

The 490 Years of Daniel 9

In Daniel chapter 9 God said He had decreed a special 490 years for Israel and for Jerusalem. Not for the church; not for the Gentile world — they are for Israel and her capital city, Jerusalem. This prophecy has been skewed by mainline Christianity until it is unrecognizable, and the result has been either the denial of its literalness or simple bewilderment.

Those who insist that we who believe in the distinct places of Israel and the church in God's plan also insist that we must believe that He failed in His work through Israel and thus defaulted to making another attempt using the church...Plan B. I know of no literalist, as we are sometimes called, who believes such a thing though it seems no degree of explanation from the scriptures gets past our critic's ears. To be absolutely clear: the church is not an afterthought of God.

This issue can be studied from two perspectives in order to show how God is consistently fulfilling every phase of that prophecy in perfect order so that His plan is continuous and perfect to its completion. A short snapshot of Jesus' earthly life will be considered along with an overview of God's extended timeline for humanity past, present and future.

In order for Jesus to be the One the scriptures prophesied He would be, and for Him to accomplish the things those same scriptures said He would accomplish, there had to be the fulfillment of every prophecy regarding His first coming. For example, Messiah had to be virgin born as seen in Isaiah 7:14. Interestingly, if this prophecy were unfulfilled it would be far more perplexing than those regarding His future second coming, yet the Christian world accepts it literally.

The context of that passage centers on Ahaz, a king of Judah during Isaiah's day who was fearful of an invasion. God's prophet sent a message of encouragement to Ahaz and warned that he must believe it, or else he would not last as king. In order to calm his fears, the Lord told Ahaz to ask anything from God as a sign. Ahaz, a hypocritical apostate, took on an air of false humility and said he would "not test the Lord". The prophet answered, but not only to Ahaz. He addressed the whole house of David. He said the Lord will send a sign to the house of David in the form of a virgin who will give birth to a son. Amazingly, it happened about 700 years later in Bethlehem; an event we celebrate this month.

But, if the promise of John 3:16 had ended with Bethlehem we would all spend eternity in hell because God's plan would not be complete. In addition to Jesus' birth, He had to be crucified and He had to rise from the dead (Psalm 22:11ff; Matthew 17:22, 23) because His death and resurrection are just as necessary for our salvation as is the virgin birth (1 Corinthians 15:12-20). The cross is flanked by the manger on the left and the empty tomb on the right. Truth requires the inclusion of all God said about Messiah's first coming whether anyone accepts or understands it, or not.

Had these, or any other prophecies about Messiah, been "fulfilled spiritually" the result would have not only been confusion about what God said, but there would be no salvation for humanity. Can anyone imagine the gospel being literal in some points and figurative in others? By what consistent laws of interpretation, we ask, would a student be able to distinguish the literal from the figurative? What a tangled web would be woven, and the helpless prey would be humanity.

Jesus lived thirty-three years on this earth, and looking in the rear-view mirror of time it is easy to see the prophetic links in the chain of His life. Further, it is easy to understand how each link was necessary for the precise fulfillment of God's plan regarding Messiah's first coming. It is both scriptural and logical that God intends for us to use the same template in order to understand how Israel, the church, the following 7-year tribulation and ultimately Messiah's second coming are all links in the same chain.

The prophecies of Daniel address these subjects, and a "plain sense" interpretation of those prophecies reveals the logic and continuity of God's plan for both Israel and the church. God told Daniel that a total of 490 years (70 increments of seven years) had been decreed for his people and his city in which six things would be accomplished (Daniel 9:24). Daniel's people were the Jews, not the church, and his city was none other than Jerusalem. The word "weeks" is like the English word "dozen" — the numerical value is known, but its application cannot be known without knowing the context. For example, the word dozen could refer to donuts, baseballs, whatever. The context of Daniel 9 is Jeremiah 25:11 where the time period is years.

None of the 490 years are for the church, only Israel. But God, of course, had the church in His mind and on His calendar for a future time and reason (Ephesians 2:11-3:12). History accounts for 483 of those years. Obviously seven years are yet to be fulfilled, and this time frame is an example of where the majority of Christians either apply something other than a literal interpretation to the text, or they simply live their entire lives in confusion about it.

In the process of fulfilling the 490 years, the clock stopped when Jesus was rejected as is clearly indicated in the use of the words, "then after" in Daniel 9:26. It will begin again — and continue until the end of the final seven years — when Antichrist inaugurates a seven-year agreement between Israel and some other entity, probably a consortium of western nations (Daniel 9:27; also Matthew 24:15ff). If God had left us with no information regarding this break between the 483 years and the final 7-year period we might have reason to be confused. But, He has not left us in such a state. Hosea 3:4,5 refers to that interim period and the above-mentioned Ephesians passage sheds a bright light on the answer regarding the purpose of the break; a reason that was formerly a mystery (Ephesians 3:1-6).

The answer to the mystery is the church, the body of Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:14). The rejection of the Messiah by the Jews brought the 483 years to an end as recorded in Daniel, but it did not force God into a Plan B because there was no Plan B. Rather, He began the next dispensation in

His foreordained plan when the church was born on Pentecost. Why the church? So that Gentiles would have full access to the unconditional covenant promises God made to the Jews and to their associated blessings. The church would be included in the Kingdom of God, but is not the exclusive aspect of the Kingdom of God as non-literalists claim. The household of God did not become the church; rather, the church became part of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19). Note that the promise of Galatians 3:29 is the same covenant promise mentioned in verses 17,18, and refers to the inheritance promise God made to Abraham.

Prior to the church age when God was dealing exclusively with the Jews, it was a mystery as to how His plan of salvation would include the Gentiles who were, "...separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Ephesian 2:12). Said another way, since Messiah was the promise of God to Israel, how would God create a door for the Gentiles in order that they could be saved and made a part of the Kingdom of God whose Messiah is Jesus? The church. Certainly He always had this plan in mind because 700 years BC Isaiah said His house would be a house of prayer for all nations (Isaiah 56:7,8).

The Gentile church did not supplant Israel, but has rather been grafted into her root stock as seen in Romans 11. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the prophets were never in the church, the Bride of Christ, but they are certainly in the Kingdom of God, along with many believing Gentiles, as noted by Jesus (Luke 13:28). As a sidebar and in context of God's plan of salvation, it must be clear that people are not saved by membership in the church or through the practice of Judaism, but solely through the propitiatory blood of Jesus.

After the completion of the 483 years when the Jews rejected their Messiah, God temporarily ceased dealing directly with them as a nation, and has been dealing mostly with the Gentile world for 2000 years. In AD 70 the Jews were scattered around the world, but they returned as a nation in 1948, just as God promised (Ezekiel 36, etc.). The reestablishment of Israel in their own homeland is the greatest prophetic sign of the 20th Century and indicates the second coming of Messiah is near (Matthew 24). We can know with assurance that since the taking out of the church precedes the 2nd Coming by 7 years (the final 7-year period of the 490 years) the taking out of the church is imminent.

The final seven years decreed for Israel and Jerusalem will be a time of unprecedented trouble when God will pour out His wrath on this Jesus-rejecting earth. At the end of that time the remnant of Jews will finally accept Him as their Messiah though 66% of them will die in the process (Zechariah 13:7ff, Romans 11:23-32). This will also be a time when a great multitude of those Gentiles left behind post-rapture will also be saved (Revelation 7:9).

It is of paramount importance to understand that there is no prophecy that must be fulfilled before Jesus takes His church out. The prophecies of Matthew 24 and Mark 13, commonly called the Olivet Discourse, have to do with events preceding the 2nd Coming, not the rapture, and

were given to Israel, not the church. Luke records the same discourse, but he included Jesus' answer to the question the disciples asked regarding the destruction of the Temple (Luke 21:20-24). Matthew and Mark did not record Jesus' answer to that question.

Just as each prophecy having to do with Jesus' first coming was literally fulfilled, so will each prophecy that is part of the 490 years be literally fulfilled.

Any other means of interpretation would force a question upon God: Why did You fulfill the prophecies regarding Jesus' first coming literally, but changed Your mind and imposed a figurative interpretation upon the prophecies regarding the future? Such a question from humanity would be out of order because such an action by God is unfeasible. DLM



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