

## Daniel's Seventy "Weeks": Daniel 9 – Allen P. Ross

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This is a very rich, and yet very detailed and involved passage about the times and circumstances of Messiah. It includes the suffering of the Messiah; but I include it here because it gives a general picture of the sweep of history. Daniel writes pertaining to Jews and Jerusalem. "Seventy weeks" makes up the oracle. This period of time is set to accomplish several things: to restrain or finish transgression (Rom. 6:4), to make an end of sin or sin offerings, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21), to seal up vision and oracle (He fulfilled them), and to anoint the Most Holy Place.<sup>1</sup> These were partially fulfilled in the first coming, but must await the second advent for completion.



The period of time known as "seventy weeks" begins with the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem,<sup>2</sup> which most probably refers to the decree of Artaxerxes to Nehemiah on Nisan 1 (March 4/5) 444 B.C. (Neh. 2:1-8).<sup>3</sup> After 69 weeks the Messiah would be cut off, indicating He would not receive the kingdom then. We know that Jesus died the 14th of Nisan, 33 A.D. (see below). So that time period is what Daniel is predicting. The term *sebu'ah* (pronounced *she-boo-ah*) is a *heptad* or period of seven, or "week" in the interpretations. Jeremiah had predicted that the nation would be in captivity for 70 years because they had not kept the sabbath years to let the land lie in rest; the captivity was back-payment for these omissions (Jer. 25:11 and 29:10). Each of the 70 years of captivity, then, represented seven years. On the basis of that, Daniel sees 70 time periods stretching into the future, and so each of those 70 likewise represent seven years. Seven of these periods would be 49 years; and from the time references in the context that works--from the decree given to rebuild Jerusalem (March 5, 444 B.C.) to the completion of the building of Jerusalem with moat and plaza (Ezra 10:9; Est. 4:6; 2 Chron. 32:6; Neh. 8:1,3).

A lot of scholars gloss over this section as "mere symbolism"; but the text of Daniel is too specific for that. He is concerned with exact time frames and precise events. So how does it come out? Let's test it and see what happens--and then you can decide if it is vague symbolism.

Daniel has 70 "weeks"; but after 69 of these the Messiah would be cut off. If the unit is seven years, then 70 "weeks" would be 490 years. So 69 weeks would be 483 years--if one uses solar years. The total of 483 solar years would come out to 38 A.D. But they did not use solar years. They were on the lunar system. How did that work? There is good evidence that the year was calculated as 360 days, or 12 equal months of 30 days. Then, after an interval of years, a thirteenth month would be added to bring the calendar and the harvest back into harmony. We see in the story of the Flood that the waters of the Flood began on the 17th day of the second month, and ended on the 17th day of the seventh month, which we are told is 150 days--five months of 30 days. John in Revelation takes the Old Testament prophecies of the end-times and calculates the three and a half years (times, time and half a time) as 42 months to be 1260 days. That is 42 months of 30 days to get 1260 days. So we are on good ground to say that 360 days made up a year in the prophetic calendar (see Hoehner, *Chronology*).

Now it is a matter of mathematics: 69 weeks times seven years times 360 days will give us the number of days in the prophecy: 173,880 days. So Daniel is saying after the decree of March 5, 444 B.C., there are 173,880 days until Messiah is cut off.

Now, this can be verified with our calendar system. The difference between 444 B.C. and 33 A.D. is 476 solar years. How many days is that? By multiplying 476 by 365.24219879 (or by 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, 45.975 seconds), one gets 173,855 days, 6 hours, 52 minutes, 44 seconds--or 173,855 days. There is a difference of 25 days. But the solar reckoning is from March 5, 444 to March 5, 32 A.D. So if we add the difference of the 25 days to March 5, we come to March 30 (of A.D. 33), which in the year 33 A.D. was Nisan 10. That is the Monday of the Passion Week, the day of the Triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> Jesus died Nisan 14, 33 A.D., or April 3, 33 A.D.<sup>5</sup>

The prophecy continues then to describe the people of the prince who was to come and try to destroy God's program. Daniel's oracle at this point becomes very general, saying that there would be wars until the great destruction at the end of the age. The statement that Messiah was to be cut off "after" the 69th week, but not in the 70th week, is very unusual, and can only be explained by an interval of unknown length between the 69th and 70th week. This is often the way Old Testament prophetic perspective works, for they look to the future and see the pinnacles of events, but not necessarily how close the events are.<sup>6</sup> In Matthew 24 and 25 Jesus Himself predicts the destruction of Jerusalem after His death and the great wars and abominations that come at the end of the age prior to His return. His disciples could not discern from the way that is laid out that there would be 2000 years at least between some of the sections. So Daniel's discussion of the great desecrations looks to the end of the age.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These were only partially fulfilled at Christ's first advent, and so will be completely fulfilled at the second. So Daniel's vision--we now know--encompasses the period from 444 B.C. to the second advent, even though he focuses on periods of time within that stretch.

<sup>2</sup> This is not to be confused with the earlier decrees to rebuild the Temple, or walls. This is the complete city.

<sup>3</sup> Nisan 1 in 444 was either March 4 or March 5, March 5 being more likely since the crescent of the new moon would have been visible late in the evening of March 4, about 10:00 p.m. and could have been easily missed (Goldstine, *New and Full Moons 1001 B.C. to A.D. 1651* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1973), p. 47.

<sup>4</sup> Nisan 10 is the day the Jews chose the animal in the Temple that they were going to use for Passover on Nisan 14.

<sup>5</sup> Jesus was born in the winter of 5/4 B.C. just prior to the death of Herod, who died between March 29 and April 11, 4 B.C. He began His public ministry in the fall of 29, just after John began His that summer, the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberias. Jesus' ministry included at least three, most likely four trips to Jerusalem for Passover, the last being His death (the narratives mention three different passovers, but a fourth fits in the chronology as well). So that rules out a 30 A.D. death, which would have given Him a ministry of a few months. Passover fell on Friday in 30, 33, and 36. The year 36 is too late, for Pilate was only there through 35 A.D. So 33 A.D. fits all the evidence the best.

<sup>6</sup> This is clear from most Messianic prophecies that do not distinguish between a first and second advent; they just tell of the coming of Messiah.

<sup>7</sup> It may be that God chose to do it this way because of His intent to make a legitimate presentation of the kingdom of heaven to Israel (even though He knew they would reject). But the contingency is there--if they receive it, this is Elijah who should come (but they didn't, and this wasn't Elijah).