

Revisiting the Seventy-Weeks Prophecy—Part Two

What can we know about the seventy-weeks prophecy? Does it represent a 490-year period of time pointing to the birth and ministry of Jesus? Is it somehow related to the return of Jesus the Christ?

At the end of the Babylonian domination the prophet Daniel reviewed Jeremiah's writings concerning the seventy-year period of desolation that was determined for the city of Jerusalem. Daniel's particular concern was the rebuilding of the sanctuary, which had been largely dismantled by the Babylonian army starting in 587 BCE (Jer. 39:1-2; 52:12-15).

So, Daniel prayed and confessed that the city and the people had become worthy of blame among the nations, and Daniel asked God to favor the sanctuary "that is desolate, for the Lord's sake" (Dan. 9:17). And, in respect to this desolation of Jerusalem and its sanctuary, we find that Cyrus' decree initiated the restoring of temples and sanctuaries throughout his kingdom, which was confirmed by the decrees of Darius and Artaxerxes I (Longimanus).

However, none of these Medo-Persian rulers issued a mandate to rebuild the city of Jerusalem in the time of Daniel or in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah even though many people have assumed that [Artaxerxes' decree](#) was given for the purpose of restoring Jerusalem. But Artaxerxes I only reaffirmed the mutually inclusive decrees of his predecessors by beautifying the Temple to appease the God who resided in Jerusalem.

Why is this important?

Because many people claim that the seventy-weeks prophecy is an astoundingly accurate prophecy based on 1) the day-for-a-year principle, and 2) the supposition that

Artaxerxes' decree was the starting point for the seventy-weeks prophecy.

But if this is so, then why are there different interpretations and conclusions about the seventy-weeks prophecy?

Notably the number of interpretations and conclusions are many, with people believing the prophecy points to the first coming of Jesus, and his second coming, and possibly the period of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, and Palm Sunday, and the Rapture. In Rabbinic tradition the seventy-weeks prophecy is seen as having prophesied the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, while expositors and others have thought the prophecy was about the antichrist, or Nero's abomination, or even the images of Caesar brought into the Temple by Pontius Pilate.

Obviously then the seventy-weeks prophecy has become subject to several biblically unsupported methods of interpretation, which has created numerous contradicting interpretations as to what is meant by the seventy-weeks prophecy (Dan. 9:23).

But some people might wonder if the seventy-weeks prophecy actually means "seventy weeks of years," as this conclusion is sometimes found in biblical commentaries.

Let's examine this.

The angel Gabriel said that, "seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city" (Dan. 9:24).

Now according to some expositors and some translations, the "seventy weeks" is sometimes stated to be "seventy sevens" or simply seventy times seven, which gives us the indefinite number of 490. The problem with this understanding and translation is that it makes the "seventy weeks" an undefined period of time that no longer

represents calendar weeks, making the “seventy sevens” subject to definitions based on other grounds.

Here is why.

If we understand the seventy-weeks prophecy in terms of actual “weeks,” we are accepting a conceptual understanding and a responsible translation based on relative contexts and usage, and thereby we can conclude that the seventy weeks would be 490 days. But if we change the word “weeks” to “sevens” alone and define these groupings of “sevens” by unrelated contexts (i.e. day-for-a-year), then we are changing the meaning from an historical and contextual view to a metaphorical and non-literal view, with no biblical guidelines or substantiation for its application to prophetic understanding or interpretation.

In other words, if Scripture means “seventy weeks,” then it means a literal 490 days, but if the Scripture only means “seventy sevens,” then it can become subject to personal and unfounded interpretation, such as with the concept of 490 so-called “prophetic years” (seventy weeks “of years”). (This metaphorical interpretation has engendered the development of different schools of thought—amillennialism, premillennialism, and dispensationalism—with each trying to explain the meaning of the seventy-weeks prophecy.)

This opens the door for many [unverifiable interpretations](#), none of which provide a biblically-based context for understanding the “weeks” of the seventy-weeks prophecy.

Simply, when the “seventy weeks” are unconventionally changed to mean “seventy sevens,” the meaning becomes abstract and undefined, which leads to the question: “Sevens of what?”

Thus, we have those who try to apply the day-for-a-year principle in this context, which is a biblically unfounded and impermissible method of interpreting Scripture.

Then there are those who rely on Rabbinic tradition to interpret the seventy weeks as meaning seventy weeks “of years,” which is not a translation, but rather a traditional view imposed upon Scripture. (Some people adopt a method of explaining the seventy-weeks prophecy by a sort of “borrowing” from the “sabbaths of years” used to calculate the jubilee year (Lev. 25:8).)

Finally there are those who interpret the seventy weeks in the context of Jeremiah’s seventy-year prophecy. And, in this respect, people typically speak of the 70 years of [Babylonian domination](#) upon the Jews and other nations, while assuming it is the same as a seventy-year period of captivity or the 70 years of desolation upon Jerusalem. And by relating the “seventy years” of desolation with the seventy-weeks prophecy, they are assuming Daniel was given the prophecy by Gabriel on account of Daniel’s examining Jeremiah’s prophecy.

However, there is no reason to think so.

First, the Bible doesn’t specifically address a seventy-year period of captivity.

Second, there was a seventy-year period of Babylonian domination that would affect many nations, and there were at least 70 years that the land would be given rest, and there were also to be 70 years of desolation upon Jerusalem. And it is the latter that Daniel was examining after the fall of Babylon and at the establishing of the Medo-Persian Empire. (The time of the Babylonian initiated captivities did not last 70 years, but varied for different groups of people, at different times, and in different places depending on when they were deported. Some people never survived the captivities or returned from the deportations.)

Consequently, Daniel understood “by books” the number of years of desolation upon Jerusalem: “because of the abominations which ye have committed; therefore is your land a desolation, and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day” (Jer. 44:22).

Therefore, Jeremiah’s prophecy regarding the “seventy years” of Jerusalem’s desolation was already understood by Daniel and destined to be fulfilled within a number of years, making the seventy weeks spoken of by Gabriel to be unrelated to Jeremiah’s prophecy (Dan. 9:2).

Summarily then we cannot change the contextual understanding of the “seventy weeks” to mean “seventy sevens” alone apart from the “week,” or interpret them as “seventy weeks of years” in the context of tradition and history, without creating an ambiguous interpretation of the seventy-weeks prophecy. (Pentecost is understood as requiring the counting of seven-day cycles, and groupings of seven days, understood as weeks in the context (Deut. 16:16).)

Now, some people might disregard all of these reasons and say the seventy-weeks prophecy points to the time of Jesus’ ministry while assuming Jesus came: “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).

But did Jesus accomplish any of these things during his ministry?

We read in the writings of Jeremiah that: “Israel is a scattered sheep; the lions have driven him away: first the king of Assyria hath devoured him; and last this Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon hath broken his bones” (Jer. 50:17). (See also Rom. 11:1-5.)

This situation continued to be true during the Medo-Persian Empire and during the Greek and Roman Empires that followed (Dan. 9:7).

This was also the setting for Jesus’ ministry in the Roman period. And, in this historical context, Jesus stated that he was sent to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel,” which was also the commission he gave to his

twelve chosen disciples who became apostles (Mt. 10:5-6; 15:24).

In this context, we can review a brief summary of Jesus’ ministry as expressed by Jesus to the disciples of John the Baptist: “And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities. Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me” (Mt. 11:1-6). (See also Lk. 1:72-73.)

Also, Jesus came “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,” calling for people to repent and to believe the good news of an intervening kingdom of God (Acts 5:31).

Therefore, Jesus did not accomplish the things spoken of by Gabriel during his ministry because these particular transgressions and sins have not yet occurred, neither has reconciliation for the iniquity of these transgressions, and the kingdom of God is not yet established on earth, and the seventy-weeks prophecy has not been sealed up, and the most holy has not been anointed.

What then was Gabriel talking about?

Gabriel was talking about an undivided seventy weeks, highlighted by important geopolitical events, that will be “cut out” or cut short for Jerusalem, which will occur during the “transgression of desolation” (Dan. 8:13). “And the people of a coming ruler shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end shall be with the flood, and ruins are determined, and war [desolations] shall be until the end” (Dan. 9:26, LITV).

Consider then that war and ruin are transgressions and iniquities and are noted in prophecies still not sealed even to this day. And so we read that, “for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation [conclusion], and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate” (Dan. 9:27).

Therefore, the seventy-weeks prophecy is about a specific time of desolation, which befalls the city of Jerusalem in the future.

Even Jesus warned his disciples about these events during his ministry.

“When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened” (Mt. 24:15-22). (See also Rev. 11.) (We should not assume to apply what Jesus said beyond the context given in Scripture.)

This is the context for the seventy-weeks prophecy, which is contextually understood to be a seventy-week period of time.

For there are 70 consecutive weeks marked for the city of Jerusalem at a time of political and military incursion and occupation in the Middle East. And during this time people will seek a hoped-for leader to restore Jerusalem, but it will be a time of a leader who comes to destroy the city until Jesus’ returns, because these weeks “finish the transgression” (Dan. 9:24).

The seventy-weeks prophecy then portends to a distressful period of time to someday be written in human history, which apparently indicates that proposed solutions, negotiations and diplomacy for peace will someday fail in the Middle East, leaving only one hope, which is the intervention of Jesus Christ.  (andrewburdettewrites.com)