

Finishing The Week

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Each year in the spring, when we observe the Passover, we partake of the wine, which symbolizes the shed blood of Jesus Christ. When He instituted this new Passover symbol, He explained it by saying, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many" (Mark 14:24). When we come under the blood of Jesus Christ upon our baptism and acceptance of Him as our Savior, we enter into that New Covenant.

Considering how important the New Covenant is, there are surprisingly few references to it within the New Testament—and even fewer explanations. What references there are—largely in the book of Hebrews—depend heavily on quotations from the Old Testament prophets. In fact, the New Testament teaching of the New Covenant relies entirely on one already having an understanding from reading the prophets. Without those prophecies, we would not understand what we actually enter into.

The New Covenant is mentioned in numerous places (Isaiah 54:9-10; 55:3; 59:20-21; 61:1-11; Jeremiah 32:36-41; 50:4-5; Ezekiel 16:60-63; 20:33-38; 34:23-26; 37:15-28), but perhaps the clearest description—and the one quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12 and 10:16-17—is found in Jeremiah 31:31-34:

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.

One other brief but intriguing mention is found in the Seventy Weeks Prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27). It puts the New Covenant in a context that is rarely focused on. The covenant is mentioned in the first half of verse 27: "Then [H]e shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week [H]e shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering."

Confirming the Covenant

The Seventy Weeks Prophecy is perhaps best known for its descriptions of the future Beast. However, because of the poetic, non-linear style in which it is written, many are erroneously waiting for the Antichrist to make a peace treaty with the Jews for seven years. This misunderstanding results from the fact that the descriptions of the Messiah and the Beast are interwoven in verses 26-27. The Messiah is described in the first halves of verses 26 and 27, while "the prince who is to come" (the figure commonly known as "the Beast," "vile person," and "little horn") is described in the latter parts of the same verses (see "Seventy Weeks Are Determined . . ." *Forerunner*, December 1994.)

But in the first half of verse 27, it is the *Messiah* who is prophesied to "confirm a covenant *with many* for one week." Recall that Jesus told His disciples, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for *many*," and Hebrews 9:28 confirms this connection: "Christ was offered . . . to bear the sins of *many*." So, even though it is not specifically called the new, eternal, or perpetual covenant in Daniel 9:27, as it is in other places, this is the covenant that is being described. This covenant radically alters the lives of those making it, for under its terms sin is forgiven, the Holy Spirit is given, God's laws are internalized, eternal life is granted (because it gives us personal, experiential knowledge of the Father and the Son; see John 17:3), and there are more instances of divine grace than can be counted.

A large controversy in the early church dealt with the fact that Jews and Gentiles were on equal terms under the New Covenant, since it made salvation available to anyone who is called and responds in faith. In fact, when the Messiah began confirming this covenant, Israelites in general did not want to have anything to do with Him. He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him (John 1:11-12).

After the leaders within Israel rejected Christ, the apostles began to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Then, on the road to Damascus, Saul, renamed Paul, was appointed as the apostle to the Gentiles. Clearly, the prophecies regarding salvation for the Gentiles were coming to pass, showing that they were included in the New Covenant.

This is where we in the church are now. It matters not whether we are Israelite or Gentile—we are the firstfruits of God's spiritual harvest and already beneficiaries of a superior covenant with extraordinary promises.

"Seventy Sevens"

However, we often stop thinking at this point, which is understandable since this is what affects us personally. Yet the context of the Seventy Weeks Prophecy provides us a better understanding of the covenant we have made.

Daniel 9 opens with Daniel at the "tender, young age" of 87. He knew from Jeremiah's writings that the desolation of Jerusalem was prophesied to last for 70 years, and they had been fulfilled. Since God is faithful, Daniel knew that it was time for God to act. So he prayed to God, confessing on behalf of the nation and beseeching God to turn away His anger toward Jerusalem, even though the nation deserved everything that had happened and much more. He asks God, because of His great mercy, to hear, to forgive, to listen, and to act on behalf of His people (Daniel 9:4-19).

In response, the angel Gabriel comes to Daniel and gives him a prophecy (Daniel 9:20-23). God does more than just give the command for Jerusalem to be rebuilt: He actually outlines what He would do to solve Israel's problems once and for all. The problems, of course, were sin and rebellion against God—unbelief—and so His response to Daniel is a promise that these things would be overcome. God, through Gabriel, tells Daniel that "seventy sevens" (of years; 490 years) had been decreed, and when that span of time ran out, some truly remarkable things will have happened, to say the least.

Daniel 9:24 shows the scope of what God will accomplish by the time the seventy sevens of years are complete:

Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.

God presents six elements that He will accomplish within the 490 years. It is His outline for what will happen in order for Daniel's people to be spiritually restored. In verses 25-27 He tells, in general terms, how that will happen:

Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined. Then [H]e shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week [H]e shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate.

Verses 26-27 show that all six of verse 24's elements will be accomplished through the arrival of the Messiah, His being cut off, and His confirming the New Covenant with many. Though much could be written about each of these six, *Adam Clarke's Commentary* summarizes them:

- I. To finish (to restrain) the transgression, which was effected by the preaching of the Gospel, and pouring out of the Holy Spirit among men.
- II. To make an end of sins; rather, "to make an end of sin-offerings"; which our Lord did when he offered his spotless soul and body on the cross once for all.
- III. To make reconciliation ("to make atonement or expiation") for iniquity; which he did by the once offering up of himself.
- IV. To bring in everlasting righteousness, that is, "the righteousness, or righteous ONE, of ages"; that person who had been the object of the faith of mankind, and the subject of the predictions of the prophets through all the ages of the world.
- V. To seal up ("to finish or complete") the vision and prophecy; that is, to put an end to the necessity of any further revelations, by completing the canon of Scripture, and fulfilling the prophecies which related to His person, sacrifice, and the glory that should follow.
- VI. And to anoint the Most Holy, "the Holy of holies." . . . Here it means the consecration or appointment of our blessed Lord, the Holy One of Israel, to be the Prophet, Priest, and King of mankind.

Notice in particular the fifth element, "to seal up vision and prophecy." What it means is *to make an end of* vision and prophecy *by fulfilling it*. In other words, when the seventy sevens are finished, the

visions and prophecies will *all* be wrapped up. What is not certain is the scope of the phrase "vision and prophecy." It may refer to just those found in the book of Daniel, or it could refer to *all* the visions and prophecies given to that point. What is significant is that, at the end of the 490 years, a majority, if not the entirety, of the Old Testament prophecies will have had their fulfillment.

Blocks of Time

It is also important to understand that these 70 prophetic "weeks" do not happen all at once. Verse 25 shows that there will be a span of seven weeks, and then a second span of 62 weeks. Yet historically, the second block of time did not happen right after the first.

Obviously, $7 + 62$ equals only 69 weeks, so one "week"—a span of seven years—still remains after verse 25. Verse 27 fills that in, showing that the Messiah's confirming of the covenant covers that final week: "Then [H]e shall confirm a covenant with many *for one week*."

Combining verses 26 and 27, we see that, in reality, the first half of that final week has also already taken place: It was the $3\frac{1}{2}$ years during which Jesus Christ confirmed the New Covenant with the church, was cut off in the middle of the week, and brought an end to animal sacrifice and offering.

Perhaps this explains why, after Jesus' resurrection, the disciples ask Him if He would now restore the Kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). They were probably thinking, "Wow, what a week! And it's only half over!" Knowing the prophecies, they could see that many of the elements of Daniel 9:24 had been or were being fulfilled. Realizing that they had just made the New Covenant, they probably expected that the second half of the week was about to come to pass, too, and that the Israelites and the holy city would be the beneficiaries. No wonder they assumed it was time for the Kingdom to be restored! Instead, Jesus tells them that it was not for them to know the times or seasons—meaning the timing of when the prophecies would all be fulfilled—and instead they would receive the Holy Spirit and become witnesses of Him in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:7-8).

We, too, should recognize that $3\frac{1}{2}$ years are still left of His confirmation of the covenant—the same one we have made—and what remains of the prophecy relates to Jerusalem and the people of Israel, as Daniel 9:24 shows.

Thus, there will be a span of $3\frac{1}{2}$ years at some point in the future, during which God will fully accomplish those six elements found in verse 24, and the beneficiaries will be physical Israelites. Though we will not know for sure until it happens, those $3\frac{1}{2}$ years may correspond with the time of Jacob's Trouble, the reign of the Beast, the treading down of the holy city by Gentiles, and the persecution of the woman's offspring, as related in Revelation 12.

Olive Branches

God's annual holy days reveal that this is not the only "day of salvation"—that He is working with only a relative few right now, and the rest of mankind will have an opportunity for salvation either during the Millennium or after the Second Resurrection. Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost hold great significance for the firstfruits who have already made the New Covenant, but they have little spiritual meaning for the Israelites who have not. Next, the Feast of Trumpets, the pivot point in the holy day calendar, is meaningful for firstfruits, for Israelites, and for all of mankind because it pictures the return of Christ to establish His Kingdom on earth.

After that are the holy days associated with the second harvest, the fall harvest—particularly the Feast of Tabernacles, which pictures the Millennium when the resurrected and glorified firstfruits will have responsibilities. Yet, the greater meaning concerns Israel. The remnant of Israel—those who survive Jacob's Trouble—will then have the opportunity to make the New Covenant, even though, as a nation, they will not be a part of the First Resurrection.

The apostle Paul goes to great lengths to explain this phased approach to salvation, using the metaphor of an olive tree with natural branches, representing Israel, being broken off, and wild branches—Gentiles—being grafted in (Romans 9-11). To summarize, Paul explains that God will use the Gentiles, and by implication, those making the New Covenant now (including individual Israelites), to make the majority of Israel jealous, to bring her back to Him when she sees the spiritual blessings. Paul shows that God has not at all disowned Israel. Even in his day, a small believing minority of Israelites had been chosen by grace, of which Paul was a part.

Only the elect—whether Israelite or Gentile—have obtained God's favor at this time, while the rest of Israel has become callously indifferent to it. Israel was broken off the olive tree because of unbelief, and others were grafted in because of true belief. But, Paul warns, there is no room for pride, because if God did not spare the natural branches when they fell into unbelief, neither will He spare us if we do the same thing. Now notice Paul's conclusion:

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins." Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. (Romans 11:25-29)

When Christ confirmed the covenant during the 3½ years of His earthly ministry, the covenant was not just for those alive at the time. The firstfruits have been making that covenant for nearly 2,000 years now. Similarly, there will be *another* 3½ years, finishing out that final week, during which Jesus will complete the confirming of the covenant. This will set the stage for the salvation of all mankind, but in particular the salvation of Israel.

If we use Jesus' earthly service as a guide, most of the 3½ years were spent in preaching and in preparing His servants. This is how He "confirmed" the covenant, even though it was not actually sealed until the end of the 3½ years, at that last Passover. If this pattern holds, it indicates that the final 3½ years of "confirming" will also consist of preaching to, and a rigorous and even violent preparation of, a remnant of Israel. Then, at the end, they will enter into the covenant.

At that final Passover, Jesus said that He would not drink the fruit of the vine again—that symbol of His shed blood and of the covenant—until He drinks it with His disciples (and, by extension, all of the glorified firstfruits) in His Kingdom (Matthew 26:29). That joyous occasion corresponds with the time when Israel will also drink of that cup of the New Covenant, but for the first time. That covenant, then, will be available throughout the Millennium and into the time of the Second Resurrection. The Seventy Weeks will have been fulfilled, but the effects will continue.