

DANIEL 9:24-27 – THE SEVENTY HEPTADS

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DANIEL 9:24-27 – THE SEVENTY HEPTADS

A non-Christian Israeli tour guide friend of mine, when asked what he thought about the prophecy of Daniel 9 and its implications about Jesus being the Messiah, replied, “Well, most Jews really don’t make too much of that prophecy.” This attitude of ambivalence reflects the view point of a post-temple Judaism that has suffered generations of anti-Semitic persecution at the hands of those who came in the name of Jesus Christ. Daniel 9:24-27, along with numerous other Old Testament prophecies that point very explicitly to Jesus as Messiah (e.g., Isa 7:14; 9:6; 52:13 – 53:12; Mic 5:2), are largely ignored in the synagogue and yeshiva, not so much because they are problematic, but because they unquestionably proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah. This unwillingness to acknowledge the clear prophetic message is shared also by the liberal “Christian” scholar. To a lesser degree, the conservative, yet non-dispensational, scholar is unwilling to see in this prophecy a prediction of a future literal tribulation period followed by a literal millennial reign of Christ.

That this prophecy held great significance for Second Temple Judaism is clear both from the many references to Daniel in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and, more importantly, from the fact that Jesus referred to the abomination of Daniel 9:27 as the primary sign of the Great Tribulation (Matt 24:15), thus harkening the nearness of the “Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt 24:30). The

ambivalence seen in modern day Judaism gives evidence of its discontinuity with Second Temple Judaism. And liberalism's reluctance to acknowledge legitimate predictive prophecy in Gabriel's words reflects an underlying low view of God, His omniscience and His sovereignty.

I. Describe the Problem

In this brief passage of four verses, one finds a multitude of conflicting interpretations among the commentators. At least nine significant conflicts in interpretation can be found among the various commentators:

1. In verse 24a, are the initial seventy heptads the same as the seven plus sixty-two plus one in verses 25 and 27?
2. Are the six purposes of verse 24 fulfilled at the first or second coming of Christ, or at some other time?
3. In verse 24b, what is the "Most Holy" that is to be anointed – the temple or the Messiah?
4. In verse 25, does the rebuilding involve only the temple, or does it also include the city and its defensive structures? I.e., is it for the purpose of worship or for reestablishing the civil/political entity?
5. What is the *terminus a quo* of the seventy heptads (or sixty-nine heptads)? (I.e. Which Persian decree begins the countdown?)
6. What is the *terminus ad quem* of the sixty-nine heptads? (If it is the first coming of Jesus, then what manner of reckoning [360 vs. 365 day years] and what point in His ministry [birth, baptism, triumphal entry, crucifixion, etc.]?)
7. Is the anointed one of verse 26a reference to Jesus Christ, or to some other individual (Nehemiah, Judah Maccabeus, etc.)?

8. Does the final heptad follow immediately after the sixty-ninth, or is there a gap?
9. Who confirms the covenant in verse 27, in what sense does he cause sacrifice and grain offering to cease?

Though this appears to be a high concentration of variant interpretations for such a short passage (a mere four verses) the diversity of interpretations appears to be grouped around just two or three basic positions. These positions arise from the different viewpoints held by three disparate groups of scholars: (1) liberal scholars, (2) conservative non-dispensational scholars, and (3) conservative dispensational scholars. These differing viewpoints lead to the nine interpretive variants listed above, but at the root of these conflicting interpretations there seem to be two primary problems in the interpretation of this prophecy:

1. The identification of the “Messiah” (מָשִׁיחַ).
2. The nature of the seventieth heptad.

The first of these primary problems divides conservative scholars from liberal scholars; the second divides conservative dispensational scholars from conservative non-dispensational scholars.

A. The Problem of the Identification of the “Messiah” (מָשִׁיחַ)

Conservative interpreters almost unanimously identify the “Messiah” (vv. 25, 26) as Jesus Christ.¹ This being the case, the *terminus ad quem* of the first sixty-nine heptads

¹ One recent exception is evangelical scholar Leslie McFall who puts forth the thesis that the messiah has primary reference to Nehemiah. See Leslie McFall, “Do the Sixty-Nine Weeks of Daniel Date the Messianic Mission of Nehemiah or Jesus?” in *Journal of the Evangelical Society*, Vol. 52, No. 4, Dec. 2009.

of the prophecy will be located in the lifetime of Jesus' first advent. This, in turn, limits the possible interpretations for the *terminus a quo* (identified simply as, "a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem," v.25). Yet, even among conservative interpreters, there exists some disagreement concerning to which specific decree this refers, either to the decree of Cyrus (2 Chron 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4; 6:3-5), the decree of Darius (Ezra 6:1-12), or to one of two decrees issued by Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:11-26; Neh 2:4-8).

Liberal interpreters, on the other hand, generally prefer to see the "messiah" (anointed person) as being a reference to some Maccabean or Hasmonean personality. This leads the liberal interpreter to locate the *terminus a quo* either at Cyrus' decree or some earlier point in time, such as Nebuchadnezzar's accession or the Jewish exile.

B. The Problem of the Nature of the Seventieth Heptad

Non-dispensational interpreters almost universally see the seventieth heptad as immediately succeeding the sixty-ninth (i.e. without any intervening gap of time); thus the entire prophecy of seventy heptads finds its fulfillment either during or shortly after Jesus' first coming. This leads the non-dispensationalist to certain conclusions about the meaning of the six-fold purpose expressed in verse 24, and the identity of the covenant maker of verse 27.

Dispensational interpreters identify the seventieth heptad with the future tribulation period. This requires the dispensationalist to postulate a gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth heptads, an instance of the law of "double reference."² This being the case, the dispensationalist comes to quite different conclusions about the meaning of

² Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, rev. ed. (San Antonio: Ariel Ministries, 2004), 5-6; Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1974), 178-79.

the six-fold purpose expressed in verse 24, and the identity of the covenant maker of verse 27.

II. Various Explanations or Solutions

A. Explanations Arising From One's Identification of the Messiah

The term מָשִׁיחַ occurs twice in this passage (vv. 24 & 26). This term is commonly understood as meaning “the Messiah”; however, it simply means “anointed” and can refer to any individual who fills the capacity of either priest or king.³ For example, the Old Testament uses this term to refer to Saul, David, and Solomon (1Sam 2:10, 35; 12:3, 5; 16:6; 24:7, 11 26:9, 11, 16, 23; 2Sam 1:14, 16, 21 19:22; 2S 23:1; Lam 4:20; Psa 2:2; 18:51; 20:7; 28:8; 84:10; 89:39, 52; 132:10, 17; 2Chr 6:42) and to the Levitical priests (Lev 4:3, 5, 16; 6:15; Nu 3:3). It even refers to the Persian king Cyrus in Isa 45:1! The Old Testament's use of this term to refer to a personal eschatological Messiah is debated and is likely limited to 1Sam 2:10; Psa 2:2 and Dan 9:24, 26.

Because of this ambiguity as to the specific reference for the term מָשִׁיחַ in Dan 9, some interpreters, notably those of a theologically liberal persuasion, prefer to see the referent as other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course the liberal interpreter has a theological bias against actual supernatural predictive prophecy. This leads the liberal interpreter to the position that the book of Daniel was not authored by the historical “Daniel” described in that book, but rather by some legendary “Daniel” who lived closer to the actual events being prophesied. Eissfeldt, for example, says, “Modern scholarship is far from being agreed as to whether Dan. i-xii is a literary unit, deriving from an author

³ The collocation מָשִׁיחַ נָגִיד (v.25) is variously translated: "Messiah the Prince" - NASB, KJV, NKJV, HCSB, Darby; "an anointed one, a prince" - ESV, NET, RSV; "the anointed one, the prince" - ASV; "an anointed one, a ruler" - NIV; "an anointed prince" – NRSV.

active between 167 and 163, or whether it must be assigned to at least two different hands, of which the one compiled (i,1-ii,4a) ii, 4b-vi (vii) in the third century, the other (vii) viii-xii in about 165.”⁴ Hartman speculates:

Whether Daniel in these stories represents a historical figure or a legendary literary creation cannot be determined with certainty. In a Jewish composition, however, the absence of a genealogy, contrary to custom, gives probability to the suggestion that the characters of Daniel and his pious companions are legendary.⁵

Given this liberal presumption, the “prophecies” in the book of Daniel were actually written around the same time as the events they describe, or even after the events, thus constituting a “*prophetia post eventum*.”⁶ Those who date the authorship of the book of Daniel to the Maccabean/Hasmonean era believe that the author of Daniel was describing some Maccabean or Hasmonean leader. Hartman, for example, claims quite confidently: “The quasi-prophecy that ‘an anointed one will be cut down, when the city is no longer his’ (9:26) refers almost certainly to the murder of the high priest Onias III in 171 B.C.”⁷ Hartman offers no explanation as to why this identification is “almost certain,” but beginning with this assumption, the sixty-nine heptads can then be back-dated by going back in time by 483 years to arrive at a *terminus a quo* for the prophecy. Hartman does not perform this calculation in the *Anchor Bible*, perhaps because the year 654 BC (171+483) is totally without significance! Other Maccabean or Hasmonean “messianic” identifications of the second century BC result in a *terminus a quo* somewhat

⁴ Otto Eissfeldt, transl. Peter R. Ackroyd, *The Old Testament An Introduction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 518.

⁵ Louis F. Hartman. “The Book of Daniel: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary on Chapters 1-9” in *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1978), 8.

⁶ Hartman, 247.

⁷ Hartman, 252.

closer either to Nebuchadnezzar's accession date or to the Jewish exile,⁸ but it remains unclear how either Nebuchadnezzar's accession or the Jewish exile amount to a "decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem."

There is nearly universal agreement among conservative interpreters that מָשִׁיחַ is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. Assuming that the author of the book of Daniel is the same as the literally historical "Daniel" described in that book, the conservative interpreter understands this prophecy from the perspective of someone living near the end of the Babylonian captivity before the return from exile. From this perspective Daniel is seen as receiving a message from God that entails genuine predictive prophecy. The future deliverance envisioned in the prophecy focuses on the coming of Israel's Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. If the *terminus ad quem* of the sixty-nine heptads is to be found at some point in the life and ministry of Jesus, the *terminus a quo* should be found some 483 years (7 x 69) before the first advent. This is the basic reasoning followed by nearly all conservative interpreters; however, these interpreters are far from universal agreement as to the details. There is agreement as to the interval of 483 years, but there is disagreement as to *when* the 483 years begin and end, and as to *how* the 483 are to be reckoned.

1. When the 483 years begin and end.

The beginning, or *terminus a quo*, of the 483 years is described in 9:25 as, "from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem" (NASB). The end, or *terminus ad quem*, is described simply as "until Messiah the prince" (NASB). The identification of this "decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem" has been the subject of much debate. Four Persian decrees have been identified as potentially meeting the requirements of this *terminus a quo*:

⁸ See time lines and associated dates in the appendix at the end of this paper.

1. Cyrus' Decree, 539 BC – 2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4; 6:3-5
2. Darius' Decree, 519/18 BC – Ezra 5:3-17
3. Artaxerxes' Decree to Ezra, 457 BC – Ezra 7:11-26
4. Artaxerxes' "Decree" to Nehemiah, 445/4 BC – Nehemiah 2:1-8

The Persian king Cyrus had already been prophesied by Isaiah as the one whom God would raise up for the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

It is I who says of Cyrus, "*He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.*" And he declares of Jerusalem, "*She will be built,*" And of the temple, "*Your foundation will be laid.*" (Isa 44:28 NASB)

Cyrus' decree allowing the Jews to return to their land is recorded in 2 Chronicles 36:22-23; and Ezra 1:1-4; 6:3-5. Therefore, it might be considered reasonable to assume that Daniel would have thought of this decree as the *terminus a quo*. The biggest problem with this view is that the timing does not work out. The date of Cyrus' decree is agreed upon by most historians as being 539 BC, but 483 years later only brings one to a *terminus ad quem* of 56 BC, which falls too far short of Jesus' first advent. Nevertheless, some conservative interpreters still prefer this date. E. J. Young, for example, argues:

The word which went forth became evident in history during the first year of Cyrus. This seems to be the year (538-7 B.C.) in which the exile came to an end, and a new order of things appeared.... It cannot be denied that this was the year in which the effects of the going forth of a word began to appear in history. Cyrus issued the decree which brought an end to the exile and again turned the Jews toward Jerusalem.⁹

To handle the problem of the *terminus ad quem*, Young must resort to a non-literal interpretation of the years. He writes, "... the burden of proof rests with those who insist

⁹ Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), 202-03. Other conservative interpreters adopting the decree of Cyrus include Keil, Mauro and Leupold.

that sevens of years are intended. Of this I am not convinced. If the sevens be regarded merely as a symbolical number, the difficulty disappears.”¹⁰

Another problem with the decree of Cyrus is that the decree itself, as recorded in 2 Chronicles and Ezra, says nothing about rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. The decree only states that the Jews may return to rebuild the temple. While it is true that Isaiah’s prophecy (Isa 44:28) had mentioned the city of Jerusalem, the decree itself, when actually issued, only permitted the building of the temple. Isaiah’s mention of Jerusalem in conjunction with Cyrus may be referring merely to the fact that Cyrus set in motion a historical process that eventuated in the rebuilding of Jerusalem, but it was a much later Persian king who would actually permit the building of the city. Young attempts to bypass this difficulty simply by asserting, “It is not justifiable to distinguish too sharply between the building of the city and the building of the temple.”¹¹ However, this cavalier attitude toward the actual words of Daniel’s prophecy is inconsistent with the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration.

The attempt to identify the *terminus a quo* with Cyrus’ decree, then, has two major problems: (1) It must rely on a non-literal understanding of the heptads; and (2) it cannot take at face value the matter of the decree permitting the building of the city.

The next possible *terminus a quo* would be Darius’ Decree of 519/18 BC (Ezra 5:3-17). This also has a problem with timing, since the *terminus ad quem* would only reach to 36/35 BC. In addition to this, Hoehner observes, “This decree will not serve as

¹⁰ Young, 206.

¹¹ Young, 203.

the beginning date for the seventy weeks because it has specific reference to the temple and not to the city, and because it really is not a new decree but only confirms a former one.”¹²

Because of the problems with the former two Persian decrees, many conservative interpreters have opted for one or the other of the two decrees issued by Artaxerxes. The decree of Artaxerxes to Ezra is recorded in Ezra 7:11-26 and can be dated to 457 BC. The temple had been built and dedicated some fifty-seven years earlier (Ezra 6). Because of this, it might be argued that the decree of chapter 7 is no longer concerned with the temple, but now deals with the question of the city. However, Ezra’s ministry was not focused on the city and its defenses, but on the teaching of the law; Ezra “had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice *it*, and to teach *His* statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:10 NASB). The decree of Ezra 7 permitted Jews to accompany Ezra to Jerusalem and provided funds from the royal treasury both for further equipping the temple and for the securing of appropriate offerings and sacrifices. However, this decree says nothing about building the city or fortifying its defenses. Nevertheless, several conservative interpreters take this decree to be the *terminus a quo* of the prophecy. This is really the first decree with a suitable date for producing a meaningful *terminus ad quem* relative to Jesus Christ. Four hundred eighty-three years after 457 BC produces a date of AD 27, which is clearly during the life and ministry of

¹² Harold Hoehner, “Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ Part VI: Daniel’s Seventy Weeks and New Testament Chronology” in *Bibliotheca Sacra* Volume 132 (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1975), 54-55.

Jesus. Gleason Archer, for example, sees the fulfillment of this prophecy unfolding as follows:

If, then, the *terminus a quo* for the decree in v.25 be reckoned as 457 B.C. (the date of Ezra's return to Jerusalem), then we may compute the first seven heptads as running from 457 to 408, within which time the rebuilding of the walls, streets, and moats was completed. Then from 408 we count off the sixty-two heptads also mentioned in v.25 and come out to A.D. 26 (408 is 26 less than 434). But actually we come out to A.D. 27, since a year is gained in our reckoning as we pass directly from 1 B.C. to A.D. 1 (without any year zero in between). If Christ was crucified on 14 Abib A.D. 30, as is generally believed (cf. L.A. Foster, "The Chronology of the New Testament," EBC, 1:598-99, 607), this would come out to a remarkably exact fulfillment of the terms of v.25.¹³

This is, indeed, "remarkable." However, there is still the problem of the decree's not including any permission to rebuild the city with its defensive features. Archer addresses this problem by appealing to Ezra's prayer of Ezra 9:9 as providing an insight into how Ezra understood Artaxerxes' decree. Ezra prayed, "For we are slaves; yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us, but has extended lovingkindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us reviving to raise up the house of our God, to restore its ruins and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem" Ezra 9:9 (NASB). Archer explains, "To Ezra's mind, then, the commission he received from Artaxerxes included permission to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem."¹⁴ There are, however, some problems with Archer's explanation. First, as Nehemiah's later mission to Jerusalem shows, God, in fact, had *not* yet provided a defensive wall for Jerusalem, so, apparently, Ezra meant something else. Second, the term "wall" in Ezra 9:9 is חֵטֶן, a word not normally indicating a defensive

¹³ Gleason L. Archer, "Daniel" in Frank Gabelein, gen. ed. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 114.

¹⁴ Archer, 114.

wall, but a “**dry-stone wall**, made without mortar from loose stones from a field.”¹⁵ גִּדְרֵי is used, for example of a wall around a vineyard (Nu 22:24; Isa 5:5), a wall of thorns (Hos 2:8), a weak or broken down wall (Ps 62:4; Prov 24:31), and of a wall making up part of the temple structure (Ezk 42:7, 10). Though גִּדְרֵי might on occasion refer to a defensive wall (Ezek 13:5; Mic 7:11), it is not the normal word for that purpose. Daniel’s prophecy, on the other hand, uses an entirely different expression. Daniel 9:25 refers to the building of a “plaza and moat” (NASB). Here the Hebrew expression is רְחוֹב וְחַדְרֵי. Hoehner discusses the meaning of this expression:

The first of these words means a plaza, street, or square, “the broad spaces, generally just inside the city gates, the centre of city life.” It is a wide and free unoccupied place in the city (cf. Ezra 10:9; Esther 4:6; 2 Chron 32:6; Neh 8:1, 3). The second word, חֲדָרִים, is more difficult to define. It is a passive participle of חָרַץ meaning “to cut, to sharpen, to decide.” In the Old Testament it is used fourteen times: four times it refers to a sharpened threshing instrument, a threshing sledge (Isa 28:27; 41:15; Amos 1:3); one time it suggests the idea of being maimed, cut, or mutilated (Lev 22:22); six times it is used poetically of gold from the idea of the sharp bright color or from the idea that it is eagerly desired by men (חָרִץ can have the idea “to be eager, to covet”) (Ps 68:14 [13]; Prov 3:14; 8:10, 19; 16:16; Zech 9:3); two times it refers to “something decided,” a strict decision as in the phrase “valley of decision” (Joel 3:14 bis); and once it is used in Daniel 9:25. Outside the Bible this term is used in Aramaic of a “trench”; in Akkadian it has the idea of a “city moat”; in the Qumran writings it is used of a “moat of the rampart or bulwark”; and in mishnaic and targumic literature it has the idea of an incision [*sic*], furrow, or trench. Thus its basic idea is to make an incision or cut or dig a trench... it is best to take the first word *plaza* as referring to the interior of the city and the second word *trench* as referring to a moat going around the outside of the city. Part of Jerusalem’s natural defenses consisted of a great cutting in the rock along the northern wall, which is still visible, for the purpose

¹⁵ Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, M.E.J Richardson and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1999), 181.

of building a defense wall. Montgomery states that these “two items present a graphic picture of the complete restoration.”¹⁶

So, Daniel’s prophecy apparently refers to a total reconstruction of the city, along with its defensive structures. This does not appear to be what Ezra had in mind in his prayer of Ezra 9:9. Third, the issue in determining the *terminus a quo* is not how Ezra may have understood the decree, but what the actual content of the decree was. Fourth, the reference to both “Judah and Jerusalem” makes this “wall” broader than merely the city of Jerusalem. Fifth, Ezra was likely referring metaphorically to God’s supernatural protection of the Jews during their difficult days of building the temple. The reference to a “wall” (גִּדָּר) was likely not to the literal defensive wall of Jerusalem, which was to come later under Nehemiah’s ministry, but to God’s providential care of the Jews during the early days of their return from Babylonian captivity.

Artaxerxes’ decree to Ezra may provide a helpful timeframe for explaining how the *terminus ad quem* of the prophecy lines up with the first advent of Christ, but the difficulty of the decree’s contents not matching up with the description of the rebuilding of Jerusalem in Daniel 9:25 leads us to look elsewhere for a suitable *terminus a quo*. Ever since Sir Robert Anderson published his commentary *The Coming Prince*, many conservative interpreters have favored his view that the *terminus a quo* is to be found in Artaxerxes’ decree to Nehemiah, recorded in Nehemiah 2:1-8. This decree is the only one which specifically mentions the rebuilding of the city and its defenses. First, Nehemiah had specifically mentioned the issue of the broken gates to Artaxerxes (Neh 2:3); then, Nehemiah specifically requested that he be allowed to “rebuild” the “city of my fathers’

¹⁶ Hoehner, "Chronological Aspects" 51-52.

tombs” (Neh. 2:5); lastly, the content of the decree is described as “... a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king’s forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress which is by the temple, for the wall of the city and for the house to which I will go” (Neh 2:8 NASB). Here, the term for “wall” is חֹמַי, a term which typically refers to a city’s defensive wall. Of all the Persian decrees, this is the only one that really fits the description of Daniel 9:25. However, this decree is not without its difficulties; the main difficulty is how this decree relates to the *terminus ad quem*. For this issue we must discuss how the 483 years are to be reckoned.

2. How the 483 years are to be reckoned.

In calculating the *terminus ad quem* relative to the various Persian decrees, most conservative interpreters, certainly those who are dispensational, assume that the years are normal, literal years. But just how does one understand a “normal, literal year”? If we presume a hermeneutic based on authorial intent, another way of stating this question might be, how would Daniel have understood a “normal, literal year”? To many interpreters the answer would be simple: A year consists of 365 days. This well-known formula (365 days = 1 year) causes a problem for the position of Anderson that the *terminus a quo* is Artaxerxes’ decree to Nehemiah. This decree is variously dated either to 445 BC¹⁷ or to 444 BC.¹⁸ However, these dates are too late for the *terminus ad quem* to expire sometime during the life and ministry of Jesus, since 483 years after 445/44 BC results in a date of AD 39/40, several years after Jesus’ crucifixion. Anderson, however,

¹⁷Sir Robert Anderson, *The Coming Prince* 19th ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1975), 66.

¹⁸ Hoehner, “Chronological Aspects,” 59.

proposed a solution to this problem. He posited that the “years” in the heptads of Daniel 9 were “prophetic years” that consisted of 360 days each.¹⁹ Thus, each “prophetic year” would be just slightly over 5 days shorter than a solar year. Anderson found justification for the 360 day year both in the traditions of ancient near eastern calendar systems (ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, etc.) and in the observation that the final heptad, assuming that it is the same as the eschatological tribulation period, is defined Scripturally as 1,260 + 1,260 days in the book of Revelation (Rev 11:3; 12:6). When the heptads are viewed in terms of years consisting of 360 days each, then the first sixty-nine heptads would be equivalent to 483 years x 360 days per year, or 173,880 days. By contrast, the solar year calculation has 483 years x 365 days per year, or 176,295 days. Thus, the sixty-nine heptads according to the “prophetic year” are shorter by 2,415 days, or 6.6 solar years. This brings the *terminus ad quem* to the year AD 32/33, very likely the very year of Jesus’ crucifixion. This method of calculating the heptads of Daniel 9 has found favor with many dispensational authors,²⁰ but is not without difficulty. The greatest difficulty with this method of calculation is that the time units of the prophecy are expressed in heptads of years, not in days.²¹ Even though the calendar of ancient Israel was a lunar calendar with 360 days in a year, they still made periodic adjustments by adding an occasional extra month, so that the loss of days would not accumulate over the passage of many years and throw the seasons into the wrong months. Any faithful Jew attempting to

¹⁹ Anderson, 67-75.

²⁰ Hoehner, “Chronological Aspects,” 62-64; J. Dwight Pentecost, “Daniel” in John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck ed., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 1362, 1365; Paul Benware, *Daniel’s Prophecy of Things to Come* (Clifton, TX: Scofield Ministries, 2007), 201; John H. Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 411; Renald E. Showers, *The Most High God* (West Collingswood, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1982), 123-24.

²¹ Archer 114-15; Stephen R. Miller, “Daniel” in *The New American Commentary* Vol. 18 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 265.

track the time for the arrival of the Messiah based on this prophecy would likely be counting years, not days. The greatest argument in favor of this method of calculation is the evidence from Revelation that three and one half years is equal to 1,260 days (Rev 11:3; 12:6). So, while Anderson's "solution" is clever, and perhaps helpful, it is certainly not beyond criticism.

B. Explanations Arising From One's View of the Seventieth Heptad

Verse 24 of the prophecy sets forth six things to be accomplished by the end of the seventy heptads. As translated in the *New American Standard Bible* they may be enumerated as follows:

1. to finish the transgression
2. to make an end of sin
3. to make atonement for iniquity
4. to bring in everlasting righteousness
5. to seal up vision and prophecy
6. to anoint the most holy *place*

Conservative interpreters are divided as to when these six goals are fulfilled. Non-dispensational interpreters generally see all six of these goals fulfilled at Christ's first advent. On the other hand, dispensational interpreters believe that some, or all, of these six goals are fulfilled at the second advent and are descriptive of millennial conditions for the nation Israel. If these six goals are all fulfilled at the first advent, then the seventieth heptad has already occurred, and the details of that seventieth heptad spelled out in verse 27 must be found within the historical developments of the mid-first century AD. On the

other hand, if even *some* of these six goals are not fulfilled until the second advent, then the seventieth heptad is still future, there must be a gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth heptads, and the details of that seventieth heptad spelled out in verse 27 will be fulfilled in the future tribulation period.

Dispensational and non-dispensational interpreters arrive at different conclusions about verse 24 principally because of fundamentally different hermeneutical approaches. Almost all dispensational interpreters are careful to point out, based on verse 24a, that the entire prophecy concerns Daniel, Daniel's people (*viz.* Israel), and Daniel's holy city (*viz.* Jerusalem). This focus on the context is a basic, foundational principle of a literal, grammatical-historical hermeneutic. It is this appeal to the context that leads dispensational interpreters to see the six purposes in relation to Israel. Thus:

1. To finish the transgression – refers to Israel's national transgression. The articular "transgression" (עֲוֹנוֹתָיִם) is taken to refer to the rebellion of the nation, ultimately their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. This will not be "finished" until the second advent when Israel looks on the one they pierced and repent of their rejection (Zech 12:10).
2. To make an end of sin – refers also specifically to Israel. Sin has not yet been ended for Israel, but it will be ended at the second advent when the new covenant is fulfilled in Israel and there is national regeneration (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:26-28).
3. To make atonement for iniquity – probably looks at the redemptive work of Christ accomplished at the cross; however, as Benware observes, "The total

and complete payment for sin was in the past at the cross, but it will be in the future that the provision of the cross will be applied to national Israel (cf. Zech. 12:10; 13:1; Isa. 59:20-21; Ezek. 36:25-27; Jer. 31:31-34).”²²

4. To bring in everlasting righteousness – refers to the conditions of righteousness that will prevail on earth during the messianic kingdom. The expression “to bring in” (preposition לָ with the hiph. inf. constr. of בָּרָא) suggests something more than the state of positional righteousness that the believer in Christ possesses by faith. Rather, it suggests the entrance of a condition that did not previously exist. This appears to be a very apt description of millennial conditions of righteousness that will be ushered in with the second advent.
5. To seal up vision and prophecy – refers to the attainment of the final goal of prophecy, the realization of the messianic kingdom.
6. To anoint the most holy *place* – refers to the dedication of the millennial temple (cf. Ezek 40-48).

Non-dispensational interpreters, on the other hand, are generally not as committed to a literal, grammatical-historical hermeneutic in the interpretation of prophecy. A more foundational guiding principle for such interpreters tends to be the outworking of the covenant of grace. This emphasis on the covenant of grace tends to deemphasize a future messianic kingdom, bringing the non-dispensational interpreter to the conclusion that the six goals of verse 24 largely find their fulfillment in the positional righteousness

²² Benware, 196.

possessed by the believer in Christ in the present age. At times, this forces the hand of the non-dispensational interpreter to take exegetical liberties with the text. J. Barton Payne, for example, appeals to numerous textual emendations in verse 24 in order to make many of the 6 purposes of this verse relate either to Christ's redemptive work on the cross or to Israel's rejection of Christ at His first coming and God's subsequent judgment of that nation.²³ Thus, Payne sees the seventy heptads fulfilled within a few years of Christ's crucifixion. He states quite emphatically:

... chap. 9 refers to Christ's first coming and to Rome up to A.D. 70 ... the third vision's time limit of seventy hebdomads, or 490 years, comes down to the first century and to the first century only. This is the meaning of their sixfold goal, as expressed in 9:24.²⁴

If the seventieth heptad is, indeed, fulfilled within a few years of Christ's crucifixion, then the interpreter must force the specific events prophesied in verse 27 into the events of the mid-first century. This causes some real exegetical difficulties. Three exegetical questions in particular are especially problematic for those who see a first century fulfillment: 1. Who makes the covenant and then causes sacrifice and grain offerings to cease? 2. What is this covenant? 3. In what sense are sacrifices and grain offerings stopped?

Dispensational interpreters almost universally identify the covenant maker of verse 27 with the antichrist, a position which, according to Jerome, was held as early as

²³ J. Barton Payne, "The Goal Of Daniel's Seventy Weeks" in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* Volume 21 (The Evangelical Theological Society, 1978), 98-99.

²⁴ Payne, 114.

Africanus, and is shared even by the non-dispensational interpreter Keil.²⁵ The reasoning is as follows: (1) The people who destroyed the city were the Romans; (2) the antichrist rises from the fourth empire of Daniel 2 and 7, which is Rome; therefore (3) the “prince” (מֶלֶךְ) of the people who destroyed the city is the ruler of the fourth empire who is ultimately the antichrist. The majority of non-dispensational interpreters, however, reject this identification. Smith, for example, is quite adamant, when he states, “Some commentators incredibly identify the *prince* as Antichrist, but *the people of the prince* as the Roman armies of A.D. 70.”²⁶ The weakness of Smith’s argument here is betrayed by his use of the term “incredible.” He merely writes off the position as being “incredible” without offering any explanation or argument as to why the position is not believable. The fact that many “credible” and qualified scholars have adopted this position at the very least merits a reasoned argument on Smith’s part. Young, for his part, at least attempts to mount an argument by analogy. He reasons:

[The prince] must be their contemporary, alive when they are alive. We cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, legitimately call the army of George Washington the army of a general, and by that general have reference to Eisenhower. The armies of Washington are in no sense Eisenhower’s armies. And the fact that Eisenhower was born in America many years after the time of Washington’s armies does not in the least permit us to say that they are his armies. The people who destroyed the city and the prince that should come ... are contemporaries. Otherwise the language makes no sense.²⁷

²⁵ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 733.

²⁶ James E. Smith, *The Major Prophets* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1992), 9:26 n.21.

²⁷ Young, 212.

But Keil has argued convincingly on the strength of the participle מֵבֹאֵי (“the coming one”) that this prince’s coming is separate from the peoples’ destruction of the city.²⁸ Therefore, on the strength of the argument from grammar and language, Young’s argument from analogy falls.

On the dispensationalist assumption that the covenant maker is the antichrist, this covenant is some pact the antichrist makes with Israel at the beginning of the final heptad, and the stopping of sacrifice and grain offering in the middle of the heptad corresponds to the abomination of desolation (Matt 24:15-31) and coincides with the primary sign of the soon coming of the Son of Man in power and great glory.

Non-dispensational interpreters, on the other hand, generally believe that the “prince who is to come” of verse 26 must be the same as the “Messiah Prince” of verse 25. If this is the case, then the covenant He confirms at His first advent is either the covenant of grace, the new covenant or the Mosaic covenant, and the stopping of sacrifice and grain offerings refers to Christ’s annulment of the Mosaic sacrificial system (Heb 7:11; 8:13; 9:25, 26; 10:8, 9).²⁹ However, Daniel’s description of the prince in verse 26 as one who is מֵבֹאֵי (“the coming one”) seems to distinguish him from the prince of verse 25. Furthermore, to make Messiah the Prince also the prince of the destroying Roman armies seems to be totally at variance with the purpose of this prophecy. The purpose of this prophecy is to assure Daniel and His people of God’s benevolent intentions toward the people and their city. Daniel’s vision of chapter seven has already

²⁸ Keil, 733.

²⁹ Young, 217.

introduced the powerful, eschatological Roman ruler who will seek to destroy God's people in the latter days for "a time, times, and half a time" (Dan 7:23-25); therefore, it is entirely within the scope of Daniel's prophetic message to reintroduce here in chapter 9 this nefarious individual who seeks to thwart God's gracious purposes toward Israel.

III. Your Own Solution or Explanations

So far in this paper, the distinctions between various interpreters have been presented in theological terms – "dispensational" vs. "non-dispensational"; "conservative" vs. "liberal," and, to be sure, these distinctions are appropriate. However, there is a more fundamental distinction that, to this writer, truly determines the outcome of one's interpretation; that distinction deals with the realm of hermeneutics.

Conservative non-dispensational interpreters and liberal interpreters alike depart from a consistently literal, grammatical-historical hermeneutic in the interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27. The specific hermeneutical principles to which one must adhere in order to arrive at a correct interpretation include the following:

1. The passage must be interpreted with the presumption of verbal, plenary inspiration.
2. The passage must be interpreted in the light of its surrounding context (especially the first portion of Dan. ch. 9, but also the sequence of prophecies throughout the book of Daniel).
3. The passage must be interpreted in the light of its historical setting.
4. The passage must be interpreted in the light of authorial intent.

5. The interpreter's theological bias(es) must be laid aside in the exegetical process.

The best way, therefore, to explain this writer's "solutions" to the problems in this passage is to proceed systematically and exegetically through the passage, setting it in its proper context and commenting on the verses in an expository fashion. To accomplish this, consider the following outline of the ninth chapter of Daniel:

- I. What Daniel Expected, vv. 1-23
- II. What Daniel Learned, v. 24
- III. The Sixty-Nine Heptads in Greater Detail, v. 25
- IV. After the Sixty-Nine Heptads, v.26
- V. The Seventieth Heptad, v.27

A. What Daniel Expected, Verses 1-23

The chapter begins with the chronological marker, "In the first year of Darius." Daniel uses these chronological markers at key points in the book,³⁰ the first occurring in 1:1, "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah," marking both the time of Nebuchadnezzar's raiding of the temple and of Daniel's exile to Babylon. The year of Daniel's exile can then be dated to 606/605 BC.³¹ Since the first year of Darius was

³⁰ Other key chronological markers are found in 1:21 (the first year of King Cyrus); 2:1 (the second year of Nebuchadnezzar); 7:1 (the first year of Belshazzar); 8:1 (the third year of the reign of Belshazzar); 10:1 (the third year of Cyrus); 11:1 (the first year of Darius)

³¹ Pentecost, 1329.

539/538 BC, Daniel had spent sixty-six to sixty-eight years in Babylon when he received this prophecy.

In verse 2, Daniel mentions that he had been reading various books (סְפָרִים plural) concerning the number of years that Israel would remain in exile. He specifically mentioned the prophecy of Jeremiah and Jeremiah's prediction that the exile would last seventy years. This seventy year duration is mentioned both in Jeremiah 25:11-12 and 29:10.

‘This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. 12 ‘Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,’ declares the Lord, ‘for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation.’ (Jer 25:11-12)

“For thus says the Lord, ‘When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place.’” (Jer 29:10)

Three major deportations of Jews from Jerusalem to Babylon took place, occurring in 606/605, 597, and 586 BC. It is impossible to know with certainty which of these dates would have marked the *terminus a quo* of the seventy years, but the chronological marker of verse 1 appears to indicate that Daniel was thinking in terms of his own deportation some sixty-six to sixty-eight years earlier. Thus Daniel likely expected that the end of the captivity was just a few years away.

Since Daniel had mentioned “books” (סְפָרִים) in the plural, one wonders what other book(s) Daniel might have been reading that have bearing on the length of the Babylonian captivity. There is no other explicit reference to the seventy year period elsewhere in the Old Testament; however, the reason for the seventy years was

prophesied by Moses in Leviticus 26:33-35. There we are told that the purpose of the captivity was specifically to allow the land to rest for a period of time equivalent to the number of sabbatical rests that Israel had neglected to observe.

You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste. 34 Then the land will enjoy its sabbaths all the days of the desolation, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. 35 All the days of its desolation it will observe the rest which it did not observe on your sabbaths, while you were living on it. (Lev 26:33-35)

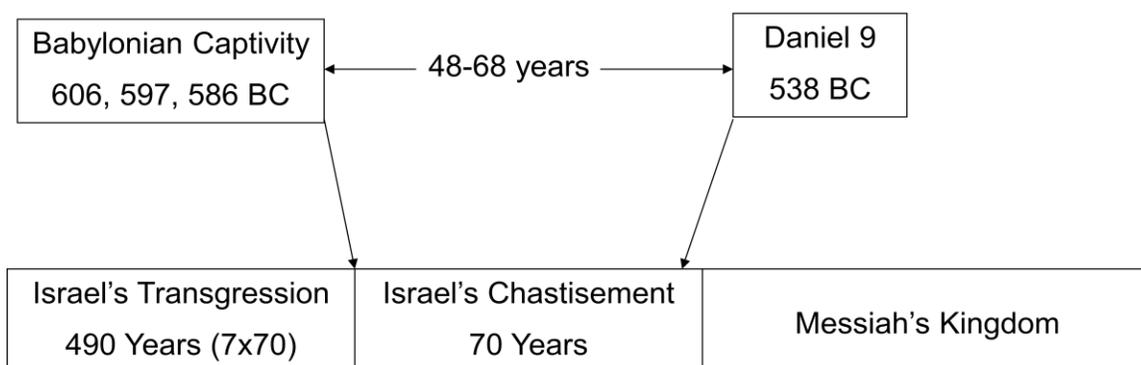
It is important to observe, at this juncture, that the reason for the seventy-year period is directly related to an institution involving units of seven years – the sabbatical law of the land (Lev 25:1-7). Later, when Daniel is given the prophecy of the seventy heptads (vv. 24ff.), the units would be understood as these seven-year units. Thus, the “seventy heptads” (שְׁבַעֵים שָׁבָעִים) in verse 24 would be understood by Daniel in this context as seventy periods of seven-years each, or 490 years.

Not only was Daniel reading Leviticus 26:33-35, but, as his following prayer makes certain, he was also reading verses 40-46 of that same chapter:

“If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me, and also in their acting with hostility against Me— 41 I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies—or if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity, 42 then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land. 43 For the land will be abandoned by them, and will make up for its sabbaths while it is made desolate without them. They, meanwhile, will be making amends for their iniquity, because they rejected My ordinances and their soul abhorred My statutes. 44 Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them, breaking My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God. 45 But I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am the Lord.” 46 These are the

statutes and ordinances and laws which the Lord established between Himself and the sons of Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai (Lev 26:40-46).

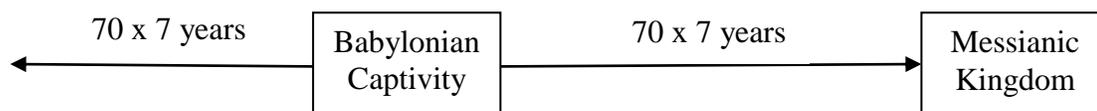
This passage is significant, not only because it explains why Daniel engaged in the following prayer of confession, but also because of the connection it makes with the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. Clearly, Daniel expected not only the end of the Babylonian exile, but also the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. In other words, Daniel thought that the Messiah would come in just a few years to usher in His kingdom! This sets the stage for understanding the language of verse 25 when Gabriel refers to the coming of “Messiah the Prince.” What Daniel expected might be diagrammed as follows:



In the verses which follow (Daniel 9:3-19) we find Daniel in earnest prayer, repenting of his own sins and of the sins of his fathers (*viz.* those who had violated the sabbatical law of the land for 490 years). This, according to Leviticus 26:40-46, is what Daniel expected to satisfy God’s requirements for allowing the Messiah’s kingdom to come.

B. What Daniel Learned, Verse 24

Verses 20-23 introduce the reader to Gabriel and his mission to Daniel. It is important to observe that Gabriel was sent specifically in response to Daniel's prayer (v. 23). Daniel had expected the soon arrival of the Messiah; what he was to learn involved a more detailed understanding of God's chronology. The Messiah was not to arrive immediately; instead, just as the Babylonian captivity had been preceded by seventy heptads, it must be followed by another seventy heptads before the Messiah can establish His kingdom. "Seventy heptads have been decreed for your people and your holy city" (v. 24), as the following diagram indicates:



The six-fold purpose of the seventy heptads, expressed in verse 24b, must be understood in light of the context. Daniel, for all intents and purposes, has been praying for the arrival of the Messiah to usher in the kingdom. He has been informed that seventy additional heptads have been decreed for the Jewish people and for the city of Jerusalem. The context requires that the six-fold purpose be related to the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant and the establishment of Messiah's kingdom. We would therefore understand this six-fold purpose as follows:

1. To finish the transgression – refers to Israel's national transgression. The articular "transgression" (עֲוֹנוֹתָם) is taken to refer to the rebellion of the nation, ultimately their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. This will not be "finished" until the second

advent when Israel looks on the one they pierced and repent of their rejection (Zech 12:10).

2. To make an end of sin – refers also specifically to Israel. Sin has not yet been ended for Israel, but it will be ended at the second advent when the new covenant is fulfilled in Israel and there is national regeneration (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:26-28).
3. To make atonement for iniquity – probably looks at the redemptive work of Christ accomplished at the cross; however, as Benware observes, “The total and complete payment for sin was in the past at the cross, but it will be in the future that the provision of the cross will be applied to national Israel (cf. Zech. 12:10; 13:1; Isa. 59:20-21; Ezek. 36:25-27; Jer. 31:31-34).”³²
4. To bring in everlasting righteousness – refers to the conditions of righteousness that will prevail on earth during the messianic kingdom. The expression “to bring in” (preposition בְּ with the hiph. inf. constr. of בָּרָא) suggests something more than the state of positional righteousness that the believer in Christ possesses by faith. Rather, it suggests the entrance of a condition that did not previously exist. This appears to be a very apt description of millennial conditions of righteousness that will be ushered in with the second advent.
5. To seal up vision and prophecy – refers to the attainment of the final goal of prophecy, the realization of the Messianic kingdom.

³² Benware, 196.

6. To anoint the most holy place – refers to the dedication of the millennial temple (cf. Ezek 40-48).

C. The Sixty-Nine Heptads in Greater Detail, Verse 25

Verse 24 gave an overview of the seventy heptads. The remaining verses divide this total up into three segments: seven heptads, plus sixty-two heptads, plus one final heptad. This seems to be the simplest and most straightforward way of understanding this three-fold breakdown. The first sixty-nine (seven plus sixty-two) heptads are the subject of verse 25.

A *terminus a quo* for these sixty-nine heptads is described in the following way: “from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.” The *terminus ad quem* is described in the immediately following words: “until Messiah the Prince.” Though there has been much debate among interpreters as to which “decree” is intended as the *terminus a quo*, there is really only one that satisfies the stipulation that it permit the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem with its defensive structures. Scholars have postulated either the decree of Cyrus (2 Chron 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4; 6:3-5), the decree of Darius (Ezra 6:1-12), the decree of Artaxerxes to Ezra (Ezra 7:11-26), or the decree of Artaxerxes to Nehemiah (Neh 2:4-8). The former three of these decrees have nothing to do with the rebuilding of the city; rather, they all pertain to the building and service of the temple. The earlier Median/Persian kings were willing to allow the Jews to have their religious ceremonies reestablished in Jerusalem, but they were clearly unwilling to allow Jerusalem to be rebuilt as a fortified city posing a potential military threat to areas under

their jurisdiction (see Ezr 4:6-24). When comparing and contrasting the four Persian decrees, the following points should be taken into consideration:

1. The decree of Cyrus called only for the construction of the temple, not the city (Ezra 1:2-4; 6:1-12; 2 Chronicles 36:23).
2. When Artaxerxes was informed that the Jews were building the city and its wall, after consulting the royal archives, it was determined that the Jews were involved in inappropriate building activity (Ezra 4:6-24).
3. Later, when the (Persian appointed) “governor of the region beyond the river” wrote to Darius about the Jews’ activities, he refers only to work being done on the temple. There is no mention of the city at all (Ezra 5).
4. The decree of Artaxerxes to Ezra (Ezr 7:12-26) speaks exclusively of the “house of God” (see esp. vv. 16, 17, 19, 20, 25). There is no mention of Jerusalem or of the city’s defensive structures.
5. It is Nehemiah who first brings up the matter of rebuilding the city for official consideration (Neh 1:3, gates and wall of the city). Note the parallel between Nehemiah’s prayer of Nehemiah 1:5-11 and Daniel’s prayer of Daniel 9:1-23. Nehemiah 2:3, 5, 8 specify the city and its gates as Nehemiah addresses king Artaxerxes. Nehemiah 2:8b refers obliquely to a “decree” allowing this rebuilding of the city with its gates and wall, though the decree is not formally quoted. Then, Nehemiah 2 – 7 records the actual completion of the wall. Note further, the confession of sin in Nehemiah 9:2 also runs parallel to Daniel’s prayer of confession in Daniel 9.

In the Hebrew canon, the last 3 books are Daniel, Ezra(/Nehemiah), and Chronicles. This places Daniel immediately adjacent to the book of Ezra. This may be an indication that those who originally assembled the Hebrew canon understood the decree mentioned in Dan 9 in terms of the succession of decrees mentioned in Ezra(/Nehemiah). If this is the case, then what we see is a progression building up to a climax in the final decree permitting the rebuilding of the city with its defenses.

The decree of Artaxerxes to Nehemiah was dated by Sir Robert Anderson at 445 BC³³ and by Hoehner at 444 BC.³⁴ Hoehner's chronology appears to correct some features of Anderson's, but he basically follows Anderson's line of reasoning in calculating the time from the *terminus a quo* to the *terminus ad quem*. The problem Anderson dealt with had to do with the fact that 483 years (*viz.* sixty-nine heptads) after 445 BC resulted in a *terminus ad quem* of the year AD 39. There is no way that anyone can reasonably say the Messiah came in AD 39, much less that He was crucified after that year. Anderson posited a solution to this enigma by proposing that the years in these heptads consisted of 360-day years, rather than 365-day years. Though this solution is not entirely without difficulty, it is, in this writer's opinion the best solution to the problem of the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem*. Both Anderson and Hoehner, when using a 360-day year calculation, place the *terminus ad quem* precisely, to the very day, on the day of Christ's triumphal entry. The strongest support for the idea of a "prophetic" 360-day year comes from the observation that the final heptad, assuming that it is the same as

³³ Anderson, 66.

³⁴ Hoehner, 59.

the eschatological tribulation period, is defined Scripturally as 1,260 days plus 1,260 days in the book of Revelation (Rev 11:3; 12:6).³⁵ When the heptads are viewed in terms of years consisting of 360 days each, then the first sixty-nine heptads would be equivalent to 483 years x 360 days per year, or 173,880 days. By contrast, the solar year calculation has 483 years x 365 days per year, or 176,295 days. Thus, the sixty-nine heptads according to the “prophetic year” are shorter by 2,415 days, or 6.6 solar years. This brings the *terminus ad quem* to the year AD 32/33, very likely the very year of Jesus’ crucifixion.³⁶

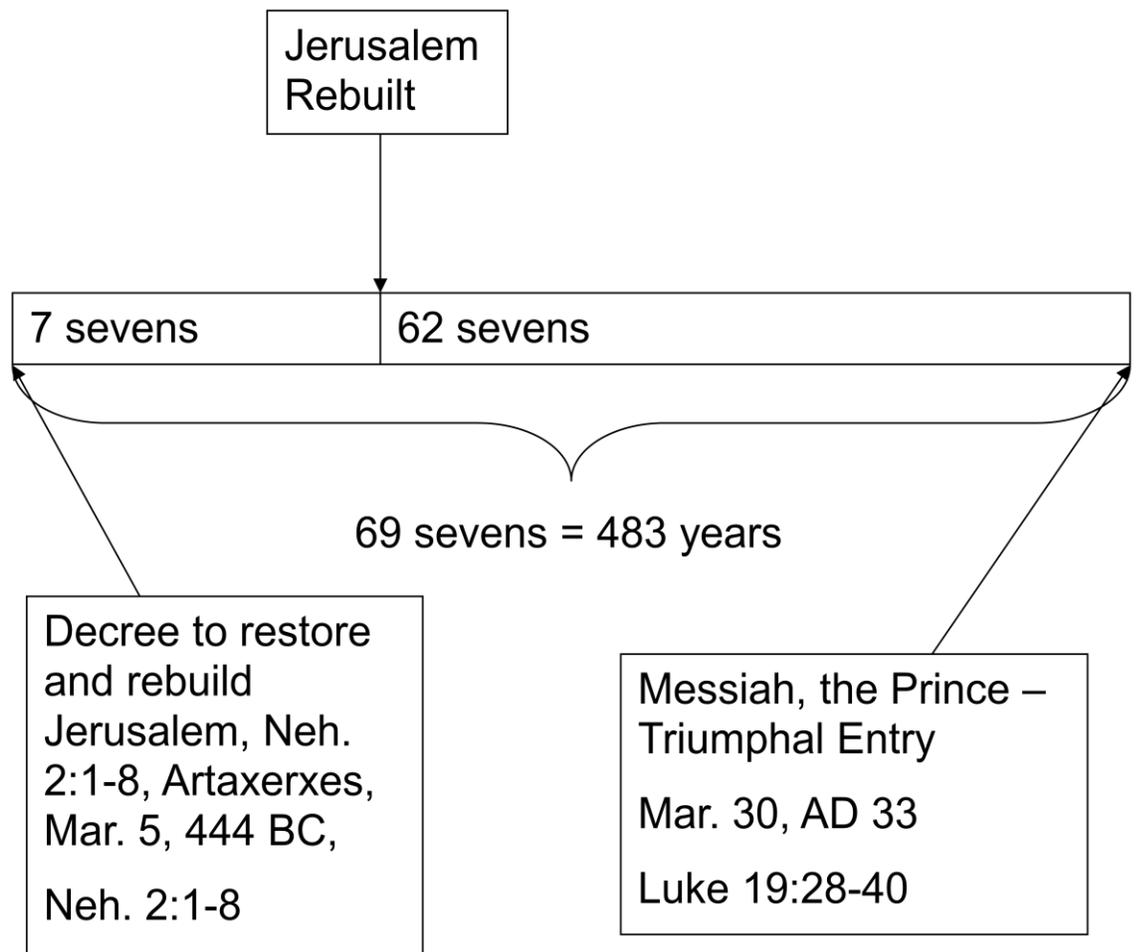
One final item in verse 25 should be addressed, namely the significance of the initial seven heptads (or 49 years). The final clause of verse 25 is probably intended to be a description of the goal of the initial seven heptads: “It will be built again,³⁷ with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.” This is a reference to the outcome of Nehemiah’s work of rebuilding the city’s defenses. Since the *terminus a quo* had specifically to do with a decree permitting this very thing, it is entirely appropriate that this intermediate goal be mentioned in the chronology of the prophecy.

The “seven heptads and sixty-two heptads” can be diagrammed as follows:

³⁵ $1260 + 1260 = 2520 \div 7 = 360$; thus, the tribulation period of Revelation consists of two halves, each one being $3 \frac{1}{2}$ years in length, but the years consist of 360 days each.

³⁶ For a very detailed chronology and the calculations that establish the *terminus ad quem* at the triumphal entry, see Hoehner, “Chronological Aspects.”

³⁷ Heb. תָּשׁוּב וְתִבְנֶה lit., “she shall return and she shall be built.”



D. After the Sixty-Nine Heptads, Verse 26

The question of whether there is a gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth heptads has to do with the events prophesied in verse 26. Three things are predicted to occur *after* (אַחֲרָיָהּ) the sixty-ninth heptad. That they were to occur *after* the sixty-ninth, must have seemed to Daniel as if they were to occur at some point *during* the seventieth, i.e., within the space of a seven-year period. These three things are: (1) “Messiah will be cut off and have nothing”; (2) “the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary”; and (3) “to the end there will be war; desolations are

determined.” Put more simply, after the sixty-ninth heptad will follow: (1) the crucifixion, (2) the destruction of Jerusalem, (3) continual warfare and desolation “until the end” (עַד אֵדֶנּוּ). The crucifixion occurred mere days after the triumphal entry; this fits quite well with the prophecy. The destruction of Jerusalem, however, would not occur until another thirty-seven years transpired. If the seventieth heptad were to follow immediately upon the sixty-ninth, this would place Jerusalem’s destruction well into the Messianic kingdom. This observation requires that there be a gap of at least thirty years, probably longer. Of course, there was no way that either Daniel or the readers of Daniel’s prophecy before AD 40 could have realized this, and they may reasonably have assumed that the destruction of Jerusalem would occur at some point during the seventieth heptad, but once the year AD 40 had come and gone, readers of this prophecy must have started wondering whether there might be a gap before the final heptad began. Non-dispensational interpreters, such as Young, come to the conclusion that the years are not literal, but symbolic.³⁸ But this makes no sense, if the first sixty-nine heptads are so precise that they predicted accurately, to the very day, the triumphal entry. No, if we are to exercise a consistent hermeneutic, the seventieth heptad must be as literal as the first sixty-nine. Thus, there must be a gap of at least thirty years to keep the destruction of Jerusalem out of the Messianic kingdom.

Some interpreters scoff at the idea of such a long gap in this prophecy, but the existence of gaps in prophecies is not unheard of in prophetic Scripture. Isaiah’s

³⁸ Young, 206.

prophecy of the kingdom in his 61st chapter is such an example. Isaiah 61:1-2a predicts Christ's ministry at His first advent:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord (Isa 61:1-2a).

This portion of the prophecy was quoted by Jesus in His reading of the Scripture at the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:16-19), but as soon as He had read the words, "to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord," we are told that "He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down" (Lk 4:20a). The synagogue congregants were amazed that He would stop the reading the passage before it was complete, and they all stared at Him (Lk 4:20b). Jesus' explanation for this remarkable behavior was, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:21). If Jesus had read on further in Isaiah's prophecy, He could not have claimed that it was being fulfilled "today," for the prophecy continues:

... and the day of vengeance of our God ... Then they will rebuild the ancient ruins; they will raise up the former devastations; and they will repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations. Strangers will stand and pasture your flocks, and foreigners will be your farmers and your vinedressers. But you will be called the priests of the Lord; you will be spoken of as ministers of our God. You will eat the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you will boast. Instead of your shame you will have a double portion, and instead of humiliation they will shout for joy over their portion. Therefore they will possess a double portion in their land; everlasting joy will be theirs. (Isa 61:2b-7)

This latter portion of Isaiah's prophecy clearly predicts events that will usher in the future Messianic kingdom and conditions that will prevail for Israel in that kingdom. There is, therefore, clearly a gap of some two thousand years or more in the middle of verse 2 of Isaiah's prophecy, and apparently Jesus recognized the existence of that gap. The gap in

Daniel's prophecy is of the same nature; it is a distinction between the first advent and second advent of Christ. The hermeneutical feature observed here is what has been called "the law of double reference."³⁹

The final item to occur after the sixty-ninth heptad is continual warfare and desolation "until the end" (יָדָוּ עַד אֶבְרַת). There is some question as to whether the expression "until the end" refers to the end of the city (AD 70),⁴⁰ the end of the Jewish rebellion against Rome (AD 73 or later?), or to the end of all warfare for Israel (i.e. the end of the seventieth heptad and the arrival of the Messianic kingdom).⁴¹ The warfare certainly refers at the very least to the Jewish rebellion against Rome that continued up to the fall of Masada in AD 73. The anarthrous יָדָוּ עַד אֶבְרַת is different from the earlier suffixed יָדָוּ עַד אֶבְרַת which *does* refer to the end of the city. But יָדָוּ עַד אֶבְרַת, being anarthrous is more general,⁴² being broader in its reference. The reference is probably to the continual experience of the Jewish people all the way up to the second advent of Christ and the ushering in of the Messianic kingdom. Thus the warfare would include not only the first and second (Bar Kokhba) Jewish revolts, but also anti-Semitic violence occurring over the past two millennia at the hands of the Muslims, the Crusaders, the Czars, the Third Reich, the Soviets, the Arabs and many others. The great and final end will come at the hand of the most horrifying of all anti-Semitic persecutors, the antichrist, to whose exploits the angel

³⁹ Fruchtenbaum, 5-6, Tan, 178-79.

⁴⁰ Miller, 268.

⁴¹ Keil, 734-35, Pentecost, 1364; Benware, 206.

⁴² Keil, 734.

Gabriel refers in the next verse. Jesus, in His Olivet Discourse, clearly refers to the Daniel 9 prophecy in Matthew 24:15 when He speaks of “the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet.” It is also likely that he has this expression, “the end,” in view in the following references:

- Matthew 24:6, You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end.
- Matthew 24:13, But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.
- Matthew 24:14, This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

E. The Seventieth Heptad, Verse 27

Verse 27 opens with a reference to the last heptad, “And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one heptad.” Verse 25 had described the first sixty-nine heptads; verse 26 described events in the gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth heptads; all that is left is to describe events of the final seven years before Messiah comes to fulfill the Abrahamic covenant and usher in the Messianic kingdom. Three events are described in this final heptad; they mark the beginning, the mid-point, and the end.

1. The Beginning of the Seventieth Heptad.

The beginning of the final heptad is marked by a covenant that is “made firm” with “the many.” The subject of the verb **הִגְבִּיר** (“he will make firm,” “he will make strong”) is widely debated. However, if one has already come to the conclusion that the

seventieth heptad describes the final seven years before the Messiah's second advent, then it makes perfectly good sense that the subject of this verb should be the antichrist, as practically all dispensational interpreters agree, and even amillennial interpreters Keil and Leupold. The nearest antecedent to which the verb's subject might refer is the prince of the people who destroy the city in verse 26. This prince is the ruler of Daniel's fourth kingdom (Daniel 2:40-43; 7:24-26; 11:36-45). "The many" is apparently a reference to Daniel's people (cf. v. 24), the Jews, but the Jews who live in this final eschatological period.

In the Qal stem **גָּבַר** means "to be strong," "to be mighty," and can take on the meanings "to achieve," "to increase" (cf. the related nouns **גִּבּוֹר**, "strong man," **גִּבּוֹרִים**, "mighty one," "hero," and the compound **אֱלֹהֵי גִבּוֹר**, "mighty God"); in the Hiphil, as here, it means "to make strong." So, the antichrist makes strong a covenant with the Jews at the outset of the final heptad. Since this covenant is made strong **שְׁבִיעַ אֶתְהָד** "one heptad," the covenant will most likely stipulate a seven year contractual agreement between the antichrist and the Jewish people. Since the breaking of this covenant will constitute a cessation of the sacrifice and grain offering, it seems very probable that the covenant will constitute a permit to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and reinstitute temple worship. This covenant is somewhat parallel to the Persian decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes to Ezra, but it is highly unlikely that the antichrist would ever permit the Jews to build up the defenses of Jerusalem, as Artaxerxes permitted Nehemiah to do.

This covenant is probably the same one that is the subject of Isaiah's prophecy of the "covenant of death" (Isa 28:14-22).⁴³ In Isaiah's prophecy, Fruchtenbaum suggests the following observations:

- a. The parties to the covenant (v. 14) – "scoffers who rule in Jerusalem." This would be parallel to "the many" of Daniel 9:27. These rulers, perhaps the Israeli Knesset or possibly a restored Sanhedrin Council, or perhaps some other representative group, will enter into the covenant on behalf of the Jewish people. However, not all the Jews will go along with this covenant.
- b. The purpose of the covenant (v. 15) – to prevent the "overwhelming scourge." The "overwhelming scourge" is the judgment of God that will come on the unbelieving nation. Apparently, the antichrist will offer (military? religious?) protection from this judgment.
- c. Those excepted from the covenant (v. 16) – those who trust in the Cornerstone. Some of the Jews will refuse to go along with this covenant of death. These are justified by faith in the Messiah, the Cornerstone.
- d. The cancelation of the covenant (vv. 17-18) – the overflowing scourge comes. In Daniel, it is the antichrist who cancels the covenant. In Isaiah it is the Lord who is seen as the Architect behind this cancelation. The covenant is canceled because the antichrist is unable to deliver on his promises of protection to the Jews. Instead, "hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters will overflow the

⁴³ Fruchtenbaum, 198-201.

secret place. Your covenant with death will be canceled, and your pact with *She'ol* will not stand.”

2. The Mid-Point of the Seventieth Heptad.

It is this cancelation of the covenant of death that marks the mid-point of the seventieth heptad. As discussed in the preceding section, this cancelation is orchestrated by God Himself. From the viewpoint of Daniel’s prophecy, however, it is the antichrist who cancels the covenant. According to Daniel 9:27, “In the middle of the heptad he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering.” Isaiah portrays a judgment of God that involves hail and a torrential flood which the antichrist is powerless to prevent. In response, the antichrist brings the sacrificial practices of the temple to a halt. This all occurs “in the middle of the heptad” (תְּצִי הַשְּׁבוּעָה). The term תְּצִי means “half” or “middle” and marks the precise mid-point of this heptad, dividing it into two halves of three and a half years each. On the presumption that these “years” are “prophetic years” of 360 days each (see discussion above on verse 24), each half would constitute 1,260 days. This corresponds exactly with the time period mentioned by the Apostle John in Revelation 12:6 and with the forty-two months of Revelation 11:2-3; 13:5. The division of the seventieth heptad into two periods of three and a half years also corresponds with the expression “time, times, and a half a time” in Daniel 7:25 where it describes the period of time during which the antichrist will persecute the “saints of the Highest One.”

Not only will the antichrist put a stop to the sacrificial system, he will also commit some act of sacrilege that Gabriel described in the following words: “On the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate” (NASB). The Hebrew is quite

difficult to translate here, and the commentators and versions display many variant renderings. The Hebrew text has **וְעַל כְּנָף שְׂקוּצִים מְשֻׁמִּים**, which is something like, “and on a wing, idols of a devastator (or shameful one).” The term **כְּנָף** can mean a literal “wing” with which one flies, or it can refer to an “edge” or a “skirt” of something. The context seems to connect this with some aspect of the temple, perhaps an adjoining room or corridor of the temple. The “idols” seem to have their counterpart in the image of the beast of Revelation 13:14-15 (cf. 2 Thess 2:4). The idol of Revelation represents the antichrist himself. There may be more than one such image, hence the plural term in Daniel 9:27, but they represent only one being, namely, the devastator or shameful one. This one is seen as a “prince” in verse 26, but here as a “devastator.” This seems somewhat parallel to Daniel’s earlier prophecies in chapters 2 and 7, where the four world powers are first depicted as a glorious shining image, then later as powerful destructive beasts.

Jesus identified this act of sacrilege as a significant sign that the appearance of the Son of Man is near (Matt 24:15). This will mark the time during the tribulation period when Jews must flee to the mountains to escape the great tribulation that will come upon them for the remaining three and a half years. Since Jesus identified this abomination as something that was yet future to His first advent, it is futile to attempt to see a fulfillment in Antiochus Epiphanes.

3. The End of the Seventieth Heptad.

The end of the heptad will see the destruction of the antichrist. Daniel 9:27 describes it as “a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who

makes desolate.” The Hebrew term for “one who makes desolate” (מְשַׁלֵּם Qal?) is approximately the same as was used in the middle of the verse for the “devastator” (מְשַׁלֵּם Polel). Linguists are uncertain as to whether מְשַׁלֵּם should be considered Qal or a shortened form of the Polel.⁴⁴ Whichever the case, the two participles of מְשַׁלֵּם surely refer to the same individual, the antichrist, the one who devastates both the people of God and the sanctuary of God. This one will be utterly destroyed (cf. Dan 7:26). That God is the agent of this destruction is implied by the phrase “one that is decreed.” The Niphal stem מְשַׁלֵּם is probably a divine passive. In the book of Revelation it is the Lord Jesus who destroys the beast with the sword that goes forth out of His mouth (Rev 19:11-20).

F. Conclusion

The prophecy ends where Daniel initially expected it to begin. In Daniel 9:1-3 the prophet had expected the soon arrival of the Messiah to usher in His kingdom. Instead, Daniel was informed by Gabriel that the kingdom would not come until seventy heptads of years had transpired. The prophecy traces the events that must transpire over the course of these seventy heptads, and even some that occur during a gap in the seventy heptads. This news may not have been what Daniel wanted to hear, but he was already an old man, and had persevered throughout the long years of the Babylonian captivity. Whether he would have lived another three or four years until his expected Messiah

⁴⁴ See discussion in Koehler HALOT.

came, no one can tell. But it is comforting to learn that before his prophetic book comes to an end, Daniel was given the personally comforting words:

But as for you, go your way to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise again for your allotted portion at the end of the age (Dan 12:13).

Daniel would yet see his long awaited Messiah in the kingdom, and he would even inherit his allotted portion in the promised land.

IV. Practical Application to Christian Life

This prophecy, though addressed to Daniel and his people – the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – has rich implications for the believer of the church age. We need not spiritualize the passage, as many amillennial interpreters have done in order to make application to ourselves. The application is based on the unchangeable nature of the One who is directing the affairs of this universe and Who is sovereignly carrying out the details of this prophecy. The same One who cares lovingly for Israel will also do “exceeding, abundantly above all that we could ask or think, according to the power that works within us; to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen” (Eph 3:20-21). Applications that arise from this passage include the following:

1. God knows both our joys and our sorrows, even before we do.

God knew of Daniel’s yearning heart and desire to see the Messianic kingdom. He also knew that Daniel would not see the kingdom in his mortal life, but would enjoy it as a resurrected saint. Knowing these things, God was gracious in answering Daniel’s prayer and providing him with valuable insights that would encourage him and God’s people as they awaited the coming of the Messiah. Likewise, the omniscient God knows of our

needs, even before we ask (Ps 38:9; 69:17-19; Matt 6:32; Luke 12:30). Since He is all powerful and has already proven His everlasting love for us, we need never fear about what the future may hold. We can take courage that God hears our prayers and knows our needs and will grant wisdom when it is needed (Ja 1:2-5).

2. A humble and contrite prayer of confession will reach the throne of God.

Daniel's prayer of confession (9:3-19) is a beautiful example of humility and contrition. It stands as a wonderful example of how the child of God can humble his heart before God. Daniel was one of the most righteous individuals who ever lived (Ezek. 14:14), yet not only did he confess his sins, he did not elevate himself above his own forefathers who had violated the sabbatical law of the land. God is still pleased with the cry that comes from a heart of humility (1Pe 5:5-7; Ja 4:6).

3. There may be unexpected delays in the accomplishment of God's program.

Daniel was fairly certain, based on his study of Scripture, that the coming of the Messiah was near. In a similar fashion, the disciples thought it quite likely that the risen Lord Jesus would quickly establish the Messianic kingdom (Ac 1:6). In both cases, these earnest lovers of God and His kingdom learned that their expectations were to be delayed. God has a perfect plan for the accomplishing of His goals according to His own chronology. Even though we may have a good understanding of *what* the goal is, we often do not know *when* the goal will be accomplished. In such cases we should learn to

be patient and thank God for His wisdom in accomplishing His goals in *His* timing (2Pe 3:3-9).

4. God is faithful to his people, even in extended times of barrenness.

Daniel is a great example of a man who continued to trust in God's faithfulness, even in a time of barrenness and apparent inactivity on God's part. Taken away from his home some sixty-six years earlier, God appeared to have abandoned his people. Nevertheless, Daniel continued to be earnest and faithful in prayer (Dan 6:10-11), expecting that God would still be faithful in honoring His covenant promises to the descendents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Dan 9:2-3). One verse from the prophecy of Daniel 9 that receives little attention is verse 21. There it says, "While I was still speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel ... came to me ... about the time of the evening offering." According to Exodus 29:39, every evening at twilight, a lamb was to be offered at the temple altar. But for Daniel, no lamb had been offered for sixty-six years. For sixty-six long years, Daniel had not seen the altar, nor could he have seen it, even if he had remained in Jerusalem, for it had been destroyed. Yet, in the midst of such desolation, despite the absence of temple worship for such a long time, Daniel continued to conduct his life with an awareness of God's temple schedule. Daniel's mind was focused on the place where God had said He would dwell. In a similar fashion, the believer of the church age is exhorted, "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things

above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:1-3).

5. There are consequences for disobedience, even when there is forgiveness.

There was forgiveness for Israel’s sin of violating the sabbatical law of the land, yet there were still consequences resulting from that sin. Though Israel was not cast away from God forever, yet she still had to face seventy years in Babylon. For the believer in the church age, there are also consequences for sin. We have forgiveness, because we have an Advocate Who pleads our case (1Jn 2:1-2), but the consequences of those sins may be experienced both in this life (1Co 11:30-32; Heb 12:7-11) and at the *Bema* of Christ (2Co 5:10; 1Co 3:13-15). The realization of this should encourage us to labor more faithfully to please God.

Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be no immoral or godless person.... (Heb 12:12-16)

6. Adversaries will attempt to thwart God’s work, but God will prevail in the end.

This prophecy reveals that there would be opposition to God’s work both in the rebuilding of Jerusalem under Nehemiah (Dan 9:25) and as the world draws very close to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom in the tribulation period (Dan 9:27). God’s adversary, the devil, is powerful and very real (1Pet 5:8-9). He is no less active in the church age than at other times in the history of mankind (the Messianic kingdom

excepted, Rev 20:1-3). Many a believer in the church age has become discouraged because of Satanic opposition to his well-intentioned service for the Lord, but we should rather be encouraged, knowing that God will prevail, and that our labors in the Lord are not in vain (1Co 15:58; 2Th 3:3; Gal 6:9).

7. The Messiah was “cut off,” not only for Israel, but for the believer of the church age as well.

Daniel apparently thought that the Messiah could come and usher in the kingdom more or less immediately, following the seventy years of Israel’s chastisement in Babylon. But one part of this prophecy reveals that God’s kingdom program involves not only the *arrival* of the Messiah, but the *cutting off* of the Messiah (Dan 9:26).

Chastisement may have been necessary for Israel, but no amount of chastisement could take away the problem of their sin. God’s kingdom can only come when the sin problem has been dealt with sufficiently. Israel cannot gain the kingdom merely by means of her own chastisement; the substitutionary atonement of Christ alone can take away the sin of Israel (Isa 53), and the substitutionary atonement of Christ alone can justify the believing sinner today (Rom 3:20-26).

Appendix: Time Lines

600	550	500	450	400	350	300	250	200	150	100	50	BC/AD	50	
605 BC		Nebuchadnezzar's Succession										122 BC		
597 BC		Beginning of the Exile										114 BC		
587 BC		Destruction of the Temple										104 BC		
539 BC			Cyrus' Decree										56 BC	
519/18 BC			Darius' Decree										36/35 BC	
457 BC			Artaxerxes' Decree to Ezra (solar years)										AD 27	
457 BC			Artaxerxes' Decree to Ezra (prophetic years)										AD 20	
445/44 BC			Artaxerxes' Decree to Neh. (solar years)										AD 39/40	
445/44 BC			Artaxerxes' Decree to Neh. (proph. years)										AD 32/33	

Cyrus' Decree, 539 BC – 2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4; 6:3-5

Darius' Decree, 519/18 BC – Ezra 5:3-17

Artaxerxes' Decree to Ezra, 457 BC – Ezra 7:11-26

Artaxerxes' "Decree" to Nehemiah, 445/4 BC – Nehemiah 2:1-8

Assassination of Onias III, 171 BC

Maccabean dedication of the temple, 165 BC

Death of Judah Maccabeus, 160 BC

69 – heptads = 483 years

x365 days/year = 176,295 days

x360 days/year = 173,880 days

Difference = 2,415 days, or 6.6 solar years

Note that Dan 9:25 does not require an actual “decree.” It simply says that a “word” (דְּבַר) will go forth. Some have objected to Artaxerxes’ “decree” to Nehemiah that it was not really an official decree. But this objection carries no weight in view of the actual language of Dan 9:25. Furthermore, the author of Nehemiah thought it significant enough to describe this דְּבַר as a way of developing the theme of his book.

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