

The Coming of the Messiah

One of the most beautiful and most powerful examples of intercessory prayer occurs in Daniel 9, the aged Daniel's passionate petition to God for the restoration of Israel after decades of captivity. Verse after verse sings with Daniel's confession of his sins and "the sin of my people Israel" (vs. 20). His prayer exemplifies our need for God's grace and mercy, because it reveals the gap between a holy God and sinful humanity—a gap that can be closed only by the Messiah, the God who became a human being and thus was the only One who could bridge that gap between humanity and God.

Perhaps that is why this chapter ends with one of the most compelling and intense Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, one that forcefully predicts the coming of Jesus, who came in order to bridge that gap. And though, in the immediate context, Daniel was concerned with the political and physical restoration of his nation, the prophecy points to the One whose advent would, eventually, lead to the ultimate restoration of sinful humanity to a holy, sinless God.

DANIEL 8 AND 9: CONNECTING LINKS (Dan. 8:26, 27; 9:23-27).

Gabriel appears to Daniel and says that he has come "to give thee skill and understanding" (Dan. 9:22). Skill and understanding about what? Nothing in his prayer suggested that Daniel needed understanding, at least not about his immediate concern regarding the captivity. What was Gabriel talking about? See Dan. 8:26, 27.

The last time Daniel needed any understanding was in regard to the vision in Daniel 8:14. In Daniel 8:26 and 27, Daniel says that he did not understand the vision about the 2,300 "evenings and mornings" of verse 14. Now Gabriel, in Daniel 9:24-27, comes specifically to give him that understanding.

The Hebrew makes the link between the two chapters obvious. Daniel uses two Hebrew terms in chapter 8 for "vision." The first one is located in verse 1: "I, Daniel, had a vision [chazon]"; the other appears in verse 26: "The vision [mar'eh] of the evenings and mornings . . . is true".

Chazon deals with the whole vision, while mar 'eh deals only with the 2,300 days. In Daniel 8, Gabriel did not explain to Daniel the mar'eh of the 2,300 days, which is why Daniel did not understand it (vs. 27). Now, in Daniel 9:23, Gabriel returns to explain to Daniel the "vision" (mar 'eh) not explained in Daniel 8 (all the rest of the vision was already explained). Gabriel says to Daniel in verse 23, "and understand the vision [mar 'eh]". What mar 'eh? Obviously, the mar'eh of the "evenings and mornings" of Daniel 8:14. Thus, Gabriel is pointing Daniel back to the 2,300 days.

THE SEVENTY WEEKS.

"Seventy weeks are determined [or "cut off"] 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" (Dan. 9:24).

In response to Daniel's prayer for restoration of his people, the angel Gabriel appears and—after pointing Daniel back to the mar'eh of the 2,300 evenings and mornings (a time prophecy)—immediately gives Daniel another time prophecy, that of the 70 weeks, which are "determined," or "decreed" (NRSV), upon his people.

The verb *chatak*, translated "determined" or "decreed," never appears anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible; thus students cannot compare its use with other texts, a commonly used method for seeking to learn the meaning of words found in the text. Nevertheless, the same verb has been used in other Hebrew sources, and from these sources it is clear that although "determine" or "decreed" is a viable translation, the verb originally expressed the more concrete idea of separation by cutting or cutting off. In fact, in a majority of cases in which it is used, *chatak* clearly means "cut off."

Because the verb could mean either "determine" or "cut off," the context is decisive in choosing the best translation. Gabriel, before even mentioning the 70 weeks, points Daniel back to the 2,300 evenings and mornings; then, in the context of 2,300 days, he says the 70 weeks are *chatak*. The basic meaning of "cut off" fits better than "decreed." The 70 weeks, the shorter time prophecy, is "cut off" from the longer one, the 2,300 days of Daniel 8:14.

In fact, the angel avoids using the verb to decree in that specific instance, though he knows the word and, indeed, uses it only a few verses later (Dan. 9:26).

Thus, whatever the meaning of the 70 weeks, this time prophecy is "cut off" from the larger one, the 2,300 days of the previous chapter.

THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH (Dan. 9:25-27).

The meaning of the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9 is much more challenging to grasp than other passages of Scripture. However, in analyzing the passage, consider the following points:

1. The first thing announced is the coming of the Messiah after 62 weeks plus 7 weeks (69 weeks). See Daniel 9:25. He will initiate His ministry at the end of the 69 weeks as the Anointed One (Mark 1:9-11).
2. Though what will take place during the seven weeks is not clearly stated, the context suggests that the city of Jerusalem will be rebuilt (Dan. 9:25).
3. According to Daniel 9:26, "after the sixty-two weeks" (plus the previous seven) the Anointed One will be killed, and no one will help Him. This will take place during the last week of the 70 weeks—an obvious reference to Christ's sacrificial death on the cross.
4. During the last week, the Messiah will also "confirm a covenant with many" (vs. 27). A better translation could be "he will make a strong covenant." This is the new covenant firmly established through the blood of Christ (Luke 22:20) and includes Jews and Gentiles who, through faith in Christ, enjoy its benefits.
5. During the middle of the seventieth week, the sacrificial system of the Old Testament would end (Dan. 9:27). The Hebrew word translated "middle" (*chatsi*) does not mean "half" but "midst." Christ's sacrificial death brought to an end the Israelite sacrificial system (Mark 15:37, 38; Heb. 10:8-10).
6. The destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies is predicted in this prophecy, even if it is not clearly stated that it will happen during the 70 weeks. The destruction is decreed to take place in the future, but we are not told when (Dan. 9:26). The fate of the city was decreed by Jesus during His ministry (Matt. 24:1, 2) and took place about forty years later.

7. Because the 70 weeks cover the historical period from the time of Persia to the coming of the Messiah, the prophetic period represents 490 literal years, not days (70 weeks, composed of 7 days each, is the equivalent of 490 prophetic days, or 490 literal years).

CHRONOLOGY OF THE 70 WEEKS (Ezra 7; Dan. 9:25).

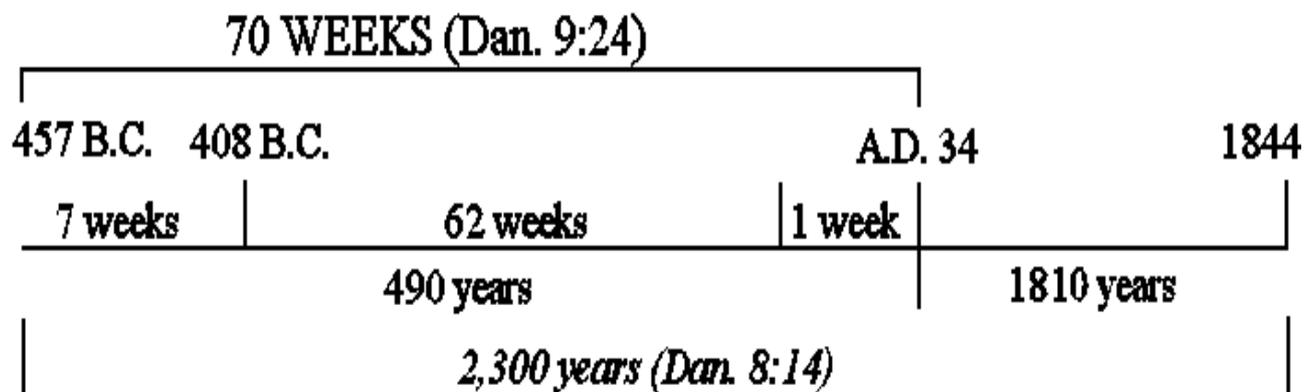
What event initiated the prophecy of the 70 weeks? Dan. 9:25.

Gabriel provides information that enables us to identify the specific decree he refers to in the prophecy. The decree authorizes the restoration and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The verb restore refers to the return of the city to the Jews to administer it in accordance with their own laws, while the reconstruction of the city is indicated by the verb rebuild.

Ezra mentions a Persian decree given by Cyrus in 537 B.C. to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-4), which was reaffirmed by Darius in 520 B.C. (Ezra 6:1-12). However, that specific decree does not refer to the one mentioned in Daniel 9:25, because, according to Gabriel's words, the decree involved the rebuilding of the city, not just the temple. Another decree was issued by Artaxerxes in 457 B.C., authorizing the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem (Ezra 4:7-23; 7:12-26). This decree allowed the Jews to govern Judah according to their own law (7:25, 26) and is the only decree that meets the prophetic stipulations. Later (444 B.C.), it was reactivated by the king as requested by Nehemiah (Nehemiah 2).

Study the following diagram (using the comments that follow and previous lessons) until you are able to explain it to others. (Dan. 9:24; Dan. 8:14)

2,300 day chart



1. In 457 B.C., Artaxerxes issued the decree; 49 years later (7 prophetic weeks) the city was rebuilt (408 B.C.); Christ was anointed in AD. 27 (the sixty-ninth week) and died in A.D. 31 (the middle of the seventieth week). Stephen died as a martyr in A.D. 34 (the date we use to end the 70-week prophecy), and from that point the gospel went also to the Gentile world.

2. Because the 70 weeks (490 years) are part of the 2,300 years, 457 B.C. becomes the starting point for the 2,300 years, which ended in 1844, the year the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary was to begin (Dan. 8:14).

3. According to Daniel 7:25, 26, the pre-Advent aspect of the final judgment was to start sonic time after 1798; we have now the exact year: 1844.

The following material expands on concepts covered:

The seventh year of Artaxerxes. Before the discovery of ancient sources, some uncertainty existed concerning the date for the seventh year of Artaxerxes. But now we have Babylonian astronomical texts and papyrus documents found on the island of Elephantine, Egypt that confirm that Artaxerxes's first full year on the throne was 464 B.C. His seventh year would then be 457 B.C.

Many historians date the seventh year to 458 B.C. because they use the Persian calendar (spring to spring) to calculate the year. But biblical and historical evidence indicate that the Jews used a fall-to-fall calendar, and this fixed the seventh year as 457 B.C. (Neh. 1:1; 2:1). This date is solidly grounded on reliable evidence.

SUMMARY:

The prophecy of the 70 weeks supplements the vision of the 2,300 years; in fact, it provides its starting point (457 B.C.). Numerous links tie these two prophecies together, both of which start in the Persian period. The 2,300 years ended in 1844, when Christ began the closing aspect of His high-priestly work, the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary.