

The Angel' S Message

by Sir Robert Anderson

Sir Robert Anderson's sermon explores the prophetic significance of the seventy weeks in Daniel, focusing on the restoration of Jerusalem and the coming of the Messiah.

Scripture: Ezra 1:1, Ezra 6:14, Nehemiah 2:5, Nehemiah 6:15, Daniel 9:24

Topics: "Daniel Prophecy", "Messiah Timeline"

Description

Sir Robert Anderson delves into the prophecy of the seventy weeks in the book of Daniel, highlighting the specific timeline decreed upon the people and the holy city, leading to the coming of the Messiah. The message reveals the delay in the full blessing promised to the Jews until the completion of the seventy sevens, with a detailed breakdown of the periods and events marking the era. The sermon emphasizes the significance of historical events, such as the decrees to rebuild Jerusalem by different Persian kings, particularly focusing on the decree by Artaxerxes Longimanus as the starting point of the seventy weeks. Through a meticulous examination of Scripture and historical records, the sermon aims to provide clarity on the prophetic timeline and its fulfillment.

Transcript

"Seventy weeks are decreed upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy.[1] Know therefore and discern, that from the going forth of the commandment[2] to restore and to build Jerusalem, unto the Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: it shall be built again, with street and moat, even in troublous times. And after the threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, and shall have nothing: and the people of the Prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and his end thereof shall be with a flood, and even unto the end shall be war; desolations are determined. And he shall make a firm covenant[3] with many for one week: and for the half of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and upon the wing of abominations shall come one that maketh desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined, shall wrath be poured out upon the desolator." Daniel 9:24-27. R.V. (See marginal readings.)

1. "The expression does not in a single case apply to any person." - TREGELLES, Daniel, p. 98. "These words are applied to the Nazarene, although this expression is never applied to a person throughout the Bible, but invariably denotes part of the temple, the holy of holies" - DR. HERMAN ADLER, Sermons

(Trubner, 1869).

2. "From the issuing of the decree." - TREGELLES, Daniel, p. 96.

3. Not the covenant (as in A. V.: see margin). This word is rendered covenant when Divine things are in question, and league when, as here, an ordinary treaty is intended (C. f. ex. gr., Joshua 9:6, 7, 11, 15, 16).

SUCH was the message entrusted to the angel in response to the prophet's prayer for mercies upon Judah and Jerusalem.

To whom shall appeal be made for an interpretation of the utterance? Not to the Jew, surely, for though himself the subject of the prophecy, and of all men the most deeply interested in its meaning, he is bound, in rejecting Christianity, to falsify not only history, but his own Scriptures. Nor yet to the theologian who has prophetic theories to vindicate, and who on discovering, perhaps, some era of seven times seventy in Israel's history, concludes that he has solved the problem, ignoring the fact that the strange history of that wonderful people is marked through all its course by chronological cycles of seventy and multiples of seventy. But any man of unprejudiced mind who will read the words with no commentary save that afforded by Scripture itself and the history of the time, will readily admit that on certain leading points their meaning is unequivocal and clear.

1. It was thus revealed that the full meed of blessing promised to the Jews should be deferred till the close of a period of time, described as "seventy sevens," after which Daniel's city and people[4] are to be established in blessing of the fullest kind.

2. Another period composed of seven weeks and sixty-two weeks is specified with equal certainty.

3. This second era dates from the issuing of an edict to rebuild Jerusalem, - not the temple, but the city; for, to remove all doubt, "the street and wall"[5] are emphatically mentioned; and a definite event, described as the cutting off of Messiah, marks the close of it.

4. The beginning of the week required (in addition to the sixty-nine) to complete the seventy, is to be signalized by the making of a covenant or treaty by a personage described as "the Prince that shall come," or "the coming Prince," which covenant he will violate in the middle of the week by the suppression of the Jews' religion.[6]

5. And therefore the complete era of seventy weeks, and the lesser period of sixty-nine weeks, date from the same epoch.[7]

4. If the words of verses 24 and 25 do not themselves carry conviction that Judah and Jerusalem are the subjects of the prophecy, the reader has but to compare them with the preceding verses, especially 2, 7, 12, 16, 18, and 19.

5. Literally the "trench" or "scarped rampart." - TRECCELLES, Daniel, p. 90.

6. The personage referred to in verse 27 is not the Messiah, but the second prince named in verse 26. The theory which has gained currency, that the Lord made a seven years' compact with the Jews at the beginning of His ministry, would deserve a prominent place in a cyclopaedia of the vagaries of religious thought. We know of the old covenant, which has been abrogated, and of the new covenant, which is everlasting; but the extraordinary idea of a seven years' covenant between God and men has not a

shadow of foundation in the letter of Scripture, and is utterly opposed to its spirit.

7. "The whole period of seventy weeks is divided into three successive periods, - seven, sixty-two, one, and the last week is subdivided into two halves. It is self-evident that since these parts, seven, sixty-two, one, are equal to the whole, viz., seventy, it was intended that they should be." - PUSEY, Daniel, p. 170.

The first question, therefore, which arises is whether history records any event which unmistakably marks the beginning of the era.

Certain writers, both Christian and Jewish, have assumed that the seventy weeks began in the first year of Darius, the date of the prophecy itself; and thus falling into hopeless error at the very threshold of the inquiry, all their conclusions are necessarily erroneous. The words of the angel are unequivocal: "From the issuing of the decree to restore and build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks." That Jerusalem was in fact rebuilt as a fortified city, is absolutely certain and undoubted; and the only question in the matter is whether history records the edict for its restoration.

When we turn to the book of Ezra, three several decrees of Persian kings claim notice. The opening verses speak of that strange edict by which Cyrus authorized the building of the temple. But here "the house of the Lord God of Israel" is specified with such an exclusive definiteness that it can in no way satisfy the words of Daniel. Indeed the date of that decree affords conclusive proof that it was not the beginning of the seventy weeks. Seventy years was the appointed duration of the servitude to Babylon. (Jeremiah 27:6-17; 28:10; 29:10) But another judgment of seventy years' "desolations" was decreed in Zedekiah's reign,[8] because of continued disobedience and rebellion. As an interval of seventeen years elapsed between the date of the servitude and the epoch of the "desolations," so by seventeen years the second period overlapped the first. The servitude ended with the decree of Cyrus. The desolations continued till the second year of Darius Hystaspes.[9] And it was the era of the desolations, and not of the servitude which Daniel had in view.[10]

8. It was foretold in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, i. e., the year after the servitude began (Jeremiah 25:1, 11).

9. Scripture thus distinguishes three different eras, all in part concurrent, which have come to be spoken of as "the captivity." First, the servitude; second, Jehoiachin's captivity; and third, the desolations. "The servitude" began in the third year of Jehoiakim, i. e., B. C. 606, or before 1st Nisan (April) B. C. 605, and was brought to a close by the decree of Cyrus seventy years later. "The captivity" began in the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar, according to the Scriptural era of his reign, i. e., in B. C. 598; and the desolations began in his seventeenth year, B. C. 589, and ended in the second year of Darius Hystaspes - again a period of seventy years. See App. 1. upon the chronological questions here involved.

10. Daniel 9:2 is explicit on this point: "I, Daniel, understood by books the number of the years whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem."

The decree of Cyrus was the Divine fulfillment of the promise made to the captivity in the twenty-ninth chapter of Jeremiah, and in accordance with that promise the fullest liberty was granted to the exiles to return to Palestine. But till the era of the desolations had run its course, not one stone was to be set upon another on Mount Moriah. And this explains the seemingly inexplicable fact that the firman to build the temple, granted to eager agents by Cyrus in the zenith of his power, remained in abeyance till his death;

for a few refractory Samaritans were allowed to thwart the execution of this the most solemn edict ever issued by an Eastern despot, an edict in respect of which a Divine sanction seemed to confirm the unalterable will of a Medo-Persian king.[11]

11. "The law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not" (Daniel 6:12). Canon Rawlinson assumes that the temple was fifteen or sixteen years in building, before the work was stopped by the decree of the Artaxerxes mentioned in Ezra 4. (Five Great Mon., vol. 4, p. 398.) But this is entirely opposed to Scripture. The foundation of the temple was laid in the second year of Cyrus (Ezra 3:8-11), but no progress was made till the second year of Darius, when the foundation was again laid, for not a stone of the house had yet been placed (Haggai 2, 10, 15, 18). The building, once begun, was completed within five years (Ezra 6:15). It must be borne in mind that the altar was set up, and sacrifice was renewed immediately after the return of the exiles (Ezra 3:3, 6).

When the years of the desolations were expired, a Divine command was promulgated for the building of the sanctuary, and in obedience to that command, without waiting for permission from the capital, the Jews returned to the work in which they had so long been hindered. (Ezra 5:1, 2, 5) The wave of political excitement which had carried Darius to the throne of Persia, was swelled by religious fervor against the Magian idolatry.[12] The moment therefore was auspicious for the Israelites, whose worship of Jehovah commanded the sympathy of the Zoroastrian faith; and when the tidings reached the palace of their seemingly seditious action at Jerusalem, Darius made search among the Babylonian archives of Cyrus, and finding the decree of his predecessor, he issued on his own behalf a firman to give effect to it. (Ezra 6)

12. Five Great Mon., vol. 4., p. 405. But Canon Rawlinson is wholly wrong in inferring that the known religious zeal of Darius was the motive which led to the action of the Jews. See Ezra 5.

And this is the second event which affords a possible beginning for the seventy weeks.[13] But though plausible arguments may be urged to prove that, either regarded as an independent edict, or as giving practical effect to the decree of Cyrus, the act of Darius was the epoch of the prophetic period, the answer is clear and full, that it fails to satisfy the angel's words. However it be accounted for, the fact remains, that though the "desolations" were accomplished, yet neither the scope of the royal edict, nor the action of the Jews in pursuance of that edict, went beyond the building of the Holy Temple, whereas the prophecy foretold a decree for the building of the city; not the street alone, but the fortifications of Jerusalem.

13. This is the epoch fixed upon by Mr. Bosanquet in Messiah the Prince.

Five years sufficed for the erection of the building which served as a shrine for Judah during the five centuries which followed.[14] But, in striking contrast with the temple they had reared in days when the magnificence of Solomon made gold as cheap as brass in Jerusalem, no costly furniture adorned the second house, until the seventh year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, when the Jews obtained a firman "to beautify the house of the Lord." (Ezra 7:19, 27.) This letter further authorized Ezra to return to Jerusalem with such of the Jews as desired to accompany him, and there to restore fully the worship of the temple and the ordinances of their religion. But this third decree makes no reference whatever to building, and it might be passed unnoticed were it not that many writers have fixed on it as the epoch of the prophecy. The temple had been already built long years before, and the city was still in ruins thirteen years afterwards. The book of Ezra therefore will be searched in vain for any mention of a "commandment to restore and build Jerusalem." But we only need to turn to the book which follows it in the canon of Scripture to find the record which we seek.

14. The temple was begun in the second, and completed in the sixth year of Darius (Ezra 4:24; 6:15).

The book of Nehemiah opens by relating that while at Susa,[15] where he was cup-bearer to the great king, "an honor of no small account in Persia,"[16] certain of his brethren arrived from Judea, and he "asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem." The emigrants declared that all were "in great affliction and reproach," "the wall of Jerusalem also was broken down, and the gates thereof were burned with fire." (Nehemiah 1:2) The first chapter closes with the record of Nehemiah's supplication to "the God of heaven." The second chapter narrates how "in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes," he was discharging the duties of his office, and as he stood before the king his countenance betrayed his grief, and Artaxerxes called on him to tell his trouble. "Let the king live for ever," Nehemiah answered, "why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchers, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire!" "For what dost thou make request?" the king demanded in reply. Thereupon Nehemiah answered thus: "If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favor in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto THE CITY of my fathers' sepulchers, THAT I MAY BUILD IT." (Nehemiah 2:5) Artaxerxes granted the petition, and forthwith issued the necessary orders to give effect to it. Four months later, eager hands were busy upon the ruined walls of Jerusalem, and before the Feast of Tabernacles the city was once more enclosed by gates and a rampart. (Nehemiah 6:15)

15. For a description of the ruins of the great palace at Susa, see Mr. Wm. Kennett Loftus's Travels and Researches in Chaldea and Susiana, chap. 28.

16. Herodotus, 3, 34.

But, it has been urged, "The decree of the twentieth year of Artaxerxes is but an enlargement and renewal of his first decree, as the decree of Darius confirmed that of Cyrus." [17] If this assertion had not the sanction of a great name, it would not deserve even a passing notice. If it were maintained that the decree of the seventh year of Artaxerxes was but "an enlargement and renewal" of his predecessors' edicts, the statement would be strictly accurate. That decree was mainly an authority to the Jews "to beautify the House of the Lord, which is in Jerusalem," (Ezra 7:27) in extension of the decrees by which Cyrus and Darius permitted them to build it.

The result was to produce a gorgeous shrine in the midst of a ruined city. The movement of the seventh of Artaxerxes was chiefly a religious revival, (Ezra 7:10) sanctioned and subsidized by royal favor; but the event of his twentieth year was nothing less than the restoration of the autonomy of Judah. The execution of the work which Cyrus authorized was stopped on the false charge which the enemies of the Jews carried to the palace, that their object was to build not merely the Temple, but the city.

"A rebellious city" it had ever proved to each successive suzerain, "for which cause" - they declared with truth, - its destruction was decreed. "We certify the king" (they added) "that if this city be builded again, and the walls thereof set up, thou shalt have no portion on this side the river." [18] To allow the building of the temple was merely to accord to a conquered race the right to worship according to the law of their God, for the religion of the Jew knows no worship apart from the hill of Zion.

It was a vastly different event when that people were permitted to set up again the far-famed fortifications of their city, and entrenched behind those walls, to restore under Nehemiah the old polity of the Judges.[19] This was a revival of the national existence of Judah, and therefore it is fitly chosen as the epoch of the prophetic period of the seventy weeks. 17. Pusey, Daniel. p. 171. Dr. Pusey adds, "The little

colony which Ezra took with him of 1, 683 males (with women and children some 8, 400 souls) was itself a considerable addition to those who had before returned, and involved a rebuilding of Jerusalem.

This rebuilding of the city and reorganization of the polity, begun by Ezra, and carried on and perfected by Nehemiah, corresponds with the words of Daniel, 'From the going forth of a commandment to restore and build Jerusalem'" (p. 172.) This argument is the feeblest imaginable, and indeed this reference to the decree of the seventh year of Artaxerxes is a great blot on Dr. Pusey's book. If an immigration of 8, 400 souls involved a rebuilding of the city, and therefore marked the beginning of the seventy weeks, what shall be said of the immigration of 49, 697 souls seventy-eight years before? (Ezra 2:64, 65.)

Did this not involve a rebuilding? But, Dr. Pusey goes on to say, "The term also corresponds," i. e., the 483 years, to the time of Christ. Here is obviously the real ground for his fixing the date B. C. 457, or more properly B. C. 458, as given by Prideaux, whom unfortunately Dr. Pusey has followed at this point. With more naivete the author of the Connection pleads that the years will not tally if any other date be assigned, and therefore the decree of the seventh of Artaxerxes must be right! (Prid., Con., 1., 5, B. C. 458.) Such a system of interpretation has done much to discredit the study of prophecy altogether.

18. i. e., Euphrates. Ezra 4:16.

19. "This last is the only decree which we find recorded in Scripture which relates to the restoring and building of the city. It must be borne in mind that the very existence of a place as a city depended upon such a decree; for before that any who returned from the land of captivity went only in the condition of sojourners; it was the decree that gave them a recognized and distinct political existence." - TREGELLES, Daniel, p. 98.

"On a sudden, however, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, Nehemiah, a man of Jewish descent, cup-bearer to the king, received a commission to rebuild the city with all possible expedition. The cause of this change in the Persian politics is to be sought, not so much in the personal influence of the Jewish cup-bearer, as in the foreign history of the times. The power of Persia had received a fatal blow in the victory obtained at Cnidos by Conon, the Athenian admiral. The great king was obliged to submit to a humiliating peace, among the articles of which were the abandonment of the maritime towns, and a stipulation that the Persian army should not approach within three days' journey of the sea. Jerusalem, being about this distance from the coast, and standing so near the line of communication with Egypt, became a post of the utmost importance." - MILMAN, Hist. Jews (3rd Ed.), 1., 435.

The doubt which has been raised upon the point may serve as an illustration of the extraordinary bias which seems to govern the interpretation of Scripture, in consequence of which the plain meaning of words is made to give place to the remote and the less probable. And to the same cause must be attributed the doubt which some have suggested as to the identity of the king here spoken of with Artaxerxes Longimanus.[20]

20. Artaxerxes I. reigned forty years, from 465 to 425. He is mentioned by Herodotus once (6. 98), by Thucydides frequently. Both writers were his contemporaries. There is every reason to believe that he was the king who sent Ezra and Nehemiah to Jerusalem, and sanctioned the restoration of the fortifications." - RAWLINSON, Herodotus, vol. 4., p. 217.

The question remains, whether the date of this edict can be accurately ascertained. And here a most striking fact claims notice. In the sacred narrative the date of the event which marked the beginning of the

seventy weeks is fixed only by reference to the regnal era of a Persian king. Therefore we must needs turn to secular history to ascertain the epoch, and history dates from this very period. Herodotus, "the father of history," was the contemporary of Artaxerxes, and visited the Persian court.[21] Thucydides, "the prince of historians," also was his contemporary. In the great battles of Marathon and Salamis, the history of Persia had become interwoven with events in Greece, by which its chronology can be ascertained and tested; and the chief chronological eras of antiquity were current at the time.[22] No element is wanting, therefore, to enable us with accuracy and certainty to fix the date of Nehemiah's edict.

21. The year in which he is said to have recited his writings at the Olympic games, was the very year of Nehemiah's mission.

22. The era of the Olympiads began B. C. 776; the era of Rome (A. U. C.) B. C. 753; and the era of Nabonassar, B. C. 747.

True it is that in ordinary history the mention of "the twentieth year of Artaxerxes" would leave in doubt whether the era of his reign were reckoned from his actual accession, or from his father's death;[23] but the narrative of Nehemiah removes all ambiguity upon this score. The murder of Xerxes and the beginning of the usurper Artabanus's seven months' reign was in July B.C. 465; the accession of Artaxerxes was in February B.C. 464;[24] One or other of these dates, therefore, must be the epoch of Artaxerxes' reign. But as Nehemiah mentions the Chisleu (November) of one year, and the following Nisan (March) as being both in the same year of his master's reign, it is obvious that, as might be expected from an official of the court, he reckons from the time of the king's accession *de jure*, that is from July B.C. 465. The twentieth year of Artaxerxes therefore began in July B.C. 446, and the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem was given in the Nisan following. The epoch of the prophetic cycle is thus definitely fixed as in the Jewish month Nisan of the year B.C. 445.[25]

23. The seven months of Artabanus were by some added to the last year of Xerxes, and by others were included in the reign of Artaxerxes." - CLINTON, *Fasti Hellenici*, vol. 2., p. 42.

24. It has been shown already that the accession of Xerxes is determined to the beginning of 485 B. C. His twentieth year was completed in the beginning of 465 B. C., and his death would happen in the beginning of the Archonship of Lysitheus. The seven months of Artabanus, completing the twenty-one years, would bring down the accession of Artaxerxes (after the removal of Artabanus) to the beginning of 464, in the year of Nabonassar 284, where it is placed by the canon. Note b: "We may place the death of Xerxes in the first month of that Archon (i. e., of Lysitheus), July B. C. 465, and the succession of Artaxerxes in the eighth month, February B. C. 464." - CLINTON, *Fasti Hellenici*, vol. 2., p. 380.

25. See Appendix 2., Note A, on the chronology of the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus.

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