

## The Second Coming of Jesus Christ (3)

### Introduction:

Two weeks ago in our study of Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians, we arrived to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, which speaks of the rapture of the Lord's people to meet the Lord in the air. We have asserted that the rapture is not an event separate from the visible, physical return of Jesus Christ, as most evangelicals have been taught. The rapture is the second coming of Christ.

But having introduced the subject of the rapture, we found it necessary to explain and refute the commonly held belief of a pre-tribulation rapture of the church. For some of you who may not be familiar with these matters, most evangelicals are taught and believe that the Holy Scriptures prophesy these future events:

(1) The **rapture of the "Church"**, after which these Christians will come before the "judgment seat of Christ"--the *Bema* seat--in which the Lord will bestow rewards upon His disciples. Then New Testament Christians will participate in the marriage supper of the Lamb. Proponents of this view believe the "Church" includes only those who became Christians between Pentecost and the rapture.<sup>1</sup>

(2) The rapture is followed by a **seven-year tribulation period** on the earth for all who are "left behind." This is said to be the fulfillment of the "70<sup>th</sup> week" of Daniel's prophecy. An end-time antichrist will arise to rule the world during the tribulation. He will persecute the Jewish people severely in the latter 3½ years, which is called "the great tribulation."

(3) At the end of the tribulation is **the second coming of Jesus Christ**, when He will defeat the world in the battle of Armageddon, in which He will slay all who refused to believe on Him as Savior and Lord.

(4) At His second coming Jesus Christ will establish a **1,000 year millennium on earth**, in which He will reign as the Son of David over the restored Jewish kingdom of David. At His second coming Jesus will judge the "nations" of the tribulation period, allowing some to continue into the millennium, but excluding the others.<sup>2</sup> He will raise Old Testament believers, who, along with those who became believers during the tribulation, will continue to live in the millennium.

(5) At the end of the millennium, after a **short period of rebellion** against King Jesus, the end will come.

(6) There will be the final **Great White Throne Judgment** in which Christ will judge and condemn all the unsaved of all of history, after which they will be thrown into the lake of fire. They believe only the unsaved will come before Jesus Christ at this time to be judged.

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<sup>1</sup> We would advocate the "Church" that the Lord will rapture are all those through history redeemed by Jesus Christ, which include all the Old Testament believers as well as New Testament believers.

<sup>2</sup> Here is what C. I. Scofield wrote of this judgment, which is recorded in Matthew 25:31-46: "This judgment is to be distinguished from the judgment of the great white throne. Here there is no resurrection; the persons judged are living nations; no books are opened; three classes are present, sheep, goats, brethren; the time is at the return of Christ (v. 31); and the scene is on the earth. All these particulars are in contrast with Rev. 20:11-15. The test in this judgment is the treatment accorded by the nations to those whom Christ here calls 'my brethren.' These 'brethren' are the Jewish Remnant who will have preached the Gospel of the kingdom to all the nations during the tribulation" [C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (Oxford University Press, 1909, 1917), p. 1036.] There are so many errors in his statements it would take me pages to address them.

(7) God will create the **new heavens and earth** in which His people will dwell with the Lord forever.

Those who believe in a two stage second coming of Jesus Christ espouse the above order of events. They affirm a pre-tribulation, pre-millennial return of Jesus Christ to rapture His Church, that the “Church” will escape the 7-year tribulation that will come upon the earth. And they claim that our passage of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 teaches their view.

In contrast to the above scenario, historic reformed theology has asserted the following doctrine of the second coming of Jesus Christ:

The Bible foretells a single second coming of Jesus Christ, when He will call unto Himself His people from the grave and the world. Jesus Christ will then bring all mankind into a general judgment over which He will preside as the Judge. He will then separate the redeemed from the damned. The redeemed will be granted entrance into the fullness of the Kingdom of God-- even the New Jerusalem in the new heavens and new earth, in which they will dwell with their Lord for eternity. The damned will be consigned to eternal punishment.

Here is the statement from our confession, **The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689**, which aligns with what we just presented:

### **Chapter 32: Of the Last Judgment**

1. God hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, by Jesus Christ; to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father; in which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged, but likewise all persons that have lived upon the earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds, and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil. (Acts 17:31; John 5:22, 27; 1 Cor. 6:3; Jude 6; 2 Cor. 5:10; Ecc. 12:14; Matt. 12:36; Rom. 14:10, 12; Matt. 25:32-46)

2. The end of God's appointing this day, is for the manifestation of the glory of his mercy, in the eternal salvation of the elect; and of his justice, in the eternal damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient; for then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fullness of joy and glory with everlasting rewards, in the presence of the Lord; but the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast aside into everlasting torments, and punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. (Rom. 9:22, 23; Matt. 25:21, 34; 2 Tim. 4:8; Matt. 25:46; Mark 9:48; 2 Thess. 1:7-10)

3. As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin, and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity, so will he have the day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come, and may ever be prepared to say, *Come Lord Jesus; come quickly.* Amen. (2 Cor. 5:10, 11; 2 Thess. 1:5-7; Mark 13:35-37; Luke 12:35-40; Rev. 22:20)

### **I. The relationship between the rapture and the seven-year tribulation**

Now last Lord's Day we began to show why the arguments of those who hold to a pre-tribulation rapture of the Church are unbiblical. We addressed how they are mistaken in their belief in a pre-tribulation rapture based on the biblical expression, “*one will be taken, the other left.*” We showed why they were wrong in their belief in a *secret* rapture of the church in their interpretation of our Lord's return will be “*like a thief.*” We explained their errant assertion that there will be *two stages* of the second coming of Jesus Christ by their claim that Jesus coming *for his saints* can be distinguished from His coming *with his saints*.

And then lastly, we refuted their teaching that the Lord has promised that His people would not go *through (the) tribulation*.

But I would like us now to consider a teaching that most evangelicals believe to be biblical, with uncritical acceptance, a doctrine, which we (i.e. I) believe to be unbiblical. This is the belief that the Bible teaches that there will be a *seven year tribulation period on the earth* ending in the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Now, I am not saying that there will definitely not be a time of tribulation before the second coming of Jesus Christ. There may be a period of intense trouble and persecution before Christ returns. Paul wrote to Timothy:

<sup>10</sup>But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, <sup>11</sup>persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra-- what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. <sup>12</sup>Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. <sup>13</sup>***But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.*** (2 Tim. 3:10-13)

Tribulation may come, perhaps even great tribulation, but the argument that evangelicals put forward that there will be a seven year tribulation period as foretold in the Scriptures, is incorrect. Those who hold to such a position, in other words, most evangelicals, impose a false interpretation on passages they wrongly believe speak to the matter. Actually the Scriptures present this entire church age as a period of tribulation, yes, tribulation is more intense at some times than others, but enduring tribulation is the way of life for Christians in this fallen world. Our Lord Jesus told His disciples, “

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

But an end time tribulation of *seven years* is essential to the belief in a pretribulation rapture. This doctrine of an end time 7 year tribulation is a doctrine on which everything they espouse rests and is measured. Arguments about the timing of the rapture are based on its relation to the seven-year tribulation. The majority of evangelicals believe in a *pre-tribulation rapture*, that it will occur *before* the onset of the seven years. But there are those who believe in a *post-tribulation rapture*, that the rapture will occur *after* the tribulation.<sup>3</sup> And there are some who espouse a *mid-tribulation rapture*, that the Lord will catch up His Church 3½ years into the seven-year tribulation. And those who hold to one of these three positions will make this a very important matter. Sometimes if one who held to a pretribulation rapture changes his view, he suffers the loss of fellowship from those who do. Some missionaries have had their financial support cut off when they changed their belief from the pretribulation rapture. But all of these issues hinge on the perceived relationship of the rapture of the Church to the seven-year tribulation.

And so, what we are asserting here is that the very doctrine of a future, end time seven-year tribulation is based on a faulty interpretation of Scripture. It is based upon an errant interpretation of Daniel’s prophecy of seventy weeks, an interpretation which emerged in the mid 1800’s, became the predominant view among evangelicals early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is a major tenant of dispensationalism, which is man-made belief system about the interpretation and understanding of Scripture. And so, let us consider Daniel’s prophecy upon which they claim their teaching is based, first from the perspective of historic reformed understanding, and then second, from the perspective of modern day dispensationalism.

## II. The historic reformed understanding of Daniel’s prophecy of “seventy weeks”

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<sup>3</sup> There are qualified “dispensationalists” who are premillennial, believing in a future Jewish 1,000 year millennium, but they believe as we do, that the rapture and the second coming are one event. But they advocate a seven-year tribulation prior to the second coming.

Let us first read Daniel's prophecy of 70 weeks, which is **Daniel 9:24-26**. This was the content of a message that God delivered to the prophet Daniel through His angel Gabriel.

“Seventy weeks are determined  
For your people and for your holy city,  
To finish the transgression,  
To make an end of sins,  
To make reconciliation for iniquity,  
To bring in everlasting righteousness,  
To seal up vision and prophecy,  
And to anoint the Most Holy.

<sup>25</sup>“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 street shall be built again, and the wall,  
Even in troublesome times.

<sup>6</sup>“And after the sixty-two weeks  
Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself;  
And the people of the prince who is to come  
Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.  
The end of it shall be with a flood,  
And till the end of the war desolations are determined.

<sup>27</sup>Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week;  
But in the middle of the week  
He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.  
And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate,  
Even until the consummation, which is determined,  
Is poured out on the desolate.”

Daniel had been deported with other young Hebrew youths after the Babylonian Empire had defeated Judah and Jerusalem in 605 BC. God's judgment was upon the nation for having broken its (Mosaic) covenant with God. Daniel arrived in Babylon as a teenager, but God blessed him and he rose to become one of the leaders of the empire. Years later, when Daniel was an old man, he was reading a copy of Jeremiah's prophecy regarding his people. He learned of God's intention and promise to restore His people to their land after *seventy years* in exile. We read of this in Daniel 9:1-3.

<sup>1</sup>In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans-- <sup>2</sup>in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books *the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years*.

Daniel knew these 70 years were coming to an end and he expected that God would soon restore His people to their land.<sup>4</sup> God had utterly destroyed Jerusalem and its temple. But Daniel believed that their physical and spiritual condition was about to be restored. He believed that upon their release from exile and

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel no doubt read the words of **Jeremiah 25:11f** and **29:10ff**. I wish we had time to read these passages today.

return to their land that the Messiah would appear and that the kingdom of Israel would be restored. And so, Daniel began to pray that God's will would come to pass for his people.

But Daniel had been mistaken in thinking that at the end of their 70 years of exile in Babylon that all things would then be restored--that the curse of God would be removed from the people and the kingdom of the Messiah would be established. God sent His angel, Gabriel, to Daniel in order to reveal to him the actual time that would transpire until the Messiah would come, accomplish His work of salvation for His people, reconciling them unto God. We read in Daniel 9:20ff these words:

<sup>20</sup>Now while I was speaking, praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God, <sup>21</sup>yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering. <sup>22</sup>And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand. <sup>23</sup>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:

It was then that Gabriel gave Daniel this prophecy of "70 weeks." Gabriel told Daniel that it would not be immediately after the 70 years of exile that their reconciliation before God would occur, that the promised kingdom of God would be inaugurated. He told Daniel that it would be after *70 weeks of years*, in other words, after **490 years**, until the promises of God's salvation through the Messiah would take place. Only then would their sins be fully forgiven and their relationship with God would be restored. Only then would all of the promises of God respecting their salvation be realized; in other words, "To seal up vision and prophecy." Only then would the Messiah come and accomplish their redemption from sin, removing God's curse from His people, fulfilling His promise to inaugurate the promised kingdom of God.

Did this event occur? Of course it did. And the early Christian witness was that Jesus of Nazareth had fulfilled all that the holy prophets had foretold would come to pass. All that Gabriel declared to Daniel that would take place after 490 years, God accomplished. God did reconcile His people unto Himself and did establish His kingdom through the life, crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation of the Promised Messiah, Jesus Christ.

The angel Gabriel gave detailed explanation to Daniel about the prophecy of the seventy weeks of years (Dan. 9:25-26). He told Daniel that the onset of this 490 year time frame would be "the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem" (Dan. 9:25). This is probably a reference to the formal decree of the Persian emperor Cyrus, who commanded that the captive Jews from the Babylonian exile be permitted to return to their homeland and rebuild the city of Jerusalem and its temple.<sup>5</sup> From this initial decree "until Messiah the Prince", 69 weeks of years, or 483 years, would transpire.

Gabriel divides these initial 69 weeks into two divisions of 7 weeks and 62 weeks. The seven weeks speak of an initial 49 year period in which the city of Jerusalem was re-inhabited and rebuilt, which takes us through the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah had led the returning Jewish exiles to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. You can read of the difficulty and the "troublesome times" that Nehemiah and the Jews endured

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<sup>5</sup> According to the record of Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, after Cyrus the Persian had conquered the city of Babylon, he was shown the prophecy of **Isaiah 44:24-28** and **45:1-7**, which Isaiah had penned two centuries before hand.<sup>5</sup> There Cyrus read a prophecy which included his own name. Isaiah foretold that God would raise up a leader named Cyrus, give him victory over all of his enemies, and then Cyrus would enable the exiled Jews to return to their land and rebuild their temple. Cyrus, upon reading this prophecy, did just that—He issued a decree that permitted the Jews to return to their homeland. This decree is recorded for us in **Ezra 1:2-4**: "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. <sup>3</sup>Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel--he is the God who is in Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup>And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem." This edict of Cyrus, signalled the beginning of the 490 years until the coming of the Messiah.

even as they rebuilt the walls of the city. And then after the city was re-established in its fortifications, another 62 weeks, or 434 years, are specified “until *Messiah the Prince*.” These 69 weeks of Daniel’s prophecy, therefore, take us from the “official” return of the Jews from the 70 year Babylonian captivity until the appearance of Jesus Christ the Messiah, when He began His earthly ministry of proclamation and reconciliation.

The 69 weeks of years describes the period of history to the onset of Jesus’ ministry. Upon the public ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the seventieth week of Daniel began, the Messiah was performing His ministry in the regions of Galilee and later Judea. **Verse 26** declares that “*after the sixty-two weeks, Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself.*” “After” 69 weeks would place this event in the seventieth week of Daniel’s prophecy. The Messiah would be “cut off, but not for Himself.” This is a clear reference to sacrificial and substitutionary death of Jesus upon His cross in which He died to reconcile His people to God.

What happens next? The Prince would then bring God’s judgment upon Jerusalem and its temple, the desolation of which would be total and lasting.

And the people of *the prince* who is to come  
Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.  
The end of it shall be with a flood,  
And till the end of the war desolations are determined.

It was our Lord Jesus who pronounced judgment upon Jerusalem and its temple. In **Matthew 23:37-39** our Lord pronounced judgment upon Israel, when He declared, “*Your house is left to you desolate.*” He announced to His disciples that the temple would be destroyed. We read in the opening words of Matthew 25:

Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. <sup>2</sup>And Jesus said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not *one* stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” (Matt. 24:1f)

Our Lord’s words were fulfilled during the time frame of that generation. As the risen and enthroned Lord of heaven and earth, He sent forth the Roman armies that brought to pass the desolation of Jerusalem and its temple that He Himself had pronounced. Here are the comments of **Matthew Henry on verse 26**:

It is here foretold that *the people of the prince that shall come* shall be the instruments of this destruction, that is, the Roman armies, belonging to a monarchy yet to come (Christ is *the prince that shall come*, and they are employed by him in this service; they are *his armies*, Matt. 22:7), or the Gentiles (who, though now strangers, shall become the people of the Messiah) shall destroy the Jews. That the destruction shall be *by war*, and the *end* of that *war* shall be this *desolation determined*. The *wars of the Jews* with the Romans were by their own obstinacy made very long and very bloody, and they issued at length in the utter extirpation of that people.

But what of **Daniel 9:27**, which reads:

Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week;  
But in the middle of the week  
He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.  
And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate,  
Even until the consummation, which is determined,  
Is poured out on the desolate.”

This speaks of what occurred during the seventieth week of Daniel, which began with the onset of the public ministry of the Lord Jesus. This last seven year period in Daniel’s time frame included our Lord’s entire 3½ year public ministry and, I would argue, approximately 3½ years afterwards. Our Lord initially

“confirmed” a covenant with “many.” Reformed commentators offer two opinions as to the meaning of this prophecy. (1) Some argue this is the new covenant that our Lord enacted the night of His betrayal and arrest. Just as He gave His life a ransom for “many”, so He makes a new “covenant” with many.<sup>6</sup> But the language suggests that the duration of this “covenant” was only 7 years.

(2) Others argue that this alludes to Jesus Christ as the Jewish Messiah came to “confirm” or fulfil God’s promise and commitment to the Jews, that He would send to them the Messiah. To argue for this second view we could cite the occasion when the Lord Jesus had announced to His disciples who he sent out on a short term preaching mission to go only to Jews.

These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” (Matt. 10:5-7)

Later He would tell a Gentile woman, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24). Romans 15:8 could also be cited. Paul wrote, “Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, *to confirm the promises* made to the fathers...” When the Lord Jesus came as the promised Messiah of Israel, He “confirmed”, or fulfilled a commitment to (ethnic) Israel for “one week.”

But in “the middle of the week”, that 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel, Jesus Christ was crucified, “having brought an end to sacrifice and offering.” As the Epistle to the Hebrews declares: “But as it is, He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 9:26). But then the desolation of Jerusalem and its temple would take place. The city and temple that Daniel prophesied would be rebuilt “in troublesome times”, would be destroyed once again.

And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate,  
Even until the consummation, which is determined,  
Is poured out on the desolate.” (Dan. 9:27)

If the Lord Jesus was “cut off”, that is, crucified, in the middle of the 70<sup>th</sup> week, 3½ years into the 7 years, what of the second half of the seven year period? I would argue that for the first 3½ years of this church age that the primary emphasis of mission took place among Jews, because God was fulfilling His commitment and promise to them. Peter would himself declare to gathered Jews, “God, having raised up His servant, sent Him to *you first*, to bless *you* by turning every one of *you* from *your* wickedness” (Acts 3:26). The early church went to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile. But approximately 3½ years after the crucifixion, the Lord Jesus appeared to Paul, and called him to become the apostle to the Gentiles. It would be Paul’s later decision upon the Jews’ refusal to hear and respond to the gospel that he announced these words to those Jews:

*“It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you.* Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”<sup>48</sup> And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. (Act 13:46-48)

Why was it “necessary” that Paul first offer salvation to the Jews? Because the Lord Jesus had confirmed the covenant with the Jews for “one week”, which was from the onset of our Lord’s earthly ministry to His crucifixion and through the ministry of the early church. That seventieth week had come to its fulfilment, and God now determined that this Gospel would be preached in all the world, and then the fall of Jerusalem would take place, which occurred in AD 70.

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<sup>6</sup> This is Matthew Henry’s understanding.

Now I just described the *historic reformed* (i.e. Protestant) view of Daniel 9:24-27. In summary, the seventy weeks of Daniel 9 is a prophecy of the first coming of Christ, His ministry and death, and then of a temporary ministry to the Jewish people with a message of salvation. All 70 weeks of years (490 years) were fulfilled, from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile (a. 460 BC) through the appearance of Christ at His baptism, His “anointing” for His ministry, His death for others, and then 3½ years of ministry to the Jews before the Gospel went chiefly to the Gentiles. All 70 weeks of years were a continuous time period fulfilled in their entirety.

But very few evangelicals agree with the position we just rehearsed. There was a time when this position was the only one held by Protestants. But now it is commonly taught that the 70 weeks of Daniel were not fulfilled in their entirety. It is taught that there is a prophetic “gap” of this church age, inserted between the end of the 69<sup>th</sup> week and the onset of the 70<sup>th</sup> week. This is the invention of dispensationalism, a view that emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and became the predominant evangelical view in the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the influence of the Scofield Reference Bible.

Let us now attempt to understand...

## II. The view that Daniel’s prophecy of “seventy weeks” that projects the 70<sup>th</sup> week to a future seven year tribulation

Over against the historic reformed position in the interpretation of *dispensationalism*. They understand the seventy weeks to be two separate time periods, one of 483 years (69 weeks), the other 7 years (1 week). These two time periods are separated by a great parenthesis, which is this church age of 2,000+ years. They say, therefore, that the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel is a prophecy of an end time 7-year tribulation period just before the second coming of Jesus Christ.

We would argue that their division and separation of the 70 weeks of Daniel into two separate period of time, renders Daniel’s time frame unclear and imprecise. We would argue that Daniel never foresaw a time lapse interrupting the unfolding of these weeks of years. For Daniel, it was one continuous time frame.

This dispensational view of the 70 weeks of Daniel claim that because the Jews rejected their Messiah, their promised King, the kingdom that Jesus “offered” the Jews was postponed. With the end of the 69<sup>th</sup> week, they say that God’s prophetic “clock” paused or stopped, and then these past 2000 years+ have transpired. This church age is a long protracted parenthesis in God’s actual plan in history, which has to do with the nation of Israel, not the Church. But they say that God’s prophetic clock will resume again, the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel’s prophecy will begin to unfold, after a secret rapture occurs in which Jesus would take His Church to meet him in the air. They claim, therefore, that the prophecy of the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel is a prophecy of a final 7 year tribulation period, culminating in the second coming of Jesus Christ to the earth.

How does this position, therefore, deal with the passage of Daniel 9:25-27? First recognize that they are in agreement with the reformed understanding that **verse 25** is a prophecy of the coming Christ. The reformed and dispensational positions are in agreement here. However, there is a slight difference in the details. Whereas the reformed view sees the end of the 69 weeks as the *onset of Jesus Christ’s ministry* when He was baptized, that is, “anointed” with the Holy Spirit, the dispensational position believes that the conclusion of the 69<sup>th</sup> week occurred at *the crucifixion of Christ*. The reformed position understands Daniel 9:26 as saying that the Messiah would be “cut off”, in other words, killed, sometime “after” the 69 weeks, half way through the 70<sup>th</sup> week (after 3½ years of His earthly ministry).

But here lies the major difference. The reformed position understands verse 26 to speak entirely of “Messiah the Prince” who was identified in Daniel 9:25. The dispensational interpretation does not believe this to be the case. Take note that Daniel the mentions the Messiah directly three times in verses 25 and 26. (1) He first identifies “Messiah the Prince” in verse 25, then (2) he again mentions the “Messiah” in verse 26, but then (3) he refers to him as “the Prince who is to come”, which is also in verse 26.<sup>7</sup> Again, **verse 26** reads as follows:

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<sup>7</sup> The reformed position also sees Daniel prophesying of the risen and enthroned Lord Jesus sending “His” armies, which are the Roman forces under the Roman general Titus, to destroy the city of Jerusalem and the temple, which transpired in AD 70. Jerusalem would remain desolate, void of God’s presence from then even unto the end of the age.

“Know therefore and understand,  
That from the going forth of the command  
To restore and build Jerusalem  
Until (1) *Messiah*<sup>8</sup> *the Prince*,  
There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks;  
The street shall be built again, and the wall,  
Even in troublesome times.

“And after the sixty-two weeks  
(2) *Messiah* shall be cut off,  
But not for Himself;  
And the people of (3) *the prince who is to come*  
Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.  
The end of it shall be with a flood,  
And till the end of the war desolations are determined.

Interestingly, and I think devastating to the dispensational view, rather than understanding verse 26 to be speaking throughout of the coming Messiah, their interpretation introduces another person. They view verse 26 to be *a prophecy of both Christ and the antichrist*. Whereas they are right in viewing verse 25 to speak of “Messiah the Prince”, and in verse 26 the reference to “Messiah” is also understood rightly to be a prophecy of Jesus. But amazingly, they interpret the reference to “the prince who is to come” in verse 26, as not a reference to Messiah the Prince, but it is the introduction of the antichrist.<sup>9</sup> And so, they believe that between the clauses of verse 26, that end with the words “not for Himself” and the words “and the people of the prince”, one needs to insert 2,000 plus years of church history. In my opinion, to make the second “prince” (v. 26) a different person than the first “Prince” (v. 25) is a terrible abuse of the context and it ignores standard rules of grammar. The antichrist is nowhere spoken of in Daniel’s prophecy of 70 weeks.

The entire context of Daniel’s 70 weeks is a prophecy of the coming Messiah the Prince who would remove the curse from His people through the sacrifice of Himself and who would bring God’s judgment upon all those Jews who refused to acknowledge and submit to Him. The elder Simeon would later pronounce a prophecy respecting the infant Jesus that he held in his arms, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel” (Luke 2:34). Daniel 9 foretold of this work of salvation and judgment.

Let us look at one more verse in Daniel 9 and see how these two differing interpretations deal with its meaning. **Daniel 9:27** reads,

Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week;  
But in the middle of the week  
He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.  
And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate,  
Even until the consummation, which is determined,  
Is poured out on the desolate.

The dispensational interpretation sees this not as a prophecy of Jesus Christ in His ministry to the Jews, but as *a prophecy of the antichrist at the end of the age*. It is claimed that the covenant he “confirms” is with the Jews at the beginning of the future seven-year tribulation period, which is “the 70th week of

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<sup>8</sup> The ESV translates “Messiah” as “anointed one”, which is the meaning of the Hebrew word, “Messiah”, as well as the Greek word equivalent, “Christ.”

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, the editors of the New King James Version in the Reformation Study Bible have the first “Prince” spelled with an upper case “P” and the second “prince”, spelled with an initial lower case “p.” This suggests to me that the editor board of the New Reformation Study Bible must have had at least one dispensationalist who insisted on this translation.

Daniel).<sup>10</sup> The antichrist is the political leader of the western world, it is claimed, who gives permission to the Jews to rebuild their temple and to reinstitute their Old Testament sacrifices in Jerusalem. But in the middle of the seven years, the antichrist reveals himself as the evil leader that he is. He forbids the Jews from sacrificing any longer, bringing “an end to sacrifice and offering.” He will then set up an idol of himself in the temple, which the dispensationalists see as “the abomination of desolation”, and he will then persecute the Jews for the remainder of the tribulation period until Jesus returns the second time at the end of the seven years.

In contrast to the dispensational interpretation the reformed view sees **verse 27** as continuing to speak of the first coming Christ. Jesus came to confirm the covenant with many, the lost sheep of the house of Israel<sup>11</sup>, fulfilling God’s promises of salvation to the Jews. “In the middle of the week” Christ died on the cross, which brought an end to sacrifice and offering. This is what Matthew 27:50 and 51 record,

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.

And then Daniel foretells the Lord’s rejection of the Jewish leadership and of Jerusalem as an emblem of the Jewish hegemony (priority) in the purpose of God. Its desolation, both physical and spiritual abandonment by God, would continue through this age. **Daniel 9:27b** reads,

And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate,  
Even until the consummation, which is determined,  
Is poured out on the desolate.

Jesus had pronounced His judgment upon Jerusalem just prior to His Olivet Discourse, when He said, “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate” (Matt. 23:38).

Whereas the dispensational view sees “the abomination of desolation” a future end time antichrist who sets up an idol in a rebuilt Jewish temple, by which he demands all people everywhere to worship him as god, the reformed position has a different view. In fact, there are several proposals about “the abomination of desolation.” Some reason that the “abomination” that resulted in Jerusalem’s “desolation” was (1) the abominable act of the Jews in rejecting and crucifying their Messiah. They would cite Luke 19:41-44 to substantiate their view.

Now as He (Jesus) drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.” (Luke 19:41-44)

Other reformed interpreters see (2) the “abomination that makes desolate” are the actual Roman armies that bring desolation to the land and the city in AD 70. Others still understand the abomination of desolation to be (3) the Roman ensigns and emblems of “eagles” on their banners when the conquerors brought them into the temple area at the end of the siege.

**Conclusion:** Someone might argue, “What is the point of all this debate and speculation? What difference does it make?”

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<sup>10</sup> Note this: the reformed view says that Christ “confirmed” the covenant that God had already had made with the Jews. The dispensational view sees the antichrist “making” a covenant with the Jews. If Daniel were describing what the antichrist would do, why did he say that he would “confirm” an existing covenant rather than that he “would make” an initial covenant with the Jews?

<sup>11</sup> Or perhaps it speaks of the new covenant that Christ made with His people.

1. In my opinion, to deny the fact that God used Daniel to prophecy of the events surrounding the desolation of Jerusalem by the risen Lord Jesus is to fail to give God the glory for the great things He has done. We are to recognize and acknowledge who our God is and what He has done for His people in history. A dispensational view of Daniel 9 denies the glory due His name. It blames the antichrist for unjust persecution upon Jews rather than glorifying Christ for administering His righteous judgment upon a sinful nation.

2. It leads believers to focus wrongly and needlessly on imagined false views of the future. There is a tremendous waste of resources upon end time prophecy that lulls people in thinking that they are going to escape God's dealings in history, falsely assuming that they are going to be "raptured" out of this world prior to an end time tribulation period.

3. It fails to recognize a major manner in which the Lord Jesus was vindicated respecting His arrest, trial, and crucifixion. The judgment of Judea and Jerusalem confirmed that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah, the Prophet who was foretold to come, the one who was raised and then enthroned over the Kingdom of God from which throne He now controls the events of history. To deny the significance that Jesus foretold of these days of AD 70 is to deny His office as a prophet and it strips away one of the biblical means that proves Jesus is indeed risen and enthroned as Lord over all.

4. The classical dispensational view teaches that our Lord failed to inaugurate the kingdom of God, because the Jews rejected Him as their king. It is taught that He will be "successful" when He returns a second time when He then will establish the kingdom that He failed to do when He first came. To me this is near to blasphemy.

5. The dispensational view has led to political positions of evangelicals whereby they give unqualified endorsement to the secular, political state of Israel, even to encouraging Israel to exclude all non-Jews from borders that were at one time the legitimate possession of the Jews. The right possession to Israel of the Promised Land was contingent upon their keeping the Mosaic covenant, which they broke. The curse they endured and that still abides on them can only be removed through faith in their Messiah, Jesus Christ.<sup>12</sup>

6. Christ is currently Lord of lords and King of kings. His kingdom was not postponed, but was inaugurated. He declared, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and earth" (Matt. 28:18). The Jews rejection of Jesus did not thwart Jesus Christ becoming King; their rejection of Him and crucifying Him was the very means and grounds upon which the Father raised Him from the dead and gave Him all kingly authority in heaven and on earth. To the ones who rejected Him and to the ones who refuse to submit to His Lordship, God expresses His will and purpose in Psalm 2.

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Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24f)

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<sup>12</sup> I would be accused immediately by some due to these comments as the worst kind of anti-Semite. Hal Lindsey had the audacity to write a book to assert the historic position that I espouse is the road to another Jewish holocaust, which is the title of his book: "The Road to Holocaust." I would argue that his position is more conducive to Israel's ruin than the biblical position we set forth. I am for the present state of Israel. I desire their protection, secure borders, and their peace.