

No, not *that* gap theory! When someone mentions “the gap theory,” they are usually referring to an interval of time between the events of Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2. This article will rather address the gap that we personally believe will fall between the Rapture and the beginning of Daniel’s seventieth week of Tribulation. While many good Bible teachers believe the seventieth week will begin immediately after the Rapture, we believe the two will be separated by an indeterminate interval of time, up to a generation in duration.

The practical ramifications of this position should not be overlooked, for it affects the way we look for the Rapture. While it is commonly taught that “the stage is being set” for the Tribulation in our own day, we personally believe that *none* of the world events we hear about on a daily basis are in any way connected to the coming time of Jacob’s trouble. We rather believe that a post-Rapture gap of up to a generation in length will provide more than enough time for any stage-setting that needs to be done for that terrible day.

The Case for This Position

To present the case for this position, let’s begin with a look at the seventy weeks prophecy. In Daniel 9:24, the angel Gabriel tells Daniel:

“Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.”

Here Daniel is being given a timetable for the coming of the kingdom of heaven on earth. Since neither Israel nor the world will see an “an end of sins” and “everlasting righteousness” until the

establishment of the kingdom, Daniel is being told how long his people will have to wait for it. God had “determined” that *seventy weeks* must transpire before the kingdom could come.

A Hebrew who knew his Bible well, Daniel would know that Gabriel was speaking about weeks of *years*, not weeks of days (cf. Gen. 29:27; Lev. 25:8). This Hebrew idiom of *a week of years* sounds strange to our Gentile ears, until we remember that we ourselves sometimes speak of “a month of Sundays.”

After learning that the kingdom was still seventy weeks away, Daniel is next given a breakdown of what will transpire during these 490 years. Gabriel begins by speaking about the first 69 weeks:

“Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times” (Dan. 9:25).

Here Daniel learns that the first 69 weeks of the prophecy will consist of two segments, one of 7 weeks, followed by a segment of 62 weeks. Since the first seven weeks were to begin with “the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem,” we believe these first seven weeks refer to the 49 years it would take to build Jerusalem after Nebuchadnezzar’s destruction of that great city at the onset of the Babylonian captivity. The other 62 weeks of the prophecy refer to the 434 years that would then follow, unto the Messiah.

In his book *The Coming Prince*, Sir Robert Anderson correctly calculated that the 69th week would end on the very day of the Lord’s “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem, which marked His official presentation of Himself to His nation (See Page 4 of this issue).

The Gap

As we continue in the 70 weeks prophecy, Gabriel proceeds to tell Daniel what would happen “after” Messiah presented Himself to His people on the final day of the 69th week:

“And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for Himself...” (Dan. 9:26).

Here Daniel is told that “after” the 69th week ended with the presentation of Messiah to His nation, He would be “cut off” or *killed*, “cut off *out of the land of the living*” (Isa. 53:8).¹ While Gabriel does not say *how long* after, we now know that our Lord died a few days after His “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem. This means He died *after* the 69th week ended, but *before* the beginning of the 70th week, which Gabriel does not mention until the next verse of this prophecy (Dan. 9:27). Thus our Lord was cut off during a *gap* in the 70 weeks prophecy. The Cross was still a prophesied event, of course, but a prophesied event that transpired outside the confines of the prophesied 70 weeks.

Before we continue, we should point out that Daniel 9 is not the only place in Scripture where a prophetic gap appears. The seven feasts that God gave to Israel (see Leviticus 23) are “a shadow of things to come” (Col. 2:16,17), a prophetic schedule for the future of the nation. The first four of these prophetic feasts have all been fulfilled. The first, Passover (Lev. 23:5), was fulfilled in the death of Christ (I Cor. 5:7). The Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:6-8) was fulfilled when the “lamb without blemish” (I Pet. 1:19) was sacrificed without the leaven of sin.

This feast was followed by the Feast of Firstfruits (Lev. 23:10-14), which spoke of the resurrection of Christ (I Cor. 15:20,23). Fifty days later came the Feast of Pentecost (Lev. 23:15-22), which finds its fulfillment in Acts 2:1 “when the day of Pentecost was fully come.”

The remaining three of Israel’s seven feasts await a future fulfillment, but it is clear what each one signifies. The Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:24,25) foreshadows the gathering of redeemed Israel to enter the kingdom (Matt. 24:31). Since the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:27-32) was a day when Israel was cleansed from their sins as a nation (Lev. 16:30), this feast will come to fruition after the second coming of Christ, when God takes away their sins as a nation (Rom. 11:26,27). They will then be ready for the kingdom, the last entry on Israel’s prophetic calendar, typified by Israel’s last feast, the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:33-44).

God told Israel to keep this feast “when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land” (Lev. 23:39), and so it speaks to the time when the “wheat” of redeemed Israel will be gathered into the “barn” of the kingdom (Matt. 3:12; 13:30). Significantly, the first four feasts began in “the first month” of Israel’s calendar year (Lev. 23:4,5), and all four were finished within fifty days (vv. 15,16). Then there was a *gap* of several months before the Feast of Trumpets and the other remaining feasts began to be celebrated “in the seventh month” (v. 24). As in Daniel 9, this gap in Israel’s prophetic calendar suggests that God intended for the fulfillment of Israel’s last three feasts to come sometime after the fulfillment of the first four feasts.

Not the Mystery

Here it is important to point out that the gap in the seventy weeks prophecy is *not* the dispensation of grace. The dispensation of grace is an *unprophesied* gap in God’s prophetic program, a gap of which Old Testament prophets like Daniel knew nothing. However, this *prophesied* gap is what allowed God to insert the *unprophesied* dispensation of grace into the seventy weeks prophecy, a sort of a gap within a gap. Without this prophesied gap, *even God Himself* would have no right to insert a dispensation of two thousand years duration into the precise timetable of the 70 weeks prophecy. He Himself had given this prophecy of 490 years, and without a gap in the schedule, He could not add or detract years from it without breaking His word. Needless to say, this prophetic gap worked out to our advantage as Gentiles.

This prophesied gap also worked out to Israel’s advantage, for the cutting off of Messiah was to have been followed immediately by the wrath of the 70th week. Psalm 2 clearly predicts that, after the kings of the earth and the rulers in Israel “take counsel together, against the Lord, and

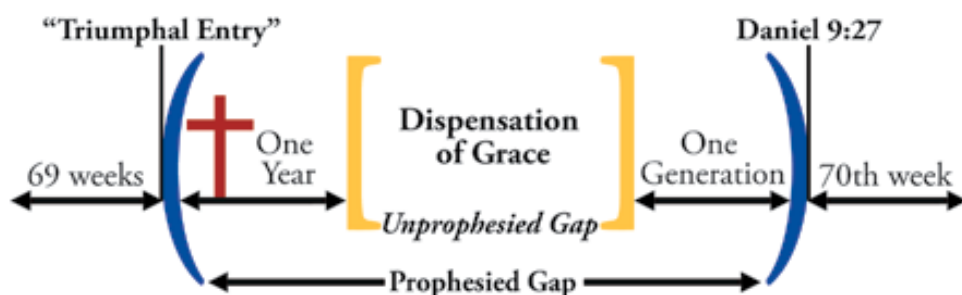
against His anointed....*then* shall He speak unto them in His wrath” (vv. 2-5). But because God had provided an interruption in the airtight schedule of the 70 weeks prophecy, He was able to give the people of Israel an additional year to reconsider what they had done at Calvary. This additional year was the subject of the Lord’s parable in Luke 13:6-9. The “certain man” represents God the Father, who planted the fig tree of Israel in His vineyard (cf. Isa. 5:1-7). During the “three years” (Luke 13:7) of the Lord’s earthly ministry, God sought spiritual fruit in Israel.

Finding none, He determined to cut Israel down when the cutting off of Messiah brought an end to His three year earthly ministry. But “the dresser of his vineyard” (the Lord Jesus) prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do,” and persuaded His Father to let the tree of Israel alone “*this year also*” (13:8).

This is where it gets interesting. Those who have studied Bible chronology assure us that the events described in the first seven chapters of the Book of Acts cover a period of *one year*. When at the end of this additional year the leaders of Israel stoned a man filled with the Holy Ghost, it showed that the fig tree of Israel had still not produced the spiritual fruit that God was seeking. At that point, God had no choice but to “cut it down” (Luke 13:9).²

The Gap within the Gap

When this writer was in school, we learned that when a writer wishes to insert parenthetical information into the body of a sentence, he uses parentheses, of course. If he then wishes to insert parenthetical information within the parentheses, he must set this information off with brackets, not with parentheses within parentheses.



The point? When grace teachers draw a timeline to help illustrate God’s plan of the ages, the dispensation of grace is often placed within parentheses. While we would not quibble with this time-honored portrayal of God’s plan, in the illustration above we placed the prophesied gap between the 69th and 70th week in parentheses, and the dispensation of grace in brackets within those parentheses.

Looking back, we know that one year after the open parenthesis marked the interruption of the 70 weeks prophecy, the opening bracket of the dispensation of grace began. This means, however, that after the Rapture brings the closing bracket of the present dispensation of the

mystery to an end, there may be additional prophetic time remaining in the parenthetical break in the 70 weeks prophecy before the 70th week begins. We believe this to be the case, based on some things the Lord said during His earthly ministry to Israel.

In Matthew 16:28, the Lord said that “there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom.” We know it is commonly taught that this prophecy was fulfilled six days later when the Lord was transfigured before James, Peter and John (Matt. 17:1-5), who became “eyewitnesses of His majesty” (II Pet. 1:16-18). However, we feel that seeing the Lord’s majesty is not the same as seeing “the Son of man coming in His kingdom.”

Indeed, Luke’s version of our Lord’s words have Him saying that “there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, *till they see the kingdom*” (Luke 9:27). If a prediction of *seeing* the kingdom can be satisfied with *a vision* of the kingdom, how do we know that those who are born again will see more than just a vision of the kingdom (John 3:3)? We feel it is more natural to believe that the Lord was saying that some who were standing there would live to see the actual kingdom of heaven established on earth. Remember, *most* if not *all* of the disciples, and certainly all of the apostles, were alive six days later for the transfiguration, and the Lord had said that only “*some*” would live to see the kingdom. Later, after speaking of events that will transpire during the Great Tribulation, the Lord asserted that “this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled” (Matt. 24:34). We know it is commonly taught that the Greek word translated *generation* here should be translated something similar to *race*, making this a prediction that the Hebrew race would not die out, but would rather remain in existence unto the Tribulation. Here we have to agree with preterists,³ who label this interpretation as “a reach” and “a stretch.” We believe this construal, and all other attempts to explain away our Lord’s plain statements to this effect, originated with well-meaning Bible teachers who did not understand that the present dispensation of grace *interrupted* the fulfillment of our Lord’s plain prophecies. Had the dispensation of grace not interrupted the prophetic program, that generation would have lived to see the Tribulation, and the subsequent establishment of the kingdom of heaven.

This then is why we believe that a period of time of up to a generation may yet remain after the Rapture, before the beginning of Daniel’s 70th week. Only one year of the Lord’s generation passed before the age of the mystery interrupted prophecy. That means that after the Rapture, when God picks up exactly where He left off in His prophetic program, much of that generation will remain before the 70th week begins.

Crying Wolf

If Satan is not now setting the stage for post-Rapture events, we believe it is high time that believers stop trying to identify current events as signs that the Rapture is near. This writer has been saved for 41 years, and in every one of those years we have heard prophecy preachers pointing to world events and concluding from them that the Rapture must be very near.⁴ We believe such predictions discredit legitimate Bible study in the eyes of the world, just as surely

as setting exact dates for the Rapture does, the foolishness of which we were again reminded last month when yet another predicted date for the Rapture came and went.

We further believe that Rapture predictions based on world events are actually counterproductive to the cause of readying believers for the coming of the Lord. The fabled boy who cried wolf too often found that when the wolf really appeared, no one believed him. In the same way, believers who have heard one too many world-event-based predictions of the Rapture are more apt to ignore the next such prediction, rather than readying their hearts and lives for His coming.

Keep Looking Up!

While we personally do not believe in looking for the Rapture based on current events, we firmly believe in looking for the Rapture! God's Word *says* we should be "looking for that blessed hope" (Titus 2:13), and so we should always be ready for His return, and warning the lost that His coming is imminent. However, we do not believe Paul told Titus to look for the Rapture based on the current world events of his day. We rather believe he based his exhortation on the only firm foundation a child of God has, the truth of God's Word. God *says* that the Lord may come for us at any moment, and it is this and this alone that should motivate us to live like people who "love His appearing" (II Tim. 4:8).

As a boy, we delighted in watching the silliness of *Gilligan's Island* on TV. One day Mary Ann was missing, and the castaways combed the island to find her. When they met back at the rendezvous point, the Professor asked the Skipper if he had found her. He replied, "I didn't see hide nor hair of her." To this Gilligan interjected, "You're not supposed to be looking for hides or hairs, you're supposed to be looking for Mary Ann!"

Seeming not to hear, the Skipper went on, "There's not a sign of her anywhere," to which Gilligan responded, "You're not supposed to be looking for signs, you're supposed to be looking for Mary Ann!" We often think of this when we hear yet another observation based on world events that the Rapture must be near. Christian friend, we are not told to be looking for *signs* of the Lord's coming, *we are supposed to be looking for the Lord!* The fact that Paul told Titus to be looking for the Rapture 2,000 years ago means nothing needs to be fulfilled before He can come to catch us up to be with Him.

Are you ready? Are you busy fighting the fight that the Apostle Paul fought? If Satan is focusing all of his efforts on battling the proclamation of Paul's gospel, we should likewise be focusing all of our efforts on getting the blessed message out to others. May God help us to ignore the wolf cries and focus on the task at hand, fulfilling our commission "to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery" (Eph. 3:9).

Endnotes

1. Messiah was cut off “not for Himself” (Dan. 9:26), but for the sins of Isaiah’s people (Isa. 53:8), the Jews.

2. This parable is the death knell of the Acts 28 position, which holds that Paul preached the kingdom gospel to Israel all the way to Acts 28:28, a period of 32 years. The parable allows for only *one* additional year of kingdom ministry, not 32.

3. Preterists believe that the Matthew 24 prophecies of the Tribulation were all fulfilled by 70 A.D.

4. Over thirty years ago, we were told that vultures were massing in the valley of Armageddon in unprecedented numbers, and that this was surely a sign that this apocalyptic battle was nigh at hand (Rev. 19:17-19). After three decades, one would assume these birds must be getting pretty hungry, and Armageddon is still a generation and seven years away!