the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls do not simply follow one another in a straight line but circle the same ground again and again, each time with greater clarity. I am persuaded that Daniel's weeks were written in the same manner.

I have tried to write for the pastor, the elder, and the thoughtful member of the congregation, not only for the specialist. Wherever a technical term appears, I have explained it at its first use, and the Glossary near the end of the book gathers the principal terms in one place. Each chapter closes with three questions for reflection, and the book closes with questions and challenges for personal use. Please do not hurry past them. Prophecy was never given to satisfy our curiosity

about the calendar. It was given to bring us to our knees before the Anointed One.

I have not attempted to answer every question that has been raised about these four verses, for that would require many volumes. I have tried instead to set out the main lines of the argument and to let Scripture speak for itself. Where I have been compelled to differ from other faithful teachers, I have tried to do so with respect, and I ask the same patience from the reader.

May the Lord who gave Daniel insight and understanding in the hour of his prayer give the same gift to every reader who opens this book with a humble heart.

Soli Deo gloria.

Introduction

Daniel prayed. He had been reading the prophet Jeremiah and had come to understand that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. He wrote, “in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years” (Dan. 9:2). The prophet had spoken the same word twice: “Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste” (Jer. 25:12), and again, “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place” (Jer. 29:10).

As the end of that period drew near, Daniel did not assume the fulfilment would come automatically. He did not say, “God has promised, therefore I may rest.” He did the opposite. “Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes” (Dan. 9:3). He prayed with fervent confession, identifying himself with the sin of his people. He pleaded for the restoration of the holy city, and he asked, above all, for the honour of God’s name: “O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name” (Dan. 9:19).

This is the first lesson of the Seventy Weeks, and it is a lesson for every pastor who has ever wondered whether prayer changes anything. God’s decrees are certain, and yet God ordains that his people will pray for the very things he has decreed. The promise did not make Daniel prayerless. The promise made him pray.

The answer Daniel received exceeded anything he had asked. “While I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice” (Dan. 9:21). Gabriel said, “O Daniel, I have now come out to give you

insight and understanding” (Dan. 9:22). Then he added a word of great tenderness: “At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved. Therefore consider the word and understand the vision” (Dan. 9:23).

The answer was not only about seventy years of Babylonian captivity. It was about seventy weeks, seventy *heptads* (units of seven), that would govern the destiny of the Jewish people and the holy city, and that would culminate in the coming of the Anointed One, the Messiah, and the establishment of everlasting righteousness.

“Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.”

— Daniel 9:24

I set the remainder of the prophecy before the reader here, so that the whole text may be in view as we study it part by part.

“Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come like a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

— Daniel 9:25-27

The passage has an unmistakable shape. There is a decree at the beginning, a Person at the centre, and a judgment at the end. Between them stand three divisions of time: seven weeks, sixty-two weeks, and one week. Every serious student of the passage must answer four

questions. What is the length and the starting point of the period? What did God intend to accomplish by it? Who are the people and the city to whom it was addressed? And how are its parts fulfilled in the history of redemption? The four chapters of this book take up these four questions in that order.

In **Chapter 1** I consider the prophetic period itself: the meaning of the *heptad*, the first seven weeks, the sixty-two weeks, and the final week, and I give my reasons for rejecting the idea of a great gap between the sixty-ninth week and the seventieth. In **Chapter 2** I turn to the six purposes of Daniel 9:24, arranged as two triads, and I show how every one of them was accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ. In **Chapter 3** I ask who “your people” and “your holy city” are, and what became of them. In **Chapter 4** I draw the threads together and explain why I read the whole prophecy as overlapping and progressively fulfilled, with the cross as its fulcrum.

A word about method. I hold that Scripture interprets Scripture. When the New Testament speaks of the cross, the temple, the destruction of Jerusalem, or the gathering of the Gentiles, it does so in the language of Daniel, and I take the apostles at their word. I have also tried to speak charitably of those who differ from me. Many who hold the dispensational view love the Lord and honour his Word, and I count them as brothers and sisters in Christ. My disagreement is with a framework, not with persons.

The God who answered Daniel is the same God who hears us now. Let us read the prophecy as Daniel received it: on our knees, with the Word open before us, and with our eyes fixed on the Anointed One.

CHAPTER 1

The Prophetic Period of the Seventy Weeks

“Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks.”

— Daniel 9:25a

The seventy weeks of Daniel 9:24 are, in the Hebrew text, seventy *heptads*, which means seventy units of seven. The context shows that these are units of years, and so the whole period totals 490 years. The reasoning is plain. Daniel had been thinking in years from the first verse of the chapter (Dan. 9:2). The seventy years of Babylonian captivity were the subject of his prayer, and the angel’s answer extends that same reckoning: seventy sevens of years.

There is a deeper reason, and it lies in the Law of Moses. The Lord had warned Israel that if they refused to keep the Sabbath rest of the land, the land would keep it for them: “Then the land shall enjoy its Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemies’ land; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its Sabbaths. As long as it lies desolate it shall have rest, the rest that it did not have on your Sabbaths when you were dwelling in it” (Lev. 26:34–35). The Chronicler records that this is exactly what happened: “to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years” (2 Chr. 36:21). Israel’s exile lasted seventy years, one year for each Sabbath year the people had failed to observe. Now, as the seventy years of discipline came to an end, the Lord answered Daniel’s prayer with seventy times seven years, “decreed” for the fulfilment of his redemptive plan. The word suggests divine appointment and sovereign purpose. These years were not left to chance or to the schemes of kings. They were cut out of the stream of time by the hand of God.

I must now say something that the reader will find repeated, in various forms, throughout this book. Daniel's seventy-week prophecy is the key to all prophecy found in the Old and New Testaments. This is not hyperbole. Matthew 24–25, Luke 21:5–38, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation 2–22 should all be read and interpreted in the light of Daniel 9:24–27. The Lord Jesus himself sent his disciples back to this chapter when he spoke of the destruction of the temple: “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)” (Matt. 24:15). If the Lord of the Church directs us to Daniel in order to understand the end of the temple, we ought to obey him.

The interpretation of the thousand years in the book of Revelation by the various millennial and dispensational schools sprang, in large part, from a reinterpretation of Daniel that had been introduced by Jesuit scholars in the sixteenth century. As I understand the history, the Reformers had identified the Roman papacy with the Antichrist of Scripture, and Rome needed an answer. The Jesuit Francisco Ribera moved the Antichrist into a distant future, and his fellow Jesuit Luis de Alcázar moved him into the distant past. Later schemes that postponed the final week of Daniel to the end of the age drew on this same instinct, to remove the prophecy from the world in which the Reformers read it. I say this not to wound anyone but to explain why the matter of the seventy weeks is no minor point of chronology. It touches how the whole Church has read her Bible.

The prophecy divides itself into three parts, which Gabriel announces in Daniel 9:25–27: seven weeks, sixty-two weeks, and one week. I take each in turn.

A. The First Seven Weeks: Seven Heptads (49 Years)

The first subdivision of the seventy weeks is a period of seven heptads, or forty-nine years. This period refers to the times of Ezra and Nehemiah, the era of restoration and rebuilding after the Babylonian captivity. During these years the street and moat of Jerusalem were

rebuilt “in a troubled time” (Dan. 9:25). That is to say, they were rebuilt under opposition and difficulty, exactly as the books of Ezra and Nehemiah record.

The starting point of the period is “the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem” (Dan. 9:25). This is most naturally understood as the decree of Artaxerxes in 445/444 BC. Nehemiah tells us how it came about. He was the king’s cupbearer, and in the month of Nisan, “in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes” (Neh. 2:1), the sorrow of his heart showed on his face. The king asked what he wanted, and Nehemiah prayed to the God of heaven and then answered with a request.

“And I said to the king, ‘If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it.’ ... And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.”

— Nehemiah 2:5, 8

After this permission, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the walls. The work was done in the face of ridicule, conspiracy, and threats of violence, but “the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days” (Neh. 6:15). The forty-nine-year period thus encompasses the whole work of restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah and the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, who stirred the people to finish the house of the Lord.

I should acknowledge that some faithful interpreters begin the count at an earlier decree of the same king, given to Ezra, and that they arrive at slightly different calendar dates for the later events. I do not think that my reading of the prophecy stands or falls on this question. The point on which all parties agree is the one that matters: Gabriel’s starting point is a word of command that sets the rebuilding of Jerusalem in motion, and the starting point is found in the age of Persia, not in some age yet to come.

Here is a pastoral encouragement. The city rose “in a troubled time.” God did not wait for peaceful conditions before he began to build, and

he does not do so now. His Church has always been built in troubled times, with a trowel in one hand and a weapon in the other, as Nehemiah's workmen were. If you are labouring for the Lord in a difficult season, take heart. The prophet Zechariah gave the builders of that day the secret of their success: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). The troubled time is the very setting in which the Lord has promised to build.

B. The Sixty-Two Weeks: Sixty-Two Heptads (434 Years)

After the initial seven weeks, sixty-two additional weeks were to pass before "an anointed one, a prince" would come (Dan. 9:25). This extended period of 434 years covers the silent centuries between the close of the Old Testament canon and the appearance of Christ. By the *canon* I mean the collection of books that God has given to his people as the standard of faith. During these centuries Jerusalem would be inhabited but under constant threat from the surrounding nations, as the angel had said: "it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time" (Dan. 9:25).

1. The Silent Centuries

After Malachi no prophet's voice was heard in Israel for a long season. The people returned to the land, rebuilt the temple, and resumed the sacrifices, but they lived under the shadow of one great power after another. There was no king of David's line on the throne, and the glory of the earlier days seemed a distant memory. Yet the silence was not emptiness. God was preparing the world for the coming of his Son, and he was working through the movements of empires, languages, roads, and synagogues to do it. The last page of the Old Testament ends with a promise of coming: "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts" (Mal. 3:1). The silence

was a silence of waiting, and the sixty-two weeks were the measure of the wait.

2. The Shadow of Antiochus

The 434 years of the second period encompassed the times of Antiochus Epiphanes, the Seleucid ruler who desecrated the Jerusalem temple in 167 BC. The *Seleucids* were the Greek-speaking dynasty that held Syria after the death of Alexander the Great. The atrocities of Antiochus are described in Daniel 11, where the angel foretells his actions: “Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate” (Dan. 11:31). The faithful remnant of that day, who suffered and resisted, are an example to every generation that has been pressed to compromise.

3. The Fullness of Time

The era of Roman domination followed, and under it Christ was born. The sixty-two weeks thus bring us to the doorstep of the New Testament, to the Anointed One who is Christ the Lord. The angel announced to the shepherds, “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). Paul looked back on the same moment and called it the fullness of time: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law” (Gal. 4:4). Our Lord began his public preaching with a proclamation that would have startled any student of Daniel: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). The time was fulfilled because the weeks had run their appointed course to the coming of the Anointed One.

Do you see how the Lord keeps his appointments? The generations that lived through the silent centuries could not see the end from the beginning. They walked by faith in a promise whose hour had not yet come. We too live between promises given and promises yet to be completed, and the same God who kept every hour of Daniel’s calendar keeps ours.

C. The Final Week: One Heptad (7 Years)

The seventieth week is the most debated portion of the prophecy. I approach it with care, because my brothers who differ from me are sincere, and because the stakes are high.

1. The Gap That Is Not in the Text

Dispensational interpreters place the final week in the distant eschatological future. A *dispensation* is, in their system, one of the distinct ages in which God is said to deal with mankind on a different principle, and the system keeps Israel and the Church sharply apart. To make the seventieth week fit that scheme, they insert a gap of two thousand or more years between the sixty-ninth week and the seventieth. I contend, with the historic Reformed interpretation, that this gap is not present in the text and imposes a foreign grid upon Daniel's prophecy.

The language of the angel is of one decree: "Seventy weeks are decreed" (Dan. 9:24). It is a single, continuous period that is subdivided into seven, sixty-two, and one. No interval is announced, no parenthesis is marked, no hint is given that the clock stops for the age of the Church. A reader who came to Daniel 9 with no theory would conclude that the seventieth week follows the sixty-ninth as the sixty-ninth follows the sixty-eighth. The gap is not found by reading the text. It is brought to the text.

2. The Covenant Confirmed

The final week refers to the period of Christ's public ministry and the subsequent ministry of the apostles to the Jewish people. The angel says of the Anointed One: "And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week" (Dan. 9:27). Who makes this covenant? The nearest Person in the prophecy is the Anointed One of the previous verses, and the New Testament leaves us in no doubt about the covenant he made. On the night before he died, he took the cup and said, "for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28). The word "many" in the Lord's mouth is the word

of Daniel's angel. After his resurrection the gospel went out "to you first," as Peter told the men of Jerusalem: "God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness" (Acts 3:26). Paul followed the same order in his missionary labours, for the gospel is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). The strong covenant was confirmed to the many, first among the Jewish people, through the ministry of the Lord and then through the apostolic preaching that carried his work forward.

3. The Fulcrum of the Weeks

"For half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering" (Dan. 9:27). At the midpoint of the seven years, this was accomplished by Christ's death on the cross, which rendered the entire Levitical sacrificial system obsolete. The term *Levitical* refers to the offerings of the Law of Moses, which were administered by the priests of the tribe of Levi. The letter to the Hebrews explains why that system could not stand once the Son had died: "For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near" (Heb. 10:1). The shadow gave way to the substance, as Paul says of the Old Testament ordinances: "These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ" (Col. 2:17). The writer to the Hebrews concludes: "And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10).

When the Lord said from the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30), he was announcing more than the end of his own suffering. He was declaring that the sacrifices of centuries had reached their goal. The cross is the fulcrum of the seventy weeks. Every earlier week leans toward it, and every later event is weighed by it. To place the seventieth week in a distant future, and to fill it with a rebuilt temple and renewed animal sacrifices, is to ask the altar to receive again what Christ has already finished.

Let me turn this toward the heart. If the Lord has finished the work, then there is nothing left for you to add. The anxious believer who is trying to earn his standing with God through a thousand little sacrifices of his own will find no comfort in a new temple. He will find rest only in the One who “offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins” (Heb. 10:12). Come to him, and rest.

Reflection Questions — Chapter 1

1. Why is it significant that Daniel’s prophecy of the seventy weeks was given in response to earnest prayer and confession? What does this teach us about God’s relationship between the prayers of his people and the unfolding of his redemptive purposes?
2. How should a proper understanding of Daniel’s seventy weeks affect the way your church community reads and preaches the prophetic portions of Scripture, both Old Testament prophecy and the book of Revelation?
3. In what ways does knowing that the cross is the fulcrum of all biblical prophecy strengthen your confidence in the sovereignty of God over history? How does this truth shape the way you face uncertainty in your personal life?

CHAPTER 2

The Threefold Purpose of the Seventy Weeks

“Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.”

— Daniel 9:24

Daniel 9:24 specifies six purposes for which the seventy weeks were decreed. These six purposes may be organized into two triads, three negative and three positive, and together they describe with remarkable comprehensiveness the totality of what Christ accomplished in his atoning work. Every one of these purposes was fulfilled in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and in the extension of that ministry through his apostles.

Notice first that the verse speaks of what God will do, not of what man will achieve. The six infinitives that follow the decree, to finish, to put an end, to atone, to bring in, to seal, and to anoint, have no human subject. No generation of Israel was told to accomplish them by obedience, by reform, or by political achievement. The weeks were “decreed,” and the Decreeer himself would bring about every result. That is the grammar of grace, and it is the grammar of the whole Bible.

Notice also how large these purposes are. The prayer of Daniel was for the restoration of a city, but the answer of Gabriel reaches to sin, righteousness, prophecy, and the temple of God. The Lord often answers the small prayer of his servant with a great purpose of his own. He heard Daniel’s plea for Jerusalem and replied with the redemption of the world. This should teach us to pray without fear that we ask too much. We cannot ask for more than the cross has already secured.

Let us examine the six purposes together, the first three in Section A, and the second three in Section B.

A. The Threefold Negative Purpose

The first three purposes of Daniel 9:24 are negative in character. They describe what the seventy weeks would bring to an end. Each of them looks toward the removal of something that stands between a holy God and his people.

1. To Finish the Transgression

To “finish the transgression” refers to the culminating act of Israel’s sin in the rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah. The Lord himself said as much to the scribes and Pharisees: “Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers” (Matt. 23:32). Generation after generation had stoned the prophets and resisted the Spirit, and now the measure of that long rebellion was to be filled. Peter put it plainly on the day of Pentecost: “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23).

Stephen made the same charge before the council, and it cost him his life: “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered” (Acts 7:51–52). The long record of resistance, from the wilderness to the prophets, had one final act to come. I would not have the reader point a finger at anyone else, for every sinner has a share in that deed, and it was for our sins that he died.

Sin reached its fullest and most terrible expression in the killing of the Son of God. In that act the world did what sin had always wished to do, which is to be rid of God. And in that same act, according to the “definite plan and foreknowledge of God,” the redemption of sinners was secured. I do not understand how the wickedness of men and the sovereign purpose of God can both be present in a single event, but I know that Scripture teaches both, and I know that the cross is where they

meet. The transgression was finished there, not because men repented, but because God turned their worst deed into his greatest mercy.

2. To Put an End to Sin

To “put an end to sin” (or, in some ancient readings and translations, “to seal up sin”) is the forensic act of Christ’s atonement. The word *forensic* means that it concerns the court of God, where guilt is judged and a verdict is given. The idea is the covering and judicial dealing with sin’s guilt, so that it is sealed up, like a document that is closed and no longer open to the accuser. The letter to the Hebrews makes this the centrepiece of its argument. The Levitical sacrifices could never finally deal with sin because “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:4). But Christ’s sacrifice was of a different order entirely: “he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb. 9:26).

There is a verdict to which the believer may point. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). The word “now” is the word of a settled court. Sin has been sealed up, and the charge has been closed, because the penalty was borne by another.

This was the sacrifice of the eternal Son, which was, as the older theologians put it, “sufficient for all and efficient for the elect.” Its worth is infinite, because of who offered it, and therefore no sinner who comes to him will find that the atonement is too small. Its application is particular, because the Father gave a people to the Son, and every one of them will be brought to faith. These two truths are not enemies. They stand side by side in Scripture, and they sing together in the heart of a believer who knows that his sin has been put away.

Our Lord described the same particular application when he said, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (John 6:37). The Father’s gift to the Son is certain, and the welcome of the Son to every comer is free.

3. To Atonement for Iniquity

To “atone for iniquity” (or “to make reconciliation for iniquity”) is the positive dimension of the same act. It is the *propitiation* of divine wrath, which is to say the turning away of God’s righteous anger against sin by the offering of a substitute, and the restoration of the broken relationship between God and his people. Paul wrote that God “put forward” Christ “as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith” (Rom. 3:25). And he declared the result in a sentence that has comforted countless sinners: “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Cor. 5:19).

The Hebrew word behind “atone” belongs to the vocabulary of the Day of Atonement, the day on which the high priest entered the Most Holy Place with blood. The angel is saying that the work of that day, repeated year after year without finality, would be accomplished once for all by the Messiah. All three negative purposes converge on the cross of Christ. There the transgression was finished, sin was sealed up, and iniquity was atoned for. If you are weighed down with a sin that you cannot forget, bring it to the cross. It has already been dealt with there, by the One who was appointed to deal with it.

John states the breadth of this work in a verse that every Reformed pastor must be prepared to handle with honesty: “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). I hold, with the older theologians, that the atonement is sufficient in its worth for the whole world and that it is applied to those whom the Father has given to the Son. These two thoughts do not conflict. They describe two sides of one gift: its worth, which is without limit, and its saving application, which is sure.

Take these three purposes together and you have the heart of the gospel as Peter states it: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Pet. 2:24). The transgression, the sin, and the iniquity are not ignored by God, and they are not cancelled by a word. They are borne. The Anointed One who was cut off carried them away.

This is why the Christian does not look at the cross as a defeat to be explained but as the victory that Gabriel announced.

B. The Threefold Positive Purpose

The second triad is positive. It describes what the seventy weeks would bring in. The first triad cleared the ground, and the second builds on it. Where the first speaks of removal, the second speaks of arrival: righteousness, fulfilment, and the presence of God.

1. To Bring in Everlasting Righteousness

To “bring in everlasting righteousness” is the *imputation* of Christ’s righteousness to the sinner who believes. To impute is to credit to someone’s account. In *justification*, God declares the believing sinner to be righteous before him, not because of anything done by the sinner, but on the basis of Christ’s obedience. Paul speaks of “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (Rom. 3:22), and he states the exchange at the heart of the gospel: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21).

This righteousness is “everlasting” because it is grounded not in human effort but in the immutable righteousness of the Son of God. A righteousness that I had built up by my own labour would be as fragile as I am. A righteousness that has been credited to me by God, on the strength of the finished work of his Son, cannot be lost, because it does not depend on me. That is why the believer can stand in the judgment with confidence. The verdict has already been spoken, and it was spoken on the basis of another’s merit.

Paul saw the truth in his own history. He had once counted his obedience to the law as gain, but he came to long “to be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Phil. 3:9). The righteousness that was promised in

Daniel is the righteousness that Paul received on the road to Damascus, and it is the same righteousness that is offered to you.

2. To Seal Both Vision and Prophet

To “seal both vision and prophet” is to bring to their intended close the whole prophetic tradition of the Old Testament. To seal is to authenticate and to complete, as a king seals a decree to show that it is his and that it is finished. Christ is the “yes” to all God’s promises: “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory” (2 Cor. 1:20). When he came, he did not abolish the prophets but fulfilled them: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt. 5:17).

The entire Old Testament prophetic canon was a forward-pointing arrow, and Christ is the target at which every arrow was aimed. On the road to Emmaus, the risen Lord taught this to two confused disciples: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). He had told the religious leaders of Jerusalem the same thing: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (John 5:39). The prophet who reads Isaiah without seeing Christ has not yet understood Isaiah. The pastor who preaches the Old Testament without the Anointed One has left the target and kept only the arrow.

The letter to the Hebrews begins with the same thought: “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb. 1:1–2). The prophets were many, and the Son is one. The prophets pointed, and the Son arrived. To seal the vision and the prophet is to say that the redemptive word of the prophets has reached its goal in a Person, and that we look for nothing in its place.

3. To Anoint a Most Holy Place

To “anoint a most holy place” most naturally refers to the consecration of the new temple, the body of Christ and, by extension, the Church. The apostle asks the Corinthians, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16). He says of the individual believer, “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God” (1 Cor. 6:19). And he describes the Church as a building under construction: “in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Eph. 2:21–22).

The Holy Spirit’s anointing of Jesus at his baptism and the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit upon the Church are the fulfilment of this final purpose. At the Jordan, “the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:16–17). At Pentecost, Peter proclaimed of the risen and exalted Christ: “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing” (Acts 2:33). The anointing that was once localized in the Jerusalem temple has now been poured out upon the living community of the redeemed.

Even in the days of his flesh, the Lord had spoken of himself in the language of the temple. When the authorities asked him for a sign, he answered, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). The evangelist adds, “But he was speaking about the temple of his body” (John 2:21). The true Most Holy Place was never a room of stone. It was the Son of God, in whom God had come to dwell among men, and it is in union with him that the Church is built up as a house for the Spirit.

The six purposes, then, form a single harmonious work. The transgression is finished, sin is sealed, and iniquity is atoned for, and so a righteousness that never fails is brought in, the prophets find their goal,

and God makes his dwelling among his people by the Spirit. This is the gospel in its fullness, and Daniel's angel announced it more than five centuries before Bethlehem. Let us give thanks to the Father who decreed it, to the Son who accomplished it, and to the Holy Spirit who applies it to every heart that believes.

Reflection Questions — Chapter 2

1. How do the six purposes of Daniel 9:24 provide a comprehensive summary of what Christ accomplished in his atoning work? Which of these six purposes is most personally meaningful to you, and why?
2. How does the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophetic tradition in Christ shape the way your community reads and preaches from the Old Testament? Are there passages that you tend to read without seeing their Christ-centred fulfilment?
3. The prophecy promises “everlasting righteousness.” How does the certainty of this righteousness, grounded not in your effort but in Christ's, change the way you approach your failures and shortcomings before God today?

CHAPTER 3

The People in Particular

“Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city.”

— Daniel 9:24a

The seventy-week prophecy is addressed to “your people,” Daniel’s people, the nation of Israel, and to “your holy city,” Jerusalem. This particularity is not incidental. Redemptive history unfolds through the particularities of the covenant people and the covenant city, and the seventy weeks of Daniel trace the arc of God’s redemptive purposes through specific historical agents. God did not save the world in the abstract. He chose a man called Abraham, a nation descended from him, a city on a hill, and a house of David, and through them he brought forth the Saviour of the world.

The pattern begins with Abraham. The Lord said to him, “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing,” and he added the promise that carries the whole plan: “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:2–3). Notice the order. The blessing of all the families flows through one family. The nations were not forgotten in the choice of Israel. They were the reason for it. When Gabriel speaks of “your people,” then, he speaks of a people chosen for the sake of the world.

We should not be embarrassed by this particularity, as if a God of all nations ought to deal with all nations in the same way at the same time. It is the way he has chosen to work, and it is a mercy to us. Because the Lord bound himself to a particular people with a particular promise, we can trace his faithfulness through names, dates, places, and events. We can read about Daniel’s prayer and know that it happened in a real year, in a real city of exile, to a real man. The gospel is not a philosophy. It is a history, and the seventy weeks are part of the record.

Daniel himself spoke in the same particular way. In the very prayer that preceded the prophecy, he was “confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the LORD my God for the holy hill of my God” (Dan. 9:20). The people of his prayer and the people of the prophecy are the same. Gabriel’s answer meets Daniel exactly where he stands. We may add that the apostle Paul warns us against a careless reading of the word “Israel” in the Scriptures: “For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel” (Rom. 9:6). In this chapter I ask who the people and the city of the prophecy are, what became of them in the weeks that were decreed, and what that history teaches the Church.

A. The Gentile Empires and Jerusalem

Among the peoples involved in the seventy-week prophecy, Daniel explicitly mentions the empires that would restore and later destroy Jerusalem. Three of them stand out in the history of the weeks: Persia, which restored the city, Greece in its Seleucid form, which profaned the temple, and Rome, which destroyed both temple and city.

1. Persia: The Empire That Restored

The restoration began with a fulfilled prophecy. “In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing” (Ezra 1:1). The same Jeremiah who foretold seventy years of exile foretold the end of it, and the Lord moved the spirit of a pagan king to make his word good. Gabriel’s count begins with the later word that sent Nehemiah to rebuild the walls, but it rests on the same truth, that the nations are in the hand of God.

The word to restore and build Jerusalem went out from a Gentile throne. This is one of the quiet wonders of the prophecy. The Lord who is King over all kings moved the heart of Artaxerxes to grant Nehemiah’s request, and, as Nehemiah testified, “the king granted me what I asked,

for the good hand of my God was upon me” (Neh. 2:8). The Gentile empire served the purpose of the covenant God. It did not know it, but it served. This should comfort us in every age when the rulers of this world appear to hold the destiny of the Church in their hands. Scripture says, “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will” (Prov. 21:1), and the decree that begins the building of Zion may come from the palace of a pagan king.

2. Antiochus: The Desolation That Prefigured

Before the Romans, the prophecy’s reference to the “abomination of desolation” (cf. Matt. 24:15) was partially fulfilled in the desecration of the Jerusalem temple by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 167 BC. By “abomination of desolation” I mean a defilement of the holy place so terrible that it leaves the sanctuary empty of God’s worship. The angel had spoken of it in these words: “And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator” (Dan. 9:27). This earlier desolation was a prefigurement, a *type*, of the greater desolation to come under Titus. A type is an event, a person, or an institution in the Old Testament that foreshadows a greater fulfilment in Christ and his kingdom. The history of the people and the city thus involves multiple overlapping layers of prophetic fulfilment, and this is a point to which I shall return in Chapter 4.

The same angel who foretold the desolation foretold the faithful. “But the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action” (Dan. 11:32). The generation that endured Antiochus did not know the end of its trial, but it knew its God, and that knowledge was enough. There is no better preparation for any dark hour than to know the God who has numbered the weeks.

3. Rome: The People of the Prince Who Is to Come

The prophecy anticipates “the people of the prince who is to come” who “shall destroy the city and the sanctuary” (Dan. 9:26). I take this to be the Roman armies under Titus, who destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70, an

event that Jesus himself had explicitly predicted. As the disciples admired the temple, he said, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down” (Matt. 24:2). As he drew near to the city and wept over it, he said that its enemies would “hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation” (Luke 19:43–44).

“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ... for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.”

— Luke 21:20, 22

The Lord did not leave his own people without instruction for that day. “Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let those who are out in the country not enter it” (Luke 21:21). The disciples who believed his word were warned to leave, and the destruction fell upon those who clung to the city and the temple as to a guarantee of safety. The lesson is old, and it is as fresh as this morning: a holy place cannot save those who have refused the Holy One.

The words are terrible. They show us that the destruction of Jerusalem was not an accident of imperial politics. It was a judgment foretold by Daniel and confirmed by Christ, and it fell on a city that “did not know the time of [its] visitation.” Let the Church take this seriously. The Lord is patient, but he is not mocked, and a people who have been given great light are accountable for it.

B. The Jews and Their Covenant Responsibility

Paul never spoke of his own people with contempt. He grieved for them, and he listed the gifts that God had given them: “They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and

from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen” (Rom. 9:4–5). Every Christian owes a debt to this people, for through them came the Scriptures, the apostles, and the Saviour. Whatever we say about their rejection of the Messiah must be said with the sorrow of the apostle and not with the pride of an outsider.

The Jewish people are the primary recipients of the seventy-week prophecy. The extended period of 490 years was given to them as a time of probation, an extended opportunity for repentance and reformation before the coming of the Anointed One. It was a gift of patience. The Lord did not hasten the day of reckoning, and he sent prophet after prophet and, in the fullness of time, his own Son. The tragedy of the first century is that the covenant people, as a whole, rejected their Messiah when he came. John wrote, “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (John 1:11). The Lord lamented over the city, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! See, your house is left to you desolate” (Matt. 23:37–38). And he warned the leaders of the nation, “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits” (Matt. 21:43).

The prophet Isaiah had long ago described the patience of God with this people in the figure of a vineyard. The Lord asked, “What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?” (Isa. 5:4). The seventy weeks are the final chapter of that parable. God had sent the prophets, restored the city, and raised up the walls, and at the end he sent his own Son. The question of Isaiah was answered in the history of Jerusalem.

Yet the rejection of the Messiah by the majority of Israel did not nullify God’s covenant faithfulness. Paul addresses this in Romans 9–11, arguing that God has not rejected his people. He asks the question that every honest reader of the New Testament must ask: “I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!” (Rom. 11:1). He answers from the evidence of his own life, since he himself is an Israelite, and from the

pattern of Scripture: “So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace” (Rom. 11:5). The *remnant* is the faithful portion of a people that God preserves in every age of apostasy, so that his promise does not fail.

The divine purpose reaches far beyond the remnant, for through the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles God is at work to provoke Israel to jealousy: “So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous” (Rom. 11:11). Those who believe, Jew or Gentile, are brought into one family in Christ: “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:29). Peter can therefore speak to a largely Gentile church in the language once used of Israel at Sinai: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

The seventy weeks, properly understood, are not the end of God’s purposes for Israel but the decisive turning point in the outworking of those purposes. The Anointed One came to his own people first, and a multitude of the Jewish people, beginning with the apostles themselves, received him. The door was then opened wide to the nations. I do not know all that the Lord will yet do among the children of Abraham according to the flesh, and I will not speculate beyond what he has written. I know that the gates of the kingdom are open to them as to everyone else, and that the God who has not cast off his people will gather in all whom he has chosen.

C. The Holy City and the City That Is Above

The prophecy speaks of “your holy city,” and the question of what became of that city is as important as the question of what became of the people. The earthly Jerusalem was the centre of the old covenant worship, the place where the temple stood and the sacrifices were offered. When the Romans razed it, the last visible structure of the

Levitical system was removed. The Lord had told the Samaritan woman beforehand, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father” (John 4:21), and the destruction of the temple sealed what he had said.

But the holy city did not vanish from redemptive history. It was transformed. The apostle Paul contrasts the present Jerusalem with another: “But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother” (Gal. 4:26). The writer to the Hebrews declares to the new covenant people, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering” (Heb. 12:22). And John, at the end of the Bible, sees the final form of the city: “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2).

John adds a detail that would have startled any reader of Daniel: “And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (Rev. 21:22). The holy city of the prophecy has no temple of stone at its end, because everything the temple signified has been gathered into the Lamb.

Here is the answer to the particularity with which this chapter began. The people and the city of Daniel’s prophecy, chosen and addressed in a specific time and place, become the doorway to a people and a city that include every tribe and tongue. The Lord never abandoned his particular promises. He fulfilled them, and in fulfilling them he enlarged them beyond anything Daniel could have imagined. Let us then rejoice that the God who spoke to one man in Babylon has spoken to us, and that the city to which we are travelling is the city that he himself has built.

Reflection Questions — Chapter 3

1. How does the particularity of God’s purposes, his specific dealings with Israel and Jerusalem, give you confidence in his faithfulness to his specific promises to you in the new covenant? What does it mean

that God's purposes are always achieved through particular people, places, and times?

2. How does your church community engage with the Old Testament history of Israel and with the continuing significance of the Jewish people in God's redemptive purposes? What does Romans 9–11 teach us about how the Church should relate to Israel?
3. The Jewish people's rejection of Messiah was, in God's sovereignty, the occasion of salvation for the Gentiles (Rom. 11:11). How does this great reversal shape your understanding of how God works through apparent tragedy and failure?

CHAPTER 4

The Prophecy Overlapping and Progressively Fulfilled

“And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering.”

— Daniel 9:27a

The interpretive key to Daniel 9:24–27 is the recognition that biblical prophecy, like the book of Revelation with its seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls, unfolds in overlapping parallel movements rather than in a single linear sequence. The seventy weeks are not three disconnected historical episodes separated by millennia. They are three interrelated phases of a single, divinely orchestrated movement toward Christ and his kingdom. I call this *progressive parallel fulfillment*: parallel, because the same great events are seen again and again from different angles, and progressive, because each viewing is fuller and clearer than the one before it.

Anyone who has studied the book of Revelation knows how this works. John writes, “Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, ‘Come!’” (Rev. 6:1). Later he writes, “Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them” (Rev. 8:2). And near the end of the series: “Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, ‘Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God’” (Rev. 16:1). Seals, trumpets, and bowls do not describe three consecutive stretches of history. They are three views of the one era between the first and second comings of Christ, each reaching nearer to the end. The Lord taught Daniel to see in the same manner. In Daniel 2 the kingdoms are seen as a statue, and in Daniel 7 as beasts, and both visions end in the same way: “the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed” (Dan. 2:44),

and “to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him” (Dan. 7:14).

If this is how Scripture teaches, then we should expect the seventy weeks to follow the same pattern. The weeks are not a calendar for the curious but a portrait of Christ’s work in history, and a portrait may be viewed from several sides without ceasing to be a single portrait. In this chapter I follow the three sections that the prophecy itself provides, and in a closing section I show why this reading is a gift to the preacher and to the Church.

A. From Nehemiah to the Anointed One

The first sixty-nine weeks (seven plus sixty-two) run from the decree to restore Jerusalem to the coming of the Anointed One. This is calculated as 483 years (sixty-nine times seven) from the decree of Artaxerxes in 445 BC to the public ministry of Christ, a calculation that various scholars have worked out with remarkable precision, depending on the calendar system employed. Some use the solar year, others the prophetic year of twelve months of thirty days, and they reach slightly different dates. I do not wish to claim more precision than the text provides. What I wish to claim is the main point, that the weeks reach their goal in the age of the Messiah’s coming, and that no other candidate in history has fitted the description.

This is not a novelty of my own. The commentators of the Reformed tradition, from Calvin in the sixteenth century to Edward J. Young in the twentieth, have read the seventy weeks as a prophecy that finds its goal in the person and work of Christ, though they differ from one another over the details of the calendar. The point on which they agree is the point on which I rest: the Anointed One of Daniel 9:25 is Jesus of Nazareth.

During this period, the prophecy anticipates that “an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing” (Dan. 9:26). It is a clear prediction of the crucifixion of Christ, rejected by his own people and put to death by the Roman authorities. Isaiah had prepared the way for the language:

“who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?” (Isa. 53:8). The phrase “shall have nothing” tells us of the depth of the humiliation. The Anointed One would receive no throne in this age, no honour from the leaders of his people, and no earthly possession, and he would die as one forsaken.

The prophecy says that the Anointed One would “have nothing,” and the Gospels show us how that was lived out. “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Matt. 8:20). Paul sings of the same descent: “but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:7). The King who was promised came as one who owned nothing, and he went to the cross as one who was given nothing, that we might receive everything.

The “cutting off” is not an accident of history. It is the appointed moment at the heart of the seventy-week prophecy, the hinge upon which all of God’s redemptive purposes turn. The early church understood this and prayed accordingly: “for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place” (Acts 4:27–28). Notice that the very word of Daniel, “anointed,” appears in their prayer. They saw the Messiah’s death where Daniel had seen it, as the planned centre of the plan of God.

B. The Midpoint of the Final Week: Christ’s Crucifixion

“For half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering” (Dan. 9:27). This is the centre of the entire seventy-week prophecy. Christ’s death at the midpoint of the final seven years brought to an end, in principle and in fact, the entire Levitical sacrificial system. “But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:12). The temple curtain was torn in two, and Matthew records it with a solemn “behold”: “And behold, the

curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom” (Matt. 27:51). It was a dramatic divine declaration that the old order of access to God through sacrifice had been superseded by the new and living way through Christ. The writer to the Hebrews draws the conclusion: “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh” (Heb. 10:19–20).

The strong covenant was sealed on the third day as surely as on the cross. Paul says of the Lord that he “was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). A covenant confirmed with many requires a living Mediator, and the One who put an end to sacrifice by his death confirmed the covenant by rising from the dead.

A reader may object that sacrifices were still offered in the temple for some forty years after the cross. This does not contradict the prophecy. A sacrifice that God no longer accepts is not a sacrifice in his sight at all. The prophets had said as much long before the cross, when the worship of Israel had become a form without a heart: “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats” (Isa. 1:11). When the curtain was torn, the offerings that continued were an echo with no voice behind it.

The remainder of the final week, the second half of the seven years following the crucifixion, is identified with the apostolic ministry to the Jewish people, of which the apostle Paul’s preaching in the synagogues is the best-known example. Before his definitive turn to the Gentiles, Paul laboured to bring the word first to his own people. At Antioch of Pisidia, he and Barnabas told the Jews, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46). At Corinth, when the Jews opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles” (Acts 18:6). And at Rome, at the close of the book of Acts, he declared, “Therefore

let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen” (Acts 28:28).

I do not insist that every year of the seven can be fitted to a date in the Gospels and Acts with the same confidence. Chronologists differ, and the Scriptures do not give us a table. What I insist on is the shape of the prophecy: a covenant confirmed with many, a sacrifice ended at the midpoint, and a remaining period in which the gospel is offered first to the Jew and then to the Gentile.

Paul’s declaration, “we are turning to the Gentiles,” marks the transition from the final week’s focus on Israel to the broader Gentile mission that characterizes the present age. The seventy weeks thus conclude not with a distant future event but with the apostolic preaching that launched the Church into the world. The Anointed One, cut off in the midst of the week, did not leave his people without a witness. He sent his apostles first to his own people, and when the greater part of that people had refused, he sent them on to the nations. The covenant was confirmed with the many, and the many came from every nation.

C. The Final Abomination and the End

The “abomination of desolation” spoken of by Daniel and cited by Jesus in Matthew 24:15 found its fulfilment in the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in AD 70. Luke gives us the explanation in the words that our Lord used: “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near” (Luke 21:20). The armies surrounding Jerusalem, which Jesus identifies with Daniel’s desolating sacrilege, are the “one who makes desolate” of Daniel 9:27. This event brought the sacrificial system to a definitive, historical end. With the temple destroyed, no further sacrifices were possible. The writer to the Hebrews had already said that the first covenant was passing away: “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (Heb. 8:13).

It may be asked how the destruction of AD 70 can belong to a prophecy whose seventy weeks have already run their course. The answer

lies in the pattern of progressive parallel fulfilment. The cross is the midpoint of the final week, but the consequences of the cross unfold in widening circles: the apostolic preaching, the judgment on the city and temple that had rejected the Anointed One, and, finally, the consummation of the age. Daniel 9:26–27 describes both the cutting off of the Messiah and the desolation that follows, and the angel speaks of “the decreed end” that is “poured out on the desolator” (Dan. 9:27). These are one story seen in successive stages, not separate stories separated by thousands of years.

The progressive, overlapping pattern of fulfilment does not reduce the gravity of these events. Rather, it reveals the deep coherence of God’s redemptive plan. Each phase of the seventy weeks points forward to the next, and all of them point forward to the final consummation when Christ returns in glory: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne” (Matt. 25:31). The darkness that accompanied these prophetic fulfilments, the desecration under Antiochus, the crucifixion of Christ, and the destruction of Jerusalem, is always enveloped in the larger light of God’s sovereign and gracious purpose.

Our Lord gave his disciples a posture for such days: “Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:28). The believer who understands the seventy weeks does not cower at the news. He lifts his head, because he knows who has numbered the weeks.

D. Reading All Prophecy in the Light of the Cross

I said at the beginning that Daniel 9:24–27 is the key to all prophecy. I conclude this chapter by showing what that means for the preacher and for the believer. The apostle John was told by the angel, “Worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10). If Jesus Christ is the substance of prophecy, then every prophecy must be read with him at the centre. The seventy weeks give us the pattern. They begin with a word of restoration, they move toward the Anointed One, they

find their centre in his death, and they extend into the proclamation of his gospel and the judgment of his enemies.

When we turn to the Lord's teaching on the Mount of Olives in Matthew 24–25 and Luke 21, to the Thessalonian letters, to Peter and Jude, and to the visions of Revelation 2–22, we carry this pattern in our hands. We do not expect to find a calendar of unrelated crises, with the Church lifted out of the way. We expect to find the same Lord, the same cross, the same judgment on those who reject him, and the same victory of his people. This reading frees the preacher from the tyranny of headlines. It does not make him a prophet of the next political crisis. It makes him a witness to the Anointed One who has already come, who is reigning now, and who will come again.

The preacher who has learned this pattern will not use Daniel to frighten his people or to feed their curiosity about the calendar. He will use it to show them Christ. He will tell them that the God who counted the weeks and kept every appointment is the God who has counted the hairs of their heads, and he will call them to worship, to obedience, and to hope. This is what prophecy is for. A sermon on the seventy weeks that does not end at the cross has not yet reached the end of the text.

There is also a lesson here for the reader who is troubled by the speed of events. The apostles did not see the whole of what we now see. They preached, suffered, and wrote, and the pattern of the weeks was being completed around them without a chart to explain it. We have the advantage of seeing it from the other side. Where they walked by faith, we may walk by faith with the added assurance of history.

Here is the comfort of it for every believer. Daniel's weeks assure us that history is not a random succession of disasters. It is a story, and the Author has written the centre of the story with his own blood. The darkness of any season cannot overturn the purpose of the One who numbered the weeks. Let us therefore trust him, work faithfully, and wait.

Reflection Questions — Chapter 4

1. How does the progressive, overlapping fulfilment of Daniel's seventy-week prophecy in the ministry of Christ and the apostolic era shape your understanding of how God works in history? What does this teach you about trusting the apparent silence of God in difficult seasons of your own life?
2. Christ's death at the midpoint of the final week brought to an end the entire Levitical sacrificial system. How does this finality of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice shape the worship and sacramental life of your church community?
3. The Seventy Weeks of Daniel ultimately point to Christ as their fulfilment and consummation. In what areas of your life do you most need to be reminded that Christ has done everything necessary, and that your calling is to trust, not to add to, what he has accomplished?

Conclusion

The Seventy Weeks of Daniel is not an obscure curiosity of Old Testament prophecy. It is a window into the very heart of God's redemptive purposes, a prophecy that gathers up six centuries of covenant history, focuses them on the person and work of Jesus Christ, and then sends them outward into the world through the preaching of the gospel.

The prophecy's threefold purpose, in its two triads, was accomplished in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. The transgression was finished at the cross, sin was sealed up, and iniquity was atoned for. An everlasting righteousness was brought in for all who believe, the vision and the prophet were sealed in the One to whom they pointed, and a most holy place was anointed, the living temple of the Church in which the Spirit dwells. The darkness that attended the fulfilment of these weeks, the crucifixion and the destruction of Jerusalem, was not the defeat of God's purposes but their achievement.

I have argued in these pages that the weeks run as one continuous period from the word to rebuild Jerusalem to the Anointed One, through his cutting off in the midst of the final week, to the apostolic proclamation of the covenant to the many, and that the judgment on the city and the temple belongs to the overlapping fulfilment of the same prophecy. I have argued also that the clue to the interpretation of all prophecy lies here. If I have been faithful to the text, the reader will find that Matthew 24–25, the Thessalonian letters, and the book of Revelation have become, not harder, but plainer. If I have erred, I ask the reader to correct me from the Scriptures, as the Bereans did, who “received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11), and I will be grateful.

The God who decreed these seventy weeks is the same God who governs the hours of our own lives. He is sovereign over the rise and fall of empires, over the course of history, and over the smallest details of every believer's life. To study Daniel 9:24–27 is to stand at the control

room of history and to see that it is not chaos but cosmos, not accident but purpose, from the hand of the God who says of himself, “declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose’” (Isa. 46:10).

A last word to my fellow pastors and to every teacher of the Word. The church in our day is hungry for certainty and often fed on speculation. The seventy weeks give us a better food. They tell our people that the decisive events of history have already happened, that the cross stands at the centre of time, and that the Lord who died and rose is the Lord who will come again. The Bible closes with that hope on the lips of the Church: “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20). A people who pray in this way do not need a calendar. They need the Anointed One, and they have him.

Daniel prayed, and the heavens answered. May we, who live on the far side of the cross, pray as he did, read as he did, and worship as he did. To the Father who decreed the weeks, to the Son who fulfilled them, and to the Holy Spirit who applies them to us, be glory for ever.

Soli Deo gloria.

Personal Questions and Challenges

On Prophecy and Providence

1. How does a proper understanding of Daniel's Seventy Weeks, as already fulfilled in Christ and the apostolic era, protect you from the anxiety and speculation that often surrounds end-times discussions? How can you share this confidence with others in your church or family?
2. What does the precision of God's prophetic fulfilment, 490 years unfolding exactly as promised, teach you about his reliability in keeping his promises to you?
3. Daniel prayed before he received the prophecy. How does the example of Daniel's prayer life challenge and shape your own approach to Scripture and to God's revealed purposes for your life? What one change will you make to your daily time of prayer and reading this week?

On Christ as the Fulfilment

1. How does seeing Christ as the centre and fulfilment of Daniel's Seventy Weeks deepen your appreciation of the cross? In what ways does the Old Testament context make the significance of Christ's death more vivid?
2. In what areas of your life are you tempted to look for signs and wonders rather than resting in the finished work of Christ? How does the finality of the cross speak to those areas?
3. What one concrete step can you take this week to deepen your study of the Old Testament prophetic books in the light of their fulfilment in Christ?

Soli Deo gloria.

Glossary

Abomination of Desolation: A defilement of the holy place so terrible that it empties the sanctuary of true worship. Daniel foretold it, Antiochus Epiphanes prefigured it in 167 BC, and Jesus applied it to the coming destruction of Jerusalem.

Anointed One: The English rendering of the Hebrew word *Messiah*. It names the one set apart by God, with an anointing, for his saving work. In Daniel 9:25–26 it points to Jesus Christ.

Atonement: The work of Christ in dealing with sin by his sacrificial death, so that sinners may be reconciled to God.

Canon: The collection of books that God has given to his people as the standard of faith and life, which we receive as the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments.

Dispensationalism: A system of interpretation that divides history into distinct ages, keeps Israel and the Church sharply apart, and usually places the seventieth week of Daniel in the future, after a gap of many centuries.

Eschatology: The doctrine of the last things, including the return of Christ, the resurrection, the judgment, and the final state.

Gap Interpretation: The view that a long interval of time lies between the sixty-ninth week and the seventieth week of Daniel 9:24–27.

Heptad: A unit of seven. In Daniel 9:24 the “seventy weeks” are seventy heptads, understood as seventy sevens of years, or 490 years.

Hermeneutics: The principles and methods by which Scripture is interpreted.

Imputation: The crediting of Christ’s righteousness to the account of the believing sinner, who contributes nothing to it.

Justification: God's declaration that a sinner who trusts in Christ is righteous in his sight, on the basis of Christ's obedience and not the sinner's own works.

Levitical Sacrifices: The offerings of the Law of Moses, which were presented by the priests of the tribe of Levi and which pointed forward to the sacrifice of Christ.

Millennialism: Any view about the thousand years mentioned in the book of Revelation. The main views are premillennial, postmillennial, and amillennial, and they differ over when and how Christ's reign is related to that period.

Preterism: The view that much of the prophecy found in Matthew 24 and in the book of Revelation was fulfilled in the first century, especially in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Progressive Parallel Fulfilment: The reading of prophecy, used throughout this book, in which the same great events are seen again and again from different angles, each time more fully, so that the fulfilment overlaps and deepens instead of following a single straight line.

Propitiation: The turning away of God's righteous anger against sin, accomplished through the sacrificial death of Christ, who bore that anger in the place of sinners.

Remnant: The faithful portion of a people whom God preserves through times of widespread unbelief, so that his promises do not fail.

Sabbath Year: The seventh year, in which the Law of Moses commanded that the land be left to rest. Israel's neglect of this command lies behind the seventy years of exile.

Seleucids: The Greek-speaking dynasty that ruled Syria after the death of Alexander the Great and whose king Antiochus Epiphanes profaned the Jerusalem temple.

Type: A person, event, or institution in the Old Testament that foreshadows a greater fulfilment in Christ and his kingdom.

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About the Author

Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar is a Pastor Emeritus who holds the degrees of Th.B. (Bachelor of Theology), A.B. (Bachelor of Arts), and D.D. (Doctor of Divinity). He has devoted his life and ministry to the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the rigorous theological formation of God's people, and the equipping of pastoral leaders for faithful and effective ministry in church and society.

Pastor Bal served for many years as a pastor and theological educator, and has been a central figure in the work of Holistic Enhancement for Lay-leaders and Pastors (HELP, Inc.) — a parachurch ministry committed to equipping the whole people of God for faithful service across every sphere of life. His monthly theological lectures to the HELP, Inc. fellowship have addressed the most foundational questions of the Christian faith, and these studies — expanded, deepened, and formatted for print — have shaped the theological works he continues to write.

His theological formation reflects sustained engagement with the whole of the Reformed and evangelical tradition. Among those whose thought has most shaped his own are Augustine of Hippo, John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, Louis Berkhof, Benjamin B. Warfield, Oscar Cullmann, Herman Dooyeweerd, Karl Barth, Paul Jewett, Francis Schaeffer, R.C. Sproul, and Ravi Zacharias. He reads every theological question through the lens of the whole counsel of God, and has spent a lifetime teaching others to do the same.

The present work, *The Seventy Weeks of Daniel*, represents Pastor Bal's sustained engagement with Daniel 9:24–27, the prophecy that he holds to be the key to all biblical prophecy. Developed through years of preaching, teaching, and pastoral ministry, it follows the seventy weeks from the word to rebuild Jerusalem to the coming of the Anointed One, and it shows the reader how every purpose of the prophecy finds its fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

Other theological works by the author:

Spiritual Unity and Personal Diversity in Christ
Why God Did Decree and Allow Evil to Exist
What the Christian Church Should Be
The Reformed Theological Paradigm
The Holy Loving Triune Lord God
The Seven Loci of Dogmatics
Vital Words Related to Salvation
The Athanasian Creed Understood by Faith
Biblical Salvation: A Study in Soteriology
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Doctrines of Divine Grace Part II
Paul's Summary of His Message in the Ministry
Six Calvinistic Schools on Soteriology
The Seven Loci of Christian Theology
The Five Solas
The Thinking Process of the Christian Mind: Position, Practice, and Perspective
The Threefold Understanding of Salvation
Millennium in the Bible

He lives with his beloved wife, Estrella. He is the father of Dr. Ellazar and Zarelle Grace. He continues to preach, teach, write, and intercede for the reformation and renewal of the Church of Jesus Christ, until the day when faith gives way to sight and the knowledge that is now partial becomes the knowledge that is full.

Soli Deo gloria.