

Prophecy Difficulties
Matthew 24:1—2

Our last lesson dealt with the prophecy that Jesus told the Disciples about the temple. He told them that there will come a point in time in which not one stone will be left upon the other (Matthew 24:2). The fulfillment of this prophecy is usually understood to have occurred in 70 A.D. when Titus besieged Jerusalem and tore down the temple walls.

Dealing with prophecy is a complicated procedure. The use of symbols and shaded meanings often obscures the actual meaning. Also, accurately dating of events is very difficult. No one really knows precisely, for instance, when Jesus was born or even when the books of Scripture were written. This is why there are so many different interpretations of the same passage. However, there are many events that can be ascertained through prophetic writings. We can at least obtain a fairly clear picture of what is to come by studying Scripture rightly divided.

A 490-year timeline

Daniel was one of the captives taken out of Jerusalem when Babylon subjugated Jerusalem. As an old man, Daniel was reading Jeremiah and noted that Israel's captivity would shortly be coming to an end. He prayed to God to ask what would happen to Israel after their captivity came to an end. The answer to Daniel's question is recorded in the ninth chapter of the Book of Daniel and lays out 490-years to the end of the Tribulation. For Daniel, this was the future of his nation leading to the Millennial Kingdom. This 490-year span begins at the decree to rebuild Jerusalem, which I believe refers to Ezra 7 and would put the date around 457 B.C. but could also refer to the decree in Nehemiah 13 years later. Adding 490 years to the Ezra decree date should reveal the year the Tribulation should come to an end. If the dates are correct, the Tribulation would come to an end in 34 A.D. Backing up seven years puts the beginning of the Tribulation at 27 A.D. and therefore Christ's death would be around 25—26 A.D. and His birth at 8 B.C. If the Nehemiah decree were used then all the dates would move up 13 years putting Jesus' birth at 5 A.D. This is much later than most anyone would agree with.

These dates don't really add up so either Daniel's prophecy is wrong or man's dating calculations are wrong. Sir Robert Anderson has some complicated calculations to bring the cutting off of Messiah to His Triumphal Entry. Others have their own calculations to make actual events and Daniel's timetable line up. The take away from all this is to trust that Scripture is accurate. There were 490 years from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem to the end of the Tribulation. It really doesn't matter if we can't make it work out because if we were to look at God's calculations it would work out perfectly.

A possible gap?

See "The Gap Theory" Ricky Kurth, Berean Searchlight November 2011

Those who hold to the end of week 69 as being Christ's Triumphal entry into Jerusalem, just days before His death on a cross, explain that there is a gap of time between the Triumphal entry and the beginning of the 70th week of Daniel, the Tribulation. They say this gap is found in the feasts of Israel with the first four feasts (Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits and Pentecost) picturing Christ's death, burial, resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit. The last three feasts (Trumpets, Day of Atonement and Tabernacles) all occur several months later with the last feast being a shadow for when Israel goes into the Kingdom.

This gap of several months is understood to represent the one-year extension for Israel to believe right after the cross (Luke 13:6—9) plus an unspecified gap of time—up to one generation—before the 70th week of Daniel begins. In the middle of these two gap events falls the Dispensation of Grace, a 2,000-year gap that will come to a close after the Rapture.

The one generation comes from Matthew 16:28 (There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.) and in Matthew 24:34 Jesus said, “this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.” That particular generation was around for only one year after Jesus spoke these words so the generation that is alive after the Rapture will continue in the place of the generation that was interrupted by the Dispensation of Grace. They say the Tribulation will happen sometime within that generation.

If this were the case then the events of 70 A.D. could be fulfillment of what Jesus said in Matthew 24:1—2 since the Tribulation could start as late as a generation later.

Cutting off Messiah

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Another way to view Daniel’s end-time events is to see the cutting off of Messiah (Daniel 9:25) as the point in time when Israel said their final “no” to the Kingdom offer. Stephen in Acts 7, through the power of the Holy Spirit, offered Israel one last chance to accept the offer of the Kingdom. If the leadership had acknowledged Jesus as their Messiah then the “times of refreshing” would have been ushered in (Acts 3:19—21). Stephen’s words were actually the words of the Holy Spirit. By rejecting what Stephen told them then killing him the religious leaders of Israel blasphemed against the Holy Spirit, a sin that would not be pardoned (Matthew 12:31). Israel had cut off the Messiah and God responded by cutting off unbelieving Israel from the olive tree (Romans 11:11—24).

Since, according to Daniel’s prophecy, the Tribulation would begin right after the cutting off of Messiah, this view would solve the problem without inserting a gap. As Stephen looks up into heaven he sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God. His is normally sitting at the right hand of God so this change in posture is significant. When Jesus arises, He will do so in His anger (Psalm 7:6; 110:1; Isaiah 2:19). The Tribulation is about to begin...except instead of God’s wrath being poured out on mankind, we see a great demonstration of His grace with the inauguration of this present Dispensation of Grace.

This view also allows for a one-year extension for Israel to respond to the offer of the Kingdom (Luke 16:6—9). This happened after the cross but before Stephen. The Tribulation will begin right after the Rapture of the Church.

One objection is in the understanding of the words “cutting off.” To cut off is usually understood in terms of a death. For instance when God was going to destroy unbelieving Israel he said He would cut them off from the earth, an obvious reference to death (Exodus 9:15). Isaiah 53:8 is probably the most compelling passage to lead us to interpret the cutting off Messiah as being His death on the cross.

On the other hand, the Hebrew word for cut off usually refers to a severing or cutting asunder. It can also mean to cut a covenant (we would say to cut a deal) or to take away. Zechariah 13:8 makes it clear that cutting off is not about a death but about separating unbelieving Israel from believing Israel. It’s only after they are cut off that the unbelievers will die. To interpret that the Messiah will be separated (cut off) from Israel is certainly a valid interpretation.

The standard interpretation of Daniel 9:26 is that the Messiah will be cut off (killed) but not for himself (he died for His own (Israel, John 1:11). A literal reading of this verse is:

And after the sevens sixty and two he shall be cut off anointed one and there is no to him.

Instead of seeing this verse as saying He didn’t die for Himself it probably should be seen as saying that the city and the holy place are not his (Young’s Literal Translation) or that He has been rejected.

The upshot from all this is that there is much disagreement about the exact meaning of prophetic events even among mid-Acts people. The goal will be to get a good and accurate idea of Israel’s future without delving into the minutiae of various interpretations in light of God’s prophetic plan for Israel.

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