

'Seventy Weeks Are Determined...'

by **Richard T. Ritenbaugh**

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While Herbert W. Armstrong was alive, the church preached and published a great deal about prophecy. Especially in the *World Tomorrow* broadcasts, the church focused on Nebuchadnezzar's image (Daniel 2), the beasts that represent world empires (Daniel 7), and the symbols and time frame of the book of Revelation. The church, however, rarely explained the Seventy Weeks Prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27.

It is an important prophecy—maybe not as important as these other prophecies or the blessings and cursings of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28—but it is important to the dating of Christ's birth, ministry, and death. This season, during which the world celebrates what they consider to be the birth of Jesus, is a good time to review it.

The prophecy was given to Daniel by the cherub Gabriel late in the prophet's life. It was 538 BC, and the decree from Cyrus that the Jews could return to Judah had already been made or was about to be made. Earlier in chapter 9, Daniel had prayed, asking God for forgiveness of Israel's sins. The reason behind his prayer, though he does not specifically ask the question, is, "How long until You redeem us? When will Messiah come?"

The Seventy Weeks Prophecy is God's reply.

Prophecy and Poetry

[Before continuing, one vital point needs to be made: These four verses are not only prophecy, but they are also poetry. A poet can take a bit of license, especially with form. Hebrew poets (and angelic ones) are no different, and one of their favorite devices was contrast. They would take subject *A* and contrast it with subject *B*, as in Proverbs 15:18: "A wrathful man stirs us strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention."

Gabriel does the same with this prophecy. It is composed of two similar contrasts that we will label A1B1A2B2.

Verses 25-26a = A1

Verse 26b = B1

Verse 27a = A2

Verse 27b = B2.

The verses below are formatted this way to help in understanding the prophecy. This is very important because, if it is not heeded, one will credit Antichrist with things that should be credited to the true Messiah.]

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

25 Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. **26a** And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself;

26b and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined.

27a Then He shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.

27b 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. (Daniel 9:24-27)

Verse 24 introduces the prophecy. Basically, Gabriel says that, within the seventy weeks, all of these things—the whole plan of God—will be fulfilled. *Weeks* is the Hebrew word *shabua*, meaning "sevens." In his prayer Daniel mentions Jeremiah's prophecy of seventy years of captivity (verse 2), but Gabriel says it will not be just seventy years but *seventy times seven years*.

The starting point of the seventy weeks is stated in verse 25: a decree to rebuild Jerusalem. "*The command*" should be "*a command*." The Persian emperors made four decrees in all (see chart below), so we have a choice of which one fits best with the facts. The only viable decree is the one made by Artaxerxes I in 457 BC. This is the return under Ezra the scribe (Ezra 7:1-10).

Gabriel splits the first sixty-nine weeks into seven weeks (forty-nine years) and sixty-two weeks (434 years). During the forty-nine years from 457 to 408 BC, Jerusalem was being rebuilt. After this time Jerusalem was a fully functioning trade center and fortress. This fulfills the prophecy exactly.

Adding the 434 years to 408 BC brings us to AD 27 (adding one year for passing over the non-existent year 0). During this year John baptized Jesus and His ministry began. Luke records that "Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age" (Luke 3:23). Taking Luke at his word, if Jesus was within a few months of His thirtieth birthday, His birth must have occurred in 4 BC.

Many Protestants, using a 360-day "prophetic" year and quite a bit of calculation, begin on Nisan 1, 444 BC, and end up on March 30, AD 33, the day (they say) of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem before His crucifixion. This fits neatly into their scheme, as the Passover in AD 33 occurred on a Friday, but they are two years off! Jeremiah's seventy years of captivity were seventy literal years. Why should Gabriel's seventy weeks of years be anything else? Their method of calculation is contrived and confusing. They have forced the prophecy into conforming to their beliefs rather than following the simple sense of the Bible's words.

Besides, Christ was not proclaimed as the Messiah for the first time during His triumphal entry, but at His baptism. God the Father, not the people, publicly proclaimed Him to be the Messiah, "My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:16-17).

Verse 26 continues explaining about the Messiah. He would be cut off—killed—sometime after the sixty-two weeks. Verse 27 tells us how long after: "in the middle of the [seventieth] week." Halfway through a literal week is three and a half days, prophetically three and a half years, which is how long His ministry lasted before He was crucified. That brings us to AD 31, when significantly, the Passover, Nisan 14, was on a Wednesday, literally the middle of a week! Good Friday and Easter cannot stand before these facts.

The prophecy says that the Messiah would be killed "not for Himself." How true! He died for the redemption of mankind in a completely selfless, sacrificial act. His crucifixion also brought an end to the need for further sacrifice and offering of animals (Hebrews 10:12—"He . . . offered one sacrifice for sins forever").

Christ and Antichrist

The remainder of verses 26 and 27 describe the Beast or the final Antichrist. It was the Roman people who destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70, and from the Roman Empire would rise the Antichrist. Gabriel predicts that from Jerusalem's fall until the end, wars and desolation would continue.

Protestants try to ascribe the covenant of verse 27 to the Antichrist because "he," they say, refers to "the prince who is to come." But this cannot be! Remember the poetic organization! The key is the word "many." It is literally "*the* many," and whenever it is used in the Old Testament, it refers to either the covenant people Israel or to the saints, that is, true believers. Jesus says in Matthew 26:28, "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for *many* for the remission of sins." Christ makes the covenant, not Antichrist!

Confirm means "strengthen" or "make firm"—almost to the point of being unbreakable. This helps substantiate its reference to the New Covenant, an everlasting covenant that strengthened the basic requirements of the Old Covenant. Significantly, when Christ in the Olivet Prophecy gives His disciples the signs of the end, He does not mention a covenant or treaty to be enacted between the Antichrist and the Jews, Christians, saints, or anyone! He does cite both of the events Gabriel mentions here: the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (Matthew 24:2) and the abomination of desolation (verse 15).

What about the final three and a half years of the seventieth week? They have yet to be fulfilled, but Gabriel leaves us hanging regarding when they occur. He does not mention them. When could they be fulfilled?

- The seventieth week has been completely fulfilled by the three and a half year ministry of Christ. This seems to be the least likely of these options.
- Christ will complete His ministry in the first three and a half years after His return, before Satan is locked in the bottomless pit. But the Bible does not indicate that any time elapses between His return and Satan's binding in Revelation 19 and 20.
- They are the years of the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord, during which Christ will complete His ministry through the Two Witnesses and/or to the church in the Place of Safety. Again, this is only speculation—although Paul's training in Arabia may provide a precedent (Galatians 1:11-18).

What good is understanding this prophecy? First, on chronological grounds, it destroys three of false Christianity's holidays surrounding Jesus: Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter. Second, it puts

Christ's ministry and the founding of the church in their proper historical context, helping explain and vindicate the Bible. Third, it enhances our understanding of prophecy, and helps us to watch for the correct world events as the end draws closer. Christ gave us the true signs of His coming, so we do not have to look for the false sign of Antichrist's treaty with the Jews.

As the crisis at the close of the age approaches, we can say with Daniel, reminiscent of Revelation 22: 20: "O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name!" (Daniel 9:19).

Seventy Weeks Prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27)			
Decree and Year	Leader(s) of Return	Year of Messiah's Appearance [Decree Year + 483 Years (7 days/week x 69 weeks)]	Significant Biblical Event
Of Cyrus in 538 BC	Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1:1-11) Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:1)	55 BC	None
Of Darius in 520 BC	No Return Work Resumed on Temple (Ezra 5-6)	37 BC	None
Of Artaxerxes I in 457 BC	Ezra (Ezra 7:1-10)	AD 27	Jesus' Baptism Beginning of Christ's Ministry
Of Artaxerxes I in 444 BC	Nehemiah (Nehemiah 2:4-11)	AD 40	None