

Thursday Evening Bible Study

Series: **the End Times – Bible prophecy about future events and periods**

Teaching Summary for Week 45

The Tribulation Period

Part 3. The Chronology of the Tribulation Period

Introduction

We cannot know the **absolute** chronology of the future Tribulation. However, there is one Old Testament prophecy that did specify the exact date of an event that would occur in the future. We will see this soon because the same prophecy also predicts events that are still future for us – the Tribulation Period.

The Bible does provide information about the **external** chronology of the Tribulation Period. We have already studied this. We know that it is still future, and we know that it precedes the second coming of Christ as well as the Millennial Reign.

And the Bible also gives us quite a bit of information about the **internal** chronology of the Tribulation Period -especially the Great Tribulation. The Bible tells us what the duration of the period is, and the order of events.

We are going to also study two important features of prophecy that come into play for the Tribulation Period.

The first one is the existence of **gaps** of time in between events in prophecy. Most of these gaps are indeterminant in length. We don't know how long the gap is until the next event occurs.

I want to give you a couple of examples of prophetic gaps in the Bible.

The first one occurs in Daniel 9:26.

Dan 9:26-27

26 "Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.

The Messiah being cut off refers to the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The destruction of the city and the sanctuary by the people of the prince who is to come occurred in 70 AD.

This is a gap of nearly 40 years!

The second example of a gap in prophecy occurs between the first and second advents of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Isa 9:6

6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

We have references to the Lord's first and second coming in this verse.

The second feature of prophecy that comes into play for the Tribulation Period is called **recursion**. This happens when a prophecy or narrative describes an event or period in brief, and then circles back to give more details about that same event or period.

Genesis 1 and two are a good example of recursion.

In chapter 1, the Lord introduces the subject of **the creation of man** on the sixth day.

Then in chapter two, He describes the seventh day. But then he **returns to the sixth day and gives more details about the creation of man**.

Daniel's prophecy of the Seventy Weeks

If you want to understand the chronology of the tribulation period, you must first study Daniel 9:24-27. In this astounding prophecy of the seventy weeks, Daniel gives an outline of the chronology concerning God's future plans for Israel.

There are two big reasons why this prophecy is astounding.

First, part of it has already been fulfilled, and it was fulfilled on the exact day that Daniel predicted it would be.

Second, Daniel 9:24-27 provides the indispensable key to the chronology of all New Testament prophecy. Dan 9:26 predicts the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 21:12-24). Our Lord's prophetic discourse in Matthew 24:15-22 and Mark 13:14-20 fixes the time of the Great Tribulation within the seventieth week of Daniel (Dan 9:27). And the prophecies of Revelation 6-19 also occur during Daniel's 70th week.

Dan 9:24-27

24 "Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place. 25 "So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.

26 "Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.

27 "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate."

We will begin by analyzing **the main features** of Daniel 9:24-27.

1. The entire prophecy has to do with Daniel's people and Daniel's city, that is, the **nation of Israel** and the **city of Jerusalem** (Dan 9:24)
2. Two different princes are mentioned, and they should not be confused. The first is named "**Messiah the Prince**", and the second is described as "**the prince who is to come**".
3. The time period involved is exactly specified as "**seventy weeks**" (Dan 9:24). These seventy "weeks" are divided into three shorter periods: a period of **seven** weeks; after that a period of **sixty-two** weeks, and finally a period of **one** week. (Dan 9:25,27)
4. The beginning of the seventy weeks is fixed at the **issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem**.
5. The end of the seven weeks plus the sixty-two weeks (**sixty-nine weeks** in total) will be marked by the **appearance of Messiah** the Prince of Israel. (Dan 9:25)
6. At a later time (after the sixty-nine weeks), the Messiah will be cut off. Then the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city of Jerusalem and the Temple (Dan 9:26).
7. After these events, we have the final, seventieth week. It begins with the prince who is to come making a **firm covenant** with many for one week. (Dan 9:27)
8. However, in the middle of that week, he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering. And by the wing of **abominations he brings desolation**, until the consummation (end of the seventieth week), when wrath and destruction will be poured out on him. (Daniel 9:27)
9. After the seventy weeks are completed, a time of **unparalleled blessings** for the nation of Israel will commence. (Dan 9:24)

Those blessings are (1) to finish the transgression; (2) to make an end of sin; (3) to make atonement for iniquity; (4) to bring in everlasting righteousness; (5) to seal up vision and prophecy; and (6) to anoint the most holy place.

The first three blessings came as a result of death of Christ in His first advent. The nation of Israel will enjoy these blessings when Christ returns and establishes the new covenant with Israel.

The second three blessings will also come at the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What does Daniel mean by a “week”?

In order to understand the chronology of Daniel 9:24-27), we need to determine what Daniel means by a “**week**”.

The Hebrew word that Daniel uses here is *shabua*. It literally means “a seven”.

So Daniel 9:24 should be translated as

“Seventy sevens have been decreed for your people and your holy city...”

Shabua always refers to a period of time. So what time period does it refer to in Daniel 9:24-27?

To answer that question, we turn next to the Jewish Calendar. It turns out the number 7 features prominently in the Jewish calendar.

In their divinely established calendar, the Jews had a “seven” of **years** as well as a “seven” of **days**. And this Biblical seven of years was just as familiar to the Jew as the seven of days.

The **seventh day** of the week was a day of rest for the nation of Israel. It was the **Sabbath for men**. It was a day given to man by God.

The **seventh year** was the year in which the land rested. It was called the Sabbath year, and it was a **Sabbath for the Lord**.

Lev 25:1-12

1 The Lord then spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, saying, 2 "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you come into the land which I shall give you, then **the land shall have a sabbath to the Lord**.'

3 'Six years you shall sow your field, and **six years** you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its crop, 4 but during the **seventh year the land shall have a sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord**; you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard.

5 'Your harvest's aftergrowth you shall not reap, and your grapes of untrimmed vines you shall not gather; the land shall have a sabbatical year. 6 'All of you shall have the sabbath products of the land for food; yourself, and your male and female slaves, and your hired man and your foreign resident, those who live as aliens with you. 7 'Even your cattle and the animals that are in your land shall have all its crops to eat.

8 'You are also to count off **seven sabbaths of years** for yourself, seven times seven years, so that you have the time of the seven sabbaths of years, namely, forty-nine years. 9 'You shall then sound a ram's horn abroad on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the day of atonement you shall sound a horn all through your land. 10 'You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family. 11 'You shall have the fiftieth year as a jubilee; you shall not sow, nor reap its aftergrowth, nor gather in from its untrimmed vines. 12 'For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you. You shall eat its crops out of the field.

So which “seven” is Daniel referring to in Daniel 9:24-27?

Let's consider all the things that need to happen during this period of time.

Daniel's people are in captivity in Babylon. So first there would be the decree to rebuild and restore Jerusalem. Then the remnant would need to travel from Babylon to Jerusalem. After that, the people would need to do all the work to rebuild and restore Jerusalem. Then the Messiah would need to be born, grow up, and present Himself as the Prince of Israel.

70 sevens of days is less than a year and a half. Is there any way that all these things could be completed in under two years?

The answer is no. So *shabua* cannot refer to seven 24 hour days.

What does *shabua* refer to in Daniel 9:24-27?

To find the answer, we need to examine the context in Daniel.

The immediate context in Daniel 9:24-27 strongly supports the conclusion that *shabua* is used here to refer to seven years.

Let's see if that is confirmed by other elements in Daniel.

The Hebrew word *shabua* appears twice in one other passage in the book of Daniel.

Dan 10:2-3

2 In those days, I, Daniel, had been mourning for three entire weeks. 3 I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I use any ointment at all until the entire three weeks were completed.

Here, the context demands that we interpret *shabua* to mean seven days. Daniel was fasting.

But here's where it gets interesting: in this passage *shabau* is accompanied by another Hebrew word: *yowm*.

In the New American Standard translation, as well as most other English translations, we have the word "full".

But *yowm* literally means **day**, the period of time from one sunset to the next.

See for example Exodus 16:22-30.

In other words, when Daniel used *shabau* to refer to seven days, he added *yowm*.

But Daniel did not add *yowm* in Daniel 9:24-27. That strongly suggests that Daniel meant some other time period of sevens when he used *shabau* in Daniel 9.

Finally, we examine the times in which Daniel wrote his prophecy.

He is in exile in Babylon, along with the rest of the nation of Israel. He knows from the prophet Jeremiah that this exile is about to end.

Dan 9:1-2

9 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans — 2 in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.

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But why did the exile last for 70 years?

Lev 26:33-35

'You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste.

34 'Then the land will enjoy its sabbaths all the days of the desolation, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. 35 'All the days of its desolation it will observe the rest which it did not observe on your sabbaths, while you were living on it.

Israel was in exile in Babylon for seventy years because Israel did not give the land its Sabbath rest for seventy Sabbath years.

That means that the period of disobedience was 7 times 70 years! (sound familiar?)

2 Chron 36:20-21

20 Those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, 21 to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete.

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Because the land never got that seventh-year rest for 490 years, the Lord took Israel out of the land to give it all the rest that it should have gotten earlier!!

So, when the judgment for 490 years of disobedience ended, the Lord sent the angel Gabriel to Daniel to reveal a new era in God's dealings with Israel. How appropriate it was that the Lord would give His people another, final 490 years.

The past and the future

We now return to Daniel's great prophecy:

Dan 9:24-27

24 "Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place. 25 "So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.

26 "Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.

27 "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate."

The first sixty nine sevens of years have already been fulfilled in the past.

The Messiah, the Prince of Israel, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, was cut off (crucified) almost 2,000 years ago.

And the people of the prince who is to come, the Romans, destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD.

Luke 21:20-24

20 "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. 21 "Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; 22 because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled. 23 "Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to this people; 24 and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

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So that leaves the final seventieth period of 7 years.

We know from verse 24 what happens at the end of the seventieth seven of years: The Lord will bring in everlasting righteousness, seal up vision and prophecy, and anoint the most holy place.

Everlasting righteousness refers to the Millennial reign and the eternal state. The Millennial reign will begin in the future.

There are still prophecies that remain unfulfilled, so they will be sealed up in the future, after the prophecies of the day of the Lord, the Millennial reign, and the New Jerusalem have all been fulfilled.

The most holy place is the holy of holies in the Millennial Temple, as we learned in Ezekiel.

Very simply, then, the events of Daniel 9:27 will occur sometime in the future.

If the first 483 years ended with the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the last 7 years given to Israel are still future, then there is a gap between the sixty-ninth "week" and the seventieth "week".

The length of this gap of time is not specified in the Bible.

Next, we will turn our attention to the chronology of Daniel's 70th "week".