The “Seventy Weeks”

Daniel 9:24-27

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Dan 9:24-27 is “the most difficult text in the book. . . . All one can do is to continue to apply agreed criteria as consistently as possible, weigh carefully the conclusions of others, and make suggestions as to the most likely solution to a difficult problem.”

Interpretive Issues and Problems with the Passage

There are several issues and problems that make Dan 9:24-27 difficult to interpret. The number and importance of these issues means that there will always be disagreement over the correct interpretation of the passage. To a large degree, these problems stem from the difficulty of the text itself. Almost every phrase in the passage is ambiguous. The following are some, but not all, of the issues and questions the passage raises.

- 9:24—Seventy “weeks”? “sevens”? “periods of time”?
- 9:24—Chronology or chronography? If it is assumed that the “seventy weeks” refers to 70 periods of 7 years, or a total of 490 years, then the question is: Are these periods meant to be taken as a strict chronology (i.e., the sequential order in which the events of history occur) or as a chronography (i.e., “a stylized scheme of history used to interpret historical data rather than arising from them”)?
- 9:24—What do “finish,” “make an end of,” “make atonement for,” “bring in everlasting righteousness,” and “seal up” mean in this context?

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1 Baldwin, *Daniel*, 163.
2 Goldingay, *Daniel*, 257
• 9:24—Who or what is the “most holy” (place? person? or people?) that is to be “anointed”?

• 9:25—Which decree (“word”)?

• 9:25—Who is “the anointed one, the prince”?

• 9:26—Is the “anointed one” of v. 26 the same as the “anointed one” of v. 25?

• 9:26—What does “cut off and have nothing” mean?

• 9:26—Who are “the people of the prince who is to come”?

• 9:26—What do “the end” and “a flood” refer to?

• 9:27—Who is “he”?

• 9:27—What is the “covenant”?

• 9:27—What does “put a stop to sacrifice” refer to?

• 9:27—What is the “wing of abominations”?

• 9:27—“Desolate” or “desolator”?

**Major Interpretive Approaches to Dan 9:24-27**

In the first century AD, Jewish Zealots interpreted Dan 9:24-27 as indicating that Messiah would appear in AD 70 and rescue the Jews from the Romans. On the other hand, first-century Jewish historian Josephus held that the Zealots’ themselves, who had killed the high priest, constituted the “abomination of desolation.” He concluded that the prophecy had been fulfilled both by Antiochus and by Titus and the Romans.

Most patristic fathers held that the seventy weeks were fully completed with the first advent of Christ and/or the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. However, the apostolic and post-apostolic fathers introduced ideas that have been re-mixed and refined by contemporary interpreters.

Contemporary interpretations fall into three main groups: (1) Those that see the passage as primarily concerning historical Jerusalem, culminating in Antiochus

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4 Josephus, *Ant.* 10.11.7; *J.W.* 4.6.3.
Epiphanes and the Maccabean Revolt which ended in 164 BC (Antiochene views); (2) Those that see it as a messianic passage, primarily fulfilled in the first coming of Christ (messianic views); and (3) Those that see it as culminating with Antichrist and a future Israel and Jerusalem (dispensational views). Each of these major viewpoints is further subdivided into more chronological versus chronographic and literalistic versus idealistic positions (similar to different interpretations of the book of Revelation).

**Antiochene views**

The 490 years (i.e., the “70 weeks” or 70x7 years) begin with Jeremiah’s prophecy (Jer 25:12) in 605 BC or his prophecies of restoration (Jer 30:18-22; 31:38-40) in 587 BC; they include the rebuilding of the temple and Jerusalem and end with the rededication of the temple and death of Antiochus Epiphanes in 164 BC. This interpretation views at least the first two sets of “sevens” as figurative or schematic, since 605 BC-164 BC is only about 440 years. The “anointed one” of 9:25 is seen as the high priest Joshua and/or governor Zerubbabel. The “cutting off” of the anointed one in 9:26 is taken as referring to the murder of the high priest Onias III in 171 BC. The “covenant” of 9:27 is taken as Antiochus’ agreement with Hellenizing Jews. The stopping of sacrifices is Antiochus’ stopping of Jewish sacrifices in 167 BC.5

Critique of the Antiochene views includes the following:

- “The historical interpretation is surely correct in seeing a primary fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy in the second century BC, but to confine its meaning to that period is to close one’s eyes to the witness of Jesus and of the New Testament writers in general that it also had a future significance.”6

- “It is the seventy weeks that are to achieve the six-fold goal; that is, each of the listed purposes should be accomplished within the years designated. This factor is what invalidates the theory . . . which puts the 70th week in the Maccabean age, up to 165 B.C.: that era is too soon for the length of time given (490 years from the decree to start Jerusalem’s rebuilding, probably in 458 B.C. . . . It is inadequate as well, because atonement and eternal righteousness were not made available then.”7

- “Commentators who argue that Antiochus Epiphanes fulfilled this

5 Pate and Haines view the time periods both chronographically and literally. They begin the first seven weeks with Jeremiah’s prophecies of restoration (Jer 30:18-22; 31:38-40) in 587 BC, which terminate in 538 BC with Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua. They date the 62 sevens from Jeremiah’s prophecy (Jer 25:12) in 605 BC, which terminates in 171 BC with the death of Onias III. The rest of their interpretation follows classic lines. It thereby accounts for the full 490 years but has the 62 weeks beginning before the seven weeks. Pate and Haines, *Doomsday Delusions*, 69-75.

6 Baldwin, *Daniel*, 173.

7 Payne, “Interpretation,” 37
prophecy are at a loss to account for the fact that he destroyed neither the Temple nor the city of Jerusalem, though undoubtedly much damage was done (1 Macc. 1:31, 38).”

Messianic views

The promises of 9:24 are all seen as messianic. Artaxerxes’s decree recorded in Ezra 7:12-26 (458 or 457 BC) is taken as the starting point for a literal chronology. The first set of sevens covers the actual rebuilding of Jerusalem (9:25a). The 62 weeks immediately follows and terminates with Jesus’ baptism in AD 26 or 27. Jesus is the “anointed one” of 9:25b. The “prince who is to come” of 9:26b is often seen as Titus since Jesus cited 9:26-27 in the Olivet Discourse. Others see the “prince” as Christ and his “people” as the Jews who rejected him and thereby brought about the destruction of the city by the Romans. In other words, Daniel’s prophecy is saying essentially what Christ said in the Olivet Discourse.

Most view the “covenant” of 9:27 as Jesus’ finalizing or ratifying the Abrahamic or New Covenant. The “stopping of the sacrifices” is generally seen as Jesus’ death on the cross which legally terminated the efficacy of the Jewish sacrificial system, although some see it as Christ’s sending “forces of destruction against the Jerusalem temple [in AD 70], so making the old ritual system cease,” since “Jesus himself depicted the destruction of Jerusalem as the work of a divine army in the parable of Matthew 22:2ff. (see especially vs. 7).” After the second set of sevens (i.e., half way through the 70th week, in approximately AD 30), Jesus is “cut off” (crucified).

Critique of messianic interpretations includes the following:

- “This phrase [‘most holy,’ 9:24] has been given a messianic interpretation, and has been taken to refer to the anointing of ‘a most holy one’. There is no basis for this in the text itself, nor in the book of Daniel as a whole, which has no explicit reference to a ‘messiah’.”

- The “anointed” of 9:25 as Messiah faces three objections: “1. There is the lack of clear interest in a ‘messiah’ figure elsewhere in Daniel. 2. It is tied

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8 Baldwin, Daniel, 171.
9 See Duguid, Daniel, 172-73.
11 “Idealist” messianic interpreters view the seventy “weeks” as symbolic periods of time extending to the parousia. Often, “the first period of seven weeks specifies the period of time from Cyrus to the coming of the Messiah (Christ). The second period, 62 weeks, refers to the time since that advent of the Messiah (the present age). The final week, or period, lies still in the future.” Elwell, Baker Encyclopedia, 1931. Most hold the final week or final three and one half years of the seventieth week are symbolic of the entire church age. Riddlebarger, Amillennialism, 156.
to taking the ‘word’ of this verse as one of the decrees of Artaxerxes in order to get the chronology even approximately right. . . . 3. It ignores the MT [Masoretic Text] punctuation and follows [Theodotion] in reading ‘seven weeks and sixty-two weeks’ as the period prior to the anointed leader’s appearing.”

- Some interpretations end the 69th week with the death of Christ or with the baptism of Christ (his death would then be in the middle of the 70th week). In that case, all that remains for the climactic seventieth week is an unimportant date seven (or 3½) years after Christ’s death. That seems to be an incongruous way to end a prophecy based around seventy weeks. That objection assumes the seventy weeks are a strictly 490 year chronology, but it is not a valid objection if the seventy weeks are to be seen chronographically.

**Dispensational views**

This interpretation views the seventy weeks as 490 literal years. The starting point is Artaxerxes’s warrant given to Nehemiah in Neh 2:7-8 (445 or 444 BC). However, 490 years from that would terminate in about AD 46 or 47 (dates of no significance). The end of the 69th week (483 years) would be in about AD 39 or 40 (dates of no significance). Therefore, to try to get the first 69 weeks to end on some date having something to do with Christ, dispensationalists do not use regular years, but use years consisting of 360 days, which they call “prophetic years.” They then turn the “years” into “days” by adding extra days to account for “leap years” and thereby arrive at a total of 173,880 days (which amounts to only 476 “real” years instead of 483). That puts the end of their recalculated 69th week sometime in AD 32 or 33 at what they believe was the date of Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem.  

The “anointed one” of 9:25 is Jesus. The “cutting off” (9:26) is his death on the cross. Even though his death was “after the sixty two weeks,” dispensationalists do not think it occurred in the 70th week, but before the 70th week. They claim that after 9:25 “the Seventieth Week does not immediately follow the Sixty-ninth Week, but there is a great parenthesis of time between these two which has already lasted for over nineteen hundred years, and therefore the Seventieth Week still lies in the future.” They hold that “this Seventieth Week is a period of seven years which lies prophetically between the translation [i.e., the ‘pretribulational rapture’] of the church and the return of Christ in glory.” According to dispensationalists, this seven-year period is the future “tribulation.” The “prince who is to come” (9:26) is Antichrist, who is the “king of a restored

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13 Ibid., 243.
16 Ibid., 45
Roman confederacy.” The covenant of 9:27 is an agreement Antichrist makes with Israel to restore “the Jewish Temple sacrificial system.” The stopping of sacrifices is Antichrist’s disallowing the sacrifices half way through the 70th week; he then persecutes the Jews but is destroyed at the parousia.

Critique of dispensational interpretations includes the following:

- The 360-day “prophetic year” is “unconvincing special pleading. Although, at various times and places in the ANE [Ancient Near East], calendars with twelve months of thirty days were used, it was always recognized that these ran out of step with the ‘real world’, and various schemes of intercalary days or months were used to correct for this. It is very unlikely that anyone would have used a 360-day year in chronological calculations.”

- Turning “prophetic years” into 173,880 days does not end at the date dispensationalists want. In his classic dispensationalist book The Coming Prince, Sir Robert Anderson arrived at the date of April 6, AD 32 as the end of the 69 weeks (which he regarded as the date of Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem). However, even dispensationalists have recognized that Anderson’s dates are untenable. Harold Hoehner has tried to preserve Anderson’s methodology while, at the same time, correcting his errors. Despite those corrections, Hoehner’s methodology and conclusions are invalid for several reasons.

- The insertion of a 2000+ year gap between the 69th and 70th weeks is without any textual or contextual basis. The text of Dan 9:24-27 does not mention any “gap” between any of the “weeks.” Further, “the time-segments [in Dan 9:24-27] must all be joined together in conformity with Daniel’s prophecy.” In other words, the six purposes of the prophecy must all be fulfilled within the 70 weeks which cannot happen within the dispensational system.

- The dispensational idea that the “covenant” of 9:27 is a treaty made by

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17 Ibid., 51.
18 Fred Zaspel uses normal years rather than the so-called “prophetic years.” Similar to Pate and Haines’ modification of the Antiochene interpretation, Zaspel views the sets of sevens as representing 490 total years but dates the first set from 587 BC (God’s word to Jeremiah) then inserts a gap. He dates the 62 weeks from 440 BC which is when he believes the rebuilding of Jerusalem under Nehemiah began. The final seven years and the rest of the interpretation follow classic dispensational lines. Zaspel, “Historical and Exegetical,” n.p.
19 Lucas, Daniel, 246.
22 Hoehner, “Chronological Aspects,” 47-65; Chronological Aspects, 115-139.
23 Quoted by Jerome, Commentary on Daniel, 105.
Antichrist is contrary to the wording of the verse. “The covenant here is not made, it is confirmed.” Further, “Neither history nor Scripture can document a covenant made (not to mention ‘confirmed’) by a leader of Israel’s enemies, whether by Antiochus the Greek, Titus the Roman, or the Antichrist of the future.”

The Christological Nature of Dan 9:24-27

“Critical scholarship, setting the writing of Daniel in the context of the second century BC, sees the period in view as intended to stretch from the sixth century to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. . . . But from the perspective of the NT, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Anointed One (25) is fulfilled in Jesus Christ whose coming brings atonement and the end of guilt (24).” Even commentators who have an Antiochene interpretation of the passage agree.

Behind the prophecy is God’s covenant relationship with Israel, which included a pattern of Sabbaths, Sabbath years, and the Sabbath Jubilee. Both Daniel’s prayer and the answer to that prayer show that. Daniel refers to God “who keeps His covenant” (9:4), although Israel has violated the covenant (9:5) and has not listened to God’s prophets (9:6, 10). As a result, the curses prescribed by God’s covenant have fallen on Israel (9:11-14). That is the background, and Dan 9:24-27 is God’s unique answer to Israel’s predicament. The recognition of the covenantal framework of the Seventy Weeks is important to its proper interpretation. It virtually demands the focus be on the fulfillment of redemption in the ministry of Christ.

The focus of Daniel’s prophecy is on the city and the people (Jerusalem and Israel), but there are broader implications for the nations. The Abrahamic Covenant had promised that the nations would be blessed through the seed of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). With the Mosaic Covenant broken, Israel now needs the forgiveness of sins so that the covenant is renewed and the blessings can flow to the nations. The way in which the Abrahamic Covenant is fulfilled and the nations are blessed and the way in which Israel receives forgiveness of her sins and rebellion are through the New Covenant. The New Covenant had been prophesied through Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-34). It is the only one of God’s covenants that promised the forgiveness of sin. Unlike the old Mosaic Covenant, the New Covenant is called an “everlasting covenant.” The covenantal structure discussed above indicates that the “covenant” of 9:27 is the

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24 Gaston, No Stone, 118.
25 Payne, "Interpretation," 36.
27 See Russell, Daniel, 184; Goldingay, Daniel, 266-68.
30 Jer 31:34; see also Jer 32:38-40; 50:4-5; Ezek 11:16-20; 36:24-32; 37:15-28.
31 Gentry, “New Exodus,” 38; 43n.33; see Isa 55:3; 61:8; Jer 32:40; 50:5; Ezek 16:60; 37:26.
New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah, not an agreement made between Antichrist and Jews.

Dan 9:27 refers to the covenant being confirmed with “the many,” which almost certainly is a reference to “the many” referred to in Isa 53:10-12. Peter Gentry states, “Without a doubt, Isaiah 53, describing a future Davidic Servant of the Lord, who is also both priest and sacrifice, laying down his life for the many, is the background to the brief comment in Daniel’s vision. His death brings an end to the sacrificial system because it is a final solution to the problem of sin.”  

The NT writers specifically quote and apply the Servant passages to Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy.

Research indicates that the correct date for Artaxerxes’s decree (Ezra 7) was 457 BC, which would bring the 69th week of Daniel to completion in AD 27. Despite the assumptions and unknowns, and if not presumed to be a “to-the-day” prediction, by using the 457 BC decree date “the prophecy remains an astounding prediction finding fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth and yet allows for differences as well in calculating the crucifixion [which] is almost always dated between A.D. 27 and 34 [i.e., the 70th sabbatical cycle/seventieth week from 457 BC].”  This corroborates that the seventy weeks is based on the sabbatical cycle, the seventy weeks are being used symbolically, and the seventy weeks legitimately can be used chronologically—and all culminate in Christ.

Thus, Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of the six purposes of the prophecy stated in Dan 9:24: He “finished the transgression” by “the act which He performed, namely, His atoning death”; he "made an end of sin" since he "took away the sin of the world by the sacrifice of himself"; he "made atonement for iniquity" ("who, in the light of the NT revelation, can read these words without coming face to face with that one perfect Sacrifice which was offered by Him?"); he "brought in everlasting righteousness" because "the final, complete atonement establishes righteousness"; he "sealed up vision and prophecy" in that "when Christ came, there was no further need of prophetic revelation in the OT sense," which is confirmed by Heb 1:1-2; and he was the "most holy" who was "anointed," i.e., "we have a verb that is normally used of a person and an object normally used

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34 See Gentry, “New Exodus,” 35; Pickle, “Chronological Difficulties,” n.p. It is significant that “Ezra 6:14 speaks of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes as though they issued a single decree. . . . So the decree which Cyrus drafted in 537 to restore the temple is not completed until 457 B.C. under Artaxerxes, which is therefore the date of the ‘word to rebuild Jerusalem’ starting with its sanctuary.” Gentry, “New Exodus,” 3
35 Gentry, “New Exodus,” 37
36 Young, Prophecy of Daniel, 198.
37 John 1:29; Rom 7:1-8; Heb 9:26; 10:11-14; 1 John 3:5.
38 Young, Prophecy of Daniel, 199; see Rom 3:25; Eph 2:16; Col 1:20; Heb 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10.
40 Young, Prophecy of Daniel, 200.
of a temple. It may suggest that both the future king and temple are one and the same. It finds fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth as both Messiah and true Temple.\textsuperscript{41}

**Bibliography**


\textsuperscript{41} Gentry, “New Exodus,” 40.


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When did the prophetic “seventy weeks” actually begin? As to the beginning of the 70 weeks, Nehemiah was granted permission by King Artaxerxes of Persia, in the 20th year of his rule, in the month of Nisan, to rebuild the wall and the city of Jerusalem. (Ne 2:1, 5, 7, 8) In his calculations as to the reign of Artaxerxes, Nehemiah apparently used a calendar year that began with the month Tishri (September-October), as does the Jews’ present civil calendar, and ended with the month Elul (August-September) as the 12th month. Measuring the timeline of the 69 ‘Weeks’ or 69 ‘Sevens’ of years. Job #1 is to determine the precise number of days in each ‘Year’ of the 70 weeks of Daniel. As we have seen in our previous discussions the seventy weeks, (or sevens), of Daniel are made up of seventy “sevens” of years or 490 years. Remember that these ‘seventy weeks (sevens) of years’ are issued to us from the throne of God. Fortunately we are not left to guess or to argue about this. SEVENTY WEEKSThe “seventy weeks” of the prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27 have long been a subject of controversy in the critical schools. The conflicting views may be seen very fully in Dr. Driver’s Daniel, 94 ff, 143 ff, and Dr. Pusey’s Daniel the Prophet, lectionaries II, III, IV. On both sides it is. Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary. Seventy Weeks. SEVENTY WEEKS Time spoken of in Dan. 9:24–27, usually understood as 70 weeks of years or 490 years.