

ANCIENT WORLDS *of the* BIBLE

Study Guide 4

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The time prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27 is one of the most specific Old Testament predictions pointing to Jesus as the Messiah. It declares that “seventy weeks” (or 490 days) would be allotted to Jerusalem and to Daniel’s people, the Jews. Interpreting each day as a year (see Ezekiel 4:6; Numbers 14:34), the prophecy spans a period of 490 years. A shorter portion—sixty-nine weeks, or 483 years—leads up to the coming of the Messiah, or “Anointed One.”

History records several decrees concerning the return of the exiles, but only the decree of Artaxerxes in 457 BC fulfills all the criteria of this prophecy (see Ezra 7). Counting forward 483 years brings us to AD 27, the year Jesus was baptized. He then ministered for about three and a half years before His crucifixion. The prophecy foretells that the Messiah would be “cut off, but not for Himself,” and that “in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.” At His death, the temple veil was torn from top to bottom, signaling the end of the sacrificial system’s significance.

For another three and a half years following His resurrection, the disciples preached the gospel in Judea—until persecution drove them to spread the message more broadly (see Acts 7:59–8:4). Just a few years later, in AD 70, Jerusalem was destroyed.

Why did the Jewish nation reject Jesus and the gospel message? In part, it was due to a misinterpretation of prophecy. Like the Crusaders many centuries later, the religious leaders focused on prophecies about the Messiah’s eternal reign in Jerusalem, while overlooking those that spoke of His suffering and death for sin. In the same way, we too could be deceived if we fail to understand how the ancient predictions of Scripture apply to our time!

Decoding an Ancient Prediction

History is littered with stories of people who spent their lives pursuing the fulfillment of ancient predictions. In the late 11th century, a wave of religious fervor swept across Europe. Pope Urban II proclaimed the First Crusade at the Council of Clermont in 1095, but his original vision quickly morphed into a popular movement fueled by the preaching of Peter the Hermit. Thousands believed they were living on the edge of the end times. If they could reclaim Jerusalem from Muslim rule, they believed, it would trigger Christ’s return and the establishment of His kingdom.

Among the earliest to act on Peter’s vision was Count Emicho of Leiningen, who claimed that Christ had personally called him to fulfill prophecy. His “army” was a ragtag band drawn not only from eager peasants but also from mystics and fanatics — including a group that famously worshiped a goose, believing it was filled with the Holy Spirit to guide them to Jerusalem.

Emicho never reached the Holy Land. After pillaging the countryside and murdering countless Jews, his undisciplined forces were eventually routed in Hungary, leaving a trail of bloodshed and tragedy across Europe. Yet the larger Crusader army pressed on, convinced that victory in Jerusalem would bring about the end of the age.

The saga of these so-called “Holy Wars” would continue for two centuries. The knights of Europe eventually succeeded in establishing Crusader states, driving out many Muslims and Jews from the Holy Land, at least for a time. But their long-sought dream of ushering in the millennial reign of Christ in Jerusalem never materialized.

Later we will explore the prophecies of Christ’s triumphant reign, but this lesson looks at an ancient prediction that pointed to His first coming.

Prophecies of Time

Some of the most fascinating Bible prophecies are the predictions that point to a specific time. Jeremiah prophesied that Jerusalem would go into captivity and that “these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.” (Jeremiah 25:11) This was fulfilled exactly as the Bible predicted, when Cyrus let the Jews return to Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 36:19-23).

The time prophecy of Daniel 9 is even more fascinating, because it points to a coming “Anointed One” or “Messiah.” Let’s read it and fill in the blanks:

“ _____ weeks are determined
For your people and for your _____,
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 _____ . (v. 24)

“Know therefore and understand,
That from the going forth of the command
To _____ and _____ Jerusalem
Until _____ the Prince,
There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; (v. 25)

“And after the sixty-two weeks
_____ shall be cut off, but not for Himself;
And the people of the _____ 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. (v. 26)

Then he shall confirm a _____ with many for one week;
But in the _____ 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.” (v. 27)

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

SCRIPTURE: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.” (Mark 1:15)

REFLECTION: Throughout His ministry, Jesus referred to a divine timetable that outlined His work on this earth. (Luke 4:16-21, Matthew 26:18, Luke 22:16, John 7:6-8, John 7:30, John 8:20, John 12:23, 27). Do you think that Jesus’ timetable connects to our time, as well?

EXPERIENCE: Have you ever had a “chance” happening that seemed like it was orchestrated by God? How does that build your faith?

QUESTION: How can you tell if an event, something in the news, is a fulfillment of prophecy or just a coincidence?

INSIGHT: A portion of the 70-week prophecy, the final “week” or “seven” has become a popular framework for understanding many prophecies in Revelation. However, this interpretation requires inserting a long gap after week 69, in order for the 70th week to frame the end-time tribulation. Are you familiar with this theory? Do you think it’s a useful way of understanding this prophecy? Why or why not?

RESPONSE: Will you commit to study the prophecies of the Bible so that we will not be deceived?

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