

Study Guide #4: The 70 Weeks Prophecy

Introduction

The 70 Weeks Prophecy is found in Daniel 9:24-27 and fundamentally concerns a period of national probation given to the nation of Judah to get right with God. Verse 24 states that 70 weeks are given to Daniel's people **"To finish the transgression and To make an end of sins"** (NKJV). **God's part is "To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy"** (NKJV). During these 70 weeks, Jerusalem would be rebuilt and restored, and the Messiah would come and die (vv. 25-26). This is the only prophecy in Scripture that gives the time when the Messiah would appear. Thus, it's an amazing prophecy!



Ancient Jerusalem

Question #1: How should the time period in this prophecy be calculated?

Answer: Conservative scholars—both futurists and historicists—agree that 70 *literal* weeks is far too short for the city of Jerusalem to be rebuilt and restored. Since Daniel had been contemplating the 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecy as the time when Judah's Babylonian Captivity would end (Daniel 9:2), these scholars correctly understand the 70 weeks to mean 70 weeks *of years* in a kind of play on words. Since a week of years is obviously 7 years (7 days per week), conservative scholars agree this is a period of 490 years. [NOTE: Futurists are scholars who view the apocalyptic prophecies as pertaining *primarily* to the far future shortly before the 2nd Coming of Jesus, while Historicists are those who view those prophecies as pertaining to much of Christian history as well as to the short period before the 2nd Coming. Explorer III, Study Guides #7-9 and #14-15 will more directly address this debate in terms of Antichrist and the book of Revelation.]

However, futurists understand these 70 weeks of years to be literal time, as in 70 "sevens" of years. This avoids applying the year-day principle (1 symbolic day = 1 literal year), which has a long history of being variously applied in Christian history. The Hebrew word for **"weeks"** indeed means "weeks" and is so translated elsewhere in the Old Testament, including in the book of Daniel (10:2-3). Confirmation that the word **"weeks"** is the correct translation comes from the relationship between the literal Hebrew for the 70 years (9:2) and the 70 weeks (9:24). The literal Hebrew would be translated this way: 70 years [and] weeks 70. Note that the numeral 70 are in parallel positions to each other, as are the words **"years"** and **"weeks."** This means that since the word for **"years"** is a calendar word, so must be the word for **"weeks."** To translate the **"70 weeks"** as **"70 sevens"** (per the New International Version) breaks the parallelism.

Historicists recognize that it's only 70 weeks of years because each day in a week represents a literal year, which applies the year-day principle. Although this particular prophecy isn't apocalyptic in nature, it's part of an apocalyptic book and in the apocalyptic section of that book (chapters 7-12). Therefore, the 70 Weeks

Prophecy is evidence that the year-day principle does at least sometimes operate in apocalyptic time prophecies.

Question #2: What is the beginning date for the 70 Weeks Prophecy?

Answer: Daniel 9:25 states that the 70 weeks would begin “**from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem**” (NKJV). Conservative scholars agree that this must be one of the two decrees by the Persian King Artaxerxes I concerning the city of Jerusalem because the decree of King Cyrus and King Darius only concerned the rebuilding of the Temple, and Ezra 6:14 declares that Ezra’s broader



Artaxerxes I

mission was the fulfillment of the three-fold decree by Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes. Artaxerxes I issued 2 decrees involving Jerusalem and the Jews, one in 458/457 B.C. and the other in 445/444 B.C. Virtually all futurists choose the 445/444 B.C. date, when Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to “**rebuild it**” (Nehemiah 2:5, NKJV). However, only the wall was rebuilt by Nehemiah, and it only took 52 days (Nehemiah 6:15). It's clear that some of the private houses had already been rebuilt before Nehemiah arrived in the city (Nehemiah 7:3), but apparently not most of them (Nehemiah 7:4)—which implies that Ezra’s mission included rebuilding the city, but that the project was taking longer than expected. Moreover, the prophecy included the

word “**restore**” in regard to the city. Artaxerxes’ 1st decree was understood by Ezra to mean the restoration of Jerusalem’s status as the capital of Judah because he did that, and the Jewish nation was given a fair amount of autonomy, subject to the Persian Empire, of course.

Question #3: Is there any other reason that the 445/444 B.C. date is not the correct starting date for the 70 Weeks Prophecy?

Answer: Yes. This date is clearly too late to apply to the Messianic part of the prophecy to Jesus. Therefore, futurists interpret the 490 years as so-called *prophetic* years, consisting of only 360 days. The problem is that this doesn’t harmonize with the New Testament data regarding Jesus either, which some futurists acknowledge. Therefore, the cleaner interpretation is to view the 490 years as regular solar years.

Question #4: If the correct date is Artaxerxes’ first decree, is it 458 or 457 B.C.?

Answer: The short answer is that since we know the books of Ezra and Nehemiah used the fall-to-fall reckoning for the Jewish year, and Ezra 7:8-9 states that Ezra and company left for Jerusalem on the 1st day of the 1st month in Artaxerxes’ 7th year of his reign, it must have been 457 B.C. The reason for this is that Ezra and company couldn’t have gotten organized and left for Jerusalem on the same day the decree was issued. Therefore, the 1st month would have to be the 1st month of the religious year, which would be the spring of 457 B.C. Their arrival in Jerusalem on the 1st day of the 5th month (Ezra 7:9) would be sometime in the summer of 457 B.C.

Question #5: What does the phrase “To anoint the Most Holy” mean in Daniel 9:24?

Answer: The Hebrew words for “**Most Holy**” occur numerous times in the Old Testament and always refers to the sanctuary or something associated with the sanctuary. Therefore, this phrase does not refer to the anointing of Jesus at His baptism. To “**anoint**” a sanctuary is to consecrate it so that it can be utilized on behalf of a religious people. In other words, anointing a sanctuary is its inauguration service (see Exodus 40:9-10). But to which sanctuary does Daniel 9:24 refer? It isn’t the Second Temple because that was anointed in 515 B.C. (Ezra 6:15-18), almost 60 years before the beginning of the 70 Weeks Prophecy. Futurists view this as the Jerusalem Temple at the time of Jesus’ millennial reign. However, the next sanctuary to be anointed for service after the Second Temple would be the sanctuary in heaven, which would have been inaugurated shortly after Jesus’ ascension back to heaven following His resurrection. See Hebrews 8:1-2, 5; 9:11-12 and Revelation chapters 4-5; 8:2-5; 11:19; and 15:5-16:1 for evidence that there is a *real* sanctuary in heaven right now, where Jesus ministers as our High Priest.

Question #6: What is the relationship between the city of Jerusalem and the Messiah in Daniel 9?

Answer: The prophecy features an alternating pattern between Jerusalem and the Messiah, as shown below:

- A **To restore and build Jerusalem** (v. 25)
- B **Until Messiah the Prince** (v. 25)
- A **There shall be seven weeks** (v. 25)
- B **and sixty-two weeks** (v. 25)
- A **The street shall be built again, and the wall...** (v. 25)
- B **And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off** (v. 26)

Each A line in the above diagram pertains to the city of Jerusalem, and each B line pertains to the Messiah. The Messiah would make His appearance after the 62 weeks, which is to say, after the 69 weeks ($7 + 62 = 69$). This evidence also suggests that Jerusalem would be rebuilt at the end of the first 7 weeks, or after 49 years, which would be the year 408 B.C. Unfortunately, scholars have no historical evidence to either confirm or invalidate that date for the completion of the rebuilt city.

Question #7: Did Jesus as the Messiah appear at the end of 69 weeks?

Answer: Yes. $69 \text{ weeks} = 69 \times 7 \text{ symbolic days}$, which is 483 solar years. Remember that B.C. dates run backward (i.e., the larger the year, the earlier in the past). Thus, $483 - 457 = \text{A.D. } 26$. But because 1 B.C. was followed by A.D. 1 (with no “0” year), you must add 1 to the end result, which makes 483 solar years after 457 B.C. the year A.D. 27. Note that the word “**Messiah**” means “anointed.” According to the New Testament, Jesus was anointed at His baptism, which was the event that inaugurated His public ministry (see Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:29-34; and Acts 10:38; cf. Luke 4:18). According to Luke 3:1, 21, Jesus’ baptism



Jesus at His Baptism

occurred in the 15th year of Roman Emperor Tiberius Caesar, which is dated variously anywhere from A.D. 27 to A.D. 29. Therefore, A.D. 27 is consistent with the historical evidence. And A.D. 27 is exactly 483 years after the beginning of the 70 Weeks Prophecy in 457 B.C. So Jesus was “anointed”—made His appearance as the Messiah—right on time!

Question #8: Does Daniel 9 make any other predictions about the Messiah?

Answer: Yes. Daniel 9:26 says that at some point after the 69 weeks, the Messiah would be “**cut off**” (NKJV), which is a term referring to an official execution or death penalty. This verb “**cut off**” is the same verb used in Isaiah 53:8 to describe the fact that the Messiah would be “**cut off from the land of the living**” (NKJV).

Question #9: To what event does the rest of Daniel 9:26 refer?

Answer: Both Futurists and Historicists agree that the remainder of Daniel 9:26 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The fact that this event happened beyond the total of 490 years for the entire prophecy is seen as evidence by dispensational Futurists that the 70th week is cut off from the other 69 weeks and placed at the very end-time. But note that the prophecy never says when Jerusalem’s destruction would occur—only that it would occur. The fact that it’s mentioned in connection with the Messiah’s execution strongly suggests that its destruction would come as a result of Judah failing its probationary period and putting itself outside of God’s protection. Therefore, its mention is no reason to assign the last week of the prophecy to the very end-time. [NOTE: The Futurist interpretation is the basis for the popular view of the final tribulation period lasting 7 years (the 70th week lasts 7 years).]



Question #10: Why shouldn’t the 70th week apply to the very end-time?

Answer: *First*, there’s no gap between the other 2 sections of the prophecy—between the 7 weeks and the 62 weeks (v. 25)—so there should be none between the 69th and 70th weeks either. *Second*, remember that the entire prophecy is a period of national probation for the Jewish people. Since the prophecy gives Judah 70 weeks of years (490 solar years) to get right with God, it makes no sense to stop that probationary period after 69 weeks (483 solar years) and then resume it at the very end-time of human history. *Third*, Daniel 9:27 can be interpreted in light of Jesus as the Messiah without regard for the very end-time (See under Questions #11-13]. For example, the pronoun “**he**” in that verse is a reference to the Messiah because the alternating pattern of Jerusalem and the Messiah shown under Question #6 demonstrates that fact. Specifically, continuing the A-B pattern after the reference to the Messiah being cut off makes the pronoun “**he**” refer to the Messiah, as follows (A pertains to the city, and B pertains to the Messiah—see Question #6):

- A **And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary (v. 26).**
- B **Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week... (v. 27)**
- A **And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate (v. 27).**

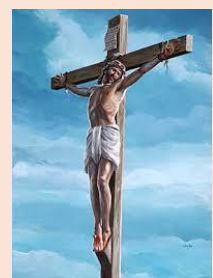
Finally, Daniel 9:24's verb **"are determined"** in the clause **"seventy weeks are determined"** is actually *singular* in number in the Hebrew. In other words, it really means "is determined." However, since that would violate the rules of English grammar (to have a plural noun "weeks" with a singular verb), none of the English translations we know of translate it as "is determined." Nevertheless, with the Hebrew having a singular verb with the plural noun here means that the entire 70 weeks period is a single, whole unit of time. This makes it impossible to place any gaps of time between any of the 3 segments. There's a significant difference between distinguishing part of a time period in order to highlight it for some reason—which this prophecy does—and actually separating it from the whole period.

Question #11: But doesn't Daniel 9:27 say that "he" will make a covenant with the Jews and then break it?

Answer: No. Although most of the commonly used English Bibles read "will *make* a covenant," notice that some of them read "will *confirm* a covenant" instead (such as the popular New International Version, the King James' Version, the New King James' Version, the New American Standard Bible (2020 edition), and the New English Translation). The verb **"will confirm"** is the correct translation because (a) the Hebrew word there isn't in the adjective position, which makes the natural reading "to make a covenant firm or strong," which is to say, "to confirm a covenant;" and (b) the literal Hebrew doesn't read "to cut a covenant," which it always does (although not usually reflected in the English translations) in the Old Testament when describing someone actually making a covenant. This, in turn, means that the Messiah would confirm an already existing covenant, which would make it the Sinai covenant. The Messiah would confirm this covenant even for approximately 3 ½ years after His death, resurrection, and ascension. [NOTE: This means that the national probation for the Jewish nation would end in A.D. 34, which is exactly 490 solar years after 457 B.C.]

Question #12: How did the Messiah (Jesus) "bring an end to sacrifice and offering" (Daniel 9:27, NKJV)?

Answer: Daniel 9:27 says that the Messiah ("he"—see Question #10) **"in the middle of the week...shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering"** (NKJV). By His atoning death, Jesus fulfilled all of the animal sacrifices as He, the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36), was Himself sacrificed, so that the entire animal sacrificial system no longer had any meaning for God. That's the reason the veil between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place was torn by an unseen hand at the moment that Jesus died on the cross (Matthew 27:50-51; Mark 15:37-38; Luke 23:45-46). By the way, the Hebrew word for **"middle"** doesn't necessarily mean exactly the halfway point, but an approximate midpoint. [NOTE: Our chronology indicates Jesus died in the spring of A.D. 31, although His precise death date was never predicted—only that it would be after the 69 weeks (483 years after 457 B.C., which would be sometime relatively soon after A.D. 27).]



Question #13: To what does the remaining portion of Daniel 9:27 refer?

Answer: The remainder of verse 27 refers again to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70, as the alternating pattern in the answer to Question #10 shows. Futurists connect the expression “**the wings of abominations**” to the Antichrist per the phrase “**the abomination of desolation**” (Daniel 11:31; 12:11). There’s no doubt that any expression involving the word “abominations” in Daniel *can* refer to Antichrist. However, Jesus also used the same phrase from Daniel and applied it to the events associated with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. (Luke 21:20 with Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14). And the structure of Daniel 9 (the alternating pattern) shows that it's the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 that is in view here.