

Genesis 1:26-28

# COVENANT RENEWAL

Matthew 28:18-20

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## COVENANTAL SEVENTY WEEKS

(The **Covenantal** Structure of Daniel Nine)

by Ray R. Sutton

Prophecy is serious. False prophecy is dangerous. I recently heard an eye-witness account of the destructive nature of false prophecy.

For the last several months, I've been told by some of my charismatic friends about the latest outbreak of the miraculous in Kansas City. I've been surprised. Some have spoken glowingly about what's happening in the cow town of the midwest. Others, to my amazement, have responded with a great deal of skepticism. It seems that this sort of thing has become to them what predicting the rapture has become to a number of dispensationalists. They believe in the miraculous, but they're sick and tired of the phoniness and manipulation. They know that the "real thing" exists, and they also know that the fakes destroy the credibility of the faithful. It was one of these brothers who told me an interesting story about one of the leaders in Kansas City.

This preacher/healer came to a community of believers in East Texas. He called a big meeting where he promptly began to hand out prophecies as fast as a guy at a football game delivering program guides into the hands of hoards of entering spectators. He suddenly pointed to one young man who had gone to this community of believers to prepare for the mission field. He said, "The Lord has told me that members of your family are going to be reconciled."

Okay, I'm not a skeptic and I'm not the kind of person who rules out the miraculous. But this sort of prophecy is the kind that could be given to almost any believer in Christendom. Who doesn't have members of his family that haven't as of yet converted and whom he (she) has been praying for? I'd say that any would-be-prophet is fairly safe when he points his finger at an audience of Christians and says, "Members of your family are going to come to the Lord."

Well, the young man who was given the prophecy is young, naive (I should say, "was naive."), but he was delighted to be the object of such a prophecy. Anyway, the young man was deeply affected. He went home rejoicing to God that his parents would soon receive Christ and go to heaven with him. He couldn't wait for the evening meeting to return and give thanks.

When the young man showed up at the meeting, the prophecies began to fly again. Except this time, the would be prophet (better spelled with an "f" instead of "ph") pointed his finger at the young man and said that he had been wrong about his prophecy. He had pointed the wrong direction. The prophecy hit the wrong person and was *really intended for someone else*.

As you might imagine, the young man was devastated. He left not only the meeting but he also left training for the mission field. As far as I know, he has not recovered from

this hideous display of false prophecy. If I hadn't heard about this preposterous and blatant manifestation of unspiritual rip off from such reliable witnesses, I wouldn't believe it.

Can you imagine one of the prophets, Christ, or the apostles doing this? Think back to the time that Christ told Peter that he would deny Him three times before the cock crows (Matthew 26:34). How about this scene based on the false prophecy practices of the false prophet mentioned above.

Christ looks to John and says, "You will deny Me four times before the horse neighs three times." Then, a few moments later Jesus says to John, "Uh, John I'm sorry but I misheard the Father and I gave the wrong prophecy. I even delivered it to the wrong person. I meant to give it to Peter. The animal is a cock not a horse. And the denial will be three times before the animal crows. That's the way it is now." Sounds blasphemous doesn't it. That's because false prophecy is blasphemous. That's also why a prophecy that does not come to pass is punishable by death.

I'm often asked if I believe in the gift of prophecy. I always say, "Sure and I also believe in the Old Testament penalties for false prophecy." When I explain that those sanctions are death, I find that people and churches become much more conservative in their use of prophecy! Moses says, "The prophet which shall presume to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die" (Deuteronomy 18:20). ~~Although the Church cannot apply the civil sanctions, it can and should apply the equivalent to an~~ person commits such an offense in the Church. The appropriate penalty would be automatic excommunication for the false prophet!

Prophecy should not be graded on a curve. It's either all right or all wrong. There is no in-between if the Bible is the standard. Here is the problem. Prophecy is not mere prediction. It is promissory, a specific promise related to God's covenant. Prophecy is covenants. This is what separates Biblical prophecy from what Jean Dixon does. Demotized prophets like her simply make predictions. In contrast, the Biblical prophets tell future events in terms of God's covenant. Thus, if what we are being told will happen is not directly connected to the Biblical covenant, it is false. It is not Biblical and it is certainly not covenantal.

### The Almost False Prophecy of Dispensationalism

In my opinion, dispensationalism borders on false prophecy. Notice I said, "borders." I didn't say that dispensationalists are false prophets. But consider the Biblical ramifica-

tions of a Bible teacher's saying, "Saddam Hussein is the Anti-Christ, the Man of Sin," and we find out that he's not. To me, this is a serious infraction. It is not like predicting the rise or fall of stocks. It is specifically saying that someone in the Bible is the same as the person in the newspaper. It abuses the Bible, God's covenant Word to man. And although I don't think excommunication should be the form of discipline, I believe that there should be some kind of discipline for false Bible predictions; perhaps suspension from communion for a period.

Dispensationalism violates the Biblical covenant in its view of end times. It teaches that the people of Israel receive covenant blessings after the Church has been removed from the earth. How does this abuse the covenant, for after all, dispensationalists emphasize that Israel must receive the land in fulfillment of a covenantal promise made to Abraham (Genesis 12:1ff.)? Don't they really, after all, believe in the Biblical covenant?

No, because they fail to see that only those who enter properly under the covenant oath receive the promise of the covenant. Yes, a promise was made to Abraham and his seed (Genesis 17:1ff.). But what is the oath/sign of the Abrahamic covenant? The Apostle Paul tells us that this sign has been changed from circumcision to baptism when he says, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are the seed of Abraham" (Galatians 3:27-29). What the Apostle says is extremely relevant to the dispensational question. His logic is simple to follow. He says baptism into Christ makes a person the seed of Abraham, meaning the original covenant with Abraham is only good if a person is baptized into Christ.

This Biblical logic means the Jew cannot lay claim to the land as long as he does not have the covenant seal of baptism, meaning he must be a member of the Church of Jesus Christ since baptism admits one into the communion of the faithful. This further means that the Church could not possibly be removed from the earth and separated from Israel prior to the salvation of the nation of Israel. How could it? Israel has to enter the Church by the covenant of baptism for it to be saved and for it to receive the Abrahamic promises. Israel can only participate in the Abrahamic promises as a member of the Church.

Thus, dispensationalism misunderstands the Biblical covenants and ends up making almost-but-not-yet false, non-covenantal prophecies. It separates prophecy from covenant to come up with its fantastic misinterpretations of Scripture. It wrenches the prophetic sections of the Bible from the covenant, leaving these sections "covenantless" and susceptible to arbitrary interpretation. When, however, the prophetic passages of the Bible are approached from the perspective of the covenant, out of which they grow and into which they go, these texts of Scripture have covenantal parameters to keep imaginative, space-age dispensational interpreters from abusing the prophecy.

More important for the concerns of the present study, the covenantal nature of prophecy explains why premillennialism, and I believe also amillennialism, will not work. They both fail to grasp the successional nature of the covenant and what this means in terms of Christ's Resurrection and Ascension. They both believe that Christ is the true Heir of the covenant, but they both turn around and undermine or minimize the significance of the covenant's being transferred to Christ.

Premillennialism on the one hand preaches that Christ has come and is the fulfillment of the Word of God. But it in effect denies that He is the true Heir. The nation Israel must still receive the promises of the Old Testament. Dis-

sensionalists don't agree that the nation has forfeited the promises in any sense more than just a brief interlude when they lose them, called the parenthesis of the Church Age. But the Scripture, and especially in Daniel nine's prophecy of the seventy weeks, teaches that the promises are fulfilled in Christ and the new nation of Israel, the Church. They are shifted to Him and His new people away from Israel and will never return to Israel exclusively. They can only return via Christ, which means becoming a member of the Church.

Amillennialism does much the same as premillennialism. It fails to understand what it means when a new heir receives the inheritance of the covenant, especially Christ. It argues for a delayed effect. Except, all through the Old Testament, the world of the new heir is changed by him. Take Joshua for example. When he becomes the successor to Moses, the next new Adam, the world changes. Granted, sin is still present and the world tries to lapse back into permanent sin. But always God raises up a new heir who changes things again. Now if this is true of the Old Testament heirs, new Adams, how much more would it be true of Jesus Christ, Very God of Very God? Amillennialism in effect treats Jesus like any other Old Testament heir, believing that the world will not progress and improve under His rule. I believe that for this reason Amillennialism must head toward man-centered soteriology, Arminianism. Its eschatology denies its soteriology!

Only some form of Postmillennialism is truly consistent with the nature of the Biblical covenant, especially the successional character of it. Here is the principle in summary: The operations of the post-fall Biblical covenant dictate a transfer of inheritance when an heir apostatizes. Originally of course, covenant renewal would not have been needed; there was no sin. After the fall, the giving of the covenant became one long continuous process of covenant renewal through the giving of a new heir, the fifth point of the covenant. Once each "new" Adam of the Old Testament proved himself to be just like the old (first) Adam, the covenant had to be renewed in another, including Israel as a nation. They were given the charge as a nation of priests to renew God's covenant on the earth. They eventually apostatized, requiring a new heir, Jesus Christ, who was promised in the Old Testament anyway. What Israel did not understand and refused to accept was that He in His person would replace them as a nation. As I said, the continuation of the covenant requires a transfer to new heirs when apostasy occurs. But, when Christ comes, He becomes the Heir who will not and cannot apostatize. He totally fulfills the covenant and ushers in the New Jerusalem.

#### Daniel Nine

The prayer and prophecy of Daniel nine both have the covenant structure. This is important to understand the covenantal ramifications of both. The context says that this prayer and prophecy have to do with the restoration of a New Israel. But the Old Israel is captive to Babylon. Daniel knows that God has promised a perpetual covenant to His people. He also knows how the covenant is renewed. What he doesn't understand is how this will effect the present Israel and Jerusalem. In the ninth chapter of Daniel, he attempts to restore the covenant, what he must do as the present new Adam. As he does, he receives an interesting prophecy from God through Gabriel. He learns that Israel and Jerusalem will be restored but they will eventually take on a different character.

#### The Covenantal Prayer of Daniel 9:3-19

The beginning of the chapter hints at the resurrection of the people of God. We are told, "In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus" (9:1). This time reference

suggests a new beginning of some sort. As we read the prayer of Daniel, we learn why.

The prayer is clearly covenantal in nature. Meredith Kline in a festschrift to O.T. Allis, says, "The covenantal orientation of Daniel's prayer is underscored by its vocabulary, for it is replete with treaty terminology . . . Daniel 9 is the only chapter in the book to use the divine name Yahweh (vss. 2, 4, 10, 13, 14, 20)."<sup>1</sup>

Beyond the covenantal vocabulary, however, the prayer is covenantal in structure. Kline refers to the covenant lawsuit work of J. Harvey to point out the particular type of prayer used by Daniel. Harvey says this prayer belongs to the **todah** genre of prayer, a confessional prayer used for bringing about covenant lawsuit.<sup>2</sup> Another scholar, D. W. Kerr says of the **todah** prayer that it is, "The public act of acknowledging the glory of God in His attributes and the grace of God in His actions toward the people whom He has chosen in solemn covenant."<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, this **todah** prayer has an important covenantal purpose. First, where these prayers are found, covenant renewal results (Ezra 10:3ff.; Nehemiah 10:1ff.). Second, since they produce covenant renewal and they involve confession of sin, they are part of the covenant lawsuit process in Israel. Kline says the following:

The covenant lawsuit process, with the special role played in it by the **todah**, is delineated in the covenant sanctions passage in Leviticus 26. There, following a description of the breaking of the covenant (vss. 14f.) and of the infliction of the covenant curses on Israel, climactically the curse of exile (vss. 16-39), it is stated that the **todah**-confession by the exiles (vss. 40f.) would be prerequisite to God's renewing of the covenant and restoring its blessings (vss. 42ff.). Again, in the sanctions of the Deuteronomic treaty Moses presents such a prophetic overview of the covenant relation of Yahweh and Israel down to the exile and assigns to the act of Israel's repentant turning the same essential role as prelude to the restoration of the covenant (Deut. 30:1ff., especially 2 and 10).<sup>4</sup>

Kline therefore sees the prayer of Daniel as being part of the covenant lawsuit that the prophets had brought against Israel. Daniel prays a prayer of confession in terms of Leviticus 26. I believe that beyond the observations of the covenantal nature and **todah** structure of the prayer, therefore, we can observe the covenant structure of Deuteronomy in it. This only serves to confirm further the earlier observations. In addition, this insight will also prepare us for the message of the covenantal prophecy that follows. A brief summary of the prayer is in order.

First, Daniel begins the prayer on a transcendent/immanent note, the first point of the covenant (9:3). He acknowledges God as transcendent, the God of the covenant by using the covenantal name for God in His sovereignty: Lord God.

Second, Daniel chronicles the sins of the past in a historical prologue (9:4-8), the second point of the covenant matching the Deuteronomic structure (Deuteronomy 1:9ff.). Also consistent with the hierarchical nature of the second part of the covenant, Daniel notes the sins of the kings and princes (9:6, 8), the hierarchy of Israel, as well as Israel's failure to heed other representatives, the prophets (9:6).

1. Meredith Kline, "The Covenant of the Seventieth Week," *The Law and Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1977), p. 456.

2. J. Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophetique contre Israel apres la rupture de l'alliance* (Montreal: Bellarmine, 1967), pp. 157ff. Quoted by Kline in *Law and the Prophets*, pp. 456-457.

3. D. W. Kerr, *The Meaning of the Words Hodah and Todah in the Old Testament* (1966; unpublished Harvard doctoral dissertation), p. 180. Quoted in *Law and the Prophets*, p. 457.

4. Kline, *Law and the Prophets*, pp. 457-458.

Third, Daniel cites the fact that Israel has not obeyed the specific laws and commands of the "voice of the Lord" (9:9-11a), the third part of the covenant having to do with ethical stipulations.

Fourth, following the ethics section, Daniel makes specific reference to the "curse and oath" (9:11b-13), elements of the oath segment of the Deuteronomic covenant (Deuteronomy 27-30). He relates the present "disaster" to the "curse" of God (v. 12).

Fifth, Daniel closes on the successional concern (9:14-19), asking God to remember how He delivered Israel from Egypt. He equates the bondage under Egypt to the captivity of Babylon. He in essence asks for a transfer back to the Promised Land. This is the final emphasis of the Deuteronomic covenant where we read of Moses' anointing Joshua to accomplish the very thing that Daniel is recalling to God. He closes the prayer, "O Lord, Hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name" (9:19). He ends by reminding God of His inheritance that is at stake, ultimately His own name, should Israel perish.

Thus ends the covenantal prayer of Daniel. But it is not the end of Israel for God is not finished with this heir. The Lord responds covenantally to this covenantal prayer with a covenantal prophecy. He will tell of the full restoration of Israel and Jerusalem. As Meredith Kline says, "Gabriel's answer moves on beyond the horizon of the prayer, disclosing that the ultimate purpose of the seventy weeks program was that the divine covenant keeper *should* not merely restore but consummate the covenant order He had given to Israel through Moses."<sup>5</sup>

### The Covenantal Seventy Weeks Prophecy of Daniel 9:20-27

The covenantal structure of this prophecy confirms Kline's observations. It also sets the framework for understanding why this prophecy is fulfilled in A.D. 70! It explains the greatest covenantal transfer in the consummation of God's dealings with Israel.

#### Transcendence (9:22-23)

Gabriel actually begins to speak in these verses, even though we are given some background in verses 20-21. Gabriel's comments are similar to Moses' opening statements in the Deuteronomic covenant (Deuteronomy 1:3). He is there by "commandment" to deliver the prophecy, indicating that he is relaying this revelation from the Lord. He describes in his prophecy a God who is *transcendent* and immanent, one so powerful as to bring about the details of the prophecy and yet one so personal as to speak face to face.

#### Hierarchy (9:24)

This verse is a historical overview of the seventy weeks, forming a historical prologue to the prophetic covenant. This is commonly done in the Biblical covenant, especially in the Deuteronomic covenant (Deuteronomy 1:9-4:49). Gabriel says that "Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city" (9:24a); obviously the city is Jerusalem. He implies complete restoration at the end of the "seventy sevens," as it literally reads. How long, he doesn't clarify. Whatever view of the "seventy sevens," all positions on the passage end up with some part of this time period being viewed symbolically. In the next verse, it will become obvious that the divisions within the "seventy sevens" are symbolic and should not be pressed into exact year equivalents.

5. Kline, *Law and the Prophets*, p. 455.

Gabriel describes six items of restoration to be completed by the end of the seventy sevens. Premillennialism generally holds that these items will not happen until a future "Great Tribulation." Amillennialism believes that these items occurred at the Cross. Covenantal Postmillennialism maintains, which I will try to represent, that these items occurred at A.D. 70.

To finish the transgression: Daniel had prayed about the "transgression" of Israel. He directly ties the transgression to the city of Jerusalem and especially to the "sanctuary," the temple (9:16-17). He is now told that the transgression would be finished at the end of the seventy sevens period. The event could not be tied exclusively to the Cross, for the Apostle Paul speaks of the "filling up of their sins" after the Cross (1 Thessalonians 2:16). The event could not be beyond the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 because this is the ultimate destruction of Judaism where the sacrificial system and means of removing transgressions was forever removed; as some dispensationalists know, even if the temple were rebuilt there would be no ashes of the red heifer for purification water and no shekinah glory to fill the Holy of Holies because it is with the Church. Thus, the only event that could satisfy the "finish of transgressions" is A.D. 70.

To make an end of sins: The plural for sin is used, meaning it refers to specific sins. Max King suggests the translation, "To seal up sins," and refers to Hengstenberg's explanation when he says, "Sin, which hitherto lay naked and open before the eyes of a righteous God, is now by his mercy shut up, sealed, and covered, so that it can no more be regarded as existing."<sup>6</sup> In other words, the sins of Israel were viewed as particularly associated with the temple and its sacrifices, as indicated by the reference to the great judgments connected with abominations committed there (Daniel 11:36). To destroy the temple was to remove the tool of abomination from the hand of the Jew, which happened in A.D. 70.

To make reconciliation for iniquity: To make reconciliation means to cover it. Consistent with the first two references, this covering took place in A.D. 70 when God literally raised the temple to the ground.

To bring in everlasting righteousness: In the Old Testament, righteousness was directly associated with the temple in Jerusalem. At the fall of the temple in A.D. 70, the standard of righteousness was finally disassociated from the temple in Jerusalem. And, the righteousness of Christ that was established at the Cross was consummated as the old righteousness was forced out of existence.

To seal up vision and prophecy: Vision and prophecy were also associated with the temple in the Old Testament. When the temple was destroyed, all prophecies connected to the temple were sealed up, closed.

To anoint the Most Holy: This could not apply to the Cross event because the Most Holy place in the temple was not anointed; the veil was torn. This anointing could not refer to a future Holy of Holies because it cannot be a place of sacrifice according to the message of the Book of Hebrews. This anointing must therefore be an anointing by judgment, which comes in A.D. 70.

6. Max King, *The Cross and the Parousia of Christ* (Warren, Ohio, 1987), p. 331.

Thus, upon close examination, the only time for the fulfillment of these six items of the hierarchy section of the covenantal prophecy is A.D. 70. As has been implied all through the discussion, the authority structure of the covenant shifts away from the temple and to the new temple in heaven (Hebrews 12:22).

### **Ethics (9:25)**

This verse has an ethical emphasis because it speaks of a "command" which begins the seventy weeks, a command that was actually given by Cyrus (538 B.C.), although some have argued for other times.<sup>7</sup> The point is: Obedience to an ethical directive rebuilds the city and the temple. This is the essence of the entire ethical section of the Deuteronomic covenant. This is how Christ built the new temple, perfectly fulfilling the law.

### **Oath (9:26)**

This verse has a specific reference to the sanction section of the covenant, cut off, a phrase that speaks of the means of taking oath in the Old Testament. The phrase, cut off, refers to circumcision, meaning the Messiah would be cut off in reality and not symbolically as circumcision teaches.

In addition, a second judgment/sanction is mentioned, destruction of Jerusalem. The "people of the prince" is a reference to the Jews. The "prince" is Christ, staying in context with the previous verse that uses the phrase, "Messiah the Prince."

### **Succession (9:27)**

The final section of the prophecy describes the "consummation" of the judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70, a succession from one age to another. The key to the verse is the "bringing to an end of sacrifice and offering in the middle of the last week." The sacrifice of animals did stop in the middle of the seven-year war of the Jews, dated from A.D. 66 to A.D. 73. The daily sacrifices were discontinued in July A.D. 70.<sup>8</sup> This was the end of the Old Covenant era. But the end signalled something new.

We should not forget that Gabriel had told Daniel that his prayer for a restored Jerusalem and people was answered. How does the judgment of Jerusalem speak of an answer to the prayer? The promises of a new Jerusalem in a new heaven and new earth, prophesied by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 61-65), would be fulfilled. Daniel knew these prophecies and he knew that Gabriel was telling him the Jerusalem, as he had known it, only had seventy sevens. This is the succession of the covenant. A former heir, Israel of the Old Covenant, is replaced with a new heir, Jesus Christ and His kingdom. Succession in this covenant means a new heir forever, never to be reversed. Such a succession from one Jerusalem to another, as Gabriel has revealed to Daniel, means the prophecy is a covenant just as Daniel's prayer had been a covenantal prayer.

7. Sir Robert Anderson, *The Coming Prince* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1957), pp. 121-128.

8. Emil Schurer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), p. 269.