

## Part II

### THE PARENTHESIS OF TIME BETWEEN THE SIXTY-NINTH AND SEVENTIETH WEEKS

The results of our investigation thus far may be summarized briefly as follows: First, the "weeks" of the prophecy are weeks of years, not days. Second, the length of each of these prophetic years is 360 days. Third, the entire period of "weeks" began with the "commandment" to rebuild Jerusalem, which was issued by Artaxerxes on March 14, 445 B.C. (Neh. 2:1-8). Fourth, from this date to the appearance of Messiah as the "Prince" of Israel was exactly 69 weeks of years, or 483 years (Dan. 9:25). Fifth, at the end of these 69 weeks of years, to the very day, April 6, 32 A.D., our Lord Jesus Christ rode up to Jerusalem on the "foal of an ass" in fulfillment of the well-known prediction of Zechariah (9:9). Thus we have in past history a complete demonstration of the chronological exactness of Daniel's prophecy up to the Seventieth Week.

We now turn our attention to this final "week" of the prophecy. And here the first point to be determined is the exact chronological relation of the Seventieth Week to the Sixty-nine Weeks which precede it. On this question expositors have split into two absolutely distinct schools of interpretation, so radically different that the results reach far into the field of New Testament eschatology. The one school holds to what I shall call the *Continuous* interpretation, and the other to the *Gap* interpretation.

According to the *Continuous* view, the whole period of the Seventy Weeks is continuous and unbroken. There is no break anywhere. The Seventieth Week follows the Sixty-ninth without any gap in time. Obviously, if this theory be correct, the Seventieth Week is past, having come to an end somewhere early in the Book of Acts. Adherents to the theory are not wholly agreed as to details, but the most important group believe that Christ died in the middle of the Seventieth Week and therefore this last Week must have ended three and one-half years after the cross. One curious interpretation takes the 1260 days of the last half of the Seventieth Week, changes these days into years, and thus prolongs the period for 1260 years! But without taking such unwarranted liberties with the Word of God, there is no way for adherents to the Continuous interpretation to prolong the Seventieth Week beyond seven years after the death of Christ, or about 39 A.D. Regardless of minor differences, therefore, it should be clear that according to the Continuous view the whole prophecy of the Seventy Weeks

has been fulfilled for over nineteen hundred years, and the future contains nothing comprehended within the scope of the prophecy.

On the other hand, according to what I have called the *Gap* interpretation, the Seventieth Week does not immediately follow the Sixty-ninth Week, but there is a great parenthesis of time between these two which has already lasted for over nineteen hundred years, and therefore the Seventieth Week still lies in the future. At first sight, to those not familiar with certain characteristics of Messianic prophecy, this will seem a very startling view. And some have earnestly denounced it as a violent expedient of interpretation. What right, they ask, do we have to sunder this final week from the first sixty-nine and arbitrarily push it nineteen centuries into the future? How can such a method be justified? In reply, we must admit immediately that the objectors are wholly within their rights in demanding some good reasons for this method of interpretation. And unless such reasons can be given, we should not expect men to accept it. But there are plenty of convincing reasons. In fact, the deeper one pushes into the prophetic Word, the greater in number and importance do these evidences appear.

1. *Such a gap in time before the Seventieth Week is implied by the most natural reading of the prophecy.*

This seems so clear to me today that it is hard to understand how along with many others I could have missed the point so long. But doubtless, like the average English reader, I came to the passage with what the late Dr. M. G. Kyle liked to call "our Anglo-Saxon passion for a continuous chronology," a thing in which the Oriental mind was not greatly interested. And it is quite possible that no one would ever have thought of making the last "one week" continuous with the first Sixty-nine weeks had it not been for the language of verse 24, where we read that "seventy weeks are determined." And having read this expression--*Seventy Weeks*--we at once jumped to the conclusion that all seventy were continuous and then carried this erroneous impression throughout the reading of the rest of the prophecy.

But let the student now read carefully the analysis of the "weeks" in verses 25-27 forgetting, if possible, the expression of verse 24, and notice the order of events. First, in verse 25 we have a period of Sixty-nine Weeks ending with a definite historical event, the appearance of Messiah the Prince. Then, *after* these Sixty-nine Weeks<sup>1</sup> come two other events, the

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1 Note: It is not "after threescore and two weeks" but "after the threescore and two weeks" that Messiah is "cut off." That is, He is cut off after "the" Sixty-two Weeks which follow the first "seven weeks," or after a total of Sixty-nine Weeks. Omission of the definite article in the Authorized Version has obscured the meaning. Obviously, however, Messiah could not be cut off seven weeks before He appeared!

death of Messiah and the destruction of the city. And after these two events, we come to the final *one week* in verse 27. If we follow the order of the record strictly, both the death of Messiah and the destruction of Jerusalem are placed between the Sixty-ninth and Seventieth Weeks of prophecy. This leads directly to a second important argument:

2. *A gap in time between the Sixty-ninth and Seventieth Weeks is demanded by the historical fulfilment of the two predicted events of verse 26.*

These events were the death of Messiah and the destruction of Jerusalem, and both of them are placed *after*, not within, the Sixty-nine Weeks. Now, it is a well-known fact of history that in the year 70 A.D., Titus, the Roman, destroyed the city of Jerusalem and its sanctuary in one of the most frightful sieges of all time. And since it is certain that the first Sixty-nine Weeks came to an end not later than 32 A.D., the destruction of the city took place nearly *forty* years "after" the close of the Sixty-nine Weeks. Yet in the record of the prophecy, the destruction of the city is placed *before* the last week. Therefore, the very historical fulfilment of this one detail of the prophecy, upon which practically all are agreed, demands a gap of at least thirty-eight years, and thus provides an infallible clue to the problem which has puzzled so many interpreters. For if even so much as one year is allowed between the last two weeks, the *principle* of the "gap interpretation" is admitted. And if, as we have seen, there must be at least thirty-eight years, we have no a priori reason for denying that there may be nineteen hundred. This argument is based squarely on the rock of prophecy *already fulfilled*, than which there is no safer guide as to what we may expect from prophecy which is yet unfulfilled.

3. *The fulfilment of the tremendous events in verse 24 cannot be found anywhere in known history.*

Notice again what they are: "to finish the transgression"--"to make an end of sins"--"to make reconciliation for iniquity"--"to bring in everlasting righteousness"--"to seal up the vision and prophecy"--"to anoint a most holy place" (ARV margin). And, remember two further things: first, all these great events have to do with the *Jewish* people; and, second, they are included within the reach of the Seventy Weeks' prophecy.

Now, if the whole Seventy Weeks are continuous, then, as we have already seen, the Seventieth Week must have ended not later than seven years after the crucifixion, or somewhere early in the Book of Acts. But the history of those years contains nothing that in any reasonable way corresponds with what Daniel saw at the end of the Seventy Weeks. Even if

we should adopt the "spiritualizing" scheme of interpretation, still the bed is too short and the cover too narrow. Where in the history of Acts, for example, can you find any finishing of Jewish transgression or an ending of Jewish sins? On the contrary, the transgression of the chosen nation increases by leaps and bounds until the crisis comes in the twenty-eighth chapter, where the Apostle Paul turns definitely to the Gentiles. Or where in the period of the Acts can we find any "sealing up of vision and prophecy"? On the contrary, it is during this very period and beyond that we find the greatest loosing of "vision and prophecy" in all the history of revelation. But at the second coming of our Lord in glory, which will take place at the close of the Seventieth Week, vision and prophecy will no longer be needed. The Word of God Himself will be present in visible manifestation, and His law will go forth from Jerusalem.

4. *An unseen gap in prophetic time is not at all an unusual phenomenon in Old Testament prophecy.*

There are many instances outside of Daniel. The great Messianic prophecy of Isa. 9:6 is an interesting example. "*For unto us a Child is born*"--the whole Christian world rejoices in the knowledge that this prophecy was fulfilled nineteen centuries ago. But read the next clause: "*And the government shall be upon his shoulder.*" Here we have something still future. Between these two clauses of the same prophecy, separated only by a colon in the English translation, there is a break in time which has already extended nineteen hundred years. There is another excellent example in Zech. 9:9-10. The Messianic King is presented riding up to His city "*upon a colt the foal of an ass.*" All believers know that this is fulfilled and past. Yet the next verse, without the slightest indication of any literary or chronological break, reads on: "*And . . . he shall speak peace unto the heathen, and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea.*" Some day this will be done just as literally as the first. But between the two predictions there is the same great parenthesis of time.

One more example must suffice, attested by our Lord Himself. In Isa. 61:1-2 there is a prophecy which reads as follows: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God." Our Lord Jesus must have been deeply interested in this great prophecy concerning Himself, for one day He came to Nazareth and stood up to read from this very passage in the synagogue. But rather strangely, when He had finished the clause, "*To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,*" He closed the book and said, "This day is this Scripture

fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:16-21). Now, the amazing thing is that *He stopped at a comma* (in the English Version). Why did He stop squarely in the middle of a sentence? The answer is that the next following clause, "*And the day of vengeance of our God,*" was not to be fulfilled for over nineteen hundred years and is still future. By this one single act of His, our Lord as the infallible Interpreter laid down the principle of the "gap interpretation," apart from which the chronology of Old Testament prophecy is an insoluble enigma.

As a matter of fact, it is well known that there is often little or no time perspective in the visions of the Old Testament prophet. He saw events together on the screen of prophecy which in their fulfilment were often separated by centuries of time. This curious characteristic, so strange to Western minds, was in complete harmony with the Oriental mind, which was little concerned with a *continuous* chronology. As the late Dr. M. G. Kyle used to tell his students, the Oriental was interested in the *next* important event, not in the time which might intervene. And the Bible is an Oriental book, humanly speaking. However, we do find the prophets themselves perplexed by this lack of time perspective. Peter tells us that after the prophets had written, they actually sat down and searched their own writings to find their meaning: "Searching *what, or what manner of time* the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (1 Pet. 1:11). Evidently the prophets saw clearly both the *sufferings* and *glories* of Christ. Furthermore, they had the *order* right--first, the sufferings; after that, the glories. But the one thing which was not clear to them was the *time* element--"what, or what manner of time."

Now, this is precisely the problem in the prophecy of the Seventy Weeks. Daniel saw clearly the *sufferings* of Christ--Messiah is to be "cut off" after the Sixty-ninth Week but before the Seventieth Week. It is equally certain that Daniel saw also the *glories* of Christ--they are to be ushered in at the close of the Seventieth Week (9:24). But it seems quite evident that the intervening time problem was beyond the prophet's understanding, for this very problem is discussed briefly in 12:6-7 by the two angelic messengers, and Daniel confesses, "*I heard but I understood not*" (8). That this failure to understand was not due to any lack of spiritual discernment in the Prophet, but rather to the sovereign plan of God, is clear from the words of verse 9: "Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and *sealed till the time of the end.*" This particular ultimatum does not apply to the entire Book of Daniel, as it is sometimes taught, but only to the time element surrounding the Seventieth Week of the prophecy. The "*time of the end*" will arrive with the beginning of the Seventieth Week, and then prophetic chronology will instantly become so crystal clear that only the "wicked" can possibly

misunderstand (12:10). But until the Seventieth Week begins, all attempts to fix prophetic dates must be only so much misspent labor. This point will be discussed more fully later.

5. *As the final argument in favor of the Gap interpretation, I offer the testimony of our Lord Himself to show that the Seventieth Week is still future.*

Verse 27 of the prophecy contains a most peculiar expression: "Upon the wing of abominations shall come one that maketh desolate." The Hebrew is confessedly difficult. Luther rendered it, "Upon the wings stands the *abomination of desolation*." The same general expression occurs also in Dan. 12:11: "the *abomination that maketh desolate*." Without attempting here to fix its precise meaning, the thing we should notice is that Daniel connects it with the stopping of the daily sacrifice, which takes place in the middle of the Seventieth Week. Let the reader keep this fact clearly in mind and turn to Matthew, chapter 24, where our Lord refers to the same thing. In verse 15, He warns His Jewish hearers to flee from their houses to the mountains, "When ye shall see the *abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet*, stand in the holy place." The reason for this warning is indicated in verse 21: "For *then* shall be great tribulation." But they are not to be utterly disheartened, for "*immediately* after the tribulation of those days . . . they shall see *the Son of man coming* in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (29-30).

Now, the argument is very simple and clear: Whatever the "abomination of desolation" may be, there can be no doubt that Daniel put it exactly in the middle of the Seventieth Week, while our Lord placed it at "the end," just before His second coming in glory. Therefore, *the Seventieth Week must also come at the end of the present age just prior to Christ's coming in glory*. This is the interpretation of Christ Himself, and it should settle the matter. Our Lord has not yet come in glory; the Seventieth Week is still future; and there is a great parenthesis of time between the Sixty-ninth and Seventieth Weeks of the prophecy. Thus far we are on solid ground.

If we see clearly and accept the existence of this great parenthesis of unreckoned time between the Sixty-ninth and Seventieth Weeks, and understand that the Seventieth Week is still future, we shall be effectively guarded against some of the dangers which constantly beset the interpreter of prophecy.

First, we shall be kept from the confusion and despair which are so common even among devout scholars when they come to the Seventieth Week and attempt to unravel the chronology of events beyond the First Advent of our

Lord. The late Dr. Nathaniel West has well summed up the situation: "The effort to connect it (the Seventieth Week) immediately with the Sixty-ninth has led to results in exegesis both amazing and amusing. Never was the hopelessness of any task more thoroughly evinced than here." The great Hengstenberg insisted upon a literal fulfilment of the Seventy Weeks, yet when he comes to the last one, he confesses that "their terminal point is a vanishing one." Stanley Leathes frankly admits in his reply to the critical Kuenen: "Chronology fails as to the last Week." And Pusey says, "We have not the chronological data to fix it." So completely did many of the greatest Biblical scholars lose their way in utter disagreement that Bosanquet rightly observed: "Every fresh interpretation only adds to the force of our conviction that *some radical error* lies at the foundation of all our Christian interpretations, and, till it is discovered, the Seventy Weeks of Daniel will remain unexplained and inexplicable to the comprehension of every unprejudiced inquirer." This "radical error" was the failure to see the great interval of time between the Sixty-ninth and Seventieth Weeks. Delitzsch stated clearly the general principle which was needed by the interpreters when he said, "All prophecy is complex; that is, it *sees together what history outrolls as separate*: and all prophecy is apotelesmatic; that is, it sees close behind the nearest-coming, epoch-making turn in history, the summit of the End." But along with the others, Delitzsch failed to apply this true principle to the Seventieth Week.

Second, this important principle of interpretation explains why the whole of our present age, so great in many respects, is passed over by the prophets with comparative silence. And it constantly keeps us on our guard against attempting to find things in Old Testament prophecy which are not there. I need not rehearse here the extravagant fancies into which men have been led by their failure to see and apply the principle of the Prophetic Parenthesis, thus often bringing the study of prophecy into disrepute.

In the third place, if we see this principle and understand that the Seventieth Week lies in the future, we shall be saved from that popular but pernicious fallacy which assumes that God is finished with the nation of Israel. "Seventy Weeks are determined upon *thy* people," said the angel to Daniel, and if the last week is yet future, there is still a place for Israel in the divine plan. In fact, the whole plan will be consummated in that final week. And the error of putting the Seventieth Week in immediate connection with the Sixty-ninth has undoubtedly made no small contribution to the erroneous theories of both Postmillennialism and Amillennialism.

Fourth, the acceptance of the Gap interpretation of the Seventieth Week *makes utterly impossible all date-setting schemes* for the present age and

for the second coming of our Lord, for the entire parenthesis of time between the Sixty-ninth and Seventieth Weeks is both unrevealed and elastic from the human standpoint. Every scheme of date-setting requires for its basis a continuous prophetic chronology covering the present age. Without this, the date-setters are helpless. And according to the Gap principle, there can be no such chronology. Only an omniscient God could have given such a continuous chronology, and He for good and wise reasons did not give it. Therefore, we need not waste any time even discussing the possibility of setting a date for the Lord's return. It simply cannot be done. And I, for one, am glad that this is so. The Blessed Hope that the Lord may return for His church *at any moment* would be destroyed if the date-setters should ever succeed. But there is no danger. Once the last week of Daniel begins its course, it will be possible for the "wise" to set some accurate dates. But the church will have been taken up at that time.

In concluding this discussion, one more question should be considered. Does the prophecy of Daniel shed any light at all upon the nature of our present age which lies between the Sixty-ninth and Seventieth Weeks? The material is scarce but very significant. The rather amazing thing is that in all this vast chasm of over nineteen centuries, Daniel identifies clearly only two events: the death of Messiah and the destruction of Jerusalem. Outside and beyond these two events, he mentions nothing. All the pomp and glory and boasted achievements of the so-called Christian era are passed over with complete silence. There is something very humbling about this silence, if we have eyes to see. "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

But if the prophet mentions specifically only two events, he does not altogether ignore the general character of the age. Sweeping through our centuries of "progress" with the eye of divine inspiration, he sums up the whole period in two statements, very startling for their ominous brevity. The first is: "*unto the end shall be war.*" And the second is: "*Desolations are determined*" (see verse 26, A.R.V.). The first statement seems to declare the abysmal failure of unregenerate man apart from God, while the second affirms the decree of a sovereign God to permit the failure and use it for His own wise and holy ends. From these two statements, we may learn some valuable lessons.

In the first place, there will be war on earth among men until the Lord returns. Of course, there are some modern prophets who think otherwise, but we shall do well to stick by Daniel in these matters. As a prophet, he has an *established* reputation. Over two thousand years ago Daniel said that "unto the end shall be war," and no one can deny the accuracy of his prediction *thus far*. Any prophet who has been right for two thousand years is worth listening to. Let the other prophets establish their reputations

before asking us to follow their prognostications. Of course, Daniel's prophecy does not mean that all efforts against war in the present age are futile. It is a matter of common knowledge that *some* threatened wars have been stopped in the past, and doubtless others in the future can be stopped. Such efforts are worthwhile. But the point is, no matter how successful the nations may be in avoiding a war here and there, we are to remember that *no permanent peace* can come to this sinful world till the Prince of Peace comes down to earth again in glory. "Unto the end shall be war." We may not like the prophecy; it may humble our rebellious pride; but God hath spoken.

The other lesson is still more important! *The God of heaven is in control* over the events of this sinful age of ours. If war continues to the end, bringing destruction and desolations, we are not to forget that these "desolations are *determined*." Man is responsible for his failure, but man's failure never takes God by surprise. What man does, God has determined. The present age, even at its worst, is not running out of control. An infinite God sits upon the throne of Providence, and He always has the last word in human history. And through all the mystery and confusion of human failure, the great providential formula holds good: "Ye meant evil . . . but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20, A.R.V.).