

# THE SEVEN WEEKS

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## Introduction

Welcome to Session twelve on 'The Seventy Weeks prophecy'. We will continue from last week, considering the second half of Daniel Chapter 9 verse 25. 'Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the streets shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times.'

We considered these major waypoints in our last session. We made the point that the street of the city was the open square on the eastern side of the temple that was restored by Ezra to be the public meeting place between the Lord's messengers and the people.

That was where Ezra preached to the people, and confronted them, particularly concerning the mixed culture in their marriages and households. Then, when Nehemiah returned, he rebuilt the walls of the city. The walls of the city were important, because they represented the commitment of the people to live as a sanctified, God-fearing community.

In this session, we will continue to consider this verse, but we will focus on the two time periods that are mentioned, and we will particularly focus on the 7 weeks. As we read the verse, we note that there were 7 weeks and 62 weeks. We have added those two together to say that there is 69 weeks in total, or 483 years, from the going forth of the command to the coming of the Messiah, which is the baptism of Jesus Christ.

## The first 7 weeks - the Lord extended grace to the inhabitants of Jerusalem

Why does the Scripture break it up between 7 weeks and then 62 weeks?

Our first key point is that the first 7 weeks, which is 49 years, of the Seventy Weeks prophecy, was the length of time that the Lord extended grace to the inhabitants of Jerusalem through the ministry of Ezra, then through Nehemiah, and then, finally, through the prophet Malachi.

This short period of 49 years should have been a profound period of restoration for Jerusalem and

the Jewish nation. It is significant that it is 7 weeks, because the number 7 means 'fullness'.

This is something of a keynote verse. Ezra proclaimed at the beginning of this season of restoration and grace, 'And now for a little while grace has been shown from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage.' Ezr 9:8.

How long is 'a little while'? We know there were increments of time in this. When Ezra first proclaimed to the people that they needed to come and to gather in the open square, in front of the house of God, he gave every person three days to respond. That was the first increment.

Then there was another season. Ezra, with a presbytery of leaders, took three months to appraise the situation. There was an ongoing season of recovery and restoration for the people. In the ultimate sense, this season was a 49-year period where the Lord brought restoration. This is the significance of the 7 weeks.

## The restoration ministry of Ezra and Nehemiah

The first 25 years of this period of restoration is well documented in the book of Ezra and the book of Nehemiah. When Ezra returned, he restored the street of Jerusalem, the open square in front of the temple, and he addressed the culture of the people's marriages.

Ezra returned in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes, approximately 457 BC. Nehemiah returned 13 years later, in the 20th year of Artaxerxes, approximately 444 BC, 13 years after the return of Ezra. Ezra and Nehemiah ministered together as this season of restoration continued.

We see in Nehemiah Chapter 8 that Ezra proclaimed the word, and Nehemiah was there, also admonishing the people concerning their response to the word.

Nehemiah's first task, as we know, was to rebuild the walls; and he did that in 52 days. Then he continued to be the governor for 12 years. After this 12-year period, he returned to the king of

Persia for a brief time, and then he came back again to Jerusalem.

We begin with Ezra. Then Nehemiah came 13 years later, and was the governor for 12 years. That 25-year period is well documented in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

When Nehemiah returned the second time, that is where the scriptural account finished. It is widely agreed that Malachi prophesied during the later part of the fifth century BC; however, the exact date is unknown. We know he was after Ezra and Nehemiah. Some scholars have suggested he prophesied between 420 to 415 BC.

If this is the case, it means that the prophecy of Malachi was almost at the end of the first 7 weeks. If the prophecy of Malachi was as late as 408 BC, which is entirely plausible, then the prophecy of Malachi was right at the end of the 7 weeks, and the beginning of the 62 weeks.

**By the time of Malachi, the majority of the people had again turned away from the Lord.**

The key point is that, by the time of Malachi, the majority of the people had again turned away from the Lord. The restoration that had been experienced by the inhabitants of Jerusalem in response to the ministry of Ezra and Nehemiah had been lost.

The prophecy of Malachi was the final call to repentance that belonged to this period of restoration. When we read the book of Malachi, and if Malachi prophesied around 20 years after the second return of Nehemiah, it is remarkable to consider how quickly everything that Ezra and Nehemiah had restored was lost in that period of time.

Exactly the same thing happened concerning the ministry of the apostle Paul, particularly in the region of Asia. We see what he established there in terms of lampstand churches, and then how quickly all of those leaders and the people turned aside to a different gospel. The word of present truth was replaced by Greek philosophy, and the fellowship of the *agape* meal was replaced by the Eucharist. The falling away can happen very, very quickly.

We will look briefly at four major areas that were restored by Ezra and Nehemiah, and then fell away. Malachi addressed this corruption among

the people. I am nominating them here as they appear in the book of Malachi.

Malachi firstly addressed the culture of *the Lord's table*.

He then addressed *the culture of the teaching priests*, or the messengers.

He then addressed *the culture of the households*, and particularly the marriages.

Finally, he addressed *the culture of offering*.

**Malachi addressed the culture of the Lord's table**

We will begin with the culture of the Lord's table. We considered in our last session that the fellowship of an *agape* meal, in faith for the New Covenant, was restored by Ezra and Nehemiah.

In Nehemiah Chapter 8, Ezra read from the prophetic book of the New Covenant, the book of Deuteronomy, from sunrise to midday. He was supported by a number of other messengers and by the Levites, who were among the people. They explained the word. They gave the sense of it and they discussed its implications and applications; and understanding came to all of the people.

The fruit of this fellowship in the word was an *agape* meal, and they rejoiced in the word.

'And all the people went their way [having received the word] to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.' Neh 8:12.

In the first chapter of the book of Malachi, we read that the Lord confronted the people because they profaned the name of the Lord and the fellowship of His table, by their words and their conduct.

We read, concerning the table of the Lord, 'But you profane it in that you say, "The table of the Lord is defiled; and its fruit, its food, is contemptable".' Mal 1:12.

The food that the Lord has set on His table is His word, and His word invites us and equips us to participate in the fellowship of the table.

'You also say [concerning the fellowship of the table, the *agape* meal], "Oh what a weariness!" And you sneer at it, says the Lord of hosts. And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; thus you

bring an offering! “Should I accept this from your hand?” says the Lord.’ Mal 1:13.

Earlier, He had also talked about the blind sacrifices that they were bringing. In the days of Malachi, the faith of the people toward the table of the Lord was expressed by their participation in the continual, or the daily, offering, and was expressed by the offering that they brought to the altar. When they brought a blind, a stolen, a lame, or a sick offering, it revealed their heart toward the Lord’s table. It demonstrated that there was no fear of God before their eyes.

There is an important parallel here for us, concerning our participation in the Lord’s table. We can’t come and ask the Lord, or our brethren, to embrace our spiritual blindness or to embrace what is stolen, meaning that it doesn’t belong to us.

If we bring such an offering, we are asking our brethren to embrace a projection that we have created for ourselves, according to our own knowledge of good and evil, to ‘cover the shame of our nakedness’.

Paul said that if we eat and drink the *agape* meal in an unworthy manner, we are eating and drinking judgement to ourselves, and for this reason many are weak and sick. We cannot ask our brethren in Christ to embrace our spiritual sickness. When we do this, we demonstrate that we despise the word of the Lord and the fellowship of His table.

Malachi went a little further than this. He said, ‘I warned the people that their ‘yes’ needed to be ‘yes’ and their ‘no’ needed to be ‘no’ in relation to the Lord’s table.’ He warned them that if this was not the case, then they would come under judgement. We have also been considering this theme.

‘But cursed be the deceiver who has in his flock a male, and takes a vow, but sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished - for I am a great King,’ demonstrating that our yes is not yes, and our no is not no. ‘For I am a great King,’ says the Lord of hosts, “And My name is to be feared among the nations”.’ Mal 1:14.

This very issue was the reason why Ananias and Sapphira came under the judgement of the Lord. Of course, the outcome of that judgement on Ananias and Sapphira was that a great fear came upon the whole church.

In this regard, Malachi proclaimed the foretaste of the prophecy of Zechariah regarding the flying scroll. Remember, Zechariah saw a scroll, and it was written on both sides. The flying scroll was the curse that belongs to the holy place. The scroll was 20 cubits by 10 cubits, the exact dimensions of the holy place in the tabernacle.

Zechariah saw that there is a curse connected to the holy place. This curse works to expel every unrepentant thief - according to one side of the scroll - and perjurer or deceiver from the Lord’s house. Significantly, the way in which the curse worked to expel either the thief, or the perjurer, or the deceiver, from the Lord’s house is that that curse entered their household.

We do need to appreciate that there are two sides of the cross, and that we do eat and drink judgement to ourselves if we participate in the Lord’s table in an unworthy manner.

The *judgement* of this curse had a specific application in the days of Malachi. Zechariah prophesied that this scroll would go out over the face of the whole earth following the offering of Christ to expel the thief and the perjurer from the sanctuary of the true temple in the heavenly places. As we participate in the *agape* meal, in the offering of Christ, we either go out under the curse into judgement or we are coming back with Him from the death of our sin and are being remembered as part of the new creation.

### **The culture of the teaching priests, or the messengers**

The second point that Malachi raised is the culture of the teaching priests, or the messengers. He began Chapter 2 by saying, ‘And now, O priests, this commandment is for you.’

Having addressed the corruption of His table, the Lord turned His attention to the corruption of the mandate that belonged to the teaching priests as the Lord’s messengers.

‘My covenant was with him, one of life and peace [referring to the descendants of Levi, the Levites] and I gave them to him that he might fear Me; so he feared Me and was reverent before My name.’ Mal 2:5

Interestingly, the Lord established a covenant of peace with the priests after the intervention of Phinehas, who was Aaron’s grandson, when the anger of the Lord burned against the whole nation

of Israel concerning their harlotry with the daughters of Moab. Scripture recorded that 24 000 people died in a plague as the anger of the Lord burned against the people, until Phinehas intervened to rid the camp of the immorality.

In the immediate aftermath of that, the Lord said to Moses, 'Phinehas the son of Eleazer, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal.' Num 25:11.

We know that this was not His own zeal. He was not a religious zealot like Peter was before the Lord confronted him eye to eye and heart to heart. Phinehas was zealous with the zeal of the Lord. The love of God in the heart of Phinehas burned with a zeal to rid the house of the Lord, or the camp of the Israelites, of this immorality.

'Because he was zealous with My zeal among them so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal. Therefore say, "Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace. And it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement [or participated in this cleansing work] for the children of Israel".' Num 25:11-13.

The fear of God was before his eyes; he was committed to sanctification.

The Lord referred to this covenant of peace in Malachi Chapter 2 verse 5. The way in which the English translation reads makes it sound as though he gives life and peace, and then the outcome of the life and peace is the fear of the Lord.

However, the literal meaning is 'I gave him fear'. He first gives fear; and this is the prerequisite for receiving the covenant of life and peace. It should read, 'My covenant was with him, one of life and peace, and I gave him [fear]; so he feared Me and was reverent before My name.' Mal 2:5.

As a possessor of this life and peace, the messenger who fears God is then called to become a minister of life and peace by proclaiming the truth, and by warning many to turn away from iniquity.

In this regard, Malachi continued, 'The law of truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with me.' That is

always a beautiful phrase, meaning that there is participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering.

'He walked with me in peace and equity, and turned many away from iniquity.' Mal 2:6.

'For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the Law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.' Mal 2:7.

This mode of a teaching priest who proclaimed the truth and turned many away from iniquity was not only *restored* by Ezra; it was also it was *exemplified* by Ezra.

When Ezra read from the prophetic book of Deuteronomy in the open square, he was supported by many of the Levites, who helped the people to understand the application and the implications of the word. They should have continued to this. However, by the time of Malachi, the ministry of the teaching priest and the teaching Levites had been completely lost.

'"But you have departed from the way; you have caused many to stumble at the Law. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the Lord of hosts.' Mal 2:8.

In the same way that the Lord warned the people about the judgement of the curse because of the corruption of the Lord's table, He also warned the priests about the judgement of the curse if they failed to faithfully teach the word as those who feared God.

He did this very graphically. He said that it would be like the dung, or the refuse, of the sin offering. It would be spread across their faces as a testament that they were being taken out in the offering of Christ, into judgement.

Now, by the time of Jesus, the ministry of the teaching priests in the open square of the house of God, restored by Ezra, and the teaching Levites in all the various synagogues, were completely usurped and replaced by the religious, political sects of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. When John the Baptist saw the Pharisees and the Sadducees coming to him to be baptised, he called them 'a brood of vipers'.

### **The culture of the households and marriages**

The third element, or the third area, that Malachi addressed was *the culture of the households and marriages*.

As we have been considering, this was the major outcome, in a lot of ways, of the ministry of Ezra and Nehemiah. It was the restoration of family culture. It was the removal of the mixture that existed in their culture.

Yet, by the time of Malachi, the people were again profaning the covenant of marriage by dealing treacherously with their own wives, while still presuming to bring their offerings to the house of the Lord and expecting that the Lord would be pleased with them.

The Lord was clear, and made it very clear through the prophet Malachi, that He would not accept their offerings until they gave attention to their marriage culture. This is the context of the verse concerning 'the remnant of the Spirit'.

He said, 'But did He not make them one [the married couple], having a remnant of the Spirit', meaning that unique portion of the divine nature that we are receiving and need to continue to receive in our marriages so that we are joined in one Spirit.

'Having a remnant of the Spirit. And why one? [Because] He seeks godly offspring [or seed]. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.' Mal 2:15.

Malachi addressed this issue among the children because, if parents did not address this, all of their children would be unblessed heathen.

### **The culture of offering**

The fourth area is *the culture of offering*.

The economy of tithes and offerings had also been restored in the days of Nehemiah, during his first tenure as the governor. As I said, he was governor for 12 years. He then returned to Persia for a short period of time. When he returned, he found that it had regressed again in his absence, so he readdressed it.

'I also realised that the portions for the Levites had not been given them; for each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to his field.

'So, I contended with the rulers and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their place [the Levites and all of the singers].

'Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse.' Neh 13:10-12.

This, again, was the backdrop to what Malachi addressed in Chapter 3 when he said, 'Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me. But you say, "In what way have we robbed You?" In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation.' Mal 3:8-9.

That brings us back to the flying scroll and the curse that was invoked on the thief.

What was the response of the people to the ministry of Malachi? As we have said, the prophet Malachi was sent by the Lord towards the close, or right at the end, of the 7-week period of restoration, to confront the people again concerning these issues. Again, the Lord came to them with eyes like a flame of fire, asking and looking for a response, a response of repentance.

This was really the last opportunity for repentance before the beginning of 'the silent years'. Malachi warned the people that the day of the Lord was coming, burning like an oven, when the proud and the wicked among them would be burned up like chaff or stubble.

When he talked about 'the day', he was referring to the day of Christ's offering.

The overwhelming majority of the people did not receive the ministry of Malachi. The book of Malachi itself documented the people's response to the word of the Lord. Rather than turning in response to the word of the Lord to meet Him eye to eye, they disagreed with the word, and continually demanded further explanation. Their responses demonstrated their spiritual blindness and arrogance. We read this throughout the book of Malachi.

When the Lord addressed them by saying, 'You have despised My name,' they immediately responded by saying, 'In what way have we despised Your name?' When he said to them, 'You offer defiled food on My altar,' they immediately responded by saying, 'How have we offered

defiled food on Your altar?’ That is not the response that the Lord was looking for.

It is not the response of someone who is turning to the Lord, meeting Him eye to eye and heart to heart to receive illumination from Him. The evidence that we are receiving illumination from Him is that the fear of God is before our eyes.

Our response is not to be a response of justification or of demanding further explanation so that we are convinced.

Our response is *a cry for mercy* and then to run for refuge to lay hold of that fellowship that the Lord is revealing to us to see the matter dealt with. We understand that He is looking at us with eyes as a flame of fire, which are revealing His judgement and His wrath on the issue that He is bringing to our attention.

The apostle John referred to this response that we see in the book of Malachi, by saying, ‘If we say that we have not sinned we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.’ IJn 1:10.

Having rejected the veracity of the Lord’s word, the people embraced another word, or doctrine. They responded this way to the Lord, but they also embraced another word. We know this because it produced *an alternative conversation* among them. They bemoaned the fact that the Lord did not meet them in the way that they expected.

The Lord also addressed them on this point by saying, ‘“Your words have been harsh against Me,” says the Lord, “Yet you say, ‘What have we spoken against You?’ ”’ Mal 3:13.

We see that the same dynamic continued. ‘You have said, “It is useless to serve God; what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked as mourners before the Lord of hosts?”’ Mal 3:14.

Despite this overwhelming response of unbelief, there was a remnant who responded to the word of Malachi by turning to meet the Lord eye to eye.

The evidence that they had met the Lord eye to eye was that *they feared the Lord*.

The fruit of the fear of the Lord among this small remnant was *their conversation of faith*.

‘Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; so

a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name.’ Mal 3:16.

This is the opposite of going out under the curse of judgement. It is being remembered by the Lord in the fellowship of His offering.

### **No prophetic ministry – the 62 weeks**

I will comment briefly on the 62 weeks. The book of Malachi concludes with the prophecy concerning John the Baptist, who would come in the spirit and power of Elijah to prepare the way for Christ. The key point concerning the 62 weeks is that the intervening period between the ministry of Malachi and the ministry of John the Baptist is often referred to as ‘the silent years’.

This intervening period with no prophetic ministry was identified in the Seventy Weeks prophecy as being 62 weeks, or 434 years.

Now, the lack of prophetic ministry during this period does not mean that there was no prophetic Scripture that was relevant for this period of time.

In fact, in the book of Daniel, regarding the 2300-year prophecy, Daniel provided great detail concerning this period of time, and particularly the Seleucid Empire and all of the various battles that happened between them and the Ptolemies. He gave so much detail that has been historically verified that it has led many commentators to assume that it must have been written after the fact. However, we know that it simply bears witness to the accuracy of biblical prophecy.

There is much detail concerning this period of time, but there was no prophetic ministry during this period. The silent years drew to a close when John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah to announce the coming of the Messiah. Significantly, in direct fulfilment of the prophecy of Malachi, John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus Christ to come as the Messenger of the covenant.

‘Behold I send My messenger [speaking about John the Baptist]. And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight.’ Mal 3:1.

That is Jesus Christ. ‘Behold, He is coming, says the Lord of hosts.’ This is a very important point concerning the Seventy Weeks prophecy, because

Jesus Christ is the One who came to confirm the Everlasting Covenant with many for one week. 'Then He shall confirm a covenant with many for one week.' Dan 9:27. This is the Messenger of the covenant.

In our next session, we will begin to consider how Christ 'confirmed the Everlasting Covenant with many for one week'.