

The Mystic Era of the Weeks

by Sir Robert Anderson

The prophecy of the seventy weeks is a prediction of a future period of time when the Jews will be restored to their national position and the blessings of Calvary will be secured to them.

Scripture: Acts 3:19

Topics: "Daniel Prophecy", "End Times"

Description

Sir Robert Anderson delves into the parallel between Daniel's visions and the prophecy of the seventy weeks, highlighting the gap between the time of Christ and the division of the Roman earth into ten kingdoms. The prophecy of the seventy weeks was conveyed mystically to emphasize the responsibility of accepting the Messiah, leading to the postponement of blessings due to Judah's impenitence. The fulfillment of the seventieth week is still future, as indicated by Christ's prophecy of the abomination of desolation and the tribulation lasting three and a half years.

Transcript

THE conclusions arrived at in the preceding chapter suggest a striking parallel between Daniel's earlier visions and the prophecy of the seventy weeks. History contains no record of events to satisfy the predicted course of the seventieth week. The Apocalypse was not even written when that period ought chronologically to have closed, and though eighteen centuries have since elapsed, the restoration of the Jews seems still but a chimera of sanguine fanatics. And be it remembered that the purpose of the prophecy was not to amuse or interest the curious. Of necessity some mysticism must characterize prophetic utterances, otherwise they might be "fulfilled to order" by designing men; but once the prophecy comes side by side with the events of which it speaks, it fails of one of its chief purposes if its relation to them be doubtful. If any one will learn the connection between prophecy and its fulfillment, let him read the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, and compare it with the story of the Passion: so vague and figurative that no one could have acted out the drama it foretold; but yet so definite and clear that, once fulfilled, the simplest child can recognize its scope and meaning. If then the event which constitutes the epoch of the seventieth week must be as pronounced and certain as Nehemiah's commission and Messiah's death, it is of necessity still future.

And this is precisely what the study of the seventh chapter of Daniel will have led us to expect. All Christian interpreters are agreed that between the rise of the fourth beast and the growth of the ten horns there is a gap or parenthesis in the vision; and, as already shown, that gap includes the entire period

between the time of Christ and the division of the Roman earth into the ten kingdoms out of which the great persecutor of the future is to arise. This period, moreover, is admittedly unnoticed also in the other visions of the book. There is therefore a strong a priori probability that it would be overlooked in the vision of the ninth chapter.

More than this, there is not only the same reason for this mystic foreshortening in the vision of the seventy weeks, as in the other visions,[1] but that reason applies here with special force. The seventy weeks were meted out as the period during which Judah's blessings were deferred. In common with all prophecy, the meaning of this prophecy will be unmistakable when its ultimate fulfillment takes place, but it was necessarily conveyed in a mystical form in order to shut up the Jews to the responsibility of accepting their Messiah. St. Peter's inspired proclamation to the nation at Jerusalem, recorded in the third chapter of Acts, was in accordance with this. The Jews looked merely for a return of their national supremacy, but God's first purpose was redemption through the death of the great Sin-bearer. Now, the sacrifice had been accomplished, and St. Peter pointed to Calvary as the fulfillment of that "which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets"; and he added this testimony, "Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send the Christ, who hath been appointed for you, even Jesus." (Acts 3:19, 20, R.V.) The realization of these blessings would have been the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy, and the seventieth week might have run its course without a break. But Judah proved impenitent and obdurate, and the promised blessings were once again postponed till the close of this strange era of the Gentile dispensation.

1. See pp. 44-47, ante.

But it may be asked, Was not the Cross of Christ the fulfillment of these blessings? A careful study of the Angel's words (Daniel 9:24) will show that not so much as one of them has been thus accomplished. The sixty-ninth week was to end with Messiah's death; the close of the seventieth week was to bring to Judah the full enjoyment of the blessings resulting from that death. Judah's transgression has yet to be restrained, and his sins to be sealed up. The day is yet future when a fountain shall be opened for the iniquity of Daniel's people, (Zechariah 13:1) and righteousness shall be ushered in for them.

In what sense were vision and prophet sealed up at the death of Christ, considering that the greatest of all visions was yet to be given, (The Revelation.) and the days were still to come when the words of the prophets were to be fulfilled? (Luke 21:22) And whatever meaning is to be put upon "anointing the most holy," it is clear that Calvary was not the accomplishment of it.[2] 2. All these words point to practical benefits to be conferred in a practical way upon the people, at the second advent of Christ.

Isaiah 1:26 is a commentary on "bringing in righteousness." To take it as synonymous with declaring God's righteousness (Romans 3:25) is doctrinally a blunder and an anachronism. To any whose views of "reconciliation" are not based on the use of the word in Scripture, "making reconciliation for iniquity" will seem an exception. The Hebrew verb caphar (to make atonement or reconciliation) means literally "to cover over" sin (see its use in Genesis 6:14), to do away with a charge against a person by means of bloodshedding, or otherwise (ex. gr. by intercession, Exodus 32:30), so as to secure his reception into Divine favor.

The following is a list of the passages where the word is used in the first three books of the Bible: Genesis 6:14 (pitch); 32:20 (appease); Exodus 29:33, 36, 37; 30:10, 15, 16; 32:30; Leviticus 1:4; 4:20, 26, 31, 35;

5:6, 10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7, 30; 7:7; 8:15, 34; 9:7; 10:17; 12:7, 8; 14:18, 19, 20, 21, 29, 31, 53; 15:15, 30; 16:6, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 20, 24, 27, 32, 33, 34; 17:11; 19:22; 23:28. It will be seen that caphar is never used of the expiation or bloodshedding considered objectively, but of the results accruing from it to the sinner, sometimes immediately on the victim's death, sometimes conditional upon the action of the priest who was charged with the function of applying the blood.

The sacrifice was not the atonement, but the means by which atonement was made. Therefore "the preposition which marks substitution is never used in connection with the word caphar" (Girdlestone's Synonyms O. T., p. 214.) Making reconciliation, or atonement, therefore, according to the Scriptural use of the word, implies the removal of the practical estrangement between the sinner and God, the obtaining forgiveness for the sin; and the words in Daniel 9:24 point to the time when this benefit will be secured to Judah.

"In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness" (Zechariah 13:1); that is, the blessings of Calvary will be theirs; reconciliation will be accomplished for the people. In keeping with this, transgression will be restrained (see use of the word in Genesis 8:2; Exodus 36:6); i. e., they will cease to transgress; sins will be sealed up, -- the ordinary word for securing a letter (1 Kings 21:8), or a purse or bag of treasure (Job 14:17); i. e., sins will be done with and put away in a practical sense; and vision and prophet will likewise be sealed up, i. e., their functions will be at an end, for all will have been fulfilled.

But is it consistent with fair argument or common-sense to urge that an era thus chronologically defined should be indefinitely interrupted in its course? The ready answer might be given, that if common-sense and fairness -- if human judgment, is to decide the question, the only doubt must be whether the final period of the cycle, and the blessings promised at its close, be not for ever abrogated and lost by reason of the appalling guilt of that people who "killed the Prince of life." (Acts 3:15) There exists surely no presumption against supposing that the stream of prophetic time is tided back during all this interval of the apostasy of Judah. The question remains, whether any precedent for this can be discovered in the mystical chronology of Israel's history.

According to the book of Kings, Solomon began to build the temple in the 480th year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt. (1 Kings 6:1) This statement, than which none could, seemingly, be more exact, has sorely puzzled chronologers. By some it has been condemned as a forgery, by others it has been dismissed as a blunder; but all have agreed in rejecting it. Moreover, Scripture itself appears to clash with it. In his sermon at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:18-21) St. Paul epitomizes thus the chronology of this period of the history of his nation: forty years in the wilderness; 450 years under the judges, and forty years of the reign of Saul; making a total of 530 years. To which must be added the forty years of David's reign and the first three years of Solomon's; making 573 years for the very period which is described in Kings as 480 years. Can these conclusions, apparently so inconsistent, be reconciled?[3]

3. According to Browne (*Ordo Saec.*, §§. 254 and 268) the Exodus was on Friday the 10th April, B. C. 1586; the passage of Jordan was the 14th April, B. C. 1546; the accession of Solomon was B. C. 1016, and the foundation of the Temple was the 20th April, B. C. 1013. He therefore accepts St. Paul's statements unreservedly. Clinton conjectures that there was an interval of about twenty-seven years before the time of the Judges, and another of twelve years before the election of Saul, thus fixing on B. C. 1625 as the date of the Exode, extending the whole period to 612 years. Josephus reckons it 621 years, and this is adopted by Hales, who calls the statement in Kings "a forgery." Other chronologers assign

periods varying from the 741 years of Julius Africanus to the 480 years of Usher, whose date for the Exode -- B. C. 1491 -- has been adopted in our Bible, though clearly wrong by ninety-three years at least. The subject is fully discussed by Clinton in Fasli Hell., vol. 1., pp. 312-313, and by Browne, reviewing Clinton's arguments, in Ordo Sceec., §. 6, etc. Browne's conclusions have much to commend them. But if others are right in inserting conjectural periods, my argument remains the same, for any such periods, if they existed, were obviously excluded from the 480 years on the same principle as were the eras of the servitudes. (This subject is discussed further in App. 1.)

If we follow the history of Israel as detailed in the book of Judges, we shall find that for five several periods their national existence as Jehovah's people was in abeyance. In punishment for their idolatry, God gave them up again and again, and "sold them into the hands of their enemies." They became slaves to the king of Mesopotamia for eight years, to the king of Moab for eighteen years, to the king of Canaan for twenty years, to the Midianites for seven years, and finally to the Philistines for forty years.[4] But the sum of 8 +18+ 20+ 7+ 40 years is 93 years, and if 93 years be deducted from 573 years, the result is 480 years. It is obvious, therefore, that the 480 years of the book of Kings from the Exodus to the temple is a mystic era formed by eliminating every period during which the people were cast off by God.[5] If, then, this principle were intelligible to the Jew in regard to history, it was both natural and legitimate to introduce it in respect of an essentially mystic era like that of the seventy weeks.

4. Judges 3:8, 14; 4:2, 3; 6:1; 13:1. The servitude of Judges 10:7, 9 affected only the tribes beyond Jordan, and did not suspend Israel's national position.

5. The Israelites were nationally God's people as no other nation ever can be; therefore they were dealt with in some respects on principles similar to those which obtain in the case of individuals. A life without God is death. Righteousness must keep a strict account and sternly judge; or grace may pardon. And if God forgives, He likewise forgets the sin (Hebrews 10:17); which doubtless means that the record is wiped out, and the period it covers is treated as though it were a blank. The days of our servitude to evil are ignored in the Divine chronology.

But this conclusion does not depend upon argument however sound, or inference however just. It is indisputably proved by the testimony of Christ Himself. "What shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?" the disciples inquired as they gathered round the Lord on one of the last days of His ministry on earth. (Matthew 24:3) In reply he spoke of the tribulation foretold by Daniel,[6] and warned them that the signal of that fearful persecution was to be the precise event which marks the middle of the seventieth week, namely, the defilement of the holy place by the "abomination of desolation," -- some image of himself probably, which the false prince will set up in the temple in violation of his treaty obligations to respect and defend the religion of the Jews[7] That this prophecy was not fulfilled by Titus is as certain as history can make it;[8] but Scripture itself leaves no doubt whatever on the point.

6. thlipsis, Matthew 24:21; Daniel 12:1 (LXX)

7. kai epi to hieronn bdelugma ton eramoseon, Daniel 9:27; to bdelugma eramoseos, Daniel 12:11 (LXX.); hotan oun idate to bdelugma tas eramoseos to rathen dia Danial tou prophatou, estos en topo hagio, Matthew 24:15. Comp. 1 Maccabees 1:54, okodomasan bdelugma eramoseos epi to phusiastapion. This passage in Matthew affords an unanswerable proof that all systems of interpretation which make the seventy weeks end with the coming or death of Christ, and therefore before the destruction of Jerusalem by Tiffits, are wholly wrong. And that that event was not in fact the terminus of the era is plain from

Matthew 24:21-29, and Daniel 9:24.

8. Making all allowance for the contemptible time-serving of Josephus and his admiration for Titus, his testimony on this point is too full and explicit to admit of doubt (Wars, 6., 2, §. 4).

It appears from the passages already quoted, that the predicted tribulation is to last three and a half years, and to date from the violation of the treaty in the middle of the seventieth week. What is to follow is thus described by the Lord Himself in words of peculiar solemnity: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heaven shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (Matthew 24:29) That it is to the closing scenes of the dispensation this prophecy relates is here assumed.[9] And as these scenes are to follow immediately after a persecution, of which the era is within the seventieth week, the inference is incontestable that the events of that week belong to a time still future.[10]

9. I am aware of systems of interpretation which flitter away the meaning of all such scriptures, but it is idle to attempt to refute them in detail. (See chap 11 post, and App. Note C.)

10. Such was the belief of the early Church; but the question has been argued at length out of deference to modern writers who have advocated a different interpretation of Daniel 9:27. Hippolytus, bishop and martyr, who wrote at the beginning of the third century, is most definite on the point. Quoting the verse, he says: "By one week he meant the last week, which is to be at the end of the whole world; of which week the two prophets Enoch and Elias will take up the half; for they will preach 1, 260 days, clothed in sackcloth" (Hip. on Christ and Antichrist). According to Browne (Ordo Saec. p. 386, note), this was also the view of the father of Christian chronologers, Julius Africanus. That half of the last week has been fulfilled, but the remaining three and a half years are still future, is maintained by Canon Browne himself (§ 339), who notices, what so many modern writers have missed, that the events belonging to this period are connected with the times of Antichrist.

We may conclude, then, that when wicked hands set up the cross on Calvary, and God pronounced the dread "Lo-ammi" (Romans 9:25, 26; cf. Hosea 1:9, 10) upon His people, the course of the prophetic era ceased to run. Nor will it flow on again till the autonomy of Judah is restored; and, with obvious propriety, that is held to date from the moment their readmission into the family of nations is recognized by treaty.[11] It will, therefore, be here assumed that the former portion of the prophetic era has run its course, but that the events of the last seven years have still to be accomplished. The last point, therefore, necessary to complete the chain of proof is to ascertain the date of "Messiah the Prince."

11. i. e., the covenant mentioned in Daniel 9:27.

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