

**10. THE SEVENTY WEEKS  
OF YEARS**

**DANIEL 9:1-27**

**<sup>1</sup>In the first year of Darius son of Ahasuerus, by birth a Mede, who became king over the realm of the Chaldeans – <sup>2</sup>in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, was considering in the Scriptures the number of years that, according to the word of YHWH to the prophet Jeremiah, must be fulfilled for the devastation of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.**

History does not know of a Darius who ruled the Medes. If the story used by the author has unwittingly taken the name from the famous Darius of Persia, we should note that Darius was the father (not the son) of Ahasuerus (Xerxes in the Old Greek Version; see Ezra 4:5-6).

'The Scriptures' (verse 2) refers to what are called 'the holy books' in 1 Maccabees 12:9). In Jeremiah we read:

Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfil to you my promise and bring you back to this place.

– Jeremiah 29:10 (see 25:11-12)

Zechariah 1:12 seems to understand the 'seventy years' as measuring from the destruction of Jerusalem (587) to the completion of the second temple (516). However, seventy is a symbolic number and could stand in Jeremiah for the fullness of time as determined by God (compare Isaiah 23:15,17; Zechariah 1:12; 7:5; 2 Chronicles 36:21; Daniel 9:2).

The author of this chapter wants to link the prophecy with the reconsecration of the temple desecrated by Antiochus IV in 167. He wants to use it to encourage those suffering under Antiochus by giving them God's word that the time established by God for their punishment is all but complete. Their God (called YHWH only in chapter 9 of Daniel) is about to visit them.

The prayer (verses 4-19) is not composed by the author of chapter 9. He has inserted it here to highlight the fundamental truth that forgiveness cannot be given without genuine repentance. Confession of sin is appropriate in a time of suffering, as is clear from the following text from Leviticus:

If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their ancestors, in that they committed treachery against me and, moreover, that they continued hostile to me – so that I, in turn, continued hostile to them and brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity, then will I remember my covenant.

– Leviticus 26:40-42

Daniel represents his people when he acknowledges sin and pleads for forgiveness. His prayer is of a type familiar in Jewish literature in the period after the exile (see Ezra 9:6-15; Nehemiah 1:5-11; 9:5-37; Psalm 79). Texts can be found throughout the Older Testament to match every sentence.

**<sup>3</sup>Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. <sup>4</sup>I prayed to YHWH my God and made confession, saying:**

**“Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, <sup>5</sup>we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. <sup>6</sup>We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our elders, and to all the people of the land.**

**<sup>7</sup>“Righteousness is on your side, O Lord, but open shame, as at this day, falls on us, the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. <sup>8</sup>Open shame, YHWH, falls on us, our kings, our officials, and our ancestors, because we have sinned against you. <sup>9</sup>It is for the Lord our God to have mercy and forgiveness, since we have rebelled against him, <sup>10</sup>and have not obeyed the voice of YHWH our God by following his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.**

**11**“All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. So the curse made under oath written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against you. **12**He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers, by bringing upon us a calamity so great that what has been done against Jerusalem has never before been done under the whole heaven. **13**Just as it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us. We did not entreat the favour of YHWH our God, turning from our iniquities and reflecting on his fidelity. **14**So YHWH kept watch over this calamity until he brought it upon us. Indeed, YHWH our God is right in all that he has done; for we have disobeyed his voice.

**15**“Now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and made your name renowned even to this day, we acknowledge the wickedness of our sins. **16**O Lord, in view of all your righteous acts, let your anger and wrath, we pray, turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy mountain; because of our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors, Jerusalem and your people have become a disgrace among all our neighbours. **17**Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his supplication, and for your own sake, Lord, let your face shine upon your desolated sanctuary. **18**Incline your ear, O my God, and hear. Open your eyes and look at our desolation and the city that bears your name. We do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies. **19**O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, listen and act and do not delay! For your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people bear your name!”

The ‘curse’(verse 11) refers to the punishments which will come down upon those who are unfaithful to the covenant (see Deuteronomy 28:15-68; 29:20; Leviticus 26:27-45).

Verse 14, compare: ‘I am going to watch over them for harm and not for good’(Jeremiah 44:27).

The word ‘now’[עַתָּה] often marks the transition from a confession of sin to an appeal for mercy.

Traditionally the ‘desolated sanctuary’ would refer to the condition of the temple during the seventy years after its destruction in 587. Those suffering under Antiochus would have seen themselves going through a similar situation. The word ‘desolate’[שָׁמֵם, šāmēm] is used in Daniel with reference to the desecration of the temple by Antiochus (see Daniel 8:13; 9:26; 11:31; 12:11).

Daniel is portrayed as a prophet interceding for the people

From verse 21 it appears that Gabriel is the angel referred to in 7:16. There and in 8:15-16 his role was to interpret a symbolic vision. Here it is to reveal (compare Enoch 9:1-3; 10:9-10 and Luke 1:19, 26).

In light of verse 2 'seventy weeks' (verse 24) is intended to mean seventy weeks of years; that is 490 years. The 'Holy of Holies' (the inner sanctuary of the temple) was desecrated by Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 167. The author's real interest is only in the final seven years ('week of years'). The rest is an artificial construction. Furthermore 70 lots of 7 is about fullness not chronology.

The first 49 years ('seven weeks of years', verse 25) he interprets as the period from Jeremiah's prophecy to the return of the exiles from Babylon with Zerubbabel (the 'anointed prince').

The next 434 years ('sixty-two weeks of years') is conceived as covering from the return from exile through to the murder of the high priest, Onias ('an anointed one', verse 26) in 170 (though this period is closer to 350 years!).

The desecration of the temple in 167 ('the abomination that desolates', verse 27, see 1 Maccabees 1:54) is half-way through the final week (three-and-a-half years). The persecution has reached its turning point. The prophecy of Jeremiah is on the verge of being fulfilled!

**<sup>20</sup>While I was occupied with these prayers, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before YHWH my God on behalf of the holy mountain of my God – <sup>21</sup>while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen before in a vision, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. <sup>22</sup>He came and said to me, "Daniel, I have now come out to give you wisdom and understanding. <sup>23</sup>At the beginning of your supplications a word went out, and I have come to declare it, for you are greatly beloved. So consider the word and understand the vision:**

**<sup>24</sup>"Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city: to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint the Holy of Holies.**

**<sup>25</sup>Know therefore and understand: from the time that the word went out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the time of an anointed prince, there shall be seven weeks; and for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with streets and moat, but in a troubled time.**

**<sup>26</sup>After the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one will be cut down and will have nothing, and the troops of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end will come with a flood, and to the end there will be war. Desolations are decreed. <sup>27</sup>He will make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half a week he will abolish sacrifice and offering; and in their place will be an abomination that desolates, until the decreed end is poured out upon the desolator."**

