The Seventy Sevens
Scripture Text: Daniel 9:24–27

Introduction

What kind of answer do we expect when we pray? Most of us probably want an answer to some question or problem, and we usually want it right now! This chapter in Daniel is primarily a prayer, but it included a very special answer to that prayer. Daniel had studied a prophecy of Jeremiah and realized that the period of Israel’s captivity in Babylon was coming to a close. Daniel then fervently prayed to God about what he perceived to be the time for the prophecy to be fulfilled. Daniel praised God, he then confessed his sin and the sin of the nation, and lastly he asked God to restore Jerusalem in accordance to Jeremiah’s prophecy. In response to Daniel’s prayer, God sent a very special messenger, the angel Gabriel, to deliver some news to Daniel. God quickly answered Daniel’s prayer. God also responded with more than Daniel asked. Daniel asked God about a past prophecy from Jeremiah and the events at that time, but God answered Daniel’s prayer with a revelation about the future. The answer God gave revealed more than just Jerusalem being restored. It revealed a grander plan of God for His people, that included a Messiah. So, let us look at God’s answer to Daniel’s prayer.

God Summarizes A Glorious Future

Some scholars have claimed that this passage is one of the most difficult passages in the Bible to understand. I agree with that assessment. There are several difficulties in deciding between the many interpretations of this passage. It is with humility and some uncertainty that I offer the following interpretation. Many people call this passage God’s program for Israel, as they believe it foretells God’s plan for Israel up to the end times. Verse twenty-four seems to be summary statement for the entire revelation that gives a brief overview of God’s plan to restore Israel. God first described the blessings, before revealing the steps that He ordained to bring about those blessings. Look at this verse.

Daniel 9:24 (HCSB) Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city— to bring the rebellion to an end, to put a stop to sin, to wipe away iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place.

There are many suggested interpretations of the seventy weeks (or “seventy sevens”). In Scripture only two types of “weeks” are mentioned—sevens of days and sevens of years. Most believe this prophecy refers to periods of seven years each. If that is so, the seventy weeks are seventy groups of seven years, or seventy times seven years, or 490 years. The Jewish people were familiar with the concept of sevens of years because the Sabbatical Year was based on this premise. Every seventh year there was to be a sabbath for the land (Leviticus 25:1–7). God promised that if Israel did not keep these years of rest, they would be driven from the land and scattered among the nations. According to 2 Chronicles 36:21, one reason for the Babylonian captivity was for the land to rest in order to make up for the sabbath years that the Jews had not kept.

Scripture quoted from the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) unless otherwise noted.
The message Gabriel revealed was that God had mandated a certain period of time, “seventy weeks”, from the remainder of history for His specific purposes.

According to this verse, God has decreed a certain amount of time to end humanity’s transgression and to atone for our sin. To “atone” means “to make a covering.” This symbolism is drawn from the Old Testament sacrificial system in which the blood was sprinkled over the mercy seat in the Temple, depicting that the sin of the people was forgiven because it was covered by the blood. This atonement for humanity’s sin was made by Jesus Christ upon the cross. His blood is the covering for sin. All the blessings of the coming kingdom of God have been made possible by what Christ accomplished through His death and resurrection. To bring in everlasting righteousness signifies that at the end of the “seventy weeks” a time of righteousness will exist for all eternity. As the prophecy pertains to Israel specifically, Daniel’s people, it indicates that at the end of the seven weeks the nation as a whole will have received a right relationship with God that will result in living according to His will. Only when the kingdom of God is ushered in at Christ’s return will such a state of universal righteousness be possible.

**God Reveals Judgement and A Coming Messiah**

Gabriel told Daniel to pay special attention to the very important information that he was about to receive, partially because here was the answer to Daniel’s prayer for an end to Jerusalem’s desolation. Daniel was told that sin would come to an end, an atonement for sin would be made, everlasting righteousness would come, and all prophecy would be fulfilled. The starting point of the seventy sevens is revealed in the next verse. They will commence with a decree “to restore and rebuild Jerusalem”, that was destroyed when Nebuchadnezzar conquered the nation. Look at the following verse.

*Daniel 9:25 (HCSB)* Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince will be seven weeks and 62 weeks. It will be rebuilt with a plaza and a moat, but in difficult times.

The prophecy divides the seventy weeks into three groups - seven weeks, sixty-two weeks, and one week. Something significant was to occur after the first seven weeks, or forty-nine years, after this period of time began. Many believe these first seven weeks began with a command to rebuild Jerusalem and concluded with the completion of the work under Ezra and Nehemiah about forty-nine years later. That would be the first group of weeks in the prophecy. The next sixty-two sevens, or 434 years, extend from the time when Jerusalem and the Temple was rebuilt until the coming of the Messiah. Scripture is clear that the Messiah would atone for sin by offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice and He would put an end to sin and bring in everlasting righteousness. The coming of the Messiah at the end of sixty-nine sevens could refer to several events in Jesus’ earthly life, such as His birth, His baptism, or His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Although this verse may not completely identify the future Messiah as Jesus, the description in the following verse as well as other passages of Scripture reveal more about who He is. Let us look at the next verse.

Scripture quoted from the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) unless otherwise noted.
**Daniel 9:26 (HCSB)** *After those 62 weeks the Messiah will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the coming prince will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come with a flood, and until the end there will be war; desolations are decreed.*

After the first two groups of “weeks”, seven sevens and then sixty-two sevens, the Messiah will be cut off and would have nothing. When Jesus died, His earthly ministry seemed to have been in vain. His disciples deserted him. He was killed as a criminal. From all appearances He was cut off and had not accomplished what He had set out to do. It might appear that Jesus had accomplished nothing, except on that first Easter Sunday when Jesus proved that He had conquered death. He had accomplished exactly what He was sent to do. Sometime after the Messiah comes and is cut off, Jerusalem and the Temple would again be destroyed. Imagine how Daniel might have received this news. Daniel prayed for restoration, believing the prophecy of Jeremiah was about to be fulfilled. Gabriel revealed to Daniel that Jerusalem would indeed be rebuilt after the Babylonian destruction, but that was not all. By some terrible turn of events, Gabriel informed Daniel that in the future Jerusalem and the Temple would again be destroyed. So, Daniel received some good news and some bad news.

This time the destruction would not be by the Babylonians, but by the people of a ruler to come. Historically, the next destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple after the Babylonian Exile was by the Romans. Jesus even prophesied that this would happen and forty years after His crucifixion, these events occurred. In A.D. 70, the Roman army utterly destroyed both Jerusalem and the Temple, which the Jewish historian, Josephus, believed was fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy. The Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, but the next verse in the prophecy seems to indicate that a future persecutor of Israel during the seventieth seven will utterly destroy “the city and the sanctuary”. This future ruler will most likely come out of the peoples and nations that made up the ancient Roman Empire. Daniel already revealed in chapter seven that a king who causes great trouble for Israel would arise from the fourth empire, Rome. Therefore, Jerusalem will experience a period of conflict that will include a series of desolations. This war and the desolations brought about by it will continue until the end, that is, until the city is completely destroyed. Thankfully, that is not the end of the prophecy.

**The Final Week That Ends All Suffering**

God’s answer to Daniel’s prayer described the completion of God’s plan for Israel. If the first sixty-nine sevens conclude with Jesus’ first coming, then the final seven years conclude with Jesus’ return. There must be a period of time between the end of the sixty-ninth week and the beginning of the seventieth seven. This is a period of time many see as the time of the Gentiles, which is not counted in the “seventy weeks” of this revelation. Just as God focused His attention primarily on the Jewish people before Jesus first coming, during the first sixty-nine weeks, God has focused His attention since then on the Gentiles. At the end of this present age, God will again deal with Israel in a special way, and then the final week, the last seven years of this prophecy, will begin. The final week is described in the last verse of the chapter. Look at the following.
Daniel 9:27 (HCSB)  He will make a firm covenant with many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and offering. And the abomination of desolation will be on a wing of the temple until the decreed destruction is poured out on the desolator.

Remember, God was answering Daniel’s prayer, which specifically concerned the future of the nation Israel. Shortly after Daniel’s people rejected Jesus as their Messiah, after the sixty-nine sevens, Jerusalem was destroyed, the Jewish people were dispersed throughout the earth, and for almost two thousand years Israel as a nation did not exist. This period of time was omitted from the prophecy given to Daniel. Israel has now been reestablished as a nation, since 1948, suggesting that the final seventieth week may soon begin. During the last seven, which precedes Jesus’ second coming, there will be a terrible time of tribulation for Israel and the world. This time is commonly referred to as the tribulation period, of which the second half of it is known as the Great Tribulation. But, who is the person in this verse who will make a covenant for a time, but in the middle of the seven years, will break covenant and bring persecution? This person’s behavior and ultimate doom match that of the “little horn” described in chapter seven, who is a future ruler of a great empire in the last days and the persecutor of the saints. This person is believed to be the Antichrist, who in this last part of the tribulation period will persecute many people and commit many atrocities. Even Jesus prophesied about this terrible time and referred to Daniel’s prophecy about it. Look at the following verses.

Matthew 24:15–16, 21 (HCSB)  15 So when you see the abomination that causes desolation, spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16 then those in Judea must flee to the mountains!...21 For at that time there will be great tribulation, the kind that hasn’t taken place from the beginning of the world until now and never will again!

This will be a terrible period in the world’s history. It will be a time of great suffering, but we should remember that God has decreed that these atrocities will not continue forever. The Antichrist’s wickedness will last only “until the decreed destruction is poured out on the desolator” (v. 27). God will use this time to bring people to Him. At that time the majority of the people in Israel will acknowledge Jesus as their Savior, repent, and be saved. This final seven years of the prophecy will end with Jesus’ second coming and the establishment of His earthly kingdom. Jesus’ reign will continue for all eternity.

While there may be some disagreement over dates and other matters of interpretation in this prophecy to Daniel, there are certain facts that seem to be clear.

God Appoints A Time For His Plan

However one understands this prophecy, an important point is that God has appointed a time and the amount of time for things to happen. God’s people should trust Him and not lose heart. To some extent, we know what is going to happen in the future. As bad as it may be, we also know Who holds the future. Indeed, the whole world in His hand. God is sovereign over all things, even history.

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God Decisively Atones for Our Sin

The passage predicts Jesus’ coming. The Messiah has come and He has died for the sin of the world. God has decisively atoned for our sin through our Savior, Jesus Christ. God has prepared the way to end all sin, our guilt of sin, the punishment of sin (death), and the eternal separation to God that is a result of sin. God has done this through the perfect sacrifice and work of Jesus Christ. So, we should trust in Christ!

God Brings An End to Suffering and Evil

At the end of the age an evil ruler will arise who will persecute people. This will be a terrible time in the history of the earth. The good news is that his wicked activities will not continue. Jesus is coming again and He will judge the Antichrist and all those who follow him. God will finally destroy all evil completely. All pain, suffering, persecution, and evil will be finally and forever destroyed. Thanks be to God!

Conclusion

In closing, we can and should have hope through this prophecy. This passage predicts the coming of our Savior—Jesus Christ. Jesus did die, and the city of Jerusalem and the Temple was destroyed. An evil ruler will one day arise and he will persecute God’s people, but the same Messiah who died for us will come again in all His glory. Jesus will not come a second time to die again, but to gather His people together, to judge all evil, and to establish His eternal kingdom. Although the revelation given to Daniel in this passage was primarily given to the Jewish faithful, all believers in Jesus Christ will participate in His kingdom and enjoy all His benefits. This is good news! Thanks be to God. Amen!