

Why Did Israel Go into Captivity for 70 Years?

Supplemental to Daniel's Seventy Weeks

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We are in a study of the Book of the Revelation and are looking at God's great plan to which He referred when He told the Philadelphian Church that He would "keep them from the *hour of temptation* which shall *come upon all the world*, to *try them that dwell upon the earth*." Revelation 3:10 Not only is this a promise to keep the Church from going through the Tribulation Period, but it gives us a peek behind the curtain of Biblical prophecy and as such, is very instructive and helpful as we seek to comprehend God's purpose and plan for the future. God has a plan that He is working toward a goal He is going to accomplish. His plan is to bring all things to a consummation under His Son the Lord Jesus Christ (see Ephesians and Colossians for a detailed discussion of the plan coming to ultimate completion in Christ) as described in Daniel 9:24-27. He has divided humanity into three groups according to 1 Corinthians 10:32 "Give none offence, neither to *the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God*:"

- **The Jews – an earthly people** with **EARTHLY PROMISES** that **MUST** be literally fulfilled in a Land, a Leader (Messiah), and Kingdom. These people are the people of promise in the Old Testament who were temporarily set aside for their blindness and folly in rejecting Christ at His first coming. God must purify by the Great Tribulation and restore them and fulfill all the promises He made to them in the covenants of the Old Testament in the Kingdom. Daniel 9:24-27 is largely about them. As a type in the Old Testament they are like Noah who rode out the flood in the Ark of safety protected by God.
- **The Gentiles -an earthly people** with **NO PROMISES** (see Ephesians 3:11-12). They were forsaken by God at the tower of Babel and used as an instrument of chastisement for the Jews during the "times of the Gentiles." God will judge them severely but in mercy save some of them during the Great Tribulation period. Daniel 9:24-27 is secondarily about them. As a type in the Old Testament they are like those who rejected Noah's invitation and perished in the flood by despising the Ark of safety provided by God.
- **The Church of (belonging to) God– a heavenly people** with **HEAVENLY PROMISES** (Ephesians 1:3-14) hidden from the Old Testament revelation and whose judgment was borne by Christ on the cross. These must be taken out of the World prior to the Tribulation by the Rapture of the Church (I Thessalonians 4 and Revelation 3:10; 4:1). Daniel 9:24-27 is has little to do about them, but the very structure of the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ as well as some of the early history of the world can be very helpful for our understanding. In the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the Church appears very prominently in the first three chapters, then utterly disappears until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory in Revelation 19. Israel, if it appears at all in the first three chapters of Revelation, is mostly antagonistic to the Church. Then, beginning after the disappearance of the Church, God's attention and activity for most of the book of the Revelation is riveted upon the Jewish people as the great tribulation breaks upon the world like the judgment of the flood in the days of Noah. This is very suggestive especially when we remember that as a type in the Old Testament book of Genesis, the church is like Enoch who was caught out of the world **BEFORE** the flood came. Israel, on the other hand is like Noah, who stood as a witness to his neighbors (the Gentiles prefigured) and was kept by God **THROUGH** the judgment of the Great Flood, just as Israel will be kept through the Great Tribulation Period.

Daniel 9:24-27 makes clear that God had determined a plan of 490 years to bring about His entire plan with 483 years culminating in the presentation, rejection, and crucifixion of Messiah the Prince. Then the divine stopwatch stopped its countdown for an indeterminate period of years called the Church Age depicted prophetically in Revelation 2 and 3. With the Rapture of the Church (Revelation 4:1, I Thessalonians 4), God presses the countdown timer again and the Nation of Israel and the Gentiles must fulfill the last 7 years

of the 490 years of God's plan – called the Tribulation period (the last 3 ½ years being referred to as “the Great Tribulation” and the “time of Jacob's trouble).”

God is a God of order, beauty and symmetry. Once God establishes a pattern, He loves to continually cut according to that pattern. This is why we see certain motifs (patterns) emerging in the Scriptures again and again, such as favoring the younger son over the firstborn, exalting the humble and lowering the mighty, and bringing deliverance from unlikely places. This is also why we see certain numbers (3, 5, 7, 40, 70, 490 for example) appearing over and over in Scripture. God's use of the weak and insignificant Jewish nation to bring Messiah into the world and His use of 70 periods of 7 years in accomplishing that purpose is very clear both in Revelation and in Daniel 9:24-27. But this is not the first time God has used something seemingly insignificant and 70 periods of 7 years in accomplishing His great plan. It is important to pause and see that this second 490 years prophesied by Daniel is a repeat of a pattern God has already used. Because of severe failure of the people of Israel to live up to their covenant obligations over something as seemingly trivial as following the Sabbatical year requirements laid out in the Law of Moses, the judgment of God and the seventy-year Babylonian captivity came upon the Nation of Israel. Herein lies a cautionary tale for those who will hear and heed the Word of God. Let's examine the Biblical record for the failure that led to the initial 70 years of captivity representing 490 years of disobedience on the part of the Jews before we carefully examine the record of the seventy-weeks of Daniel and the coming 70th Week of Daniel which represents the Tribulation period from which the Church is to be sheltered. To do this properly we need to see how it fits into Daniel 9:24-27 by examining the context of Daniel 9 itself:

“In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; 2 In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.” Daniel 9:1–2

By the time of this writing, Daniel was a very old man. He had been a teenager when he had been taken captive to Babylon at the beginning of the 70 years of the Babylonian captivity of the Jews. He had outlived his captor, Nebuchadnezzar, and his empire. He had lived longer than Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's grandson and had lived in splendor and favor with the Medo-Persian conquerors of Babylon. As would be true of any man nearing the end of his own life and work, Daniel was concerned about the future for his own work and his own people would be. In an age where people believed that success on the battlefield demonstrated the strength and ability of one local deity over another, the Babylonians surely felt that their gods were superior to Jehovah of Israel. One of the supposed proofs of this was the destruction of the Temple of the LORD and the carrying away of the sacred vessels of the house of God. (This why Belshazzar had brought out the vessels of the house of the LORD to drink from during his feast during the siege of Medo-Persians against Babylon.)

Daniel knew otherwise, as demonstrated by Daniel 9:2: “In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.” Daniel had been reading God's Word, and especially the prophecy of Jeremiah which explained why Judah had been taken into Babylonian captivity. Let's read what Daniel read:

“And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. 12 And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations.” Jeremiah 25:11–12

*“For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.”
Jeremiah 29:10*

Several truths strike me from the reading of these texts.

- It was the LORD who brought about the Babylonian Captivity. It is true He used the Babylonians, but it was the LORD’s doing. He brought the Jews into the hands of Babylonians and He would set them free. Now this presented a bit of a problem for the prophet Habakkuk who lived at the same time that Jeremiah did and just before Daniel was taken captive. Let’s see what he had to say about this same situation:
 - “THE burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see. 2 O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! Even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! 3 Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? For spoiling and violence are before me: And there are that raise up strife and contention. 4 Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: For the wicked doth compass about the righteous; Therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.
 - 5 Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: For I will work a work in your days, Which ye will not believe, though it be told you. 6 For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, Which shall march through the breadth of the land, To possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs. 7 They are terrible and dreadful: Their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. 8 Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, And are more fierce than the evening wolves: And their horsemen shall spread themselves, And their horsemen shall come from far; They shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat. 9 They shall come all for violence: Their faces shall sup up as the east wind, And they shall gather the captivity as the sand. 10 And they shall scoff at the kings, And the princes shall be a scorn unto them: They shall deride every strong hold; For they shall heap dust, and take it. 11 Then shall his mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, Imputing this his power unto his god.
 - ¹² *Art* thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment; And, O mighty God, thou hast established them for **correction**. ¹³ *Thou art* of purer eyes than to **behold** evil, And canst not **look** on iniquity: Wherefore lookest thou upon them that **deal** treacherously, *And* holdest thy tongue when the wicked **devoureth the man that is** more righteous than he?” Habakkuk 1:1-13
- It was a sentence and it had a definite duration. God makes it clear it would last exactly 70 years...not 71 or 69, but exactly 70 years. In our court system we are very familiar with judicial guidelines that say the penalty for some crimes will be 5 years, some 10, some 20, and some life without hope of parole. *This is obviously a judicial proceeding*. Twice in Jeremiah we are told it would be a 70-year sentence.
- Finally, we know some basic reasons that Israel was judged from Habakkuk:
 - “O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! Even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! 3 Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? For spoiling and violence are before me: And there are that raise up strife and contention. 4 Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: For the wicked doth compass about the righteous; Therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.” Habakkuk 12-4
 - Violence – danger to the persons of society

- Spoiling or robbery – danger to the property of society
- Strife and contention – danger to the peace of society
- Law is slacked – danger to the precepts of society
- Wrong Judgement – danger to the principles of society

These five charges are characteristic of our society today!

But there is something more we can learn about this period. Let me ask the question: why 70 years? Well the answer is found both here in Jeremiah and in a parallel passage in Chronicles. Let's look again:

*“And **this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment**; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. 12 And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations.” Jeremiah 25:11–12*

*“For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, **in causing you to return to this place**.” Jeremiah 29:10*

*“And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: 21 **To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years**.” 2 Chronicles 36:20–21*

Here is the key! According to the Law of Moses, *the Land of Promise had to lie fallow every seventh year*. The Jews worked hard, planted much and stored up for six years and on the seventh, the Sabbatical year, they let the land rest. Here is what the Scriptures say:

“And the LORD spake unto Moses in mount Sinai, saying, 2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the LORD. 3 Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; 4 But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard. 5 That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed: for it is a year of rest unto the land. 6 And the sabbath of the land shall be meat for you; for thee, and for thy servant, and for thy maid, and for thy hired servant, and for thy stranger that sojourneth with thee, 7 And for thy cattle, and for the beast that are in thy land, shall all the increase thereof be meat.” Leviticus 25:1-7

If the Jews failed the Lord, He judge them and scatter them among the nations and allow the Land to rest.

“Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. 35 As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it.” Leviticus 26:34–35

So, the reason the length of the scattering was 70 years was that Israel had forsaken the Law of Moses and their covenant promises and did not allow the land to lie fallow for 70 sabbatical years.

70 times they missed the sabbatical year x every 7 years = 490 years

Daniel and friends were taken captive around 605 BC
Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Judah on 586 BC
So, what was happening 490 years prior to the coming of the Babylonians?

The year was somewhere around 1095-1076 BC – this was at the height of the Philistine invasion of Palestine and the reign of Samson and as the people began to argue that circumstances would not allow them to follow the Law of Moses. Like their judge, Samson, they did not trust in the LORD but in themselves. They stopped obeying the Law and started calling for a king. Samuel warned them about what having a king would do:

“And Samuel told all the words of the LORD unto the people that asked of him a king. 11 And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. 12 And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. 13 And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. 14 And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. 15 And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. 16 And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. 17 He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. 18 And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day.” 1 Samuel 8:10–18

So they first could not serve the LORD and obey Him because of their circumstances and enemies and now they could not serve Him because of their king and his taxes. Why does judgment come? There are seven lessons I would like to draw out of this as we conclude and go back to the 70 weeks:

1. Because we don't know the Word of God (many of the Jews were honestly ignorant of the teachings of the Bible in this area...but ignorance is absolutely no excuse. Surely we can understand their position because they were illiterate and did not own copies of God's Word. WE HAVE NO SUCH EXCUSE TODAY!
2. Because we think a little disobedience will not hurt anything – leaving a field fallow for a year does not seem like a big thing, but it became a habit, then a practice and finally a total failure.
3. Because we fear men more than God – Philistines and Kings seemed more frightening than falling into the eternal hands of a holy God.
4. Because we don't trust the LORD to meet our needs. They quit letting the land lie fallow for a year because they really did not believe that God could meet their needs during that year. This is more or less a practical atheism.
5. Because we allow government to be our god. Government, under the kings, took over the role of God. Today the church would have money to meet the needs of poor people if we followed God's plan.
 - People are to work and provide for themselves while they are able
 - Families are to care for the needs of each other
 - Churches are to care for those who have no family or those with too great a need for a family to bear
 - Government and Society is the last resort of support for those in real need
6. Because we think we can get away with sin

7. Because we don't think God will judge us