THE CONFIRMATION OF THE COVENANT PART I

David Baker, prepared for the Presbytery word, 25 July 2021 Transcription of recording, slightly edited

Introduction

This is the thirteenth session on 'The Seventy Weeks prophecy'. In our last session, we considered the two time periods between 'the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem' to 'the coming of the Messiah' – which is the baptism of Jesus. We were looking at the seven weeks and the sixty-two weeks.

We primarily focused on 'the seven weeks', which is a period of forty-nine years. We made the point that that was a specific season of *grace for restoration*, which began when Ezra returned. And Ezra proclaimed that 'for a little while' grace has been shown to us from the Lord.

It began with the return of Ezra, and concluded with the ministry of Malachi. The last session finished with the prophecy of Malachi concerning the coming of Christ as 'the Messenger of the covenant'.

"Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me [speaking about John the Baptist]. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant [speaking about Jesus Christ Himself.], in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," says the Lord of hosts.' Mal 3:1.

This is an important point concerning the Seventy Weeks prophecy, because Jesus Christ is the *Messenger* of the covenant, who 'confirms the covenant with many for one week'.

This refers to the *Everlasting Covenant* between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is the covenant of *sonship*. It is the Everlasting Covenant that God made with Abraham.

We will read the relevant verses in the Seventy Weeks prophecy. 'And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off.' Dan 9: 26-27.

This verse does not tell us how long after, but we know it is three and a half years afterwards - the length of Jesus' earthly ministry.

'And after the sixty-two weeks [or after three and a half years] after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself [the crucifixion]; and the people of the prince who is to come [the Romans led by Prince Titus] shall destroy the city [the earthly, natural Jerusalem] and the sanctuary', which was built by Zerubbabel - the temple built by Zerubbabel, and then significantly expanded by Herod. 'The end of it shall be with a flood, and til the end of the war desolations are determined.'

The temple was destroyed in AD70.

Christ confirms the covenant for a week

'Then He shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.' Dan 9:27.

We will stop there and focus on this statement, 'And He shall confirm a covenant with many for one week'.

Now, there has been a great deal of confusion among commentators concerning who 'he' is in this verse. So, who confirms the covenant?

If we connect it to the verse before, the question is, is it Messiah the Prince who is cut off? Is He confirming the covenant? Or is it the prince who is to come?

We will consider in this session that it clearly refers to Jesus Christ, who is the Messiah.

It does not refer to Prince Titus, who destroyed the temple in AD70; nor does it refer to the future Antichrist.

Alternative interpretations

Throughout this series, we have not particularly mentioned or considered all of the alternative views and interpretations of the Seventy Weeks prophecy. However, for the sake of our awareness, it is worth mentioning one alternative view, because of its popularity and because of its influence upon many peoples' expectations concerning the end of the age.

This alternative interpretation suggests that we should count sixty-nine weeks from the return of Nehemiah when he came back to build the walls, to the crucifixion of Christ.

The only way to make this calculation work is to say that, when the Seventy Weeks prophecy refers to 'weeks of years', rather than it being seven years so that sixty-nine weeks equals four hundred and eighty-three years, each year is a prophetic year that is only three hundred and sixty days long.

The three hundred and sixty day years need to be converted back to three hundred and sixty-five and a quarter day years so that four hundred and eighty-three years is really only four hundred and seventy-six years.

This alternative way counts from the return of Nehemiah in 444BC, as we have noted. This results in a crucifixion date of AD33.

This view also proposes that the whole seventieth week is yet to be fulfilled in the future. This is the major implication of this view.

This view proposes that the seventieth week is to be fulfilled in the future, when Antichrist will make an agreement with the Jewish nation so that they can rebuild the temple and re-institute animal sacrifice.

Then, halfway through the week, or after three and a half years, he will renege on this deal. He will put a stop to the sacrifice and offering, and he will proclaim himself to be God in the temple, and then persecute the Jewish nation for the remaining three and a half years.

Now, underpinning this alternative view is also the assumption that the Jewish nation and the Gentiles have *separate* prophetic destinies.

It is often assumed that the church will be 'raptured' before the seventieth week begins. In recent history this has been popularised in novels and movies. As I said, it has had a major influence in terms of peoples' expectations concerning the end of the age.

Refuting problems of this interpretation

We will not consider all of the problems with this interpretation, directly. It is worth noting, however, that the following major points easily refute many of the things that we are talking about.

The *first* one is that, at the beginning of the Seventy Weeks prophecy, the return of Ezra *to restore the street of Jerusalem* was before the return of Nehemiah to rebuild the walls.

We know that the return of Nehemiah to *rebuild* the walls is significant, and it was an important part of that forty-nine-year period of restoration.

But the restoration of the street preceded the rebuilding of the walls, as we have considered in some detail.

The *second* point is that the seventy weeks are weeks of regular calendar years, and do not require any kind of conversion. This is consistent with the cycle of sabbatical years, which underpinned the entire agricultural economy of the nation of Israel.

It is also consistent with all the various examples of 'the day for a year' principle. For example, when the spies went into the land and spied the land for forty days, because of their unbelief and their disobedience, the Lord said that the whole nation would wander in the wilderness for forty years.

That was a forty-year period. It was not a thirtynine point four-year period. The two thousand three hundred-year prophecy is two thousand three hundred years. It is not two thousand two hundred and sixty-seven. There is no need to continually run a correction on the calculations.

The *third* point, 'the coming of the Messiah', was fulfilled by the baptism of Jesus, when Jesus was anointed with the sevenfold Spirit of Yahweh, by the Holy Spirit.

We need to appreciate the significance of His baptism and His earthly ministry.

The *fourth* point is that it was Jesus Christ who 'confirmed the Everlasting Covenant' that God made with Abraham, 'with the many [Jew and Gentile] for *one week*'.

We note that the Antichrist may make any number of alliances or agreements with people, but he does not have a biblical covenant to make.

Jesus Christ confirms the Everlasting Covenant with many for one week.

A very helpful verse supports this point. Paul said to the Romans, 'Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision [the Jews] for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers.' Rom 15:8.

He was referring to the Everlasting Covenant that was made with Abraham, as well as the Everlasting Covenant that was made with David.

He continued, 'And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy', because the mercy of God has also been extended to the Gentiles to include them in this covenant.

'As it is written: "For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name". And again he says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!" 'Rom 15:9-10.

It is Jesus Christ who confirmed this Everlasting Covenant with both Jew and Gentile.

The *fifth* point is that it was Jesus Christ who put a stop to sacrifice and offering, by fulfilling the Law, abolishing the Old Covenant, and inaugurating the New Covenant.

The fact that the Jews sewed up the veil after the sacrifice of Christ, and then continued to make animal sacrifice, does not change the fact that Christ brought all of that to an end. Every animal sacrifice after the offering of Christ was an abomination to the Lord, and if animal sacrifice is ever re-instituted, it will also be an abomination to the Lord.

This is *not* the sacrifice that the Seventy Weeks prophecy refers to in it being brought to an end.

Point *six* is that Jesus Christ 'removed the middle wall of separation' and has united both Jew and Gentile, in His body, on the cross. This means that both Jew and Gentile have one, singular, prophetic destiny in the fellowship of the body of Christ.

We will consider the mercy and the judgement of the Lord in relation to this one, prophetic destiny, in coming sessions, because the apostle Paul addressed this in Romans Chapter 11.

Finally, point *seven* is that the period of delay is between the first and second half of the seventieth week. It is not between the end of the sixty-ninth and the beginning of the seventieth week.

The earthly ministry of Christ

The earthly ministry of Christ was three and a half years, and the book of Revelation is clear that there is only one three and a half-year period still to come.

We will consider the earthly ministry of Christ, lasting from His baptism – the coming of the Messiah – through to His crucifixion, when He put a stop to sacrifice and offering when He abolished the Old Covenant and inaugurated the New Covenant, in the middle of the seventieth week.

A 'week' is seven years long, so we would expect that the earthly ministry of Christ – the first half of the seventieth week – was three and a half years in length.

Even though the Gospels do not specify the exact timeframe, and reading the synoptic Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke - and the events recounted, we could have the impression that it was quite a condensed period of ministry.

The apostle John very helpfully gave us some time markers. He recorded three specific Passover feasts, plus a fourth, which he referred to as 'the feast of the Jews'. This clarity is very helpful in our understanding and substantiating the fact that Christ's ministry was three and a half years long.

The Messenger of the covenant bearing witness

We will examine Jesus' focus, or point, of ministry at each of these Passover feasts, as He came as the Messenger of the covenant to confirm the Everlasting Covenant that God had made with Abraham.

As the Messenger of the covenant, Jesus was the Word and He was the full embodiment of the word of the Father. He used each of the Passover feasts to bear witness to the coming fulfilment of the Everlasting Covenant that God had made with Abraham.

First Passover feast

In the first account of a Passover feast, we read, 'Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem'. Jon 2:13.

This was six months after His baptism, and quite a lot of events happened during that six-month period.

Immediately after Jesus was baptised, the Holy Spirit led him into the wilderness, where He overcame the temptation of Satan for a period of forty days and forty nights.

He then continued to preach and teach in the region of Galilee, calling disciples, and proclaiming Himself to be the Messiah.

He first proclaimed Himself to be the Messiah, in the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth. He stood up and, reading from the book of Isaiah, He said, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.' He continued, and closed the book and said to them, 'This prophetic passage has now been fulfilled.' Jesus proclaimed Himself to be the Messiah.

The first Passover was a significant waypoint in His ministry. It was His first trip to the city of Jerusalem, after His baptism. And He immediately went to the temple. This fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi, where we read that 'the Lord whom you seek, will *suddenly* come to His temple'. Mal 3:1.

Jesus 'suddenly' came to the temple. That would have been very sudden for the people who were present on that day because, when He got there, He found all those who were selling sheep and oxen and doves, and all of the moneychangers.

He made a whip of cords, and He drove them all out of the temple. He turned over the tables, and He poured all the money out on the floor. He created quite a scene.

'And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" [He was cleansing the temple]. Then His disciples remembered that it was written.' Joh 2:16-17.

It is interesting that they remembered it here. There are many other accounts where they remembered what was written in the Scriptures or they remembered what Jesus said after His resurrection.

The disciples witnessed something, and they recognised that this was the zeal of the Lord.

'Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up".'

The wrath of Christ toward those who had defiled the temple revealed His zeal, or His jealous love, for the Father's house. If the wrath of Christ was expressed in this way towards those who had corrupted the sacrificial system of offering in the earthly sanctuary, it is sobering to consider the nature of His wrath towards the violation of

fellowship in the *agape* meal that belongs to the heavenly sanctuary; that is, the fellowship of the body of Christ.

The judgement of God and the wrath of the Lamb are not yet being revealed in the world. This will not happen until the Ancient of Days - the Father - takes His seat, and then Jesus Christ stands up with His administration, and the seals are opened. That is when the judgement of God and the wrath of the Lamb will be revealed in the world.

We do know that Jesus Christ is presently *seated* at the right hand of God, and He is *walking* among His lampstand churches through the messengers whom He holds in His right hand.

He is walking among His lampstand churches with eyes like a flame of fire. His eyes reveal His jealous love for the sanctification of the Father's house, and also for our sanctification as sons of God. His eyes are revealing His *wrath* upon our sin and uncleanness.

It is important to understand that the jealous love of God for our sanctification is His wrath upon our sin and uncleanness.

Understanding the nature of His wrath, as Christ meets us eye to eye, is an essential foundation to receiving the fear of the Lord from Him, which motivates us to draw near, and to lay hold of our unique participation in the fellowship of His offering and His sufferings.

We have been delivered from the condemnation of the Law, and we know that 'there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus'.

Even though we have been delivered from the condemnation of the Law and are justified by the finished offering of Christ, it is only as we continue to lay hold of our participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings that we are delivered, or saved, from His wrath.

We are saved from His wrath as we receive His resurrection life, and we cease from sin.

Paul said, 'Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him' - or through participation in the fellowship of His offering. Rom 5: 9.

Immediately after Christ had cleansed the temple in this way, the Jews asked Him for a sign to substantiate His authority to do such a thing. Again, this was understandable, because the temple was the centrepiece of their whole religious, political life as a nation.

He replied, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Joh 2:19. This was the first time that Jesus identified His own physical body as 'the true temple' that is the Father's house.

It is also the first time that He clearly proclaimed the guarantee of His resurrection.

He was doing this as the Messenger of the covenant who was bearing witness to the coming fulfilment of the Everlasting Covenant that God had made with Abraham.

As an aside, once Jesus had said this, the Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple.' They were referring to the *whole temple precinct*, but we know that it only took Zerubbabel four years to finish the temple buildings themselves.

The decree to finish building the temple was issued in the second year of Darius, and the temple was dedicated in the sixth year of Darius. So, that only took four years.

But Herod the Great had begun a huge expansion project on the temple buildings, and this had been going for forty-six years. He wanted to make this the pride of the whole nation. He doubled the size of the temple mount, and then added all of the other buildings - the great porticos; all of those things. The Jews said that this building work had been going for forty-six years.

This is a very helpful confirmation of the accuracy of the Seventy Weeks prophecy, because history tells us that Herod the Great began this work in about 20BC or 19BC.

If we count forward forty-six years, again remembering that there was no year 'zero', it brings us to AD27 or AD28. We know that, according to the Seventy Weeks prophecy, Jesus was baptised in the fall of AD27, and this Passover feast would have happened in the springtime of AD28.

This statement by the Jews is very consistent with the timing of the Seventy Weeks prophecy.

Significantly, it was during this first Passover in Jerusalem that Nicodemus came to speak with Jesus at night. This is a real focus here. Jesus proclaimed to Nicodemus the need to be born from above to see the kingdom of God; and the need to be born of water and the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God.

The promise of the Spirit is 'the blessing of Abraham'. We receive the blessing of Abraham, as his true descendants, in the body of Christ as we are born of the Spirit. Jesus made this important point to Nicodemus.

In the context of this discussion, Jesus also bore witness to the truth that He had been sent from the ground of the fellowship of Yahweh to bear witness to, or confirm, this Everlasting Covenant.

Speaking as the Messenger of the covenant who had come to proclaim the word of the Everlasting Covenant as the testimony of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Jesus said to Nicodemus, 'Most assuredly [or truly, truly], I say to you.' Joh 3:11.

This statement, 'Truly, truly, I say to you' picks up the focus of Jesus' testimony as the Messenger of the covenant. There are quite a number of statements through the Gospel of John where He said this.

He said to Nicodemus, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.'

It is very interesting that Jesus shifted to plural pronouns at this point, because He was making the point that His witness was proclaiming the testimony of the Everlasting Covenant, which is the covenant between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That was the testimony that Jesus was then bringing as He came to confirm that Everlasting Covenant with many, for this one week.

Second Passover feast

The *second* Passover noted, 'After this there was a feast of the Jews [*the* feast of the Jews], and Jesus went up to Jerusalem'. Joh 5:1.

We note that He went up to Jerusalem here, in the same way that He went up to Jerusalem for the first feast.

If we consider the language of this verse only, it is possible that this refers to the Feast of Tabernacles. However, there is also nothing to suggest that it does not refer to the Feast of Passover.

In fact, *The Pulpit Commentary* reads, concerning this verse, 'Now the feast of the Jews could hardly be any other than the second Passover'. We would completely agree with that. It continues, 'While John Chapter 6 verse 4 would indicate a third'.

As an aside, it is very unlikely that Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles *until the final year of His ministry*, when He went up secretly and stood up at the end of the feast to proclaim the coming of the Holy Spirit.

At one time, Jesus' family wanted Him to go up to the Feast of Tabernacles to reveal Himself openly to the world and to prove who He said He was. Interestingly, at this point in time, His family did not believe in Him. Jesus said to them, 'You go up to the feast; I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not fully come.' Joh 7: 8.

We know that the offering of Christ was the fulfilment of the Day of Atonement; and the seven wounding events were the fulfilment of the seven times sprinkling of blood upon the mercy seat - His body, His physical body, the mercy seat of the true temple.

It is noteworthy that Jesus did not go up, ever, to Jerusalem to be present while the Day of Atonement was being officiated or celebrated.

We also know that there was no ark of the covenant in the most holy place when the people returned from exile in Babylon. Further, the sacrificial practice of the Day of Atonement was *not* recommenced in the days of Ezra or Nehemiah.

Many commentators are confused as to why the people would celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, but not celebrate the Day of Atonement.

This was because Ezra *looked forward* to the finished offering of Christ, and he knew that *grace* was flowing to the people from the finished offering of Christ. He knew that Christ was their 'Peg in the holy place'.

There was *no grace* for the nation through this sacrificial practice of the Day of Atonement, so it was not recommenced during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah.

It was recommenced some time after the ministry of Malachi. The historian Josephus explained why and how he believed that it recommenced.

The key point is that, once it had been recommenced, it was only a meaningless ritual performed by a corrupt priesthood.

Jesus did not recognise its validity; it had no capacity to cleanse the people or the sanctuary.

In fact, when Jesus went to the temple on His first visit, He did far more to cleanse the sanctuary than all of those Days of Atonement had done.

Jesus did not recognise its validity, and declined to accompany his family when they went up to celebrate this religious event.

However, in contrast to this, He *did* recognise the validity of *the Passover meals*.

As we are considering, He used these great gatherings in Jerusalem to *bear witness* to the fulfilment of the Everlasting Covenant.

Key point

This is our key point in this session.

The primary focus of Jesus' witness during the *first* Passover meal was 'the new birth'. That was His discussion with Nicodemus.

His primary focus during the second Passover meal was the resurrection of the dead at the end of the age.

The blessing of Abraham is the promise of the Spirit. It is our new birth as sons of God. It is also the adoption; the redemption of our body. It is the resurrection at the last day.

As Jesus came as the Messenger of the covenant, to confirm the Everlasting Covenant that God had made with Abraham, it certainly makes perfect sense. We would expect that the focus of His ministry was around the new birth and the resurrection.

After Jesus healed a lame man on the Sabbath - this second Passover - the Jews sought to kill Him.

Jesus healed the man. He had been lame for thirty-plus years. Jesus told the man to pick up his bed and to walk.

This happened, as I said, on the Sabbath. As he walked away, holding his bed, the Pharisees pulled him up and said, 'Don't you realise that it is against the Law to carry your bed on the Sabbath?' He said to them, 'Well, the Man who

healed me commanded me to pick up my bed and walk.'

After this the Jews tyied to kill Him. And when Jesus said to them, 'Well, I'm just doing the good works that the Father has given Me to do', they wanted to kill Him, the Scripture says, 'all the more', because He not only broke the Sabbath, but He also claimed that God was His Father.

It is a good point to note that as Jesus came as the Messenger of the covenant, and proclaimed the word of the Father, He was confronting them, and He was in direct opposition to the religious majority in the nation of Israel at that time.

This is exactly the same for us and for all of the messengers of Christ who proclaim the word of the cross. That word is in opposition, and it will create friction. It will create conflict, not only with the world, but also with the traditions and the practices of the religious majority.

Christ proclaimed the word. He bore witness to the Everlasting Covenant.

Speaking after this healing, He said, concerning the new birth, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead [those who are dead in trespasses and sins] will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.' Joh 5:25.

He then continued to speak about the resurrection at the end of the age by saying, 'Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life.' Joh 5:28-29.

He was referring to the good works of sonship that Christ has already finished and accomplished for us.

'For those who have done good [those who have continued to walk in the fellowship of Christ's offering], to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.'

In this discussion, Jesus clearly explained that the Father had given Him the authority to give eternal life and to execute judgement, as the Son of Man. His judgement is righteous because He does not seek His own will; rather, He seeks only the will of the Father.

Speaking as the Messenger of the covenant, Jesus was clear that the confirmation of the covenant was not an expression of His own witness, alone.

He explained that His witness was also verified by the witness of John the Baptist, who He described as 'a bright and shining lamp'.

He said, 'I also have *a greater witness* than John the Baptist, because the works that I do' - the works that He had been given to do by the Father also bore witness of Him.

He said, 'The *Father* Himself who has sent Me, He is also bearing witness of Me. And, in addition to this, the *Scriptures* are also bearing witness of Me.'

He said to them, 'You search the Scriptures, because in them you think you have eternal life; but they are *bearing witness of Me*, and you refuse to come to Me to find life.'

Jesus was saying, 'I have come as the Messenger of the covenant. I am confirming the Everlasting Covenant that God made with Abraham, and verifying My witness is the witness of John the Baptist; the witness of the Father; the witness of the works that I do; and the witness of the Scriptures themselves.'

He said, 'Not least of which is the writings of Moses.' We know that the book of Deuteronomy is the prophetic book of the New Covenant where Moses spoke particularly about the coming of Christ.

Third Passover feast

I will read a final section here as we close. This was the *third* Passover. 'Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near.' Joh 6:4.

Jesus did not go to Jerusalem for this Passover. He stayed in Galilee. After feeding the five thousand by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus began to proclaim the nature of our participation in the true Passover as an *agape* meal.

We know that He was in direct conflict with the political, religious leaders in Jerusalem. We might think that here, at the third Passover, He would have had His most supportive crowd of followers who had witnessed the feeding of the five thousand.

However, as He began to explain the true nature of the *agape* meal, this crowd of followers began to

grumble and then argue. They were offended and, finally, they walked away.

In this discussion, Jesus proclaimed that we 'eat His flesh' by receiving His word, by turning to see Him, and by coming to Him to abide in the fellowship of His body.

We 'drink His blood' by receiving and believing the word that joins us to the fellowship of His offering and sufferings so that we receive His resurrection life.

It is His resurrection life that we minister to one another in the fellowship of the body of Christ.

This is our key point.

The primary focus of Jesus during the *first* Passover meal was *the new birth*. That was His discussion with Nicodemus.

The primary focus of Jesus during the second Passover meal was the resurrection at the last day.

And His primary focus during this *third* Passover was *the fellowship of the agape meal*, which is our provision for our entire journey from new birth to the resurrection at the last day.

Comparing and contrasting His flesh and blood with the food and drink that sustained the nation of Israel on their journey from Egypt, which is symbolic of the world, all the way to the promised land, he said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you'; picking up these elements of *testimony* again.

'Most assuredly, I say to you, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you".

'Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.' Joh 6:53-54.

When the crowd began to disperse and to leave Him, He said to the disciples, 'Do you also want to go away?'

This is where Peter said, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.'

Peter began to recognise that Jesus Christ had come to 'confirm the Everlasting Covenant with the many'.

His confession, then, was recorded where he said, 'And also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.' Joh 6:69.

This was a confession of faith, which showed that the testimony of Christ, or His word, had begun to abide in the heart of Peter. This was the word in his heart and in his mouth.

We will continue with this theme in our session next week.