

GOD'S UNANSWERABLE CHALLENGE TO UNBELIEF

Introduction Isa. 48 : 3-5: "Before it came to pass I showed it thee."

Fulfilled prophecy is God's unanswerable challenge to unbelief. In this lesson we will study a unique time-prophecy, written over 500 years before Jesus' birth, which foretold the time of His baptism; the time of His crucifixion; and the time when the Gospel would begin to go out to the Gentile world. It has been called: "The Keystone of Old Testament Prophecy", because it locks all the others securely into place. The Bible contains many marvels, but none is greater than this! Let us open the Bible and read Dan. 9 : 24-27.

(See Chart No. 36—Diagram of the Seventy Weeks)

Discussion 1.—ARE THE "SEVENTY WEEKS" LITERAL OR SYMBOLIC?

- (a) They are found in a setting of symbolic prophecy (Dan. 8 and 9) which requires that they be interpreted according to the year-day principle mentioned in Num. 14 : 34 and Ezek. 4 : 6. On this basis they represent 70 x 7, or 490 years.
- (b) The Hebrews were accustomed to speak of "weeks of years", or "heptads" (groups of seven years), and modern translators recognise that Daniel had this usage in mind here. Examples: Moffatt's translation: "Seventy weeks of years are fixed for your people and for your sacred city." Goodspeed's translation: "Seventy weeks of years are destined for your people and for your holy city."
- (c) The footnote to Dan. 9 : 24 in the Douay Bible (Roman Catholic) agrees with this conclusion: "V 24, SEVENTY WEEKS, namely of years (or seventy times seven, that is 490 years)."
- (d) "The proof of the pudding is in the eating of it." As we will presently see, this prophecy has been exactly fulfilled on the basis of the year-day principle—a practical demonstration of its validity, which none can deny!

2.—WHAT ARE THE FIVE MAJOR EVENTS OF THIS PROPHECY?

- (a) "The commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem"—457 B.C.
Following the Babylonian and Persian captivity of Israel in the 6th century B.C., there were three historic edicts by Persian kings which authorised the return of the Hebrew exiles to their homeland. These were:
 The decree of Cyrus—536 B.C. Mainly concerned with the rebuilding of the Temple, the restoration of the sacred vessels and the Temple worship (Ezra 1 : 1-4).
 The decree of Darius—519 B.C. A renewal of the previous decree, made necessary because the work of rebuilding had been hindered by hostile intrigue (Ezra 6 : 7-12).
 The decree of Artaxerxes—457 B.C. This was a pivotal event in the epic of restoration, for in addition to promoting the re-establishment of worship in Jerusalem, it provided for the re-constitution of the Hebrew state with full powers of local government. The actual text of this royal decree, which went into effect in the seventh year of Artaxerxes' reign, is given in Ezra 7 : 11-26. Scholars have demonstrated by many lines of sound evidence that the seventh year of Artaxerxes was 457 B.C.

NOTE: These three decrees are also described as "THE COMMANDMENT OF THE GOD OF ISRAEL" (Ezra 6:14), indicating that THE HAND OF PROVIDENCE WAS THE REAL MOVING FORCE behind them all!