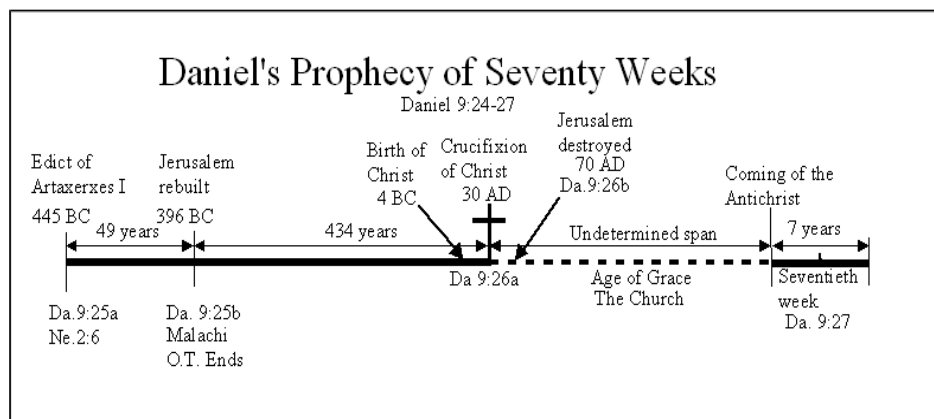


Newsletter December 2016

At the conclusion of last month's Newsletter, we had reached a point in our discussion of the last days in which the world was on the cusp of being forcibly ruled by an ungodly global government. We briefly stated that the world was about to enter into a very tumultuous seven-year period leading to the return of Christ at its conclusion. In this newsletter we shall begin to discuss that seven-year period in some detail. Events contained within that period are primarily found in three essential Bible prophecies. The major prophecy concerning the last days containing considerable detail is found in the book of Revelation. However, it is nearly impossible to properly place specific events of the book of Revelation into those seven years without first studying two other prophecies set forth earlier in Scripture. The first of these prophetic texts is found in Daniel Chapter 9, and the second is found within the Olivet Discourse of our Lord, which is recorded in Chapters 24 and 25 of the Gospel of Matthew.

In this discussion we shall focus upon the prophecy in the book of Daniel that introduces this seven year period. By the turn of the seventh century BC, Israel was a divided nation. The ten apostate tribes comprising the northern kingdom had already gone into Assyrian captivity in 722 BC leaving the southern kingdom of Judah, which also included the smaller half-tribe of Benjamin, on its own. Judah was already in a deep spiritual and political decline when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon first came against the city about 606 and captured it in 604. Although he did not destroy Jerusalem until around 587, he robbed the temple of many of its implements, and he carried away captive many of Judah's inhabitants to serve as slaves in Babylon. Within that first group of captives was an intelligent young man of about seventeen whose name was Daniel. Daniel was a very devout Jew, and a man of prayer. While in captivity, God shared many things concerning the future with him. The first half of the book of Daniel is historical, and the second half beginning with Chapter 7 is fully prophetic in style. Near the end of the historic section, Daniel tells of the fall of Babylon to Darius the Median (cf. Da. 5:31). who was later succeeded by Cyrus the Persian (cf. Da. 6:28). With this information as background, we shall now turn to Daniel's prophecy of seventy weeks beginning in Daniel 9:24, which is represented by a time-line in the figure below:



“Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy” (Da. 9:24). Every seventh year after entering their land, the Israelite was required by God to leave their land fallow; they could not sow or cultivate their fields, nor could they prune their vineyards (cf. Le.25:1-7) – they and their livestock survived by gleaning the uncultivated growth. **“And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years”** (Le.25:8; cf. De. 15:1-14). Daniel's prophecy initially speaks of the 70 years of the captivity of Judah in Babylon – each year of which corresponded to a sabbath year that Israel had transgressed over 490 (70x7) years by not allowing the land to rest as God had commanded: **“To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years”** (2Ch.36:21; cf. Je.25:11). Therefore, we find that each of the 70 weeks in Daniel's prophecy also

represents a *week of years* (i.e. seven years) based upon the seven-year frequency of a Sabbatical year.

God's prophets of old often predicted a nearby event, and the Holy Spirit used the fulfillment of that earlier event to authenticate another prophetic event that would take place much farther into the future. Therefore, many prophecies are seen to have multiple references – referring to more than one event, the first of which is a foreshadow of a later completion. The first prophetic aspect of Daniel's 70 weeks can be seen to represent a total of 490 years (i.e. 70×7), which began with an edict of Artaxerxes I, (i.e. Cyrus, king of Persia), issued around 445 B.C authorizing the release of captive Jews to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. As we read in the chronicles of the Jews, **“Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up”** (2Ch. 36:22,23). Accounts regarding the edict of Artaxerxes, their return, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and the completion of the Temple in 396 BC is recorded in the Old Testament books of Ezra and Nehemiah. As we observe on the left side of the time-line in the above figure, 49 years (7×7) were needed to rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem by the returning exiles.

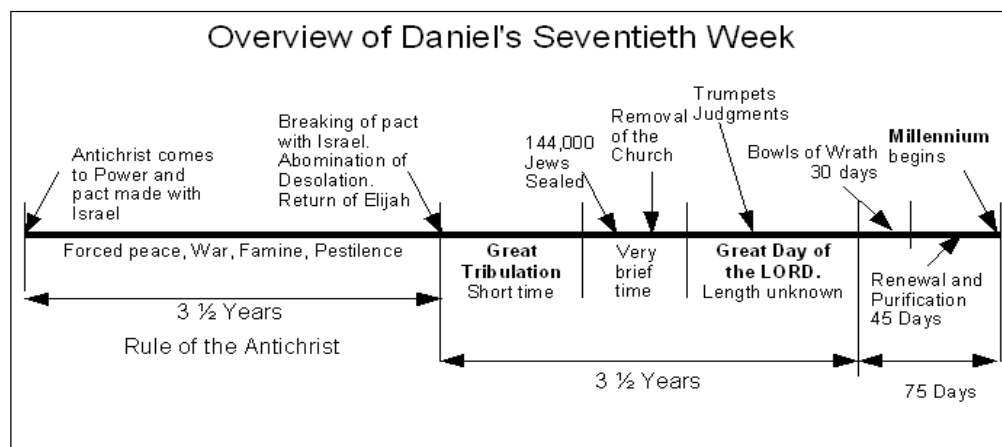
It is at this point in his prophecy that Daniel begins to speak of a far future time in which the long-expected Messiah would appear: **“Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself:”** (Da. 9:25, 26a). Referring to our time-line, we find that the end of the next 434 years (62×7), which followed the rebuilding of the Temple, closely coincides with the date of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in AD 30 as Jesus their Messiah was “cut off” (cf. Isaiah 53:8).

For a brief interval of one generation (about 40 years) following the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Jews including some professing Christians continued to worship in the Temple offering up animal sacrifices that no longer had any purpose or meaning inasmuch as Christ had been offered up once for all sins (cf. He.10:10), thus completely fulfilling the purpose of the ceremonial law of animal sacrifice. **“...and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined”** (Da. 9:26). In his epistle to the Hebrews, the author repeatedly implored Christians to cease from this now meaningless Temple practice, and to assemble themselves together within the body of Christ as this time drew near (cf. He.10:19-25). The first reference of a coming prince in Daniel's prophecy obviously refers to Titus who destroyed the city and the sanctuary in the first century. Titus Flavius Sabinus Vespasianus (AD 40-81), the ruthless son of the Roman Emperor Vespasian, was placed in charge of the military operation against the Jews in Judaea in AD 69. In AD 70, Jerusalem fell to his army after a prolonged siege. Titus' treatment of the surviving Jews was terribly brutal. He saw the Great Herodian Temple of Jerusalem demolished by his soldiers; such that not one stone remained upon another (cf. Mt.24:2). Only a portion of the wall outside the Temple proper remained standing, which still exists and is known today as the “Wailing Wall.” It has since become a religious artifact where prayers are offered up by Jewish residents of the city. As a result of the destruction of the Temple, the sacrificial system was forcibly discontinued, and the city of Jerusalem was made desolate.

This portion of Daniel's prophecy has been completely fulfilled in today's history. However, as can be clearly seen, only 69 of the 70 weeks for a total of 483 years of the prophecy have been accounted for during this time. As the Messiah (i.e. Jesus Christ) was cut off from the earth through his crucifixion we observe an obvious break in the flow of Daniel's prophecy taking place between verse 26 and verse 27 in which the second reference of Daniel's prophetic text then becomes evident. This break is indicated in the figure above by a dashed line representing a period of undetermined length, which precisely corresponds to the age of grace – the age of the Church – in which we presently live. That period is now nearly two thousand years long, and it is something that the Jew of Daniel's day could not possibly have foreseen or understood. For that reason, God had ordered Daniel to seal up this long-range aspect of his prophecy until the end times when men would be supplied with increased knowledge to comprehend it. (cf. Da. 9:24; 12:4).

The final week (i.e. seven years) of Daniel's prophecy is found in verse 27: **“And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week; and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate” (Da.9:27)**. From the greater perspective we as Christians have attained from events recorded in the New Testament, before and after the cross of Christ, we now understand that “the prince that shall come,” which initially referred to Titus, also refers to a satanically inspired ruler who is mentioned throughout the New Testament as the antichrist or the “man of sin” (cf. 2Th.2:3). He will destroy a future rebuilt Temple – thus once again putting an end to the religious offerings.

This seven-year period, which was shown at the right end of the previous time-line, is represented by an expanded time-line in the figure below. It begins on the left with the antichrist coming to power. He will make a covenant of peace with Israel for one week (i.e. seven years). Just before or during that time, Israel will rebuild their Temple and will erroneously return to the practice of blood rituals of the old sacrificial system. However, in the middle of that seven-year period the antichrist will suddenly order all offerings and animal sacrifices to cease – even as he further violates the covenant with Israel by desecrating the Temple with a technically enhanced idol.



The chronology represented in the figure above deviates at this point from commonly accepted teaching. Most Bible expositors have assumed that Jesus' reference to a “Great Tribulation Period” in his Olivet Discourse is seven years in length corresponding to the seventieth week of the prophecy of Daniel. No specific Scripture for that assumption exists; nevertheless, it is deeply embedded within modern dispensational teaching that originated in England around the year AD 1820 and was later standardized in America by the fundamentalist movement (cf. *CRC Book III*, page 369, 370). Dispensationalists characterize this entire seven-year period as a time of judgment in which God is venting his fierce wrath upon an unrepentant world.

In the expanded time-line above we show the “Great Tribulation” as a short time. This corresponds with the chronology found in Jesus' Olivet Discourse as it is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew wherein He spoke of a time of great tribulation. Jesus said, **“When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand)” (Mt. 24:15)**. Verses 16 through 20 describes a very intense persecution, which Jesus then defined as a period of great tribulation: **“For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened” (Mt.24:21,22)**. Therefore, we find that Jesus specifically refers to this period of great tribulation as a relatively short interval of time immediately following the setting up of the abomination of desolation by the antichrist in the Temple – an event which sound Bible expositors universally agree occurs about 3 1/2 years into Daniel's seven-year period (cf. Da.12:11). Accordingly, the great tribulation of which Jesus spoke will be preceded by the coming of the antichrist, whose failed reign will bring forth a great world war and an aftermath of famine, and pestilence. It could not possibly encompass the entire seven-years of Daniel's seventieth week, but instead must be a shorter period contained within it. We are not told exactly how short this terrifying period will be, but leaving time for other

events recorded in the book of Revelation that we know must also occur within this seven-year period, it could span a few days or weeks – possibly a few months at the very most.

Next represented on the above time-line following the Great Tribulation, is a very brief interval of time within which 144,000 Jews will be sealed. This is a very momentous event that we shall discuss more fully in a future newsletter. Nowhere in Scripture do we find a precise reference regarding the removal of the Church – an event described by the Apostle Paul in First Thessalonians Chapter 4, verses 15 through 17 – commonly referred to as the Rapture (transliterated from the Latin word *rapere* meaning “rapid”). We have placed this event within this brief interval just following the sealing of the Jewish remnant. This placement corresponds with the precise chronology of events as they are recorded in the book of Revelation. The Apostle John saw a great multitude appear before him in heaven (cf. Re.7:9-17) immediately following the sealing of the Jewish remnant (cf. Re.7:4-8). This great multitude is believed to be the “caught up” Church of every age, which the Apostle John saw arriving in heaven. This position shall be discussed more fully in future newsletters.

Most Dispensationalists place the Rapture just prior to the beginning of the seventieth week of Daniel inasmuch as the Church is never mentioned by name following the third chapter of the book of Revelation. Moreover, it is inconceivable that Jesus would ever allow the true Church, which is his body and beloved bride, to suffer God’s wrath. That is, of course, precisely why Christ died, and suffering God's wrath would be totally inconsistent with Paul’s statement in First Thessalonians 1:10 in which he said that the Thessalonians had been delivered from God’s wrath to come as a consequence of their having accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior and that they should: “...wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (cf. Re.6:17). However, church history attests to the fact that the Church has already suffered through many terrible times of severe persecutions in the past. As we discover upon closer examination, the tumultuous events that take place in the first 3 ½ years of this seven-year period are all brought about by mankind's total depravity, which God has allowed to run uninhibited. This will lead to the formation of an autocratic global government ruled by a powerful man of sin, who is directly motivated by Satan. Although God has preordained all of this nefarious activity to take place at a time He has appointed, none of the terrible travails mankind suffers during this first 3 ½ years are a direct result of the judgment of God, whose wrath will be fully released upon a decadent world in the second half of this seven-year period.

Although the majority of today's Bible expositors agree on a pre-seven-year Rapture, there are two other perspectives being put forth by other Bible expositors: those who believe that the Rapture will occur following the seven-year period, and those who believe it will occur at its midpoint. Post-tribulationists believe that all Christians will be gathered together by Christ into the Kingdom of God at the end of the seven-year period. That of course would mean that the believing Church must suffer the full wrath of God poured out upon the inhabitants of the earth throughout the last half of Daniel's seven years. This view is indefensible based upon 1Th. 1:10 and Re. 6:17, as we discussed above. The physical return of Christ and the Rapture are commonly seen by Post-tribulationists as a single event in which all of the saints are escorted by angels to meet with Jesus Christ in the air. The majority of Post-tribulationists are also strict Covenantalists, who deny that there will be a Millennial Age on earth and therefore believe the resurrected saints will be immediately taken into Heaven. The Millennial Age as well as various positions concerning it will be discussed in future newsletters.

Mid-tribulationists believe that the Rapture of the Church will occur about halfway through a seven-year tribulation period before the “more devastating” judgments of the second half come about. The first 3 ½ years are correctly referred to as the “beginning of sorrows” (cf. Mt.24:8) that the Church will go through while the last 3 ½ years are considered to be a period of very intense tribulation that will fall only upon the unregenerate inhabitants of earth following the removal of the Church. While this interpretation more closely conforms to the interpretation taken in this work, it differs from it in that it erroneously refers to the entire seven-year period of Daniel's prophecy as the Great Tribulation Period spoken of by Jesus in his Olivet Discourse.

Having examined Daniels’ prophecy in this newsletter, we shall focus our full attention upon the Olivet Discourse of our Lord in some detail in next month’s newsletter in order to gain a better understanding of these important end-time events. Other events represented on the above time-line, beginning with the “Great Day of the Lord” and ending in the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom, will be discussed still later within a comprehensive study of the entire book of Revelation. © Arthur J. Smith December 2016