

The Great Tribulation: The Approaching Storm of God's Wrath, Part 2

Selected Scriptures

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Well, we return tonight to our study of "*The Great Tribulation: The Approaching Storm of God's Wrath.*" I think it was back during football season last year, I was watching a sporting event, and I saw a commercial that prompted me to stop and watch again. It was a commercial where someone had set up a series of dominos. There were probably tens of thousands of dominos that this person had apparently spent weeks to set up and stack in a certain way and someone accidentally blundered into it and you watch these dominoes just fall in sweeps across the room to the chagrin of the person who had spent days or weeks of his life setting it up.

As I think about what's coming in the history of the world, it really is an apt analogy. You and I need to understand that God, as it were, has already knocked the first domino. It began when time began. And things are marching, history is marching, inexorably toward the ends that God designed. Nothing can stop it. Nothing can change it. God has a plan and it will come to pass. That's what we're studying when we study end times and prophecy. We're studying the plan that God has put in place and that no one can stop.

As we study the tribulation, we're looking at the fact that at some point still in the future at the end of human history, there will be a period of seven years during which God will unleash His wrath against the present earth and its people. Let me remind you of how this falls in our biblical "ordo eschatos" that we set up at the very beginning of our study. You'll remember that the first and next event on the calendar for most of us will be death and then the intermediate state, that is, the state between death and when we receive our glorified bodies. The event that follows that as we've studied already will be the rapture of the church. And that will be followed by a seven-year period called the tribulation immediately followed then by the second coming of Jesus Christ.

We're studying that seven-year period called the tribulation when God unleashes His wrath against the present earth and its people. Now in the interest of time, I'm not going to review what we studied last week. So if you weren't here, I encourage you to go back and listen because there were some important concepts that I shared with you. I will share one review item. It's the most

important one and that's to understand the heart of this event. It is the wrath of God and the Lamb.

Now I want to begin tonight by looking at the purpose of the tribulation. Essentially, there is a threefold purpose as we find it in Scripture, this seven-year period. God will be accomplishing three things on the earth. First of all, He will be taking back the earth from the usurper. In Revelation 5, turn there with me, Revelation 5:1, we've been lifted into heaven by the apostle John, and he sees in the right hand of God on the throne a book written, literally a scroll. They wouldn't have had books as we have perfect bound, but rather a scroll. He sees a scroll in the hand of God written inside and on the back, probably a summary on the back side of the scroll, and that was sealed up with seven seals.

Now both the Romans and the Hebrews, when they were signing an important document, required a number of witnesses. And usually a witness would seal the document on the edge with each roll. The more important the document, the more seals and witnesses were required.

So, what kind of document is this in the hand of God that only the Lamb (as we read through the rest of the chapter), only Jesus Christ is worthy to open? Well, it could be any kind of contract. In the ancient world, this would have been the form for deeds, for marriage contracts, for rental agreements, for wills. I think we get a little insight to it, and I'm not going to turn there because of time, (in Exodus, or excuse me,) in Ezekiel 32 where we see a similar document. And in Ezekiel 32, the document is a title deed. Many interpreters believe that that's what this probably is. This is a scroll that is a title deed, specifically, the title deed to the earth. "The earth is the Lord's," the psalmist says, but it has been taken by rebels. There is a squatter if you will be trying to take what rightfully belongs to the Lord.

In John 12:31, Jesus refers to Satan as the ruler of this world. In Ephesians 2:2 he refers to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that's working in the sons of disobedience. And in 1 John 5:19, Satan is said to have the whole world lying in his lap. The earth, though it belongs to God, has been usurped by Satan. So, part of the reason for the tribulation is to take back the earth from Satan's rebellion. And as Jesus Christ breaks each seal as we'll look at next week, at the content of those seals, as He breaks each seal on this title deed, He takes back the earth for Himself.

A second reason (for the, or purpose) for the tribulation is to bring redemption to Israel. We'll touch on this when we come to the issues relating to the second coming and specifically to the millennium, but let me just give you a couple of texts. Zechariah 12:10, through the prophet Zechariah, God promises that there will come a time when "... [He] will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn."

Or as Paul puts it in Romans 11, there's coming a time when all Israel will be saved. Israel's rejection, Paul argues, is not total - there is a remnant even today. But neither is Israel's rejection final. There's coming a day when those Israelites, many of them who were alive at the time, will be saved. So, this tribulation period is a period in which God brings redemption to Israel. We'll look at that a little more next week as we look at the specific events.

A third purpose, a third and final, or excuse me, a third purpose (we'll look at one additional purpose) is to destroy false religion. If you were to read Revelation 17 and 18, a great deal is made of the reality that there is in the world a spirit of rebellion against God. It's characterized as "Babylon the Great, the Mother of (all) Harlots" or we could say the mother of all prostituted religion. There's been a lot of speculation as to who or what this is. We can't know absolutely for certain, but it's some great religious enterprise that is the great prostitution of all that God is doing in the world, and God will act to destroy false religion in that time.

And finally, a purpose of the tribulation is to punish Christ-rejecting people that are alive when He returns. We see this in a number of texts, but as I pointed out to you last time in Revelation 6, the people on earth understand this because when the seal, I believe it's the sixth seal, is broken, they said to the mountains and to the rocks,

"... Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

These are the reasons for the tribulation.

Now when you look at this period of time, there are some major figures that you need to understand that are a part of this time. Turn to Revelation 19. You meet all of the major players, the major figures in this great drama, in these verses beginning in Revelation 19:20. First of all, we meet someone called the beast, “I saw the beast.”

Now we are introduced to this figure back in Revelation 13:1 - 8. He is the political and military leader of the final world empire. He is Satan-dominated and controlled. He is also known in a number of other passages as the little horn (Daniel 7), as the little horn of Daniel 8, the prince who is to come of Daniel 9 and the willful king of Daniel 11. When we come to the New Testament in 2 Thessalonians 2, he’s called the man of lawlessness. But the most familiar title for this person is antichrist, the apostle John calls him in 1 John 2:18. Keep in mind that this man - he is a man although Satan-empowered and controlled - he will be the political and military leader of the earth’s final world empire before Christ returns.

The next mayor, major player that were introduced to is the false prophet. He’s called in Revelation 13:11 - 17 the beast from the earth. That’s when we are told most about him. He is the religious and spiritual leader of the final world empire. He is the one who points people to the antichrist. He persecutes believers according to Revelation 13, and he promotes the worship of antichrist with counterfeit signs. He’s known as primarily the false prophet in a variety of passages although initially he’s introduced as the beast from the earth.

So, you have the antichrist, the false prophet – the third major player in end time events is the dragon you’ll see in verse 2 of chapter 20 – the dragon. By dragon, we simply mean someone who is vicious, who destroys. This title occurs thirteen times in the book. We’re also given other names for this person so we can’t miss who it is. Look at verse 2 again. He’s the devil which simply means slanderer, he’s Satan which means adversary and he is the serpent of old which means he’s identified with the fall. So, we’re talking about the devil, Satan, that one who was at one time the shining cherub, the, the great Lucifer who came because of sin to be God’s enemy.

And the final and most important actor in this drama is the Lamb. He’s identified in chapter 5 very clearly for us. In fact, look back at Revelation 5:5,

... one of the elders said to me, “Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.” And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing....”

He turns to look for a lion and when he turns, he sees a lamb. Interesting Greek word here, it's the, a diminutive type word. It speaks of a little pet lamb. You remember that the Israelites were responsible to take that Passover lamb into their homes before it was actually slain and make it like a pet. Here Jesus is described like a little pet lamb that has been killed. Those are the major actors in this great drama called the tribulation and we'll look next week at how they interact with each other.

But what I want to do tonight is I want to give you a broad timeline of this period of time, a broad timeline of the tribulation. When you think of the basic structure of this time, it is seven year, a seven-year period with some kind of significant event at the midpoint and there are a number of texts that seem to highlight that. So, when does this seven-year period begin? Well, it begins shortly after the rapture. I say shortly because we don't know exactly how long the interval will be. The Scripture nowhere says that the tribulation is initiated by the rapture. There may even be a short time between them, but the Scripture is clear about what initiates the tribulation. It's not the rapture. It's a person.

Second Thessalonians 2, turn there for a moment. Second Thessalonians 2, here's what begins this great period.

Now we request of you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us [and here's what they had been falsely told], to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction....

The day of the Lord will not come unless the apostasy comes first. In fact, as we'll see in a few minutes in Daniel 9, we learn that this person who will come, this man of lawlessness, will at the very beginning of this period of time initiate a friendly covenant with the nation Israel. That's the beginning. That starts the clock ticking on this seven-year period.

What about the midpoint and the end? Well, we discover these in a great and awesome passage in Daniel 9 where I want us to spend the rest of our time this evening. Turn with me to Daniel 9. I'm going to take some time to go through this passage for two reasons – one because it's foundational to understanding the flow of biblical history and including unlocking the rest of Daniel's prophecy which contains a lot about these events and because it's so often misunderstood. The commentator Leupold said, "This is one of the grandest prophetic passages, and yet if there ever was an exegetical crux, this is it." Jerome was already acquainted with nine interpretations in his day. It is a very challenging and difficult passage. If you've ever read it, you've maybe found yourself having questions as well. So, I want us just to walk our way through this.

Notice it begins in 9:24, "Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city...." Now let me step back and give you some context. Daniel, you'll remember, was carried off captive into Babylon. There he is waiting out the captivity, the exile, wondering how long it would be. Back in Daniel 9, the early verses, verse 2, he says, "... I observed in the ... [first year of Darius' reign] the number of years which was *revealed* as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations to Jerusalem, *namely*, seventy years."

He said I saw that Jeremiah, my contemporary, had predicted that this period would last seventy years. And so, he began to wonder exactly what God was doing and when that period began and when it would end. And so, in light of all of that, he prays for God to give him insight. And verse 20 says, "... while I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, presenting my supplication" ... while I was still speaking, Gabriel arrives, and Gabriel comes to give him insight. Verse 23,

"At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued, and I have come to tell *you* ... give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision." [So, Daniel's concern is for Israel and their captivity and how long this

will last. In response, here's what Gabriel tells him.] Verse 24, "Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city."

Now weeks here - in reality, the word "week" is not in the text. It literally says seventy sevens. The question is what kind of sevens? Are we talking about sevens calculated in days, in months, in years, in definite periods of time? Well, the word "sevens" is used some twenty times in the Old Testament in various ways so context determines its meaning. The context of this passage demands that Daniel is talking about or that Gabriel is talking to Daniel about seventy units of seven years, seventy units of seven years equaling 490 years – seventy times seven.

Why do I say that the context demands that? Let me give you several reasons. First of all, because Daniel has in the midst of this been thinking about years. Notice back in verse 2 again. He was calculating the number of years, seventy years. This was his concern and the answer was sent in response to that.

Secondly, Daniel has been thinking about why seventy years of captivity. Now this is an interesting story in and of itself. Leviticus 25 had demanded that every seventh year in Israel's history be treated like a sabbath year in which the land was allowed to lie dormant and not farmed. In 2 Chronicles 36:21 we find that God had punished Israel for not observing those sabbath years. Instead, they wanted to use the land every year, make as much money as they can. They didn't trust God, and they didn't respond in obedience, and so God punished them. He put them into captivity for every sabbath year they had missed.

They had missed them over 490 years. That means they had missed 70 sabbath years. And so, God sent them into captivity, into exile, for seventy years. So, the pattern is clear. There were 490 years when Israel did not observe the sabbatical year. So they endured seventy years of exile for all seventy years, sabbath years, they missed. That is followed then by another 490 years, or seventy weeks of years, until the coming of Messiah the Prince.

A third reason that I think the context demands that we're talking about seventy units of seven years or 490 years is that if you use 490 days, or you use 490 weeks (literal seven-day weeks), it's impossible to fit the events described in that timeframe. So, we're driven to years. Now notice what he says, "(They) have been decreed (they've been cut out, they've been determined)

for your people and your holy city.” Daniel had just prayed regarding both of these and so this prophecy is primarily about Daniel’s people. Who are Daniel’s people? Primarily, we’re talking about ethnic Jews. He’s in captivity with ethnic Jews. He’s concerned about the people now in exile - and “your holy city” being Jerusalem. So, the heart of this prophecy is about Israel, the ethnic people of God.

Now notice that we find in verse 24 that this period of time, this seventy-weeks period of time is going to accomplish six great results. You see it there in verse 24? First of all, it’s going to finish the transgression. It literally means to hem it in, to hinder it. The language describes the work of the Redeemer restraining sin, ending Israel’s long apostasy.

Secondly, to make an end of sin - literally, it means to seal sins, to seal something up as if you put it in a package so that you can’t see it. It has reference to judging sin once and for all. And to make atonement for iniquity – you understand this expression. This is the normal Old Testament word for atonement. It means to cover and the result of atonement in the Old Testament is always forgiveness. It’s going to bring about forgiveness.

Now those first three deal with sins. The last three in verse 24 deal with righteousness.

Number four, it’s going to bring in, this period of time, this 490 years, is going to bring in everlasting righteousness. Literally, it will cause to come everlasting righteousness. Messiah will bring in that which will cause Israel to become righteous – an eternal, imputed righteousness, Leupold says.

Number five, to seal up vision and prophecy. This is what’s going to be accomplished during this 490-year period. To seal up vision and prophecy - in other words, God will fulfill rather, everything He has prophesied regarding Daniel’s people in the holy city in this 490-year period. It will be closed and consummated like a book that’s fully written and sealed up.

Number six, to anoint the most holy place. Consecration is the idea here. This expression some try to make refer to Christ - the holy One, meaning Christ. It applies to a man in the Old Testament only once. Every other time this Hebrew expression occurs, it refers to the Holy of Holies, the temple. About forty times, it refers to the Holy of Holies in the temple. There’s going to be some reference to a temple.

Now the first three of these were fulfilled in principle at Christ's first coming, but they wait for the second coming for the complete and full fulfillment dealing with sin. The second three will be accomplished, this last set – four, five and six – will be accomplished at the second coming. So, the 490-year period promises to accomplish these things.

Now notice verse 25, "So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress." So, he's saying there's this 490-year period that's going to happen and the decree to rebuild Jerusalem is the beginning point of the seventy weeks. That sounds simple enough, doesn't it? Trust me, it's not simple. The problem is that there were three different decrees dealing with Jerusalem. There was the decree of Cyrus in 538 recorded in Ezra 1 and Ezra 6. There was the decree of Artaxerxes to Ezra in 458 B.C. recording in Ezra 7. And there was the decree of Artaxerxes to Nehemiah in 444 B.C. recording in, recorded in Nehemiah 2.

So, the question is which decree began this process? Well, when you look at them honestly, the first one is really impossible (the 538 date) because if you add 483, 483 years to Christ, it runs out before Christ was on the earth so the math just doesn't work. That date could not be it.

The second has possibilities but has little or nothing to say about rebuilding the city – the decree of Artaxerxes to Ezra in 458. Some people still prefer this, and they say, "Okay, essentially, we're talking about a 26 A.D. date for Messiah the Prince." Through adding leap years and doing some other math, they come up with 26 A.D. I know those numbers don't appear to add up and they don't exactly because there's, there's some other calculations that go into them. I'm just giving you the big picture. So they say it comes out roughly 26 A.D. and they usually date, because of that, the crucifixion in A.D. 30 and they say Messiah the Prince, that 483 period, ends at the baptism of Christ. Alright? That's sixty-nine weeks. You see that in verse 25? "Seven weeks and sixty-two weeks," that's sixty-nine if you do the math. Sixty-nine weeks is 483 years to Messiah the Prince. So, they say this occurred at the baptism of Christ if you use the second decree.

The third date is the prevalent view among most premillennialists, that is 444 B.C. This is documented in a couple of works – one by Sir Robert Anderson "The Coming Prince" and

another by Harold Hoehner, professor at DTS, in a book called *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*. And they go through this and they stress Nehemiah 2:5 and they say in Nehemiah 2:5, the decree of Artaxerxes to Nehemiah, he talks about rebuilding these aspects of the city, the walls and the gates. You say, well wait a minute. If I do the math, it doesn't work out. Well, they argue that Israel and most cultures at that time calculated years based on a 360-day year, not the 365 day we use. And they work out the math. I'm not going to take you through all of that. I don't think it's profitable for our time tonight, but they work out the math and Anderson has the sixty-nine weeks terminating precisely at the triumphal entry which he says was in 32 A.D., not likely for several reasons. Hoehner argues that it ended at the triumphal entry in 33 A.D. which is a possibility.

You say, well which is it? I don't know. There is no way we can definitely fix that date with certainty with our present knowledge. But here's the big picture I want you to get. Listen carefully. This prophecy given in the lifetime of Daniel while the children of Israel were in captivity in Babylon, remember they were carried off in 586, the city was destroyed, the nation was destroyed, Daniel had gone a bit earlier? So, we're talking about in the 500's before Christ, this prophecy was given about when Messiah the Prince would come. And the big picture is that regardless of which of these dates you take, the 483 years, the sixty-nine weeks, ended during the ministry of Jesus Christ either with His baptism or His triumphal entry. It's remarkable, absolutely remarkable.

Now let's continue verse 25. It says from that decree until Messiah the Prince there will be these sixty-nine weeks (or 483 years). The city's going to be built again with plaza and moat. Now, plaza simply means a wide place, a public square, could be a street, could be a marketplace. Moat speaks of a ditch or a trench that's around a fortified city. Don't think medieval moat with a drawbridge and all of that. Think a deep trench cut around the city to make it a lot harder for armies to get access to the wall. This happened (with,) in Nehemiah's time. And it will happen, it says, during times of distress. You remember that if you look at Nehemiah, Nehemiah chapter 4 and Nehemiah 6, the building activity was carried out in the face of extreme opposition.

Now that brings us to verse 26. "Then after the sixty-two weeks (we could say after the sixty-nine weeks because remember it was seven and sixty-two, so after the second phase of this, the

sixty-two weeks), the Messiah will be cut off (that simply means killed, slain). It's used that way a number of times in the Old Testament) and (He will) have nothing." Isn't that an interesting expression? Wasn't that true? Wasn't that true when Jesus died? He will not, Daniel says, at the time of His death have a kingdom. He won't have authority. The fulfillment of the Messianic kingdom would not occur at His first coming.

By the way, this is why I reject some of those who teach that Jesus presented Himself as king to Israel, and if they had accepted Him, you know, He would have ushered in the kingdom. Wait a minute. What about the death of Christ? That was decreed before time. What about this prophecy that says He's going to be cut off, He's going to be killed? He had nothing when He died.

Then it says, "and the people (verse 26, and the people) of the prince who is to come." That's an interesting expression - the people of the prince who is to come. The prince here is not Christ, but one who comes for the purpose of destruction. This applied initially to the Romans and ultimately to the forces of antichrist during the tribulation. So, we're talking about the people of the prince who will come (the Romans), will destroy the city and the sanctuary. This was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Isn't this incredible? We're talking about 500, almost 600 years before these events occurred.

The final empire that's described following the three previous great world empires is the Roman Empire. And we're told that those people, the Roman people, "will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood"; the end of the city and the temple will be like a flood of soldiers descending upon the city of Jerusalem. Picture a tsunami wave of Roman soldiers destroying everything in their path. That's the picture of this prophecy. "Even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined."

Now that brings us to verse 27. Here's where the threefold division of this passage becomes important. When I say threefold, let me just bring it to your mind like this. He said there will be seven weeks. That's forty-nine years. That's the period of time between the decree to rebuild Jerusalem and when the city was completed, forty-nine years in Nehemiah's time. Then there would be sixty-two weeks, he said. That's 434 years. At the end of that time, Messiah the Prince would come. We would be in the middle of Christ's life. Now that's a total, folks, if you do your math, of sixty-nine weeks or 483 years.

We have a problem. Houston, we have a problem. We lost a week! Daniel specified that all of the matters relating to the building of the wall, the cutting off of Messiah the Prince would occupy these sixty-nine weeks. So, what happened to the seventieth week? Well, there's one final week yet to come of seven years. It is the famous seventieth week of Daniel.

Now folks, we are left, when we come to this seventieth week, with two choices and only two. Choice number one is to say, "Well, that seventieth week began immediately following the sixty-ninth week." In other words, whether we're talking about Jesus, the sixty-ninth week ending with Jesus' baptism or with His triumphal entry, the seventieth week started right then. Well, that would mean that whatever the seventieth week is predicting has already been fulfilled. And if you take this approach, what Daniel describes in verse 27 cannot be connected to any great event. It doesn't even make sense. You just have the seventieth week fizzling out sometime seven years after the baptism or triumphal entry. Nothing happened, certainly not what verse 27 describes.

The other choice is to say, "No, that hasn't yet happened. It didn't stop or start immediately after the sixty-ninth week, but there was a gap. The seventieth week is still future because there was a gap between week sixty-nine and week seventy." I believe the Scriptures teach that this seventieth week is still future. What are the arguments for this? Well, there are several. Let me give you the arguments I've adapted from Harold Hoehner. These are good arguments.

Why do we believe that there's a gap between week sixty-nine and seventy? Well, first of all, because the six promises in verse 24 that we looked at together could not have all been fulfilled at Christ's death. Gabriel says that they are concerning Israel and the holy city. You tell me. Has Israel experienced everlasting righteousness? Well, according to Paul in Romans 11, a small remnant has, but nothing to match the promise that was given through Gabriel.

Secondly, Messiah was killed not during the sixty-ninth week, but notice it says after. Verse 26, "after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off." So that 483 period ends and sometime after that Messiah is cut off. That means there is a gap. There has to be a gap. The natural meaning is to think that there was a gap between week sixty-nine and week seventy.

Such gaps, by the way, are not uncommon in prophecy. You remember that great prophecy in Isaiah 61 where Christ gets up in His hometown of Nazareth and He reads from it? The first part of the passage contained a promise about His first coming and the second part of the passage contained a promise about His second coming. He reads till He's done with the first coming, closes the scroll and teaches the people. There was a gap there so it's not unreasonable to expect that there would be a gap in other places.

Reason number three, that we believe there is a gap between week sixty-nine and the seventieth week is still future – the person who confirms the covenant in verse 27 (we're going to look at in a moment) cannot be Christ. Why? It just says "he". Well, you tell me. What is the nearest antecedent, the noun that "he" could be referring to, that "he" could be replacing? The nearest antecedent in the passage is "the prince who is to come". Also, even if it were talking about Christ, when did Christ make a firm covenant? And why would He have just made it for one week - seven years? And why would He have broken it in the middle? That doesn't make sense. That can't be Christ.

Number four, Christ's death did not cause the sacrificial system to cease immediately. Certainly, He fulfilled the sacrifices, but it wasn't until 70 A.D. that they stopped.

Fifthly, this passage refers to something called the abomination of desolation, and we know that it has not yet occurred. How? Well in Matthew 24, Jesus said it would come after His earthly ministry. So, you say, "Oh well, maybe it was 70 A.D. Maybe the abomination of desolation was when Titus Vespasian went into the temple and desecrated it in 70 A.D." Can't be cause in Matthew 24 Jesus says that immediately following that time, He will return. That hasn't happened yet. We know that.

Number six, the person that's described in verse 27 corresponds very well with the person described in Revelation 12 and 13 who has not yet appeared and has not been judged as it's described he will be judged in Revelation 19.

So, what does all that mean? Some of you stayed with me. Some of you I lost. But here's the big picture. It means that Daniel's seventieth week is still in the future. After 483 years or sixty-nine weeks – at some point in the ministry of Christ, either at His baptism or at His triumphal entry –

the clock stopped ticking. Israel's prophetic clock stopped ticking. And there remains one seven-year period yet in the future when the events of verse 27 will unfold. Let's look briefly at those events. Verse 27 says, "... he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week, he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations (literally, the abomination which makes desolate) ... even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate."

Now what is this talking about? I've already told you "he" refers to the prince that will come, the antichrist. If you try to read it as Christ, it makes no sense. Christ didn't make a covenant for seven years. He didn't break it at three and a half years. The closest antecedent is the prince who will come. So, the antichrist will make a covenant with Israel supposedly for seven years.

In Revelation, we're told that at the end of three and a half years, he will terminate that agreement demonstrated by forced cessation of temple worship. We see that here as well. He's going to stop it. At some point, a temple will be rebuilt. Israel will be worshipping. He will form a covenant with them as their friend. And in three and a half years into that covenant, he will break it, and he will cause the temple worship to stop. And he will commit what's called the abominations of desolation.

A similar phrase is used of a historical figure by the name of Antiochus Epiphanes, who not only polluted the altar in Israel back in the time between the testaments. He not only placed an image or an altar to Zeus in the temple, but he even killed a pig on the altar in Jerusalem. That was called the abomination of desolation, and here's another one. It's obvious this is a different one because we're not talking about Antiochus Epiphanes here. And Christ says it's still in the future during His ministry. So, we're talking about antichrist. In all likelihood, antichrist (this main character, this political figure, military figure of the tribulation period, the final world empire) will not only pollute the temple, but he will place a statue or an altar or something that increases the desolation of the holy place.

So, when we look at the summary of the basic timeline, the start of the tribulation is the revelation of the antichrist and his covenant with Israel. The midpoint is when antichrist will break that covenant. And the end will be when Christ returns to make it all right.

Next week, I want to look at the, the individual judgments that God throws out upon the world during this seven-year period because God and the Lamb are the major actors. We want to look at what they're doing through this time.

But in light of our study tonight, let me just leave you with a couple of things to think about. And these are encouraging to me. When you look at Daniel 9, when you see that incredible prophecy fulfilled, so much of it fulfilled through 483 years leading up to Messiah the Prince as He's called there, be courageous because of God's power. God is sovereign. He is in control of history. Don't be afraid of whatever comes. Don't be afraid if you pick up the paper tomorrow and World War III has begun. God is on the throne. He is in control. He has pushed the domino, and they're all falling exactly as He planned. It will work out just as it's described here, just as the previous portion, that the other sixty-nine weeks have.

Secondly, be secure and certain because of God's plan. God will accomplish all His purpose. You don't have to worry. God has a plan for you as well just as He has a plan for the world, a plan for the world to pour out His wrath, a plan for you according to Ephesians 2 to spend eternity lavishing His grace upon you. Be secure in the love of God, in the plan of God for you.

Be patient. Be patient because of God's patience. Listen, as "The Christmas Carol" says, the right seems strong. It doesn't appear that it'll ever be corrected. What's going to happen? Where's it going to go? Listen, God is patient and therefore, He's giving time. As the great southern Baptist preacher said, "(The wheels or) the heels of God's justice are very slow, but they always crush completely." God takes His time, but He will fulfill His plan. Be patient. God is patient.

God will take back this earth from the usurper. He will keep His promises to Israel to save them as He promised in Zechariah 12:10 and His promise to you. And He will pour out His wrath on all of those who have set himself against Him. It will happen. The clock is ticking. The dominos are falling. It's coming. So be patient. God will act in His time according to His great eternal plan.

There's hope and confidence in that for us, isn't there, as believers in Christ? That's what these prophetic passages were intended to do. That's what Daniel 9 was intended to do for Daniel. It

was intended to give him hope in the midst of his trouble and difficulty, and that's what it's intended to do for you as well. Be courageous. Be secure and certain. And just be patient. God will act in His time.

Let's pray together.

Father, we are absolutely amazed at Your control of history. Lord, as we think about this prophecy that we've looked at tonight that unfolded, everything that would happen until the coming of Christ and then unfolds for us some of what will occur in the midst of that coming period of time called the tribulation.

Father, we thank You that we will be kept from that hour, that we will be preserved by Your power, that we can be courageous, and we can be secure in Your love because You have a plan, and You're working that plan. And Father, we thank You that in Your time, You will execute the plan.

Help us to be patient even as You were patient. Help us to join Your great heart in being patient because You were not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Make us evangelists in light of the approaching storm of Your wrath.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.