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Miscellanea

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Miscellanea

Notes on the Seventy Weeks in Daniel's Prophecy 9:24—27

The undersigned has been requested to write a brief article on the "Seventy Weeks" of Dan. 9:24—27 to be published in this periodical.

What prompts the writer to comply with the request submitted to him is largely a twofold caution. The one is that we do not permit ourselves to be drawn away from the center to the periphery, in other words, from the discussion of important doctrines and movements to such as are of minor significance, especially not to prophecies which at best can be explained only in a general way. Luther's dictum that the devil is always trying to mislead theologians, in the main, by two ways, first, by work-righteousness and, secondly, by inducing them to leave the essentials to discuss less important things in religion, deserves consideration also today. The second caution is that we must not make any passage a proof-text for some doctrine which manifestly is not a *sedes doctrinae*. Theologians may err by not fully evaluating passages which indeed are prooftexts, but there is danger, too, that they may be led to twist certain passages to prove things which actually they neither teach nor prove. This then becomes a case of ἀπερ γράφησ, that is, of going beyond Scripture.

Now, with regard to Dan. 9:24—27 there is not a single explanation of this famous passage which solves every problem that it raises. That is not strange. In fact, that is true of many prophecies where the prediction must be applied to historical facts or phenomena. It is not necessary to go into detail on this point, since the matter is so very obvious. Fortunately, however, there are fundamentally two explanations of Dan. 9:24—27 which satisfy not only the analogy of faith, but also the majority of readers. It has been said that the Hebrew original of Dan. 9:24—27 is very difficult, but in the writer's estimation that is not the case. It is true, in v. 25 the traditional Hebrew text has a disturbing punctuation, but, after all, the punctuation of the Masora is not inspired, and Christian scholars are not bound to the traditions of the Masorites. The difficulty does not lie in the text, but in the application of the rather indefinite text to the time during which the predicted matters should occur.

One explanation regards the "seventy weeks" (v. 24) as a symbolical number, just as prophecy in many other cases deals with symbolical numbers. The *terminus ad quem* this explanation fixes as the perfection of the Kingdom of God, or the Church in its perfection, in other words, as the whole time from Daniel's prophecy to Judgment Day. The explanation divides this time into the following three periods: 1) The seven weeks (v. 25), or the

period from the building of the Temple to the coming of Christ; 2) the sixty-two weeks (this explanation observes the athnach, or semicolon, between the two sentences), or the period during which the New Testament Church will be built; 3) the one week, or the period during which the Antichrist will come who will cause the sacrifice to cease (cf. Dan. 7:7, 8) and who ushers in the final Judgment. The statement that the Antichrist will cause the sacrifice to cease in the midst of the week, suggests, as this explanation holds, that a change will take place (the Reformation), so that during the latter part of this last week his "abomination of desolation" will not be so great as it was during the first part.

To the writer it seems as if this explanation simplifies matters too greatly, while at the same time it does not recognize a number of important factors. In the first place, it ignores the fact that the prophetic information was granted Daniel upon his prayer for the restoration of the City of Jerusalem (v. 19 ff.). The reference of the prophecy is therefore properly to the building of the Holy City and the coming of the Messiah, and not to the entire New Testament era. Again, while the first period (according to this explanation) comprises only a short time (seven weeks), it does not seem quite clear why the period of the New Testament up to the coming of the Antichrist should be indicated in terms of sixty-two weeks and the period during which Antichrist reigns as only one week. Even if the seventy weeks are regarded as symbolical, the time proportion is hardly in keeping with the actual events as they have occurred in history. This explanation, moreover, translates "the most Holy" (v. 24) as neuter, referring it to the Temple, whereas in v. 25 "the most Holy" is explained as "the Messiah, the Prince." This is a minor point, but one, nevertheless, that should be considered. Finally, this explanation ignores Matt. 24:15 f., where Christ Himself describes the "abomination of desolation" as taking place in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem. He tells the believers that when they behold the abomination of desolation prophesied by Daniel, they should flee into the mountains (v. 16). The same admonition of Christ is recorded, with some variation, in Mark 13:14. The Christians, as history reports, understood the Savior's warning very well, for when they saw the Roman army encircling the city, they fled. Anyone who has read the report given by Josephus can well understand why the horrors that came upon Jerusalem before and during its destruction, should be called the "abomination of desolation." So much regarding the first explanation.

The second explanation is the most ancient and also the most popular. With more or less justification, it regards the "seventy weeks" as "weeks of years" ("Jahrwochen"), comprising, roughly speaking, a period of four hundred and ninety years. According to this explanation, the first period, or the seven weeks, includes the whole time when the city was rebuilt and its walls were completed, in other words, the whole period of Nehemiah's administration, extending through forty-nine years. The second period, com-

prising sixty-two years, embraces the entire time from the rebuilding of the city to the Messiah's coming and death. In short, from the time of the beginning of the rebuilding of the Temple to the Messiah there will be sixty-nine (seven and sixty-two) weeks of years. The question is: How shall we arrive at these 483 years? There are various ways of computing this time, but essentially they are the same.

The first command to rebuild the Temple was given by Cyrus in 536 B. C. (cf. Ezra 1:2; 6:1-12). However, the work of rebuilding the city walls was not begun until Artaxerxes issued a special decree to this effect in the year 453 (or 454) B. C. (cf. Neh. 2:4-8). Add to this the thirty years until the anointing of the Messiah, and you will have the sixty-nine weeks or 483 years. If, with others, we reckon from the year 449 B. C., this brings us to A. D. 34 or about the time of Christ's death. This is as close as we can hope to come, since neither the time of Artaxerxes' decree nor that of our Lord's birth and Baptism is exactly settled. That is essentially the explanation of Luther (cf. St. L. Ed., VI:906 ff.), who warns his readers that in computing the time one must not be too exacting, but be satisfied with a general computation. Luther's explanation is followed by the exegetes who prepared the so-called *Weimarer Bibel*. It is also set forth with some detail in the *Concordia Bible with Notes*, which Concordia Publishing House hopes to put on the market this year.

According to this second explanation, v. 24 roughly predicts the entire time from the rebuilding of the city walls under Nehemiah until the Messiah will come and finish His redemptive work. In v. 25 the prophecy divides sixty-nine weeks of this time into two periods, one covering that of Nehemiah's administration and the other that of the coming and anointing of the Messiah. In v. 26 the prophecy foretells that after these sixty-nine years the Messiah will be crucified, and in close connection with this criminal act it predicts the destruction of the ungodly city. V. 27 then foretells that though the city will be destroyed, the Messiah's work will not have been in vain; for He will confirm the covenant (of grace which was ratified by His death) with many. In other words, in Jerusalem many will be saved through faith in the Messiah, before the destroyer will come who with the overspreading of abominations will make it desolate (cf. Matt. 25:15 ff.).

The difficulty in this verse lies in the "one week" which is granted for the confirming of the Messiah's covenant. There are many who believe that all v. 27 means to say is that this preaching of grace will take place in the last of the "Seventy Weeks" or in the seventieth week. This explanation is justified in view of the fact that Christ is said to have been raised after three days, though actually He was dead only a part of that time, since He died on Friday evening and was raised early the next Sunday morning. Biblical reckoning, just as Oriental reckoning in general, is not always as accurate as is our modern Western timekeeping.

Luther seems to regard this last week, or seven years, literally. He says that the first seven years after Christ's ascension were the true "Easter week" during which the Gospel was preached at Jerusalem and many mighty miracles were performed to confirm it. The words of v. 27 that the sacrifice will cease in the midst of the week, he refers to the abrogation of the ceremonial laws in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15:6 ff.). The end of the last week marks the hardening of the unbelieving Jews at Jerusalem so that the Apostles now turned to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 13:46). While the dates of many events even in the New Testament are not exactly settled, we know that the persecution of the Christian Church at Jerusalem began very early and Luther may be right in saying that the hardening of the Jews set in at the end of the seventieth week, or seven years after the Savior's ascension. With the rejection of Christ as the Messiah the millennialistic movement among the Jews grew stronger and stronger, and this finally brought about Rome's destruction of Jerusalem.

The explanation just described, while it presents a number of difficulties, is in keeping with Matt. 24:15-16, and was so understood by the Christians at Jerusalem, who fled when they saw the eagles of the Roman standards, regarded as objects of idolatrous worship, encamped about Jerusalem. But let no one say that this or that explanation of the important prophecy, made about five hundred years before the destruction of Jerusalem, is the only correct one. Personally the writer prefers the second. Nevertheless let us bear in mind that the destruction of Jerusalem will forever stand as the symbol of the world's destruction and that the many antichrists in Jerusalem foreshadowed the coming of the great Antichrist, of whom St. Paul speaks in 2 Thess. 2. Only when we speak of that Antichrist, let us use the *sedes doctrinae* which teach the doctrine clearly and unmistakably.*

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

A Glimpse of Church Conditions in Germany

In *America* (Roman Catholic weekly) for September 8, 1945, Rev. Henry Klein, S. J., speaks of conditions under which he worked during the war, and is working at present, as pastor of St. Clemens Church in Berlin. While the article is written from the Roman Catholic point of view, it is informative, and all of us who are interested in the future of the Christian Church in Germany will be glad to read it. We print the greater part of the article. Having spoken of Gestapo activities against Catholic priests, the writer continues:

"This took place in June, 1941. I myself had just been discharged from the Army, in which I had served for a year and a half as Army Chaplain and from which I was removed, as were all other Jesuits, for being politically unreliable. While my

* In *Lehre und Wehre* this material was treated in articles that appeared in Vol. 31, Nos. 7 and 8 (1885) and Vol. 32, No. 12 (1886).

predecessors were in prison, I took charge of the services at Saint Clemens and was determined to entrench myself in one corner of the church building, now occupied by the Gestapo, until the day should come on which I could once more take over the rightful property of the church. For four years one of the Chaplains and I actually lived in two rooms close to the church—rooms that were so dark they called for artificial lighting during the entire day.

"At first many of the Catholics no longer attended church for fear of the Gestapo, who, from their windows, could observe every churchgoer. Gradually, however, the congregation came in increasing numbers, happy in this way to demonstrate against the Nazis. Meanwhile the Bishop of Muenster, Count von Galen, and the Bishop of Berlin, Count von Preysing, had protested vehemently in public against Nazi infringements. Saint Clemens was the first church in the whole of Germany that had been expropriated by the Nazis and for which the Nazis subsequently wanted to exact an annual rent of twelve thousand marks from the parish.

"The firm attitude adopted by the Bishop of Muenster in July and August, 1941, towards the Hitler regime led to a change of Nazi policy towards the Church. The most radical among the Nazis, who, notwithstanding the war, wanted an open break with the Church, demanded that the Bishop of Muenster be immediately hanged and that further measures be adopted against the Church. They were, however, admonished by Hitler—on Goebbels' advice—to moderate themselves, since it was feared that opposition on the part of the Bishops would grow to an ever greater extent if measures antagonistic to the Church were adopted. The Bishops were now readily listened to by the people, and things did not look so well for the Nazis in 1941 as they had in 1939. Nazi policy was now more dependent upon public opinion than it had been formerly. Hitler, therefore, decided to act during the war as though the Nazis were collaborating loyally with the Church. He promised, however, to hand over the entire property of the Church to the German people for social welfare after the war. In the delirium of victory it would be child's play, he thought, to carry out these plans and to take revenge on the Church.

"Thus it came about that the Gestapo was compelled to accept my stay in this impossible vicinity and that one fine day the Church came into its own again. The Gestapo, it is true, made efforts to have me removed by 'legal methods.' I was sent to prison for several weeks, and meanwhile they tried to collect material against me. Though my rooms were repeatedly searched, nothing of an incriminating nature was found, and I was thereupon released from prison.

"In March, 1943, following a very bad air raid, the Nazis once again tried to close Saint Clemens on another 'legal' basis. They converted the church into a storeroom in which furniture from damaged houses was stored, a measure which on the surface would seem to be one adopted for public welfare. We protested, however,

by drawing public attention to the hypocritical manner in which the Nazis deplored the damage done to churches by air raids while at the same time they made storerooms of those that had not been destroyed. Our protests were not in vain, for every bit of furniture was removed overnight. We knew the Nazis would not forget this, but at the same time we were convinced that we had the better chance of surviving the war.

"I admit, however, that I had hoped that the day of liberation from the Nazis would be somewhat different from what it eventually was. The number of souls in my parish dropped from four thousand to five hundred. The church was severely damaged by shells; the interior was plundered, the priestly vestments torn or ruined. Fighting and looting around the church continued for days. The church buildings, or what is left of them, are once more in our hands, yet so far there is no sign of new life in or around them. They are now filled with the homeless and the many fugitives who are being driven out of Silesia and Bohemia and do not know where to go. Among them are German soldiers returning home, tired, hungry, demoralized, in search of their wives and children—men who were once the pride of the nation have now to beg for bread and shelter, since their country could do nothing to prepare for their return. Catholic societies have not yet been re-established nor have Catholic schools so far received permission to re-open, though children are already attending other schools."

A.

The Common Cup and the Danger of Infection

In the *Living Church* of September 2, 1945, an editorial appeared having the title "The Common Chalice." From the remarks made there it is evident that in the Protestant Episcopal Church the subject of the common cup is much discussed. We reprint the section which concerns itself with the health angle of the subject.

"A letter in this week's correspondence columns discusses further the famous Burrows and Hemmens report on the bactericidal properties of the silver chalice, pointing out that these properties are ineffectual against the germ which causes tuberculosis. The writer, Dr. Joseph H. Pratt, is a distinguished physician and churchman of Boston.

"Dr. Pratt's letter forces us to go into a discussion of medical matters which will, we know, be distasteful to many readers. Investigating the pathological possibilities of the Blessed Sacrament is certainly not a spiritually rewarding activity. To those who are confident that the Sacrament is not to be seriously considered as a source of infection, we say that we believe their confidence well founded, and suggest that they skip the rest of this editorial. Those who have doubts about the matter may find them relieved by a careful consideration of the supposed hazards.

"The first fact that the medical layman has to absorb in any consideration of disease is that absolute freedom from germs is

(at least in the present stage of human development) impossible in a room containing a human being. A surgeon about to operate washes his hands thoroughly with a very efficient disinfectant. But all he has to do is twiddle his fingers and they are again well populated with bacteria. Any contact between human beings exposes each to whatever the other may have. Handshaking, conversation, singing, laughter, passing Prayer Books back and forth, using money (especially paper money) — these are only a few of the thousands of possible ways of spreading disease which beset human beings every minute of every day.

"The Burrows and Hemmens report concluded, after a most careful and exhaustive study of the evidence, that the silver chalice was a considerably less dangerous source of infection than many others which human beings face with equanimity every day. Dr. Pratt, in reply, asserts that the tuberculosis germ is not killed by the self-sterilizing action of the chalice. (Incidentally, his reference to 'ten minutes' with reference to streptococci does not mean, as one might think who had not studied the report, that the chalice is a dangerous source of such infection for ten minutes.) The question is, does the hardness of the tuberculosis germ refute the report's assertion that the chalice is not to be seriously considered as a source of infection?

"Burrows and Hemmens obviously thought not, or they would have included this warning in their summary. The explanation, we think, is to be found in the character of the disease.

"The tubercle bacillus surrounds itself with a tough coating which protects it from many germicides, including silver ions. Yet the disease is not an epidemic one; people are not as a rule seriously affected with it unless they have repeated contact with a source of infection.

"Coughing, laughing, talking, and singing are also effective ways of spreading tuberculosis. In fact, 'spray infection' by one of these means is probably the commonest cause. If a tuberculous person is a choir singer, the other members of the choir are in definite danger of infection—a danger which is not greatly increased by the use of a common chalice in the Holy Communion.

"Fortunately, there is a simple and positive test to show whether a person has been infected by tuberculosis—the well-known tuberculin test. It is to be hoped that before very long everyone will take this test once a year. If it proves positive, further examination will show whether the subject actually has the disease at the present time. There is little reason for a case of tuberculosis to remain undetected under modern medical practice.

"A first infection with tuberculosis, furthermore, is seldom serious. The bacillus does not ordinarily lodge in the porous tissue of the lungs until the body has developed the habit of resisting it because of a previous infection in some less vital spot." A.