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Does Following a Normal Grammatical-Historical Interpretive Methodology Demand a Gap Between the 69th and 70th Week of Daniel's Seventy Weeks Prophecy?

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1.1 Introduction

The “seventy weeks” prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 has provided an eschatological framework for a dispensational-premillennial understanding of God’s timetable for Israel. The basis for this framework stems from a perceived gap between the 69th and 70th prophetic week. The dispensationalist’s claim is that dispensational eschatology stems from a normal grammatical-historical reading of the biblical text. Some non-dispensational scholars have accused dispensationalists of abandoning a normal grammatical-historical interpretive methodology when interpreting Daniel 9:24-27 in order to accommodate certain *a priori* dispensational conclusions. This paper is intended to answer the question: *Does following a normal grammatical-historical interpretive methodology demand a gap between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel’s Seventy Weeks Prophecy, or is the presence of a gap a peculiar presupposition that dispensationalists must bring to the biblical text?*

1.2 The Significance of Daniel 9:24-27

Dispensational theologian John Walvoord has noted that the “interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27 is of major importance to premillennialism as well as pretribulationism,” and has referred to it as “the indispensable chronological key to Bible prophecy.”¹ Walvoord’s views concerning this passage are shared by dispensationalist Thomas Ice, who has written: “One of the most important prophecy passages in the whole Bible is that of God’s prophecy given in Daniel 9:24-27,” and to that he has added: “this text is both seminal and determinative in the outworking of one’s understanding of Bible prophecy.”² Concerning the importance of this prophetic passage, prominent reformed scholar Oswald T. Allis has agreed “the importance of the prophecy of the Seventy Weeks in Dispensational teaching can hardly be exaggerated.”³

¹ John Walvoord, “Seventy Weeks of Daniel,” in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, ed. by Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2004), 356.

² Thomas Ice, “Why a Gap in Daniel’s 70 Weeks,” Pre-Trib Research Center, accessed February, 02, 2016, <http://www.pre-trib.org/data/pdf/Ice-WhyAGapInDaniels70We.pdf>.

³ Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1945), 111.

1.3 The Contention over the Gap

In 2012 noted postmillennialist, Kenneth Gentry Jr. published a series of articles⁴ addressing what he describes as “Dispensationalism’s Difficulty with Daniel.” Gentry has concluded: “Daniel’s Seventy Weeks prophecy leads dispensationalism into one of its most strained peculiarities: the doctrine of the gap theory of the Church age.”⁵ Gentry’s contention over the dispensationalist’s interpretation of Daniel’s 70 week prophecy is shared by reformed theologian Gary DeMar, who has perhaps best articulated the concern of so many non-dispensational interpreters:

There is one major problem with the futurizing scenario that views the seventieth week as not being fulfilled in the first century: There is no *biblical* warrant for stopping Daniel’s prophecy of the seventy weeks after the sixty-ninth week. *The idea of separation and the placing of an indeterminable gap between the two sets of weeks is one of the most unnatural and nonliteral interpretations of Scripture found in any eschatological system.* This interpretation is taught by those who insist on a literal hermeneutic. If dispensationalists were consistent in their literalism, they would never manipulate Scripture to fit an already established prophetic system.⁶

DeMar proceeds to challenge the dispensationalist’s interpretation of Daniel’s seventy week prophecy by stating, in no uncertain terms: “The weeks form a unit without separation or a gap. Interpreters who place a gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel should be challenged to produce a single verse that even implies such a division.”⁷ DeMar’s accusation is two-fold, with the one argument being derived from the other. First, he insists that to perceive a gap between the 69th and 70th prophetic week of Daniel is unnatural and foreign to Scripture—thus, he maintains that it reflects a departure from the dispensationalist’s normal interpretive methodology. Second, as a result of this allegedly strained interpretation, he concludes that dispensationalists are guilty of manipulating Scripture to fit their *a priori* understanding of a futurist eschatology.

Since the second claim hinges entirely upon the first, it follows that if it can be demonstrated that the perception of a gap between the 69th and 70th prophetic week of Daniel is not a strained interpretation, but rather results from a normal grammatical-historical interpretive methodology, then the contention of so many non-dispensational interpreters must fall by the wayside. Moreover, if DeMar is correct in his assessment that there is “one major problem with the futurizing scenario that views the seventieth week as not being fulfilled in the first century,” then to demonstrate that there is, in fact,

⁴ Multiple articles are located at postmillennialism.com, one such article is titled “Dispensationalism’s Difficult with Daniel” (<http://postmillennialism.com/dispensationalisms-difficulty-with-daniel/>). Another article has the title “Is There a Gap in the Seventy Weeks?” (<http://postmillennialism.com/is-there-a-gap-in-the-seventy-weeks/>). A more complete and detailed article is located at Chalcedon.com with the title “Daniel’s Seventy Weeks and Biblical Prophecy” (<http://chalcedon.edu/research/articles/daniels-seventy-weeks-and-biblical-prophecy/>)

⁵ Kenneth L. Gentry, “Dispensationalism’s Difficulty with Daniel.”

⁶ Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Atlanta, GA: American Vision, 1994), 77.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

“*biblical* warrant for stopping Daniel’s prophecy of the seventy weeks after the sixty-ninth week” should silence the mouths of critics concerning the futurist interpretation of Daniel’s seventy week prophecy.

2.1 Background to Daniel’s Seventy Week Prophecy

Before proceeding to demonstrate this, however, it is worthwhile to review Daniel’s seventy week prophecy, and to brush-up on the particulars that lead to the contention being considered. The book of Daniel spans the long and illustrious career of the prophet Daniel who served as a Hebrew consultant to three different gentile kings revealed in Scripture by the following names: Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, Darius the Mede, and Cyrus the Persian. While historians and archaeologists have failed to confirm the specific identity of Darius the Mede, ample corroborating evidence has provided dates for both Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus the Persian. Moreover, experts have confirmed the date of the fall of Babylon at 539 B.C. Thus the dating of this prophecy is likely between 539 B.C. and 538 B.C.⁸ as revealed by internal evidence from the ninth chapter of Daniel:

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—in the first year of his reign, I Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

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, 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. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, “O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand. 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.” (Daniel 9:1-3; 20-24)

This provides the reader with the relevant context for understanding Daniel’s seventy weeks. The text indicates that God provided Daniel understanding concerning “the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem” (Dan 9:2). Therefore, at the outset it can be safely determined that the background for Daniel’s seventy weeks prophecy is Jeremiah’s seventy years prophecy which concerned the number of years that Jerusalem would suffer desolation and be an object of ridicule, subject to Babylonian captivity (Jer 25:11).

Therefore, thus says the Lord of Hosts: “Because you have not heard my words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,” says the Lord, “and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against

⁸ Andrew E. Hill, “Daniel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. by Tremper Longman III and Garland E. David (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 8:157.

these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations. Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then it will come to pass, when seventy years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity," says the Lord; "and I will make it a perpetual desolation." (Jeremiah 25:8-12)

Not long afterwards, Jeremiah added to this prophesy:

For thus says the Lord: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive." (Jeremiah 29:10-14)

This message of the prophet, which promised Israel's return from Gentile captivity after so many years, hearkens back to the language of Moses in those days when the children of Israel were gathered in Moab, overlooking the land that God had promised them, saying:

"Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God drives you, and you return to the Lord your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you. If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the Lord your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers." (Deuteronomy 30:1-5)

Against the backdrop of all these centuries of Jewish expectation, which began not with Daniel, nor with Jeremiah before him, neither did it begin with the land covenant God established with Israel through Moses, but rather stretched so far back as the covenant God had made with the Patriarch Abraham, Daniel prayed with confidence, knowing that God's word was reliable. So that in his day, as a member of the generation that not only went into Babylonian captivity at the hands of King Nebuchadnezzar, but as one who outlived that regime and was now a member of the court of King Darius the Mede, Daniel made supplications to God concerning when the seventy years of captivity, which Jeremiah had numbered, would be accomplished.

Some scholars have debated whether “Jeremiah’s seventy-year period of Babylonian rule might be reckoned to begin with Judah’s submission to Babylon in 605 B.C. or with the fall of Jerusalem in 597 or 587 B.C.”⁹ In either case, Daniel would have been a youth at the time when it occurred, and thus, some sixty plus years later, he would have been justified in his desire to see Jeremiah’s seventy-year prophecy draw to a close. If nothing else, this helps to reveal that Daniel’s sincere expectation was that Jeremiah’s seventy-year prophecy would run for seventy literal years.

These circumstances form the background for the message delivered to Daniel by the angel Gabriel, saying: “O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand...therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision” (Dan 9:22-23).

2.2 Daniel’s Seventy Week Prophecy

Though Daniel does not express his dismay, the understanding that the angel Gabriel provided Daniel was that God had decreed seventy-sevens for the people of Israel and for their holy city, Jerusalem. Thus, Daniel came to understand that while he may have been nearing the end of the seventy years prophesied by the prophet Jeremiah, God had determined that Israel would yet endure seventy periods of seven years, amounting to no fewer than four-hundred and ninety years.

“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.

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.

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.

⁹ John Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary 30 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 239.

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 9:24-27)

While the concept of “weeks of years” may present some confusion to modern readers, the idea of weeks or heptads¹⁰ of years would not have been in any way unfamiliar to Daniel. Israelites were intimately accustomed to “seven weeks of years,” as Moses had delivered to them in the year of Jubilee: “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). In this manner, the seventy heptads would correspond to Jeremiah’s seventy years inasmuch as both concern the divinely appointed times of Israel’s displacement from the Promised Land.

Not unlike Jeremiah’s seventy-year prophecy, Daniel’s seventy weeks prophecy had a definitive starting point, expressed in verse twenty-five: “the command to restore and build Jerusalem.” Again, this occasion is settled historically by both internal and external evidence. As Sir Robert Anderson noted in his classic work *The Coming Prince*:

The edict in question was the decree issued by Artaxerxes Longimanus in the twentieth year of his reign, authorising [sic] Nehemiah to rebuild the fortifications of Jerusalem.

The date of Artaxerxes’s reign can be definitely ascertained—not from elaborate disquisitions by biblical commentators and prophetic writers, but by the united voice of secular historians and chronologers [sic]...The seventy weeks are therefore to be computed from the 1st of Nisan B.C. 445.¹¹

What is unique about Daniel’s prophecy is that it provides key internal markers which serve to confirm the veracity of the prophecy. Without these crucial markers, it might be understandable that some interpreters would be left scratching their heads and shrugging their shoulders. Since these internal markers are provided, readers are not justified in remaining agnostic concerning the timespan of the first sixty-nine weeks of this prophecy.

“Know therefore and understand,
 That from the going forth of the command
 To restore and build Jerusalem

¹⁰ The Hebrew phrase שִׁבְעִים שָׁבָעִים *shib`iyim shabuwa`* is best translated “seventy sevens” or “seventy heptads.” A week of days are nowhere expressed by the text. To the contrary, years are implied, if by no other means, the association with Jeremiah’s seventy-year prophecy, here God is revealing to Daniel, by contrast, seventy heptads of years.

¹¹ Sir Robert Anderson, *The Coming Prince* (1894: repr., Edinburgh: Pickering & Inglis, n.d.), 121.

Until Messiah the Prince,
There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks;

And after the sixty-two weeks
Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself.” (Daniel 9:25-26)

In no uncertain terms, the reader of this prophecy is supplied with not only the start date of this prophecy—which corresponds to the command given by Atexerxes in 445 B.C. to rebuild Jerusalem (Neh 2:1-9)—but the arrival of Messiah as a marker, signifying the close of the sixty-ninth week (Dan 9:25). Perhaps this sheds light on why—if not in anticipation of the coming of the Jewish Messiah—Chaldean wise men from the east, were looking to the skies nearly five centuries later (Matt 2:1-2). Surely if they had access to the prophet Micah, which they had quoted to King Herod (Matt 2:6), they had access to Daniel’s prophecy—seeing as how Daniel himself was counted among the Babylonian magi, and likely penned this prophecy in their own hometown.

In either case, it can be determined from the language of this prophecy that the period spanning from the command to rebuild Jerusalem, issued in 445 B.C., until the arrival of the Messiah would be seven tetrads and sixty two tetrads (Dan 9:25), or 49 years and 434 years, for a total of 483 years. Sir Robert Anderson has done an immeasurable service to mathematically challenged readers by calculating the number of days—based on the Jewish 360-day calendar—spanning from the month of Nisan in 445 B.C. forward. Based on his calculations he arrived at the date of April 6 A.D. 32.¹² Whether his dates are precise or in some way flawed is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say, the nearness of this date to the arrival of the Messiah, demonstrates the reliability of Daniel’s prophecy as far as the first 69 weeks are concerned.¹³

Therefore, with the conclusion of this review of Daniel’s seventy week prophecy, the following summary observations could be made: 1) Daniel’s prophecy anticipates a span of seventy heptads of years—or 490 years; 2) Daniel’s prophecy anticipates a commencement that corresponds to the command to rebuild Jerusalem—likely 445 B.C.; 3) Daniel’s prophecy anticipates that the arrival of the

¹² Anderson, *The Coming Prince*, 127.

¹³ In his book *Daniel’s Prophecy of the 70 Weeks*, Alva J. McClain clarifies that the arrival of the Messiah is not a reference to His birth, but the day of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem: “That our Lord understood perfectly the crucial nature of His action on that day is unmistakably clear from the record in Luke 19:28-44, a passage which should be studied carefully noting the following details: First, realizing that the day had arrived for Him to ride up to Jerusalem in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9, He sends His disciples to procure the “colt” upon which as the *King* He must appear (30-34). Second, the whole multitude of the disciples, clearly understanding the meaning of His act, began to shout a well known quotation from a Messianic Psalm (118:22-26), saying, “Blessed be the *King* that cometh in the name of the Lord” (37-38). Third, although previously He had forbidden the disciples to make Him known as the Messiah, now He rebukes the Pharisees’ protest and commends the disciples’ shout, saying that “if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out” (39-40). Certainly something was happening here that had never happened before. But most important of all, we have from the lips of Christ Himself an estimate of the unparalleled importance of that day and what He was doing. Weeping over the city because He knew in advance the certainty of His rejection, He laments, “If thou hadst known, even thou, in *this day*, the *things which belong unto thy peace*, but now they are hid from thine eyes” (42). What “day”? Why, the day God had fixed in Daniel’s prophecy. (26-27). Alva J. McClain, *Daniel’s Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks* (1969: repr., Winona Lake, IN: Zondervan Pub. House, 1969).

Jewish Messiah would occur after seven and sixty-two heptads—or 483 years. Thus, the first 69 of the 70 weeks prophecy of Daniel were fulfilled, literally, and in perfect keeping with how one would expect them to occur, based on a normal grammatical-historical interpretation of the language.

3.1 The Challenge over the Gap

Up to this point in the argument, there is generally little debate among conservative Evangelical interpreters. Any contention that may exist usually centers on the rigidity of the chronological timetable of Daniel's prophecy. Some non-dispensational scholars have argued that the seventy week prophecy is imprecise, and that it is not intended to reflect a chronological sequence.¹⁴ However, that is not the challenge raised by reformed theologians such as Kenneth Gentry, and Gary DeMar. Their contention is that dispensational interpreters depart from a normal grammatical-historical interpretive methodology at this most crucial point. They maintain that this departure results from an *a priori* commitment to a futurist expectation of eschatological events rather than a plain reading of the biblical text.

If dispensationalists were consistent in their literalism, they would never manipulate Scripture to fit an already established prophetic system. The weeks form a unit without separation or a gap. Interpreters who place a gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel 9:24-27 should be challenged to produce a single Bible verse that even implies such a division. Why is there no mention of this “great parenthesis” either in the Bible or in nearly nineteen hundred years of church history?¹⁵

4.1 Answering the Challenge

The first step in answering this challenge must include clarifying some terms. Namely, that dispensational interpreters are not beholden to a rigid “literalism” that is irrespective of the normal use of language. The term “literalism” has been used in a pejorative manner as if to imply that dispensationalists cannot discern between genres of literature, such as would be typical of narrative as opposed to poetic or prophetic language. This unfortunate mischaracterization of the dispensationalist's hermeneutic may be useful in constructing a “straw man” argument, but does little to address the issue.

4.2 Defining the Dispensationalist's Interpretive Method

The dispensationalist's method of interpretation is best described by the term historical-grammatical, which emerged from the Reformation and post-Reformation periods of Western European Christianity.¹⁶ The historical-grammatical method is one which stems from Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, John Knox, and a host of Protestant Reformers who were reacting to the allegorical method which had

¹⁴ John Goldingay represents this position in his commentary *Daniel* (Word Biblical Commentary): “It begins from Jeremiah's ‘seventy years,’ which was hardly a chronological calculation but a term denoting a period such as human lifetime that extends beyond the years that the hearers will see; it combines that with the principle of sevenfold punishment from Lev 26. None of this background suggests that either the total period of 490 years or its subdivisions are to be expected necessarily to correspond numerically to chronological periods.” (258)

¹⁵ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 77-78.

¹⁶ Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (1950: repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973), 32-33.

dominated the medieval church for nearly a millennium.¹⁷ This hermeneutical method is founded on basic, fundamental principles which assign to the grammar the same meaning it would normally possess in common usage, given account of its historical context. In other words, it expects the language to express the plain, ordinary sense that it would convey if it were not of supernatural origin. Simply stated: it does not anticipate that the rules of language would be broken, on account of the fact that God is the one speaking.

It should be noted that the historical-grammatical method is affirmed by dispensational and non-dispensational scholars, alike. What is different about the dispensationalist's use of the historical-grammatical method is that it is employed with a greater degree of consistency. That is to say, the dispensationalist is less prone to depart from the normal historical-grammatical interpretive method simply because previously, reformers may have done so, as in the case of Calvin's interpretation of the millennium.¹⁸ Instead, the dispensational interpreter would be prone to interpret a text based on what a normal reading would convey, taking into account the historical context, the rules of grammar which govern the original language in which the message was conveyed (i.e. Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic), and in a manner that would be in keeping with the style and genre of literature of that day, whether historical narrative, poetical, prophetic, or otherwise.

4.3 Applying the Dispensationalist's Interpretive Method

Taking all of this into account, when it comes to the passage at hand, the question may be rightly asked: Does the normal grammatical-historical method, when applied to Daniel's prophecy demand a gap between the 69th and 70th week?

“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.
 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 9:26-27)

An argument could be made from the plain reading of the text that verse twenty-six does, in fact, allow for a gap, inasmuch as the language indicates that a number of significant events will occur “after” the 69th week, but prior to the 70th week: 1) Messiah will be cut-off; 2) the people of the coming

¹⁷ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (1950: repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1970), 51-60.

¹⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. II, XXV.V.

prince will destroy the city and the sanctuary; and 3) a war will conclude with desolations. Only after all of these monumental occurrences does the text reveal: “Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week” (Dan 9:27). Thus, it could be maintained that the text allows for a gap between the 69th and the 70th week, based on a normal historical-grammatical reading of the text.

However, that does not answer the question at hand. Although the text may allow for a gap between the 69th and 70th prophetic week, the question is whether a grammatical-historical interpretation of the text necessitates a gap. After all, one could even argue that the language: “the end of it shall be with a flood” (Dan 9:26) could imply suddenness, where all of these various events (the cutting-off of Messiah, the siege of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple, and the various desolations of war), would all cascade at once, at the commencement of the 70th week, and without interruption from the 69th week.

4.4 Daniel Likely Did Not Anticipate a Gap

Therefore, it may be considered quite unlikely that an interpreter, such as Daniel, or any other recipient living in his day, following a normal grammatical-historical interpretive methodology would have the expectation of a gap between the 69th and 70th week. That is to say that an interpreter living prior to the resolution of these events would be justified to expect that all of these events should occur in immediate succession without the presence of a gap between the 69th and 70th week.

4.5 Grammatical-Historical Interpretation Today Demands a Gap

However, it is necessary to observe that grammatical-historical interpreters living within the past two millennia have a unique advantage over interpreters of Daniel’s day, inasmuch as their position relative to the 69th week provides a historical perspective that must not be undervalued. This same historical perspective, which allows modern readers to look back upon the resolution of the first sixty-nine weeks and perceive of the precision with which the dating foretold the coming of the Messiah as well as his termination, serves to reveal that in or around AD 32-35, Jerusalem was not besieged, the temple was not laid waste, and no wars were resolved with a covenant of peace. Today’s interpreters can conclude with 100% certainty that such historical events simply did not occur.

Because of this, grammatical-historical interpreters are presented with one of two options: 1) depart from a normal grammatical-historical hermeneutic, and interpret the seventieth week allegorically or symbolically,¹⁹ or 2) perceive a gap between the 69th and 70th week, which would allow

¹⁹ A preterist perspective is offered by Ralph Woodrow, in his book *Great Prophecies of the Bible* (Riverside, CA: Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, 1989), which reflects the kind of imprecision that is typical of a non-dispensational interpretation of Daniel’s seventy week prophecy. In it, he argues that the phrase: “He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering” (9:27) was fulfilled by “the death of Christ that caused sacrifice to cease...after three and a half years—which was the length of Christ’s ministry” (107), thereby anticipating the cutting off of Messiah to have occurred in the middle of the seventieth week. Simultaneously, he maintains: “we know that the predicted destruction found fulfillment in 70 A.D. when the armies of Titus brought the city to desolation” (110), regardless of the fact that the biblical text indicates the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple will occur prior to the commencement of the seventieth week. Such feats of prophetic gymnastics are only possible with an allegorical, symbolical, or otherwise spiritualizing interpretive method

the seventieth week to resolve in a normal sequence, in keeping with the sixty-nine weeks which preceded it. Non-dispensational interpreters have generally chosen the former, whereas dispensational interpreters have maintained the latter.

It can therefore be concluded that the claim of Gentry, DeMar, and so many other non-dispensational interpreters must be abandoned. If dispensationalists are guilty of anything regarding their interpretation of Daniel's seventy week prophecy, it would be an obstinate insistence upon a normal grammatical-historical interpretation of the text, despite history not playing out according to an immediately successive sequence. By no means can it be said that the dispensationalist departs from this method when it comes to interpreting Daniel's seventy week prophecy. In fact, it is a stubborn insistence on maintaining a grammatical-historical methodology that demands the presence of a gap between the 69th and 70th week. Thus, the conclusion may be restated that the historical-grammatical method of interpretation not only allows for a gap between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel, but it demands it.

5.1 The Claim of No Biblical Precedent for a Gap

While it may be seen that dispensationalists may be acquitted from the charge of departing from a consistent application of their hermeneutic when interpreting the seventy week prophecy, there remains a final claim that must not go unanswered. What is to be the response to the non-dispensationalist, who claims: "Interpreters who place a gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel 9:24-27 should be challenged to produce a single Bible verse that even implies such a division"?²⁰ To them the following response should be given.

6.1 The Biblical Precedent for a Gap

It was noted previously that Daniel, or any reader of his day would have not likely perceived of a gap between the 69th and 70th week. This is principally because the Jewish expectation concerning the coming of Messiah was one which anticipated a single coming of a conquering king who would occupy the throne of David and displace all of the kingdoms of the earth. With the exception of Isaiah's insight concerning God's suffering Servant (Isa 52:13-53:12), Israel's rightful expectation was that the Jewish Messiah would come to earth not to serve, but to be served.

Once again, the hind-sight afforded to interpreters of the previous two millennia provide readers with ample reason to arrive at a very different conclusion. Evangelical interpreters of all stripes can agree that there is not one coming of Christ—but two. However, it must be admitted that this understanding results not merely from a reading of the Old Testament text, but rather because of the position of the reader, relative to the cross. Today's readers can therefore look back on prophetic texts throughout the Old Testament with far greater insight and understanding than those who lived in or around that day.

²⁰ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 78.

An excellent example of this can be seen in the Gospel according to Luke, where it is revealed that Jesus entered a synagogue in Nazareth at the outset of His public ministry, and the following scene occurred:

So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:16-21)

6.2 Jesus Perceived a Gap in Isaiah’s Prophecy

Readers who are familiar with this prophecy of Isaiah should note that Jesus abruptly interrupted His reading of this text concerning the day of the Lord. Not only did He stop in the middle of the prophecy, much to the amazement of His onlookers, He, in fact, stopped in the middle of a sentence. He did this in order that He could utter the statement: “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Lu 4:21).

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me,
Because the Lord has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,
To console those who mourn in Zion,
To give them beauty for ashes,
The oil of joy for mourning,
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
That they may be called trees of righteousness,
The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.”

And they shall rebuild the old ruins,
 They shall raise up the former desolations,
 And they shall repair the ruined cities,
 The desolations of many generations.
 Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks,
 And the sons of the foreigner
 Shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers.
 But you shall be named the priests of the Lord,
 They shall call you the servants of our God.
 You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles,
 And in their glory you shall boast.
 Instead of your shame you shall have double honor,
 And instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion.
 Therefore in their land they shall possess double;
 Everlasting joy shall be theirs. (Isaiah 61:1-7)

It can be seen from this reading of Isaiah that if had Jesus finished the sentence which He started to read, He would not have been able to conclude that He had fulfilled all of the words of that prophecy on that day. Jesus knew that the prophecy spoke both of His first coming as well as His second coming. Moreover, He knew the distinct purposes of each of these comings, despite the fact that first century readers could not perceive this from a normal grammatical-historical interpretation of the text.

Readers today can look back upon Jesus' reading in the synagogue and discern that, in accordance with the prophecy of Isaiah, Jesus had come "to preach the good tidings to the poor...to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives...to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Isa 61:1-2). Moreover, those who reflect on the life of Christ can plainly see that He had not come to bring the vengeance of God (Isa 61:2), nor did He declare the restoration of ruins that had remained desolate for generations (Isa 61:4). Nevertheless, these prophecies must be expected to still come to pass in the same manner as the former, that is to say, in a way that emerges from a normal grammatical-historical reading of this passage.

As Evangelical scholars are quick to point out, the prophecies of the Old Testament, concerning Christ's first coming, were literally fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. He was born of a woman (Gen 3:15, Matt 1:20), more specifically, He was born of a virgin (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:22-23), in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2; Matt 2:1), from the line of Abraham (Gen 12:3, 22:18, Matt 1:1), Isaac (Gen 17:19; Lu 3:34), and Jacob (Num 24:17; Matt 1:2), of the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:10; Lu 3:33), He would be called a Nazarene (Isa 11:1; Matt 2:23), and would speak in parables (Ps 78:2-4; Matt 13:10-15), be betrayed (Ps 41:9, Lu 22:47-48), falsely accused (Ps 35:11; Mar 14:57-58), crucified with criminals (Isa 53:12; Ma 27:38), buried with the rich (Isa 53:9; Matt 27:57-60), and would rise from the dead (Ps 16:10; Matt 28:2-7). The burden of proof should therefore rest squarely upon those who would suggest that the prophecies related to Christ's second coming will not be of the same character, and thus, be literally fulfilled.

7.1 Conclusion

This paper has served to demonstrate that the dispensational understanding of the “seventy weeks” prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 emerges from the consistent application of a normal grammatical-historical interpretive methodology. Moreover, it has been affirmed that the perception of a gap between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel is not the result of a futurist presupposition that dispensationalists bring to the text. Finally, the claim that there is no precedent for an indeterminable gap of time in prophecies concerning Christ’s first coming and His second coming has been proven to be unfounded. It may, therefore, be concluded that: *following a normal grammatical-historical interpretive methodology demands a gap between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel’s Seventy Weeks Prophecy.*

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