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MESSIAH: HIS FIRST COMING SCHEDULED

In the first message of the series I called your attention to the fact that the Eternal God is a triune being consisting of three personalities known as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In the second I endeavored to show from the scriptures that one of these divine personalities was scheduled to come into the world, entering it by virgin birth. And in the last one we learned, especially from Psalm 110, the outline of Messiah's redemptive career which consists of His coming to earth, of His rejection by His people (the Hebrew nation), of His return to heaven, of His session at the right hand of the throne of God, and of His future coming to earth to establish His kingdom when Israel accepts Him. In the present message it is proper for us to study the scriptural predictions which foretell the time when the Messiah was scheduled to make His first appearance according to His great redemptive scheme.

Jacob told us in Genesis 49:10 that the sceptre should not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh would come and unto Him would be the obedience of the peoples. By all conservative scholars this prediction is recognized as being messianic. In the light of the full context of this prediction, it is evident to every one that this prophecy foretold that Judah would be exercising the sovereignty among the tribes of Israel at the time when Messiah would make His first appearance. Since the preeminence of that tribe and the entire national government of the throne of David passed out of existence in the year 70 A.D. when the Roman authorities captured the city of Jerusalem, and since this passage of Scripture cannot be broken, we are irresistibly driven by stubborn facts to believe that King Messiah made His appearance, according to His redemptive career, prior to that catastrophic event in 70 A.D. From this conclusion there can be no escape for the one who believes the Book of Genesis to be the infallibly inspired Word of God. Hence the year 70 A.D. is the date beyond which Messiah would not, according to this promise make His first advent into the world.

The next question which demands consideration is, "Have we any specific promise that would indicate the very date when He would come, or any other information concerning His life and ministry?" The answer to this question is found in the ninth chapter of Daniel, to which I will now give some special attention.

According to the first two verses, Daniel was studying the Book of Jeremiah the prophet concerning his prediction relative to the return of the Babylonian captives. It was in the sixty-eighth of the seventy years of exile that Daniel was reading the prophecy and praying in regard to the matter.

In verses 3-19 we find recorded the wonderful petition which Daniel uttered as his heart's response to the marvelous prediction which he had just read. The study of prophecy always has a salutary effect upon the one who reads it in order to learn the will of God. Invariably such study will bring one closer to God and cause him to conform his life to that of the Master's will.

In response to Daniel's petition the Lord dispatched Gabriel to give him further light concerning the prophecy. The angel admonished Daniel to listen attentively to his message.

In order to understand this new revelation brought by Gabriel, we must remember that Daniel was reading Jeremiah 25 and 29 which foretold that Israel would be in Babylonian captivity for seventy years. Since he had been reading this prediction, it is clear that he was thinking in terms of years.

The angel said to Daniel, "Seventy weeks are decreed upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy. Know therefore and discern, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the anointed one, the prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: it shall be built again, with street and moat, even in troublous times. And after the threescore and two weeks shall the anointed one be cut off, and shall have nothing: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and even unto the end shall be war; desolations are determined" (Dan. 9:24-26).

What is the meaning of the expression, "seventy weeks are decreed upon thy people and upon thy holy city"? Daniel's people and the holy city are the Hebrew people and the city of Jerusalem. Since the prophet was thinking in terms of years, as we have already seen, and especially since he had been thinking of the period of seventy years of Babylonian captivity, the angel Gabriel said that there would be seventy sevens decreed upon Daniel's people and the holy city. The Hebrew of this verse is translated "seventy weeks," but the English word *week* signifies seven days. The Hebrew word rendered "weeks" does not have any such connotation but simply means seven without any indication as to the objects that are enumerated. It is used similarly to our words *dozen* and *score*; Hence, when Gabriel said that there were seventy sevens decreed upon Daniel's people and the holy city, he naturally understood that the angel was speaking of years. Hence Gabriel foretold that seventy sevens of years, 490, were decreed upon the Hebrew people and upon the city of Jerusalem, "to finish transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy. God promised to bring about these six highly desirable blessings at the expiration of these 490 years. A Careful study of these items reveals the fact that the period here promised is none other than that of the great Kingdom Age for which Israel has been looking and which is called by the Christians the Millennial Era.

In this connection the question is most appropriate, "When did this period begin?" This query is answered in verse 25:

Know therefore and discern, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the anointed one, the prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: it shall be built again, with street and moat, even in troublous times."

From this verse we see that this era of 490 years begins with the proclamation of the decree to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem. Can we find when that order was issued? According to Isaiah's prophecy Cyrus the Persian, whom the Lord called His shepherd, would give this command and perform all His pleasure "even saying of Jerusalem, She shall be built; and of the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid" (Isa. 44:28). I believe that God through Isaiah spoke accurately when He said that Cyrus would issue the edict for the restoration of the temple and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Some good brethren however, have overlooked this prediction and have hastily, in my judgment, drawn an unwarranted conclusion from the decree

issued by Cyrus as recorded in the first chapter of Ezra. There only the temple is mentioned without a word concerning the city. Nevertheless I have faith to believe God knew what he was talking about when He said that Cyrus would issue the proclamation for the restoration of the *temple* and the *city*, even though the mention of the rebuilding of the city is not to be found in the recorded decree of Cyrus. If we will study the book of Ezra carefully, we shall see that the Jews, armed with such imperial authority, began to lay the foundation of the Temple and to build the city. This is clearly evident from the letter that was written by the enemies of the Jews to the Persian king. "Be it known unto the king, that the Jews that came up from thee are come to us unto Jerusalem: they are building the rebellious and the bad city, and have finished the walls, and repaired the foundations" (Ezra 4:12). If the decree had included only the Temple, the returned exiles never would have been presumptuous enough to go beyond the authority granted them and attempt to build the city. From this and several other statements in the Word of God, we may be certain that Cyrus actually did issue the command for the Jews to rebuild both Temple and city. In view of these facts, therefore, I am confident that the initial date of the 490 years mentioned by the angel Gabriel was the year 536 B.C. in the Ussher chronology, which corresponds to the year 3589 A.H. in the biblical system of computing time—which dates all events from the creation of Adam onward.

Accepting the date of 536 B.C. in the Ussher chronology, one cannot harmonize this position with the statement of the angel Gabriel. But are we called upon to harmonize the infallible statements of Scripture with man-made systems of chronology? Every one will answer in the negative. All students of chronology know that the B.C. dates, which are usually designated as the Ussher chronology, are incorrect, and realize that many mistakes were made in the computation for this system. I feel absolutely certain that the 490-year period began with the issuing of the decree of Cyrus for the Jews to return from Babylon to their native land.

With this thought settled in our minds we can advance another step by noting the fact that at the end of sixty-nine sevens of years, 483, the Messiah would be cut off and have nothing. Since the beginning of this period was the year 3589 A.H., which was the first year of the 483, we must add 482 to this date in order to arrive at the year when Messiah would be cut off. By the process of simple addition we find that, according to this prediction, His execution occurred in the year 4071 A.H.

Since He entered the world by virgin birth prior to this time, we may be certain that His birth occurred some years before that date.

From a reading of the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke we see that there were certain ones who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. There is only one way upon which we can account for this general expectation—namely, that those who were looking for the year of redemption were students of the prophetic Word and believed its message.

From the standpoint of the New Testament, we know that the Hebrew Messiah foretold in the Old Testament was none other than the Lord Jesus, who came as was foretold, and who grew up performing the works likewise foreshadowed by the Prophets. According to current chronological schemes, He was executed in the year 30 A.D.

When He poured out His life's blood upon the cross, He did it for the redemption of the human family—for all who will believe Him and accept His atoning mercy.