

# THE DISTINCTIVE *MAREH* PROPHECY UNFOLDS

## (DANIEL 9 – PART 2)

**“Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city,” (Daniel 9:24a).**

This begins one of the greatly contested areas in Old Testament prophecy. Daniel had clearly understood the meaning of Jeremiah’s 70-year prophecy. That issue related to “why” the Jewish people went into Babylonian captivity. Gabriel is now echoing *elements* of that past missive as he moves deeper into the future of the *mareh* vision that occurs on God’s surrender terms. That will be His “deliverance” treaty which offers restoration to ancient Israel and to last-day spiritual Israel. Since we know that the main issue causing the captivity was a breach in Judah’s loyalties to the Sabbatical year (II Chronicles 36:20-21), one can see how this new timing prophecy might contextually be associated with those seven-year cycles. It flows from that “time” noted in the first part of this chapter.

In addition, “seventy” is the motif that builds on a “*desolation*” theme. Jeremiah had predicted that the Babylonian king would “come from the north” (the route by which Nebuchadnezzar had to approach Palestine) and take them captive for **70 years**, leaving the “whole land” in “desolation” (Jeremiah 25:11). At the end of Gabriel’s current visit with Daniel, he will say that because of abominations (9:27), God has already decreed that **once again** “*desolation*” will come. Thus, “70 weeks” suggests another probation that has a desolation end that is tied to seven-year cycles!

In the next chapter it is clear that it took time for Daniel to absorb all the meaning of this. But finally in 10:1 (the summation verse of the chapter) he understood the *mareh* vision. On two counts, Daniel then knew that his people, Israel, as he envisioned them, would likely not be God’s chosen forever (all associated with the composite *mareh* messages):

1. There would be another “desolation” of Daniel’s people at the end of the 490 years. His people would experience failure once again – but then it would be final. The curse did come before the Cross (Matthew 21:43, 23:37-38), before the 490 years ended. The desolation didn’t occur until 70 A.D. – thus, a gap.
2. The 2300 years of 8:14 (judicial language – part of the *mareh* vision) suggests another probation that ends in the 9:27 “desolation,” also referring to a point in time **after** this period. When that desolation comes, the verse notes that it will be at the “*consummation*” (*kala*) – a *final end*. That desolation is repeated in 11:31 and 12:11. All this final end-time application fulfills Matthew 24:15. Thus – another gap is in view!

### **Seventy weeks are determined (vs 24)**

This “seventy weeks” is a composite of seven, sixty-two and one week segments, later noted in the prophecy. The word for “seventy” is *shibim*. Virtually all scholars agree that it is the cardinal number 70 and is exactly the same word used by Jeremiah relative to the 70-year captivity (Jeremiah 25:11, 29:10), associated with 490 years of rebellion against the Sabbatical years (70 Sabbatical years missed during that time).

The word for “weeks” is *shabua*, which refers to “periods of seven” or “units of seven.” The “sabbatical theology” of Leviticus 25–26 has already been drawn upon (II Chronicles 36:18-21 – and to Jeremiah’s references noted above – cf. Leviticus 26:34-35). Thus, “70 periods of seven” **contextually** alludes to “70 sabbatical years.” That would mean “seventy periods of seven.” What periods? The Sabbatical cycles of seven years each. Thus, 70 Sabbatical cycles or 490 solar years. Some call the Sabbatical cycle the “Sabbatical week” – thus “70 weeks of years” – four hundred and ninety solar years, which would equal ten Jubilee cycles, incorporated in this prophecy.<sup>1</sup> Dispensationalists calculate this period on a 30-day month and not solar years. That is at variance with the Sabbatical theme in this chapter.

*Shibim* (70) *shabua* (seven periods) are “determined.” Again, what periods? God is giving to them another probationary time of equal length that brought on the 70-year captivity (one year for each seventh year desecrated). But – this time it will be the last chance. The ensuing linguistics describe the climax of redemptive history! [*kala* – the consummation – everything finished (vs 27)].

The concept of a “week” symbol represents a *renewal cycle* – *in a re-creation or deliverance setting*. The people are given 70 “renewals” to put away sin.

“First, years fit the context well. Second, the Hebrews were familiar with the concept of sevens of years as well as of days because the Sabbatical Year was based on this premise. Every seventh year there was to be a Sabbath of rest for the land (cf. Lev 25:1–7). God promised that if Israel did not keep these Sabbath years, they would be driven from the land and scattered among the nations (cf. Lev 26:33–35; cf. Jer 34:12–22). According to 2 Chr 36:21, one result of the seventy-year Babylonian captivity was that the land was allowed to rest in order to make up for the Sabbath years, which the Jews had failed to keep. Therefore in Scripture only two types of weeks or sevens are mentioned – sevens of days and sevens of years. All agree that days is not a valid option in this context; only sevens of years remain. The burden of proof rests squarely upon anyone who would take the sevens in any other sense.”<sup>2</sup>

Of intriguing interest is the Mathian counsel Christ gave regarding Jerusalem’s end and the final apocalyptic end at His coming. “Go to Daniel the prophet” where he describes the sin/abomination that leads to **desolation** (Matthew 24:15). This opens a very critical reminder. Apocalyptic “ends” must be associated with “desolation”! Daniel clearly reveals this at the terminus of the 490-year period and later in a three and a half year period (11:31, 12:11). “Desolation” is a key **reference word** in apocalyptic prophecy. It is an orientation word that describes an “end” to a major probation period.

That means that a commonly held view of the 490 years ending in 34 A.D. would not be applicable. The 70 A.D. destruction of Jerusalem would apply with its desolation, which would affirm the Mathian record. But either a late onset decree for the 490 years to begin must be discovered, so that this period would end at 70 A.D. – or – there is a “gap”! Since the “final” consummation is also associated with utter desolation, it too welcomes the concept of a “gap.” The onset and subsequent periods must be in sympathy with the timed decree, then with the Shemitas, Jubilees, probation, apostasy and finally destructive desolation.

### **“are determined” (vs 24)**

<sup>1</sup> Collins, John J; *Daniel* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN – 1993), p. 352.

<sup>2</sup> Miller, *Op. cit.*, pp. 257-258.

*Hatak* (“determined”) is in the *niphal* or passive tense. Though it could mean “to be severed” or “cut off,” its sole use here in the whole Old Testament invites us to look at Rabbinic Hebrew for better clues. There, it is used frequently as “decreed” or “determined.”<sup>3</sup> Since Gabriel is reporting a message of surrender to divine terms, the setting reveals only 490 years to meet heaven’s expectations that were “**decreed.**” “Time” will passively receive what man does but be actively terminated when the “clock” stops. Mercy is spelled out in covenant terms. Shortly, it will be clear what God requires. The 70 sevens are tangible evidence for God’s amazing mercy – but equally persuasive that terminal justice is anticipated.

### **“upon thy people and upon thy holy city,” (vs 24)**

The majority of scholars take this phrase to mean the Jewish people and the physical city of Jerusalem. That is the hermeneutic approach to “literalism.” But others, such as Young, Keil and Leupold, introduce the idea of “spiritual Israel.”<sup>4</sup> The latter is the directive God clearly implies. Gabriel noted in a qualifying statement in 12:1 that “thy people” (“Daniel’s” people) were “every one that shall be found written in the book.” The prophetic application is broad and not restrictive to the Jewish people.

“Jerusalem” is also a metaphor for “God’s people.” In Matthew 23:37 its personification by Christ depicted it in apostasy. In that setting, it symbolizes the Jewish nation, but addresses, symbolically, all those in all ages who scorn Christ’s love.<sup>5</sup> In Revelation 21:2 and 9, the “new” Jerusalem is seen as the bride of Christ, a restored people.

The implications are forward-moving. This oracle clearly refers to the Jewish people in a minor application but spiritual Israel in an eschatological context.

Now the great purpose for this “probation period,” “time for a final chance,” is given. To achieve what Daniel prayed for **and** to come back into harmony with God, a distinct path of reformation must be followed. Surrender of self and identity with God’s original purpose for man is the unyielding objective. What Gabriel now presents is a directive from heaven for all of God’s people, applicable to the end – when **desolation** occurs and everlasting righteousness makes its debut.

There are two sets of three objectives:

First Set: What those who claim to be His people must implement (Daniel 9:24a).

Second Set: The promised outcome, if they honor that reform of the first three objectives (9:24b).

There is end-time spiritual drama in what follows. Words like “everlasting,” “consummation,” “anointing,” “reconciliation,” “seal up,” “confirm the covenant” are used. The message is elevating, exciting and filled with hope. There are warnings, however, which add urgency and balance: “finish **the** transgression,” “troublesome times,” “destroy the city and the sanctuary,” “flood,” “desolations” and “end.”

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<sup>3</sup> Steinmann, Andrew E.; *Daniel* (Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis – 2008), p. 445.

<sup>4</sup> Miller, *Op. cit.*, pp. 258-259.

<sup>5</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 587. In Revelation 21:2, 9, Jerusalem is seen as the bride of Christ.

The decree is “passive” – its objectives are realized only through man’s actions. It is activated by man’s decisions.

Again, as with most apocalyptic prophecy, there is a minor and a major application. We will make that transition as we move deeper into the prophetic narrative. To recapitulate, the forward-moving predictive history outlined here in Daniel 9 leads to “the termination of the seventy weeks, coinciding with the end of the present course of ... [God’s redemptive] work.”<sup>6</sup> That will be the final “accomplishment of God’s purpose for all history”<sup>7</sup> for all of humanity.<sup>8</sup>

That, once again, means that there is a “timing gap” within the infrastructure of this prophecy. We are reminded of this several times. That must be carefully analyzed in light of the great purpose of this chapter!

**“to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy” (Daniel 9:24b).**

### “to finish the transgression” (vs 24)

To “finish” (*kaia*) means to “bring to an end.” The implication suggests that it won’t arise again. It is the Hebrew piel verb tense and reveals intensity and action – a decision being acted upon to its completion.

The “*transgression*” alluded to is from the Hebrew word *bepesha*. This is a specific, willful and intentional sin against God. In the Hebrew ordinances, no specific gesture atoned for *bepesha*. Yet, we know that the blood of Jesus did so: “*But he was wounded for our transgressions [bepesha], he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all*” (Isaiah 53:5-6). *Bepesha* has deep religious connotations.<sup>9</sup>

Based on the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible), Judaism described three levels of sin (all presented in this sequence in Daniel 9:24).

- *Bepesha* – intentional, deliberate defiance of **God**
- *Hattat* – mainly sin against **man**
- *Awon* – sin of lust, emotion to please **self** but not deliberately against God

*Pesha* is the highest level of severance of one’s tie with God. It is a rebellion against God’s authority and His covenant relationship. It is a deliberate act of man (Hosea 14:9) against Him. Gabriel notes that “this covenant relationship” must be reestablished by ceasing all rebellion and acts against the government of heaven. Independence from God must end (Amos 4:4).

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<sup>6</sup> Keil, C. F. and Delitzsch, F.; *A Commentary on the Old Testament*, (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA; 1866–1991), vol. 9, p. 349.

<sup>7</sup> Baldwin, Joyce G.; *Daniel* (Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, IL), p. 169.

<sup>8</sup> Miller, *Op. cit.*, p. 259.

<sup>9</sup> Lucas, Ernest C.; *Daniel* (Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL; 2002) p. 241.

In its collective use, *bepesha* is rebellion against God's authority, law and covenant. Those are a "sign" of one's loyalty to God. The seventh-day Sabbath embodies all of those and is God's perpetual "mark" of that special relationship. Thus, *bepesha* is summarily seen as defiance against the weekly Sabbath!

*"Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a **sign** between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you.... Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a **perpetual covenant**"* (Exodus 31:13, 16-17).

Within the Sabbath law, most beautifully outlined in Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:14-15, is:

- God's authority (Creator) – Exodus 20:11
- God's law (part of the Decalogue) – Exodus 20:3-17
- God's restoration covenant (deliverance) – Deuteronomy 5:15

The ultimate mark of loyalty is keeping His seventh-day Sabbath. The ultimate mark of rebellion – *bepesha* – is desecrating that Sabbath. That is tied to the "*abomination*" that leads to "*desolation*" (8:13). God has two alternative responses to *bepesha*.

1. Punishment – which is ultimately "desolation"
2. Renewal of the covenant relationship

Number 1 is God's response to those who fail to repair the relationship. Number 2 is our response to God to finish *bepesha* and enter into a restored relationship. The eleventh chapter of Daniel (vss 30-45) fills in end-time details of the antichrist hatred towards the covenant and towards God's people (implied – who are bonded to the covenant).

It is crucial to note a distinct theological concept emerging with this first infinitive. Though Daniel pleads for restoration, the reality comes through the moral choice of man. God in mercy says, "I'll give you time to make up your mind." Contextually, however, there is a defined time limit in which to respond. Within that framework, God gives a number representing "judicial completeness" – ten Jubilees – ten complete restoration cycles as probation. He is telling us that all decisions must be made within that period of time! The number "ten" in prophecy means completeness – nothing is beyond.

In turn, this is an early Biblical prophecy that at the apocalypse, the Sabbath will be a key issue!

### **"and to make an end of sins," (vs 24)**

Many old translations, such as the OG and Masoretic text, say: "And to finish" or "to make an end" (KJV).<sup>10</sup> Theodotian uses words that suggest "to seal," "affix a seal" or "seal up."

This is another willful decision that God is requiring of His people. The sins or *hattat* (plural) are mainly against man [I Samuel 20:1, Psalm 59:3 – TWOT (Theological Word Dictionary of

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<sup>10</sup> Steinmann, *Op. cit.*, p. 445.

the Old Testament)]. This alludes particularly to commandments 5 through 10 of the Decalogue. The wording means: Within the body of God's people, this sin will become history. Only at the end of time does that occur. The first group of individuals who appears to reflect this purity of action are the 144,000 (white horse, Philadelphia church, pure woman – Revelation 7, 12, 14:1).

The very language is invitational to God's people and looks forward to what will take place just before "desolation" comes in. It is part of God's restoration imperatives. For righteousness to come, these sins have to be put away, finished, sealed – nevermore to arise. Daniel understood the issues relative to the 70 literal years of **desolation** for the Babylonian captivity (Daniel 9:2). We are to understand the 490 years that **end** in **desolation** (Daniel 9:27) at the **end of time**.

This is very different from the past. In God's dealings with Israel, He had qualifying positions: "If you repent, I will bless you" (Leviticus 26:40-42). This time period of 490 years is a "set" time. It is mainly for "spiritual Israel" **because**, as we will shortly see, it is integrally tied to the 2300 years of Daniel 8:14 and moves forward to the eschatological end. God is speaking to us!

### **"to make reconciliation for iniquity," (vs 24)**

This infinitive has been the subject of dissertations and much speculation. A large number see this (and the previous two phrases) as the completion of Messianic expiation. But there is a problem. "Messiah" is **not** the subject. It is "your people" and the "holy city." This redirects totally the purpose and meaning of these phrases!

The words "to make reconciliation" is from the Hebrew word *kippur*. It means "to atone" or "to make a covering." The immediate allusion that many expositors assume comes from the Jewish ordinance of sprinkling blood on the mercy seat on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:15-16). There, it depicts not only forgiveness (already done in the courtyard) but "removal" or "total coverage" by the blood.

The easiest way to understand this phrase is to first look at the word "iniquity" (*awon*). It is used as a noun, and encompasses the collective misdeeds of man, **especially against himself**. It represents an overwhelming trait of man's character, the very nature of man acting against itself, misdeeds against oneself and, in turn, God (Numbers 14:34, I Samuel 25:24, II Samuel 22:24, I Kings 17:18, Ezra 9:6, Isaiah 1:4, Jeremiah 11:10). (TWOT 9:24 – *awon*).

In this setting the confusing word *kippur* or "to atone" takes on rich meaning. Man (your people) and the church (the holy city) are the subject. Rebellion against God and sins against man have been addressed in the first two infinitives in a judicial summary against the two great parts of the Decalogue. Now the infinitive is associated with other kinds of remaining iniquity, which must be addressed and atoned for. They, too, must be covered by the blood and taken away. *Awon* addresses all other sins not obvious in the Decalogue. Hebraic emphasis again stresses especially sins against one's self, such as lust. There is an allusion to acting on man's propensities to evil that may not directly affect another.

"It was not inevitable that punishment [automatically followed] ... [*awon*]; there was a way to escape it.... Man must be aware of and confess ... [*awon*] (Gen 44:16; Lev 16:21; Neh 9:2; Psa 32:5; Psa 38:18 [H 19]) and it must be a request directed to God (Exo 34:9; Num 14:19;

Job 7:21; Psa 25:11). Man must also change his way of life or thinking (Ezek 18:30; Ezek 36:31). There is provision for a substitute in [place of] punishment (Lev 16:22; Isa 53:5-6, 11; Ezek 4:4-6)." (TWOT). It was God's atonement, even for "secret" types of sin.

"Of supreme importance is God's acts of taking away, forgiving ... [*awon*]; this is both promised and declared as an actuality (Num 14:18; Psa 65:3 [H 4]; Psa 78:38; Psa 103:3; Prov 16:6; Isa 6:7; Jer 32:18; Dan 9:24; Mic 7:18-19; Zech 3:4, 9.... In three places the divine act of cleansing is stressed (Psa 51:4; Jer 33:8; Ezek 36:33)." (TWOT) (by His atoning blood). Expiation is strongly in evidence for this special sin.

Daniel prayed for restoration, Gabriel counseled him as to what will activate that possibility – these three infinitives. The instruction is broad, encompassing God's people and His church. Because of its speedy answer from the courts of heaven, it was advice in urgent waiting. The "time" in history, the prayer and now the probationary period to repent have coalesced.

The invitation is to eliminate sin guilt through the atoning blood – to Daniel, in promise; to us, in reality. Thus:

1. "**finish**" – transgression (against God) – epitomized in the Sabbath command
2. "**bring to an end**" – sin (against man)
3. "**make reconciliation**" (*bring atoning blood*) – iniquity (against self)

Though perhaps oversimplified, the **three together** bring into play beautiful imagery of man actively engaged in pleasing God by eliminating everything that impedes holiness (anticipated in the last half of verse 24)!

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