

"WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ABOUT END TIMES?"

Dr. Michael Heiser

I don't like any of the systems of Christian eschatology. They all cheat when they need to in order to create the appearance of coherence. There is truth in all of them, and bogus thinking in all of them. Consequently, I don't care to embrace any of them and don't care if that irritates people utterly absorbed by them. I taught dispensationalism and covenant theology on the college level for five years, so yes, I've heard or read all the arguments and know them backward and forward. When I say all the systems cheat and are driven by interpretive decisions brought to the text (as opposed to being derived from the text) I know what I'm talking about. Your latest personal study isn't going to change that, so don't send it to me. As I noted on my Contact page disclaimer, I'm just trying to be honest with you.

See my Naked Bible blog series on why an obsession with end times is a waste of time. I believe biblical eschatology is deliberately cryptic. It was for the disciples and it is for us as well. What I believe about eschatology is related to the larger "divine council worldview" of biblical theology (defined: the center of biblical theology is about God's rule in our realm and the unseen realm through his council imagers - human and non-human alike). In other words, the divine council is a much bigger deal than Psalm 82. No area of biblical theology is untouched by it. Demonstrating that is what I view as, academically, my life's work. That's why I've compiled a 230-page bibliography on all things related to divine council motifs and biblical theology as my scholarly launching pad. Every data point of this divine council worldview is peer-reviewed, but no one has done the synthesis. That's my life's work. All I can say here about its eschatology is that I believe Jesus will return and that the final form of the kingdom will be the new earth. That is not premillennialism as that term is normally defined (1000 years is too narrow and short for my reading of biblical theology).

The idea of a rapture is anything but self-evident in the text. It depends on a series of interpretive choices made by those who believe in it and then go back to the texts to "prove" it (and that's the problem with most eschatology; see the link to the above blog series). Certain ideas in pop eschatology are indeed nonsense. I'm embarrassed by what some "Bible teachers" say about end times. To quote myself, The Harbinger is an ode to biblical illiteracy. So is the idea that President Obama is the antichrist, and that 666 points to a Muslim antichrist. These teachings are demonstrably bogus.

How Everyone Cheats on Eschatology

Posted by DrHeiser | Jun 1, 2008

ANY view of eschatology is about the presuppositions that are brought TO the text. NONE of the views are self-evident (*"I just look at my Bible and there it is—Amen!"* Aaarrgghh!). How you answer the following questions dictates completely where you end up:

1. Are Israel and the Church distinct from each other, or does the Church replace Israel in God's program for the ages? If they are distinct, it would seem that Israel might still have a national future, apart from the church. Keeping Israel and the Church distinct is key to any view of a rapture (because the Church is taken, not Israel).
2. Were the covenants given to Abraham and David about the Promised Land and a never-ending dynasty unconditional or conditional? If the latter, then the promises were conditioned by obedience to the Law and, since Israel went into exile, the promises were "sinned away." They were inherited by the Church in a spiritual sense (cf. Gal 3 – Christians are "Abraham's seed and heirs to the promises"). There will be no literal kingdom, just the Church. If the former is the case, then it didn't matter that Israel was wicked—the Land promises are still in effect and a descendant of David MUST sit on the literal throne.
3. Was the Land promised fulfilled under the reign of Solomon or not? If you read the description of Solomon's kingdom and INCLUDE the areas he had under tribute, the boundaries match the description of the promised Land given to Abraham—hence the kingdom promises are already fulfilled and there is no more to be had. Israel sinned away the kingdom, though, and it was replaced by the church. But should we include the land only under tribute to Israel, but not actually inhabited by Israel? That's the question.
4. Is there any biblical proof that the 70th week of Daniel = the tribulation period? This is assumed by many, but the fact is that there isn't a single verse that makes this equation. Sounds right, but is it?
5. When it comes to passages that describe the return of Jesus, should we harmonize them, or separate them? Here's what I mean. Say a critic of the Bible came up to you and said, *"hey, your Bible is full of errors—just look at the gospels; they have differing accounts of the same event—they can't all be right; at least one has to be wrong!"* I'm guessing your response would be something like, "they can all be right even if they disagree, just like a newspaper story—if you took all the newspaper accounts of 911, they wouldn't all say the same thing, but they could all be right—they just complement each other — you have to join them together to get the full picture. That's what we should do with the gospels." Now, I agree with "joining" and I think just about every Christian would. So why is it, when we come to description of the Lord's return, that so many people do NOT harmonize them? We take 1 Thess 4 as being different than Zech 14, because in 1 Thess 4 Jesus never touches the

ground! That must be a different return—and so we have two returns—one a rapture and the other is the second coming. This decision—to NOT harmonize these accounts is at the heart of the doctrine of a rapture. You really can't have a rapture if you harmonize, but that's what we do everywhere else. So...are you a splitter or a joiner? Which one is right? How would we know for sure?

6. Was the book of Revelation written before or after 70 AD? This makes all the difference in the world for holding that Revelation has yet to be fulfilled, as opposed to being fulfilled by AD 70. There's evidence for either conclusion. Which is right?

7. Are we to read the book of Revelation in a linear, chronological fashion, or does the book repeat the same several events in cycles? Those who see Revelation as future prophecy assume the book is to be read straight through as a linear chronology. Others see the events of the book "recapitulating." If it's linear, you have a literal kingdom aside from the Church when you get to the end. If it's not linear, you don't. The Church = the Kingdom.

8. All OT prophecy was fulfilled literally, so the prophecy that's still left will be as well. Well, this assumes that all OT prophecy was fulfilled "literally" (whatever that means). But is that what how the NT authors see the OT? Do they always see an OT passage fulfilled literally? Maybe a prophecy gets a REAL fulfillment but it isn't what you'd literally expect. For one example, read Amos 9:10-12 and ask yourself what YOU would expect to be the fulfillment (David's house is in ruins and will be rebuilt). Then go to Acts 15 and see how James interprets this passage in Amos. Have fun.

There are more fundamental questions, but they become more technical. I think this is enough.

So how does everyone cheat? They make decisions on all these questions, and then act like their view is the "biblical" view—as though they didn't have to presuppose and assume a whole list of things at the start. They cheat by not telling you that what they believe about eschatology is based on assumptions about verses, not verses themselves. The Bible didn't come with a handbook with the "right" answers to these questions. The answers are not self-evident. There is uncertainty (to put it mildly).

Now you know why I don't like any of the views. ALL the views make assumptions and then erect their system on those assumptions. Passages that don't quite fit are "problem passages" (yeah, right). Each view has its own set of those.

Personally, I think there's a reason for the ambiguity in the Bible on these issues, which itself is the path to not cheating. But that's for another time. This is the tip of the iceberg, and I'm already feeling ill over eschatology.

Why an Obsession with Eschatology is a Waste of Time, Part 1

Posted by DrHeiser | May 2, 2010

Naked Bible enthusiasts (and despisers) may recall that, long ago, I posted a list of presuppositions that are brought to the Bible that ultimately dictate one's position on eschatology ("end times"). I posted this because all too many Christians assume that their view is self-evident from the Bible (i.e., that it's so clearly taught as to make them wonder how anyone else could see end times any other way). I'd say the position most guilty of this is the pre-tribulational rapture view (the view presented in the Left Behind novel series).

My goal in the posts that follow is to elaborate on my original list and unpack the items a bit. My goal isn't to deny or endorse any position. I don't like or hate any of them. There are things I like about all of them. I can already hear those married to one view: "how can he say that?! That's not possible!" Yeah, it is. And it's the best perspective. (I'm sure that'll tick someone off). I'll explain my own thinking at the end of the series. For now . . . drum roll, please . . . let's dive in.

Presuppositional Issue #1 – Are Israel and the Church distinct from each other, or does the Church replace Israel in God's program for the ages? If they are distinct, it would seem that Israel might still have a national future, apart from the church. Keeping Israel and the Church distinct is key to any view of a rapture (because the Church is taken, not Israel).

Let's unpack this.

"God's people" in the first installment of the Bible (the Old Testament) was Israel (and a few Gentile converts here and there, who had to join the nation as Israelites — followers of Yahweh). God made a series of covenants with Israel to create and certify that bond. These covenants all had certain promises. As Israel came out of Egypt and entered the Promised Land, the nation inherited certain of these promises — or was it ALL of them? (that's item #2 for next time). Here's a list of the promises:

Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:1-3; Gen 15:6-7)

1. They would become a nation whose population would be like the sand of the sea and the stars of heaven.
2. They would prosper and be a blessing to all who blessed them (or a curse to those who cursed them).
3. They would inherit a land promised to them ("from the Euphrates to the river of Egypt" — more on that in other installments).

Sinai (“Mosaic”) Covenant (Exod. 20-24)

God’s covenant with the nation at Sinai was given in Exodus 20-24. Its focus is the Mosaic Law. God labeled Israel a peculiar treasure, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation, and gave them the stipulations (laws) that would guarantee the continuance of fellowship between them and their God (continuation of the Abrahamic covenant). The covenant was ratified by a covenant sacrifice and the sprinkling of blood (Ex. 24:4-8). Various Sinai covenant renewals are recorded in the Old Testament. The most important were those on the plains of Moab (Dt. 29), at Shechem in the days of Joshua (Josh. 24), when Jehoiada was able to restore the Davidic line of kings under Joash (2 K. 11), the days of Hezekiah (2 Ch. 29:10), and in the days under the rule of Josiah (2 K. 23:3).

Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7)

God promised David that his descendants should have an everlasting dynastic rule over the Promised Land and be known as his sons (2 Sam 7:12-17; Psalm 89; Isa. 55).

The New Covenant

Several passages in the prophets, but most explicitly in Jeremiah, speak of a new covenant in the messianic age (Isa. 42:6; Isa 49:6-8; Isa 55:3; Isa 59:21; Isa 61:8; Jer. 31:31, 33; Jer 32:40; Jer 50:5; Ezek 16:60, 62; Ezek 34:25; Ezek 37:26).

These passages assume a nation in exile due to its sins — its violations of the Sinai covenant. This covenant argues that, though the Sinai covenant was broken, the promise of God would not fail. There would be a remnant through whom God would honor His promises. He would make a new covenant. His law would be written on hearts of flesh. In that day the throne of David would be occupied by one of David’s line (this assume a situation when that was not the case – such as in exile) and the people would enjoy an everlasting covenant of peace in which the nations would also share (Isa. 42:6; Isa 49:6; Isa 55:3-5; cf. Zech 2:11; Zech 8:20-23; 14:16; etc.). In those days worship would be purified (Ezk. 40-48), true theocratic government would be established, and peace would be universal.

Got all that? Good. Now here’s the question: Is the nation of Israel (the national ethnic entity) still the focus of these covenant promises (before and after the final New Covenant) or is the Church their focus now?

Arguments can be made for both sides — depending on presuppositions. We’ll be getting into the details in items # 2 and 3, so let’s preview those items. The two sides of this #1 issue depend on whether one believes the promises of the Abrahamic, Sinai, and Davidic covenant were **CONDITIONAL**. That is, were there conditions behind receiving the promises (“Israel must do/be X”) or were the promises made without any conditions (“no matter what Israel

does in the way of sin, God would still give them the promises”)? If there were conditions, it is obvious that Israel failed (they went into exile at God’s hand). If there were no conditions is that what the New Covenant is about? Is the New Covenant the answer?

These questions are important for #1 because they create a construct by which to parse this first issue’s question: Are Israel and the Church distinct from each other, or does the Church replace Israel in God’s program for the ages?

Jesus very clearly came to establish the New Covenant (“this is the new covenant in my blood” – see Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6; Heb 8:13; Heb 12:24). And the Spirit came upon the disciples and their converts after the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2; see the book of Acts thereafter). The church was “circumcision neutral” — it was not only Jews, but also Gentiles, that also was a New Covenant element. But if the Church — and not Israel as a nation — was the focus of the New Covenant, then what purpose is there for national Israel (except to embrace Jesus and become absorbed into the Church)? It also means that the Davidic ruler is Jesus, and the Promised Land is bigger than Israel — it’s the whole world — hence the Great Commission. Let’s ask it this way: Is there any part of the New Covenant NOT answerable by the Church? One might say the “all nations” part — but that is precisely the point of the Great Commission — given to the fledgling CHURCH, not Israel (Matt. 28:18-20).

At this point the common objection is the Land — that the Church isn’t a theocratic kingdom. But it is — it’s head is Christ and its land is the whole earth (back to the Great Commission). Why would we insist that the Land promises must be fulfilled in a tiny portion of the earth (Israel) rather than the whole earth? The answer given would be “well, the Abrahamic covenant guaranteed the Promised Land, and have specific dimensions, and Israel never got all that land ... and so they either get THAT land as a national entity, or else God’s promises failed. That, too, is a presupposition. It presupposes that God’s plan doesn’t SUCCEED through the New Covenant and the global, Gentile-inclusive Church. It also presumes that Israel never got the land according to the dimensions of Gen 15 (see later on that). But if the covenants were conditional, then Israel sinned the land promises away (they failed; God did not), and this objection about a literal kingdom within the parameters of Genesis 15 may be completely moot.

One more note on the difference and sameness of Israel and the Church, Galatians 3 (read the whole chapter) is crystal clear that Christians — the Church — “inherited” the promises given to Abraham. Should we exclude the land from land? If “the Promised land” has been replaced by “the whole earth,” then the answer is yes — and that is the primary argument for saying that we have no reason to look for a literal kingdom in ISRAEL (a millennium) in the future.

So, are Israel and the Church distinct? Yes, one is not the equation of the other. But does the Church replace Israel as the people of God? In one sense, this is clearly the case since the Church inherits the promises given to Israel through Christ (Galatians 3). But what about the land? If the land promise is still out there, waiting to be fulfilled, then Israel as a national entity is still distinct in terms of kingdom prophecy. If the land promise was sinned away and is now replaced by the whole earth, then the nation of Israel itself has no special role in biblical prophecy — it's all about the Church.

And believe it or not, if it's all about the church, there is no seven year tribulation or rapture, since the former is entirely built on the 70 weeks prophecy given to Jerusalem and Israel, and the latter is in turn built on the literal tribulation.

Stay tuned.

Why an Obsession with Eschatology is a Waste of Time, Part 2

Posted by DrHeiser | May 11, 2010

In the first installment of this series, I talked about how certain systems of eschatology need the New Testament to distinguish between the Church and national Israel for certain elements of their eschatological system to work. Let me unpack that a bit again here by way of review.

Certain systems of eschatology (standard premillennialism, any view of a rapture) need Israel and the Church distinguished. For the premillennialist, national Israel must be distinct from the church so that the promise of a literal land (and so, literal millennial kingdom on earth) is still “out there” – a prophecy yet unfulfilled. It needs to be yet unfulfilled or there is no point to waiting for a literal millennium. If Israel got the land promised to them in the era of the OT, then one cannot use the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1-3; Gen 15:1-6) as the basis for saying “there’s a literal kingdom in the Land still coming.”

All rapture positions except the post-trib version need a distinction between Israel and the Church because they see the Church removed from the earth in Revelation 4 — and then it is argued that all the bad stuff in Revelation, the tribulation period, corresponds to “the time of Jacob’s trouble” in the OT – specific curses yet remaining on ISRAEL (not the Church). Then the Jewish Messiah returns to save ISRAEL and usher in the literal millennial kingdom. (Post-tribbers have the Church enduring the trouble with Israel, but still distinguish the Church and Israel because of its need to have a literal millennial kingdom).

Daniel’s 70 weeks which are prophesied with respect to Jerusalem and Israel are thought to make this distinction clear. Since these “weeks” (actually periods of seven years) are determined upon Israel, and since a 70th week is presumed to still be yet future, there must be a prophetic role for national Israel. The missing 70th week is thought to be the seven year tribulation period noted above (but there is no actual verse in the Bible that makes that equation – we’ll get to that in future posts).

So, the need for a distinction is apparent. The need is fed (and argued) by certain assumptions: Israel never got the land promise fulfilled to it, so it’s still out there. And the land promises NEED to be fulfilled else God failed. Daniel’s prophecy forces a distinction between Israel and the Church. Several clear NT passages mar the neatness of all this. I focused a bit on Galatians 3, which explicitly has the Church as the inheritor of the promises to Abraham, thus replacing national Israel as the recipient of those promises. Paul’s statement that Christians (including non-Jews) are inheritors of the promises of Abraham thus raises the spectre that national Israel is displaced by the Church. It is usually objected “well, when did the Church get the promised land?” That’s actually easy to answer by proponents of an Israel=Church equation. They argue:

(1) the parameters of the kingdom of Solomon match the parameters of the land promises given to Abraham, so Israel DID receive that promise;

(2) the land was promised not only as a place for the people of God to live, but a place for the presence of Yahweh to reside with his people (in a tabernacle and then the temple). The NT is clear that this place is now the whole world. How? The Spirit of Christ (who is Yahweh) descended at Pentecost (Acts 2) and now indwells every believer (Eph 2:22; 2 Tim 1:4; James 4:5; Romans 8:9-11). Each believer is the temple of Yahweh now (temple of the Holy Spirit) as is the entire Body of Christ (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). That means wherever Christians are Yahweh is. And Christians have overspread the earth. This was the point of the great commission – to reclaim the nations for Yahweh. The Promised Land is now the whole earth, not just a plot the size of New Jersey. And the people of God inhabit that land. The Church has inherited the promises given to Abraham. God's plan was fulfilled.

And if the above is all true, on what basis should we anticipate a literal earthly millennium? Isn't the kingdom of the whole earth good enough? Now, there are ways to still argue or justify a literal millennium, but my point isn't to argue for that. It's only to show that THAT position is FAR from being self-evident.

Next up: the covenants. One of the defenses of distinguishing Israel and the Church is, as we've already seen, the Abrahamic covenant. Those who keep Israel and the Church separate argue their position on the basis that Israel never got the land. Why is that important? Because, it is argued, the covenant with Abraham giving Israel the Land was unconditional — it was promised no matter what. God also made a covenant with David, that his dynastic line would never end (or, that one would ever sit on the throne of Israel who was not David's descendant). That covenant was also unconditional. Hence, it is argued, Israel MUST still get the land, and a descendant of David MUST sit on the literal throne in a literal kingdom in that literal land for these promises to be fulfilled. It is argued that the land and the throne promises remain unfulfilled — so we look to the future for all that.

The land part of this, as we have seen, is undermined by Galatians 3. It would also be undermined (potentially) if the covenant was CONDITIONAL. Many theologians argue the covenant came with obedience conditions, conditions that were broken by Israel's apostasy. Hence the promises are null and void (actually, they got passed on to the Church in this view through the New Covenant of Jer. 31). It is also argued that Jesus has already fulfilled the "Davidic dynasty rule" promise of the Davidic covenant. No need for that in the future in a literal sense. So who's right? Are the covenants conditional? Is the throne of David already occupied by the messiah?

In other words, is there more than one way to look at all this, so that no prophetic system is self evident (i.e., has the claim to being "biblical")? Well, you know I'm going to answer yes to that, but why?

Why An Obsession with Eschatology is a Waste of Time, Part 3

Posted by DrHeiser | May 17, 2010

To this point, we've talked about a single dispute that divides biblical scholars and students on eschatology: whether or Israel and the Church are to be kept distinct when interpreting prophecy. The question matters since any position that wants a literal millennial reign of Christ in the future must (to be coherent) argue that the land promises given to Abraham and his descendants are still in effect — and so literal fulfillment is expected. If the Church has replaced Israel as the people of God, and if the land promises are now fulfilled via the Great Commission to overspread the earth with God's people (i.e., the Church is the kingdom), then no literal millennium would be expected.

Or so it goes.

To be more precise, the ground we've covered thus far has effectively raised related questions, both on my part and the part of commenters. And there are some questions that stem from the "Israel and/or the Church: Yes or No?" problem that I haven't thrown out there yet. For example:

1. While Galatians 3 explicitly says that the Church (Christians) have inherited the promises given to Abraham, does Paul RESTRICT those promises to those that promise a seed (descendants – literal and/or spiritual) but exclude the land? In other words, since there is no mention of the land in Galatians 3, might THAT part of the promises still be out there for national Israel?

2. While it makes sense that the Great Commission would translate to fulfilling the land element — the oversweeping of the nations via evangelism to reclaim those lost nations — what are we to think of the fact that there is NO VERSE that makes that explicit connection?

3. Since Paul is clear in Romans 9-11 that

(a) "Israel" refers to "natural Israelites (Jews); and

(b) "Israel" also refers to "spiritual Israelites" (believers); and

(c) "all Israel is not Israel" (that within national Israel there is a spiritual Israel, composed of Jew and Gentile); and

(d) there is this thing called the Church (Jew and Gentile)

... then can we really NEATLY separate OR merge these groups with respect to prophecy? Some would say yes; others, no. And THAT is the problem. You can make a coherent case

in any regard. All we can really say is that, for sure, with respect to the New Testament, Paul (and other writers) do not restrict “Israel” to only ethnic Israelites — the term now means much more.

The question really comes down to this: Would Paul (or other NT authors) say that national Israel had no eschatological future apart from being members in the new, spiritual Israel, the Church? Are the destinies of the Church and national Israel tied together en toto, or can they be tied together “mostly” and yet there still be an eschatological future involving national Israel?

Again, there’s no way we can know for sure. So everyone gets to be humble (or ought to). This is just one reason (of a whole list I’m working on here) I just cringe when I get an email from someone utterly captivated by their eschatological position to the exclusion of any other (and they probably don’t even know there are others). I find myself praying and hoping that person’s faith isn’t really built on the latest lame prophecy novel or TV prophecy preacher.

All of the above takes us into today’s topic: Did the covenants that God made with Abraham and David, and the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34), come with conditions for fulfillment? Are these covenants conditional or unconditional?

Seasoned prophecy nerds know this question is important since, if these covenants came with conditions, there may have been a chance that they were dissolved or nullified due to Israel not meeting the conditions. The picture looks bleak, too. Since Israel (all 12 tribes) were exiled, it would be easy to argue that the promises were voided to national Israel and handed over to the Church as recipients of fulfillment. The kind of perfect obedience required by the covenants would be fulfilled in and by Jesus. He is the ultimate son of Abraham, the king in David’s line, and it was he who sent the Spirit after his resurrection to inhabit the hearts of believers according to the New Covenant. Looks pretty tidy.

But that would mean that the Church has displaced national Israel in its entirety. Israel (frankly) was no longer useful. The Servant of Isaiah — and chapter 53 is the ONLY place in Isaiah where Servant is a singular person — is actually the representative of the corporate Servant in Isaiah — Israel (the rest of the occurrences of “Servant” in Isaiah refer to the nation of Israel – look it up). Hence Jesus is everything and all the covenants find fulfillment in Him. And His body is the Church. Again, a very tidy picture — one that would make Left Behinders pretty sullen, since there is no need then for a literal kingdom, and without that, the whole rapture idea doesn’t even make it to the table.

I hope you see (again) how tenuous the whole framework is for this undeniably common view of end times. It is FAR from being self evident. But the other views can’t claim absolute certainty, either. We’ll get to them. For now, let’s talk about the conditional (C) vs. unconditional (UC) problem.

The short answer to my question is “yes” – the covenants are BOTH C and UC. Those who believe in a rapture have been taught they are unconditional. Wrong. So let’s start there.

The Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:1-3; Gen 15)

For sure there are UC elements in this covenant. God initiates the covenant and its promises. The first six verses deal with the promise of descendants (Gen 15:1-7). Gen 15:7-16 deals with promises of the Land. Then God alone passes through the ritually slain and prepared animals sealing the covenant (Gen 15:17-21). The fulfillment of the covenant’s promises therefore depend on Yahweh alone. Case closed, right? Wrong.

While the fulfillment of the promises depend on Yahweh’s ability, it is an entirely different question as to WHO will be on the receiving end of the promises Yahweh fulfills. That’s where the conditional elements come in to play. Put succinctly, receiving the promises depends on a spiritual relationship with Yahweh — obedience to his revelation.

In Gen 12:1-3, the first passage concerning the covenant with Abraham, we see Abraham obeying what he is told (“and he [Abraham] went”; Gen 12:4). After the covenant ceremony of Genesis 15, God reiterates the covenant in Genesis 17:2. But Gen 17:1 lays down a clear condition. Here are the two verses together:

When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.

Notice that the language of v. 2 is clearly drawn from the covenant of Gen 12 and 15. But this time there is a clear condition. God goes on in Gen 17 to repeat all the elements of the original covenant. Then he demands that Abraham and all in his household be circumcised.

Here’s the point: Only Abraham’s circumcised descendants — those who obey — are eligible to receive the promises Yahweh will give. Refusal to obey meant you weren’t going to be part of the promises. God would make sure the promises got fulfilled, but the person who refused to obey wouldn’t be on the receiving end. We see more of this conditionality in Genesis 18. The dual elements are crystal clear:

The Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.”

To summarize all this, Yahweh unilaterally committed himself to do certain things He promised to Abraham. But these promises only extend to Abraham's spiritual descendants — those who, like him, would follow Yahweh. At first this was basically operating only within Israel, Abraham's physical seed. Eventually, it expanded to Gentiles. But the premise was the same: the "obedience of faith" as the apostles liked to call it was necessary to receive the promises. The Abrahamic covenant was both conditional and unconditional.

And so now the questions: Did national Israel corporately forfeit the promises? Since it is those who BELIEVE that inherit the promises, what Paul says in Galatians 3 makes perfect sense — but is that the end of the story? Is the kingdom the Church? On what grounds would we look to a national kingdom in Israel in the future? If it is, it isn't because the covenant was unconditionally given to THE NATION of Israel. Both testaments agree that those who were given the promises were those who BELIEVE.

It's about the obedience of faith, not nationality. At least that much is clear. So we can stop now with defending a literal millennium on the basis of covenant unconditionality. For that idea you need a different argument.

Next up, the Davidic Covenant.

Readers who would want a more technical discussion of this issue are referred to Bruce K. Waltke, "The Phenomenon of Conditionality within Unconditional Covenants," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, ed. Avraham Gileadi, Baker: 1988, pp. 123-140.

Why An Obsession with Eschatology is a Waste of Time, Part 4

Posted by DrHeiser | May 24, 2010

In the last post, we talked about how certain views of end times are tied to certain views of the biblical covenants with Abraham and David, as well as the New Covenant. Many Christians want to argue for a literal millennium on the basis of the irrevocable nature of the Abrahamic covenant — the notion that the covenant can never be undone since it was unconditional. The Land promises must therefore come to Israel, and that means a literal millennium is still in the future with respect to biblical prophecy. We saw, however, that the Abrahamic covenant did indeed have conditions, and that it was fulfilled only to Abraham's "true" children — those who, like Abraham, believe. We saw that the Church fits that nicely per Galatians 3. But we ended with these questions: Since it is those who BELIEVE that inherit the promises, what Paul says in Galatians 3 makes perfect sense, but is that the end of the story? Is the kingdom the Church? On what grounds would we look to a national kingdom in Israel in the future?

In this post we'll look at the covenant with David.

A kingdom naturally needs a king. The Israelite king had to be an Israelite (a son of Abraham). That goes without saying. But when David finally reached the throne, God issued a covenant with him as well that added to the criteria for kingship. That covenant is recorded in 2 Samuel 7 (and it is repeated with basically the same language in Psalm 89):

But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, "Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?' Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with

your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

This covenant is unilateral (initiated only by God) and is unconditional in its language. 2 Samuel 7:21 has David responding: “Because of your promise, and according to your own heart, you have brought about all this greatness, to make your servant know it.” There are no conditions placed on David. It can be divided into promises David would see in his lifetime (vv. 8-11a) and promises to be fulfilled after his death (11b-16). The key idea in this covenant is that David’s dynasty is established as the sole legitimate dynasty for kingship in Jerusalem. God guarantees that no one would reign as king in Jerusalem except a descendant of David. David’s throne is therefore eternal.

But is that it? We saw Abraham’s covenant was BOTH unconditional and conditional. It was unconditional in that God guaranteed its fulfillment regardless of human behavior. It was conditional in that only those who believed and obeyed (“obedience of faith”) would reap any benefit from it. And it was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus – the perfectly obedient son of Abraham through whom all nations would be blessed (Gen 12:3).

David’s covenant is the same — it’s actually both unconditional and conditional. Note the conditional language in 2 Samuel 7:12-15

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.

The referent is SOLOMON, who succeeded David. Even if Solomon goes astray (which he did), God promised that he would still be loyal to David’s line.

The conditional idea of loyalty to Yahweh to gain the BENEFIT of the unconditional covenant is evidenced in Psalm 132:11-12 –

*The Lord swore to David a sure oath
from which he will not turn back:
'One of the sons of your body
I will set on your throne.
If your sons keep my covenant
and my testimonies that I shall teach them,
their sons also forever
shall sit on your throne.'*

It's clear – the king was supposed to be righteous, and if he wasn't, they could expect their immediate line to be cut off. They'd be replaced.

Look what happened in Israel's history after Solomon. The kingdom split in two. David's line (2 tribes; Judah) outlived the rebel kingdom of the north (10 tribes; Israel), but it was indeed destroyed in 586 BC. There has been no king (Davidic or otherwise) that has occupied the throne of Jerusalem since . . . depending on how you look at things.

What gives with the demise of the kingdom then? Davidic kingship needs a closer look. The covenant with David actually created a "Father-son" relationship between God and the king. This is indicated in Psalm 2:7-8, Psalm 89. God says of the king, "I will be his father, and he shall be my son." But what about evil, disloyal sons? What about Israelite kings who disobeyed the Abrahamic covenant and Yahweh's righteous demands? They are cast aside, but (like the Abrahamic covenant) their rejection does not annul the covenant itself — it just means they forfeit kingship and Yahweh's blessing. Passages like 1 Kings 6:12-13; 1 Kings 9:4-7 tell us that disloyal sons/kings lose Yahweh's blessing, even if they are from David's line. Waltke says it this way:

YHWH granted both Abraham and David an eternal progeny and fief. Loyal sons . . . would fully enjoy the fief; disloyal sons would lose YHWH's protection and, if they persisted in their wrongdoing, the possession of the fief itself. The fief, however, would never be confiscated—a promise that opens up the hope that YHWH would raise up a loyal son.

The point of all this can be summarized in two questions:

1. Since God allowed the nation of Judah and David's line to be destroyed and displaced, what of the Davidic covenant? Is it over?

The question is usually answered “no” by Christians, regardless of their end time kingdom views. There is consensus that “God would raise up a loyal son” — Jesus — to fulfill the covenant. That brings us to the second, more weighty, question:

2. Is it possible that the Davidic covenant was already fulfilled in Jesus, the son of David and messiah?

If this is the case, the covenant is fully honored by God and fulfilled, and there would be no reason to expect a literal reign of Jesus on earth. But why? Many reading this will say, “How can the covenant be fulfilled when Jesus hasn’t come back and occupied the throne? The very question ASSUMES that a literal land and kingdom are REQUIRED by the ABRAHAMIC covenant — which we saw in the last couple of posts, is NOT a self-evident interpretation of the biblical text. It may well be that the kingdom = the Church. But if that is the case, is Jesus king now?

Isn’t the question interesting? Does anyone really want to deny that Jesus is king NOW?

Is Jesus on the throne now? According to Hebrews 8:1 and 12:2 he is. He is “seated at the right hand of God.” But that isn’t enough for many Christians. They want the literal reign. Fine. That isn’t a sin.

My goal here is only to show that the idea that the Davidic kingship has already been fulfilled can be made with clarity and coherence via the biblical text. The amillennialist can easily argue that both the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants were fulfilled in Jesus, period. Those who want a literal kingship in the future can say “Jesus is king in heaven now and he will be later on earth” — but recognize that such a view depends on one’s view of the Abrahamic covenant’s land promises! Without that you don’t need this. Since we cannot know absolutely which way it goes, let’s quit talking like there’s only one “biblical” view of eschatology. I hope you can see why I try not to roll my eyes when I hear that sort of thing. And we have a long way to go yet!

Bruce K. Waltke, “The Phenomenon of Conditionality within Unconditional Covenants” in *Israel’s Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, ed. Avraham Gileadi, Baker: 1988, pp. 131-132.

Why An Obsession with Eschatology is a Waste of Time, Part 5

Posted by DrHeiser | Jun 3, 2010

In the last two posts I've been making a simple observation: arguments defending a literal millennium that depend on the unconditionality of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants are poor. The reasons are twofold: (1) Each of those covenants also have clear conditional elements, and (2) Both covenants may be viewed as fulfilled, though this second item is subject to debate. But that's the point: the premillennial view cannot be defended as self-evident. Possible, yes; self-evident, no.

I'll be hitting on the land fulfillment issue in subsequent posts, thus returning to the Abraham covenant. But before that, we need to look at one more important covenant that is typically viewed as unconditional and ultimately future, but which is subject to the same two elements above: it has conditions and it can be viewed as fulfilled.

The covenant I speak of is the New Covenant. Here is the prophecy from Jeremiah 31:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Let's note the elements of importance:

1. The covenant is made with "the house of Israel" (v. 33).
2. The law of God is written on the heart of the believer/faithful person (v. 33)
3. "All" will know the Lord – How should "all" be taken? Premillers and pretribbers want to see this as millennial language, but in that case, "all" cannot mean "all" as in "every person in the kingdom" since Rev 20 tells us there are evil people in the millennium (the people who rebel with Satan after the millennium). Therefore "all" is really a subset. Amillers who would take this as already fulfilled in the Church would say this subset =

believers (i.e., everyone who has the law written on their heart will know the Lord). The “all” in this view = the true Israel of Paul — ANY and every believer.

4. The covenant with the house of Israel is made “after those days” (v.33). “Those days” refers to the time of exile, as any outline of Jeremiah 30-31 will make evident (meaning the question is “how long after the exile is the rest of this fulfilled?”). Here’s one (you can check your own Bible or study Bible too):

- a. Return from captivity (Jer. 30:1-3)
- b. “The time of Jacob’s trouble” (30:4-7) – note that this section is ASSUMED to be future by premillers and pretribbers, but verses 4-7 could easily be viewed as a “flashback” to what the Lord had said EARLIER about Israel and Judah, prior to the promise of return. Again, a future interpretation is not at all self evident.
- c. Freedom from bondage to oppressors (30:8-11)
- d. Israel’s wounds healed (30:12-17)
- e. Rebuilt Jerusalem and her ruler (30:18-22)
- f. Judgment, then blessing (30:23-24)

The new covenant (31:1-40)

- a. God’s mercy for Ephraim (31:1-6) – Since the northern kingdom of Israel (“Ephraim”) no longer existed in Jeremiah’s day, ANY fulfillment view would be future to Jeremiah’s time. While the premill/pretrib view assumes this refers to a future regathering of Israel, it could also refer to the presence of Ephraimite tribes returning back to the land (there are such tribal affiliations mentioned after the returns of Ezra and Nehemiah, and the tribes are numbered at 12 after the return – see Ezra 6:17; 8:35; Luke 2:36 [Asher]; Neh 10:28ff. [Levi]). Nevertheless, the fact that this passage (see v. 4) talks about the rebuilding of Israel and Paul equates the true Israel with ANY believer, Jew or Gentile, may make the whole subject moot.
- b. The restoration of Israel in joy (31:7-14)
- c. Israel’s lamentable present (31:15-22)
- d. Judah’s bright future (31:23-26)

- e. National increase in the future (31:27-30)
- f. God-s new covenant (31:31-34)
- g. The perpetuity of Israel (31:35-40)

Now for some discussion. The conditionality aspect with the new covenant is the law of God mentioned in Jer. 31:33. The law refers back to the Law of Moses. Thus the New Covenant relationship presumes obedience to the law. And yet the history of God's people shows that they cannot keep it. God must do something that makes that possible. He puts the law "in" their heart. In effect, the New Covenant is God's way NOT of removing conditions to be his people, but of meeting the conditions for obedience he set long ago for the true children of Abraham (see my earlier post on the Abrahamic covenant) and any descendant of David who would sit on the throne (recall that they would be removed if they were ungodly, despite the Davidic covenant). God meets the demands of his own covenantal requirements through a remnant that he himself calls and instills his law.

So when is the New Covenant fulfilled? The New Testament uses the phrase "new covenant" several times:

Luke 22:20 And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ?This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

1 Cor 11:25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, ?This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.?

2 Cor 3:6 who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Heb 8:8 For he finds fault with them when he says: ?Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,

Heb 8:13 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 9:15 Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a

death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

Heb 12:24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Clearly, the New Testament sees the New Covenant as fulfilled in the work of Jesus on the cross and through the Church — not in a future millennium. This is not to say that the idea of a millennial kingdom rises or falls on the notion that the New Covenant fulfillment must be yet future. It IS to say that argument is lame. There is only one way to get around a New Covenant fulfillment through the Church — one must argue that the new covenant in these New Testament passages isn't the New Covenant of the Old Testament — but refers to a “new new covenant.” Sound crazy? Then don't read the Ryrie Study Bible or Ryrie's famous book, *Dispensationalism Today*, since that's exactly what he does to get around this problem (some would say to get around the New Testament). As much as Ryrie deserves respect, what he does with the New Covenant is pure sophistry.

One last question — and this is the meaty one: If one can argue so neatly, with plenty of New Testament evidence (see the last two posts plus the above new covenant references) that all three covenants — Abrahamic, Davidic, and New — are fulfilled through Jesus's work on the cross and his Church, what need is there for anything else? (or: Why be so resistant to fulfillment in the Church? Or: What are you losing?).

I can't answer this question for you. I just bring it up to focus again on why I'm doing this series. Everyone brings their bias to eschatology. There are NO self-evident views. Anyone who says otherwise ... well, you already know what I think about that from earlier posts. The only way to escape the bias trap (and not really completely escape) is to junk the systems. That's what I decided to do a long time ago. Granted, I have to make presuppositional decisions like everyone else. But I can say that I have far fewer problems (in part because I don't go into defense mode when talking about eschatology — I don't need to). When we get through all this I'll tell you where I'm at, but we have a loooong way to go.

Why An Obsession with Eschatology is a Waste of Time, Part 6

Posted by DrHeiser | Jun 15, 2010

Now that we're out of the covenants, it's time to move on to other items that demonstrate how anyone's position on end times is driven by presuppositions.

Our discussion of the covenants (and some reader comments) brought to light how readily many Christians assume that the promises of an earthly kingdom could not have been fulfilled yet. Now, I've already noted that there is more than one way to imagine the land promises being yet future while also being already realized through the Church. I want to revisit the kingdom idea a bit more and show how many Christians feel there is biblical reason to think that the earthly kingdom of God and the land promises have already been fulfilled in Israel — specifically at the time of Solomon.

Let's go back to the Abrahamic covenant to start:

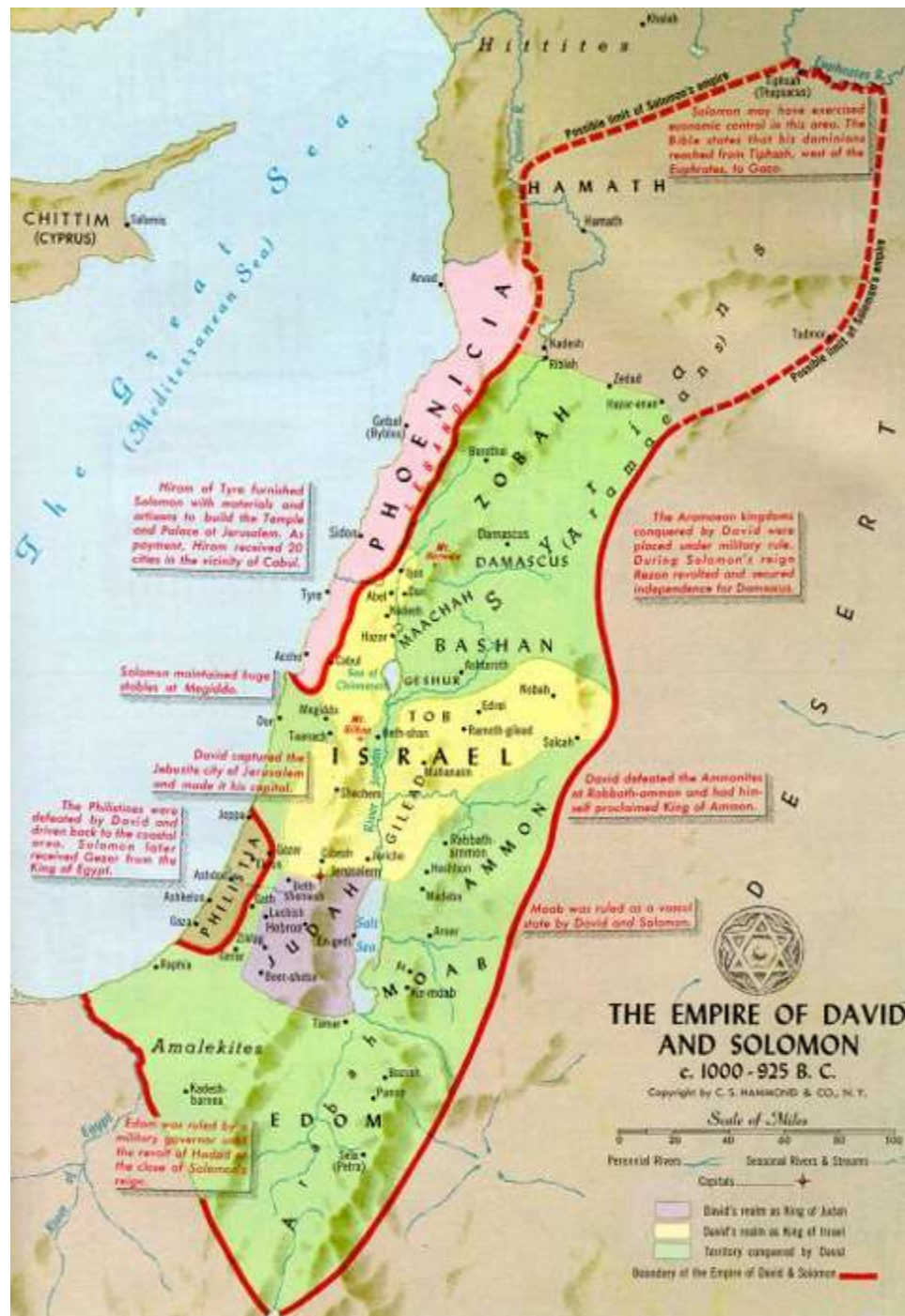
After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness. And he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess." But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it". He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners

in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.

Notice that in verse 18 we get the parameters of the land promised to Abraham. Verses 19-21 adds the details with regional descriptions. The boundaries are clear. The question is, was this promised land ever held by the nation of Israel? Modern dispensationalist evangelicals say no. The problem is that the Old Testament suggests otherwise. Here’s what 1 Kings 4:21-24 describes the boundaries of the territory under Solomon’s rule (they match the Abrahamic covenant):

Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life. Solomon’s provision for one day was thirty cors of fine flour and sixty cors of meal, ten fat oxen, and twenty pasture-fed cattle, a hundred sheep, besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and fattened fowl. For he had dominion over all the region west of the Euphrates from Tiphseh to Gaza, over all the kings west of the Euphrates. And he had peace on all sides around him.

Here’s what it would look like on a map (next page):



This very obviously fits a “no millennium” understanding of the Abrahamic covenant — the position that says the land promises were fulfilled in Israel’s past, so there is no need to posit a literal millennial kingdom future taking place in national Israel.

The other side would object, arguing that all the turf outside the dotted lines (like the coastline) needs to be included for the promise to really be fulfilled. They’d also argue that there were parts of Solomon’s kingdom that were not part of the nation of Israel, but which were just under Solomonic tribute. They believe (“presuppose”) that this doesn’t conform to the way the original promises should be fulfilled.

So which presumption is better? I can’t say I care too much. The point is that the idea of a future millennial kingdom in Israel is not self evident with respect to the Scriptures. That may or may not be the correct read.

Why An Obsession with Eschatology is a Waste of Time, Part 7

Posted by DrHeiser | Jun 27, 2010

The question to address in this post is much simpler than others: Is there any biblical proof that the 70th week of Daniel = the tribulation period?

This equation is critical to the pre-trib, premill view of the rapture. That is, without this equation, that view is very damaged.

Sure, there are plenty of biblical references to a time of tribulation, “the time of Jacob’s trouble,” and of course there is the “70 weeks” prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27. But is there any biblical proof that these terms overlap or are to be defined by each other? Is the 70th week of Daniel ever called or alluded to as a period of tribulation? You’d think that would be important (at least I would).

A couple of observations are in order on this one – I’d like some participation from you all, too.

1. At the end of this post is a list of all the occurrences of the word used in Matthew 24 for “tribulation” (Greek: *thlipsis*). Does any use of the term allude to Daniel 9’s 70th week?
2. Notice that in Daniel 9 the only reference to “trouble” (v. 25) is placed before the 70th week. The Septuagint (Greek translation of Old Testament that Jesus and the Apostles usually quoted from) does NOT use *thlipsis* in this passage to translate this word.
3. The only time Daniel 9:24-27 is specifically referenced in the New Testament is Matt. 24:15. Note that the “tribulation” period in Matthew FOLLOWS in Matt 24:21 (the earlier reference to “tribulation” in 24:9 is obviously personal to each of the disciples of Jesus’ day). This suggests that the tribulation period cannot be the 70th week of Daniel, though PART of that 70th week is defined as a period of tribulation. This is a common position of the pre-wrath rapture view.

So, what I’d like in terms of interaction is for those who would define/equate the 70th week of Daniel with a seven year tribulation to provide some textual support for that view.

We’ll get into the 70 weeks prophecy itself shortly.

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lemma:marks({el}θαλιψις{/})

45 hits in 43 verses

- Matt 13:21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, * and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.
- Matt 24:9 “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake.
- Matt 24:21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.
- Matt 24:29 “Immediately • after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.
- Mark 4:17 And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.
- Mark 13:19 For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be.
- Mark 13:24 “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,
- John 16:21 When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.
- John 16:33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”
- Acts 7:10 and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household.
- Acts 7:11 Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food.
- Acts 11:19 Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.
- Acts 14:22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter • the kingdom of God.
- Acts 20:23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city • that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

- Rom 2:9 There will be **tribulation** and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek,
- Rom 5:3 More than that, * we rejoice in our **sufferings**, knowing that **suffering** produces endurance,
- Rom 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall **tribulation**, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?
- Rom 12:12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in **tribulation**, be constant in prayer.
- 1 Cor 7:28 But if • you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry * will have worldly **troubles**, and I would spare you that.
- 2 Cor 1:4 who comforts us in all our **affliction**, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any **affliction**, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.
- 2 Cor 1:8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the **affliction** we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.
- 2 Cor 2:4 For I wrote to you out of much **affliction** and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.
- 2 Cor 4:17 For this light momentary **affliction** is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, *
- 2 Cor 6:4 but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in **afflictions**, • hardships, • calamities,
- 2 Cor 7:4 I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. In all our **affliction**, I am overflowing with joy.
- 2 Cor 8:2 for in a severe test of **affliction**, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.
- 2 Cor 8:13 For I do not mean that others should be eased and you **burdened**, but that as a matter of fairness
- Eph 3:13 So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am **suffering** for you, which is your glory.
- Phil 1:17 The former * proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to **afflict** me in my imprisonment.
- Phil 4:14 Yet it was kind of you to share my **trouble**.
- Col 1:24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's **afflictions** for the sake of his body, that is, the church,
- 1 Thess 1:6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much **affliction**, with the joy of the Holy Spirit,
- 1 Thess 3:3 that no one be moved by these **afflictions**. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.
- 1 Thess 3:7 for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and **affliction** we have been comforted about you through your faith.

- 2 Thess 1:4 Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.
- 2 Thess 1:6 since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you,
- Heb 10:33 sometimes being publicly exposed • to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.
- James 1:27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, • the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.
- Rev 1:9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.
- Rev 2:9 “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.
- Rev 2:10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.
- Rev 2:22 Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works,
- Rev 7:14 • I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. • They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Why An Obsession with Eschatology is a Waste of Time, Part 8

Posted by DrHeiser | Jul 2, 2010

I was going to try and address Daniel 9:24-27 in one post and then move into another point of eschatology, but the comments have persuaded me that this passage needs close scrutiny. My reason for that is the same as it has been for this entire series: I want readers to see for themselves how the popular end times view of the 70 weeks is FAR from being self evident. There are MANY issues in this passage that I expect most readers will never have seen before. The standard pre-trib (any trib, actually) pre-mill view is presented to the masses in overly simplistic ways. Each element that you'll see in this and other posts in regard to Dan 9:24-27 must be accounted for before one decides what the prophecy meant and thus how it was or will be fulfilled.

To begin, here is a summary of some of the issues we'll encounter from John Goldingay's *Word Biblical Commentary* volume on Daniel. Each of the items highlighted below has its own set of sub-issues as well. Goldingay writes:

"Seventy sevens" presumably denotes "seventy times seven years," as the original "seventy" of Jeremiah was explicitly a period of years (v 2). The period suggests that the seventy years of punishment due according to Jer 25:11/29:10 is being exacted sevenfold in accordance with Lev 26...

Ancient and modern interpreters have commonly taken vv 24-27 as designed to convey firm chronological information, which as such can be tested by chronological facts available to us. It may then be vindicated, for instance, by noting that the period from Jeremiah's prophecy (605 b.c.) to that of Cyrus's accession (556) was 49 years and the period from Jeremiah's prophecy to the death of the high priest Onias III (171) was 434 years so that the sum of these periods is 483 years, the final seven years taking events to the rededication of the temple in 164. Or it may be vindicated by noting that according to some computations the period from Nehemiah (445 or 444 b.c.) to Jesus' death at Passover in a.d. 32 or 33 was exactly 483 years, the seventieth seven being postponed.

Both these understandings of the seventy sevens may be faulted on the grounds of their arbitrariness.

In the case of the first, it is not obvious why two partly concurrent figures should be added together.

In the case of the second, it is not obvious why the word about building a restored Jerusalem should be connected with Artaxerxes' commission of Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem; nor why we should accept the basis of the computation, that of a 360-day year; nor why we should separate off the seventieth seven, as the theory requires; nor why we should date Nehemiah's commission in 444 b.c. or Jesus' crucifixion in a.d. 32 - the computation requires one or the other, but the usually preferred dates are 445 and a.d. 30 or 33; according to J. K. Fotheringham, a.d. 32 is "absolutely impossible"! ["The Evidence of Astronomy and Technical Chronology for the Date of the Crucifixion"]. Further, it is striking that the New Testament itself does not refer to the seventy sevens in this connection; Luke 1-2 applies v 24 in a quite different way.

This last comment deserves a closer look. How does Luke 1-2 refer to the seventy sevens? Understand the import of this. The question we are asking is "How does the New Testament itself understand the 70 weeks?"

There's more here than meets the eye.

First, we need to observe that the 70 weeks passage is NOT quoted in the gospels in relation to the crucifixion, which is the assumed reference point for the prophecy in the standard trib/mill view(s). That is very curious IF the end of the 69th week was intended to end with the crucifixion of the messiah. How could ALL the gospel writers have missed that?

Second — and here's where we need to think about the deliberate literary UNITY of the Bible — there are a series of parallels between Daniel 9 and Luke 1, and so the question is, are they deliberate:

- a. The angel that speaks to Zechariah to announce the birth of John the Baptist, the eschatological herald, is Gabriel. Gabriel is the same angel who spoke to Daniel in Daniel 9. He's the same guy that gives Daniel the information of Dan 9:24-27.
- b. Gabriel's appearance to Daniel when Daniel was praying (Dan 9:20-21). In Luke 1:8-13 his appearing happens in connection with the hour of incense when prayers are being offered.
- c. The description of the fear of Daniel and Zechariah respectively are parallel (Luke 1:12 matches that of Dan 8:17; 10:7).
- d. The Greek word *hoptasia* (?vision") in Luke 1:22 is found six times in the Septuagint (Greek) version of Dan 9-10.

e. Both Zechariah and Daniel are rendered mute (Luke 1:20, 22 and Dan 10:15).

f. Luke gives chronological details in his gospel that mirror the 490 weeks of Daniel 9: There are six months (180 days; Luke 1:26) between the two birth announcements to Elizabeth and Mary; Mary's pregnancy lasted nine months (270 days); there were 40 days from the birth to the presentation in the temple [cf. Lev 12:1-4; i.e., $7 + 33 = 40$ days before the mother could go to the sanctuary]. These numbers produce a total of 490 days, the number of the total of weeks in Daniel 9.

Is this all a coincidence? Maybe. If it's not, then what we have here is that, in the mind of Luke (who of course traveled with Paul, the Pharisee, and used Jewish sources), the presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple sanctuary when he was 40 days old marked the end or fulfillment of the seventy sevens — both in years and in the days since God first moved to begin the fulfillment of OT prophecy (the announcement of the herald, John, who would “prepare the way of the Lord” in fulfillment of Isaiah 40).

Now, for sure, this may be a coincidence, or there may be more to Daniel 9, or other ways Daniel 9 could work (including but also aside from the standard trib/mill view). But that's my point: HOW CAN WE KNOW FOR SURE which scheme is right? We can't, and to assume one view is somehow “biblical” and the others are not is arrogant, as it depends on our own omniscience.

More Daniel 9 to come.

Why An Obsession with Eschatology is a Waste of Time, Part 9

Posted by DrHeiser | Jul 3, 2010

Continuing on with the assumptions made in regard to the 70 weeks of Daniel...

In the last post we jumped into Daniel 9:24-27 and saw (to the surprise of some I am sure) that, although so many people are sure that the 70 weeks prophecy was about a timeline that had the 69th week end with the crucifixion, no New Testament writer ever quotes Daniel 9:24-27 as a fulfillment of the crucifixion (or resurrection). If that prophecy was so incredibly accurate ON THAT POINT AND FOR THAT REASON then it seems nothing short of amazing that no New Testament writer ever put that together.

As we proceed, I'm going to ask a series of questions about how to interpret Daniel 9:24-27. Here's the first:

Does the text of Daniel 9:24-27 have the *mashiach* ("anointed one") coming after the first seven weeks, followed by 62 more (=69) before the 70th week, or does the "anointed one" come in conjunction with / toward the end of the 69th?

To many readers this no doubt sounds like a dumb question, since many will consider the second option to be self-evident from the passage. That is because they assume that the "anointed one" in the passage is the messiah, Jesus. No way he could have come only 49 years after Daniel has the prophecy beginning (which most take to be around the time of Nehemiah. I should say here that it is NOT self evident that the "anointed one" here is Jesus the messiah. As we go through some other posts it will become clear why this is the case.

It is also not self-evident that the 70 weeks is to begin at the time of Nehemiah's rebuilding — or ANY rebuilding. That may sound amazing, but we'll hit that on in the next post. For now, we'll stick to one issue — the question posed above: Does the text of Daniel 9:24-27 have the *mashiach* ("anointed one") coming after the first seven weeks, followed by 62 more (=69) before the 70th week, or does the "anointed one" come in conjunction with / toward the end of the 69th?

This question arises from how the text of Daniel 9:24-27 was accented by the Masoretic (Hebrew Old Testament) scribes.

In Dan 9:25 the Massoretic tradition places what is called a disjunctive accent (*atnah*) between the words for "seven sevens / weeks" and "sixty-two sevens." A disjunctive accent served to separate items on either side of the accent. That means the Masoretes saw a break (a disjunction) between the 7 weeks and the following 62. This in turn means that the "anointed one" comes at the end of the seven weeks, before the other 62 occur. The ESV, RSV, and NRSV translate the text according to this Masoretic division. Here they are — note

how these translations (due to the accenting) has the “anointed one” coming in conjunction with the end of the first seven weeks:

(ESV) 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.

(RSV) Know therefore and understand that from the going forth 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.

(NRSV) Know therefore and understand: from the time that the word went out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the time of an anointed prince, there shall be seven weeks; and for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with streets and moat, but in a troubled time.

This understanding of the verse is known from early Christian sources (e.g., Eusebius) so it is not coherent to chalk this up to an anti-Jesus fiddling with the text by Jewish scribes, as some have charged. Besides, the accents were added centuries after the church began, making the presence of this translation / interpretation of the verse in early Christian sources all the more striking.

Other English translations ignore the Masoretic accent (for one reason or another). Here are some examples. Note how in these translations the “anointed one” comes after the 69 weeks (7 + 62).

(NIV): Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven sevens, and sixty-two sevens. It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.

(NLT): Now listen and understand! Seven sets of seven plus sixty-two sets of seven will pass from the time the command is given to rebuild Jerusalem until a ruler the Anointed One comes. Jerusalem will be rebuilt with streets and strong defenses, despite the perilous times.

(KJV): 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.

Getting back to our question, here's the point. The neat 69 weeks from (whatever starting point) that culminate in the ministry and crucifixion of Jesus, assumed by so many end times teachers, may not be the intended meaning of the prophecy at all. In fact, if the Masoretic accenting of the text is accurate, then the prophecy isn't even messianic (or at least that idea is weakened considerably). The "anointed one" would not be Jesus the messiah, but another "anointed one" (and there were a number of these in the OT, even pagans, like Cyrus the Persian king; cf. Isa 45:1).

So . . . which is it? Does Daniel 9:25 have the "anointed one" coming after the first seven weeks, or after the 69 weeks? And how can we know FOR SURE? Answer: we can't know for sure. It would sure have been nice for at least one New Testament writer to quote the passage in such a way that we could know.

Granted, in my first post on this I sketched out the speculation that Luke may have been seeing Daniel 9 that way, but that doesn't actually help those who want the 69th week to end with the crucifixion (when the "anointed one" is "cut off"). If Luke was angling for what I sketched out, to him the 69th week went up to the birth of Jesus, not the death. That seems incongruous with the "cut off" language (but maybe . . . just maybe . . . the "anointed one" WAS a figure in the past — not Jesus — but the NT writers see an analogy . . . that's future fodder). I hope you see that there is more to this than you've been told in the Left Behind novels and XYZ (take your pick) prophecy book.

Why An Obsession with Eschatology is a Waste of Time, Part 10

Posted by DrHeiser | Jul 7, 2010

Continuing on with our series, “why the seventy weeks of Daniel is more complicated than popular prophecy writers tell you — or even know.”

This Daniel 9 issue requires especially close attention. It runs so contrary to what all the popular end times experts have planted in your mind that it may go right past you. The focus now is the context of Daniel 9:25 — i.e., what context is set in Daniel 9? (What a novel idea — view verse 25 in light of what has preceded in the chapter).

Here’s how Daniel 9 begins:

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans, 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. Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying...

Notice that Daniel tells us he had been reading the book of Jeremiah — specifically, the word of the prophet about the 70 year exile. The exile is referred to as a time of “desolations” for Jerusalem. The passage Daniel refers to is Jeremiah 29:10-14:

For thus says the Lord: 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. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

Now take a look at Daniel 9:25:

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.

The relationship between Daniel 9:1-4 (with its allusion to Jeremiah 29) and Daniel 9:25 isn't readily apparent. Let me try to make it clear.

Typically, Daniel 9:25 is viewed as Daniel looking into the future to a time when Jerusalem will be rebuilt by its people. That rebuilding campaign would be the starting point of the 70 weeks prophecy. Those who hold to a trib/pre-mill view usually debate over dates in the mid-400s BC as the time of this rebuilding, and hence the commencement of the 70 weeks prophecy. This allows the 69 weeks to end at the crucifixion, leaving a yet future 70th week still out there in prophecy.

But what if Daniel wasn't looking AHEAD? What if he saw the beginning of the seventy weeks prophecy BEFORE his own time?

Here's what I mean. What if the seventy weeks prophecy given to Daniel by Gabriel began with the decree of Jeremiah? Jeremiah would have uttered this "word" sometime before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. This would mean that as soon as Jeremiah prophesied what he did in Jeremiah 29, the 70 weeks started ticking down. That's over a century before the popular view starts the 70 weeks, and it therefore destroys a connection with the crucifixion.

Now, I know this is quite foreign to what many of you have heard. It's actually a simple matter of which phrase in Daniel 9:25 one focuses on. Let me illustrate (note the boldfacing for which words are considered to mark the beginning of the 70 weeks):

Popular View, where the 70 weeks begins with Nehemiah's rebuilding so that the 70 weeks end with Jesus' death:

... from the going forth of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one (mashiach), a prince (nagid), there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time.

“Jeremiah View” – If Daniel, who we know was reading Jeremiah (Dan 9:2) was thinking of Jeremiah’s prophecy of the end of Jerusalem’s desolations (Jer 29:10-14):

... from the going forth of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one (mashiach), a prince (nagid), there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time.

(in this view, the “word that went forth” in Dan. 9:25 = Jeremiah’s prophecy in Jer. 29:10-14)

Given the context of Daniel 9:1-4, it is entirely possible that Daniel was thinking BACK to Jeremiah’s decree — that Gabriel was telling him that the clock started ticking as soon as God gave Jeremiah that word.

So how would that work in chronology? It’s pretty straightforward, actually.

1. Let’s say Jeremiah got the Jeremiah 29 prophecy right before Jerusalem was destroyed, say 588 BC. We don’t know, but logic says it would have been close to the end of Jerusalem, which was 586 BC.
2. From 588 to Cyrus’ rise to power over Babylon in 539 = 49 years, or the first seven sevens of Daniel 9:25. Cyrus was the guy who liberated the Jews and ended the exile.
3. If we go with the Masoretic accenting (see the post prior to this one), then the anointed one immediately follows those 49 years. The identity of the anointed one is obvious: Cyrus himself. Why? We need an anointed “prince” [ruler] from Daniel 9:25, and Cyrus is called by God “my anointed” in Isaiah 45:1. It is he who would deliver the exiled nation (and he did). It’s quite explicit.
4. Following Cyrus’ decree to let the Jews return, there are 62 more periods of seven years to follow. That brings us to 104 BC.
5. Some could (and have) argued that 104 BC is significant since it marks the death of John Hyrcanus, the last of the Hasmonean (Maccabean) rulers (ethnarch and high priest). At the end of his reign, John Hyrcanus had built a kingdom that rivaled the size of Israel under King Solomon. After Hyrcanus, his son and successor (they were not Davidic) took the title of “king,” something they had no claim to. Not good. The Romans were (in this view) God’s instrument of punishment for that.

At any rate, any attempt to rationalize the chronology with the events of history has its points of special pleading. The trib/pre-mill view has been trying to work out its own chronology since the late 19th century. Other views have the same task.

The point here is NOT to argue for any specific chronology. Rather, it is to point out that the beginning of the 70th week in the mid-400s is NOT a self-evident starting point, especially since Daniel tells us he was reading Jeremiah 29 when Gabriel unloaded on him.

Only omniscience could give us certainty here. I'm running short on that.

Why An Obsession with Eschatology is a Waste of Time, Part 11

Posted by DrHeiser | Jul 11, 2010

As you read this, bear in mind again I am not taking a position or describing where I'm at with all this. My goal is to show the ins-and-outs of how Daniel 9:24-27 could be viewed (i.e., the “self evident” problem).

Taking another look at Daniel 9...

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 with 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.

Our focus this time around is the “anointed prince” (or is it princes?).

In verse 25: “*an anointed one, a prince*” shall come (after either the first seven weeks, followed by 62 more, or after the 69 weeks)

Let's assume (with the standard pre-trib view) that “*the anointed one, the prince*” comes after the 69 weeks.

In verse 26a: after the 62 weeks (69 in total by the above reckoning), “*an anointed one*” shall be “*cut off*” and “*have nothing*”.

QUESTION: Is the “*anointed one / the prince*” in verse 26 the same as the one in verse 25?

This is certainly possible (and probably the easiest reading) if one presumes the 7 + 62 weeks are not to be split up via the Masoretic accenting.

In verse 26b: now we read of “*the people of the prince who shall come*”...

QUESTION: Is this prince (26b) the same as the anointed prince in 26a?

If YES — then ...

(1) the same prince who is “cut off” in 26a is still alive in 26b to “*come and destroy the city and the sanctuary.*” That would mean “*cutting off*” cannot refer to death (ruling out crucifixion).

(2) if one wants to identify the prince of 26a as Jesus (interpreting the “*cutting off*” with the crucifixion), then if one wants the prince of 26a to be the same prince of 26b, one has to posit a resurrection in between. That might sound good, but look at what it produces — the people of the prince of 26b (meaning, the followers of the resurrected Jesus) then destroy the city (Jerusalem) and the temple (sanctuary). Not only did this not happen in history, but it would be completely out of character for the followers of Jesus.

CONCLUSION: If you want Jesus to be the prince of 26a, you cannot also have him be the prince of 26b. There must be two different princes. This is the way most pre-tribbers take the passage, assuming the second prince to be the antichrist, since “*his people*” destroy Jerusalem and the temple.

So is there a problem with that? To say the least, it’s an odd reading because we aren’t TOLD there are two princes — that has to be read INTO the passage. Rather, there is one prince mentioned (v. 26a) and then we meet “*the people of the prince who is to come*” (and since the prince we’re actually told about is being predicted as coming, one would more naturally assume the same prince is in view). In other words, one can ASSUME that these “*people*” and their “*prince*” are separate characters (and chronologically separated to boot), but it would be very easy (and natural), since we just read about a coming prince to assume that “*the people of this prince that will come*” refers to the same prince in 26a. But again, if they are the same, we cannot be talking about Jesus.

But let’s assume that we have a separation. The prince of 26a is Jesus, who is “*cut off.*” Then there is a second prince (with “*his people*”) who destroys Jerusalem and the temple, and then, in v. 27 “*HE*” (the second prince — the bad one, the antichrist — makes a covenant with many for one seven ... and then we get the abomination. Standard pre-trib reading.

How could that be a problem for the standard pre-trib view? I’d say it can work, but it needs to work WITHOUT verse 24 — and verse 24 is the main reason anyone is thinking of Jesus as a candidate to be the prince of verse 26. Why do I say this? Look at verse 24 (note my boldfacing):

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.”

Here’s the point: All of these conditions only happen **AFTER** all 70 weeks. Pre-tribbers assume that some of them are accomplished at the end point of verse 26a, when the anointed prince [Jesus in that view] is “cut off” — but the text doesn’t say that. The natural (literal? face value? plain?) reading of verse 24 is that when the 70 weeks are up, all these things will be true. We have no warrant for attaching SOME of them to a time before the 70 weeks are fulfilled. It’s just done to make the system work.

And think about the list. Did ANY of them come to pass with the crucifixion?

— **was all transgression and sin ended at the cross?** No. We all still sin.

— **to atone for iniquity** — one could argue that was accomplished, but since it is the **ONLY** possible connection to the cross (the others didn’t happen with the cross as we’ll see below), one ought to wonder if the phrase was intended to speak of the crucifixion. (Why would one work well and not the others?) Maybe it referred to the sacrificial system or Yom Kippur. If Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed (see vv. 25-26) you would need an end to those circumstances to be able to make atonement for iniquity again. And that would certainly be the case after the 70 weeks were done.

— **“to bring in everlasting righteousness”** — did that happen at the cross? This is kingdom language, but only an amillennialist **MIGHT** say that the cross and resurrection brought the kingdom about in this way. And one wonders, if everlasting righteousness was brought in at the cross, what’s left to bring about in terms of righteousness? I don’t know what we’d be waiting for if it was already accomplished. It seems if you’re premill, you can’t equate this with the cross event.

— **to seal the vision** — this couldn’t be done with the cross event since there were events still subsequent to the cross that had to come to pass (like antichrist and what he does).

— **“to anoint a most holy place”** – I don’t know how the crucifixion did this. It reads like the holy place had been desecrated and needed to be sanctified. That would be the case after the 70 weeks horror (all of it) were over — and that speaks to interpreting the atonement language the way I outline above — not having to do with the crucifixion.

This is why I think if you're going to take the standard pre-trib view of Daniel 9:25-26, you need to forget verse 24, but that amounts to dispensing with the very thing that fuels your view.

More briefly to the point: If you think the standard pre-trib view is a straightforward reading that is completely clear and coherent, think again. You would need to account for all these issues that arise from the text. It might be possible, but it isn't self-evident. To me the biggest issue is the arbitrariness of having two princes. Again, that's possible, but it feels dicey.

Next up – last post on Daniel 9. I'll finish up the Gentry article and have some notes on it, as well as two others. Then (finally) on to the rapture idea.

Why An Obsession with Eschatology is a Waste of Time, Part 12

Posted by DrHeiser | Jul 22, 2010

Before leaving Daniel 9 I wanted to comment on Peter Gentry's very recent article (included at the end of this Part), as well as two others. All three take Daniel 9:24-27 as messianic (i.e., that the "anointed one" who is "cut off" is indeed Jesus the Messiah), though they do not take all elements of the outworking of the 70 weeks the same way.

Gentry's article was everything I've come to expect from anything Peter writes. It was clear, cogent, and thorough. Frankly, it's the most coherent explanation I've read on Daniel 9:24-27. I'm quite glad that a reader brought it to our attention. All of you should give it a close read.

Before anyone says, "wait a minute Mike, Peter takes positions in the article with which your previous posts have disagreed, what's up?"

What's up is that you haven't been paying attention (or I haven't repeated it sufficiently!). I wasn't taking any positions in my prior posts (none of them), only bringing to your attention the interpretive difficulties and ambiguities in the passage.

I'll summarize how Peter handles the specific issues we've been chatting about below. In a nutshell, he sees Daniel 9:24-27 as entirely messianic - no antichrist is in view - and already fulfilled. Again, this is well presented and well-argued (that is, every element has exegetical support). What this means is that, for Peter, the passage is about Jesus, his first coming, his vicarious death, and the destruction of the temple that was Jesus' body AND the Jerusalem temple in 70 AD.

Peter's article covers every facet of Daniel 9:24-27, but if we zero in on how exactly he sees what's going on in those verses, this is his most crucial note:

Verses 25-27 are not to be read in a linear manner according to the logic of prose in the western world based upon a Greek and Roman heritage. Instead, the approach in ancient Hebrew literature is to take up a topic and develop it from a particular perspective and then to stop and start anew, taking up the same theme again from another point of view. This approach is kaleidoscopic and recursive. . . First, v. 25 introduces the first period of seven weeks and the gap of sixty-two weeks to the climactic seventieth week. This last week is described twice in verses 26 and 27. Verses 26a and 27a describe the work of the Messiah in dying vicariously to uphold a covenant with many and deal

decisively with sin, thus ending the sacrificial system. Verses 26b and 27b show that ironically, supreme sacrilege against the temple at this time will result in the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. Thus verses 26-27 have an A-B-A'-B' structure:

A 26a the beneficial work of the Messiah

B 26b ruin / spoliation of the city by his people and its desolation by war

A' 27a the beneficial work of the Messiah

B' 27b abominations resulting in destruction of the city by one causing desolation

KEY THOUGHT at this point. Gentry argues that since the 70th week is really about the ending of the ultimate exile (the spiritual exile) of Israel and its solution - the coming of the messiah, only the events in verse 24-27 that deal specifically with the messiah are to be viewed as occurring WITHIN the last seven year period. Other events that are fallout from what happened with Jesus can (and he says do) happen outside the last seven year week. This is essential for his view that vv. 24-27 (in places) deals with the fall of Jerusalem at the hand of the Romans. You'd have to read the whole article for how he builds this case. THIS is the key place where Peter has to do some presupposing/make some assumptions that are critical to his own view. The literary structuring above seems to support him, though some could argue that he is using his assumption to CREATE the structure as opposed to deriving his from an intended authorial structure. The real question would be this: does Peter's structuring make better sense than someone else's - someone who would want to take Daniel 9:24-27 as a linear chronology from v. 25 through the end of v. 27?

Here is the interpretation that results from Peter's approach (and which is supported by a number of other items throughout the 19 page article):

v. 25 ("the Messiah")

The anointed one, the Leader = THE messiah, Jesus

v. 26a ("the beneficial work of the Messiah")

Sometime after the 69th week ends, this same anointed one (messiah, Jesus) will be "cut off" but "not for himself" (= a vicarious death not for his own benefit, but for his people).

These events occur in the last seven (week).

v. 26b (?ruin / spoliation of the city by his people and its desolation by war?)

These events are NOT within the last seven year period, but follow sometime after (note that Jesus himself had the abomination being fulfilled yet future to his own ministry in Matt 24).

The people of this Leader (the messiah) will be responsible , in the same seven year period (years 27-34 AD), for despoiling the city and the sanctuary. In other words, the Jewish people bear the responsibility for the pollution of the sanctuary (Gentry mentions a specific historical circumstance here) and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

v. 27a (?the beneficial work of the Messiah?)

This same Leader (Jesus) will “uphold a covenant with the many” (Israel). At the halfway point of the seven (between 27-34 AD) he will cause sacrifice and offering to cease – by virtue of his vicarious sacrifice (sacrifices are no longer necessary).

v. 27b (?abominations resulting in destruction of the city by one causing desolation?)

Again, these events are NOT within the last seven year period, but follow sometime after (note that Jesus himself had the abomination being fulfilled yet future to his own ministry in Matt 24).

The “abominations” refer to the sacrilege which resulted from the struggle for the control of Jerusalem in the first century prior to 70 AD and after Jesus’ crucifixion.

Gentry writes:

The “war” to refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and Temple by Vespasian/Titus (the “one causing desolation”). The “one causing desolation” (Titus) comes “on the wing of,” i.e., in connection with, those causing “abominations” (Jews), the one (i.e., people) being desolated. Jesus’ mention of the “abomination of desolation” in the Olivet Discourse supports this understanding since he is probably speaking of the sacrilege of John of Gischala as the “abomination” which forewarns of the impending “desolation” of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans.

In regard to an antichrist figure being the referent of v. 27, Gentry does a good job showing how the language used to support that from Daniel 7 and 8 confuses and interchanges the third and fourth kingdoms of Daniel 2 and 7. His thoughts here are brief but, in my view, very damaging to an antichrist identification.

While I'm sure many readers will be quite enthusiastic about the way Peter establishes the messianic character of Daniel 9:24-27, they should fully realize what it means is he is correct:

1: Jesus is the point of reference through the entirety of Dan 9:24-27 with respect to any mention of an anointed one and a prince ("leader") - that means there is NO BAD GUY in the passage CONNECTED TO A 70TH WEEK. The "desolation" occurring in v. 27 refers to activity AFTER the 70 weeks prophecy is history.

2: There is no future 70th week (which pre-tribbers identify with the Great Tribulation). The 70 weeks are over.

3: If there is an antichrist figure, that idea cannot be argued or produced from Daniel 9:24-27. That means that all the looking forward (or reading a newspaper) for the signing of a covenant with Israel to start the 70th week and "term" of the antichrist is pointless. There may be an antichrist, but he'd sneak up on you if you were looking for him to do things described in Daniel 9. You'd never see him coming.

4: With no seven year tribulation pending, there's no rapture pending, since all views of the rapture see it as logically having something to do with escaping a great tribulation or separating the Church from Israel. A post-tribber might be able to weasel his/her way into viability if Gentry is right, but it would prompt the obvious question: why do you need a rapture when the old historic premill view accounts for everything here? (Historic premillennialism is the view that there is no rapture and tribulation - there is just the return of Christ to set up a literal earthly kingdom; post-tribbers would add a rapture right before the second coming - so believers go up and come right back down - seems kind of pointless, especially if there is no 70th week to account for).

So, in a nutshell, Gentry's view is quite workable with preterism (even full preterism), as well as what used to be called "historic premillennialism".

Again, I highly recommend reading his article.

I also mentioned two other articles that defend a messianic view. These are both by J. Paul Tanner and appear in Dallas Seminary's journal, BibSac. Obviously, the writer would need to be pre-trib and pre-mill if writing for Dallas on prophecy, though Tanner doesn't really get into all that in his articles. His focus is the messianic nature of Daniel 9:24-27. His articles are:

"Is Daniel's Seventy Weeks Prophecy Messianic?" Part 1 BibSac 166 (April-June 2009): 181-200

"Is Daniel's Seventy Weeks Prophecy Messianic?" Part 2 BibSac 166 (July-September 2009): 319-335

Next up: presuppositions and the rapture — are you a splitter or a joiner? (I'll leave you wonder what I mean by that for now).

Daniel's Seventy Weeks and the New Exodus¹

Peter J. Gentry

INTRODUCTION

DANIEL 9 IS famous for the Vision of the "Seventy Weeks." Unfortunately, interpretation of this text has been difficult not only for average readers, but for scholars as well. We must not only pay attention to (1) the cultural and historical

setting, and (2) the linguistic and textual data, but also carefully analyze and consider (3) the literary structures, (4) the apocalyptic genre of the text, (5) the relation of Daniel 9 to other prophetic texts in the Old Testament, and above all (6) the metanarrative or biblical-theological framework crucial for making sense of any individual text. Lack of understanding as to how apocalyptic and prophetic literature communicates has hindered the church especially in the last hundred years. In addition, a failure to grasp the larger story that alone makes sense of the details in this text have resulted in imposing on it a framework of understanding foreign to it.

PETER J. GENTRY is Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Prior to this, he served on the faculty of Toronto Baptist Seminary and Bible College for fifteen years and taught at the University of Toronto, Heritage Theological Seminary, and Tyndale Theological Seminary. The author of many articles, Dr. Gentry is currently editing *Ecclesiastes* and *Proverbs* for the Göttingen Septuagint Series, and he provides leadership for the Hexapla Institute.

OVERVIEW OF DANIEL

The Stories and Visions of Daniel²

Part 1: Six Stories (Chapters 1-6)

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Daniel and Friends in the Court of Babylon |
| 2 | King's Dream: A Huge Statue / Small Stone |
| 3 | Daniel's Friends Rescued from the Furnace |
| 4 | King's Dream: A Huge Tree |
| 5 | Belshazzar and the Writing on the Wall |
| 6 | Daniel Rescued from the Lion's Den |

Part 2: Four Visions (Chapters 7-12)

- | | |
|-------|---|
| 7 | A Vision of Daniel: Awful Beasts / Son of Man |
| 8 | A Vision of Daniel: The Ram and The Goat |
| 9 | A Prayer of Daniel and Vision of 70 Weeks |
| 10-12 | A Vision of Daniel: The Writing of Truth |

The book of Daniel consists of twelve chapters which divide equally into six narrative (1-6) and six visionary chapters (7-12). In the Hebrew canon, Daniel follows the poetic section which ends with Lamentations—a book focused on the theme of exile. The narratives of chapters 1-6 of Daniel take up this theme of exile and describe

how faith in the God of Israel, the one true and living God, is to be maintained in the face of defilement, idolatry, and prohibitions of prayer backed up by wild beasts and fire and great persecution. The dreams and visions of chapters 7-12, apocalyptic in nature, give hope to the people of God by showing God in control of history through four periods of domination by foreign nations until a decisive end is made to rebellion and sin, with a renewal of the broken covenant and restoration of the temple and establishment of God's kingdom as eternal and final.

GRASPING THE LITERARY STRUCTURE

Grasping the literary structures of Daniel is crucial for a proper understanding of Chapter 9. Literary structures also aid in dating the work to the sixth century B.C. and seeing it as a unity. Part of the literary artistry of Daniel can be seen in chiasmic structures. The word *chiasm* comes from the letter in the Greek alphabet known as *chi* (χ), which is shaped like an X. The top half of the letter has a mirror image in the bottom half. If, for example, a literary piece has four distinct units and the first matches the last while the second matches the third, the same kind of mirror image is created in the literary structure and is called a chiasm. The literary structure of Daniel is complex and rich and only partly revealed in the following two charts:³

Chiastic Structures in Daniel – Chart I

Prologue	1
Image of Four Metals: Triumph of God's Kingdom	2
Persecution of Daniel's Friends	3
Humbling of Nebuchadnezzar before God	4
Humbling of Belshazzar before God	5
Persecution of Daniel	6
Vision of Four Beasts: Triumph of God's Kingdom	7
Vision of Future History	8
Daniel's Prayer and God's Response	9
Daniel's Grief and God's Response	10
Vision of Future History	11:1-12:4
Epilogue	12:5-13

Note that chiasmic structures mark chapters 2-7 and 8:1-12:4 as main sub-units.⁴ Thus chiasm firmly links the visions to the stories.

Chiastic Structures in Daniel - Chart II

DANIEL'S FAITHFULNESS	DANIEL'S FAITHFULNESS
Ch 1 – Refusal to eat the king's food. Daniel is vindicated.	Ch 6 – Refusal to obey king's command. Daniel is vindicated.
TWO IMAGES	TWO VISIONS OF BEASTS
Ch 2 – Nebuchadnezzar's Dream-Image Ch 3 – Nebuchadnezzar's Golden Image	Ch 7 – The Four Beasts Ch 8 – The Two Beasts
TWO KINGS DISCIPLINED	TWO WRITINGS EXPLAINED
Ch 4 – Discipline of Nebuchadnezzar Ch 5 – Writing on the Wall and Destruction of Belshazzar	Ch 9 – The Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah Chs 10-12 – The Writing of Truth and Destruction of the King

Again, note that parallel literary structures mark chapters 1-5 and 6-12 as main sub-units. Thus literary parallelism firmly links the visions to the stories. The chiasms and parallel structures may be simultaneously valid.

In summary, the literary structure divides the book into halves both between chapters 5 and 6 and between chapters 7 and 8, linking chapters 2 and 7 as dreams referring to the same thing. This interlocks the two halves of the book as determined by stories and visions. What is the significance of this unity? It is just this: the first half of the book establishes and proves that Daniel has a gift of interpreting dreams and visions of events which could be independently verified by the contemporaries of Daniel. Therefore, we must believe and trust the interpretation of the visions in the second half of the book, which deal with the distant future and hence were not open to verification by the audience of Daniel's time.

The literary structures are the key to interpretation. We need a clear view of the whole in order to understand the parts and their relationship to each other.

The dream of Chapter 2 and the vision of Chapter 7 are at the center of the book and communicate in different ways the same thing. In Chapter 2 a gigantic image of man is front and center in the Babylonian king's dream. Its head consists of gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron and feet of iron and clay. It is struck down by a rock—cut without hands from a mountain—which then grows to fill the entire earth. This dream foretells four successive human kingdoms succeeded by the kingdom of God which will endure forever.

Chapter 7 begins the second half of the book in which the Babylonian king's dream is expanded in a series of visions presented like maps provided with blowup inserts. Each successive vision is an enlargement of part of the previous vision, each provides greater and greater detail of the same scene. Daniel replaces the king as dreamer and sees four beasts coming out of the chaotic sea.

Then in a picture of the court of heaven, one like a Son of Man is given the kingdom. This vision again foretells four successive human kingdoms succeeded by the kingdom of God. The vision of chapter 8 expands upon the second and third kingdoms; the vision of chapters 10-12 provides an expanded view of events in the third and fourth kingdoms.⁵ We now have a detailed road map through the maze of forces arrayed against the people of God throughout successive human kingdoms.

DETAILED OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER 9

Outline of Daniel 9

1. The Motivation for Prayer	9:1-4a
2. Daniel's Prayer for Favor	9:4b-19
A. Invocation and Confession	9:4b-14
B. Appeal for Favor and Mercy	9:15-19
3. Revelation Through Divine Messenger	9:20-27
A. Occasion for Angelic Message	9:20-23
B. Vision of the Seventy Weeks	9:24-27

SETTING OF THE VISION OF THE SEVENTY WEEKS (9:1)

Chapter 9 begins in the typical way by giving a chronological notice. The date is the first year of Darius "who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom" (v. 1). This is significant for this was the year in which the Persians conquered the Babylonians, whose empire, under Nebuchadnezzar, had defeated and exiled Judah some decades earlier. This was also the first year of Cyrus the Great, who gave the decree which permitted the exiles of Judah to return to their homeland.

Nonetheless, Chapter 9 is different in many ways. It begins with an extensive prayer by Daniel—the only major prayer recorded by him in the book (aside from 2:20-23). And although the section includes a vision like chapters 7, 8, and 10-12, this vision is obviously not part of these other "roadmap" visions that proclaim a sequence of four human kingdoms followed by the kingdom

of God. So interpretation of the Vision of Seventy Weeks must show how this is related to the other visions.

PRAYER MOTIVATED BY SCRIPTURE (9:2-4A)

Daniel's prayer is motivated by Scripture and based upon Scripture. In verses 2 and 3 Daniel indicates that he understood by the word of the Lord given through the prophet Jeremiah that the length of time to complete and end the divine judgment of the exile is seventy years. Although Daniel could not give a particular reference as to the passage(s) he had in mind as we would do today, clearly he is thinking of Jer 25:1-15 and 29:1-23.

His prayer is also based upon 1 Kgs 8:33-34, 46-51 where Solomon outlines the necessity and possibility of praying towards the Temple when the people sin, and then God will hear and forgive and bring the people back to the land.

The prayer of Solomon is based in turn upon Deut 30:1-10 where Moses promises a restoration after the application of the covenant curse of exile, a restoration contingent upon repentance for sin.

ADDRESSING GOD (9:4B)

Daniel's prayer does not begin by requesting something. It begins by addressing God properly and by acknowledging his character and person. Daniel speaks of God as "the great and awesome God who keeps the covenant and loyal love (*hesed*) for those who obey the requirements and terms of the covenant." The focus here is upon God's loyal love within the covenant relationship. He does not quickly punish his people, and he stands ready to bless them when they obey his laws.

CONFESSING SIN (9:5-10)

The next part of the prayer is devoted to confession of sin. Daniel is not concerned to demonstrate his own personal innocence and piety. Instead, he completely and fully identifies with his

people and acknowledges their sin. He confesses that God's people have not obeyed his commands, but have rebelled against him instead. They have not listened to the warnings of the prophets who were sent to God's people to get them to change their attitudes and behavior to conform to the directions and instructions given by God in the covenant for their lifestyle. The prophets are like the lawyers of the covenant. When the covenant is broken, they appear in order to accuse the people with the ultimate intention of restoring their love and faithfulness to God. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and many others were used by God to carry the message of warning and repentance, but they went largely unheeded.

The prophets were sent, according to Daniel, to all strata of society—from kings to common people. None of them, however, responded. Rather, they persisted in their foolish and dangerous rebellion.

Next Daniel marks a contrast between the sin of the people and the mercy of God: God is faithful; his people are rebellious. The prophet is brutally honest in his acknowledgement of the responsibility of God's people for their present dire condition. They are in exile because they have rebelled against the covenant God made with them through Moses.

GOD'S PUNISHMENT (9:11-14)

Then, in verses 11-14 of his prayer, Daniel draws a direct connection between the sin of the people and their present suffering (cf. Lam 2:2-5). The present suffering is due to the curses promised to those who violated the covenant (Deut 28:15-68).

APPEALING FOR COMPASSION AND MERCY (9:15-19)

Finally, Daniel calls upon God as the one who delivered his people out of Egypt to lift the covenantal curse and to restore the city of Jerusalem and its sanctuary. The exodus was a pivotal event in the life of God's people. It defined them as a nation. Through it, God freed them from slavery

and brought them into the Promised Land. The prophets before Daniel saw an analogy between the exodus and the future deliverance that would free them from the shackles of the exile (cf. Isa 40:3-5; Hos 2:14-15). In essence, the return from the exile would be a second exodus, a new exodus.

GOD'S RESPONSE: THE VISION OF SEVENTY WEEKS (9:20-27)

As verses 20-23 show, the brief message supplied by vision in verses 24-27 constitute a direct divine response via an angelic messenger to the appeal and request raised by Daniel on the basis of Jeremiah's prophecy. What follows is a fairly literal translation of the Hebrew text to show how the numerous problems in the text have been understood. Space does not allow all of the exegetical issues to be given full treatment.

20 And I was still speaking and interceding in prayer and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and making my pleading before the LORD my God fall upon the Holy Mountain of my God.

21 I was still speaking in the petition, when the man Gabriel whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning—while I was made weary by fatigue—was touching me about the time of the evening offering.

22 And he explained and spoke with me and said, "Daniel, I have now come to give you clear insight.

23 At the beginning of your supplications a word went out and I came to declare [it] for you are beloved. So pay attention to the word and consider the vision:

24 Seventy sevens are determined for your people and your holy city, to end wrongdoing, and to finish with sin, and to atone for guilt / iniquity, and to bring in eternal righteousness, and to seal up prophetic vision, and to anoint a most holy place,

25 so you must know and understand, from the issuing of a word to rebuild Jerusalem until an

Anointed One, a Leader, are seven sevens and sixty-two sevens. It will be rebuilt in square and trench and in distressing times.

26 And after the sixty-two sevens, an Anointed One will be cut off, but not for himself, and the people of the coming Leader will ruin / spoil the city and the sanctuary, and its end will come with the flood. And until the end war—desolations are what is decided.

27 And he will uphold a covenant with the many for one seven, and at the half of the seven he will cause sacrifice and offering to cease, and upon a wing of abominations is one bringing desolation and until an end and what is decided gushes out on the one being desolated."

Among many difficulties encountered in lexical and syntactic issues facing the translator, the most problematic is the clause division in v. 25. According to the accents in the Masoretic Text, "seven weeks" belongs to the first sentence, while "sixty-two weeks" along with the conjunction preceding this noun phrase (i.e. "and sixty-two weeks") begins a new clause. One could argue that beginning a new sentence with the conjunction and noun phrase before the imperfect verb *tāšûb* (from the hendiadys for "it will be rebuilt") is a natural reading according to the rules of syntax in Hebrew. Moreover, if the author desired to delineate sixty-nine weeks, why not just say so specifically? Why divide the period into seven and sixty-two weeks? On the other hand, according to the rules of macrosyntax, beginning a clause by *tāšûb* without a conjunction (asyndeton) would signal a comment or explanation on the previous sentence rather than supply new information.⁶ An explanation for dividing the period into 7 and 62 can be given (see below), but problems of interpretation arising from following the accents in the Masoretic Text are insurmountable. Who is to be identified as the Anointed One after seven weeks? Further, the most natural reading is to identify "Anointed One" and "Leader" in v. 25 with the same terms in v. 26, but this identification is not

possible according to the division in the Masoretic Text. In a detailed historical study Roger Beckwith has demonstrated that the clause division represented by the Masoretic Text represents a reaction against messianic interpretation of the text while the clause division accepted in the translation above follows the Septuagint, Theodotion, Symmachus, and the Syriac Peshitta.⁷ Thus the clause division adopted here is both strongly and widely supported early in the text tradition.

UNDERSTANDING THE END OF EXILE

In order to grasp properly the request as raised by Daniel and the answer as provided through the Vision of the Seventy Weeks, we need to understand the prophetic teaching concerning the end of the Exile.

According to the context, Daniel is concerned about the end of the exile. God's people had broken the Covenant (Exodus 19-24 / Deuteronomy), and as a result, the covenant curses had fallen upon them. The final curse or judgment was exile (Deut 28:63-68). Nonetheless, exile was not the last word; God had a plan *from the start* for his people to return (Deut 30:1-10). Isaiah indicates that the return from exile entails two separate stages: (1) return from Babylon to the land of Israel, and (2) return from covenant violation to a right relationship to God so that the covenant relationship is renewed and restored (see Isa 42:18-43:21 and 43:22-44:23 respectively). The first stage is the physical return from exile. But as is often said, "You can get the people out of Babylon, but how do you get Babylon out of the people?" The physical return from exile gets the people out of Babylon, but the problem of getting Babylon out of the people must be dealt with by a second stage. The second stage is the spiritual return from exile: it deals with the problem of sin and brings about forgiveness and reconciliation in a renewed covenant between Yahweh and His people. According to the structure of Isaiah's message, Cyrus is the agent for the return from Baby-

lon, and the Servant of the Lord is the agent for the return from sin. Thus there are two distinct agents and they correspond to the two distinct parts of the redemption which brings about the end of the exile. This can be clearly seen in the structure of Isaiah 38 - 55 as follows:⁸

Overview of Isaiah 38 - 55: The Book of the Servant

A.	Historical Prologue – Hezekiah's Fatal Choice	38:1-39:8
B ¹ .	Universal Consolation	40:1-42:17
	1. The Consolation of Israel	40:1-41:20
	2. The Consolation of the Gentiles	41:21-42:17
C ¹ .	Promises of Redemption	42:18-44:23
	1. Release	42:18-43:21
	2. Forgiveness	43:22-44:23
C ² .	Agents of Redemption	44:24-53:12
	1. Cyrus: Liberation	44:24-48:22
	2. Servant: Atonement	49:1-53:12
B ² .	Universal Proclamation	54:1-55:13
	1. The Call to Zion	54:1-17
	2. The Call to the World	55:1-13

Daniel's prayer is focused upon the physical return from Babylon—the first stage in redemption, but the angelic message and vision of the Seventy Weeks is focused upon the forgiveness of sins and renewal of covenant and righteousness—the second stage in return from exile. Note the six purposes of the message and vision:

Three Negative Purposes

1. to end the rebellion
2. to do away with sin
3. to atone for guilt/iniquity

Three Positive Purposes

4. to bring in everlasting righteousness
5. to seal up prophetic vision
6. to anoint the most holy place

When one considers the plan of redemption as outlined by Isaiah, clearly the angelic message is concerned principally not with the first stage, but especially with the second stage of return: the forgiveness of sins and renewal of a right relationship to God.

The end of the exile is frequently portrayed in terms of the exodus. Just as God brought his people out of Egypt in that great event known as the exodus, so He will now bring about a new exodus in bringing his people back from exile. In fact, many aspects of the return from exile parallel the original exodus. In Ezek 4:4-6, for example, the prophet is instructed to lie on one side for 390 days for the sin of Israel and on the other side for 40 days for the sin of Judah: in each case a day for each year. The sum of 390 and 40 is 430—exactly the length of the period of bondage in Egypt. What is being portrayed by the drama of Ezekiel is that just as there was a period of bondage in Egypt before God brought about the exodus, so now there will be a long period of foreign overlords before He brings about the new exodus. Outside of Daniel 9, this longer period of subjugation before the new exodus is referred to in 8:19 as the “time of wrath.”⁹

The vision of Daniel 9 communicates the same truth. From the prophecy of Jeremiah, Daniel expects a literal period of seventy years for the Exile to be completed. This seventy-year period apparently begins with the death of Josiah in 608 B.C. and extends to the fall of Babylon to Cyrus the Great in 539 B.C. When Daniel brings this issue to God in prayer, the answer is that this seventy year period only deals with the first stage of the return from exile. Before the new exodus, there will be a longer period of exile. Thus the real return from exile, a return including the forgiveness of sins, renewal of the covenant, and consecration of the temple, will not take just seventy years, but rather seventy “sevens,” i.e. a much longer time. This *fundamental point* of the vision has unfortunately escaped the attention of proponents of both dispensational and non-dispen-

sational treatments in the last one hundred years.

Although the focus of the message is on the city and the people (Jerusalem and Israel), there are broader implications for the nations. This passage must be seen in the light of the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants. The Abrahamic Covenant promised blessings for the nations through the family of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). The Mosaic Covenant directed and instructed the family of Abraham how to live in a right relationship with God, a right relationship with one another in covenant community, and a right relationship to the earth (as stewards of the creation), so that they could be the blessing to the nations (Exodus 19-24). With the Mosaic Covenant broken, Israel now needs the forgiveness of sins so that the covenant is renewed and the blessings can flow to the nations. Thus, the final and real return from exile is achieved by dealing effectively with Israel’s rebellion: the first objective in the list of six is to end “the rebellion,” i.e., of Israel. Then the blessing can flow to the nations, and this blessing finds fulfillment in the apostolic preaching of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ when each one turns from their wicked ways (Acts 3:26). In this way, the second stage of return from exile has implications specifically for Israel, but also universally for the nations.

THE ROLE OF THE DAVIDIC KING IN ENDING THE EXILE

The angelic message of Daniel 9 refers to an “anointed one” (*māšîaḥ*) / “leader” or “ruler” (*nāgîd*). Various proposals have been made for the identification of this person or persons. The grammar of the apposition in v. 25 requires that both terms refer to one and the same person. And without any grammatical or literary signals to indicate otherwise, the simplest solution is that the same two terms in v. 26 also refer to one and the same person—the same individual referred to in v. 25. Although many scholars identify the “anointed one” as the High Priest Onias III whose murder in 171 B.C. is reported in 2 Macc 4:33-38, Daniel I. Block provides four cogent reasons to reject this

identification:¹⁰ (1) It depends upon dating the composition of the book of Daniel to the second century B.C., a position that is not tenable according to the chronological, linguistic, and literary data.¹¹ (2) The arrival of this person is associated with the rebuilding and restoration of Jerusalem, so that one naturally thinks of a Davidic figure. (3) Although *nāgîd*, “leader, ruler,” is used elsewhere of cultic officials, *nāgîd* and *māšîaḥ* are conjoined elsewhere only with reference to an anointed king (1 Sam 9:16; 10:1; 1 Chron 29:22). (4) While the Old Testament speaks of a coming king who will function as a priest, it never speaks of a coming priest in royal terms. In this way the Old Testament consistently distinguishes the Aaronic / Zadokite priesthood from Davidic royalty. As John Oswalt notes, the reference in Daniel 9 is the only unambiguous reference to *māšîaḥ* (the Messiah) as the eschatological Anointed One, in the entire Old Testament.¹²

There is a good reason why the future king is referred to in vv. 25 and 26 by the term *nāgîd*, “ruler,” rather than by the term *melek*, the standard word in Hebrew for king. This is revealed by Donald F. Murray, who has provided the most recent and thorough treatment of *nāgîd*, particularly in the context of 2 Sam 5:17-7:29. His conclusion is worth citing:

In our texts the *melek* is one who sees his power from Yahweh as susceptible to his own arbitrary manipulation, who obtrudes himself inappropriately and disproportionately between Yahweh and Israel, and who treats Israel as little more than the subjects of his monarchic power. The *nāgîd*, on the other hand, is positively portrayed as one who sees his power as a sovereign and inviolable devolvement from Yahweh, who acts strictly under the orders of Yahweh for the benefit of Yahweh’s people, and holds himself as no more than the willing subject of the divine monarch.¹³

In short, *nāgîd* communicates kingship according to God’s plan and standards whereas *melek* communicates kingship according to the Canaanite model of absolute despotism and self-aggrandisement. That is why the term *nāgîd* dominates in the passage on the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7) and is also the term used here.

The Davidic king ruling in Jerusalem was removed from the throne by the exile in 586 B.C. Yet according to the eternal and irrevocable promises of Yahweh to David, the prophets spoke of a coming king from David’s line. The message and vision given to Daniel associates the king’s return with the end of exile and the climactic purposes for Israel and Jerusalem, but with great personal tragedy: he will be cut off, *but not for himself*. The coming king will give his life to deliver his people.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE SEVENTY WEEKS

The Hebrew word translated “weeks” is *šāwûa’*. It may refer to a period of seven days, like the English word for week (Gen 29:27, 28 [cf. Judges 14:12, Tob 11:19]; Deut 16:9 (x 2); Lev 12:5; Jer 5:24; Dan 10:2, 3; Ezek 45:21¹⁴). Still referring to a period of seven days, it occurs in the phrase “Feast of Weeks” (Exod 34:22; Deut 16:10, 16; 2 Chron 8:13; and, without the head-word “feast,” Num 28:26). It also occurs in Dan 9:24, 25 (x 2), 26, 27 (x 2), apparently referring to a period of seven, but not seven days. This is clear from the occurrences in Dan 10:2, 3 where we find the phrase “week of days” because the author wants to return to the literal and normal use of the word “week.” Daniel 10:2 and 3 are the only instances of the phrase “week of days” in the OT, a phrase required by the context in proximity to chapter 9 where the word has a different sense.

The number seventy is clearly connected by the context (9:2) to Jeremiah’s prophecy concerning the end of exile (Jer 25:1-15 and 29:1-23). Chronicles explains the fulfilment of Jeremiah’s prophecy of seventy years as lasting “until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths” (2 Chron 36:20-22).

Chronicles explicitly connects the seventy years of exile to the principle of sabbatical years, although this is not spelled out by Jeremiah. The explanation given in Chronicles is based squarely on Lev 26:34-35: “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” (cf. Lev 26:40-45).

Paul Williamson is therefore right on target when he correlates the “seventy sevens” with sabbatical years and the Jubilee:

The “seventy sevens” chronography is probably best understood against the background of Jewish sabbatical years, and the Jubilee year in particular (cf. Lev. 24:8, 25:1-4; 26:43; cf. 2 Chr. 36:21). Thus understood, the seventy sevens constitutes ten jubilee years, the last (the seventieth seven) signifying the ultimate Jubilee (cf. Isa. 61:2). Given the Jeremianic context that prompted this revelation (Dan. 9:2; cf. Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10), some explicit association between this climactic Jubilee and the anticipated new covenant is not unexpected.¹⁵

Thus the “sevens” or “weeks” are periods or units of seven years, i.e., sabbaticals. Understood this way, the “seventy sevens” constitutes ten jubilees, the last (the seventieth seven) signifying the Ultimate Jubilee. In Luke 4 when Jesus reads from the Scroll of Isaiah, he sees the Ultimate Jubilee in 61:2 as fulfilled in his own life and ministry.

Retributive justice, the foundation of divine righteousness in the Mosaic Covenant, requires a symmetry to the experience and history of the nation of Israel. The period of time from the beginning of the Israelite Kingdom to the fall of Jerusalem is essentially seventy sabbaticals. Then come seventy years of exile, a period when the land enjoyed its sabbath rests. This is followed by seventy sabbaticals before the exile is finally over:¹⁶

Seventy Sabbaticals	Seventy Years of Exile	Seventy Sabbaticals
= Causes of Exile	= Sabbaths for the Land	= Solution to Exile

Thus the time required to resolve the problem of Israel’s sin is precisely the same time it took to create the problem in the first place.

THE DIVISION OF THE WEEKS AND THE STARTING POINT

A chronology of seventy sabbaticals is required that answers appropriately to the divisions of the seventy “weeks” specified in the text and also allows the details concerning the events and persons predicted for these times to be easily identified. According to verses 25-27, the period of seventy sabbaticals is divided into three parts: seven sabbaticals in which the city of Jerusalem is rebuilt (v. 25), sixty-two sabbaticals in which nothing noteworthy or remarkable happens in relation to the purposes specified in this vision, and the climactic seventieth sabbatical when a covenant is upheld, offerings and sacrifices are ended, somehow in connection with extreme sacrilege to the temple and someone who causes desolation (v. 27). As D. I. Block similarly notes,

despite the textual problems raised by these verses, the focus of attention in this seventieth week of years is on an Anointed One, who is “cut off, but not for himself.” Ironically, within the very week that the root problem of Israel’s exile (sin) is solved through the death of the Messiah, the city of Jerusalem is destroyed.¹⁷

In the history of interpretation, four possible dates for the beginning of the period of seventy weeks have been proposed:¹⁸

- (1) 586 BC = God’s Word at the Fall of Jerusalem (Jer 25:11-12, 29:10)
- (2) 537 BC = Cyrus’s Word allowing the Return from Exile (2 Chron 36:23, Ezra 1:1-4)
- (3) 457 BC = Artaxerxes’s Commission to Ezra (Ezra 7:11-26)¹⁹
- (4) 444 BC = Artaxerxes’s Commission to Nehemiah (Neh 2:1-6)²⁰

The first proposal is the least likely. The “word” coming from Jeremiah is actually dated by 25:1 to the fourth year of Jehoiakim, i.e. 605 B.C., and predicts the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Beginning the seventy sabbaticals at either date does not yield a satisfactory solution for the three periods of time or the events occurring in them and the identity of the Anointed One.

Many scholars opt for the fourth proposal because Artaxerxes’s commission to Nehemiah specifically entails building the walls and this accounts for the word to rebuild Jerusalem. Yet this proposal faces many problems. It requires that the Messiah be cut off *in* the sixty-ninth sabbatical and leaves the seventieth sabbatical in v. 27 unexplained. This option also simply does not work if we are counting sabbaticals and years in a literal sense. To make this proposal work, H. Hoehner, one of its most able proponents, uses so-called “prophetic years” of 360 days, but with scant support for such a calendrical definition or evidence that this is typical in prophetic predictions.²¹ Scholars who argue that the death of

the Messiah occurs in the sixty-ninth sabbatical explain that “*after* sixty-nine weeks” really means “*in* the sixty-ninth week” in ordinary language or reckoning of the time.²² Such an argument constitutes special pleading.

According to Ezra 1:1-4 and 2 Chron 36:23, the “word” of Cyrus in 537 is focused on building a house for the Lord at Jerusalem. This word matches perfectly the prophecies of Isa 44:28 and 45:13 which predict Cyrus giving leadership to rebuild the city and temple of Jerusalem. Cyrus’s divinely appointed purpose (Ezra 1:2) led him to allow the people to return to accomplish this task (Ezra 1:3). After the altar was rebuilt and foundations were laid for the new temple, opposition brought the work to a halt. A decree of Darius allowed it to be finished (Ezra 6) spurred on by the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah. In Ezra 7, the “word” of Artaxerxes (c. 457) is focused on support for the new temple. Yet Ezra 6:14 speaks of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes as though they issued a single decree. Darius’s decree (Ezra 6) was based upon the fact that Cyrus had *already* issued the decree to permit the return and rebuilding of Jerusalem (see Ezra 5:17-6:7). Darius’s decree was therefore a renewal (6:6-7) and an expansion (6:8-12) of Cyrus’s original decree (6:3-5). Ezra 6:14 shows that Artaxerxes’s decree to Ezra (in Ezra 7) is also an extension of Cyrus’s original decree. So the decree which Cyrus drafted in 537 to restore the temple is not completed until 457 B.C. under Artaxerxes, which is therefore the date of the “word to rebuild Jerusalem” starting with its sanctuary. Artaxerxes’s commission to Nehemiah in 444 B.C. is not connected to Cyrus’s decree in Ezra 6:14 because the decree of 6:14 has to do specifically with rebuilding the *temple*, not the walls of Jerusalem. No doubt the rebuilding of the city was not complete until Nehemiah restored the walls, but rebuilding the city and rebuilding the temple were one and the same thing to the Jewish people (cf. Isa 44:28).²³

457 B.C., then, is the correct date to begin marking off the seventy sabbaticals because this

“word” to rebuild the city is associated with the return of Ezra and the re-establishing of the judiciary, central to the concept of a city (Ezra 7:25, 26). Ezra is a central figure in the return. (As already noted, the commission of Artaxerxes to Ezra connects with the earlier contributions of Cyrus and Darius.) In addition, the book of Nehemiah (not separate from Ezra in the Hebrew Canon) is about rebuilding and restoring the city of God. While chapters 1-6 focus on restoring the city in physical terms, chapters 7-13 focus on restoring the city as a group of people devoted to the service and worship of their God. So rebuilding the city for Nehemiah is not merely about bricks and mortar. Daniel had computed the first year of Cyrus (537) as the end of the Exile according to 9:1-2. Ezra 1:1-4 acknowledges Cyrus as the fulfilment of Jeremiah’s prophecy. But it seems that the point of the vision of Seventy Weeks is to mark a beginning *after* the word of Cyrus in 537. Thus, Ezra’s return commissioned by Artaxerxes is the next possible point. More importantly, the command in 457 is actually at the beginning of a sabbatical cycle.²⁴ When one begins the computation from this point, the three periods of the Seventy Weeks and the events and personae associated with them fit both precisely and simply. First, the literary structure of the text must be observed; then the explanation of the chronology and events is straightforward.

THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF VERSES 25-27

Verses 25-27 are not to be read in a linear manner according to the logic of prose in the western world based upon a Greek and Roman heritage. Instead, the approach in ancient Hebrew literature is to take up a topic and develop it from a particular perspective and then to stop and start anew, taking up the same theme again from another point of view. This approach is kaleidoscopic and recursive. It is like hearing music from stereo system speakers sequentially instead of simultaneously. First comes the music of the right speaker; then comes

the music of the left speaker. Then the person hearing (i.e., reading) puts the two together into a three-dimensional stereo whole.

First, v. 25 introduces the first period of seven weeks and the gap of sixty-two weeks to the climactic seventieth week. This last week is described twice in verses 26 and 27. Verses 26a and 27a describe the work of the Messiah in dying vicariously to uphold a covenant with many and deal decisively with sin, thus ending the sacrificial system. Verses 26b and 27b show that ironically, supreme sacrilege against the temple at this time will result in the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. Thus verses 26-27 have an A-B-A’-B’ structure.²⁵ This fits the normal patterns in Hebrew literature to deal with a topic recursively. The literary structure can be diagrammed as follows:

- A 26a the beneficial work of the Messiah
- B 26b ruin / spoliation of the city by his people and its desolation by war
- A’ 27a the beneficial work of the Messiah
- B’ 27b abominations resulting in destruction of the city by one causing desolation

Observing this literary structure is crucial because one can explain difficulties in one section using the parallel section. For example, “the people of the coming leader” in v. 26b bring ruin to the reconstructed Jerusalem. Verse 27b provides further details showing that the “one causing desolation” does so in association with abominations. Below we will see how this makes perfect sense of the role played by both Jewish and Roman people in the fall of the temple. The literary structure also clarifies how the terms *māšīaḥ* and *nāgīd* in 25 and 26 refer to one and the same individual and moreover makes perfect sense of the “strengthening of a covenant” in v. 27a.

THE FULFILMENT OF THE PROPHECY

Verse 25 speaks of the issuing of a word to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah, the

Ruler, as seven and sixty-two sevens. During the seven weeks, the city is rebuilt fully with plaza and town-moat. The sentence “It will be rebuilt with plaza and trench and in distressing times” has no sentence-connector (asyndeton) and according to discourse grammar markers indicates a comment on the previous statement that specifies the time. This clause adds the comment that the city will be fully restored and the restoration will occur during distressing times. The seven sabbaticals cover the period roughly 457-407 B.C. and include the efforts of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. If one employs either the command of Cyrus in 537 or Artaxerxes in 444, the period of approximately fifty years does not correspond well to our records of the history of Israel and the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Then for sixty-two sevens, there is nothing significant to record as far as God’s plan is concerned. There is a *good* reason, then, for dividing the sixty-nine weeks into seven and sixty-two weeks: in the sixty-nine weeks to the time of the Messiah, active reconstruction of the city and temple occupies only the first seven weeks.

Sixty-nine sabbaticals or weeks of years bring the time to 27 A.D. when the “word to restore Jerusalem” is understood to refer to the decree of Artaxerxes in 457 B.C. The calculation of sabbatical years in Israel for antiquity is based upon evidence from Maccabees, Josephus, inscriptions, the Talmud, and Maimonides. The standard treatment derives from Benedict Zuckermann in 1866.²⁶ More recently Ben Zion Wacholder has analysed the data differently and provided a table of sabbatical years from 519 B.C. to 441 A.D.²⁷ Here I follow the standard view of Zuckermann according to the critique of Ben Zion Wacholder by Bob Pickle, although the difference between the chronologies reconstructed by these two scholars is only one year.²⁸ Thus, the seventieth sabbatical is from 27-34 A.D. following Zuckermann or 28-35 A.D. following Ben Zion Wacholder.

Half way through this time, i.e., 31 A.D., the

Messiah is cut off, but not for himself. Astonishingly he dies, but his death is vicarious. The phrase וְאֵין לִּי, commonly rendered “and he will have nothing” is better translated “but not for himself.” The quasi-verbal וְאֵין in Late Biblical Hebrew can function precisely as the Standard Biblical Hebrew negative אֵין.²⁹ The point in the vision is that the coming king dies vicariously for his people.

Serious students of scripture have not always agreed on the date of the crucifixion. Newman, Bloom, and Gauch have an excellent response for this issue:

In any case, if the traditional scheme for the location of the sabbatical cycles is followed instead of Wacholder’s, the 69th cycle shifts by only one year, to AD 27–34, which still fits equally well. Likewise an error by a year or two on either end—for Artaxerxes’s 20th year or the date of the crucifixion—would not change the result. The prediction fits Jesus even allowing for the largest possible uncertainties in chronology.³⁰

Thus, by employing sabbaticals, the prophecy remains an astounding prediction finding fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth and yet allows for differences as well in calculating the crucifixion. The crucifixion is almost always dated between A.D. 27 and 34.

If we put verses 26a and 27a together, the vicarious death of the coming king brings about a confirming / strengthening / upholding of a covenant with “the many,” almost certainly “the many” referred to in Isa 53:10-12.³¹ Without doubt, Isaiah 53, describing a future Davidic Servant of the Lord, who is also both priest and sacrifice, laying down his life for the many, is the background to the brief comment in Daniel’s vision. His death brings an end to the sacrificial system because it is a final solution to the problem of sin. The expression “he will strengthen a covenant” occurs only here in the entire Old Testament. Careful analysis of all constructions involving the term “covenant”

shows that the closest expression to “*higbîr berît*” in Dan 9:27 is “*heqîm berît*”, i.e., to confirm or uphold a covenant, an expression which refers to a covenant partner fulfilling the obligation or promise previously enshrined in a covenant so that the other partner experiences in historical reality the fulfilling of this promise, i.e., one comes good on one’s promise.³² In Genesis 15 God’s promises to Abraham of land and seed are formalized in a covenant. The expression used is *kārat berît* (15:18). Later in Genesis 17 God upholds his promise and says Sarah will have a baby within a year. The expression consistently used there is *heqîm berît* (17:7, 19, 21).

In Dan 9:27a the statement “he will uphold a covenant with the many” refers to the work of the Anointed King in effecting the new covenant described by the prophets at different times and in a variety of ways. It is important to note that there are different perspectives in the prophets on the new covenant. Their contributions are *not monolithic*, but view the gem of God’s future covenant renewal from many different facets. Usually the expression is *kārat berît*—to cut a covenant—to indicate a covenant that did not exist previously and is being initiated now between partners for the first time. Excellent examples are Isa 55:3, Jer 31:31, and Ezek 34:25 and 37:26. Yet Ezek 16:60, 62 employs *heqîm berît* for the new covenant. We should not assume here, against the linguistic use in general, that the expression is now equivalent to *kārat berît*, but rather looks at the making of the new covenant from a different point of view. Verse 60 speaks of Israel breaking the covenant of Sinai and of God subsequently establishing an everlasting covenant with them. Ezekiel’s language indicates that there is a link between the Sinai covenant and the new. He employs the expression “confirm or uphold a covenant” to show that the new covenant establishes effectively what God intended in the Sinai covenant. The point is supported by the fact that the new covenant is called here an everlasting covenant whereas the term “everlasting” is never used of the Sinai covenant.³³

Something similar is probably the thrust of Dan 9:27a. The expression “uphold a covenant” is chosen and used here because the context entails the return from exile and the “renewing” of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel.

Notwithstanding the above explanation, the expression *higbîr berît* in Dan 9:27, unique in the Old Testament, is difficult. An alternative explanation proposed by Jason Parry may be more satisfactory. He notes that the construction *higbîr berît* in 9:27 is similar to the Aramaic expression *tqp* (Pa”el = “strengthen”) plus *’ēsār* (injunction or prohibition), i.e., “to put in force an injunction.” This Aramaic expression occurs in Dan 6:7 (6:8 Heb) when the enemies of Daniel want the king to create a new law that they wish to use to trap Daniel and is parallel to the expression “enact a statute.” A cognate adjective of *tqp* in Imperial Aramaic and Nabataean has the meaning “lawful” or “legitimate.” Thus, though the basic meaning of *tqp* in the Pa”el is “strengthen,” a meaning like “make lawful” is appropriate, especially when the object is “injunction.” The Hebrew expression *higbîr berît* in 9:27 could be viewed, therefore, as a calque of the Aramaic expression in Dan 6:7 and as a result, would be equivalent in meaning to *kārat berît*, i.e., initiating a covenant rather than upholding an existing commitment or promise. Whichever explanation of *higbîr berît* is adopted, there is no doubt that the covenant of 9:27 is the new covenant which was effected by the sacrificial death of the Messiah in order to restore the broken covenantal relationship between God and his people.

Strangely, at the same time that the Messiah comes and effects a final solution for sin, v. 26b states that the people of the coming ruler will destroy the city and the sanctuary. There is no grammatical issue in identifying object and subject in this sentence. The meaning of the sentence is also straightforward. The coming ruler must be the Messiah of v. 25 according to the context and normal rules of literature. Therefore “the people of the coming ruler” are the Jewish peo-

ple.³⁴ The statement is telling us that it is the Jewish people who will ruin / spoil the restored city and temple at the arrival of their coming King. Historical records confirm that this is precisely right. We have firsthand accounts of the Fall of Jerusalem from the first century in *The Wars of the Jews* by Josephus. Anyone who has read and studied these texts will understand the author's point. Although the Roman army actually put the torch to Jerusalem, the destruction of the city was blamed squarely on the Jewish people themselves. Josephus wrote his work to try to exonerate the *masses* by blaming the *few*, i.e., the Zealots. Thus, he wanted people to believe that the fall of Jerusalem was not the fault of the people as a whole, but rather due to a few extreme rebels who brought down the wrath of Rome upon them. So Josephus is adequate historical proof that the destruction of Jerusalem was entirely the fault of the Jewish people, just as Dan 9:26b predicts. Since few interpreters find it possible to accept the straightforward statement of the text, ingenious alternative proposals are multiplied. These cannot be detailed here except to say that many of them assume rather unnaturally that the "ruler" in v. 26 is different from the one in v. 25, when v. 25 clearly connects the "ruler" with the "anointed one" and no contextual clues exist that this is a different person.

Moreover, the literary structure of verses 26-27 helps to explain the cryptic phrase in v. 26b, since v. 27b returns to the topic of the ruin of the restored Jerusalem and elaborates, providing further details and information. The "people of the coming ruler" who ruin the city and sanctuary (26b) are responsible for the "abominations" (27b), and the "one causing desolation" (27b) is responsible for the "war" in 26b since there it is the war which brings about "desolations," and "desolations" in Daniel's prayer (9:17-18) are the result of a foreign nation brought against Israel for breaking the covenant (e.g., Lev 26:31-35). The "abominations" refer to the sacrilege which resulted from the struggle between John, Simon,

and Eleazar ("people of the coming ruler") for control of Jerusalem, and the "war" refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and Temple by Vespasian / Titus (the "one causing desolation"). The "one causing desolation" (Titus) comes "on the wing of," i.e., in connection with, those causing "abominations" (Jews), the one (i.e., people) being desolated. Jesus' mention of the "abomination of desolation" in the Olivet Discourse supports this understanding since he is probably speaking of the sacrilege of John of Gischala as the "abomination" which forewarns of the impending "desolation" of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans.³⁵

Verse 27b speaks of the "one causing desolation on the wing of abominations." The term "wing" can mean "edge" or "extremity." The phrase refers to one causing desolation in association with extreme abominations. A similar expression, but not exactly the same, is used to predict the act of Antiochus Epiphanes in Dan 11:31 and 12:11 in desecrating the temple. Here in 9:27b, however, the agent of the abominations is the Jewish people, not a foreign ruler. The Gospels present Jesus as both genuine Messiah and true Temple. The paralytic lowered through the roof by four friends, for example, was not only healed, but forgiven his sins.³⁶ This angered the leaders because Jesus was claiming to do something that could only happen at the Temple; thus he was claiming to be the true Temple (John 2:18-22). So when the Jewish people rejected Jesus as Anointed One / Messiah and the High Priest blasphemed Jesus, the true Temple, the Herodian temple supported by the Jewish people had to fall and the city had to be destroyed.

According to v. 26b this destruction is something that would happen *after* the sixty-ninth sabbatical. In v. 27b, there is nothing stated that actually requires the desolation of Jerusalem to happen precisely *in* the seventieth week, although this event is associated with the events happening at that time. Thus, the fall of Jerusalem some time later does fit suitably because it is the final working

out of the Jewish response to Jesus in the seventieth week. This situation is similar to God telling Adam that in the day he ate of the forbidden fruit, he would die. In one sense this did happen on the very day, but took time to be worked out. Just so, when the Jewish people rejected the Messiah and the High Priest blasphemed Jesus, the true Temple, the Herodian temple had to fall and the city had to be destroyed. The coming destruction, symbolized by the curtain protecting the Holy of Holies torn in two at the crucifixion, finally came to pass in A.D. 70, i.e., within the time of that generation which committed this sacrilege.

The notion of a person who is both King and true Temple is hinted at by the last of the six purposes in 9:24: “to anoint the Holy of Holies.” The verb “to anoint” is normally used of consecrating persons for offices, e.g., priest (Lev 4:3), prophet (Ps 105:15), and most often king (1 Sam 2:35). It can also be used to refer to the consecration of the Mosaic Tabernacle and its holy objects (Ex 29:36; 30:26; 40:9, 10, 11; Lev 8:10, 11). Only in Dan 9:24 do we have the “Holy of Holies” being anointed. This phrase could be construed as “the most holy place” or “the most holy person.” The latter meaning would be most unusual. Thus we have a verb that is normally used of a person and an object normally used of the temple. It may suggest that both future king and temple are one and the same. It finds fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth as both Messiah and true Temple.

Some interpreters have opted for a proposal that views *nāgîd* in v. 26b as referring to an evil prince,³⁷ perhaps even the Antichrist, and different from v. 25 where the *nāgîd* refers to the Messiah. This is bolstered by interpreting v. 27a as referring to this evil ruler making a false covenant which disrupts sacrifice in a way similar to the abomination causing desolation in 8:12-14, 11:31, and 12:11. A supporting connection may even be drawn between the fact that several texts in Daniel appear to speak of a three and one-half year period (7:25, 12:7, 11, 12; cf. 8:14, 26). All of these texts are fraught with interpretive problems

and associated with them is the identification of the four kingdoms portrayed symbolically in the dream of chapter 2 and the vision of chapter 7 followed by the expansions on these themes in chapters 8 and 10-12.

Space does not permit addressing the difficult exegetical issues pertaining to the connections just outlined. Some good reasons, however, can be provided to show in a general way that these connections are both superficial and leading to faulty interpretation. First, as already pointed out, the context strongly suggests that *nāgîd* in vv. 25 and 26 refers to the same individual. Second, the literary structure of the text does not suggest connecting v. 27a to v. 26b. Third, the larger literary structure is against this view. Chapter 7 entails a vision of four successive kingdoms that is followed by the Kingdom of God. In the fourth kingdom there is a ruler who is boastful against God (7:8) and oppresses the saints (7:25). In the “blowup maps” of chapters 8 and 10-12 that expand upon the basic vision of chapter 7 there is a ruler who sets himself against the Prince of the Host (8:12-14). This ruler is clearly in the Greek kingdom according to 8:21. The last vision of chapters 10-12 expand further upon 8:12-14 and speak of the abomination causing desolation (11:31 and 12:11), ultimately fulfilled in Antiochus Epiphanes, a ruler within the Greek kingdom. Since I would identify the fourth kingdom as Roman and the third as Greek, it is problematic to relate 7:8, which belongs to the fourth empire, to 11:31 and 12:11 which belong to the third.³⁸ That consideration aside, we can see from the literary structure of the book that the vision of the Seventy Weeks is by virtue of its content not directly related at all to the three visions portraying the sequence of foreign overlords in 7, 8, and 10-12.³⁹ The fact, then, that the vision in chapter 9 is not related to the other three is a powerful reason against connecting 9:26b and 9:27a with 8:12-14, 11:31, and 12:11. The literary structure of the book prevents the reader from connecting them in spite of some superficial similarities.

THE PLACE OF DANIEL 9 WITHIN CHAPTERS 7-12

The question may be raised, quite legitimately: what is the relationship of the vision of Seventy Weeks to the other visions? How does it fit into the larger literary structure of the book as a whole? This question urgently needs to be addressed.

As already noted, the visions in chapters 7, 8, and 10-12 focus on a series of four gentile / human kingdoms succeeded finally by the Kingdom of God. I attempted to show in an earlier examination of the issue of the “son of man” in Daniel 7 that the “son of man” represents at the same time a divine figure, a human king, and the constituent people of his kingdom: in the end, the saints of the Most High receive the Kingdom of God (7:18, 22, 27).⁴⁰ These three visions, then, focus on the question: what is happening to God’s Kingdom now that Israel is in exile, without an earthly king, and subject to foreign powers? Chapter 9, nicely sandwiched between the second and third of the three visions, deals with a different but closely related issue: how long will Israel be in exile? How long will the kingdom of God suffer at the hands of the foreign nations? The final or real return from exile, equivalent to the forgiveness of sins, is *prerequisite* to the saints receiving a kingdom, and so the vision of the Seventy Weeks reveals how and when the ultimate jubilee is ushered in.

CONCLUSION

The vision of Daniel’s Seventy Weeks, then, can be explained simply. It refers to a period of seventy sabbaticals or periods of seven years required to bring in the ultimate jubilee: release from sin, the establishment of everlasting righteousness and consecration of the temple. During the first seven sabbaticals the city of Jerusalem is restored. Then for sixty-two sabbaticals there is nothing to report. In the climactic seventieth week, Israel’s King arrives and dies vicariously for his people. Strangely, desecration of the temple similar to that by Antiochus Epiphanes in the Greek Empire is perpetrated by the Jewish people themselves

resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem. These events are fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He is the coming king. His crucifixion is the sacrifice to end all sacrifices and the basis of the New Covenant with the many. His death is “not for himself,” but rather vicarious. The rejection of Jesus as Messiah and desecration of him as the true Temple at his trial by the High Priest result in judgment upon the Herodian Temple carried out eventually in A.D. 70. The notion of a gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week is contrary to a vision of chronological sequence. The prophecy is remarkable both for its precision and imprecision as it fits the events concerning Jesus of Nazareth.

ENDNOTES

¹I am grateful to the following for constructive criticism and proofing of my work: Barbara Gentry, Stephen Kempf, and especially Jason T. Parry.

²The “Overview of Daniel” and “Grasping the Literary Structure” are adapted and summarized from Peter J. Gentry, “The Son of Man in Daniel 7: Individual or Corporate?” in *Acorns to Oaks: The Primacy and Practice of Biblical Theology*, (Toronto: Joshua Press, 2003), 59-75.

³The first is adapted from course notes produced for “Introduction to the Old Testament: Part II, 2003” at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary by Daniel I. Block. The second is adapted from David W. Gooding, “The Literary Structure of the Book of Daniel and its Implications,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 32 (1981): 43-79.

⁴Instead of D. I. Block’s four-part chiastic structure in chapters 8:1-12:4, the analysis of A. Kuen offers an A –B –A’ structure with A = chapter 8, B = chapter 9 and A’ = chapters 10-12. Thus A and A’ are the “Expansion Visions” on the Basic Vision of chapter 7 with the different “Vision of the Seventy Weeks” sandwiched in between. This is more persuasive and may well give chapter 9 greater prominence. See Alfred Kuen, *Soixante-six en un: Introduction aux 66 livres de la Bible* (St-Légier: Editions Emmaüs, 2005), 121. I am indebted to Stephen Kempf for drawing my

attention to this.

⁵To be more specific, 11:1-2 provides new details on the second kingdom and 12:1-3 provides new details on the kingdom of God. Thus the vision of 10-12 technically spans all of the still-future kingdoms. Nonetheless, the focus is largely on the Greek Kingdom (11:3-35) with some space devoted to the Roman Kingdom (11:36-45).

⁶Stephen G. Dempster, "Linguistic Features of Hebrew Narrative: A Discourse Analysis of Narrative from the Classical Period" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1985). As an example, see Gen 1:27 where the second and third clauses are asyndetic because they are exegetical to the first.

⁷Roger T. Beckwith, "Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah's Coming in Essene, Hellenistic, Pharisaic, Zealot and Early Christian Computation," *Revue de Qumrân* 40 (1981): 521-42.

⁸Adapted from J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 289.

⁹Cf. Zech 1:12 where the seventy years under Babylonian rule is described as a time of wrath.

¹⁰Adapted in part and cited in part from D. I. Block, "Preaching Old Testament Apocalyptic to a New Testament Church," *Calvin Theological Journal* 41 (2006): 17-52.

¹¹I have argued this in Gentry, "The Son of Man in Daniel 7."

¹²J. Oswalt, "מֶלֶךְ," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (ed. Willem A. VanGemeren; 5 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 2:1126.

¹³Donald F. Murray, *Divine Prerogative and Royal Pretension: Pragmatics, Poetics and Polemics in a Narrative Sequence about David (2 Samuel 5.17-7.29)* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 264; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 299.

¹⁴There is a problem in the text at Ezek 45:21.

¹⁵Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed With an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose* (New Studies in Biblical Theology; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 174-75.

¹⁶D. I. Block, "Preaching Old Testament Apocalyptic

to a New Testament Church," 49.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Robert C. Newman, John A. Bloom, and Hugh G. Gauch, Jr., "Public Theology and Prophecy Data: Factual Evidence that Counts for the Biblical World View," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46, no. 1 (2003): 79-110, esp. 104.

¹⁹Newman, Bloom, and Gauch employ the conventional date of 458 B.C. The Fall of 457 B.C. is adopted here based upon the chronological work of Bob Pickle, "An Examination of Anderson's Chronological Errors Regarding Daniel 9's First 69 Weeks" [cited 30 Nov 2009]. Online: <http://www.pickle-publishing.com/papers/sir-robert-anderson.htm>. Newman, Bloom, and Gauch also erroneously provide Ezra 4:11-12 and 23 as references to Artaxerxes's commission to Ezra.

²⁰Newman, Bloom, and Gauch employ the conventional date of 445 B.C. Again, the date adopted here is based on the work of Pickle, "An Examination of Anderson's Chronological Errors."

²¹Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977).

²²Newman, Bloom, and Gauch, "Public Theology and Prophecy Data," 104.

²³I acknowledge help from Jason Parry for the argument at this point.

²⁴For the calculation of sabbatical years, I follow Benedict Zuckermann rather than Ben Zion Wacholder (see below).

²⁵Williamson acknowledges this A-B-A'-B' structure although he interprets "leader" or "prince" differently; see Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed With an Oath*, 175.

²⁶Benedict Zuckermann, *Über Sabbathjahrcyclus und Jubelperiode* (Breslau: W. G. Korn, 1866).

²⁷Ben Zion Wacholder, "The Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles During the Second Temple and the Early Rabbinic Period," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 44 (1973): 153-96.

²⁸For the calculation of sabbatical years I follow Benedict Zuckermann rather than Ben Zion Wacholder. See Bob Pickle, "Daniel 9's Seventy Weeks and the Sabbatical Cycle: When Were the Sabbatical

Years" [cited 9 Nov 2009]. Online: <http://www.picklepublishing.com/papers/sabbatical-years.htm>. Pickle offers a critical evaluation of all the evidence employed by Wacholder in setting up the table of sabbatical years. In any case the seventieth sabbatical is from A.D. 27-34 (Zuckermann) or 28-35 (Wacholder) and one can find satisfaction in either A.D. 31 or 33 for a crucifixion date.

²⁹See Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (New Studies in Biblical Theology 15; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 218. On the use of 'ên functioning as a simple negation, see HALOT, 42. If expressed by the normal negative, possible aural confusion could and would have resulted: *lô' lô*.

³⁰Robert C. Newman, John A. Bloom, and Hugh G. Gauch, Jr., "Public Theology and Prophecy Data: Factual Evidence that Counts for the Biblical World View," 105.

³¹Meredith Kline, "The Covenant of the Seventieth Week," in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Oswald T. Allis* (ed. by J. H. Skilton; Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974), 452-69.

³²The difference between the expressions *kārat berît* and *hêqîm berît* was already recognized by Cassuto; see U. Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1941 [Hebrew], 1961 [English]); and idem, *La Questione della Genesi* (Pubblicazioni della R. Università degli Studi di Firenze, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofica, 3 Serie, Vol. 1, Florence, 1934). Recently, Paul Williamson and Jeffrey J. Niehaus have reacted to the way in which the difference was described by William J. Dumbrell. This is partly due to the inadequate description of Dumbrell and partly to inadequate lexical study on the part of Niehaus and Williamson. See Peter J. Gentry, "Kingdom Through Covenant: Humanity as the Divine Image," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2008): 16-42. Exhaustive analysis of *berît* and constructions therewith will be provided in a forthcoming volume *Kingdom through Covenant* by Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum (Crossway, 2011).

³³It is noteworthy that the term "everlasting covenant" occurs sixteen times in the Hebrew Old Testament: two times of the covenant with Noah (Gen 9:16, Isa 24:5), four times of the covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:7, 19, Ps 105:10, 1 Chr 16:17), one time of the covenant with David (2 Sam 23:5, cf. 2 Chr 13:5), six times of the new covenant (Isa 55:3, 61:8, Jer 32:40, 50:5, Ezek 16:60, 37:26) and three times of covenant signs (Gen 17:13, Exod 31:16, Lev 24:8). Nowhere is the Sinai covenant called a "permanent" covenant.

³⁴In the Bound Phrase עַם מְשִׁיחַ הַבָּא, the attributive relative participle הַבָּא modifies מְשִׁיחַ. Normally, the attributive participle and noun would agree in definiteness, but exceptions are found. See Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O'Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 621-22. The participle "who is to come" does not indicate, then, that another person is intended. The phrase means "the people of the ruler who is to come" and the subject of the verb in the sentence in v. 26b is the leader's own kin; the leader is the Anointed One of v. 26a.

³⁵I acknowledge here the helpful analysis of Jason Parry.

³⁶For more examples, see N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 432-37.

³⁷Cf. Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel* (New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 271, and Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed With an Oath*, 175.

³⁸This does not preclude a typical / anti-typical relationship between the two. A typology between Antiochus Epiphanes and the oppressive ruler of 7:8, 25, however, does not necessarily imply that the *nāgîd* of 9:26b refers to the same individual as described in 7:8, 25.

³⁹See paper by Jason Parry, "Desolation of the Temple and Messianic Enthronement in Daniel 11:36-12:3" (Paper presented to Prof. James M. Hamilton in Ph.D. Seminar on Daniel, November, 2009 at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary). He argues that there are allusions in 11:36-45 to 9:26-27 showing that 11:36-45 is the fulfillment of v. 26b and v. 27b, and he shows how 11:36-45 can be understood

as a reference to the events of A.D. 67-70. Nonetheless, chapter 9 does not present a vision showing a sequence of kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God as do the visions in chapters 7, 8, and 10-12.

⁴⁰See Peter J. Gentry, "The Son of Man in Daniel 7: Individual or Corporate?"

Why an Obsession with Eschatology is a Waste of Time, Part 13

Posted by DrHeiser | Jul 24, 2010

I want to start this post with something I'd do in class during my teaching days at Christian colleges that I think will make this post — which is about the question of whether there is such a thing as a rapture or not — more comprehensible.

When I taught through New Testament Survey or Bibliology I'd invariably need to talk about how the gospels disagreed with each other on many occasions. This of course is a favorite launching pad for biblical skeptics, who love to talk about the contradictions in the gospel stories about Jesus. I used to give some illustrative examples of where Matthew, Mark, and Luke (and occasionally John) would have slightly different details of the same story, or different dialogue, or present items in a different order.

I'd ask the question, “which one is wrong — or are all of them wrong?” (I liked to push buttons in class — I've walked into many a freshman Bible class and looked at dozens of faces that were all expressing the same sentiment: we dare you not to bore us with the Bible).

Anyway, it was always fun to get feedback in that session to my questions. After watching them squirm for a while I'd point out the obvious — there was another alternative: they could all be right, yet disagreeing. I'd pull out a newspaper story on something they'd no doubt heard of (some great tragedy or current event) and show them that any given national newspaper could (and did) run a story on that event but they would invariably disagree, even when the reporter had asked the same questions (sometimes even of the same person at the same press conference). But differences in wordings, the way the writer arranged the information, and presentation of dialogue (they were invariably snippets, though germane) did not compromise accuracy. Even when one included something the other didn't, students could see that was part of the journalistic enterprise — selection of material depending on audience, space constraints, “angle”, etc. But none of that meant that something that wasn't identical had to be wrong.

It was easy to apply this to the gospels. Given that more than one story about the same person, events, and places could differ, yet that should not be presumed to mean there were errors, maybe it was a good idea to try and harmonize the stories first and see how they could all be parts of a greater whole. Mark that thought.

So what's the point?

Well, among Christians who have some sense of obligation or interest in ideas like the inspiration of the Bible and its inerrancy, the idea of harmonizing material in the gospels — and in the Bible in general — is second nature. It's part of the "interpret the Bible with the Bible" approach to hermeneutics. Point A is harmonized with point B. Passage A is better understood by merging it or harmonizing its content with passage B — putting things together gives us a fuller picture of what the Bible says about XYZ. Harmonizing apparently contradictory items is so common, so accepted as an interpretive technique, that it's hard to imagine the opposite — keeping passages apart, as though they taught opposite ideas, as a way to get a full picture of something. **JOINING** is much more common than **SPLITTING**.

And yet **SPLITTING** is precisely the hermeneutical approach that **MUST** be employed to have a rapture. Sound odd? Then you haven't read much about the doctrine. Here is a short list of examples. My point is that IF you separate (split) these items, you come out with the idea that the second coming and a rapture are two different events, BUT if you merge all these events — if you harmonize (join) them to remove contradictions — then there is no rapture.

RAPTURE: Meets believers in the air. 1 Thes 4:15-17; Acts 1:9-11

SECOND COMING: Meets Israel on earth, Zech 14:4-5; Rev 19.

RAPTURE: Christ does not touch earth. Acts 1:11

SECOND COMING: Christ comes to stay for 1000 years. Rev 20; Mal 3:2-4

RAPTURE: For the church. 1 Thes 4:15-17; 1 Cor 15:51-55

SECOND COMING: For Israel and tribulation saints. Rev 19; Mal 3:2-4

[On this one, recall the obvious — that Galatians 3 says the church has inherited the promise that Abraham would have a seed — a spiritual seed — the "Israel that is real Israel, but not ethnic Israel — Romans 9:1-6]

RAPTURE: To keep promises to the church. Jn 14:1-3

SECOND COMING: To keep promises to Israel through OT prophets.

[ditto the above on whether the Church and Israel can really be split like this coherently.]

RAPTURE: souls of saints to get bodies. 1 Thess 4:14-18

SECOND COMING: With saints and angelic armies. Rev 19

So, are you a splitter or a joiner? You cannot have a rapture if you employ the **JOINING** hermeneutic that is so commonly used to avoid contradiction in the gospels (and throughout the Bible). For those who believe in a rapture the question is therefore simple: why would you want to harmonize the gospels to avoid contradictions, but then not harmonize passages about the return of Jesus to avoid contradiction?

In other words, **WHY** is splitting prophecy texts the better interpretive strategy than joining, like basically everywhere else? Is the text driving that approach or is it a theology brought to the text that drives the decision? This is a fundamental question that everyone who embraces a rapture must coherently answer (but few have ever even considered since it doesn't appear in popular prophecy books).

Why An Obsession with Eschatology is a Waste of Time, Part 14

Posted by DrHeiser | Jul 28, 2010

It's time for "when was the book of Revelation written?" The two candidates are, of course, before or after 70 AD (the latter in the 90s). I think the most thorough recent discussion on this is by Greg Beale in his massive commentary on Revelation in the New International Greek Text Commentary.

[LINK: <https://drmsb.com/TheNakedBible/THE%20DATE%20OF%20THE%20APOCALYPSE.pdf>]

I think you'll see that the question is a toss-up. Like everything else, each side needs to make a couple of assumptions along the way. I'm sure many of you heard in Sunday School (if anyone still does things like book studies in Sunday School) that the book was written in the 90s. Could be. But there's a lot they don't tell you in Sunday School.

My opinion is that the evidence for a late date (90s) seems to outweigh the pre-70 AD date. Beale thinks so as well. Note that he's an "idealist amillennialist," so don't conclude that a 90 AD date adds up to a pre-mill argument (something else they may have told you in Sunday School).

Why an Obsession with Eschatology is a Waste of Time, Part 15

Posted by DrHeiser | Aug 4, 2010

I think this will be my last eschatology post in regard to listing things that have no clear answer or closure.

For this post, here's the "not self evident question": Is the book of Revelation to be read from start to finish as a chronology of the end times — read as a linear chronology — OR, do major sections of the book "reiterate" each other in a cyclical way (referred to as "reiteration" or "recapitulation")?

A sub-question to the above is: Why would it matter?

As far as the first question, this one is hard to illustrate. The least complicated explanation to which I have access comes from the College Press NIV Revelation Commentary (the boldfacing is mine):

Notice that the vision contains two main elements: First, there is a revelation of the present, a revelation of "what is now." The "present," of course, refers to "what is now" from John's perspective. Christ offers John a vision of the late first century a.d. in Asia. Second, the Lord promises a revelation of the future - a vision of "what will take place later." Again, this is the "future" from John's point of view - the period from a.d. 95-96 through Christ's return and the consummation of the kingdom of God.

Which part of the book reveals John's "present" and which part reveals the "future"? John treats these two subjects in the order in which they are mentioned. His discussion of the "present" appears in 2:1-3:22 and takes the form of seven letters to the churches of Asia. This part of the vision describes the "present" circumstances of the Asian churches from Christ's point of view.

The Lord's revelation of the "future" appears in 4:1-22:6, as the structure of the passage makes clear. The first verse of this section (4:1) reads: 'After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.'

The initial phrase "After this," in and of itself, marks a transition - the

end of one discussion and the beginning of another. Christ then introduces the next major portion of the book when he says, “I will show you what must take place after this” - that is, “after” the “present” described in chapters 2 and 3. Revelation 4:1 marks the beginning of the promised vision of “what will take place later.” Where does the vision of the future end? After a long series of images we come to Revelation 22:6: The angel said to me, ‘These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.’ This verse marks the end of John’s discussion of the future. The remainder of the book (22:7-21) consists of a short Epilogue.

By far the largest portion of Revelation describes John’s vision of the future (4:1-22:6). How has the author structured this important part of the book? The revelation of “what will take place later” begins with an introduction (4:1-5:14) in which John describes his new vantage point in heaven (‘Come up here, and I will show you’). The prophet will see the future from God’s point of view. The rest of the section (6:1-22:6) contains the revelation of the future itself. However, a careful reading shows that John does not receive one long, sequential vision of the future. Instead, he receives three separate revelations of the complete future from John’s time through the consummation of the kingdom of God.

John describes how the future unfolds in 6:1-8:1. Then he starts over and describes the same period again in 8:2-11:19. Then he reviews the same period a third time in 12:1-22:6. The approach is cyclical, with each vision examining the future from a slightly different angle, and the third vision offering the most detail.

Christopher A. Davis, Revelation; The College Press NIV commentary (Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub., 2000), 76.

This selection (I think) explains the view of the author (and most commentators on Revelation), that the book’s “future sections” repeat one another.

The reason the issue is important can be illustrated from one portion of the repeated cycling. Put simply, if Revelation 19:11-21 is reiterated in Rev 20:1-10, then there is no millennial kingdom. What follows will appear bewildering, but just observe the structuring and the “gaps” - then see my notes at the end. This will illustrate how an amillennialist uses the fairly obvious reiterative structure of Revelation 4-22 to argue against a literal 1000 year millennium. Stay with me. (TABLES ON NEXT TWO PAGES)

Revelation 19:11-21	Revelation 20:1-10
Jesus Returns ¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.	Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. ² And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³ and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. ⁴ Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. ⁷ And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison

Battle ensues, Jesus vs. evil hordes

¹⁷ Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God," ¹⁸ to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great." ¹⁹ And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army.

The beast and the false prophet defeated and cast into the lake of fire

²⁰ And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. ²¹ And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, **Gog and Magog**, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹ And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them,

¹⁰ and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

A few observations are in order.

1. There are certifiable connections between the second and third sections.
2. The table on the right does NOT repeat the second coming - just Armageddon and its aftermath.
3. The above means that as assumed equation between “the period before the second coming” is to be struck. The lefthand column has nothing - but by implication the age before the second coming = the church age. That would mean, when bringing the right column into the picture, that the church age of the left corresponds to Rev 20:1-7, the description of the millennium. Therefore, church age = “millennium talk” of Rev 20. The church IS that kingdom age.

Now, at this point, if you’re a premillennialist, you’re thinking “good grief this is contrived and self-serving.” I understand. But did you notice I have “Gog and Magog” underlined? That reference is actually the key to the whole idea - the justification for what looks like interpretive gymnastics.

But how? Very simple.

1. Ezekiel 38-39 describes the Gog and Magog battle.
2. In that description, there is a reference to the birds being summoned to devour the flesh of Yahweh’s defeated foes (39:4, 17-18). (Followers of my divine council work will note the reference to the bulls of Bashan in v. 18 - just notice it - not going to comment on it here).
3. This “birds devouring the flesh of the Day of Yahweh victims” is the only such reference in the OT. As such, it must be what was in John’s mind when writing Revelation 19:17-19. Got it? Now here’s the kicker?
4. The fact that John explicitly references Gog and Magog in Rev 20:8 shows that JOHN intended Rev 20:8-10 to be a repetition of Rev 19:17-19.
5. If we agree with number 4, then the “structural synchronism” falls into place and the millennium = the church age.

Bear in mind that this is one of the more explosive reiteration sections. It is NOT the only such section that an amillennialist will note in defense of his/her position. There are others. What I want premillennialist readers to get is that they ought to stop saying the amillennial view is the result of “spiritualizing” the text. The amillennialist has very clear exegetical arguments. If one begins with Galatians 3, which clearly has believers (the Church) as the inheritors of the Abrahamic covenant promises, and then follows with this textual appeal to the precise wording of Ezekiel 38-39, they ain’t sucking it out of their thumbs. But that doesn’t mean it isn’t without weaknesses - some serious ones at that.

So how do premillennialists escape this? Well, there’s the ridiculous strategy of saying “that Rev 20:8 reference to Gog and Magog... must be a second Gog and Magog event, not the one in Ezekiel.” Thanks for that invention - please patent it. This is nothing more than simply adding an event to the Bible to make your system work. But “prophecy experts” do it all the time, even in print. If you favor this argument, you should stop reading this blog and look for the newest end times novel in your Christian bookstore and just go with that.

Again, my goal is to get you to see the thinking processes so you can avoid pretending anyone’s view is self-evident.