

# THE GOING FORTH OF THE COMMAND

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## Introduction

Hello, everyone, and welcome to our ninth session on the Seventy Weeks prophecy.

In our previous sessions, we considered the six outcomes of the prophecy that are recorded in Daniel Chapter 9 verse 24. We know that all six of the outcomes were fully accomplished by the one offering of Jesus Christ when He was lifted up on the cross.

Our key point has been that Jesus Christ, as our great High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, forever lives now to minister to us our participation in His finished offering.

The major implication of this point is that we witness the progressive fulfilment of all of these outcomes in our lives, as we continue to embrace our participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and His sufferings, and as we continue to walk in obedience to Him.

## Summary of the six outcomes

It is difficult to summarise all of the implications because they are so far-reaching, and we have been considering this over quite some weeks now.

- As Christ has 'finished the transgression', we know that we can be recovered and restored to first love.
- As Christ has 'made an end of sin', we know that we have been crucified with Him. We believe that if we die with Him, we will also live with Him as we reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God. We present ourselves alive to God each morning, by His mercy.
- As Christ has 'made reconciliation for iniquity', we know that as we turn and we look upon Him whom we have pierced, meet Him eye to eye and heart to heart, and are joined to His broken heart, the power of the other law is broken in our hearts, and we are reconciled to God and His fatherhood toward us.
- As Christ has 'brought in everlasting righteousness', we know that we can participate in the New Covenant. Remember, we defined bringing in everlasting

righteousness as 'the inauguration of the New Covenant'. Christ has brought in everlasting righteousness. We have been given eternal participation as sons of God in the New Covenant, where righteousness and the righteousness of sonship will increase forever and ever.

- As Christ has 'sealed up all vision and prophecy', and has fulfilled everything that is written in the Scriptures concerning you and me, we know that He has learned our obedience; He has fulfilled our righteousness; He has accomplished all of our works. We know that we can fulfil the works of our sonship as we continue to walk with Him, each and every day.
- As Christ has 'anointed the Most Holy', we know that we have received the Holy Spirit, who joins us to the fellowship of Christ's offering, so that, as members of the body of Christ and as sons of God, we are equipped and anointed to serve God the Father in His temple, which is His house in the heavenly places.

These are precious and magnificent promises that we receive only as we continue to lay hold of our participation in Christ's offering and His sufferings, and as we continue to walk in obedience to Him.

It has been important for us to take our time to consider these six outcomes, because they are the major focus of the prophecy. Obviously, the Seventy Weeks prophecy has some very specific time frames. But it would be unhelpful if we were to become preoccupied with the time frames, and lose focus of the outcomes, because the outcomes are the major focus of the prophecy.

## The timing of the Seventy Weeks prophecy

Having considered these outcomes, we will now turn our attention to the timing of the prophecy. In this session we will begin to consider this by asking two questions.

The first question is, 'How long is each week?' That is a reasonably straightforward question to answer.

The second question, which is less straightforward is, 'When did the Seventy Weeks prophecy begin?'

### **The length of each week in the prophecy**

How long is the seventy weeks; or how long is each week? The literal translation is seventy sevens, and the Scripture declared, 'Seventy sevens have been determined.'

Purely from a language perspective, this could be seventy times seven *days*, or it could be seventy times seven *years*.

We know that it cannot be seventy times seven days because, if that were the case, then the whole prophecy would have been finished in a little over sixteen months, or less than a year and a half. We know that that was not the case.

In one sense, that already answers it for us, but we will examine three different methods so that we can be assured that each week is a period of seven years.

### **A day equivalent to a year**

The first method is to apply the prophetic 'day for a year' principle, which is regularly used in the Scriptures.

As an example, Moses sent the twelve spies into the promised land, and it was only Joshua and Caleb who brought back a positive report and encouraged the people to enter. The other ten spies brought back a negative report and dissuaded the people. As a consequence, they failed to enter *because of unbelief and disobedience*.

The Lord said that for every day that the spies were in the land - forty days - they would wander in the wilderness for one year. Their wilderness wandering was to be *forty years*. This is using the 'day for a year' prophetic principle. Num 14:34.

Another particularly good example is when the Lord asked Ezekiel, in his prophetic mandate and ministry, to be fully identified with the judgement of the nation of Israel and the nation of Judah, to whom he was proclaiming the word of God.

He asked Ezekiel to lie on his left side. The Lord said to Ezekiel, 'Lie also on your left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it. According to the number of the days that you lie on it, you shall bear their iniquity. For I have laid on you the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety

days; so you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel.' Eze 4:4-5. Again, we see the prophetic 'day for a year' principle.

Then Ezekiel needed to turn over and to lie on his right side for a further forty days, to identify himself with forty years of judgement on the house of Judah. Eze 4:6.

Perhaps the most noteworthy example is the transgression that caused the trampling of the Lord's messengers and His people for a period of two thousand three hundred years.

The prophet Daniel declared, 'Then I heard a holy one speaking; and another holy one said to that certain one who was speaking, "How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be tramples underfoot?" And he said to me, "For two thousand three hundred days; and then the sanctuary will be cleansed".' Dan 8:13-14. We know that refers to two thousand three hundred years.

We can now look at the Seventy Weeks prophecy and apply the prophetic 'day for a year' principle.

### **The role of weeks of years in the economy of Israel**

We could also look at it and say that it is just as likely that the language should be interpreted as seventy weeks of years, anyway.

Obviously, when we read or hear the term 'week', we naturally think about a week of seven days. That is part of our society.

For the nation of Israel, a week of seven years was equally important. Their whole agricultural economy was structured around weeks of years.

The seventh year was to be a sabbatical year, when they let the land lie fallow. The fact that they did not leave the land to lie fallow every seventh year was one of the major reasons that the Lord sent them into exile into Babylon. This was an important part of their economy and was the way that their times in the nations were structured.

### **Seventy times seven years**

Furthermore, Scripture uses the phrase, 'sabbaths of years' to determine the time of a Jubilee year.

Moses wrote, 'And you shall count seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years; and

the time of the seven sabbaths of years shall be to you forty-nine years'. Lev 25:8. The Jubilee year was the fiftieth year.

The Seventy Weeks prophecy also uses this same principle. It is seventy sabbaths of years, or seventy times seven years.

### **'A time' equals a year**

The third method we can use, to be confident that the Seventy Weeks prophecy refers to seventy times seven years, is to recognise that, in the book of Daniel, a 'time' equals *one year*. Dan 7:25.

There are a couple examples of this, but this verse refers to the Antichrist and his rulership over the eighth world kingdom.

Daniel prophesied that 'He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then they shall be given into his hand for *a time, times and half a time*.' Dan 7:25.

A 'time' is one year. 'Times', plural, is two years. And 'half a time' is half a year. This makes three and a half years in total.

This phrase is also used in the book of Revelation, where it is described as a period of forty-two months, and also as one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

We know that a 'time' is one year. When King Nebuchadnezzar went out to eat with the beasts of the field, so that seven 'times' passed over him, for him to learn that 'the Most High God rules in the affairs of men', we would suppose that that was a period of seven years.

### **A week, and seven times, is seven years**

Using any of these three methods, it is safe to conclude that each week, or seven 'times', is a period of seven years.

This means that the full seventy weeks refers to four hundred and ninety years in total.

Now, remember that there is a period of delay between the first half of the seventieth week and the second half of the seventieth week. We will look at that period of delay in detail, in coming sessions.

### **When did the Seventy Weeks prophecy begin?**

Having established the length of the week, the next major question is, 'When did the Seventy Weeks prophecy begin?'

The book of Daniel answered that question. 'Know therefore and understand, that *from the going forth of the command* [our key phrase], to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, [the coming of the Messiah] there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks [sixty-nine weeks in total] ; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times.' Dan 9:25.

### **The going forth of the command**

We see that the beginning of the Seventy Weeks prophecy is clearly set as 'the going forth of the command'.

The complexity is that the Scripture identifies four different commands. There is much debate regarding which command should be used to identify the beginning of the seventy weeks.

This is our key point. It is important to recognise that *all four of these commands are part of one, integrated package*.

We do not play the commands off against each other in trying to determine which is the most 'important'. All four commands are part of one, integrated package.

### **Four commands**

The book of Ezra nominates all four commands in relation to rebuilding the temple and the city of Jerusalem.

Ezra returned to Israel around sixty years after the temple was completed and dedicated. So, when he wrote, he was able to include all of the various events, right up until his day. He made quite a lot of summary statements.

In his writings, you will notice that he ran ahead in the historical narrative, but then came back to the context of when he was writing. Any historian can do this.

Ezra wrote, 'So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished it [this goes beyond building the temple], according to the *commandment of the God of Israel*, and according to

the command of *Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes* King of Persia.' Ezr 6:14.

The temple was completed and dedicated in the second year of Darius. Artaxerxes was Darius's grandson, so we can see that Ezra made a summary statement where he identified four commands.

### **The first command was the command of God**

The first command was the command of the God of Israel which, of course, had pre-eminence.

Then there was the command of Cyrus, the command of Darius and, finally, the command of Artaxerxes.

The command of the God of Israel was the first and foremost of these commands.

The command of God was issued in direct response to the prayer of Daniel. Gabriel said to Daniel, 'At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision.' Dan 9:23.

Gabriel himself was sent as the messenger of the Lord, by command, and that command was the beginning of the seventy weeks. Seventy weeks were determined *according to the commandment of the God of Israel*.

### **God's command ordained the commands of the kings**

This commandment of the God of Israel also ordained the *timing* of the commands of the three Persian kings. Therefore, it is one, integrated package.

### **The command of Cyrus**

The command of *Cyrus* brought the Jewish exile in Babylon to an end. Cyrus was a very significant person from both a secular point of view, and also from a scriptural point of view.

When Cyrus conquered Babylon, he freed the slaves; he gave religious freedom; he established racial equality; and several other things. His decrees are preserved for us in what is called 'the Cyrus cylinder', and they are considered to be the first charter of human rights.

From a scriptural perspective, he was anointed by the Lord to achieve His purpose according to the commandment of the God of Israel. Many years

prior to the Jewish exile, the prophet Isaiah declared that Cyrus would issue the first decree in response to the word of the Lord. The Lord said of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," and to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid".' Isa 44:28. We see here that the temple was in view, but also the city of Jerusalem itself.

In fulfilment of this prophecy, we read in the book of Ezra, 'Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord, by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled [concerning the seventy years rulership of Babylon, and the seventy years' desolation of Jerusalem] the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth *the Lord God of heaven has given me*. And *He has commanded me* to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah.' Ezr 1:1-2.

We see that Cyrus issued this command consistent with, or in subjection to, the commandment of the God of Israel. He recognised that his command was in response to the command of the Lord God of heaven. Specifically, his written decree gave the Jewish remnant the mandate to rebuild the temple as the house of God in Jerusalem.

Under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua, the people rebuilt the altar and laid the foundation of the temple. They then encountered severe opposition from the ungodly inhabitants in the land. Building did not recommence until the Lord sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to encourage and strengthen the people to finish building the temple.

We know that the mandate of Haggai and Zechariah, particularly, extended far beyond encouraging the people to build the physical temple, which was 'the day of small things'.

Zechariah also prophesied concerning how Christ and His administration would build the true temple in the heavenly places and would judge Babylon as the administration over the kingdoms of the world.

### **The command of Darius**

This was a significant time in response to the command of Cyrus, and then of Darius. When the people recommenced building in response to the prophecy of Zechariah and Haggai, the secular governor of the region sent a letter to King Darius.

In response to this letter, Darius searched the Persian archives and found the original decree of King Cyrus. He then issued his own decree which gave the Jewish remnant the undisputed authority to finish building the temple. This decree is recorded in Ezra 6:3-12.

King Darius did not recognise the commandment of the God of heaven in the same way that King Cyrus did. But we know that the timing of his command was also consistent with the commandment of God, because he issued his decree *in response* to the prophecy of Zechariah and Haggai.

It was the provocation of the Spirit upon Zechariah and Haggai, and their prophetic mandate, that provoked the decree by Darius. The temple was completed and dedicated in the sixth year of the reign of Darius. He had quite a long reign of thirty-six or thirty-seven years.

He was then succeeded by Ahasuerus, his son. In the secular reigns of the kings of Persia, he was called Xerxes. Interestingly, he is most likely the Ahasuerus who married Queen Esther. That puts all the events of the book of Esther into historical context.

### **The command of Artaxerxes**

Ahasuerus was then replaced by his son Artaxerxes, and that brings us to the time of Ezra. Scripture records that Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel. Ezra was a priest and a scribe.

He was also something of a historian, or a chronicler. He was the person who most likely put together the books of Chronicles. He was possibly also the person who compiled most of the psalms by King David and King David's leading singers and psalmists.

Ezra approached king Artaxerxes, according to the sovereign timing of the Lord, because Scripture records that 'the hand of the Lord was upon him'. Artaxerxes responded by issuing the

most extensive of all the commands of the Persian kings.

Rather than being fearful that the Jews would rebel against him - and we know that earlier in his reign he was fearful of that - he was fearful that if the city of Jerusalem was rebuilt, then they would not pay tax or tribute to him, so his treasury would be depleted.

But, rather than being fearful that the Jews would rebel against him, Artaxerxes gave Ezra the mandate to establish an autonomous administration in the city of Jerusalem.

Ezra recorded that Artaxerxes said, 'Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it diligently be done for the house of the God of heaven [that is an amazing statement], for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?' Ezr 7:23.

Isn't it incredible that this was stated by a secular king? He recognised that there is a God of heaven. He recognised that the God of heaven had made a proclamation. And he also recognised that if he did not act consistently with that command, wrath would come upon him, his sons, his whole kingdom; in fact, upon the whole realm.

The king further said, 'Also we inform you that it shall not be lawful to impose tax, tribute, or custom on any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Nethinim, or servants of this house of God.

'And you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are in the region beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know them.' Ezr 7:24-25.

### **The commands of Artaxerxes exceeded those of Cyrus and Darius**

This was quite a comprehensive decree. In contrast to the hasty decree proclaimed earlier in his reign, this command by Artaxerxes was consistent with the timing that had been ordained by the commandment of the God of Israel, in response to Daniel's prayer.

This command by Artaxerxes was built upon the command of Cyrus and upon the command of Darius, as part of one, integrated package. But it significantly expanded the scope of the mandate

that was given to the people, beyond only rebuilding the temple, to include the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem itself, with its administration and culture.

### **The command of Artaxerxes marked the beginning of the Seventy Weeks prophecy**

The key point is that it was the command of Artaxerxes according to the sovereign timing of the Lord which marked the beginning, or the specific commencement, of the Seventy Weeks prophecy.

We do not make this point simply because the command of Artaxerxes gave the people the broadest or most comprehensive mandate. That is true, but we make this point because it coincided with the return of Ezra.

### **The prophetic insight of Ezra**

When we look at the prophetic ministry of Ezra and his prophetic insight, it was Ezra who prophesied, looking forward to the finished offering of Christ, that the people had been given 'a peg in the holy place'.

And grace for restoration flowed to them from the face of Christ.

It was by this prophetic insight of Ezra, and his ministry among the people, that the Lord was able to meet the people eye to eye, and heart to heart.

It was this ministry that designated this time as the beginning of the Seventy Weeks prophecy. We will consider the ministry of Ezra in some detail in our next session.

### **Dates and chronologies**

I will now make a brief comment on dates.

According to the secular records of the kings of Persia - and we know that, as with all dates, there is some debate concerning this, but these are the best dates that we have - the command of Cyrus was issued in approximately 538BC.

The command of Darius was issued in approximately 520BC.

Then, over sixty years later, the command of Artaxerxes, in the seventh year of his reign - and Scripture is very specific on that - was issued in approximately 457BC.

This is certainly significant in relation to the Seventy Weeks prophecy. The prophecy states

that there will be sixty-nine weeks, in total, between 'the command to restore Jerusalem' and 'the coming of the Messiah'.

'Know therefore and understand [It is important to recognise that we can know and understand this. We can identify the beginning of the prophecy.], that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince [Christ], there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks [sixty-nine weeks]; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times.' Dan 9:25.

Sixty-nine weeks. We have established that each week is a period of seven years. So, sixty-nine weeks is four hundred and eighty-three years.

Interestingly, and as we would expect, if we count four hundred and eighty-three years from approximately 457BC, it brings us to approximately 27AD, remembering that there is no year 'zero', so we count directly from 1BC to 1AD. This brings us to 27AD.

### **Seventy weeks of years marked the beginning of Christ's ministry**

In direct fulfilment of the Seventy Weeks prophecy, it brings us to the time when Jesus was baptised and anointed with the sevenfold Spirit of God, by the Holy Spirit, for His earthly ministry.

This is 'the coming of Messiah the Prince.'

He then began His earthly ministry as the Christ, or the Messiah.

In our next session, we will consider the ministry of Ezra in more detail.