

PRAISE FOR *THE 70 WEEKS JUBILEE*

“Travis Snow has presented a very important study on the Last Days and Daniel 9 using extrabiblical literature from before and after the writing of the New Testament. I am still undecided on some of the issues related to Daniel’s 70th week. However, this important study should be read by all who want to make informed decisions regarding interpretation.”

—**DANIEL JUSTER, TH.D.**, RESTORATION OF ZION OF TIKKUN
GLOBAL AND ADJUNCT PROFESSOR, THE KING’S UNIVERSITY.

“The prophet Daniel’s prophecy of the seventy weeks is one of the most important and foundational prophecies in the entire Bible, providing the very scaffolding around which the story of redemption will be completed. By carefully analyzing this critical prophecy in an easy-to-understand manner, Travis Snow has provided the Church with a tremendous gift. As Christians throughout the world prepare for the last days and the return of Jesus, this book will prove to be an invaluable resource.”

—**JOEL RICHARDSON**, INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED
PROPHECY TEACHER AND *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING
AUTHOR

“Using a Jubilee strategy, Travis Snow examines the interpretive options of Daniel’s well-known Seventy Weeks prophecy. He makes a fortified case that Daniel’s prophecy was not completely fulfilled in 70 AD, as the preterist school of thought argues. Instead, as Snow demonstrates, Daniel 9 shouts *future*, and bears witness to the fact that God is not finished with Israel! Don’t take my word for it—get the book, today.”

—**ALAN KURSCHNER (PHD)**, FOUNDER OF ESCHATOS MINISTRIES,
AND LEADING EXPERT ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION

THE
ISRAEL, THE MESSIAH,
70 WEEKS
AND THE END OF THE AGE
JUBILEE
IN DANIEL 9:24-27

TRAVIS M. SNOW



SHILOH
MEDIA

The 70 Weeks Jubilee

Shiloh Media Inc.

Dallas, T.X.

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For the Bereans (Acts 17:11)

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1

DANIEL IN BABYLON

IN THE YEAR 539 BC, many decades after the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and sent its inhabitants into exile, the elderly Daniel, now famous for his prophetic insight and unyielding integrity while living in the midst of pagan Babylon, found himself in a state of spiritual anxiety, vexation of soul, and deep emotional distress. After reading in the writings of the prophet Jeremiah that the Babylonian captivity and the “desolations of Jerusalem” would only last for 70 years, Daniel realized the time of Jerusalem’s restoration, and the return of the Jewish people to the Promised Land, would occur very soon.

Daniel 9:1 opens with the comment that the events in this chapter took place “in the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans[.]” Conservative scholars generally agree this verse refers to the year King Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon, in 539 BC.

There is some disagreement over whether the “Darius” mentioned

in Daniel 9:1 is another name for Cyrus himself, or whether this Darius was a viceroy of Cyrus; a subordinate of the king appointed as overseer of the region of Babylon where Daniel lived. The second option seems more likely. But no matter which of these possibilities is correct, we can be certain that Daniel recognized the first year of Cyrus' reign over Babylon (539 BC) as the year when Israel's period of exile should have been coming to an end, and ultimately giving way to a new season of restoration and redemption. Though very few of us have ever experienced life as an exile or refugee, cast out of our homeland, it is not hard to imagine the yearning and anticipation Daniel must have felt, as he realized that he and his people might finally be able to return home.

By this point in his life, Daniel had been living in Babylon for nearly 70 years and was probably in his early 80s. Daniel 1:1 tells us that "in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Judah king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it." This occurred sometime between 605-603 BC, at which point Judah officially became a subservient vassal state of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians.

At this time, Nebuchadnezzar took some of the Temple treasures from Jerusalem back to Babylon, and also appointed one of his officials to bring the first Jewish captives to Babylon. Daniel 1:4 tells us Nebuchadnezzar was looking for "youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court." Daniel and a few of his friends were among those chosen by Nebuchadnezzar to serve within the halls of power in Babylon, so off they went to modern-day Iraq, when they were only teenagers. Even though the Babylonians also carried out another large-scale deportation of Jews from Judah in 597 BC, and then burned Jerusalem to the ground and destroyed the Jewish Temple in 586 BC, c. 605 BC marked the initial stage of the exile and the desolations experienced by Judah.

Now an old man, Daniel made the calculations in his mind, or perhaps even jotted them down on a scrap piece of parchment, as he read the words of Jeremiah in Jeremiah 25:11-12 and 29:10-14:

“This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon **seventy years. 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 bring you back to this place.** For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope” (Jer. 29:10–11).

From the time of the initial exile of the Jewish people in 605 BC, to the first year of King Cyrus’ reign over Babylon in 539 BC, 66-67 years had passed. Because of this, Daniel knew the exile would have to end sometime very soon. As pointed out by many commentators, Daniel probably viewed the “70 years” of Jeremiah’s prophecy as a literal period of time, albeit one that could also be understood as more of a round number and general approximation of time. For all practical intents and purposes, Daniel was looking for the restoration 66-70 years after he was exiled.¹

But when would the Lord fulfill these promises? Hadn’t the time of restoration arrived, or at the very least, shouldn’t it be right around the corner? These were the agitating ruminations that stirred in Daniel’s soul as he meditated on the prophecies of Jeremiah and longed to see Jerusalem rise from the ashes of destruction. As we read in Daniel 9:2:

I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of years that was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.

1 Moreover, the Second Temple itself was completed by 516/515 BC, exactly 70 years after Jerusalem and the first Temple were destroyed in 586 BC. Even though Daniel was counting the 70 years from the time he was exiled, we can look at Jeremiah’s 70-year exile/destruction prediction from a number of angles and see that it was fulfilled as written.

Rather than sinking into passivity, Daniel realized that the prophetic word of Jeremiah was a call to petition the Lord during an extended time of prayer and fasting. Daniel writes, “So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes” (Dan. 9:3).

In the remaining verses of Daniel 9:4–19 we find the righteous and devout Daniel confessing Israel’s sin on their behalf, and exhibiting the heart and humble posture of a true intercessor. Daniel laments the wayward rebellion of his Jewish kin, and vindicates God’s righteousness in allowing His chosen people to be judged for their rebellion against His holy prophets, beginning with Moses.

Then, in one final outcry of holy anguish and righteous perplexity, Daniel pours out his heart before the Holy and Compassionate One, the Righteous Sovereign of Israel and the Nations:

So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplications, and for Your sake, O LORD, let your face shine on Your desolate sanctuary. O my God, incline Your ear and hear! Open your eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Your name; for we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your holy city and Your people are called by Your name (Dan. 9:17–19).

When we pray to the Lord, we might hope for a breakthrough. But when Daniel dedicated himself to prayer and fasting, God sent the angel Gabriel himself to Daniel’s aid, to offer the prophet of God a word of both consolation and profound prophetic revelation:

Now while I was speaking and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God in behalf of the holy mountain of my God, while I was still speaking in prayer, then the man Gabriel, whom I had seen

in the vision previously, came to me in my extreme weariness about the time of the evening offering. He gave me instruction and talked with me and said, “O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you insight with understanding. At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued, and I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed; so give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision” (Dan. 9:20–23).

After Gabriel’s affirming introduction, the remaining verses of Daniel 9 record the substance of the “message” and “vision” God sent him to communicate to Daniel:

24. Seventy weeks have been set apart for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to purge iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.
25. So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a word to restore and to build Jerusalem, until the Anointed Prince, there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.
26. Then after sixty-two weeks the Anointed One will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the Prince to Come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And his end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are decreed.
27. And he will strengthen a covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come the utter desolation, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate (*author’s translation*).

THE 70 WEEKS PROPHECY

These four verses comprise the contents of what is now widely referred to as the 70-weeks prophecy. As I have intensively studied this prophecy over the last three years, I have been continually amazed at how it is simultaneously simple and complex, straightforward, albeit profound, apparently unassuming at first glance, yet absolutely daunting and theologically imposing below the surface. I do not believe there is any other passage of Scripture that says so much, about so many different important issues, in such a concise mode of presentation, as Daniel 9:24–27. If ever there was a prophecy given in Scripture that reflects the paradoxical mysteries, and even the very nature, genius, and sovereign omniscience of the Holy One Himself, it is Daniel 9:24-27. Without exaggeration, this text is one of the greatest gifts from above ever bestowed on the sons and daughters of men. It bears the deepest imprints of divine inspiration and is truly worthy of our full attention and utmost efforts as students of the word of God. As we will see, this is a miraculous prophecy on so many levels, and the primary purpose of this book is to help the Lord's people understand the meaning, the beauty, and the critical importance of Gabriel's words, with a particular focus on how they would have been understood by Daniel himself in 539/538 BC.

THE SWAMP OF THE OLD TESTAMENT?

Anyone familiar with the 70-weeks prophecy will know that Daniel 9 has often been the source of intense debate among scholars, prophecy teachers, and laypersons alike. Efforts to interpret this prophecy have produced a confusing cacophony of different views and opinions. Everyone from orthodox Jews and liberal Christian scholars to evangelical pastors and Messianic Jewish rabbis have recognized the importance of Daniel 9:24–27. At times, it has seemed that no two groups of people have been able to agree on the actual meaning of this prophecy, what it predicted, and when it was/will be fulfilled. Daniel 9 has been so controversial within the world of academia in particular, that Old Testament scholar J.A. Montgomery even once notoriously described

this prophecy as “the Dismal Swamp” of the Old Testament.² Not a very hopeful metaphor to say the least!

One of the reasons Daniel 9:24–27 has been so polarizing is because there are a wide variety of complex and interrelated questions that have to be explored and answered before one can arrive at a sound and coherent interpretation of this text. Throughout history, some of the most important questions interpreters have raised in response to this prophecy have included the following:

- Do the 70 weeks represent a literal 490-year period of time, or could the 70 weeks be a symbolic and indefinite time designation? Furthermore, if we say the 70 weeks are literal seven-year periods, do they progress without interruption, or is there a gap of time somewhere in the timeline?
- What was the starting date of the 70 weeks (*the terminous a quo* of verse 25)?
- What is the termination point, or the fulfillment date of this prophecy, that is to say, when did Daniel believe the 70th week would end (the *terminous ad quam* of verse 27)? Was Daniel 9 fulfilled in ancient times, or in the first century, or does it have some future significance related to end-time events as well?
- Who is the “anointed” figure mentioned in verses 25 and 26, and are both of these verses referring to the same person, or possibly two different people? Is Daniel 9:25–26 a Messianic prophecy that predicted when the Messiah would first appear in Israel, as well as the Messiah’s sufferings? Or, is the word “anointed” in this text used in a more general sense, to describe another important political leader, and possibly even two political leaders?

2 J.A. Montgomery, *Daniel* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1927), 376.

- Does verse 27 refer to the man many Christians call the Antichrist, as well as to the Great Tribulation, or is this eschatological (end-times) reading of the text based only on tradition and faulty assumptions?
- What is the relationship between Daniel 9 and the many New Testament texts, particularly in the Olivet Discourse of Jesus, and the book of Revelation, that reference this prophecy?

How a person answers each of these questions will also impact where they land on a host of other theological issues as well, which is another reason why Daniel 9 has been such a source of contention within both the Jewish and Christian communities. In other words, because the various branches of Judaism, as well as the different denominations within Christianity, have historically held to such opposing positions on the Messiah, the end times, biblical interpretation, the place of Israel in God's plan of salvation, the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, etc., it should not surprise us that Daniel 9:24–27 has produced a plethora of divergent and contradictory interpretations over the years.

As daunting as this prophecy may seem however, its interconnectedness to the broader biblical canon and framework of theology also offers us a great opportunity. The words of the famous environmental philosopher John Muir can help to illustrate this point.

Muir wrote, “when one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world.” This quote summarizes what I call “the law of interconnectedness,” or, the ripple effect, and we could just as easily substitute the word “nature” in Muir’s quote with the words “Daniel 9,” and the word “world” with “the Bible.” “When one tugs at a single thing in Daniel 9, he finds it attached to the rest of the Bible.” When we begin to explore a single verse, or even a single word in this prophecy, we find that the 70-weeks prophecy is connected to, informed by, and in many respects also responsible for shaping, many other biblical texts, from the Hebrew Bible, all the way through to the New Testament.

This interconnectedness between Daniel 9:24–27 and the rest of the Bible means that if we can get our bearings right, and approach this prophecy in the right way, it will inevitably also pay enormous dividends by helping us understand God’s entire plan of redemption in a much deeper way. In that sense then, I wouldn’t call Daniel 9:24–27 a “Dismal Swamp.” I would call it a bit of a gauntlet, but it is a gauntlet that leads to an abundance of riches.

OUR ROADMAP

Throughout our time together we will explore the meaning and mine the depths of Daniel 9:24–27. We will go verse-by-verse, word-by-word, through this prophecy, as well as many other texts in the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament that shed more light on Daniel 9.

While doing so, we will thoroughly contextualize our interpretation against the backdrop of ancient Jewish, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman history. We will also make sure to interact with and respond to all of the most popular interpretations of Daniel 9, both Jewish and Christian, that have been generated over the last 2,200 years.

By the time we are done, it is my hope that readers will be able to see through the hazy fog that so often lingers when Daniel 9 is discussed and debated today. Our aim will be to attain a more vibrant picture of God’s glorious plan of redemption for the world, as outlined in this prophecy.

No doubt, working through Daniel 9 can be a demanding journey. But this is definitely a journey worth taking.

In Daniel 9:23 Gabriel told Daniel, “Give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision.” With this exhortation, it’s almost as if Gabriel was hinting at the benefits that will come to those who fully apply their energies to the 70-weeks prophecy. Perhaps that was Gabriel’s way of saying, “Take this one very seriously.”

God willing, we will attempt to do exactly that. So let us now take heed and gain understanding.

2

THE 70 WEEKS JUBILEE

AFTER EVERY 49 YEARS IN ANCIENT ISRAEL, on the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), the head of the Jewish Sanhedrin would sound nine blasts on a ram's horn trumpet (shofar). In the first century, these blasts from the shofar went forth from the Temple's Chamber of Hewn Stone in Jerusalem.

The sound of the shofar at this time initiated one of the most important events on Israel's religious calendar, the year of Jubilee. The year of Jubilee is outlined in the Torah as a time of freedom and release in the Land. Debts were settled, slaves were set free, land was returned to its original owner/tribal family, and the earth was allowed to rest. During the year of Jubilee, Israel was commanded not to sow seed or bring in a proper harvest. They were only allowed to eat produce directly from the field.

The basic stipulations of the Jubilee are outlined in Leviticus 25:8–12:

You are also to count off **seven Sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years**, so that you have the time of the seven Sabbaths of years, that is, forty-nine years. **You shall then sound a ram's horn abroad on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall sound a horn all through your land.**

So you shall consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family. You shall have the fiftieth year as a jubilee; you shall not sow, nor harvest its aftergrowth, nor gather grapes *from* its untrimmed vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you. You shall eat its produce from the field.

It is widely accepted that Israel's Jubilee year was rooted in the more foundational observance of the seven-year Sabbath cycle in the Torah. Just as the Jewish nation had a weekly Sabbath on every seventh day, every seventh year was also set apart to the Lord, during which time the Land was not to be sown or mass harvested (Lev. 25:1–7). Building on the concept of the Sabbath year, the Jubilee year took place not in every seventh year, but every “seven times seven years” (Lev. 25:8).

Once the shofar sounded in the Temple on *Yom Kippur* after the 49th year, emissaries from the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem would then travel throughout the Land of Israel announcing that the Jubilee had arrived. According to the Torah and Jewish tradition, “every Jew was obliged to blow from the ram's horn upon receiving this news.”¹

Today, we can only imagine what the scene must have looked like when the Jubilee began, as the sound of multiple shofars resounded throughout the cities and countryside in Israel, and slaves were set free to experience a new life of independence. This was a time of recognizing God alone as Provider, but also a time of great rejoicing in God as the source of one's freedom and liberation.

1 Israel Ariel & Chaim Richman, *Carta's Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem* (Carta: Jerusalem: 2015), 171.

THE JUBILEE IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Sometimes when the Jubilee comes up in modern conversations, it is appealed to as a justification for “biblical socialism,” the redistribution of wealth and property by the government, top-down government programs, and perhaps even large-scale “forgiveness” of national and consumer debts. For example, “Jubilee 2000” was a popular political and religious movement in the 1990s, which called for the total cancellation of \$90 billion of debt owed by the world’s poorest countries. With “social justice” movements on the rise, we will probably continue to see people invoke the Jubilee, especially in Christian circles, to justify various political agendas.

Analyzing different approaches to governmental fiscal and economic policy is way beyond the scope of this book. However, in order to understand some of the practical implications of the Jubilee, and to avoid misapplying the Jubilee in the 21st century, we do need to take a closer look at what the Jubilee signified in its historical context in Ancient Israel.

From a biblical perspective, the Jubilee had nothing to do with the redistribution of land and assets, or with the “cancellation” of large debts in the way modern politicians and activists often define these things. Rather, the Jubilee helped to preserve Israel as a unified coalition of independent tribal families, each with their own land and local government. Remember, after Israel entered the Promised Land in the time of Joshua the Land was divided between the tribes and there was no centralized national government or monarchy until the time of Saul and David, c. 400 years later (Josh. 13–23). The Jubilee was meant to hinder one family from gaining dominance over—effectively enslaving—another through exploitative lending practices, perpetual debt-slavery, and unchecked acquisition of tribal real estate. Basically, the Jubilee enabled Israel to live out its calling as a set apart, holy nation, according to God’s will, which is why the Jubilee laws in the Torah are found within the Holiness Code in the book of Leviticus.

There were various economic situations that might arise in the ancient world which would in turn require a person to sell some of

his property, or perhaps even himself or a family member into slavery (which was more like indentured servitude). Given the unpredictable nature of life, one can easily imagine a scenario in which certain individuals might try to take advantage of this situation by amassing more and more land, and more and more slaves/servants, until they eventually developed a monopoly over all the means of production (land and labor). This would result in the establishment of oppressive fiefdoms, similar to what we find in feudal Europe during the Middle Ages, which were characterized by the concentration of all wealth and power into the hands of only a few wealthy landowners.

Israelite society was set up in the Torah to prevent the formation of this type of elite landed aristocracy. The Jubilee in particular is a central piece of legislation that reflects the Torah's superior social-economic vision for the people of Israel. It was a means of preserving some equilibrium between the different tribes, so that individual farmers and families, rather than a handful of landowners or government bureaucrats, could maintain their independence and live with dignity off their own land, to the glory of God.

The Jubilee released people from debt-slavery and also returned land to the original tribal family to whom it belonged:

If a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to you that he sells himself to you, you shall not subject him to a slave's service. He shall be with you as a hired man, as if he were a sojourner, he shall serve with you until the year of jubilee (Lev. 25:39–40).

But if he has not found sufficient means to get it back [i.e. his land] for himself, then what he has sold shall remain in the hands of its purchaser until the year of jubilee; but at the jubilee it shall revert, that he may return to his property (Lev. 25:28).

The release of indentured servants and land in the year of Jubilee guaranteed Israel's continued existence as a confederation of tribes, each living on, and benefiting from, the land God had given to their forefathers.

In the words of biblical scholar John Bergsma, “the jubilee is a recurring safety net to prevent any permanent alienation of land.”²

Once we understand how the Jubilee actually dispersed land and power to a large degree, it is easier to see that the Jubilee does not justify socialism or centralized government bureaucracies that take more money from people through higher taxes and/or the seizure of assets, and then bestow upon themselves the power to decide how they should use those assets to “help” others. The Jubilee points more towards an agrarian ideal of “living off the land,” one characterized by decentralization of power, the absence of business monopolies, and the protection of both the individual and the land itself from oppressive commercial and economic practices. The Jubilee was connected to a pre-industrial and pre-urban agrarian economy overseen by free individuals who personally produced most of what they consumed. This unique observance ensured that the land itself would remain productive, which is why the land was allowed to rest every seventh year, and during the Jubilee. It also ensured that each tribe would never be permanently displaced from the sacred land God had given them as a source of provision.

THE JUBILEE DIDN'T CANCEL DEBT OR INCOME DISPARITIES

Two other important points to note about the Jubilee. (1) The Jubilee did not result in debt being “canceled” as if by a magic wand. (2) The Jubilee was not aimed at obliterating “income inequality” or one person’s ability to gain more wealth than another.

In terms of debt cancellation, what the Jubilee did was create a system whereby debts could be paid off by leasing one’s land to a temporary “purchaser,” so that by the time of the Jubilee the debt would be repaid to the purchaser/lender through the crops harvested from the land. Hypothetically, let’s say I owed Bill the equivalent of \$500,000, and the Jubilee year was scheduled to occur in ten years. If the harvest

2 John Stetze Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 143.

from my land brought in the equivalent of about \$50,000 a year, I could lease my land to Bill for those ten years. Bill would recoup his \$500,000 through the crops produced by my land, and then, in the year of Jubilee, I would get my land back.

In this scenario, my debt was never cancelled. I had to pay it by leasing out my land and not being able to earn money from my crops those ten years. Regardless, I would still be very glad that I didn't have to permanently give up my family's inheritance in Israel just to pay off my debt. The Jubilee would still be a time of rejoicing for me, and a time when I would recognize the wisdom and justice of God. But the Jubilee didn't cause my debts to magically disappear.

This arrangement of debt repayment through land-lease agreements before the Jubilee is outlined in Leviticus 25:13–16:

On this year of jubilee each of you shall return to his own property. If you make a sale, moreover, to your friend or buy from your friend's hand, you shall not wrong one another. Corresponding to the number of years after the jubilee, you shall buy from your friend; he is to sell to you according to the number of years of crops. In proportion to the extent of the years you shall increase its price, and in proportion to the fewness of the years you shall diminish its price, for it is a number of crops he is selling to you.

Old Testament scholars recognize that this law outlines how land was to be temporarily leased to one party to repay a debt, based on the amount of crops expected to be harvested prior to the next Jubilee. This again proves that the Jubilee wasn't about debt cancellation or debt forgiveness per se. It was an institution that allowed debts to be repaid without permanently separating a person (and their descendants) from their ancestral inheritance.

In the words of Old Testament scholar Walter Kaiser:

Verses 13-17 of Leviticus 25 go on to spell out the financial implications of this transaction, for what appeared to have been the sale of the land

was in fact only the sale of the *use* of the land. Therefore, as the year of Jubilee approached, and the years were few, it diminished the value and the cost of the land to the purchaser, depending on the number of harvests the land could produce until the Jubilee.³

There is no way to “forgive” a debt by decree. All debts have to be repaid in one way or another, by someone, and the Jubilee follows this basic law of economics.

As a brief side note, certain laws in Deuteronomy 15 do appear to “cancel” some debts by requiring the lender to absorb the remaining costs in the seventh year. However, these were smaller debts held by the poorest of the poor (Deut. 15:1–8), which still had to be paid back to whatever extent possible. Overall, the Torah balances responsible debt repayment with charity towards the poor/indebted Israelite.

ANCIENT ISRAEL AND INCOME INEQUALITY

In terms of income inequality, the Jubilee didn’t stop some people from making more money than others. The previous example about land leasing before a Jubilee proves that. Different people were allowed to keep different amounts of land, which thereby led to some people making more money and amassing more wealth than others. If Bill brought in an exceptionally abundant harvest in the last year he leased my land, he was allowed to keep the proceeds. Legally, once tithing obligations were met, the extra surplus didn’t have to be redistributed to me or to anyone else. Also, Leviticus 25:29 says that properties bought within a “walled city” carried no “redemption rights” after one year and did “not revert in the jubilee,” meaning some people could acquire more properties within cities.

This stipulation in Leviticus 25:29 demonstrates how the Jubilee was more rooted in God’s desire to protect each tribe’s connection to

3 Walter Kaiser, “Ownership and Property in the Old Testament Economy,” *Journal of Markets & Morality* 15, no. 4 (2012): 234.

their farmland, because only farmland outside the cities reverted to the original family in the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:29–34). That some people within Israelite society could acquire certain types of property long-term, without having to give them up during the Jubilee, shows that the Jubilee was not meant to eradicate all disparities in the realm of property ownership and wealth.

The Torah presupposes that people will enjoy what they produce, that different people will produce different amounts, and that different people will own different amounts of real estate. But it also presupposes care for the poor, and for those who have been forced into difficult life circumstances (e.g. debt, servitude, loss of property, etc.).

THE JUBILEE AND JUSTICE

As we can see from taking a closer look at the Jubilee, there should be no doubt that the Jubilee epitomized God's concern with broader ideals such as justice, freedom from oppression, and the protection of personal dignity. During the Jubilee, Israel was reminded that God does not want us to be in exploitative relationships with anyone or anything, whether other humans, animals, or even the earth we inhabit. Cycles of rest, remission, and liberation reflect God's ideal for His people and His entire creation.

Oppressive labor, long-term economic subjugation of others, and the ruthless acquisition of land and power represent the way of the world. God called Israel to be a free people, and in many respects, the Jubilee was the natural extension of Israel's call to freedom in the book Exodus. This is why God framed the Jubilee laws in Leviticus 25 with a reminder of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt:

For they [the Israelites] are my servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt; they are not to be sold in a slave sale. You shall not rule over him with severity, but are to revere your God (Lev. 25:42).

At the same time, even though the Jubilee was connected to many positive ideals that we can all agree should be upheld in every society, we need to be careful not to take the Jubilee legislation out of context. We need to be careful not to use the Jubilee to justify modern government policies that have no real connection to the laws of the Torah, in content or outcome. In its native historical context, the Jubilee existed to preserve the nation of Israel in the form in which it was originally established by God, as an independent confederation of twelve tribes living on the land promised to the biblical patriarchs.

If Israel failed to observe their Sabbath cycle of years, including the Jubilee, God promised in Leviticus 26:32-35 that they would be conquered, and that their land would be given over to their enemies, in part, so that the land would have a chance to “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” (Lev. 26:34).

Remarkably, 2 Chronicles 36:20 specifically mentions that the Babylonian exile of the Jews and the 70 years of captivity predicted by Jeremiah were decreed “to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete.” In other words, between the time Israel was established in their land, to the time they went into Babylonian exile, they neglected to observe 70 Sabbath years, which in turn, had to be made up in one fell swoop during the entire period of the exile. After those Sabbaths were complete after 70 years, as Jeremiah predicted, and as Daniel himself realized (Dan. 9:2), they could return to the Promised Land.

THE JUBILEE AS A PATTERN FOR THE MESSIANIC AGE

During Israel’s pre-exilic tribal days, the Jubilee had primarily economic, agricultural, and social significance within their culture. Over time however, the Jubilee also began to take on an even deeper symbolic and prophetic significance, especially in the writings of the later Hebrew prophets who lived after Moses.

The natural Jubilee eventually evolved into a prophetic symbol of the holistic physical and spiritual freedom God's people will experience when the Messiah arrives to establish His kingdom. In the Hebrew prophets, the Messianic Age is presented to us as the Age of Jubilee.

This evolution of the Jubilee in Scripture, from a historical-legal practice to a prophetic ideal, should not surprise us, primarily because the longer Israel existed as a nation, the more oppression they experienced at the hands of unjust Israelite and Gentile leaders. Consequently, God's people began to long for something more than an earthly Jubilee. They began to long for a Jubilee of Jubilees, a completely new age in which the oppressed would experience the deepest levels of physical, emotional, and spiritual freedom.

One of the best examples of this connection between the Jubilee and the Messianic Age can be found in the book of Isaiah. In Isaiah 61:1–11, Isaiah spoke of the time when Israel and the nations will experience ultimate spiritual and physical liberation through the Messiah. Here at the end of Isaiah, the Messiah is presented as God's "anointed" one who will accomplish redemption and healing on our behalf:

The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me, because He 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 [the Jubilee] and the day of vengeance of our God. [...] (Isaiah 61:1-2).

Many commentators agree that the background to this prophecy in Isaiah 61 is the agricultural and economic Jubilee that Israel was first commanded to observe in the Torah. For example, biblical scholar John Bergsma writes:

Already in Isaiah 61, the jubilee attracts a *messianic* sense. Although the original jubilee legislation required no individual mediator for its actualization, in Isaiah 61:1–4 notions of an anointed *go'el* (redeemer)

figure are associated with the realization of justice, equality, and general *shalom* of which the jubilee has become a symbol or “type.”⁴

Based on the way Isaiah 61 incorporates Jubilee symbolism and motifs from the Torah, we can say that the Messianic Age Isaiah envisioned will be a time when the Jubilee will reach its deepest spiritual and prophetic significance. Isaiah predicted that when this Messianic Jubilee arrives, those who mourn will be comforted, and will receive “a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting” (vv. 2–3). He also predicted that at this time the Land of Israel will be rebuilt, prosperous, and function as a light to the nations, enjoying peace and righteousness like never before (vv. 4–11):

For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes the things sown in it to spring up, so the LORD God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations (Isa. 61:11).

These themes of restoration, renewal, and prosperity that we see in Isaiah 61 are common throughout the writings of the Hebrew prophets, especially in passages that speak about the coming Messianic Age. What is particularly unique in Isaiah 61 however, is that Isaiah also unites these major redemptive themes with the concept of Israel’s Jubilee, thus merging notions of Messianic deliverance and Jubilee freedom into one prophecy.

THE JUBILEE AND DANIEL 9:24–27

In addition to Isaiah 61:1–11, many scholars have noted that the 70 sevens or “weeks” of Daniel 9:24–27 should be understood within a Jubilee framework as well. Notice in particular how the 70 sevens in Daniel 9:24, or 490 years, correspond directly to the seven Sabbath

4 Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 3.

cycles, or 49 years, that led to the Jubilee year in Ancient Israel.

In contrast however, the 490 years of Daniel 9:24 represent ten Jubilee cycles, rather than just one. There is an intentional symmetry and interdependence established in Daniel 9:24 between the 490 years of the 70 weeks and the 49 years (or seven weeks) that led up to the Jubilee year in Leviticus.

Many will be aware that seven is the number of completion in the Bible. The multiplication of the number seven in Daniel 9:24 signifies a time of perfect completion, perfect Sabbath rest, and ultimate Jubilee. The 70 sevens are seven-year Sabbath cycles that when complete, will culminate with the same Age of Jubilee that Isaiah foresaw in Isaiah 61.

Given that the Jewish exile in Daniel 9 is also demarcated as a period of 70 years (Dan. 9:2), we can further conclude that the 70 sevens in Daniel 9:24 imply a kind of multifaceted symbolism. It could be said that the 70 sevens build upon the notion of Israel's prior exile of 70 years, and point forward to the end of the ultimate exile, which will take place only after another 70 sevens. Thus, there is a multilayered meaning to the number 70 in Daniel 9:24. It points to more difficulties to come (the exile motif), but it also points to the end of Israel's separation from God and their land, and to their experience of salvation in the Messianic Age (the Jubilee/Sabbath motif).

With this background related to the Jubilee and the exile in mind, we can conclude that Gabriel's reference to the 70 sevens was not random or coincidental. This time designation was a strategic and poetic way for him to indicate from the very first words of the prophecy that Daniel 9:24 has both Messianic and eschatological (i.e. end-times) significance. Basically, Gabriel was telling Daniel, "this 490-year period of time is what will lead to the end of this age and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. You've been seeking the restoration of your people and your city after 70 years. But I will also give you insight into an even greater restoration that will occur after another 70×7 years. This period of time will encapsulate some of the key events that will eventually culminate with the Jubilee of Jubilees."

Traditional Jubilee in Leviticus 25	Messianic Jubilee in Daniel 9:24
7 x 7 Sabbath Cycles = 49 Years → Year of Jubilee	70 x 7 Sabbath Cycles = 490 Years → Age of Jubilee

In a later chapter, we will see how many early Jewish commentators recognized the Jubilee and Sabbath-year symbolism in Daniel 9:24, including the Essenes and the Pharisees. We will also see that it was precisely because they understood the Jubilee symbolism in Daniel 9:24 that these early Jewish commentators believed the 70-weeks prophecy to be both Messianic and eschatological (i.e. concerned with the end times).

Below are some examples from Old Testament scholars who have also argued that 70 weeks equals 490 years, and that these 490 years are symbolically and theologically related to the 49 years that preceded the historical Jubilee in Ancient Israel:

- John S. Bergsma in *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*: “Since the restoration symbolized by the jubilee was not fully realized by the partial return of the Judeans from exile in Babylon, in Second Temple literature the *chronological* value of the jubilee comes to the fore, in part as an aid to determining when the restoration would be perfectly realized. **The key text in this respect is Daniel 9, where the angel Gabriel is said to specify a period of 490 years until the eschaton arrives. Later literature seems to have understood these 490 years as a period of ten jubilees.**”⁵
- Ben Zion Wacholder in “Chronomessianism”: The 70 weeks are “70 sabbatical cycles equal to ten jubilees or 490 years [...]”. **Daniel never uses the term jubilee directly, but his numbers can only be understood in light of Lev. 25:1–23**, which gives seven sabbaticals as the maximum time of sanctioned bondage.

5 Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 3.

[...] The author of Daniel 9 not only assumed the reality of a jubilee period, but without mentioning it directly made it the most significant unit of the divine divisions of time.”⁶

- Andrew E. Hill in the *Expositors Bible Commentary*: “It is generally understood that the ‘seventy sevens’ represent seventy weeks or heptads [i.e. sevens] of years by analogy to the ‘seven weeks of years’ **associated with the year of Jubilee** (cf. Lev. 25:8).”⁷
- Old Testament scholar Dean Ulrich: “The seventy sevens structure of ten jubilee cycles anticipates the Jubilee of Jubilees [...]”⁸
- Old Testament scholar Paul R. Williamson: “The ‘seventy sevens’ chronography is probably best understood against the background of Jewish sabbatical years, and the Jubilee year in particular (cf. Lev. 24:8, 25:1–4; 26:43; cf. 2 Chr. 36:21). Thus understood, the seventy sevens constitutes ten jubilee years, the last (the seventieth seven) signifying the ultimate Jubilee (cf. Isa. 61:2).”⁹

Old Testament scholar Peter Gentry also offers a good summary chart of how the theology of Daniel 9 is rooted in the Sabbath, exile, and Jubilee cycle in Leviticus:

Seventy Sabbaticals [490 Years]	Seventy Years of Exile	Seventy Sabbaticals [490 Years]
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- 6 Ben Zion Wacholder, “Chronomessianism: The Timing of Messianic Movements and the Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles,” *Hebrew Union College Annual*, Vol. 46 (1975), 204.
- 7 Andrew E. Hill, “Daniel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Daniel–Malachi*, eds. Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 168.
- 8 Dean R. Ulrich, “How Early Judaism Read Daniel 9:24–27,” *Old Testament Essays*, Vol. 27, n3, Praetoria, 2014.
- 9 Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 174–175.

= Cause of Exile	= Sabbaths for the Land	= Solution to Exile
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Note: each of the above scholars interpret Daniel 9 differently, but it is still helpful to see that most agree that this prophecy utilizes a Jubilee framework for its chronology.

WHEN WILL DANIEL 9:24–27 BE FULFILLED?

As we will continue to discover throughout this book, one of the reasons Daniel 9:24–27 produces so many divergent interpretations is because many commentators either do not recognize the Jubilee symbolism in Daniel 9:24, or, if they do, they do not fully appreciate the meaning of this Jubilee symbolism, including its Messianic and eschatological (end-times) implications. Beginning in chapter 4, we will start to cover the distinct features of the major interpretations of Daniel 9 in more detail.

For now, I only want to point out that many interpreters, both ancient and modern, Jewish and Christian, have contended that the 70-weeks prophecy was already fulfilled at some point in the past. Some say it was fulfilled in the 160s BC, during the Maccabean Revolt against Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Other say it was fulfilled in the first century, after Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. In this second group are many Christians who argue that the first-century ministry of Jesus completely fulfilled Daniel 9:24–27, including the Jubilee aspects of this prophecy (a topic we will discuss more in chapter 6).

Once we come to grips with what the Jubilee signified in the Hebrew Bible however, it is difficult to make a solid argument that Daniel 9:24–27 was already fulfilled at some point in the past. Because the Hebrew Bible depicts the coming Messianic Age as the Age of Jubilee, and because Daniel 9:24 presents the 70 weeks as the time that will lead to this ultimate Jubilee in Israel, we can conclude that the 70-weeks prophecy will only be fulfilled when the Messiah returns and establishes his kingdom, in Israel. Stated another way, the Jubilee symbolism in Daniel 9:24 requires an interpretation of the 70-weeks

prophecy that is both Messianic and eschatological (concerned with the end times). Any interpretation of Daniel 9 that is non-messianic, or, perhaps messianic, but not in any way eschatological, cuts too awkwardly against the grain of the text to be satisfactory. Until we see the Age of Jubilee fully manifest on the earth, that is to say, until all of the events outlined in Isaiah 61 are tangibly fulfilled, and until oppression, war, slavery, economic exploitation, etc. are literally abolished throughout the entire world, it is not possible to say that any of the key Jubilee prophecies in the Bible, including Daniel 9, have reached their final fulfillment. Those who argue otherwise are erroneously minimizing what the Jubilee signifies in the prophetic literature.

Biblical scholar John Bergsma has written the best in-depth study of the Jubilee. In his revised PhD dissertation, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, Bergsma notes that the way the Jubilee theme is used in the Bible proves it has eschatological (end-times) implications. He writes:

Although each [prophet] alludes to the jubilee in a different way, [they all] seem to re-apply the concept of the jubilee from the individual Israelite debtor and return to the land as a corporate jubilee for the nation. This may be called a *corporate re-application* of the text. For these authors, the return from exile would involve **the restoration of Israel and the inauguration of an eschatological age, for which the jubilee was one among several images.** [...]

Although the chronological value of the jubilee is prominent in Daniel, *Jubilees*, and several Qumran documents, **it is also clear that its eschatological and messianic senses are not forgotten. The forgiveness of debts (material and spiritual), return to the land, and restoration of equality and prosperity integral to the jubilee legislation continue to function as images of the final age these writers envision at the end of their chronological schemes.**¹⁰

10 Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 2–3.

Daniel 9:24–27 is fundamentally a prophecy of hope, and one that covers the events that will lead to the restoration of paradise on earth, a prophetic motif that is also intricately connected to the Jubilee aspect of this particular text. Though we will see that this prophecy covers many earlier historical events as well, and that the Jubilee was partially fulfilled to some extent through the first-century ministry of the Messiah, we should still accept that the coming Jubilee is an end-times/future-kingdom event. As a result, Daniel 9:24–27 needs to be interpreted within a framework that incorporates both earlier historical events and future end-time events.

To some, this might seem like a very basic point. However, it is a foundational point to grasp. Ignorance of, or a failure to accept, the eschatological implications of the Jubilee symbolism in Daniel 9:24 often exerts a corrupting influence upon the entire interpretive endeavor, within both Christian and Jewish circles.

In the rest of this book, we will look at the other aspects besides the Jubilee symbolism in Daniel 9:24 that further prove that the entire 70-weeks prophecy is both Messianic and eschatological (concerned with the end times). We will also explore how the Jubilee is one of the most widely overlooked keys that can help us develop a solid interpretation of the 70-weeks prophecy. Every element of Daniel 9:24–27 is connected to the Jubilee in some way.

THE FUTURE JUBILEE, ISRAEL, AND THE LAND

There are universal elements to the Jubilee that relate to the freedom from oppression that all people will experience in the Age to Come (Isa. 61), and even to some extent to what we can experience now through a relationship with the Messiah. At the most basic level however, the Jubilee was always about the return of the the Israelite tribes to their land. This is another reason why we cannot say the Jubilee prophecies in the Bible, including Isaiah 61 and Daniel 9, have already been fulfilled.

Until the final eschatological return of the Jewish people to their land takes place in the Messianic Age, we can be certain that every

Jubilee prophecy in the Bible still awaits a future fulfillment. In the same way the historical Jubilee in Ancient Israel involved the return of the Israelites to their land, the Jubilee of Jubilees in the future will also involve the return of the Israelites to their land, a reality that is also outlined in many other eschatological texts besides Daniel 9:24–27.

As we read in Ezekiel 47:13: “Thus says the LORD God, ‘This shall be the boundary by which you shall divide the land for an inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel.’” This is a prophecy that describes what will happen in the Messianic Age, when the Jubilee is fully realized.

Other prophecies, such as Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33, also give insight into the division of the Land of Israel into its tribal allotments in the future. These passages develop this Jubilee theme by emphasizing the return of the Israelite tribes to their land at the start of the Messianic Age (Dan. 9:24; Isa. 61).

For example, Deuteronomy 33:28 describes Israel’s experience after the Messiah returns in the following way: “So Israel dwells in security, the fountain of Jacob secluded, in a land of grain and new wine.” To the same effect, in Ezekiel 37:25, God promises the twelve tribes of Israel that when the Messiah sets up his kingdom, “They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons’ sons forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever.”

Daniel 9:24–27 fits within this larger matrix of Jubilee texts that presuppose a return of the twelve tribes of Israel to their ancestral land after the destructive events of the end times. Regarding Leviticus 25, Bergsma also adds: “Leviticus 25—in its present position in the Pentateuch—looks forward to the time when the ‘eschatological’ condition of Israel dwelling in her land will be realized [...]”¹¹

We should not spiritualize or universalize the Jubilee in the way many Christian commentators have done, to the extent that it has no real application to the tribes of Israel returning to their land, because

11 Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 81.

such an approach violates the very essence of what the Jubilee was about in the first place.¹² Furthermore, even passages like Isaiah 61 that draw out a spiritual application of the Jubilee, one connected to holistic redemption, still predict an earthly restoration of Israelite “cities,” and an agrarian ideal in which Israel’s “flocks” and farms will be blessed.

These are not mere symbols for a deeper spiritual reality. Isaiah 61 describes the full realization of the Jubilee in Israel in the future, in all of its complexity, and with each of its various elements, such as freedom from oppression, return to physical land, and the fruitfulness of the land itself, becoming a tangible grass-roots reality in the Messianic Age. Daniel 9:24 builds on Isaiah 61 and points forward to the same fulfillment of the Jubilee in the future, after 70 sevens (10 Jubilee cycles).

Of course, all the nations of the earth will also experience the benefits of this future Jubilee restoration of Israel in the Messianic Age, so God is not leaving the Gentiles out here. In Isaiah 61, God promises that “foreigners” will participate in the Jubilee rebuilding of Israel (61:4–5), and that righteous Israelites will make God’s message of Jubilee freedom “known among the nations” (61:9).

But again, we should not interpret any Jubilee prophecy in such a way that it causes us to remove the nation of Israel from the center of the biblical storyline. There cannot be a fulfillment of the Jubilee such as Isaiah 61 and Daniel 9 envision until the Messiah restores the tribes to their ancestral land and ushers in a new age of shalom for the entire earth. Taken at face value, that is what these Jubilee texts predict, which is why it is so important to understand from the outset how Gabriel’s “70 weeks” language evokes the eschatological Jubilee that is yet to come.

12 Some Christian commentators argue that the Jubilee has already completely arrived through the work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Others might say the historical Jubilee was a typological foreshadowing of the restored creation that we will experience in the New Heavens and the New Earth, but that it doesn’t pertain specifically to Israel’s future. The problem with both of these approaches is that all of the key Jubilee texts in the Bible speak of the restoration of the nation of Israel as both a territory and a people. This focus on Israel will become more clear in chapter 7 when we look at the rest of Daniel 9:24.

The Jubilee is one of the central prophetic motifs in Scripture that describes God's future plan of kingdom redemption for Israel and the nations. We could even go so far as to say that the Jubilee harkens forward to the time when the nations will be restored through the prerequisite restoration of ethnic, national, and territorial Israel, and that Daniel 9:24–27 anchors this Israel-centric vision of the future kingdom of God.

APPROACHING JUBILEE CHRONOLOGY

Often when the topic of the Jubilee comes up, it generates debate over when the Jubilee year occurred in relation to the previous and the next Sabbath cycle. Was the Jubilee (1) the 49th year, that is to say, the last year of a seven-week cycle? (2) an extra 50th year added after the seventh Sabbath cycle, but before the first year of the next Sabbath cycle? or (3) simultaneously a 50th year after the previous 49th year, but also the first year of the following Sabbath cycle?

The most plausible answer is option three. The Jubilee year was reckoned as the 50th year after the 49 years of seven Sabbath cycles, but it was also the first year of the next Sabbath cycle. This kept Israel on a continuous cycle of 49-year Jubilee periods, which also explains why the ten Jubilee cycles in Daniel 9:24–27 amount to 490 years, not 500 years. In the words of John Bergsma, the Jubilee “does not interrupt the cycle of sabbatical years by the insertion of an additional, uncounted year.” Bergsma further clarifies where the Jubilee year fell on Israel's calendar of seven-year weeks:

A complete set of seven cultic-agricultural year weeks would terminate at the end of the seventh sabbatical-year, at the last day of the sixth month according to the civil (spring) calendar. Thus, the seventh month would begin the new, fiftieth cultic-agricultural year [which would also be the first year of the next Sabbath cycle of seven years.]¹³

13 Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 89. The following chart is an abbreviated form of one produced by Bergsma.

No worries if this chronology of the Jubilee seems a little hard to follow at first. Here is a chart that depicts how the Sabbath and Jubilee years would have been counted:

Year 43	44	45	46	47	48	49 Sabbath Year End of 7 Weeks
50/1 Jubilee	2	3	4	5	6	7 Sabbath Year

The Jubilee years coincide with the first year of the next Sabbath cycle. They are not added independently as extra years, but neither are they the same thing as the previous Sabbath year.¹⁴

This way of reckoning the Jubilee as a continuous 49-year cycle is confirmed in the book of *Jubilees* (c. 100s BC). *Jubilees* is one of the oldest extrabiblical sources that evidences interaction with both Leviticus 25 and Daniel 9. *Jubilees* 45:17 gives the lifespan of Israel (Jacob) in Jubilee periods as, “three jubilees, one hundred and forty-seven years.”¹⁵ As we can see here, three Jubilee periods was the equivalent of 49×3 , not 50×3 .

From this we can deduce that the 70 weeks of Daniel 9 are ten Jubilee cycles of 49 years each (490 years). The only Jubilee year that is not technically included in the 490 years of Daniel 9:24 (70×7) is the

¹⁴ This point has been debated in both the rabbinic and scholarly literature. But I believe Bergsma’s synthesis of the data is sound.

¹⁵ *Book of Jubilees*, 45:17, *Sefaria*, online.

Jubilee year that will signify the start of the Messianic Age, because it will begin after the 490 years of Daniel 9 are complete, in the 491st year, or, at the beginning of the first Sabbath cycle in the kingdom of God.

484 Beginning 70th Week	485	486	487	488	489	490 End of 70th Week
Year 1 (491) Age of Jubilee Begins	2	3	4	5	6	7

Note: we will also discuss in later chapters why the last Jubilee cycle in Daniel 9 was interrupted after the 69th week (483rd year), which implies a gap of time in the prophecy.

WILL THE MESSIAH RETURN IN A JUBILEE YEAR?

The relationship between Daniel 9:24–27, the Jubilee, and biblical eschatology, raises many questions related to when the Messiah will return. Does Daniel 9 reveal, in a kind of indirect way, that the Messiah will appear and establish his kingdom in a Jubilee year (after the 70th week)?

Put simply, there is no way to be sure. It is possible that the Jubilee symbolism in Daniel 9 points to a literal future Jubilee year during which the Messiah will establish his kingdom, which will also be based on past Jubilee years from earlier in history. It is also possible that the year the Messiah returns will simply be counted as the first Jubilee year of the Kingdom, and that Sabbath/Jubilee years will be calculated from this Jubilee year moving forward (year 1 of the Kingdom), without reference to past Jubilee years from earlier in history.

Later we will see that the 70th week in Daniel 9:27 (i.e. the one that

will end right when the Messiah begins his reign) is separated from the other Jubilee cycles in Daniel 9:24-26 and stands on its own as an independent seven-year cycle. This makes it even more difficult to discern if we are supposed to conclude that the 70th week, and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom, must coincide precisely with past Jubilee years. It almost seems to me that the last seven years of Daniel 9:27 were purposefully broken off from the other Jubilee cycles in the prophecy to stop us from being able to make any kind of precise calculation of what year the Kingdom will be established. This is why I will never be dogmatic about the extent to which the future prophetic events outlined in Daniel 9 will be connected to Jubilee years in Ancient Israel.

Also, this entire issue raises a much more complicated question of biblical interpretation, which concerns how far we are supposed to take a symbolic motif, such as the Jubilee, when it appears in the prophetic literature. It can be proven that the Jubilee will have a future kingdom fulfillment in terms of the events that will take place when the Messiah reigns on the earth. But no specific dating scenarios can be proven as of now.

For these reasons, my intention in the rest of this book is not to provide any kind of detailed calculation of when future prophetic events will occur, such as geopolitical developments, the return of the Messiah, the Rapture, etc., based on Jubilee years. No doubt people will continue trying to make such calculations, but in my experience prophetic date setting based on Jubilee years is usually too speculative and subjective, and is often based on disputed Jubilee dates to begin with.

Let's say for the sake of argument that the Messiah will return in a Jubilee year that is somehow linked to previous Jubilee dates in Ancient Israel. This still would not tell us much, because the Messiah could arrive at any number of points in time in the future. There would be no way to narrow his return down to one particular Jubilee year.

As a result, my approach to Daniel 9:24-27 is to use the Jubilee motif as an interpretive key that can help to illuminate the meaning of the biblical text itself, and its practical implications. I do think it's

a cool possibility that the Messiah could potentially return in a Jubilee year that is somehow related to Israel's prior cycle of Jubilees, but I'm still in a "wait and see" position on this one.

WILL THE MESSIAH RETURN ON YOM KIPPUR?

Besides attempts to precisely date the specific year of the Messiah's return based on past Jubilee years, I have also spoken to people who believe in a more general sense that the Messiah must return in the fall, perhaps even on the Day of Atonement (or shortly before at the time of the Feast of Trumpets). Though these people may not try to predict the exact year of the Messiah's return, many still believe that the eschatological prophecies that utilize Jubilee symbolism (such as Dan. 9) prove the time of year when he will return, because the Jubilee occurred on the Day of Atonement in the fall.

Others also connect certain key prophetic fulfillments, such as the defeat of the Antichrist, to the Day of Atonement and the Jubilee. In either case, there are assumptions made about when prophetic events have to take place, whether the Rapture, the return of the Messiah, or the defeat of the Antichrist, etc., because of the prevalence of the Jubilee motif within the biblical and extrabiblical prophetic literature.

In my first book, *The Passover King*, I discussed why it is problematic to connect the return of the Messiah, the defeat of the Antichrist, and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom only to the fall feasts (including the Day of Atonement/Jubilee). My central thesis in that book was that the Bible also uses a lot of Passover and Exodus symbolism to describe the events of the Second Coming (Num. 24; Isa. 11; Ezek. 38; Rev. 15–16), and Jesus himself even spoke of a future fulfillment of Passover "in the kingdom of God" (Lk. 22:15–16).

As a result, we cannot so quickly bypass all of the passages that link the return of the Messiah to the spring feasts (Passover, Unleavened Bread, Early First Fruits, & Weeks; cf. Lev 23), just because there are also passages that use the symbolism of the fall feasts (Atonement/Jubilee) to describe the coming kingdom of God. In reality, my guess

is that we are probably looking at a both/and scenario here.

There will likely be events connected to the return of the Messiah and the establishment of his kingdom that span the entire seven-month period between the spring and fall feasts (Passover → Unleavened Bread → Early First Fruits → Weeks → Trumpets → Atonement/Jubilee → Tabernacles). The idea that the Messiah must return on the Day of Atonement/Jubilee, just because Daniel 9 and other related passages use Jubilee symbolism, is an oversimplification.

FROM SECOND EXODUS TO JUBILEE

It could very well be that the initial return of the Messiah, Israel's "Second Exodus," and the defeat of the Antichrist, will be more closely linked to Passover. But then, after the initial return of many Israelites to their land, there will still be continued waves of spiritual outpouring and Jewish immigration to Israel for a period of months, which will then lead up to the full realization of the Jubilee on the Day of Atonement, after the Messiah has already been on the earth for many months (cf. *The Passover King* for fuller discussion). Daniel 9:24–27 does imply a fulfillment of the Jubilee at the time the Messianic Kingdom is established. But this prophecy does not have to be read as though it specifies the exact day or time of year when the Messiah will return, defeat the Antichrist, etc.

I suspect that even though Daniel 9:24–27 does use Jubilee symbolism, we are not meant to take the symbol quite so far that we use it to ground a prediction that the 70th week will end, and the Messianic Kingdom will be set up, on the exact day of *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement). There is a lot of complexity here, especially because the Bible speaks of the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom using the symbols and motifs of both the spring and fall feasts.¹⁶

16 And again, as mentioned earlier, because the final seven years of Daniel 9 are separated from the other weeks and Jubilee cycles in the prophecy, it could be that the 70th week could begin and end at any number of points in time, without reference to any earlier Jubilee year or particular month on the calendar.

Many people have developed end-time scenarios that are exclusively linked to the fall feasts because they have not taken seriously enough the large number of passages that also speak of the return of the Messiah in terms of the spring feasts (especially Passover), which actually occur earlier on the biblical calendar. It is at least possible that the Messiah could return just before Passover, in a year that will also lead into a Jubilee year, and then, after we have celebrated Passover with him in the kingdom (Lk. 22:15–16), as a sign of his victory over the powers of darkness (Rev. 15–16; 19; cf. Ezek. 38; Hab. 3), we will transition six months later into the full celebration and realization of the Jubilee on the Day of Atonement, once he has solidified his rule, brought more Jewish people back to the Land of Israel, and cleansed the land itself from the catastrophic fallout of the Tribulation (Ezek. 39).

It is important to grasp that the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom, and the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, will unfold over a period of time. The Second Exodus the Messiah will lead right after he returns to the earth will involve scattered Israelis who will be exiled into the Middle East and North Africa during the Tribulation (Num. 24:8; Isa. 11). However, there are also other texts of Scripture that refer to other Jews living in other parts of the world, who will be brought back to Israel through a more prolonged and natural process (Isa. 49:22–23; 66:18–21; Zech. 8:23).

This is why I can foresee the celebration of the Day of Atonement and the Jubilee taking place only after more Jews have returned to the Land, not at the exact same time the Messiah returns and defeats the powers of darkness. From a biblical perspective, the Day of Atonement and the Jubilee reflected God's desire to purify His land, His people, and His sanctuary, and to settle His people on the land He had promised them. Thus, it is worth asking how the Day of Atonement and the Jubilee could be fulfilled and celebrated in the Messianic Age before there has even been enough time to (1) bring the entire Jewish remnant back to Israel, and (2) purify the Land and the Temple from the destruction that will be wrought during the final battles of the end times.

Right after the Messiah returns and defeats the Antichrist, the Land itself will be polluted with dead bodies (cf. *The Passover King*, ch. 15). The Day of Atonement/Jubilee is the holiest day of the year on the biblical calendar, so it's hard to imagine how these "appointed times" could be celebrated under such circumstances (i.e. with death everywhere), which is why I personally doubt that the Second Coming of the Messiah will coincide directly with the fall festivals (i.e. Feast of Trumpets & Day of Atonement). It is most likely that the Day of Atonement/Jubilee will only be celebrated in the Messianic Age after the Messiah has established his rule, brought the entire Jewish remnant back to Israel after six to eight months (+/-), and purified his land, at which point the Jubilee will be fulfilled when he allows each individual tribe to return to their inheritance (Gen. 49; Deut. 33; Ezek. 47–48), which is not something that could happen right at the precise moment of the Second Coming.

Here is a chart that summarizes the fulfillment of the spring and fall feasts in the kingdom of God:

Biblical "Feast"	Kingdom Fulfillment
Passover, Unleavened Bread, Early First Fruits	Messiah returns, saves first-fruits Jewish remnant, leads Second Exodus into Israel, defeats powers of darkness, and celebrates Passover with his people "in the kingdom of God" (Lk. 22:15–16; Num. 24; Isa. 11; Ezek. 38–39; Rev. 15–19).
Weeks (Pentecost)	Outpouring of Holy Spirit on Israel and the nations, continued waves of Jewish immigration into the Land of Israel (Isa. 49:22–23; 66:18–21; Zech. 8:23; Joel 2:28–29; Jer. 23:7).
Trumpets	Israel and the nations called to encounter the Messiah at Mt. Zion, mirroring the original encounter at Mt. Sinai, which was also initiated through trumpet blasts (Ex. 19; Isa. 2:1–4; 18:3–7; 66:18–21).

Atonement/ Jubilee	Land of Israel and Temple cleansed from desolations of the end times, Messiah installed as King, Land of Israel divided between the twelve tribes as fulfillment of the Jubilee on the Day of Atonement (Gen. 49; Deut. 32:43; 33:6–29; Ezek. 39:11–16; 47–48; Dan. 9:24–27).
Tabernacles	Climactic festival of joy and feasting as Messiah extends his rule over all the earth (Zech. 14:16–19).

Of course, to some extent we are all in a “wait and see” position on these matters, especially as far as precise timelines are concerned, and my thoughts here are admittedly speculative. I only include this outline as a hedge against date-setting scenarios that are built exclusively around the fall feasts, including the Day of Atonement and the Jubilee.

The Jubilee does give us a beautiful picture of what the future holds for God’s people, because it is a window into the Messianic Age as a time of freedom, joy, and rest. The Jubilee is also a promise to Israel that guarantees their future return to their land after the Tribulation events of the end times. But the Jubilee is never utilized in Scripture in such a way that it allows us to draw up precise eschatological timelines and charts depicting exactly when future prophetic events will take place. God has reserved His right to leave some mystery here.

In addition, rather than becoming obsessive over timelines, the most important thing is that we allow the full force of all the symbols used in Scripture to describe the return of the Messiah and the Messianic Age, whether the Passover, the Exodus, the Jubilee, the Davidic monarchy, the Garden of Eden, the Temple, etc., to impact our hearts, and lead us into deeper adoration of our Messiah and a more fervent anticipation of his glorious kingdom. This is all about him!

THE JUBILEE IS THE BLESSED HOPE

Before we go deeper into the text of Daniel 9:24–27, I also feel I should highlight here that the Jubilee symbolism in this prophecy has profound

practical significance for the Lord's people today, especially as we live in this fallen world, awaiting the Messianic Age.

We all know that life can be extremely difficult. We constantly face the reality of our own frailty, mortality, and weakness. We continually experience the pervasive and unrelenting consequences of human sin, both on a personal and corporate level.

Chronic and even life-threatening health challenges. Betrayal and difficulty in personal relationships. Crime and economic hardships. Wars, political divisions, and civil strife. Unfulfilled dreams, oppressive boredom at work, deferred hope, and unanswered prayers. The silence of God, the sense that He is absent, the feeling that He just doesn't care, and maybe even the haunting prospect that things will never get better. If we are honest, we probably all deal with these and other sources of real or existential pain on a regular basis. These are only some of the elements that characterize our current state of slavery and bondage in this fallen world.

As hard as it can be to face these realities, the message of hope in the biblical prophets continually reminds us that there is a light dawning on the horizon. God has not forgotten us. He will not abandon us. Even now He is working towards our final redemption.

Daniel 9:24 comforts us with the idea that the Messiah will indeed reign on this earth, and put everything right for us, and for his "people and his holy city," in the end. This prophecy grounds us in God's Messianic-redemptive purposes for the world and beckons us to look forward to a better Age to Come.

Corruption will be eradicated. Our bodies will be healed. There will no longer be any strife, divisions, war, or slavery. Evil will be judged. God will no longer feel absent or seem silent. The Messiah himself will one day stand in Jerusalem and blow the shofar on the Day of Atonement, and we will know that the Age of Jubilee has finally arrived.

It is true that in order to navigate through the labyrinthine details of Daniel 9:24–27, in the rest of this book we will have to engage in a level of Bible study and historical analysis that can at times test the limits of body, mind, and spirit. I know I often felt this way when writing this

book! But as we traverse the interpretive territory in the remainder of our time together, never forget the basic and extremely practical message of this prophecy, communicated in its first two words.

The Jubilee is coming.

After “70 sevens,” the earth will be set free.

3

ARE THE 70 WEEKS LITERAL OR SYMBOLIC?

IN THE LAST CHAPTER, we discovered that the 70 weeks of Daniel 9:24 have symbolic significance related to Israel's Sabbath cycle of years, the Jubilee, and the historical period of exile/restoration. The 70-weeks theme weaves together a number of theological strands from the Hebrew Bible as a way of pointing us towards the age of Jubilee restoration in the future.

Because the 70 weeks have a deeper symbolic meaning that goes beyond a mere numerical value, many Bible teachers have concluded that the 70 weeks could represent a strictly symbolic period of time, rather than a period of 490 literal years. For example, Mitchell Chase, on the popular Christian website Crossway.org writes:

Perhaps we should expect **a figurative or symbolic meaning rather than applying 490 with strict literalism**, for not even the number seventy was applied with the sort of precision often expected today.

Similarly, Old Testament scholar Ron Haydon writes, “it is probable that the seventy sevens is not a strict time reference, but a time *image* [...]”.¹

As mentioned in the last chapter, seven is the number of completion in the Bible. Other ancient cultures, such as the Babylonians, also associated the number seven with wholeness and perfection. And perhaps most importantly, there is evidence from extrabiblical Jewish literature that religious Jews during the Second Temple Period often utilized the concept of the “week” (or “seven”) as a theological symbol. This trend in Judaism is especially prevalent in the book of *1 Enoch*, and also in the book of *Jubilees*, though it should be pointed out that the authors of *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees* did not understand the “week” in a hyper-symbolic way, as though it had no literal meaning related to real time (more on this in chapter 6).

In any case, when scholars like Haydon and Chase speak of the 70 sevens as a “time image,” or “figurative” symbol, they are arguing that a more nebulous and symbolic reading of the 70 weeks in Daniel 9:24 is justifiable. This then leads to the conclusion that we are not supposed to try and align Daniel 9:24–27 with events that either occurred or will occur at real points on the historical timeline. As the argument goes, we are only meant to read Daniel 9:24–27 as a kind of vague apocalyptic prophecy about suffering, exile, restoration, and hope.

There are also scholars who fall on the middle of the spectrum. They argue that even though Daniel 9:24–27 does correspond to real historical events, each of the weeks in this prophecy do not necessarily have to represent a period of seven 365-day years. They’ll say the “weeks” could be longer or shorter than seven years, because the text doesn’t require much specificity here.

The primary problem with this predominately symbolic interpretation of the 70 weeks in Daniel 9:24 is that it fails to take into account a number of important pieces of biblical data, all of which indicate how

1 Mitchell L. Chase, “What are the Seventy Weeks of Daniel? (Daniel 9),” *Crossway*, online, 10.13.2018.

we are supposed to understand the term “weeks” or “sevens” in Daniel 9:24. In this chapter, we will cover these pieces of biblical data, and look at how they reveal that the 70-weeks timeline in Daniel 9:24–27 covers a period of 490 literal years.

It should go without saying that this literal reading of the 70-weeks timeline does not undermine the symbolic and poetic beauty of this time designation, or its relationship to the Jubilee. It simply means that a theological motif in Scripture can have both symbolic and literal meaning at the same time, and this is definitely the case with the “weeks” in Daniel 9:24.

Understanding the symbolic and literal meaning of the 70 weeks is vital. In the same way that we cannot properly interpret Daniel 9:24–27 until we first recognize how it uses Jubilee symbolism from the Torah, we also cannot properly interpret this prophecy unless we simultaneously accept that it gives us a real prophetic timeline of 490 years, one that encompasses past and future events. Furthermore, as we will learn in later chapters, one of the keys to properly interacting with and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of various 70-weeks timelines proposed by interpreters over the last 2,200 years, is having a biblical understanding of the 70 weeks as a literal 490-year time designation. Basically, where we land on the issue of the 70 weeks and what this time designation signifies, will have a profound effect on where we land on a host of other critical issues as well.

I should also add here that I do not consider myself a fundamentalist who always advocates a hyper-literal interpretation of every biblical text. In my view, questions regarding the literal, figurative, and/or symbolic nature of different passages can only be answered on a case-by-case basis. Nevertheless, when looking specifically at Daniel 9:24–27, I am convinced the biblical evidence supports a both/and (i.e. a symbolic & literal) interpretation, not an either/or interpretation of the 70-weeks timeline.

SITUATING THE 70 SEVENS

The literal Hebrew meaning of the phrase translated “seventy weeks” in our English Bibles would be “sevens seventy” (*shavuim shivim*). Notably,

the term “years” is not used in Daniel 9:24.

This prophecy begins by introducing a series of events that will occur within seventy different periods of time called “sevens.” As noted by prophecy teacher John Walvoord, the “English word ‘weeks’ here is misleading, since the Hebrew is actually the plural of the word for *seven* without specifying whether it is days, months, or years.”²

Since the word “years” is not used in Daniel 9:24, we may then rightly ask why it is appropriate for interpreters, including myself, to say this prophecy refers to 70 distinct seven-year periods of time (490 years), rather than 70 distinct seven-month periods of time (490 months), 70 distinct seven-day periods of time (490 days), or maybe even a collection of symbolic and indeterminate time periods. In other words, how can we justify reading the generic word “sevens” in Daniel 9:24 as a reference to seven years?

To answer this question, we need to look at the four pieces of evidence that support the idea that the 70 weeks in Daniel 9:24 correspond to a period of 490 literal years. This evidence also simultaneously disproves the notion that the 70 weeks could somehow represent purely symbolic or indeterminate periods of time.

1: THE BIBLICAL USAGE OF “WEEKS”

Anyone who follows my ministry will know that I often emphasize the importance of word usage within the biblical text itself. How a term is used *within the Bible* should be the primary driving factor that determines how we interpret a word when it appears in a number of different contexts.

The word “weeks” or “sevens” in Daniel 9:24 is never used in the Bible in a purely symbolic manner, nor is it ever used to refer to an undefined or arbitrarily flexible period of time. Instead, the word “week” always refers to either a period of seven literal days, or seven literal years.

2 John F. Walvoord, *The John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries: Daniel*, eds. Charles H. Dyer & Philip E. Rawley (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012), 269.

In most cases, the word “week” in the Bible denotes a traditional week of seven days (Ex. 34:22; Lev. 12:5; Num. 28:26; Deut. 16:9–10, 16:16; 2 Chron. 8:13; Jer. 5:24). However, there is also evidence that a “seven” could describe a seven-year period of time. For example, in Genesis 29:27–28 we read that Jacob had to work for Laban seven additional years (i.e. a “week”) in order to marry Rachel:

But Laban said, “It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week (*shavua*) of this one, and we will give you the other also for the service which you shall serve with me for another seven years (*sheva shanim*).” Jacob did so and completed her week (*shavua*), and he gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife.

In this text, the word “week” or “seven” (*shavua*) is used in conjunction with the plural form of the word “year” (*shana*). This confirms that although the term “week” was often used in Hebrew to refer to a week of days, it was also used to refer to a week of years. Because all of the events described in Daniel 9:24–27 could not fit within a period of only 490 days, that is to say, 70 seven-day periods, a process of elimination indicates that the phrase “70 sevens” in Daniel 9:24 denotes a period of years.

Many other scholars have recognized that from a biblical perspective, the 70 weeks must represent a period of 490 years. Below are a handful of examples of this view:

- “Therefore in Scripture **only two types of weeks or sevens are mentioned—sevens of days and sevens of years**. All agree that days is not a valid option in this context; **only sevens of years remain. The burden of proof rests squarely upon anyone who would take the sevens in any other sense**” (Stephen R. Miller, *The New American Commentary: Daniel*).³

3 Stephen R. Miller, *The New American Commentary*, Daniel, Vol. 18 (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1994), 258.

- In Daniel 9:24-27, the word *shavua* (week) “**denotes a period of seven years in each of its appearances in these four verses.** This is proven by the context wherein Daniel recognizes that the seventy-year period of captivity is almost over. [...] **Just as Daniel is in prayer concerning this matter, the angel Gabriel appears and informs him that Israel’s restoration will not be complete until she goes through another seventy periods-of-seven, *shavua* (Dan. 9:24ff)!**” (Gary G. Cohen, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*).⁴
- Daniel 9:24 “sets forth the approach of seventy ‘sevens’ of years during which God would accomplish his plan of national and spiritual redemption for Israel. **The seventy ‘weeks’ or [...] ‘units of seven,’ [...] are 490 years** (divided as we shall see, into three sections)” (Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *The Expositors Bible Commentary: Daniel-Minor Prophets*).⁵
- “Most commentators agree that the time unit is not days. Further, the fact that there were seventy *years* of captivity, discussed earlier in the chapter, would seem to imply that years were also here in view [in Daniel 9:24]. **The overwhelming consensus of scholarship [...] agrees that the time unit should be considered years**” (John F. Walvoord, *The John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries: Daniel*).⁶

#2: THE CONNECTION BETWEEN DANIEL 9 AND DANIEL 10:2-3

Besides the biblical definition of the word *shavua* (week), Daniel 10:2-3 also proves that Daniel believed the weeks of Daniel 9:24-27 represented a period of 490 years. In Daniel 10:2-3 Daniel mentions

4 Gary G. Cohen, “Shabua” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1980), 899.

5 Gleason L. Archer, Jr., “Daniel,” in *The Expositors Bible Commentary, Daniel-Minor Prophets*, Vol. 7, eds. Frank E. Gaebelein & Richard P. Polcyn (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 112.

6 Walvoord, *Daniel*, 269.

that he mourned and fasted for three “sevens of days” or “weeks of days” (*shavuim yawmim*). In the NASB this text reads:

In those days, I, Daniel, had been mourning for **three entire weeks** [*shlosa shavuim yawmim*]. I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I use any ointment at all until the entire **three weeks** [*shlosa shavuim yawmim*] were completed.

As we can see in the Hebrew transliteration above, Daniel modified the term “weeks” with the word “days” (*yawmim*) in 10:2–3, so his readers would know that in chapters 9 and 10 he was using the word “week” in two different ways. In other words, by including the word *yawmim* (days) in 10:2–3 Daniel was saying something along the lines of: “Back in 9:24 the weeks represented seven years. But here, in 10:2–3, the weeks represent seven days. Just to avoid confusion, I’m adding the modifier ‘days’ in 10:2–3 to clarify the meaning of ‘weeks’ in these two different passages.”

Unfortunately, most English Bibles translate the phrase “three sevens of days” in 10:2–3 as “three weeks.” However, the presence of the term “days” (*yawmim*) in the original Hebrew is extremely important and strategic. There is no other place in the Hebrew Bible where the word “weeks” is modified with the word “days,” because in most cases, it would not be necessary. Unless the context indicated otherwise, people generally understood that a “seven” or a “week” referred to days and not years.

What we can conclude from this discussion is that the presence of this unique phrase “three sevens of days” (*shlosa shavuim yawmim*) in Daniel 10:2–3 is an implicit indication from Daniel that the “weeks” he mentions one chapter earlier carry a different definition than those in 10:2–3. Old Testament scholar Peter Gentry adds that by using the word “days” in Daniel 10:2–3, Daniel was alerting his readers that in this passage he had returned to the “literal and normal use of the word ‘week,’” which he had departed from in Daniel 9:24 when he spoke

of sevens of years.⁷ According to Gentry, the phrase “week of days” in 10:2–3 was “required by the context in proximity to chapter 9 where the word has a different sense.”⁸ When commenting on why the word “days” appears with the word “weeks” in Daniel 10:2–3, Old Testament scholar Harold H. Hoehner also articulated a point of view similar to Gentry’s. Hoehner stated:

The only other usage of [*shavuim*; weeks] by Daniel is in 10:2, 3 where the phrase [*shlosha shavuim yawmim*] is literally “three units of seven days” or twenty-one days. [...] The very fact that Daniel adds [*yawmim* (i.e. days)] indicates that he did not want his readers to think of the unit of seven the same way it was used in chapter nine. **Everyone would have realized that Daniel would not have fasted twenty-one years, but the fact that he inserted [*yawmim*] “days” in 10:2, 3 when it was not necessary would seem to indicate that he *would* have used [*yawmim*, days] in 9:24–27 if there he meant 490 “days.” Therefore, in 9:24–27 Daniel was referring to years and not days.**⁹

Daniel 10:2–3 is an important text that is often ignored in discussions of Daniel 9:24–27, especially by those who advocate for a non-literal or purely symbolic reading of the 70 weeks in Daniel 9. Throughout the Bible, a week (*shavua*) refers to a period of seven days or seven years. The book of Daniel confirms this definition. In Daniel 10:2–3 Daniel used *shavua* to refer to a period of days, and one chapter earlier, Daniel used *shavua* to refer to a period of years (Dan. 9:24). There is no evidence that Daniel intended to depart from the normal biblical definition of a “week.”

7 Peter J. Gentry, “Daniel’s Seventy Weeks and the New Exodus,” *SB/T*, 14.1 (2010), 26–44.

8 Gentry, “Daniel’s Seventy Weeks...” 26–44.

9 Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 118.

3: THE CONNECTION TO THE 70 YEARS OF CAPTIVITY, THE SABBATH YEAR, & THE JUBILEE

The third reason we can be certain Daniel's 70 weeks represent a period of 490 years, is because of the relationship between Daniel 9:24 and Jeremiah's prediction about the Babylonian captivity. This connection between Daniel 9:24 and the prophecies of Jeremiah is on display in Daniel 9:1–3. As we saw in chapter 1, it is in this passage that Daniel writes:

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans—in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, **namely, seventy years**. So I gave my attention to the LORD God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes.

Scholars have pointed out the relationship between the “seventy years” in Daniel 9:2 and the “seventy weeks” in Daniel 9:24. The poetic wordplay that illustrates how these two verses are related is even more apparent in the Hebrew, which speaks of the *shivim shana* (seventy years; Dan. 9:2) and the *shavuim shivin* (seventy weeks; Dan. 9:24).

In light of Jeremiah's earlier prediction that the captivity would last 70 literal years (Dan. 9:2; Jer. 25:11–12, 29:10), it is most logically consistent to also understand Daniel's 70 weeks as a period of calendar years as well. It doesn't make sense to switch from a literal to a purely symbolic interpretation of the number 70 between Daniel 9:2 and 9:24. From a contextual point of view, such a switch is methodologically inconsistent. The number 70 is a simultaneously symbolic and literal time designation in both instances.

In addition to Jeremiah's prophecies, the connection between the 70 weeks and Israel's Sabbatical cycle and Jubilee year (discussed in ch. 2) also supports a literal, face-value interpretation of this time designation.

In Ancient Israel the Sabbath cycle was completed every seven years, and the Jubilee year began after 49 literal years. These were precise units of time in the Torah, not mere symbols. No one in Ancient Israel would have proposed that the Sabbath cycle might be shorter or longer than seven years. As a matter of fact, many ancient Jews, especially those living during the Second Temple Period, were extremely meticulous regarding the precise dating of their holy days and Sabbath cycles.

There is an intricate and complementary relationship between Daniel's 70 weeks and the Sabbath cycle in Ancient Israel that requires us to read Daniel 9:24 as though it depicts a specifically demarcated period of time (10 Jubilee periods = 490 years). Biblical scholar John Bergsma clarifies:

“70 weeks” would, therefore, be 490 years, i.e. ten jubilee cycles or one “great jubilee.” The author of Daniel seems to have believed that, just as ten jubilees (490 years) of national degeneration had culminated in the seventy years of “desolation” (as implied by 2 Chron 36:20–21), so now ten jubilees of national rebuilding would culminate in the inauguration of an eschatological jubilee year of restoration.¹⁰

In later chapters, we will also see that many early Jewish commentators, including the Essenes and the Pharisees, understood that Daniel 9:24 is linked to the Sabbath and Jubilee cycle of years, which also led them to a more literal interpretation of the 70 weeks as a period of 490 years. They did not believe the symbolic and literal time aspects of the prophecy are mutually exclusive, and neither should we.

Many scholars want to have it both ways after they recognize the relationship between Daniel's 70 weeks in Daniel 9:24, and Jeremiah's 70 years of captivity in Jeremiah 25:11-12 and 29:10, as well as how these passages are connected to the Sabbath and Jubilee cycle in the

10 John Stetze Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 212.

Torah. They want to read the 70 years of Jeremiah and the seven years of the Sabbath cycle as literal, but then switch their methodology when interpreting Daniel 9 in favor of a predominantly symbolic approach.¹¹ This is inconsistent and contradictory. There is no evidence in the book of Daniel, or in the Torah, that the number 70, or the term “week,” were ever meant to be read in a purely symbolic way.

A BOTH/AND APPROACH TO SYMBOLS AND LITERAL FULFILLMENT

To give an illustration that demonstrates how the literal and the symbolic can coexist, consider the following example: We know that according to the New Testament, Jesus died as the Passover Lamb, that is to say, as the one whose blood rescues us from God’s judgment. Thus, there is deep symbolic significance given to the death of Jesus throughout the New Testament, especially in terms of how the New Testament authors repeatedly connect His death to the image or symbol of the Passover lamb in the Torah.

Yet, we also know that Jesus was crucified on the exact day of the Jewish Passover in the first century, on the 14th of Nisan (*Aviv*), at the precise time when the Jewish priestly class sacrificed their Passover lambs in the Temple.

11 This pattern of inconsistency can be seen in the article by Thomas Edward McComiskey, “The Seventy ‘Weeks’ of Daniel Against the Background of Ancient Near Eastern Literature,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, 47 (1985), 18-45. McComiskey argues that since Daniel 9:24-27 (apocalyptic prophecy) is a different genre of literature than Daniel 9:1-3 and Jeremiah 25 & 29 (“historical and prophetic narrative”), the number 70 can be purely symbolic in the 70-weeks prophecy and only literal in Daniel 9:1-3 and Jeremiah 25 & 29. McComiskey also emphasizes the symbolic meaning of the number seven and the word *shavua* in the extrabiblical literature. The problem with McComiskey’s distinction between the alleged “historical prophecy” in Jeremiah and the merely symbolic “apocalyptic prophecy” in Daniel 9:24-27, is that Daniel 9:24-27 also predicts certain real-world historical events, which even McComiskey recognizes! Therefore, by his own logic, McComiskey undermines his own view that Jeremiah’s prophecy was historical and literal, but Daniel’s prophecy was only meant to function as a kind of vague apocalyptic prediction. The precise historical predictions in Daniel 9:24-27, which are said to occur at specific periods of time in history, disprove the strictly symbolic/apocalyptic reading of the 70 sevens, and justify reading Daniel 9:24-27 (as well as Dan. 9:1-3 and Jer. 25 & 29) as what McComiskey calls a “historical prophecy.”

This illustration highlights how the symbolic meaning of the Messiah's death is directly connected to the literal events of his crucifixion and burial. We could even go so far as to say that without Jesus' literal crucifixion on the day of Passover, his death could not even have the same symbolic meaning.

The same principle is also at work in Daniel 9:24. The literal time aspects of the prophecy (the 490 years) lead to—and are intricately connected to—the symbolic aspects of the prophecy (the Jubilee motif). The literal and the symbolic do not compete or cancel one another out. They complement and confirm one another.

Two things can be true at the same time, and the theological/symbolic layers in the biblical text do not automatically negate the literal layers of the text in every instance. To say otherwise is to fall into the prevalent interpretive trap known as a “false dichotomy.”

#4: THE HISTORICAL PREDICTIONS CONTAINED IN THE PROPHECY

The final piece of evidence that confirms that the 70 weeks equal 490 real years, is related to how each of these weeks are connected to a number of specific historical events in the book of Daniel. We will look at each of these historical events in subsequent chapters. For now, we can say that the chronological and numerical language used throughout Daniel 9:24-27 supports the idea that this prophecy makes very real time-specific predictions.

For example, in Daniel 9:25 we are told that certain key events will occur after “seven weeks and sixty-two weeks.” Then, in Daniel 9:26 we are told what will happen “after the sixty-two weeks.” Finally, in Daniel 9:27 we are told about a covenant that will be confirmed “for one week,” but then cancelled “in the middle of the week.” This last half of the final week in Daniel 9:27 is further described in Daniel 12:11-12 as lasting somewhere between 1,290 and 1,335 days, which is just about 3.5 years.

This is not the type of language that denotes a nebulous timeframe. If the 70 weeks were not literal, then we would never have been told

what exact events would occur at various stages during the fulfillment of this prophecy, and in the case of the last half of the 70th week, how long it will last, not only in years, but also in days!

There is no need to overcomplicate this. Gabriel did not give Daniel an esoteric and ambiguous word of encouragement about a time of wholeness and completion in the far distant future. He gave him an actual prophecy, a “vision” (Dan. 9:23) of events that were ordained to occur within a 490-year timeframe.

Granted, we should concede that some of the weeks could be slightly longer than seven exact years to the day (like the 70th week; Dan. 12:11–12). But more broadly speaking, seven years and an extra month or two is still seven years.

APPROACHING THE DANIEL 9 TIMELINE

In this chapter, we have looked at the evidence that proves the 70 weeks in Daniel 9:24 represent a period of 490 years, not a purely symbolic or indeterminate period of time, and not a period of only days or months.

We have seen that (1) the biblical definition of the word “week” (*shavua*), (2) the usage of the word *shavua* within the book of Daniel itself (Dan. 9:24 vis-a-vis 10:2–3), (3) the connection between Daniel’s 70 weeks and Israel’s 70 years of captivity, seven-year Sabbath cycle, and 49-year Jubilee cycle, and (4) the specific prophetic events delineated in both Daniel 9 and Daniel 12, require a literal interpretation of the 70 weeks. Indeed, without a literal interpretation, the passage is rendered meaningless.

One of the reasons it is so important to consider the evidence in favor of a more face-value reading of the 70 weeks, is because it is only this unadulterated reading of the timeframe that allows Daniel 9:24–27 to function as one of the most potent predictive prophecies in the entire Bible. If we do not accept that each of the weeks are seven years long, we will end up diluting the power of the biblical text, and missing out on the abundance of prophetic insight within the 70-weeks prophecy.

In the next three chapters, we will begin looking at how different

interpreters throughout history have organized the timeline of events referenced in Daniel 9. As we will continue to see, having a biblical understanding of the 70 weeks as a period of 490 years is vitally important, especially if we also want to be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to this prophecy.

4

THE ANTIOCHENE VIEW

THROUGHOUT HISTORY, there have been hundreds of different interpretations of Gabriel's words in Daniel 9:24–27. On the surface, each of these interpretations can appear contradictory and confusing. However, as we begin the process of analyzing this text in more detail, it will be helpful to recognize that in reality nearly all major positions on the meaning of the 70-weeks prophecy fall into one of three main categories:

- Category #1: The Antiochene View
- Category #2: The First-Century Fulfillment View
- Category # 3: The Messianic End-Times View

In this chapter we will look at the Antiochene view. Then in the next two chapters we will look at the First-Century Fulfillment and Messianic End-Times views. Taken as a whole, these chapters will help

us understand the interpretive landscape, and put us in the right position to analyze both the specific details of the biblical text itself, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each particular view.

INTERPRETATION #1: THE ANTIOCHENE VIEW

The Antiochene interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27 is characterized by the belief that these verses refer exclusively to events that took place in Ancient Israel, from the time of the Babylonian exile (c. 586 BC) to the 160s BC. The Antiochene view is also called the Maccabean view in some commentaries, because it upholds that Daniel 9 is concerned with events that took place during the Maccabean Revolt, when the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes ruled Israel.

After the Jewish people returned to Israel from exile in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah (c. 538–444 BC), Israel was eventually conquered by Alexander the Great of Macedon in 332 BC. When Alexander died in 323 BC, his generals fought to control the Promised Land. Although the Ptolemies of Egypt eventually controlled Israel for over 100 years, in 198 BC the Seleucid (Syrian) king Antiochus III wrested power from the Ptolemies and took possession of Israel for himself. In 175 BC, Antiochus' son, who is also known as Antiochus Epiphanes (Antiochus IV), ascended the Seleucid throne.

A key event from the life of Antiochus IV, which is also related to how some have interpreted the 70-weeks prophecy, occurred in 175 BC. At this time, because he was desperate for money, Antiochus accepted a bribe from Jason, the brother of the Jewish high priest Onias III. Antiochus then deposed Onias as high priest and supported Jason in his desire to become high priest in his brother's stead.

In 172 BC, Jason himself ended up being deposed by his rival Menelaus, who had offered Antiochus an even larger bribe. At the same time, Menelaus, who was an ardent Hellenistic Jew with no legitimate genealogical claim to the priesthood, also had Onias III murdered in Antioch in 171 BC. These events are outlined in the book of *2 Maccabees*, chapter 4.

To add insult to injury, in 169 BC Menelaus also assisted Antiochus in plundering the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, primarily because Antiochus needed funds to carry out a military campaign in Egypt. Later, when a Jewish faction in Jerusalem tried to reinstate Jason to the priesthood, Antiochus would have none of it. He stationed a military garrison in Jerusalem, built a citadel next to the Temple, and modified “the temple service into the worship of the Semitic ‘Lord of Heaven’ (*Baal Shamayim*), who was identified with Zeus.”¹ Even worse, as historian Everett Ferguson notes:

According to Jewish sources Antiochus IV in 168 or 167 BC issued decrees prohibiting the practice of the Jewish religion: the Scriptures were to be destroyed, the Sabbath and festivals were no longer to be observed, the food laws were abolished, and circumcision no longer to be practiced (1 Macc. 1:41-64). Moreover, at the end of 168/167 BC a smaller altar was erected on the top of the great altar of burnt offering, and as the supreme insult to Judaism swine were sacrificed on it.²

Antiochus’ attempt to impose Hellenistic paganism on the Jews living in Israel eventually led to the Maccabean Revolt, which culminated with the purification of the Temple in 165 or 164 BC, and the reestablishment of Jewish sovereignty over Israel during the period of the Hasmonean Dynasty (167-63 BC).

Many scholars and exegetes have viewed this entire history, and particularly the events that took place during the reign of Antiochus IV, as the prophetic fulfillment of Daniel 9:24–27. This Antiochene interpretation of Daniel 9 is most common among modern liberal and critical scholars, though there are also a handful of conservatives who subscribe to this view as well.

1 Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity, Third Edition* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 406.

2 Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 406.

THE ANTIOCHENE VIEW IN MODERN TIMES

There are many different formulations of the Antiochene view one might encounter when reading commentaries on Daniel 9. Most of these are similar, with only minor differences. One of the most popular articulations of the Antiochene view can be found in the famous *Word Biblical Commentary* on Daniel written by John Goldingay. Goldingay defends the Antiochene interpretation, stating:

[T]he detail of vv. 24-27 fits the second-century B.C. crisis [...]. The verses do not indicate that they are looking centuries or millennia beyond [...]. The passage refers to the Antiochene crisis.³

Those who hold to the Antiochene interpretation generally believe the first “seven weeks” (49 years) span from the time when Jerusalem fell to Babylon in 586 BC to “539/538 BC, which was the time of Babylon’s fall, the release of the Jewish exiles by Cyrus, and the anointed one, who most consider to be Joshua the high priest” [i.e. the first high priest of the exiles who came back from Babylon (cf. Zech. 3 & 6)].⁴

After this first period of 49 years (the first seven weeks from c. 586-538), proponents of the Antiochene view then say the next 62 weeks of Daniel’s prophecy span from “the time of Joshua to the death of another ‘Anointed One,’ the high priest Onias III” (171 BC). In this scenario the 70th week is the four to five year period that encompassed Antiochus’ persecution (c. 169-164 BC).

Upon closer inspection, we will find that there are a number of major problems with this Antiochene interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27.

3 John E. Goldingay, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 30, Daniel*, eds. David A. Hubbard & Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 267.

4 Stephen R. Miller, *The New American Commentary, Vol. 18, Daniel*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1994), 253. Note: Miller does not hold to this view personally but provides one of the best concise summaries of the Antiochene interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27.

THE DATES DON'T WORK

First, 70 weeks should equal 490 years total. If we begin counting the 70 weeks from Goldingay's proposed start date in 586 BC, we end up in the year 96 BC (490 years later), which is nearly 70 years past his proposed fulfillment date in the time of Antiochus (164 BC).⁵ The Antiochene view requires us to accept that the 70 weeks were only 422 years long, rather than the required 490. As we saw in the last chapter, lengthening and/or shortening the 70 weeks is unjustifiable, because all of the biblical evidence proves that each of the weeks are seven-year periods of time.

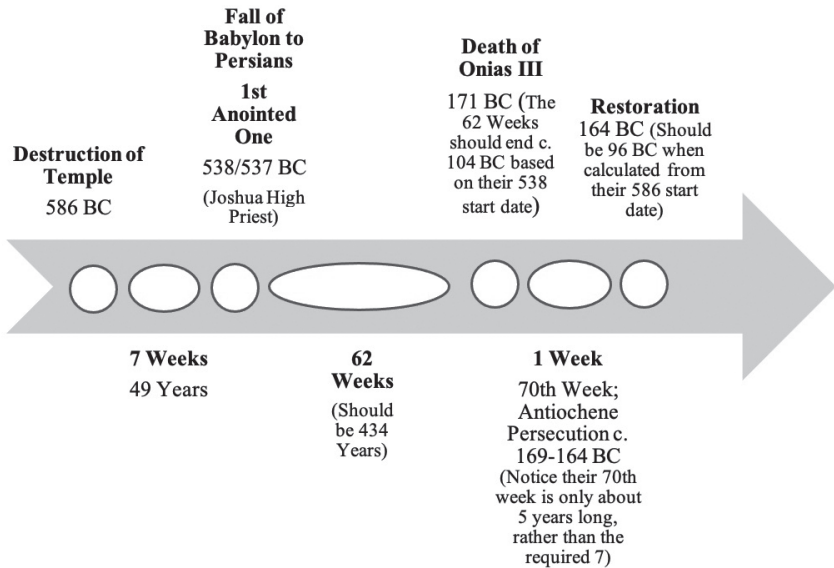
In Goldingay's scenario, most of the extra years are taken away from the 62 weeks (the 434 years that follow the first 49; see chart below). The 62 weeks (434 years), which Goldingay says took place from the fall of Babylon to the Persians in 538 BC to the death of Onias III in 171 BC should span from 538 BC to 104 BC. However, he posits that the 62 weeks only lasted 367 years, not the required 434, so that he can end the 62 weeks in 171 BC.

These problems with the Antiochene timeline are typically brushed under the rug by scholars who support the Antiochene view. They argue that either Daniel 9 contains a "chronological miscalculation" in the timeline, or, we are not supposed to view the weeks as literal time designations in the first place.⁶

5 Miller, *Daniel*, 253.

6 Quotation from James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 393. Cited in Miller, *Daniel*, 253.

Overview of Common Antiochene View



DID THE 70 WEEKS START IN 586 BC?

Besides its untenable timeframe, the Antiochene view is also unsound because it requires us to view the start date of the first seven weeks (49 years) as the day when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians, in 586 BC. This position contradicts Daniel 9:25, which tells us that the start date of the first seven weeks would be at the time when a “word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem” was issued, after Gabriel delivered the prophecy to Daniel, not many decades before.

In chapter 10 we will look more closely at how we should determine the starting date of the 70 weeks. For now, it is worth mentioning that 586 BC is one of the worst possible suggestions for the starting date of the 70 weeks. The start of the 70 weeks was connected to an important redemptive event, namely, Jerusalem’s rebuilding, not Jerusalem’s destruction in 586 BC.

Once we realize that the Antiochene view requires us to choose one of the worst starting dates for the 70 weeks, the foundations of

this view begin to crumble very quickly. The only way proponents of the Antiochene view can even somewhat force their timeline to fit the events of the Antiochene crisis is if they choose 586 BC as their starting date. Even then, they are still required to manipulate their dates and end the 70 weeks 68 years too soon. These are red-flags that reveal the extent to which proponents of this view are obligated to force a square peg into a round hole, in an attempt to make their scenario (sort of) fit with history. The proposed historical dates of the Antiochene view simply do not work.⁷

To make matters worse, the Antiochene view also introduces a high degree of arbitrary subjectivity into the interpretive process. The Antiochene view requires the interpreter himself/herself to basically just say, “yeah, this portion of weeks is longer, and this particular week is shorter than seven years, etc.,” with no biblical justification or exegetical rationale. This view makes the interpreter more authoritative than the biblical text itself, an approach that represents the exact opposite of solid biblical exegesis.

THE ANTIOCHENE 70TH WEEK

The Antiochene timeline is also weakened by its approach to the 70th week. Essentially, this scenario has no seven-year long 70th week.

The entire period of Antiochene persecution was only four to five years max (169-164 BC), depending on which dates we choose, which doesn’t qualify as a biblical week. Moreover, according to *1 Maccabees*, from the time Antiochus desecrated the Temple (167 BC) to the time the Temple was rededicated in c. 164 BC, nearly three years to the day

7 It is also worth noting that many proponents of the Antiochene view also believe the book of Daniel was written very late, probably during or shortly after the Antiochene crisis of the 160s BC. If this were true, then we should at least expect that the later pseudonymous writer would have been able to come up with a Daniel-9 timeline that aligned more harmoniously with history. It is most probable that the bulk of Daniel was written during Daniel’s lifetime, and then edited into its final form sometime in the next 200 years. For an excellent study of when Daniel was written, see: J. Paul Tanner, *Daniel: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2020), 37–80.

passed (1 Macc. 4:52–55). Thus, even if one wanted to argue that the Antiochene persecution only spanned the last half of Daniel’s 70th week, this period would still be six months too short.

Antiochus also never entered into a seven-year covenant with the nation of Israel as Daniel 9:27 says the one who commits the abomination of desolation will do. *1 Maccabees* does say some Jews made a covenant with Antiochus by agreeing to *forsake their religion*, but no time period is attached to this covenant (1 Macc. 1:11, 41–53).

Furthermore, the covenant of Daniel 9:27 is the exact opposite of the one the Jews made in the 160s BC. The Daniel 9:27 covenant will be made by an evil Gentile leader for seven years, which will apparently allow the Jewish people to *practice their religion* on the Temple Mount (the topic of chapters 16 & 17). The Daniel 9:27 covenant will not initially require religious Jews to forsake their religion like Antiochus did.

Viewed from any number of angles, the Antiochene timeline doesn’t work. It requires a poor starting date for the 70 weeks (586 BC), it ends 68 years too early, and it doesn’t have a 70th week that matches the details of Daniel 9:27.

ARE THERE TWO ANOINTED FIGURES?

In addition to the general problems with the Antiochene timeline, some may have noticed that the Antiochene view also posits two “anointed” figures in Daniel 9:25–26. The first is Joshua the high priest, who served in this role during the initial time period when Jerusalem was being rebuilt (cf. Zech. 3 & 6; c. 515 BC), and the second is Onias III, who was murdered hundreds of years later in 171 BC. In chapter 8 we will discuss in more detail why this notion of two anointed figures in Daniel 9:25–26 is biblically unsound. Suffice it to say for now, there is only one anointed person mentioned in this passage, though he is mentioned two times, once in verse 25 and once in verse 26.

THE ANTIOCHENE VIEW IN THE OLD GREEK VERSION

One of our aims in this chapter, and in those that follow, will be to cover how early and modern Jewish interpreters viewed the 70-weeks prophecy. Though we will discover that a Messianic End-Times view of the 70 weeks was the most popular Jewish interpretation during the Second Temple Period, it is worth noting here that some early Jewish interpreters did believe Daniel 9:24–27 was related to the Antiochene crisis. One of the earlier Antiochene interpretations can probably be found in the Old Greek version (OG), a Greek translation of the Old Testament distinct from the more popular Septuagint (LXX). Daniel has not been preserved in the Septuagint (LXX), but the Old Greek dates to around the same time (c. 100s BC) and it is frequently referred to as the LXX or Septuagint version of Daniel.

The Old Greek translates Daniel 9:25-26 as, “And after 7 and 70 and 62 the unction will be taken away and will not be, and the Kingdom of the gentiles will destroy the city and the temple, with the anointed one...”⁸ This interpretation in the Old Greek presents a period of 139 years instead of seventy weeks (490 years), which is depicted as starting around the time the Greeks gained control of Israel in the “Seleucid Era” (311-310 BC), and ending between 173-171 BC when Onias III was murdered. Based on this strictly historical reading of Daniel 9:24–27 in the Old Greek, Onias III is the “cut off” anointed one of the passage, and Antiochus IV is the evil prince who brought desolation in his wake.

It is possible that the Greek translators also believed Daniel 9:24–27 has eschatological implications, though this is unclear. In any case, it is interesting that they resorted to such an arbitrary and speculative timeline in order to force the 70-weeks prophecy to align with the Antiochene crisis. As noted by Old Testament scholar J. Paul Tanner, it “seems the Septuagint [i.e. Old Greek] translators were straining to make the text say what they wanted it to say,” which in turn led them

8 From Roger T. Beckwith, “Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah’s Coming in Essene, Hellenistic, Pharisaic, Zealot and Early Christian Computation,” *Revue de Qumran*, 10 (Dec. 1981) 521-542.

to adopt a very bizarre timeline for the 70 weeks (310-171 BC).⁹

Just like the modern-liberal Antiochene timeline, the timeline of the 70 weeks in the Old Greek also highlights how weak this view is. When we use a consistent interpretive method, there is no way to make the events of Daniel 9:24–27 fit with the dates of the Antiochene crisis.

To summarize, the four major weaknesses of the Antiochene interpretation are as follows:

1. This view does not uphold that the 70 weeks cover a period of 490 years. Its proponents arbitrarily lengthen and shorten various weeks (often to an extreme degree) in an attempt to make their timeline work, with no biblical basis for doing so.
2. This view requires us to choose 586 BC as the starting date of the 70 weeks. Or, in the case of the Old Greek, it requires us to move the start of the 70 weeks even further back, to 311/310 BC. These are both poor options.
3. This view is predicated on the faulty belief that there are two anointed figures in vv. 25–26, rather than one.
4. This view ignores the Messianic and eschatological language in Daniel 9:24–27, including the Messianic-eschatological connotations of the Jubilee symbolism.

No doubt many of the events that occurred in the 160s BC prophetically foreshadowed all that will take place when Daniel 9:24–27 is fulfilled in the future. In other words, the Antiochene crisis does provide some important historical background information as we work towards a better interpretation of this text. But still, at the most basic level, Daniel 9:24–27 is concerned with much more than the events of the Antiochene crisis, a point that will become even more clear in subsequent chapters.

9 J. Paul Tanner, “Is Daniel’s Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 1, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 166 (April-June 2009); 181-200. Tanner notes there is also evidence of an Antiochene interpretation of Daniel 9 in a work written by “the Hellenistic historian Demetrius, preserved by Clement of Alexandria (in his *Stromata* I, XXI, 141)” (183).

5

THE FIRST-CENTURY FULFILLMENT VIEW

IN CONTRAST TO THOSE who believe Daniel 9:24–27 was fulfilled during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (160s BC), many other interpreters throughout history have argued that this prophecy was fulfilled in the first century AD. Proponents of this First-Century view generally fall into one of two distinct subcategories. Some contend that this passage refers only to historical events that transpired between the 500s BC and 70 AD. Others believe Daniel 9:24–27 predicted the coming of the Messiah as well. In essence then, the two different forms of the First-Century view can be categorized as non-Messianic and Messianic.

JOSEPHUS: THE FIRST-CENTURY, NON-MESSIANIC VIEW (C. 70–90S AD)

There is some evidence in the writings of the Jewish historian Josephus that he interpreted Daniel's 70 weeks as a prediction of how the Temple would be destroyed by the Romans. In his famous work, *Antiquities of the*

Jews, Josephus wrote: “Daniel also wrote concerning the Roman government, and that our country should be made desolate by them.”¹ Historian Roger T. Beckwith points out that Josephus also “lays great stress upon the murder of Ananus” the former Jewish high priest who was slain in the Temple in 66 AD.² Concerning Ananus, Josephus commented:

I should not be wrong in saying that the capture of the city began with the death of Ananus; and that the downfall of the Jewish state dated from the day on which the Jews beheld their high priest, the captain of their salvation, butchered in the heart of Jerusalem [...] because God had, for its pollutions, condemned the city to destruction.³

Beckwith elaborates:

[The] connection made here between the ‘cutting off’ of the anointed high priest and the ‘destruction of the city’ and ‘sanctuary’ is exactly parallel to what we find in Dan. 9:26, **and may safely be regarded as Josephus’s interpretation of the prophecy.**⁴

The writings of Josephus represent one of the earliest examples of a first-century, non-Messianic reading of Daniel 9:24-27 (c. 90s AD). Not surprisingly, this first-century, non-Messianic interpretation was also adopted by many later Jewish commentators after Josephus, including the famous Jewish theologians Rashi (c. 1100 AD) and Maimonides (1170 AD).

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- 1 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. William Whiston, Project Gutenberg, online. Quote from *Antiquities*, Book 10.11.7.
 - 2 Roger T. Beckwith, “Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah’s Coming in Essene, Hellenistic, Pharisaic, Zealot, and Early Christian Computation,” *Revue de Qumran*, 10 no. 4 Dec. 1981, 535.
 - 3 Quote from Beckwith, Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah’s Coming..., 535. Also see Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews or History of the Destruction of Jerusalem*, trans. William Whiston, Project Gutenberg, online. Pertinent information on Ananus found in Book 4.5.2.
 - 4 Beckwith, Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah’s Coming..., 536.

THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS:**THE FIRST-CENTURY MESSIANIC VIEW**

In contrast to Josephus, many (though not all) of the early church fathers interpreted Daniel 9:24–27 as a prophecy related to both the ministry of Jesus and the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 AD. Variations of this interpretation can be found in the writings of Clement of Alexandria (c. 200 AD), Tertullian (c. 203 AD), Origen (c. 215 AD), Eusebius (c. 314 AD), Augustine (300s–400s AD), and John Calvin (1500s AD). For example, in his extensive theological work, *On First Principles*, Origen wrote: “The weeks of years, also which the prophet Daniel predicted, extending to the leadership of Christ, have been fulfilled.”⁵

Each of these early Christian thinkers hashed out the details of Daniel 9:24–27 in a different way. However, they all believed Daniel 9:24–27 predicted when the Messiah would appear in Israel in the first century, as well as what Israel would suffer after the First Jewish Revolt.⁶ Also, these early Christian thinkers believed the 70-weeks prophecy was fulfilled in the first century, meaning for them, it was not about the end times. In that sense then, this early Christian understanding of Daniel 9:24–27 can be described as the First-Century Messianic view.

**MODERN PRETERISTS, AMILLENNIALISTS,
AND POST-MILLENNIALISTS**

More recently, many modern Christian scholars have also adopted the view that Daniel 9:24–27 is a Messianic prophecy that was fulfilled in 70 AD. This view is common among those who do not believe in the ongoing election of the Jewish people, or Israel’s place in future prophecy, and it is especially popular among Preterists, Amillennialists, and some Post-Millennialists.

5 Origen, *On First Principles* (*De Principiis*), 4.5, *New Advent*, online.

6 For a great summary of early Christian interpretations of Daniel 9:24–27, see J. Paul Tanner, “Is Daniel’s Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 1, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 166 (April–June 2009), 181–200.

Preterists are those who interpret most prophecies as though they refer primarily to past historical events. Amillennialists are those who do not believe Jesus will return to establish an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem. Post-Millennialists believe Christians will usher in a golden age before the return of Jesus, during which time the Gospel will transform society and lead to the salvation of the entire earth.

For different reasons, people in each of these camps generally do not believe that Israel will be at the center of unfolding prophetic events in the last days. Thus, they are forced to locate the fulfillment of Daniel 9 sometime in the past, and usually gravitate towards a first-century Messianic fulfillment.

A FIRST-CENTURY MESSIANIC READING

One concise summary of this First-Century Messianic approach to Daniel 9:24–27 can be found in an article written by Southern Baptist Old Testament professor Peter J. Gentry titled, “Daniel’s Seventy Weeks and the New Exodus.” In this article, Gentry interprets Daniel’s first 69 weeks as a period of 483 literal years that started in 457 BC and ended around the time of Jesus’ public ministry, which he dates to 26/27 AD. Gentry then proposes that the 70th week lasted from 27–34 AD, and also argues that Jesus was “cut off” (crucified) halfway through the 70th week, in 30 or 31 AD, which eventually “put a stop” to Temple sacrifices, as outlined in Daniel 9:27. Concerning the “abomination of desolation” and the destruction of Jerusalem mentioned in Daniel 9:26–27, Gentry says this destruction began when Jesus was crucified (c. 30 AD), because that’s when the sacrificial system officially became obsolete, even though the real destruction was not carried out until 70 AD by the Romans, 40 years later. (At the end of this chapter we will look at Gentry’s First-Century Messianic timeline in visual form.)

In terms of the specific personalities mentioned in this prophecy, Preterists, Amillennialists, and Post-Millennialists in the First-Century Fulfillment group have put forth a couple of different possibilities. As noted above, Gentry believes both the “cutting off” of the anointed one

in verse 26 and the “covenant” made by the “Prince to Come” in verse 27 point to the vicarious suffering and atoning work of Jesus.⁷ In other words, for Gentry, Jesus is both the “anointed” figure and the “Prince to Come” in verses 26–27, whereas the “covenant” in verse 27 is the New Covenant.⁸

Similar to Josephus and many Jewish commentators, other Preterists, such as Philip Mauro, have taught that “the Prince to Come” in verse 27 is a historical figure distinct from the Messiah in verse 26, and thus, probably either the Roman emperor Vespasian or his son Titus. Vespasian was the emperor in 70 AD, but his son Titus was the Roman general who carried out the siege against Jerusalem.

WHAT IS THE COVENANT, AND WHEN WAS IT MADE?

It is true that Daniel 9:24–27 refers to many first-century events. However, there are a number of major problems with the idea that Daniel 9:24–27 was completely fulfilled in the first century.

First, nearly all proponents of the First-Century Messianic view argue that “the covenant” spoken of in Daniel 9:27, that is to say, the covenant of the 70th week, is the covenant made by the Messiah (the New Covenant). Some will also argue that the “covenant” in this verse is related to how the Messiah confirmed the Abrahamic covenant, or God’s broader covenant purposes of redemption, at the start of his ministry. Nevertheless, all proponents of the First-Century Messianic view connect the covenant to the ministry of Jesus in some way.

For example, Bible teacher Robert Caringola summarizes the common Preterist understanding of the covenant, and gives the following paraphrase of Daniel 9:27:

7 Peter J. Gentry, “Daniel’s Seventy Weeks and the New Exodus,” *SBJT*, 14.1 (2010), 26–44.

8 This idea that the “covenant” of verse 27 is the New Covenant has always been popular among Christians who support Replacement Theology. For example, in the 1500s John Calvin wrote: “Now, therefore, we understand why the angel says, Christ should confirm the covenant for one week, and why that week was placed last in order. In this week will he confirm the covenant with many [...].” *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Bible Hub, online.

And he [Messiah the Prince] shall confirm the covenant [New Covenant] with many [Daniel's people, the Jews exclusively] for one week [7 years]: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease [Calvary], and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation...⁹

Like many Preterists, Caringola interprets all of verse 27 as though it refers to the institution of the New Covenant by Jesus, as well as the Messiah's suffering, which eventually put an end to Temple sacrifices.

The major weakness of this position on the covenant is that it requires us to accept that Jesus made a seven-year covenant at the start of his ministry, even though this never happened. The Gospels never mention Jesus making or confirming a seven-year covenant with anyone.

Furthermore, the New Covenant was not inaugurated until the night before Jesus was crucified (Matt. 26:28). This important detail also disproves the notion that he confirmed a covenant at the start of his ministry.

And finally, the New Covenant is eternal. It is not, nor ever was, offered to the Jews for only a limited period of time (seven years). As a matter of fact, the New Covenant is still available to the Jewish people today, which is why Paul says the Gospel is (present tense) "to the Jew first" (Rom. 1:16).

The unique characteristics of the New Covenant, namely, its eternity, and its inauguration by Jesus at the end of his ministry, do not line up with the characteristics of the covenant in Daniel 9:27, especially how this covenant is made at the beginning of the 70th week for a limited period of time (seven years). Therefore, no solid case can be made that the covenant in Daniel 9:27 is the same thing as the New Covenant, or any other biblical covenant. The idea that Jesus confirmed a seven-year covenant at the start of his ministry is not substantiated by any biblical text.

9 Robert Caringola, *Seventy Weeks: The Historical Alternative* (Owasso: Kingdom Treasures Ministries, Inc., 1991), 73.

MAYBE THE COVENANT WAS MADE IN THE 70TH WEEK?

Many advocates of a First-Century Messianic Fulfillment of Daniel 9:27 have recognized that Jesus never made a covenant with his people *for* seven years. Instead of accepting that a first-century fulfillment of Daniel 9:27 is indefensible however, they will often pivot to the argument that perhaps Daniel 9:27 only implies that the covenant was made *in* the 70th week, not *for* one week. In other words, the argument is sometimes made that there is no duration-of-time preposition (*for*) with the covenant in this verse, so it could just be telling us *when* the covenant was made (in the 70th week), not *for how long*. If this is the case, then it could theoretically still be possible that all Daniel 9:27 says is that the Messiah would strengthen a covenant sometime in this scenario's 70th week (between c. 27-34 AD).

In a recent interview on the YouTube podcast The Remnant Radio, Bible teacher David Wilcoxson made this precise argument, stating that the covenant was only made in the week, not for one week. When commenting on Daniel 9:27 Wilcoxson said:

And he shall confirm the covenant with many, and it says, **in the week**, [most English Bibles say] for one week, **but for one week is not in the text, so it's saying one week**, it's simply pointing to the 70th week of Daniel. **So in the one week he will confirm the covenant, and it tells you when, in the middle of the week.**¹⁰

In his scholarly article on Daniel 9, Peter Gentry also implies that the covenant of verse 27 was only made in the 70th week, not for one week. Gentry writes: "the vicarious death of the coming king brings about a confirming/strengthening/upholding of a covenant with 'the many'" [i.e. in the middle of the week].¹¹ For Wilcoxson, Gentry, and other Preterists, Daniel 9:27 only indicates that Jesus made the covenant

10 "Daniel 9: with David Wilcoxson," The Remnant Radio, YouTube, 9.22.2020.

11 Gentry, "Daniel's Seventy Weeks and the New Exodus," 37.

within the final week of Daniel 9, which most in the First-Century Messianic fulfillment camp believe lasted from 27–34 AD. Furthermore, they place the strengthening of the Daniel 9:27 covenant in the middle of their 70th week, when Jesus was crucified (c. 30 AD).

HEBREW PREPOSITIONS 101

The most important thing to recognize about this argument that Daniel 9:27 only refers to a covenant being made in the week, rather than for a week, is that it contradicts the basic rules of Hebrew grammar and syntax, and more particularly, the rules that govern the use of Hebrew prepositions. This is a vital point to comprehend, and I am surprised that more proponents of the First-Century Messianic view have not realized the extent to which their position on the covenant *in* the 70th week violates some of the most fundamental rules of biblical Hebrew.

To briefly elaborate, when a Hebrew speaker wanted to indicate something was done within a period of time, they would supply a preposition (*in*), just like we do in English. Alternatively, in the vast majority of cases, say 80–99% of the time, when a Hebrew speaker wanted to say something was done *for a particular duration of time*, they would not use a preposition at all, because the duration-of-time preposition is implied in Hebrew.

Unlike in English, where we have to supply the preposition “for,” as in, “I studied in Israel *for* nine months,” Hebrew and Aramaic hardly ever supply the “for,” so the textual rendering often comes out more along the lines of, “I studied in Israel nine months.” Again, the duration-of-time preposition is implied, not stated, and this is the case in both Hebrew and Aramaic with very few exceptions.

If we were to read a handful of introductory Hebrew grammars, we would not even find a separate section on the prepositional use of “for” in relation to duration of time because it is so rare. In contrast, we would certainly find a separate section on the prepositional use of “in,” because when something was done in a period of time, the preposition is required.

What does this discussion on required and non-required prepositions

in biblical Hebrew have to do with Daniel 9:27? Quite a lot actually.

When Daniel 9:27 refers to “a covenant” that will be confirmed, the Hebrew text literally reads, “and he will confirm (or strengthen) a covenant with many one week [...]” Notice the lack of a preposition before “one week”?

What this lack of a preposition indicates is that the covenant is made “for one week,” not “in the week,” because if it was made in the week there would have to be a preposition (yet no preposition is supplied). This is basic Hebrew grammar and syntax 101.

As we saw earlier, Wilcoxson and other Preterists often argue that because Daniel 9:27 contains no preposition with the covenant, this could mean the covenant wasn’t made for one week, but only in the 70th week, which is the way they defend the view that it is Jesus making the covenant in the final week (c. 30 AD). This is an argument that cannot be maintained once we understand the way prepositions work in biblical Hebrew and Aramaic.

The lack of a preposition with the 70th week in Daniel 9:27 indicates duration of time. It indicates how long the covenant will be strengthened for (i.e. for seven years). This is why nearly all modern English Bible translations state that the covenant will be confirmed “for one week.” Since we know Jesus never made any seven-year covenant with anyone in the Gospels, on this point alone the First-Century Messianic view fails.

DURATION OF TIME VS. WITHIN A PERIOD OF TIME IN THE BOOK OF DANIEL

In case any of us need a little more convincing that the covenant of verse 27 will be made for one week, and not in the 70th week, it might also be helpful to look at how Daniel himself used (and did not use) prepositions when speaking of something done within a certain timeframe vs. for a duration of time.

There are 31 instances in the book of Daniel where we are told something was done in, or at a certain time (Dan. 1:1; 2:1; 2:44; 3:5; 3:7; 3:8; 3:15; 4:36; 6:7; 6:12; 6:28; 7:1; 8:1; 8:19; 8:23; 9:1; 9:2; 9:21;

9:23; 10:1; 10:2; 10:4; 10:12; 10:14; 11:1; 11:14; 11:24; 11:27; 11:29; 11:40; 12:1). Not surprisingly, all of these verses supply the preposition to indicate the time in which or at which an event occurred.

Based on this information we have to ask, if Daniel 9:27 only says a covenant would be made in the 70th week, then why is the “in” not supplied via a Hebrew preposition, as it is in every other similar instance in the book of Daniel (and throughout the rest of the Bible as well)? To say that the covenant of verse 27 was made in the week, even though there is no preposition indicating this, not only contradicts the basic grammatical and syntactical rules of Hebrew, but it also contradicts the book of Daniel itself. Statements that communicate that an event happened within or at a certain period of time always get a preposition in Hebrew, Aramaic, and in the book of Daniel, and no preposition is supplied in Daniel 9:27.

What’s more, there are also seventeen places in the book of Daniel (not counting Dan. 9:27) where we are told that an event took place for a certain period of time (Dan. 1:5; 1:12; 1:14; 4:16; 4:23; 4:25; 4:32; 7:25; 8:14; 9:26; 10:3; 10:13; 11:8; 11:24; 11:33; 12:7; 12:11). Once again, these statements that specify duration of time in Daniel follow the normal rules of Hebrew and Aramaic.

Fourteen out of these seventeen statements (83%) include no preposition when indicating something was done for a certain period of time, just like Daniel 9:27. The three occurrences that do include a preposition with the duration of time (i.e. Dan. 7:25; 8:14; 11:24) are rare exceptions to the rule, and change nothing as far as Daniel 9:27 is concerned, because again, if Daniel 9:27 were highlighting an event within a certain timeframe, there would have to be a preposition, and Daniel 9:27 has no preposition.

Below are some examples that highlight these rules, and also confirm that the covenant of Daniel 9:27 will be made “for one week.”

Events that Happened <i>Within/At</i> a Period of Time	Events that Happened <i>for</i> a Period of Time
“ In [supplied preposition] the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim...” Dan. 1:1	“Please test your servants <i>for</i> ten days [no supplied preposition] ...” Daniel 1:12
“Therefore at [supplied preposition] that time, when all the peoples, nations, and men of every language fell down and worshipped...” Dan. 3:7	“In those days, I, Daniel, had been mourning <i>for</i> three entire weeks [no supplied preposition] ...” Dan. 10:1
“ In [supplied preposition] the first year of Belshazzar...” Dan. 7:1	“But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me <i>for</i> twenty-one days [no supplied preposition] ...” Dan. 10:13
“ In [supplied preposition] the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus...” Dan. 9:1	“...yet they will fall by sword and by flame, by captivity and by plunder <i>for</i> many days [no supplied preposition] ...” Dan. 11:33
“Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in [supplied preposition] the latter days...” Dan. 10:14	“And he will confirm a covenant with the many <i>for</i> one week [no supplied preposition] ...” Dan. 9:27

As the examples in this chart demonstrate, duration of time statements in Hebrew and Aramaic most often lack a preposition, which is exactly what we find in Daniel 9:27 (cf. Gen. 15:13; Ex. 34:28; Lev. 23:34). Furthermore, statements that indicate when or at what time an event occurred always get a preposition, pretty much 100% of the time, in Hebrew and Aramaic. This same grammatical pattern can be found throughout the Bible, with only minor exceptions.

These rules create serious problems for Preterists who argue that the covenant in Daniel 9:27 is a covenant connected to the ministry of Jesus. Either (A) Preterists are forced to argue that the covenant made “for one week” in Daniel 9:27 is the New Covenant, or some other covenant Jesus allegedly confirmed, even though the New Covenant was never put into effect for only a temporary period of time, and even though there is no evidence in the Gospels that Jesus made a covenant with anyone for seven years. Or (B) Preterists are forced to make the argument that the covenant of verse 27 was only made *in* the 70th week, not *for* one week, even though this view violates the grammatical rules related to Hebrew prepositions.

In summary, Preterists in the First-Century Messianic Fulfillment camp are not able to offer any biblically-defensible explanation of the covenant in Daniel 9:27. This is a major red flag that reveals the inherent weaknesses of this view.

NOTHING HAPPENING IN THE LAST HALF OF THE 70TH WEEK?

Another major problem with the First-Century Messianic interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27, is that this interpretation suggests that nothing of prophetic significance was happening in the last half of the 70th week. For example, Gentry, Caringola, Wilcoxson, and other Preterists argue that the 70th week began in 27 AD (with Jesus’ public ministry) and ended in 34 AD. However, these same Preterists also state that most of the 70th week events of Daniel 9:27 were completed by the time Jesus was crucified in c. 30 AD, at the midpoint of their 70th week.

By their own logic, proponents of the First-Century Messianic view are left with the idea that none of the events of Daniel 9:24–27 were happening in the critical and climactic stages that led up to the conclusion of their 70th week in 34 AD. Essentially, this model turns the final three to four years of the 70th week, from 30–34 AD (depending on how long Jesus’ ministry lasted), into nothing more than an afterthought that is not described or detailed in Daniel 9 at all.

This is a big problem, because Daniel 9:24–27 is the prophecy of

the 70 weeks, not the prophecy of *the 69 ½ weeks*. As a result, we have to accept that this prophecy describes events that will take us all the way to the end of the 70th week, not just events that take us to the middle of the 70th week.

THE MARTYRDOM OF STEPHEN AS THE END OF THE 70TH WEEK?

In response to this notion that the First-Century Messianic Fulfillment model nullifies the significance of the last half of the 70th week, many advocates of this theory will say that the last half of the 70th week was fulfilled in 34 AD, because this was the time when the Messianic Jewish martyr Stephen was killed, which consequently led to the full expansion of the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 7–15).¹² According to this theory, the last half of the 70th week covered the time when the Jews were given “their last call to accept the Messiah.”¹³ After the Jews rejected the Gospel, and martyred Stephen, the 70 weeks ended, and the Gospel was then free to go to the Gentiles, or so the theory goes.

This Preterist idea that the end of the 70th week aligns with the martyrdom of Stephen, and the universal spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles, is indefensible for a number of reasons. First, and most importantly, the Jewish people were not given “their last call to accept the Messiah” in 34 AD. The book of Acts is full of examples that demonstrate that Paul in particular continued reaching out to his Jewish brethren with the Gospel after the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 13:4–43; 14:1–7; 17:1–17; 18:18:23–28; 28:11–31). Towards the end of his life, as he wrote the book of Romans, Paul was still saying the Gospel is “to the Jew first...” (Rom. 1:16). Paul even ended his missionary career in Rome, preaching to the Jewish leadership in the city (Acts 28:11–31).

The continuous flow of the Gospel to the Jewish people in the book of Acts, decades after Stephen’s death in c. 34 AD, disproves

12 Caringola, *Seventy Weeks: The Historical Alternative*, 77–80.

13 Caringola, *Seventy Weeks: The Historical Alternative*, 79.

the notion that the Gospel went to the Jews at one point in Acts, but then went out primarily to the Gentiles after that, because that's supposedly when the 70th week was fulfilled and the Jews basically lost their chance for salvation. This entire line of argument represents a contrived attempt by Preterists to try and make their 70th week have a hard ending point in 34 AD, even when no historical circumstances indicate a hard ending point at this time, especially as far as God's plan for Israel and the Jewish people was concerned. Basically, advocates of a first-century Messianic fulfillment have no valid explanation of the prophetic significance of the last half of their 70th week (30–34 AD), nor do they have any valid explanation of what key event took place in 34 AD to actually end their 70th week.

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PROPHECY AFTER THE 70TH WEEK?

A third significant problem with the First-Century Messianic view is that it requires us to accept that the events related to the “abomination of desolation” (v. 27) took place after the 70 weeks ended. As mentioned earlier, Old Testament scholar Peter Gentry believes the 70th week technically encompassed 27–34 AD. Yet, like many other Preterists, he also states that the desolations spoken of in verse 27 occurred 36 years later, after the 70th week, in 70 AD, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem.

This idea that some of the events in Daniel 9 happened after the 70th week was also proposed by the famous Preterist Philip Mauro in the 1920s. Mauro argued that there was what he called a “probationary period” added to the 70 weeks that lasted from the death of Jesus until the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans (70 AD).¹⁴ Mauro stated:

The six things of Daniel 9:24 were to be accomplished within the determined period of seventy weeks, and while the destruction of the rebuilt city and temple was also predicted, **that event is not among**

¹⁴ Philip Mauro, *The Seventy Weeks and the Great Tribulation: A Study of the Last Two Visions of Daniel, and of the Olivet Discourse of the Lord Jesus Christ*, Chapter V, Preterist Archives, online.

the things which were to happen within the seventy weeks. [Thus], a probationary period of forty years (AD 30 to AD 70) was added to their [Israel's] national existence [...]¹⁵

The primary problem with this argument that some of the events of verse 27 happened after the 70th week, is that verse 27 outlines the 70th week, not events that will happen after it is over. This verse begins by speaking of what will happen at the beginning of the 70th week (the seven-year covenant) and ends by speaking of what will happen in the middle of the 70th week (the desolation), which will then lead to the final restoration of Jerusalem at the conclusion of the 70th week (the Age of Jubilee).

In order for a first-century Messianic fulfillment to be even somewhat defensible, the crucifixion of the Messiah and the destruction of the Temple would have had to have taken place within the same seven-year period. But since the crucifixion of Jesus happened roughly 40 years before the destruction of the Temple, it is problematic for Preterists to allege that some of the events of vv. 26–27 took place after the prophecy had already been fulfilled (in their view) by Jesus in the 30s AD.

Stated differently, even if for the sake of argument we did want to entertain the idea that verse 27 is about the Messiah making the New Covenant within the 70th week, consistency would also require that the next events of verse 27, which are about Jerusalem's destruction, would take place right after Jesus was crucified, sometime between 30–34 AD. If we say the covenant in verse 27 was made right before the crucifixion in the 30s AD (in the 70th week), then we need to also say the other events of verse 27 took place in the 30s AD as well (in the 70th week).

Advocates of the First-Century Messianic view cannot do this however, because such an idea doesn't harmonize with history. Thus, they are left with the awkward option that some of the events of the prophecy took place in 70 AD, after their alleged 70th week in the 30s AD had already ended.

15 Mauro, *The Seventy Weeks and the Great Tribulation*, 27–28.

Instead of trying to force a complete fulfillment of Daniel 9 in the first century, Preterists should accept that it is impossible to make the First-Century Messianic interpretation work with real dates and real history. This view is certainly stronger than the Antiochene view. But even a broken clock is right twice a day. The fact that there are some positive features of the First-Century Messianic view doesn't make it correct. When we start to look more closely at what the First-Century Messianic camp is asking us to believe, this position becomes very weak, and quite far-fetched.

Preterists rightly argue that the first 69 weeks were literal seven-year time periods. But then, they shift gears when interpreting the 70th week, and are willing to add on an additional 40 years from the midpoint of their 70th week.

I always find this maneuver within the First-Century Fulfillment camp puzzling, especially because they often argue that their timeline is superior because it allows for a continuous and sequential period of 70 weeks (490 years) to unfold without interruption. In reality, this is not true. The only way their 70 weeks can unfold sequentially without interruption, from 457 BC–34 AD, is if they add on an extra 36 years to the end of their 70th week (or 40 years from their midpoint)! Their timeline is not as elegant as they allege, not to mention the other historical and linguistic problems with their view.

Also, notice that Mauro's 40-year "probationary period," which has since been adopted by many evangelicals, is rooted in the idea that this was an extra allotment of time God gave Israel for their "national existence." In another place Mauro wrote that after 70 AD "God had no further use for Israel."

For one, Israel still exists today, nearly 2,000 years later, so this notion that Israel's "national existence" ended in 70 AD is false. Secondly, these comments by Mauro reveal the extent to which the First-Century Messianic timeline is a product of replacement theology (supersessionism) and other mistaken Christian beliefs about God's relationship with the nation of Israel.

In the next chapter we will talk more about whether the 70 weeks had to unfold in a purely sequential way, or whether the Bible could allow for a gap somewhere in the prophetic timeline.

DID SACRIFICES END IN 30 AD?

A fourth problem with the First-Century Messianic view has to do with how those who adopt this position explain the end of sacrifices in Daniel 9:27. They believe Jesus is the Prince to Come of verse 26 (the topic of ch. 13) whose death initiated the cessation of sacrifices mentioned in verse 27. Thus, it is often argued that when Jesus died in c. 30 AD, his atoning sacrifice “put a stop” to Temple sacrifices, even though this didn’t happen in real time until the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD.

Already on the surface we can see the awkward maneuvering this position requires from a historical vantage point. Daniel 9:27 doesn’t say the Prince to Come will put a stop to sacrifices in the middle of the 70th week, which will then lead to continued sacrifices for another 40 years before the sacrifices end. It says the sacrifices will be stopped midway through the 70th week, which did not happen in 30 AD.

In a later chapter we will cover how Daniel 9:27 refers to a future evil Prince to Come who will put a stop to Temple sacrifices in Jerusalem during the 70th week, in a way that will mirror what Antiochus IV Epiphanes did in the 160s BC. This verse has nothing to do with Jesus’ death vis-à-vis Temple sacrifices.

FULFILLED WITH JERUSALEM’S DESTRUCTION?

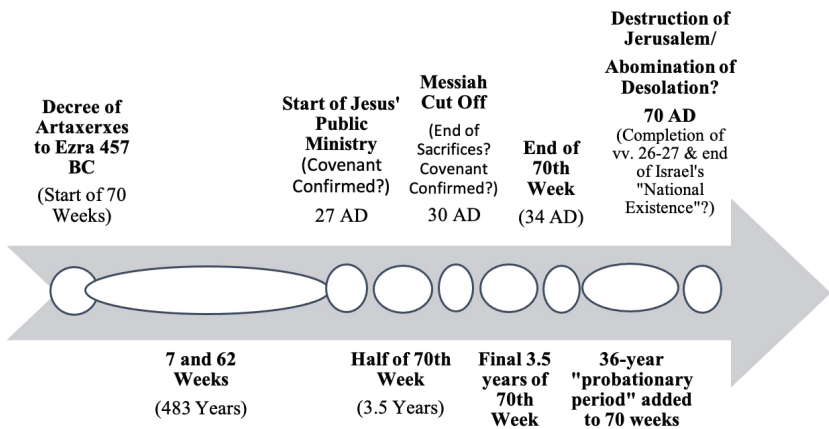
One final problem with the First-Century view, is that this view requires us to accept that Daniel 9:24–27 culminated with Jerusalem’s destruction. Such a position misses the critical point that Gabriel was originally sent to Daniel to console him concerning the “desolations of Jerusalem” (9:2), and to comfort him with the idea that *Jerusalem*, “the holy city” (9:24) called by God’s name (9:18), would ultimately be restored and blessed by God. So why then would it make sense to say that a prophecy about Jerusalem’s restoration reached its fulfillment when Jerusalem was

destroyed in 70 AD, and when one million Jewish people were killed by the Romans and close to a hundred thousand more were taken as slaves?

This assumption at the heart of the First-Century Fulfillment view misses the entire point of the prophecy. Daniel 9:24–27 is a prophecy of hope, and one that pertains to Jerusalem’s glorious future in the Messianic Age. Thus the opening line: “Seventy weeks are appointed *for your people and your holy city...*”

This prophecy does predict that Israel would go through another cycle of difficulties after Daniel lived. However, these difficulties were always understood to be a stepping stone to greater glory and final redemption in the Age of Jubilee.

Overview of Common First-Century Messianic View



As we will continue to discover in later chapters, Daniel 9:24–27 did not reach its final fulfillment in the first century. We will also cover some of the other weaknesses of the First-Century view as we proceed verse-by-verse through the text of Scripture. But here are six major issues that are worth reviewing at this point:

- 1) This view maintains that Daniel 9:24–27 culminated with Jerusalem’s destruction, whereas verse 24 tells us it is a prophecy of hope for Daniel’s “people” and his “holy city.”
- 2) The Messianic versions of this view require that either Jesus made a covenant for seven years with the Jews, which never happened, or that verse 27 only speaks of when the covenant was made (in the 70th week), not for long, which violates the rules of Hebrew grammar and syntax. Essentially, those who argue for a first-century Messianic fulfillment of Daniel 9 have no verifiable explanation of how the covenant in verse 27 could be the New Covenant, or some other covenant connected to Jesus’ ministry.
- 3) The Messianic versions of this view nullify the prophetic significance of the last half of the 70th week. Moreover, this view has no valid explanation of what happened in 34 AD to end the 70th week (and God’s plan of outreach to the Jewish people).
- 4) The Messianic versions of this view require that there was a 36-year “probationary period” added to the end of the 70th week (or 40 years from the midpoint), once the prophecy had already been fulfilled. This is the only way this view can sort of account for the abomination of desolation mentioned in 9:27.
- 5) The Messianic versions of this view maintain that Jesus’ death in 30 AD put a stop to Temple sacrifices, which did not happen at that time. As a matter of fact, the Apostles continued going to the Temple and making sacrifices many years after the death of Jesus, not for eternal forgiveness of sins, but for other communal-fellowship-ceremonial reasons (Acts 21).
- 6) The Messianic versions of this view disrupt the clear flow of Daniel 9:26–27, which states that the Anointed One would be cut off “after” the 62 weeks, but before the 70th week. In other words, many Christians who defend the First-Century Messianic view have the Messiah being cut off in the 70th week, because

they want the “covenant” of verse 27 to be the New Covenant. The problem with this proposal however, is that the text never says the Messiah would be cut off in the 70th week. The cutting off (v. 26) occurs after the 62 weeks, but before the 70th week is even mentioned (v. 27).

- 7) Like the Antiochene view, both First-Century Fulfillment views (non-Messianic and Messianic) ignore the eschatological implications of the Jubilee symbolism in the phrase “seventy sevens.” The Jubilee is an end-times motif in Scripture, so to speak of the complete fulfillment of the Jubilee in the first century makes no sense biblically.
- 8) Later we will also see that the First-Century Fulfillment view lacks a sufficient explanation of the abomination of desolation in Daniel 9:27 and 12:11–12, particularly the 1,290-1,335 days that are connected to the abomination of desolation in Daniel 12.

In the next chapter, we will move past the Antiochene and First-Century Fulfillment models. What we will see is that the Messianic End-Times interpretation of the 70-weeks prophecy has been extremely popular, both within Judaism, and Christianity, for the last 2,200 years.

6

THE MESSIANIC END-TIMES VIEW

IN ADDITION TO the Antiochene and First-Century Fulfillment views (non-Messianic and Messianic), the final major interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27 can be described as the Messianic End-Times view, or, the Messianic-Eschatological view. The Messianic End-Times interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27 is characterized by the belief that the 70-weeks prophecy outlines the coming of the Messiah, other end-time events, and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. This eschatological approach to the 70 weeks overlaps to some degree with the other views, in that it upholds that Daniel 9:24–27 does cover certain epochs of Israel’s prior history. But it is also unique in that it reads Daniel 9:24–27 as a prophecy about the consummation of history in this age and the beginning of the Messianic Age.

Many people wrongly assume the Messianic End-Times interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27 was invented by “Dispensational” Christians in the 1800s who had an unhealthy obsession with Bible prophecy, the

end times, and “newspaper exegesis.” It is true that the Messianic-End Times view was fully developed by Christian scholars and prophecy teachers in the 19th and 20th centuries. However, most of the earliest Jewish interpretations of Daniel 9:24–27, including many from the Second Temple Period (c. 200 BC - 70 AD), also fall into the category of Messianic-Eschatological. In other words, the majority of Jewish commentators interacting with Daniel 9 before 70 AD, thousands of years before the rise of modern prophecy teaching and Dispensationalism, understood that the 70-weeks prophecy is about the Messiah and the end of this current evil age.

In chapter 2 we looked at how the Jubilee symbolism in Daniel 9:24 substantiates a Messianic-eschatological reading of this prophecy. In this chapter, we will take a closer look at the history of the Messianic End-Times view, and how prevalent it has been within both Judaism and Christianity for the last 2,200 years.

Before we begin, I should also clarify that some of the early Jewish commentators who accepted a Messianic End-Times view of the 70 weeks were expecting Daniel 9:24–27 to be fulfilled in the first century, or earlier. In light of this, some might ask why I do not place these Jewish apocalyptic interpretations of Daniel 9 in the First-Century Fulfillment category, rather than in the Messianic-Eschatological category.

The reason we should categorize these early Jewish interpretations as Messianic-Eschatological (and not First-Century Fulfillment), is because many of the Jews who produced these interpretations during the Second Temple Period were expecting the end of this age and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom to take place in the first century (or even earlier). Thus, even though there is a first-century component to some of these interpretations, they are still categorically eschatological, whereas in contrast, the First-Century Fulfillment models proposed by Josephus, later rabbinic commentators, many early church fathers, and modern Christian Preterists after 70 AD, have no eschatological character whatsoever. Many early Jewish interpreters were right about the fact that Daniel 9 is Messianic and eschatological. But they were

wrong about the timing of the eschaton, since they expected the end of this age to occur in the first century.

None of the sources we will analyze should be given canonical status, or elevated to the same level as the Bible. Nevertheless, these sources are important as corroborating evidence because they shed invaluable light on the 70-weeks prophecy.

1 ENOCH AND JUBILEES (C. 150-100 BC)

The book of *1 Enoch* and the book of *Jubilees* are two of the earliest Second Temple Period Jewish works that evidence interaction with Daniel 9. *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees* have gained considerable attention in the last couple decades, primarily because they contain a treasure trove of information that illuminates so many different aspects of Jewish theology during the Second Temple Period. Both of these works also had a major impact on later Jewish commentaries on Daniel 9.

The different portions of *1 Enoch* are difficult to date, but the apocalyptic chapters discussed in this chapter were probably written sometime in the 100s BC (possibly 160s). This portion of the work is concerned with the violation of God's law in Israel and the reestablishment of righteousness within the nation during a future eschatological age.

Known as "the Apocalypse of Weeks," this eschatological section of *1 Enoch* divides history into a period of ten weeks.¹ The earlier weeks cover prior periods of history, whereas the seventh week depicts a time when "a perverse generation" will arise, "and many will be its deeds, and all its deeds will be perverse."²

It is probable that the author of *1 Enoch* believed he was living during this seventh week, and witnessing the final days of Israel's rebellion, which would soon lead to a redemptive age of Jubilee. As Biblical scholar John Bergsma explains, it "is clear that the seventh week describes the post-exilic or Second Temple period, and it is almost

1 It is possible that these 10 weeks in *1 Enoch* were viewed as "great jubilees" of 490 years each.

2 Translation from John Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 239. (Taken from George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 239.

certain that the author of the Apocalypse locates himself in this week.”³ The author of *1 Enoch* believed that sometime during the seventh week, “at its conclusion,” the righteous would “uproot the foundations of violence, and the structure of deceit in it, to execute judgment.”⁴

According to Bergsma, the seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth weeks in *1 Enoch* represent the time during which “righteousness vanquishes evil and the eschatological age arrives.”⁵ Bergsma also continues:

It is no accident that the writer places the turning point of history—and himself—at the conclusion of the seventh week. Seven weeks of years constitute a jubilee cycle (cf. Lev. 25:8), the jubilee itself falling at the conclusion of the period. **Thus, the apocalyptic author [of *1 Enoch*] evokes rich jubilee imagery in describing the rise of the “chosen witnesses of righteousness” at the conclusion of the seventh week.** Liberation from oppression for God’s chosen people will be effected at this time, **ushering in eras of successive increases in righteousness and glory.**⁶

After the seventh through ninth weeks, *1 Enoch* anticipates the eternal new heavens and new earth towards the end of the tenth week. In *1 Enoch* 91.15–17 we read:

After this, in the tenth week, the seventh part, (will be) the eternal judgment; and it will be executed on the watchers of the eternal heaven, and a fixed time of the great judgement will be rendered in the midst of the holy ones. **And the first heaven will pass away in it, and a new heaven will appear, and all the powers of the heavens will shine forever with sevenfold (brightness). After this time**

3 Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 239.

4 Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 239.

5 Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 239.

6 Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 239.

there will be many weeks without number forever, in which they will do piety and righteousness, and from then on sin will never again be mentioned.⁷

In this section from the “Apocalypse of Weeks” in *1 Enoch*, salvation history is structured “based on sevens and tens, with jubilee imagery, similar to Daniel 9:24–27.”⁸ The author foresaw a time of great rebellion that would take place during this period of “weeks,” which would then culminate with the defeat of the powers of darkness, the renewal of the heavens and the earth, and a future age of eternal righteousness.

Even though *1 Enoch* is not a direct verse-by-verse commentary on Daniel 9, it appears that its author was drawing upon and developing the theology of Daniel 9:24–27 in a kind of pastoral-prophetic way to encourage repentance, righteousness, and hope in the coming Messianic Age. The reason this connection between *1 Enoch* and Daniel 9 is so important, is because it proves that many Jews living during the Second Temple Period understood that the “weeks” and Jubilee symbolism in Daniel 9 has eschatological significance. They knew that a succession of weeks incorporated into a Jubilee framework (like we see in both Daniel 9 and *1 Enoch*) was a way of periodizing history into various epochs that will eventually lead to the end of this evil age, and the beginning of the Age to Come. Bergsma calls this the “schematization of history” using Jubilee cycles, and it is likely that Daniel 9 inspired this trend in the later apocalyptic Jewish literature.⁹

In effect, *1 Enoch* contains one of the earliest sermons on Daniel’s 70-weeks prophecy in existence, and most importantly, it attests to how Daniel 9 was being read as a prophecy about the end times during the Second Temple Period, not as a historical and/or Messianic prophecy that

7 Translation from Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 240. *1 Enoch* 91.15–17.

8 Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 240. *1 Enoch* 91.15–17.

9 Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 241.

could be fulfilled before the visible establishment of the kingdom of God.

For what it's worth, *1 Enoch* was also very popular in early Christian circles, and this work is even quoted directly in the book of Jude (Jude 1:14–15). This connection between *1 Enoch* and New Testament theology adds credibility to the idea that the Jewish New Testament authors would also have interpreted Daniel 9 as a Messianic-eschatological prophecy.

THE BOOK OF JUBILEES (150-100 BC)

The book of *Jubilees* was written by a devout Jew around 150-100 BC as a response against Hellenistic influence within Judaism. The author of *Jubilees* was particularly concerned with the proper dating and observance of the Sabbath and other biblical feast days, and utilized a 364-day calendar to ensure acceptable observance of the Mosaic Law. Multiple copies of *Jubilees* were found at Qumran near the Dead Sea, so we know this work was influential within the Essene community as well.

The author of *Jubilees* divided biblical history “from creation to the entrance into Canaan” into “a structure of fifty jubilees.”¹⁰ An excerpt that demonstrates this periodization of redemption history into Jubilee cycles places the following words into the Sinai narrative:

For this reason I [Moses] have arranged the weeks of years and the jubilees—49 jubilees from the time of Adam until today, and one week and two years. It is still 40 years off (for learning the Lord's commandments) until the time when he leads (them) across to the land of Canaan, after they have crossed the Jordan to the west of it. The jubilees will pass by until Israel is pure of every sexual evil, impurity, contamination, sin, and error. Then they will live confidently in the entire land. They will no longer have any satan [adversary] or evil person. The land will be pure from that time until eternity.¹¹

10 Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 234.

11 O.S. Wintermute, “Jubilees,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J.H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 2:52–142. Cf. *Jubilees, Sefaria*, online, chapter 50.

We don't have to agree with everything in *Jubilees*, including the way its author took creative license when retelling the biblical story from Genesis to Deuteronomy. The important point to grasp here is that the author of *Jubilees* understood that a period of multiple Jubilees will lead up to the Messianic Age, and that his understanding of this concept was undoubtedly linked back to his understanding of Daniel 9.

Although the Jubilee is used in the book of *Jubilees* as a way of dividing up Ancient Israel's history, biblical scholar John Bergsma observes that there is a sense in which the "eschatological significance of the jubilee year" has "not been forgotten by the author."¹² This eschatological focus in *Jubilees* is apparent in the above quotation, when the author says the "jubilees will pass by until Israel is pure of every sexual evil, impurity, contamination, sin, and error. [...] The land will be pure from that time until eternity."¹³

There is also a focus on eschatology and the renewal of the earth in the very first chapter of *Jubilees*. Notably, chapter 1 in *Jubilees* doesn't emphasize creation or Israel's history. It begins by looking forward to the kingdom of God and the time when Israel will turn back to the Lord and receive the Holy Spirit. This same chapter also mentions how God will build His sanctuary in Israel and dwell among His people for all eternity. In *Jubilees* 1.33 we read:

And after this [i.e. a time of rebellion] they [Israel] will turn to Me in all uprightness and with all their heart and with all their soul, and I shall circumcise the foreskin of the heart of their seed, and I shall create in them a holy spirit, and I shall cleanse them so that they shall not turn away from Me from that day unto eternity.

And I shall build My sanctuary in their midst, and I shall dwell with them, and I shall be their God and they will by My people in truth and righteousness (*Jubilees* 1.24).

12 Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 235.

13 Wintermute, "Jubilees," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:52–142.

In his book, *The Eschatology of the Book of Jubilees*, biblical scholar Gene L. Davenport has outlined the many other passages in *Jubilees* that contain eschatological elements, in that they anticipate “a continuation of history” in which the entire nation of Israel will live in obedience to the Torah on a renewed earth.¹⁴

In addition to chapter 1, chapter 23 is one of the most potent eschatological passages in the book of *Jubilees*. It foretells a time of great rebellion in Israel that will bring God’s judgment on the Land through the evil Gentile powers (23.14–25). However, this prophecy ends on a note of hope, predicting that in “those days the children will begin to study the laws, and to seek the commandments, and to return to the paths of faithfulness” (23.26). This seeking of God’s Law is then presented as that which will effectually lead to the Messianic Age (or the Millennium as many Christians call it):

And the days will begin to multiply and to increase among the children of men. Till their days grow nigh to almost a thousand years, to a greater number of years than was the number of days before. And there shall be no old man, nor one who is (not) satisfied with his days, for all shall be as children and as youths. **All of their days they shall live and complete in health and in joy. There shall be no adversary, nor any evil destroyer.** Thus, all their days shall be days of blessing and healing. **At that time, the Lord will heal his servants, and they shall rise up and be made whole. And drive out their adversaries, the faithful shall see and be thankful, and rejoice with joy forever, and shall see all their judgments and all their curses on their enemies** (*Jubilees* 23.27–30).¹⁵

Davenport calls chapter 23 the “major eschatological passage in *Jubilees*,” and it is easy to understand why. The emphasis on peace,

14 Gene L. Davenport, *The Eschatology of the Book of Jubilees* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 19.

15 Translation from: Davenport, *The Eschatology of the Book of Jubilees*, 98–99.

long life, righteousness, and security within the Land, are hallmarks of many eschatological passages in the Bible. *Jubilees* draws on these other prophetic texts as a way to encourage obedience to the Torah in the face of Hellenization and rebellion against God's Law (c. 100s BC). The primary thesis of *Jubilees* is that Israel needs to know who God is, know who they are in relation to Him, and know what He requires of them in the sense of Torah observance, so that they can usher in the eschatological age (i.e. the ultimate Jubilee) and live on their own land in peace.

THE BOOK OF JUBILEES AND DANIEL 9

Jubilees never quotes Daniel 9 directly. However, the way in which this work places its Jubilee periods within an eschatological framework provides valuable insights into how the Jubilee periods and weeks in Daniel 9 would have been understood during the Second Temple Period. *Jubilees* shows us that the weeks and Jubilee periods of Daniel 9:24 would have been interpreted by many religious Jews as a way of depicting a historical period that will eventually lead to the end times and the Age to Come.

If we want to understand the extent to which the Jubilee was invested with end-times significance during the Second Temple Period, we only need to see that one of the most popular eschatological works from this period is called, the book of *Jubilees*! If that doesn't get someone thinking about the eschatological nature of Jubilee prophecies such as Daniel 9 and Isaiah 61, then nothing will.

Just like in Daniel 9:24–27, in *Jubilees*, the Jubilee relates to history, but it is also used as a symbol to inspire hope in a “messianic and/or eschatological age.”¹⁶ Moreover, *Jubilees* and Daniel 9:24–27 communicate the same basic message, which further proves that these two texts are related. In both *Jubilees* and Daniel 9:24–27, we are told that Israel will go astray in the last days but be brought back to God after a period of Jubilee cycles, which will ultimately lead to the Messianic

16 Davenport, *The Eschatology of the Book of Jubilees*, 98–99.

Age and the building of God's sanctuary in Israel.

Jubilees and *1 Enoch* give us some of the first extrabiblical hints that the Jubilees and weeks in Daniel 9:24–27 are fundamentally eschatological, and related to the end of this evil age. Each of these texts break up the historical timeline into cycles of Jubilees and/or weeks, while simultaneously using this Jubilee/week periodization of history to point forward to a greater end-times fulfillment of the Jubilee in the future. This tendency among the Jewish exegetes to riff off of Daniel 9 when practicing apocalyptic/eschatological exhortation established a pattern during the Second Temple Period and influenced almost every stream of Judaism from about 200 BC–100 AD, including, as we will see a bit later, the stream of Judaism that produced the Gospels and the New Testament.¹⁷

THE TESTAMENT OF LEVI (C. 100S BC)

Whereas *Jubilees* and *1 Enoch* only implicitly allude to Daniel 9, one of the earliest Jewish texts that directly references Daniel's 70-weeks prophecy is the *Testament of Levi*. The history of the *Testament of Levi* is somewhat complex, because in its final form it is part of a second century "Christian" document known as the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (c. 100s AD). However, many scholars believe the *Testament of Levi* reflects earlier Jewish eschatology from the Second Temple Period. For this reason, a strong case can be made that the *Testament of Levi* was written quite early (at least in part), possibly by a Hellenistic Jew sometime in the 100s BC, which is why I include this extrabiblical work in the discussion of early Jewish views on Daniel 9. Others have connected the *Testament of Levi* to the Essene community at Qumran, and there is definitely some merit to this approach as well.

The *Testament of Levi* specifically mentions the "seventy weeks" of

17 I also refer to this as the "eschatologizing of history," in the sense that history is broken up into significant Jubilee/week epochs, but always with a broader understanding that these epochs are part of a greater eschatological reality.

Daniel 9:24 and looks forward to a righteous priest, which is a definite reference to a Messianic deliverer.¹⁸ The following quote from the *Testament of Levi* captures how many early Jews understood that the 70-weeks prophecy would culminate with the coming of the Messiah and the inauguration of the Messianic Age:

And now I have learnt that **for seventy weeks ye shall go astray**, and profane the priesthood, and pollute the sacrifices. [...] **Then shall the Lord raise up a new priest [i.e. the Messiah]**. And to him all the words of the Lord shall be revealed; **And he shall execute a righteous judgement upon the earth for a multitude of days. And his star shall arise in heaven as of a king**, lighting up the light of knowledge as the sun the day. And he shall be magnified in the world. **He shall shine forth as the sun on the earth, and shall remove all darkness from under heaven, and there shall be peace in all the earth. The heavens shall exult in his days, and the earth shall be glad, and the clouds shall rejoice [...]**.¹⁹

There is no detailed timeline of the 70 weeks given in the *Testament of Levi*. However, in a general sense, its author believed the 70 weeks would cover Israel's final period of rebellion, after which time the Lord would send the Messiah, who will "remove all darkness" from the earth, and establish his kingdom. In other places, the *Testament of Levi* divides the 70 weeks into distinct Jubilee periods (17:1–18:2), a pattern that was no doubt influenced by readings of Daniel 9.

For example, the *Testament of Levi* chapter 17 opens with these words: "And whereas ye have heard concerning the seventy weeks, hear also concerning the priesthood. For in each Jubilee there shall be a priesthood." Chapters 17–18 then outline the progressive degeneration

18 See *The Testament of Levi*, sections 14–19, in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, Volume II, ed. R.H. Charles (Apocryphile Press, 2004), Early Christian Writings, online.

19 From *The Testament of Levi*, sections 16 & 18.

of the priesthood and the prevalence of wickedness in Israel, which will lead to the arrival of the Messianic Priest mentioned above.

It is noteworthy that the *Testament of Levi* interprets Daniel 9 as an eschatological prophecy whose fulfillment will include the tangible establishment of God's kingdom over all the earth. There is a clear progression in this text in which the end of the 70 weeks leads to the Messianic Age, and most importantly, to the arrival of a Messianic Priest who will fulfill the Jubilee and usher in this new age of righteousness.

Some scholars regard the *Testament of Levi* as "one of the earliest interpretations of" Daniel's 70-weeks prophecy "on record." This interpretation was probably worked out and well established by c. 150 BC.²⁰ There are also major similarities between the *Testament of Levi* and various documents discovered at Qumran, which reflect Essene eschatology and the Essenes' understanding of Daniel 9.

THE MELCHIZEDEK DOCUMENT (C. 100S BC)

The Essenes were a monastic Jewish community that lived in the desert near the Dead Sea, awaiting the kingdom of God. This sect held to a theology that was distinctly apocalyptic, so it should not surprise us that the Essenes were intimately familiar with Daniel 9, and seriously concerned with determining when the eschatological age predicted in this text would arrive.

Two documents discovered at Qumran with the other Dead Sea Scrolls, known as the *Melchizedek* document (11Q13) and the *Damascus Document*, attest to the centrality of Daniel 9 within Essene eschatology.

In *Melchizedek* we find these words:

[For Melchizedek, a Messianic figure] will make them return. And liberty shall be proclaimed to them, to free them from [the debt of] all their iniquities. **And this will happen in the first week of the jubilee**

20 Roger T. Beckwith, "Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah's Coming in Essene, Hellenistic, Pharisaic, Zealot, and Early Christian Computation," *Revue de Qumran*, 10 no. 4 Dec. 1981, 525.

that occurs after the nine jubilees. And the Day of Atonement is the end of the tenth jubilee, in which atonement shall be made for all the sons of light and for the men of the lot of Melchizedek [...] (6–8).

It is the time for the year of grace for Melchizedek and of his armies, the nation of the holy ones of God, of the administration of justice, as it is written about him in the songs of David [...]

The interpretation of it concerns Belial and the spirits of his lot who [turned] away from God’s commandments to commit evil. **And Melchizedek will carry out the vengeance of God’s judgments and on that day he will free them from the hand of Belial and from the hand of all the spirits of his lot (9–10, 12–13).**²¹

Notice how the ten Jubilee cycles of weeks mentioned in *Melchizedek* mirror the weeks and Jubilee cycles of Daniel 9. These parallels reveal that *Melchizedek* is a commentary on a number of Jubilee passages and prophecies in the Hebrew Bible, including Leviticus 25, Isaiah 61, and Daniel 9. This text speaks of how national Israel will “abandon” their sins and be saved by the Lord after the “end of the tenth Jubilee,” which is another way of describing the end of the 70th week (because ten Jubilee cycles equals 490 years, which is equivalent to the “seventy sevens” of Daniel 9:24).

Also notice how the Essenes linked the end of the 70th week to the time when the Messianic Melchizedek figure will execute “the vengeance of God’s judgment” against “Belial and the spirits of his lot” who rebelled against the Lord. Belial was essentially a Satan figure within the theology of Second Temple Period Judaism. So here we see that the Essenes connected the end of the 70th week to the Messianic Age and the

21 Translation by Bergsma, in *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation*, 279–280. Note: Some of the quote above is placed in brackets in Bergsma’s translation, because the original manuscript is incomplete. I have removed the brackets to facilitate a better reader experience.

defeat of the powers of darkness, including the Antichrist. As historian Bernard McGinn clarifies, the “Qumran sectarians [...] believed that Belial’s army included both angels and humans, and therefore some of the sons of ‘Belial’ begin to take on characteristics of an apocalyptic human adversary, at times even an ‘antimessiah.’”²²

Melchizedek shows how the Essenes believed the 70 weeks would culminate not with Jerusalem’s destruction, but with the age of Jubilee freedom, when Israel will be delivered from their sins, have their iniquities atoned for, return to their land, and see Belial and his minions destroyed by a Messianic deliverer.

Biblical scholar John Bergsma also notes that the Essenes knew the Messianic deliverance at the end of the 70th week would be carried out by a priestly figure like Melchizedek, “because the high priest had a major role in the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement,” and the Day of Atonement was closely linked to the Jubilee in Leviticus 25. In other words:

If the sacramental acts of the high priest were seen as effecting the purification of the people on the Day of Atonement, they might also be seen as effecting that liberation of the people which was subsequently “proclaimed” in the jubilee. **It seems fitting, then, that such a momentous event as the eschatological jubilee should have a high priest of exalted standing in order to actualize it.**²³

It is no coincidence that the Melchizedek theme is also prominent in New Testament Christology. In the New Testament, Jesus is presented as the eternal King Priest “like Melchizedek” who atones for the sins of God’s people, and who will one day also defeat the powers of darkness and sit on the throne of David (Heb. 7; cf. Ps. 110; Zech. 6). Essentially,

22 Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2000), 30.

23 Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 283.

the New Testament authors present Jesus as the Melchizedek-Jubilee priest and judge whom groups like the Essenes were already looking forward to.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the *Melchizedek* document as an early Jewish commentary on Daniel 9. This text reveals how apocalyptic Jewish groups during the Second Temple Period were interacting with the 70-weeks prophecy, and incorporating this key prophetic text into their eschatology, a trend that was probably based on earlier known patterns from *Jubilees*, *1 Enoch*, and the *Testament of Levi*.

Old Testament scholar James Scott summarizes the relationship between *Melchizedek* and Daniel 9:

11QMelchizedek represents **an eschatological text** that interprets the restoration of Israel [...] within the framework of a sabbatical chronology that understands **the 70 weeks of years in Daniel 9 in terms of jubilee years in Leviticus 25**.²⁴

Bergsma also adds:

In *Melchizedek*, the Jubilee is “**re-interpreted as an eschatological event**—primarily through the use of Isaiah 61—which will bring blessing to the righteous and judgment to the wicked. The executor of this judgment will be none other than Melchizedek, who is understood as having near-divine status. **This Melchizedekian judgment will take place at the end of ten jubilees (490 years)**. Thus, [the *Melchizedek*] document gathers up themes concerning the jubilee and sabbatical year from Lev. 25, Deut. 15, Isa. 61, Dan. 9 (drawing on Jer. 25, 29), and various Psalms, forming a kind of jubiliary exegetical cocktail [...].”²⁵

24 James M. Scott, *On Earth as in Heaven: The Restoration of Sacred Time and Sacred Space in the Book of Jubilees* (Leiden: Brill: 2005), 96.

25 Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 15-16.

THE DAMASCUS DOCUMENT (C. 100S BC)

The same end-times Jubilee from *Melchizedek* is also referenced in the Essene *Damascus Document* (c. 100 BC). In this text we read:

And the exact statement of **the epochs of Israel's blindness** to all these, behold it can be learnt in the Book of Divisions of Time [book of *Jubilees*?] **into their Jubilees and Weeks.**²⁶

Like *Melchizedek*, the *Damascus Document* reflects the Essene belief that Israel's time of rebellion would come to an end after the 70 weeks, and that at that time, the Messianic Age, or, the Age of Jubilee, would begin. This statement in the *Damascus Document* could be a reference to the book of *Jubilees*, though, like the book of *Jubilees*, it is also undoubtedly linked back to Daniel 9, which again shows how central the Daniel 9 "Jubilee and Weeks" theme was in Essene eschatology.

JESUS AND THE JUBILEE

The early Jewish texts that evidence interaction with the Jubilee and weeks motif from Daniel 9 (*1 Enoch*, *Jubilees*, the *Testament of Levi*, *Melchizedek*, and the *Damascus Document*) can also help us put Jesus into his historical and theological context during the Second Temple Period. Jesus was born into a world in which the expectation of a coming end-times Jubilee permeated many segments of Jewish society.

Once we understand the centrality of the Jubilee within Jewish eschatology, it should not surprise us that Jesus (1) also conceptualized his own personal ministry within a Jubilee framework, and (2) affirmed the end-times implications of the Jubilee, as well as the eschatological significance of Daniel 9 (the Jubilee prophecy *par excellence* in the Hebrew Bible).

In chapter 17 we will go in-depth into Jesus' teaching on Daniel

26 *Damascus Document* quote from: Roger T. Beckwith, *Calendar, Chronology, and Worship: Studies in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005), 70.

9. But for now, I only want to cover how Jesus presented himself as the mediator of the Messianic-eschatological Jubilee that many of his contemporaries in the first century were already looking forward to.

LUKE 4 AS A JUBILEE TEXT

After finishing his 40-day fast in the desert, and before he engaged in any public healing ministry whatsoever, Luke tells us that Jesus went into a synagogue in Nazareth, stood up in the midst of the assembly, and began to read Isaiah 61:

And Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and as was his custom, he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. And he opened the book and found the place where it was written, "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD."

And he closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk. 4:16–21).

With a touch of boldness, Jesus announced his public ministry by reading the Messianic Jubilee prophecy in Isaiah 61, which his audience would have been intimately familiar with. From that point on, Jesus then began to fulfill the words of this prophecy by healing the sick, casting out demons, raising the dead, and bringing redemption to the world, just as he said he would when he read the Isaiah-61 scroll in the synagogue. There has even been some speculation that Jesus began his public ministry in a Jubilee year, and this is certainly possible.

But how should we understand this connection Jesus made between his ministry in the first century and the Jubilee, as demonstrated by his reading of Isaiah 61?

Many Christians who recognize the Jubilee theme in Luke 4 conclude that since Jesus said he was fulfilling a Jubilee prophecy (Isaiah 61) in the first century, this must mean that all of the Jubilee prophecies in the Bible, including not only Isaiah 61 but also the 70-weeks prophecy in Daniel 9, were fulfilled through Jesus' first-century ministry. It is common to hear people in the First-Century Messianic camp (covered in chapter 5), say that the Jubilee has already arrived in Jesus. They argue that the Jubilee reached its fulfillment through the teaching and healing ministry of the Messiah, as well as through his death, burial, and resurrection, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Many of them will point to Luke 4 to defend their position on this issue.

When we understand the extent to which the Jubilee theme permeated Jewish eschatology in the first century however, the notion that Jesus already completely fulfilled the Jubilee becomes untenable. In Luke 4, Jesus was not reconfiguring Jewish eschatological hopes, and therefore, divesting the Jubilee of its future end-times significance. No first-century Jewish apocalyptic teacher (and Jesus definitely fits into that category) would have accepted that the Jubilee in Isaiah 61 and Daniel 9 could somehow be fulfilled before the establishment of righteousness in Israel, the tangible defeat of the powers of darkness (including the Antichrist), and the inauguration of a new age of peace and healing on the earth.

We have already seen in *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees*, the *Testament of Levi*, *Melchizedek*, and the *Damascus Document* that the hope of the Jubilee was inseparable from the hope of the Messianic Age and the New Heavens and the New Earth in Second Temple Period Judaism. There is no evidence in any of the Jewish literature from Jesus' time, or even in the Hebrew prophets, that the Jubilee was viewed as something less than an eschatological symbol for the fully established kingdom of God.

Therefore, when we read in Luke 4 that Jesus said the Isaiah-61

Jubilee was “fulfilled” through his ministry, we need to interpret his words and actions here within a first-century Jewish context, and, we need to be careful to avoid reading our own Christian presuppositions back into the Gospels. This caution is especially relevant to those situated within the First-Century Fulfillment camp, who believe everything in Daniel 9, including the Jubilee aspects of this prophecy, was fulfilled 2,000 years ago.

In Luke 4, when Jesus said Isaiah 61, and by extension the Jubilee, were fulfilled through his ministry, in a beautiful and profound way he was addressing first-century Jewish eschatological hopes and self-identifying as the Jubilee Priest, Healer, and Judge anticipated in the Hebrew Bible, and in the Jewish literature (Isa. 61; Dan. 9; *Test. of Levi*; *Melchizedek*). Jewish people in the first century would have understood that Jesus’ self-identification as the Jubilee Redeemer also meant that he was claiming to be the King Priest who will one day also usher in the Age of Jubilee, which many of his contemporaries were already looking forward to. By saying that he fulfilled Isaiah 61, Jesus placed himself within the apocalyptic-eschatological stream of Second Temple Period Judaism and affirmed the biblical hope of his people for restoration and liberation in a future Age of Jubilee. This was his way of speaking right into the zeitgeist of his time and proclaiming, “I’m the one you’ve been waiting for.”

No wonder his statement raised some eyebrows!

Given the way Jesus tapped into the hopes of his people for a Messianic Jubilee, we can conclude that his first-century ministry represented a foretaste, the first fruits if you will, of what the Age of Jubilee will look like in the future, when it reaches its final eschatological fulfillment. In other words, when Jesus said the Jubilee was being “fulfilled” in his time, he didn’t mean completely fulfilled to the point that it has no end-times significance. He only meant that God’s Jubilee purposes had arrived in him, and would now become tangible from the start of his ministry, to the end of the age, and beyond.

It should also be noted that the Greek word “fulfilled” in Luke 4

can simply mean to “fill up” or “fill full.” So again, when Jesus said the Jubilee was being “fulfilled” through his ministry this only meant that the Jubilee would now reach its deepest level of significance through him, from that point forward. There is no requirement here of a strictly past-tense “fulfillment” of Isaiah 61 or any other Jubilee prophecies.

NO MENTION OF THE DAYS OF VENGEANCE IN LUKE 4

This idea that Jesus understood and accepted the end-times implications of the Jubilee, and by extension, the end-times implications of both Isaiah 61 and Daniel 9, becomes even more apparent when we realize that Jesus actually left out a certain portion of Isaiah 61:2 from his synagogue reading. Isaiah 61:2 refers to the Jubilee as a “day of vengeance of our God,” but Jesus didn’t reference this part of the prophecy in Luke 4.

Why?

Because again, it was understood that the Jubilee is also connected to God’s vengeance and judgment, since God will have to judge the Antichrist and the powers of evil before the Jubilee can truly begin. As mentioned, this Jubilee-judgment theme is prevalent not only in Isaiah 61, but also in the *Testament of Levi* and the Essene *Melchizedek* document. We will see the same theme in Daniel 9:26–27 as well.

However, Jesus didn’t want to communicate that he was going to fulfill these judgment aspects of the Jubilee in the first century. So he left this part of the prophecy about “vengeance” out of his reading, which confirms that he understood that there will be other eschatological components of the Jubilee that will only reach their fulfillment at the time of his Second Coming.

At the same time, by claiming to be the agent and ambassador of this end-times Jubilee, Jesus was also making a bold statement about his authority to execute judgment on God’s behalf. He was claiming to be the one who will not only bring healing, but also God’s vengeance against the powers of evil in the future.

THE JUBILEE KING PRIEST IN PSALM 110

Just like Isaiah 61, Psalm 110:4–6 also speaks of how God’s anointed Jubilee King Priest will judge the powers of evil in the future:

The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” The LORD is at your right hand; He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath. He will judge the nations, He will fill them with corpses, He will shatter the chief men over a broad country.

There is no direct reference to the Jubilee in Psalm 110. However, as the Essenes understood, the fact that God’s wrath and judgment will be meted out by a Messianic King Priest from “the order of Melchizedek” has implications related to the future fulfillment of the Jubilee. This is because, as we discovered earlier, the Jubilee was originally overseen by the high priest on the Day of Atonement according to Leviticus 25, and thus, whoever was to fulfill the Jubilee in the future would also have to be of high-priestly standing. Therefore, because the Messianic Melchizedek figure is referenced in Psalm 110, and because he carries out judgment events here that parallel those described in Jubilee prophecies such as Isaiah 61, we can conclude that there is a Jubilee undercurrent in Psalm 110, even if the Jubilee is not referenced as directly here as it is in Isaiah 61 and Daniel 9:24.

In Psalm 110, just like in Isaiah 61, the fulfillment of the Jubilee implies much more than simply the priest making atonement for sins, and bringing God’s people into a deeper level of spiritual freedom. The fulfillment of the Jubilee in Psalm 110 also implies the outpouring of God’s wrath through the exploits of the warrior King Priest who stands in the tradition of Melchizedek. This outpouring of wrath is specifically associated with the shattering of kings and judgment on the nations in Psalm 110, a key prerequisite component of the Jubilee that did not happen in the first century.

When interpreted in light of the Jubilee, Psalm 110 provides even

more evidence that Jesus would have understood that the Jubilee points forward to end-time events. Because he knew that he is the Jubilee King Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,” Jesus also knew that the Jubilee cannot be fulfilled until he judges the political powers of evil in the future, at the dawn of the Messianic Age.²⁷ And most importantly in terms of the topic of this book, Jesus’ end-times understanding of the Jubilee would also have had a profound effect on his interpretation of the key Jubilee prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, Daniel 9:24–27.

NO MENTION OF THE PHYSICAL RESTORATION OF THE LAND IN LUKE 4

In Luke 4, Jesus also didn’t reference the portions of Isaiah 61 that refer to the physical restoration of the Land of Israel, because he knew these aspects of the Jubilee (just like the prerequisite judgment aspects) also await an end-times fulfillment (Isa. 61:4–6; Gen. 49; Deut. 33; Ezek. 47–48). As a matter of fact, it is illogical to suggest that a first-century Jew like Jesus, steeped in the study of the Torah, including the Jubilee legislation of Leviticus 25, would have thought the Jubilee could be fulfilled before the return-to-land aspects of the Jubilee and Isaiah 61 were fully realized. In part, one of the things Jesus was doing in Luke 4 was claiming to be the very one who will someday facilitate the Jubilee restoration of Israel in the future, when he finally settles the twelve tribes peacefully on their own land (Deut. 33; Ezek. 47–48).

This eschatological reading of Jesus’ approach to the Jubilee in Luke 4 does not come naturally to many Christians, because the Church has mostly divorced Jesus from his Jewish roots and first-century Jewish

27 As stated in chapter 2, I do not believe this connection between the Jubilee and the judgment of evil implies that the Antichrist must be judged on the Day of Atonement in the future. It seems more likely to me that this judgment aspect of the Jubilee relates to a prerequisite series of events that will then lead into the full realization of the Jubilee some time later. In other words, after evil has been judged and the Land of Israel has been cleansed (prerequisite Jubilee events), the Messiah will then be able to completely fulfill the Jubilee when he settles the twelve tribes on their ancestral land (e.g. Deut. 33; Ezek. 47–48; Isa. 61). This process of settling the Jewish tribes on their land could very well be initiated on the first Day of Atonement in the Messianic Age.

context. Christian commentators who claim a total fulfillment of Isaiah 61 in the first century are not taking the actual words of the biblical text seriously enough, especially the numerous eschatological elements of this text that were overtly left out of Luke 4 (i.e. the judgment and land-restoration elements). If we put Jesus back into the world of Second Temple Period Judaism, it becomes clear that his approach to Jubilee prophecies such as Isaiah 61, Psalm 110, and Daniel 9:24–27 would not have been Antiochene or First-Century Fulfillment. His view on the Jubilee was Messianic-Eschatological.

No Jews living during the Second Temple Period believed in a purely spiritual Jubilee that could reach its fulfillment while Israel was still largely in rebellion against God, suffering under the oppressive occupation of a foreign Gentile power such as the Romans, and living on only a very small portion of their ancestral land. They knew full well that the Jubilee spoken of in Isaiah 61 would only reach its fulfillment when every aspect of the Jubilee becomes a tangible reality in the Messianic Age.

THE NOW BUT NOT YET JUBILEE

Of course, it is also important to emphasize here that the partial fulfillment of the Jubilee through Jesus' first-century ministry does have implications for his disciples today. The fact that the Jubilee has already begun to break into this current evil age through the ministry of Jesus should offer Christians and Messianic Jews great encouragement. The way in which Jesus connected his ministry to the Jubilee means that we can seek and experience the realities of God's rule and reign, His justice, His power, His healing, His deliverance, and His redemption, right this moment, through the work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. We can expect that God will cause the Jubilee to invade our lives now (at least in part), through physical healings, deliverance from oppression, etc., even before the end of this evil age. This is great news, because it shows us that God always stands by to act as our Jubilee Deliverer, in order to vindicate the reality of who Jesus is.

At the same time, the “now” aspects of the Jubilee and the Kingdom do not negate that the Jubilee, like the kingdom of God, is still best explained with a “now but not yet” model. Just as the kingdom of God is depicted as a still-future reality in Scripture, the Jubilee is a still-future reality as well, and Jesus would have understood this.

THE JEWISH ZEALOTS IN THE FIRST CENTURY (C. 66-70 AD)

The idea that Daniel 9 is a prophecy that outlines eschatological events was also prevalent among Jewish revolutionary groups in the first century, including those who are often described as the “Zealots.” In his book, *Wars*, the Jewish historian Josephus wrote that one of the prophecies that influenced the Zealots the most predicted that “at that time someone from their country should become ruler of the world.”²⁸

Unfortunately, Josephus does not tell us what prophecy he is referring to here. However, in his book *Antiquities*, Josephus does indicate that in contrast to Israel’s other prophets, it was specifically the prophet Daniel who also predicted when certain prophetic events would come to pass. In *Antiquities* Josephus wrote:

[Daniel] was not only accustomed to prophesy future things, as did the other prophets, **but he also fixed the time at which these would come to pass.**²⁹

Though we have to hold this conclusion somewhat tentatively, it is likely that these statements from Josephus reveal that the Zealots believed the Messianic Age would begin sometime in the late-first century AD, and that their belief in this regard was rooted in Daniel 9. As scholar Roger Beckwith points out, “the Zealot revolt was dominated

28 Josephus, *War* VI, v, 4, 312; quote from Roger Beckwith, “Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah’s Coming...”, 532.

29 Josephus, *Antiquities* X, xi, 7, 267; quote from Roger Beckwith, “Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah’s Coming...”, 532.

by Messianic expectation,” and it is reasonable to suggest that a key component of Zealot eschatology was the prophetic text in Daniel 9. It appears that to at least some degree, the Zealots felt emboldened in their revolution against Rome because they believed from the prophecies of Daniel that the end of this age, and the beginning of the Messianic Age, were imminent in their time.

THE PHARISEES & THE TALMUD (C. 25-500 AD)

The Messianic End-Times interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27 can also be found in the *Babylonian Talmud*, which includes a collection of rabbinic beliefs that were most prevalent among the Jewish Pharisees (c. 100s-500 AD). The Talmud undoubtedly reflects earlier Jewish traditions as well. In the *Babylonian Talmud*, *Sanhedrin* 97a, we read:

With regard to the seven-year (Sabbatical cycle) during which Messiah, Son of David comes [...]. **During the year after the conclusion of the Sabbatical Year, the son of David will come.**³⁰

In another later portion of this text, in *Sanhedrin* 97b, we also read, “And during the final Jubilee, the son of David [i.e. Messiah] will come.”³¹

Like a lot of rabbinic literature, *Sanhedrin* 97a is full of theological tangents and speculative commentary. Be that as it may, the most important thing to draw from this text is that even the rabbis linked the coming of the Messiah to a “seven-year” Sabbatical cycle, and the “final Jubilee.” The rabbis’ belief that the coming Messianic Kingdom would be established during a future Jubilee, after a cycle of weeks, was definitely informed by readings of Daniel 9. Roger Beckwith notes, since *Sanhedrin* 97a “refers to a future year-week, it is no doubt the 69th or 70th of Daniel’s 70 weeks” that the Jewish sages have in mind in this text.³²

30 *Babylonian Talmud*, *Sanhedrin* 97a, Sefaria, online.

31 *Babylonian Talmud*, *Sanhedrin* 97a, Sefaria, online.

32 Beckwith, “Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah’s Coming...”, 531.

Interestingly, just like the Essenes at Qumran, and other Jewish people during the Second Temple Period, the Pharisees who wrote the Talmud also believed that the final period of weeks before the coming of the Messiah and the Messianic Age would be marked by great rebellion and tribulation. A general theme in the Jewish literature is that the 70 weeks will encompass Israel's final period of apostasy, which will then give way to new hope for Israel and the nations when the Messiah sets up his kingdom.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE 70-WEEKS PROPHECY IN EARLY JUDAISM

It is not hard to understand why modern Jews and Christians have sought to distance themselves from the Messianic End-Times interpretation of Daniel 9. With that said, it does need to be stated that the idea put forth by many interpreters, who propose that Daniel 9:24–27 is not about the coming of the Messiah, the end times, and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom, is out of touch with the way the large majority of Jewish people in the ancient world interpreted this prophecy.

Most early Jewish commentators who studied Daniel 9, from those who produced *Jubilees*, *1 Enoch*, and the *Testament of Levi*, to the Essenes at Qumran (*Melchizedek* and *Damascus Document*), to the Zealot revolutionaries, to the rabbinic Pharisees (*Babylonian Talmud*), understood that the 70-weeks prophecy is in some way both Messianic and eschatological. They understood that it is concerned with the end of this evil age, and the inauguration of a new age of Jubilee freedom that will someday be manifest *in Israel*.

These early Jewish traditions do not necessarily prove anything in and of themselves. We still need to rely more on biblical study than early Jewish traditions to prove the Messianic-Eschatological view. Nevertheless, the fact that most early Jewish commentators adhered to a Messianic End-Times interpretation of Daniel 9 has to count for something, and this important historical reality should definitively not be ignored, as it most commonly is in the Antiochene and First-Century fulfillment camps.

No early Jewish commentators got all of the details right when interpreting Daniel 9, and some of them were more concerned with using the Jubilees and weeks from Daniel 9 for their own pastoral purposes, and their own unique “schematization of history.” Also, none of them accounted for the unforeseen possibility of a first and second coming of the Messiah, which admittedly, disrupted a lot of Messianic expectation that was based on Daniel 9.

Yet, these early Jewish authors were on the right track in their belief that the Jubilee cycles of weeks in Daniel 9:24–27 relate to eschatological events that will lead to the end of Israel’s rebellion, the victory of the Messiah over the forces of evil, and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. As a matter of fact, it was precisely because of the prevalence of this Messianic End-Times interpretation of Daniel 9 in early Judaism that Messianic and apocalyptic fervor was so strong in Israel in the first century.

To once again quote Roger Beckwith:

There is strong evidence to show that the Essenes, the Pharisees, and the Zealots all thought that they could date, at least approximately, the time when the Son of David would come, and that in each case **their calculations were based upon Daniel’s prophecy of the 70 weeks (Dan. 9:24–27), understood as 70 weeks of years.** [...] The Messianic [and eschatological] interpretation of the prophecy of the 70 weeks, whether Jewish or Christian, **proceeds from the fact that the summary in verse 24 shows it to be a prophecy of hope. Though it foretells great calamities, its overall message is gloriously hopeful.**³³

It was only much later in history, especially after Jewish hopes for Messianic deliverance were shattered in the wake of 70 AD, and after replacement theology (supersessionism) gained a firm foothold in

33 Beckwith, “Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah’s Coming...”, 521.

Christianity, that more Jewish and Christian commentators began to reject the Messianic End-Times interpretation of the 70-weeks prophecy. This is why Josephus (writing at the end of the first century), many early church fathers (writing after 100 AD), and many Jewish commentators in the Middle Ages, gravitated towards a first-century fulfillment of Daniel 9. It's not that the First-Century Fulfillment view(s) work, and it's not that most Jewish people in the ancient world were expecting Daniel 9:24–27 to reach its fulfillment when Jerusalem was destroyed. It was simply a case of these later Jewish and Christian commentators developing faulty presuppositions in light of the historical events that took place in 70 AD. Sadly, history and theological bias took precedence over the biblical text itself, which is a problem that is still with us today (in the Antiochene and First-Century Fulfillment camps).

The burden of proof rests on the shoulders of anyone who denies that the Jubilees and weeks in Daniel 9 are Messianic-eschatological, primarily because almost everywhere Jubilees and weeks are mentioned in the early Jewish literature, they have end-times significance. Is it really so likely that the early Jewish commentators, who were much closer to the book of Daniel than we are, historically, culturally, and linguistically, were completely wrong when they interpreted the Jubilees and weeks of Daniel 9 in an eschatological way?

I highly doubt it, and personally, I am always surprised to see how many Christian and Jewish interpreters today ignore the way the Jewish literature developed the Jubilee theme from Daniel 9, thereby making it one of the central eschatological motifs of the Second Temple Period. These early Jewish interpreters knew the Jubilee theme of Daniel 9 is meant to inspire hope in the Messianic Age, which rules out the possibility that this prophecy could have been fulfilled in the 160s AD, or in 70 AD, when the Romans murdered a million Jews, subjected a hundred thousand more to a life of slavery, and burned Jerusalem to the ground. That is simply not what the Jubilee is about!

THE MESSIANIC END-TIMES VIEW AFTER THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE

After the ministry of Jesus, the destruction of the Temple, and the writing of the New Testament, a number of Christian commentators began to further develop the early Jewish Messianic-Eschatological interpretation of Daniel 9. This later Christian formulation of the Messianic End-Times view has generally argued that Daniel 9:24–27 covers five major events:

1. The rebuilding of Jerusalem during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.
2. The coming of the Messiah and his death in the first century.
3. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Roman army in 70 AD.
4. The reign of the Antichrist during a final seven-year period (i.e. the 70th week), before the return of Jesus.
5. The ultimate restoration of Jerusalem at the start of the Messianic Age.

Modern proponents of the Messianic End-Times view also believe there is a long and undefined gap of time between the first 69 weeks (483 years) in Daniel's prophecy (vv. 24-25) and the final week (v. 27). It is generally understood that this time gap includes the events of verse 26, which are said to have taken place, "after the 62 weeks," but before the 70th week of verse 27.

DEALING WITH THE GAP

Commentators frequently criticize the idea that there could be a gap between verses 25 and 27 in Daniel 9, and this is one of the primary reasons why a lot of people gravitate towards either the Antiochene or First-Century Fulfillment interpretations. I have frequently heard it said

that the 70 weeks must unfold in a purely continuous and sequential way, with no gaps in between.

What is often ignored by those who criticize the way the Messianic End-Times model places a gap after the 69th week, is that every single formulation of the Daniel-9 timeline requires either a gap somewhere in the timeline, weeks that were longer or shorter than seven years, or additional periods of time added to the end of the timeline. In other words, no timeline, proposed by anyone, has 490 years that unfold in a purely continuous way.

For example, if we go back and look at the Antiochene timeline, we will find that it requires a two-year gap between the death of Onias III (171 BC) and the start of their alleged 70th week (169 BC). It also requires that we conveniently trim off 68 years from our timeline, to the effect that Daniel 9 becomes the prophecy of the 60.25 weeks, rather than the prophecy of the 70 weeks (see timeline in chapter 4).

We have already discussed at length why in terms of producing a verifiable timeline, the First-Century Messianic Fulfillment model fares no better. This model is predicated on the idea that there is a “probationary period,” a fancy name for an additional gap of time, after the 70th week (from 34–70 AD) (see timeline in chapter 5). Proponents of this view are forced to put a gap between the end of their 70th week in 34 AD, and their abomination of desolation in 70 AD, because this is the only way they can get everything to fit on their timeline.

I am always surprised when those in the Antiochene and First-Century Messianic Fulfillment camps are critical of the idea that there could be a gap of time between the 69th and 70th week, as the Messianic End-Times model does require, when they too are forced to add a gap in their own way to defend their respective timelines. What everyone needs to accept and get over, is that whether one chooses an Antiochene Fulfillment model, a First-Century Messianic Fulfillment model, or a Messianic End-Times model, there is no way to develop a 70-weeks timeline that incorporates every event outlined in the prophecy into an unbroken chain of 490 sequential years. This doesn’t mean the years

aren't literal, because they definitely are. It just means they don't unfold 100% without interruption.

Once we recognize that all major views of the 70-weeks prophecy require a gap of time somewhere (or a fudging of the numbers in some way), we can begin asking the right questions of the text.

The question at hand is not whether there is or isn't a gap or an additional period of time in this prophecy. Rather, the question at hand is, based on the text itself where should the additional years be placed? Should we place the additional period of time after the 69th week (as the Messianic End-Times view argues), or should we place the additional period of time after the 70th week (as the First-Century Messianic view argues), or, could it be somewhere else (as in the Antiochene model)?

As we will see in the rest of this book, the only real possibility is that there is a long gap of time after the 69th week, before the 70th week. If we are looking at the text itself, this is the only place we can put the gap of additional years, and as it turns out, the Christians who formulated the early Messianic End-Times view were right on this point.

OTHER GAPS OF TIME IN SCRIPTURE

There are many other examples of long gaps of time between the initial and final Messianic fulfillments of various prophecies in the Bible. For example, Isaiah 11 opens with a statement about the Messiah being born, then transitions to speak of the renewal of the entire earth and other end-time events. Some of these events spoken of in Isaiah 11 happened in the first century, but many of the other events spoken of still await a future fulfillment. This means there is a long gap of time that separates the initial and final Messianic fulfillment of this prophecy.

The same pattern is also present in Zechariah 9. Zechariah 9 mentions that Israel will see their Messiah humble, and riding on a donkey. We know this happened in the first century when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, a few days before Passover. Yet, the same prophecy in Zechariah 9 also depicts the Messiah waging war against the nations and destroying the powers of darkness. This didn't happen

in the first century, so again, there is a long gap of time between many of the events referred to in this text.

Other similar examples could be cited from Scripture, but these two should suffice. Due to the reality of a first and second coming of the Messiah, long gaps of time within one single prophecy are common. Daniel 9 follows this same pattern, as it describes events related to both the first coming of the Messiah (which we will discuss in subsequent chapters), but also later end-time events that will immediately precede and lead to his second coming.

It would be great if we could come up with a seamlessly elegant Daniel-9 timeline, one that incorporates all of the events of this prophecy into a continuous 490-year period that unfolds without interruption, with no historical contradictions, no gaps, and no problems. But this is not possible, and it is not what God intended. We may not like the gap but God is perfectly ok with it, and many people need to relax on this point and stop assuming they have put the nail in the coffin of the Messianic End-Times view just by arguing that it is wrong because it has a gap of time. There has to be a gap somewhere in the text, and this is something that all interpretive timelines require, though many individual interpreters still remain in denial on this point, failing to consciously recognize this reality.

THE GAP ADDS SOME GOD-ORDAINED MYSTERY

We should also be open to the possibility that there could be a very practical reason for this gap of time in Daniel 9:24–27, between the 69th and 70th weeks. Since Daniel 9:24–27 is an end-times prophecy, adding the gap of time was the only way God was able to stop His people from knowing exactly when the Messianic Kingdom will be established. Unlike many other Messianic-eschatological prophecies, Daniel 9 deals with moderately precise dates of historical, Messianic, and end-time events. This means that if there was no gap of time in verses 24–27, the Lord's people would have been able to precisely calculate 490 years from the starting date of the 70 weeks to the end of the world,

as many first-century Jews were attempting to do!

But with that gap of time God made things a little more complicated and threw us a curve ball. It's almost as if this was His way of saying, "you can look forward to and prepare for the last days, but you can't know exactly when everything will happen." The gap separates the 70th week from the other 69 weeks and makes it into an independent and final seven-year period that could begin at any number of points in time, rather than at only one point in time (immediately after the 69th week). In this way, the gap of time inspires end-times expectancy and watchfulness, and mitigates against end-times certainty and date setting, which is exactly what I think God was going for.

THE MESSIANIC-END TIMES VIEW IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Recently someone made a comment on one of my YouTube videos stating that the Messianic End-Times interpretation of Daniel 9 had no support in the early Church, and that it was invented by evangelical Dispensationalists in the 1800s. Some also argue that the futurist-eschatological interpretation of Daniel 9 was the product of a Jesuit and Roman Catholic attempt to undermine the Protestant Reformation.³⁴

Neither of these claims are true.

The Messianic End-Times view was not only widely held in early Judaism. It was also very popular within the early Christian movement. By no means was this view accepted by everyone in the early Church. However, many early Christians and Messianic Jews did believe Daniel 9:24–27 would only be fulfilled at the end of this age.

IRENAEUS OF LYON (C. 180 AD)

The earliest known proponent of the Messianic End-Times view within Christianity was the highly influential church father Irenaeus of Lyon.

34 Robert Caringola makes this argument in his book, *Seventy Weeks: The Historical Alternative*, 25–30. It is true that some Roman Catholic theologians in the 1500s accepted a futurist interpretation of Daniel 9. However, it is not true that these Roman Catholic theologians were the first to believe and teach that Daniel 9 is eschatological.

In his groundbreaking work, *Against Heresies* (c. 180 AD), Irenaeus argued that the last half of Daniel's 70th week refers to events that will take place during the tyrannical reign of the Antichrist. Irenaeus believed the "Prince to Come" of verse 26 is the Antichrist, whose actions are further described in verse 27, which will also be the view I defend in later chapters. In order to get at this position, Irenaeus placed a gap of time after the 69th week, but before the 70th week.

Irenaeus wrote:

"And then he [Daniel] points out the time that his [Antichrist's] tyranny shall last, during which the saints shall be put to flight, they who offer pure sacrifice to God: 'And in the midst of the week,' he says, 'the sacrifice and the libation shall be taken away, and the abomination of desolation [shall be brought] into the temple; **even unto the consummation of the time shall the desolation be complete (Daniel 9:27)**. Now three years and six months constitute the half week.'"³⁵

It is not clear whether Irenaeus believed the Antichrist would desolate a literal temple in Jerusalem during the end times, or whether he understood the desolation of the temple in Daniel 9:27 as a spiritual metaphor for the Antichrist's persecution of the Church. In any case, it is still significant that Irenaeus connected Daniel 9:24–27 to end-time events and the last 3.5 years of the Antichrist's reign.

Irenaeus of Lyon was the most important church father of the second century, who almost single handedly fought off the threat of Gnosticism within the early Church. Given the influence of Irenaeus as a theologian, his Messianic End-Times interpretation of Daniel 9 would have been extremely popular within the early Christian community.

35 St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885). Revised and Edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight (Book 5 ch. 25:4).

HIPPOLYTUS OF ROME (C. 200 AD)

After Irenaeus, Hippolytus of Rome (c. 202-230) also articulated a Messianic End-Times interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27. Hippolytus wrote the earliest known Christian commentary on the book of Daniel. In this commentary, Hippolytus divided Daniel’s 70 Weeks into three time periods.

Old Testament scholar J. Paul Tanner writes that for Hippolytus, the “first seven weeks were the forty-nine years before Joshua, the high priest. This was followed by 62 weeks (434 years) from Joshua/Zerubbabel/Ezra until Jesus Christ.”³⁶ And finally, Hippolytus believed the 62 weeks would then be followed by a gap of time before the final week and the reign of the Antichrist.

Notably, Hippolytus did not interpret verse 27 as a reference to the Antichrist desolating a literal temple in Jerusalem. He spiritualized this verse and said it only means the Antichrist will forbid Christian worship and persecute true believers.

THE TESTAMENT OF OUR LORD (C. 300S-400S AD)

Another important early Christian document that interprets Daniel 9:24–27 in an eschatological way is the *Testament of Our Lord*, originally written in Greek, probably in the 4th or 5th century AD (300s-400s AD), but then translated and discovered in Syriac. Scholars debate which community produced the *Testament of Our Lord*, but it appears to represent early Christian views in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Testament of Our Lord contains quite a bit of teaching on eschatology (ch. 3–14). In chapter 10, this work directly references the “abomination of desolation” portion of Daniel 9:27:

Judea shall clothe herself with lamentation, and shall be made ready for the day of destruction, because of her uncleanness. **Then shall she gather together the abomination of desolation.** The East shall

36 Tanner, “Is Daniel’s Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 1,” 188-189.

be opened by him, also the ways shall be opened by him. **Sword and flame [are] in his hands: he burneth with anger and fiery indignation [...] for his way is in error and his power is to blaspheme,** and his hand for deception, his right hand in misery, and his left hand in darkness.³⁷

In later chapters we will discuss the “abomination of desolation” in more detail. For now, I only want to point out that the Christians who produced the *Testament of Our Lord*, and used this work as a discipleship manual within their churches, depict Daniel’s “abomination of desolation” as a future Antichrist figure who will destroy with “sword and flame,” blaspheme God, deceive the faithful, and persecute believers. It is also noteworthy that the *Testament of Our Lord* connects the “abomination of desolation” to future events in “Judea,” which indicates that its author believed the nation of Israel would be involved in the fulfillment of end-times prophecy.

The *Testament of Our Lord* is an important historical document because it attests to a futurist-eschatological reading of Daniel 9 not only in the western churches overseen by Irenaeus and Hippolytus, but also in the eastern churches, well into the 400s AD. From this we can deduce that the First-Century Fulfillment interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27, espoused by many early church fathers, such as, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine, did not represent the only way Daniel 9 was being interpreted within the early Church. There was a diversity of views, and many early Christians understood that the fulfillment of Daniel 9 would involve the defeat of the powers of darkness, and the victorious reign of the Messiah.

37 *The Testament of Our Lord: Translated into English from the Syriac with Introduction and Notes*, trans. James Cooper & Arthur John Maclean (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902), ch. 10; 57.

THE MESSIANIC END-TIMES VIEW IN MODERN TIMES

More recently, scholars and prophecy teachers who believe in the ongoing prophetic significance of Israel have also tended to favor the Messianic End-Times interpretation of Daniel's 70-weeks prophecy. This trend to view Daniel 9:24–27 as a prophecy related to both the first coming of the Messiah, and the last seven years of the end times, became popular among evangelicals in the 1800s. Since then, some of the most influential proponents of this view have included, Sir Robert Anderson (*The Coming Prince*), Gleason Archer Jr. (*Expositors Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*), John Walvoord (*The John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries: Daniel*), Walter Kaiser (*The Messiah in the Old Testament*), Stephen Miller (*New American Commentary: Daniel*), Leon Wood (*A Commentary on Daniel*), Chuck Missler (*Daniel's 70 Weeks*), Joel Richardson (*Mideast Beast*), and others.

Throughout our time together we will discuss many of the specific components that have characterized evangelical interpretations of the 70-weeks prophecy over the years, as well as some of the proposed evangelical timelines. What I hope to demonstrate is that even though these earlier evangelical presentations of the Messianic End-Times view have been helpful in many ways, they have also been misleading in others.

Consequently, if we want to uncover what the text of Daniel 9:24–27 teaches, we need a more refined, nuanced, and updated version of the Messianic End-Times view. We need to strengthen the foundations of the Messianic End-Times view and correct some of its historical weaknesses and blind spots. This I believe will help us better appreciate how much vital information Daniel 9:24–27 conveys as both a Messianic prophecy, and as a harbinger of events that will take place in the last days.

NAVIGATING THE TERRAIN

To briefly summarize what we have covered in the last three chapters, over the last 2,200 years nearly every major interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27 has fallen into one of three main categories. Some have argued

this prophecy was fulfilled during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes in the 160s BC, some have said this prophecy was fulfilled in the first century, and others believe this prophecy still has a future end-times fulfillment that has not yet come to pass.

To be sure, Daniel 9:24–27 may initially seem like a complex maze of cryptic details and difficult to discern ambiguities, especially once we begin to work through all of the competing interpretations. Even though most major interpretations of this passage fall into three primary categories, I would not hesitate to say there have been literally hundreds of different interpretations of this passage over the course of Jewish and Christian history. We can probably see now why many people have called this passage “the swamp,” and “the Bermuda triangle of Bible prophecy.”

In any case, I hope these last three chapters have helped us become more familiar with the broader interpretive landscape. I also hope they have helped to highlight many of the problems with both the Antiochene and First-Century Fulfillment models (Messianic and non-Messianic). Not only was the Messianic End-Times view the prevailing view within early Judaism, but as we will continue to see in the following chapters, this view becomes the only viable option once we put Daniel 9:24–27 under the microscope, and take a closer look at the granular details of the prophetic text itself.

7

ISRAEL AND THE SIX PURPOSE STATEMENTS IN DANIEL 9:24

AFTER HE ESTABLISHED that the 70 weeks concern events that will lead to the Age of Jubilee, Gabriel gave a concise summary statement of the six goals of the 70 weeks, and how they relate to God's plan for the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem. As we read in Daniel 9:24:

Seventy weeks have been appointed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for/purge iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place (*author's translation*).

The six purpose statements in Daniel 9:24 can be listed in the following way:

- “To finish the transgression” (לְכַלֵּא הַפֶּשַׁע)
- “to make an end of sin” (וְלִהְיוֹת סוּאָה)

- “to make atonement for/purge iniquity” (וּלְכַפֵּר עֲוֹן)
- “to bring in everlasting righteousness” (וּלְהָבִיא צֶדֶק עֲלָמִים)
- “to seal up the vision and prophet” (וּלְהַתֵּם חֶזוֹן וְנָבִיא)
- “and to anoint a most holy place” (Dan. 9:24b).
(וּלְמַשֵּׁחַ קֹדֶשׁ קְדוֹשִׁים)

COMMON VIEWS ON THE PURPOSE STATEMENTS

Many interpreters within the First-Century Messianic Fulfillment camp argue that all of these purpose statements in Daniel 9:24 were fulfilled through the ministry of Jesus in the 30s AD. They often say things like, “We know Jesus made atonement for our sins, in some way brought an end to sin and transgression, and that he is also the source of our righteousness, so that means he fulfilled the first four purpose statements through his death and resurrection. We also know Jesus was a prophet confirmed by God, and that he came to fulfill the Law and the prophets, so that takes care of the fifth purpose statement. Finally, we know Jesus sometimes referred to his body as the Temple of God (Jn. 2:19), and that he was anointed by the Holy Spirit, so when the sixth and last purpose statement mentions the anointing of a most holy place, this is a reference to the time when Jesus was anointed by the Spirit at his baptism.”

In his book *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament*, biblical scholar Gerard Van Groningen summarizes the interpretation of the six purpose statements espoused by many advocates of a first-century Messianic fulfillment:

The Messiah is to fulfill prophecies [fifth purpose statement]; he is to bring in everlasting righteousness [fourth purpose statement]; he is to atone for wickedness; he is to put an end to sin and finalize transgression [first three purpose statements]. In a real way, Gabriel summarizes Isaiah 52:13–53:12.

[Additionally] Since the promised Messiah was prophesied as one to be anointed by the Spirit of God (Isa. 61:1), who, in turn was represented by anointing oil (Zech. 4:11–14), it is in harmony with prophecy that Gabriel here refers to a person—most likely the Messiah [being anointed] [sixth purpose statement].¹

In addition to Van Groningen’s summary, it should also be noted that even some Christians who do not accept a complete fulfillment of Daniel 9:24–27 in the first century still believe that at least some of the six purpose statements were fulfilled by Jesus in the first century, particularly the first three that relate to sin and atonement. This view is summarized by Old Testament scholars Kevin Zuber and Michael Rydelnik, who write, in “sum, it seems best to understand that the first three objectives were fulfilled in principle at Christ’s first coming and that all six will be fulfilled ‘completely for Israel by the time of the return of the Messiah and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom.’”²

On the surface, these arguments that either some, or potentially even all, of the purpose statements were fulfilled by Jesus in the first century appear compelling. After all, none of us who believe in Jesus want to deny the beauty and significance of his life, ministry, death, and resurrection. Furthermore, many of us are naturally inclined to want to read these purpose statements as though Jesus fulfilled them (at least in some way) already, especially because we know it is generally a good thing to read the Hebrew prophets in a Messianic light. As a result, we might reasonably ask, “What could be the problem with this Messianic reading of the purpose statements? Doesn’t this interpretation honor and glorify Jesus in the appropriate way, and as Van Groningen argues,

1 Gerard Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament: Volume Two* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1990), 833–834.

2 Kevin D. Zuber, “Daniel 9:24–27: When Will Messiah Come?” in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and Expositions of the Messiah in the Old Testament*, eds. Michael Rydelnik & Edwin Blum (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), 1143.

appropriately link the purpose statements back to other prophecies about the Messiah such as Isaiah 53?”

It is difficult to overstate the importance of these six purpose statements in Daniel 9:24, and their bearing upon the proper interpretation of the 70-weeks prophecy. Everything that occurs later in Daniel 9:25–27 is connected to these six statements that explain why God “decreed,” “cut off,” or “appointed” (9:24) the 70 weeks in the first place, and what He was intending to accomplish during this period of time.

Though I never want to minimize the extent to which Jesus’ ministry in the first century fulfilled earlier Messianic prophecies, there are a number of problems with the view that some, or even all, of the purpose statements outlined in Daniel 9:24 were fulfilled by Jesus between 27-33 AD. As we will see in the rest of this chapter, all of the purpose statements are eschatological, and related to God’s prophetic plan for the nation of Israel. We will also discover that the six purpose statements are linked to a number of other passages in the Bible that (1) elaborate on God’s will for Israel during the 70 weeks, and (2) describe the specific events that will lead to the eschatological Jubilee of Daniel 9:24a.

WHO IS CARRYING OUT AND/OR CONNECTED TO THE VERBAL ACTIONS?

Already at the outset, we see in verse 24 that the 70 weeks were appointed “for” Daniel’s “people” and his “holy city.” The Hebrew construction in this verse makes clear that the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem are the indirect object of the demarcated 70 weeks. The 70 weeks have primary relevance to them, because they are the two entities (the nouns) for whom the verbal action at the beginning of verse 24 (the appointment of the 70 weeks) was performed. Moreover, as verse 24 progresses, we learn that the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem are not only the indirect object of the 70 weeks, but they are also the primary subject carrying out and/or connected to the verbal actions epitomized in the purpose statements, which are nothing more than six infinitive verbal phrases.

Because the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem are in the indirect object position in relation to the 70 weeks, and in the subject position in relation to the verbal purpose statements, this means they are the ones who will either carry out, or at the very least, be intricately involved in the accomplishment of, the purpose statements. Stated another way, Daniel 9:24 does not say, “The 70 weeks are appointed for *the Messiah* to finish transgression, put an end to sin, make atonement for iniquity, etc.” The text says, “70 weeks are appointed *for your people and your holy city*” to do these things. It is the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem who are depicted as carrying out and/or being involved in all of the verbal actions demarcated in the purpose statements. So far, the Messiah has not been mentioned.

That the 70 weeks concern God’s eschatological plan for Israel becomes more apparent once we realize that Daniel was originally seeking the Lord on behalf of His “city” and “people” (Dan. 9:19). The first line in the 70-weeks prophecy about Daniel’s “people” and his “holy city” picks up right where Daniel’s prayer left off,³ so it only makes sense that the entire goal of the prophecy relates to the final restoration of Israel and Jerusalem in the Messianic Age.

When Van Groningen and other Christians state that Daniel 9:24 reveals that “[t]he Messiah is to” fulfill all the purpose statements, they are reading Messianic-theological and Christological significance from other passages that describe the first-century ministry of Jesus into Daniel 9:24 without any biblical basis for doing so. This tendency among Christians to incorrectly reinterpret Daniel 9:24 in light of other unrelated Christological passages and New Testament motifs is an example of the “exegetical fallacy” known as the “unwarranted associative jump.” An “exegetical fallacy” is a fancy name for a common interpretive error.

In his book, *Exegetical Fallacies*, biblical scholar D.A. Carson explains that the “unwarranted associative jump:”

3 John Stetzer Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 219.

[O]ccurs when a word or phrase triggers off an associated idea, concept, or experience **that bears no close relation to the text at hand, yet is used to interpret the text.**⁴

Many Christian interpreters commit this exegetical fallacy of the “unwarranted associative jump” when reading Daniel 9:24, because they are already steeped in New Testament theology, and sometimes also Christian supersessionism (replacement theology). As a result, when they see the six purpose statements in the 70-weeks prophecy, they are predisposed to make a number of cognitive associations between these statements and the ministry of Jesus (which thereby takes the focus off of Israel), even though no contextual clues confirm that these associations are justifiable, or that the Messiah and his first-century work are in view in Daniel 9:24, in contrast to say Isaiah 53, where the Messiah’s first-century work as the “Suffering Servant” of the Lord definitely is in view (because the text explicitly tells us it is).

Daniel 9:24 says nothing directly about the Messiah independently fulfilling any of the purpose statements. All of the purpose statements relate to the experience of Daniel’s people (the Jews) and his holy city (Jerusalem).

Even though Jesus did make atonement for sins, usher in righteousness for his elect, receive an anointing from the Holy Spirit, etc., these events are not directly relevant to Daniel 9:24, because this particular text does not describe the experiences or independent accomplishments of the Messiah, or his first-century ministry. It describes God’s will for the Jewish nation as a whole. The Messiah himself and his first-century ministry are not brought into the 70-weeks prophecy until verses 25–26. Verse 24 is only a general summary of the eschatological Jubilee, which includes an outline (the purpose statements) of what Israel (and by extension the nations) will experience prior to, and after, the inauguration of this future Age of Jubilee.

4 D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies, Second Edition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 115.

ISRAEL, JERUSALEM, AND THE SIX PURPOSE STATEMENTS

If we take a step back and compare the six purpose statements to a number of other texts in the Hebrew Bible, it becomes more clear that they represent a compressed outline of God's eschatological plan for Israel. The purpose statements in Daniel 9:24 are part of a larger mosaic of biblical prophecies that detail both Israel's experience before the end of this age, and her role in the future Messianic Kingdom.

For example, the first four statements, "to finish the transgression/rebellion," "to make an end of sin," "to make atonement for/purge iniquity," and "to bring in everlasting righteousness," all depict how sin, unrighteousness, and wickedness will essentially be done away with in both the broader world, and especially in Israel, in the Age to Come, when the Messiah returns. These first four statements indicate that the 70 weeks will cover Israel's final period of sin and rebellion before she reaches righteousness and maturity in the Age of Jubilee. The 70 weeks were decreed as the time for Israel "to finish transgression" so that they can finally enter into their collective national destiny as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation when their Messiah appears in glory.

Just like Daniel 9:24, the other prophets frequently spoke of the Age to Come as a time when God's righteousness will reign over the entire earth, and also as a time when Israel and the nations will be cleansed of their impurities and idolatry.

Habakkuk says that when the Messiah returns, "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14). Ezekiel says that when the Messiah reigns in Israel, the Jewish people "will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions (*pasha*)" (Ezek. 37:23; cf. Mic. 5:10–15). The word for "transgressions" here in Ezekiel 37:23 is *pasha*, the same word in the first purpose statement in Daniel 9:24. Ezekiel also saw the day when Israel's transgressions will be finished, brought to an end, and completed. Though without a doubt this removal of Israel's transgressions will be carried out by the Messiah in the future, Daniel 9:24 isn't about the Messiah's atoning

work on the cross. It is about the end of transgression *in Israel*, and a time of spiritual revival for the Jewish nation that all the prophets were looking forward to.

In keeping with the theme of finishing transgression, making an end of sin, and ushering in everlasting righteousness, Ezekiel also said that in the Messianic Age the Messiah will “sprinkle clean water on” Israel, cleanse them from their “filthiness and their idols,” and put a “new heart” and a new obedient spirit within the Jewish people (Ezek. 36:25-26). Likewise, Zechariah spoke of the Age to Come as a time when God will “remove the iniquity (*a'on*)” of Israel “in one day,” which will lead to Israel enjoying peace with all their neighbors, under their own vines and under their own fig trees (Zech. 3:8-10). Zechariah also said that in the days of the Messiah, “a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin (*chattah*) and for impurity” (Zech. 13:1). Notably, Zechariah used two of the same words from Daniel 9:24, *a'on* (iniquity; 3rd statement), and *chattah* (sin; 2nd statement), to describe how the Messiah will cleanse and purify Israel when he sets up his kingdom in the future.

Paul himself even summarized these passages from the prophets in Romans 11:26–27:

And so all Israel will be saved, just as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, **He will remove ungodliness from Jacob**. This is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.”

In this verse, Paul speaks of how every Jewish person alive at the time of the Second Coming will be saved (i.e. all Israel). Notice as well how Paul says that at this time, the Messiah will “remove ungodliness from Jacob” and enter into covenant with Israel by taking “away their sins.” This line in Romans 11 is an almost verbatim summary of what Daniel 9:24 states about Israel’s experience after the 70 weeks.

The same theme of Israel attaining righteousness in the future (4th purpose statement) can also be found in the book of Isaiah. Isaiah cried

out that he would keep preaching the word of God for Jerusalem's sake, "until her righteousness (*tsedeq*) goes forth like brightness, and her salvation like a burning torch." Isaiah also said of Jerusalem, "nations will see your righteousness (*tsedeq*) and all kings your glory" (Isa. 62:1-2). These statements concerning the future righteous destiny of Jerusalem directly parallel the fourth purpose statement in Daniel 9:24, where Gabriel stated that after the 70 weeks the Jewish people and Jerusalem will experience "everlasting righteousness (*tsedeq*)."

This collection of verses in both the Hebrew prophets, and the New Testament, demonstrates that all of the first four purpose statements in Daniel 9:24, (1) finishing transgression (2) making an end of sin (3) atoning for/purging iniquity, and (4) bringing in everlasting righteousness, are linked to the dawn of the Messianic Age and the Second Coming of the Messiah in the rest of the Bible. Daniel 9:24 was the answer to Daniel's prayer for his "people" and his "holy city." That's why the prophecy begins by saying the 70 weeks had been set apart for Israel and the city of Jerusalem to accomplish the six purpose statements. Until we see the reality of these six purpose statements within the worldwide Jewish community, and in the city Jerusalem, we cannot say that any of them have been fulfilled.

Of course, to a certain extent, we can say that the Messiah has already made a way for Israel's iniquity and sin to be brought to an end through his sacrifice and the institution of the New Covenant. We can also say that what the Messiah will do for Israel in the future will definitely be rooted in his prior work. Thus, I do not mean to imply that Daniel 9:24 is not Messianic in any sense whatsoever. All I am saying is that Daniel 9:24 is not about the *beginning point* of when the Messiah would do such things. It is about the eschatological end point of these promises and prophetic realities, and how they will be manifest in Israel in the future.

Daniel 9:24 concerns God's will for a literal city of dirt and stone in the Middle East, and a literal flesh and blood people. In a profound way, Daniel 9:24 places the city of Jerusalem and the people of Israel

at the center of world-wide prophetic events that will unfold before the return of the Messiah.

ISRAEL MAKING ATONEMENT FOR SINS?

Before we move on from the first four purpose statements, it will also be helpful to take a closer look at the phrase “to make atonement for iniquity.” This is probably the main purpose statement that leads Christians to the belief that all of the purpose statements must relate to the first-century ministry of Jesus and his sacrificial death. After all, how could the phrase “make atonement for iniquity,” when it occurs in a Messianic prophecy like Daniel 9, not be about Jesus making sacrificial atonement for our sins? Furthermore, if these purpose statements apply primarily to the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem, what would it mean that they, not the Messiah, will “make atonement for iniquity?”

A more detailed study of the phrase “to make atonement for iniquity” in the Hebrew Bible will prove that this phrase does not have to refer to the sacrificial death of the Messiah, because it is often used to describe Israel’s experience, just as it is in Daniel 9:24.

In order to decipher the meaning of this phrase in Daniel 9:24, we first need to recognize that the Hebrew word translated as “make atonement” in most English Bibles does not always depict ceremonial, ritual, or sacrificial atonement. This word “atone” (*kaphar*) can refer to making ritual atonement for sins, and it certainly does in a large number of cases (Ex. 29:33; 29:36; Lev. 1–19; Num. 5:8; 6:11; 8:19; 25–31). However, *kaphar* can also be translated more broadly as “cover,” “purge,” “appease,” “cleanse,” “make reconciliation” (see Dan. 9:24 in the KJV), and “cancel” in some contexts.

Genesis 6:14 speaks of how Noah covered (*kaphar*) the ark with pitch. Genesis 32:20 speaks of how Jacob sought to “appease” (*kaphar*) Esau with a gift. Proverbs 16:6 states that God’s mercy and truth “purge” (*kaphar*) iniquity. Numbers 35:33 says the blood of someone who was murdered can only be “cleansed” (*kaphar*) by the blood of the murderer. Isaiah 28:28 says God will “cancel” (*kaphar*) Israel’s covenant with death.

These are just a handful of examples that illustrate how the verb *kaphar* was used in a variety of ways in the Hebrew Bible, not necessarily in every case to depict blood atonement within a sacrificial context.

Given this broad range of potential meanings, we then have to ask, how should we interpret *kaphar* in Daniel 9:24? Does the word *kaphar* in this verse refer to the Messiah making vicarious blood atonement as many Christian interpreters have argued?

The simple answer is no, and this position is based on three primary points. One, as already stated, Daniel 9:24 does not say anything about the Messiah making atonement. This verse states that it will be Israel, the indirect object/subject of the 70 weeks and the six verbal phrases, who will “make atonement for iniquity.”

Two, when *kaphar* indicates vicarious blood atonement, there is always some indication in the context that a vicarious atoning sacrifice is in view. We see this in numerous places in the Torah, where the laws regarding atoning sacrifices are detailed. However, Daniel 9:24 contains no sacrificial terminology, symbolism, or motifs related to ceremonial blood atonement.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, there are other places in the Hebrew prophets where the exact same words, “atone for iniquity,” are used to describe how Israel was/will be *purged* of their iniquity *through divine discipline and suffering*, not sacrificial atonement. For this reason, a better translation of the phrase “to make atonement for iniquity” in Daniel 9:24 would be “to purge iniquity.” 70 weeks have been decreed for Israel to have their iniquity purged (*kaphar*). That’s the implication of the third purpose statement. This purging of iniquity doesn’t refer to anyone making a blood sacrifice. It refers to how Israel will have their sins washed away through judgment during the 70-weeks period, and especially during the 70th week (the subject of chapters 16-17).

THE PURGING OF ISRAEL'S INIQUITY IN ISAIAH 22:14 AND 27:9

To understand how this word *kaphar* (purge/atone) could be used to indicate purging through discipline or judgment, rather than sacrificial

atonement, we need to look at Isaiah 22:14 and Isaiah 27:9.

Isaiah 22:14 states:

And it was revealed in mine ears by the LORD of hosts, **“Surely this iniquity (*a’on*) shall not be purged (*kaphar*) from you till ye die,** saith the Lord God of hosts” (KJV).

This verse in Isaiah 22:14 uses the same two words as Daniel 9:24 for “purge/atonement for (*kaphar*) iniquity (*a’on*).” In Isaiah 22:14 however, Isaiah speaks of how *Israel* would have to make restitution to the Lord and purge their own iniquity through death. There is no connotation of ceremonial blood atonement here.

Similarly, Isaiah 27:9 also mentions how Israel will have their iniquity purged (*kaphar*) through discipline, not ceremonial blood atonement. This verse reads:

By this therefore **shall the iniquity (*a’on*) of Jacob be purged (*kaphar*); and this will be the full price of the pardoning of his sin (*chattah*):** When he makes all the altar stones like pulverized chalk stones; When Asherim and incense altars will not stand” (Isa. 27:9; KJV & NASB).

Just like Isaiah 22:14, Isaiah 27:9 uses the same two words that Gabriel used in Daniel 9:24 when speaking of Israel having their iniquity (*a’on*) purged (*kaphar*). And just like Isaiah 22:14, here in Isaiah 27:9 these two words (*a’on* & *kaphar*), when used in conjunction, refer to Israel being purged by the Lord through discipline. In the case of Isaiah 27:9, this purging (*kaphar*) of Israel’s iniquity (*a’on*) takes place through an invading army that will desolate the Land of Israel and tear down all the pagan altars.

It is also important to realize that Isaiah 27:9 is part of an eschatological prophecy that speaks to the time when God will judge the powers of darkness, save Israel, and bring the Jewish nation back

to His holy mountain in Jerusalem (Isa. 27:1–13). The eschatological nature of Isaiah 27 lends even more credibility to the idea that both this passage, and Daniel 9:24, refer to the same period of eschatological discipline that Israel will undergo before the Messianic Age.

There is a recurring theme in the Hebrew Bible that centers around how Israel would have to pay for their sins and make restitution (i.e. atonement) to the Lord by suffering discipline and judgment if they disobeyed the covenant. When Daniel 9:24 also speaks of Daniel's people and his holy city making atonement for/purging (*kaphar*) iniquity (*a'on*), ancient Hebrew speakers would not have read this as a reference to ceremonial blood atonement, nor to the Messiah making atonement. They would have read this purging/atonement language as part of this larger matrix of eschatological texts that speak of how Israel will have their sins purged by the Lord through judgment in the last days.

Isaiah 22:14	Isaiah 27:9	Daniel 9:24
Surely this iniquity (<i>a'on</i>) shall not be purged (<i>kaphar</i>) from you till ye die, saith the Lord God of hosts (KJV)."	By this therefore shall the iniquity (<i>a'on</i>) of Jacob be purged (<i>kaphar</i>)...	The Jewish people and Jerusalem will have to "purge (<i>kaphar</i>) iniquity (<i>a'on</i>)..." during the 70 weeks.

Just to be clear, that Israel will have to experience a purging of their iniquity during the 70 weeks does not imply that the Jewish people can earn their eternal salvation or forgiveness of sins through their own actions or experiences. When Daniel 9:24 uses the term *kaphar* (atonement) it is not using this term in a salvific (soteriological) sense as many Christians believe.

It is using the word *kaphar* in a more limited sense to describe a process of refinement. This process of refinement will then create in Israel the right heart posture, which will cause a remnant to put their faith in the Messiah for *eternal* salvation.

We all know that when the Lord disciplines us for our sins we are not earning our salvation through that discipline. However, the process of discipline still plays a necessary role in our salvation and reconciliation to the Lord.

This same dynamic is also evident in Daniel 9:24. In the past, Israel had to go through periods of national purging, atonement, and exile before they could return to their land, and this will be the case during the end times as well.

Once we recognize that *kaphar* can have broader applications outside the context of ceremonial/sacrificial atonement, the interpretive tradition upheld by many Christians, who argue that “make atonement for iniquity” in Daniel 9:24 must refer to the Messiah’s atoning sacrifice, is proven to be just that, a tradition. The text of Daniel 9:24 says nothing about the Messiah making atonement for sins. The focus of the prophecy at this point is on the future experiences of Israel and the city of Jerusalem.

THE PURGING OF INIQUITY IN THE EARLY JEWISH COMMENTARIES

In addition to Isaiah 22:14 and 27:9, the early Jewish interpretations of Daniel 9:24, which we looked at in chapter 6, also indicate that the “end of sin” and “atonement/purging” language in this verse refers to how Israel will remain in rebellion throughout the duration of the 70 weeks, and thus, be judged, but then, at the completion of the 70 weeks, be redeemed, revived, and empowered to walk in righteousness when the Messiah appears. For example, the *Testament of Levi* says, “for seventy weeks you [i.e. Israel] shall go astray.”⁵ The *Damascus Document* calls the 70 weeks “the epochs of Israel’s blindness.”⁶ The author of *Jubilees* predicted that before the age of Jubilee restoration, Israel would not

5 The Testament of Levi, sections 14-19, in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, Volume II, ed. R.H. Charles (Apocryphile Press, 2004), Early Christian Writings, online.

6 Damascus Document, quote from: Roger T. Beckwith, *Calendar, Chronology, and Worship: Studies in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005), 70.

“keep true” to the Lord’s commandments, and would thus incur “great wrath from the Lord.”⁷ The *Melchizedek* document adds that after this period of sin and blindness during the 70 weeks, God “will make them return. And liberty shall be proclaimed to them, to free them from [the debt of] all their iniquities.”⁸

In contrast to the First-Century view, the Essenes and other early Jewish theologians did not interpret the purpose statements as though they could have been fulfilled with ethnic-national Israel still in a state of rebellion against the Lord. They knew Daniel 9:24 outlines a process of discipline and judgment that will end only when the Messianic Priest appears to restore Israel to their land after the end times.

SEALING UP THE VISION AND THE PROPHET

The final two purpose statements in Daniel 9:24 are, “to seal up vision and prophet (or prophecy)” and “to anoint a most holy place.” These statements also refer to events that will take place in Israel as we transition into the Messianic Age.

The phrase “to seal up vision and prophet (or prophecy)” implies that the visions of the prophets will be validated and confirmed. The word “prophet” in this phrase is sometimes translated “prophecy” (NASB). However, the overwhelming usage of this word in the Hebrew Bible supports the translation “prophet” (ESV) rather than “prophecy,” although this is perhaps a minor issue in the grand scheme of things.

Some have suggested the fifth purpose statement could mean that vision and prophecy will no longer be necessary in the kingdom of God. This is an awkward interpretation of “seal up vision and prophet,” which has no precedent or basis in the Hebrew Bible.⁹

Sealing up vision and prophet refers to the overall completion and

7 *Book of Jubilees*, 15:39–40, *Sefaria*, online.

8 Translation by Bergsma, in *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 279–280.

9 See Miller, *Daniel*, 261.

fulfillment of Bible prophecy, including the prophecies in the book of Daniel, which will not take place until the Messiah establishes his kingdom. This phrase communicates that “the vision” God revealed to His prophets will be vindicated by the end of the 70th week. In essence, God and his prophets will be proven right.

We find further evidence supporting this interpretation of “seal up vision and prophet” when we take a closer look at the Hebrew word translated “seal.” This word often connotes setting a seal of authentication upon a document (1 Kings 21:8; Est. 8:8; 8:10; Dan. 6:17), but it can also imply closing something up, in contrast to something that is open (cf. Jer. 32:11–14).

Based on these definitions, there could be a kind of double metaphorical meaning to the phrase “seal up vision and prophet” in Daniel 9:24. On the one hand, the end of the 70 weeks will mark the time when prophecy has been authenticated with God’s seal of approval, because most Bible prophecies will have come to pass. At the same time, the prophetic books will also be metaphorically closed, similar to the way we close a book after reading, because what they prophesied will be complete. As stated by Old Testament scholar Stephen Miller, the fifth purpose statement speaks to how “God will someday set His seal of authentication upon every truly God-given revelation (“vision and prophecy”) by bringing about its complete fulfillment.”¹⁰

Technically, there will still be some prophecies that need to be fulfilled in the Messianic Kingdom over a longer period of time. But, in a general sense, we don’t need to be too hyper-literal here. When the 70 weeks are complete we will have passed into a new age. We will have transitioned

10 Miller, *Daniel*, 261. Some also argue that because the word “seal” in Daniel 9:24 is used elsewhere in Daniel (12:4 & 12:9) to imply concealing and hiding the meaning of Daniel’s prophecies, this could be the meaning of the word “seal” in Daniel 9:24. Thus, the idea is that maybe Daniel 9:24 indicates that the words of the prophets will somehow be concealed and hidden after the 70 weeks. This definition of “seal” as concealment doesn’t suit the context of Daniel 9:24. There are other better definitions of “seal” that are related to the idea of closing after completion, and also authentication/validation, that suit the context of Daniel 9:24 much better.

from this current evil age in which most prophecies still await their fulfillment, to the Age of Jubilee when the large majority of prophecies will either have reached their fulfillment, or be in the process of being fulfilled right before our very own eyes. In any case, the testimony of the prophets will be sealed, and fully authenticated by the Lord.

COULDN'T THIS BE ABOUT JESUS?

Earlier I mentioned that many advocates of a first-century Messianic fulfillment of Daniel 9:24 argue that the sealing up of vision and prophet occurred through the ministry of Jesus. Those who accept this view typically argue that because Jesus came to “fulfill the law and the prophets” (Matt. 5:17), he fulfilled this purpose statement in Daniel 9:24. Others might argue that Jesus himself is “the prophet” of Daniel 9:24, the one upon whom God set His seal of approval.

I certainly agree that Jesus’ ministry fulfilled prophecy. However, applying the phrase “to seal up vision and prophet” in Daniel 9:24 to Jesus is a mistake.

Even though Jesus did bring many prophecies to fulfillment in the first century, he did not bring all of them to fulfillment, nor are we living in a time when the entire earth believes that the vision of the Hebrew prophets has been validated, sealed, authenticated, and demonstrated to be a direct revelation from God. As a matter of fact, most Christians today still argue over the proper interpretation of Bible prophecy, even after the ministry of Jesus, so it could not be that the words of the prophets have been closed, settled, and completely clarified, as Daniel 9:24 requires.

The idea that Daniel’s people and his holy city will “seal up vision and prophet” implies that the prophecies throughout the Hebrew Bible that are about Israel’s prophetic destiny will come to pass after the 70 weeks. As of now, hundreds of prophecies that pertain to Israel remain unfulfilled, so neither Jerusalem, the Jewish people, Jesus, nor anyone else could have sealed or closed vision and prophet in the first century.

When Gabriel told Daniel that vision and prophet will be sealed by the end of the 70 weeks, this was his way of saying that after the

70 weeks, there will not be any more doubt in Israel over whether the Scriptures are true, nor even any more debate anywhere in the world over which particular interpretation of prophecy is correct. All the arguments over God's existence, all the debates over prophetic minutia, competing prophetic scenarios, etc., will be put to rest. When vision and prophet are sealed, only God's truth will be authenticated with His signet ring of approval, and the Jewish people and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will finally recognize the authority of God's prophetic word.

This is a future reality that we can even begin pressing into and praying over right now.

Lord, fulfill your word! Lord, confirm the prophecies of Daniel! Lord, seal up and authenticate the vision and the prophet!

THE REESTABLISHED TEMPLE

The sixth and final purpose statement in Daniel 9:24 is, "to anoint a most holy place." In the Hebrew, the phrase "holy place" literally reads "holy of holies" (*qodesh qodshim*). For this reason, a better translation would be, "and to anoint a holy of holies."

It is true that there is no definite article "the" in this verse with the phrase "holy of holies." However, every other time the phrase *qodesh qodshim* occurs in the Hebrew Bible it refers either to *the* inner sanctuary of the Holy Temple or Tabernacle, or to articles used in the Temple worship. In light of this usage, there is no evidence that we are meant to interpret the phrase differently in Daniel 9:24. This is either a reference to the inner sanctuary of the Jewish Temple, or at the very least, because of the lack of a definite article, a reference to some general space the Temple will occupy.

Earlier we saw that some interpreters spiritualize the anointing of the "holy of holies" in Daniel 9:24 as though it refers to the anointing of Jesus or "the Church" (the Body of Messiah), because Jesus did refer to himself metaphorically as a temple (Jn. 2:19), and the Church is of course the temple of the Holy Spirit; 1 Pet. 2:5).

In order to interpret this phrase properly in Daniel 9:24 however,

we need to leave behind our Christian presuppositions, and ask how a Hebrew speaking man from the Ancient Near East such as Daniel would have understood the phrase “holy of holies.” Because there is no reference to any type of “holy of holies” outside the Temple in the Old Testament, there is no evidence that Gabriel would have spiritualized this phrase and applied it to the Messiah or the Church. Furthermore, there is not even one place in the entire New Testament where the Church is ever described as the “holy of holies,” nor is Jesus himself ever described in precisely this way.

We should accept that in the sixth purpose statement Gabriel speaks of the literal Temple, and describes the time when this Temple will be anointed and sanctified by the Jewish people, in the city of Jerusalem, in the future.

Weren’t the Messiah and the Church also anointed by God? Of course. And are there also other passages that refer to the Messiah as God’s Anointed? Yes.

Daniel 9:25–26 calls the Messiah the Anointed One. However, simply because the Messiah is called the Anointed One in other places does not mean we can automatically read this idea into Daniel 9:24 when we see the verb anoint (*mashach*), especially because the anointing *in this verse* is carried out by Jerusalem and the Jewish people within the context of sacred Temple space.

Also, we can see how the anointing of the Temple in Daniel 9:24 contradicts the First-Century Fulfillment view that the 70-weeks prophecy was fulfilled when the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD. What happened in 70 AD (destruction) was the exact opposite of what Gabriel said will happen on the Temple Mount (anointing and restoration) when Daniel 9:24 is fulfilled.

THE ANOINTING OF THE FUTURE TEMPLE

Not surprisingly, we are also told in Ezekiel 37–48 that when the Messiah appears to establish his kingdom, he will oversee the building of the Messianic Temple in Jerusalem, and then reign over the entire

earth from his Temple, as he lives in the midst of the Jewish people for all eternity. In a later chapter we will also look at why the Temple will have to be anointed and purified when the Messiah returns. But for now, looking at a few key passages in Ezekiel can help us better understand the background to Gabriel's comment about the anointing of the Messianic Temple after the 70th week:

Ezekiel 37:26-27: "And I will place them and multiply them, **and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them;** and I will be their God, and they will be My people."

Ezekiel 43:12: "This is the law of the house: **its entire area on the top of the mountain and all around shall be most holy (*qodesh qodshim*).**"

Ezekiel 43:26: "**For seven days they shall make atonement for the altar and purify it.**"

In a more general way, Daniel 9:24 speaks of the same anointing and consecration of a future Holy Temple that we also find in Ezekiel (cf. Zech. 14:20). Notice as well how Ezekiel says in Ezekiel 43:12 that this future Temple will be "most holy" (*qodesh qodshim*). This is the precise Hebrew phrase that is used in Daniel 9:24 to describe the anointing of the holy of holies (*qodesh qodshim*), which again, confirms that Daniel 9:24 speaks of the same Messianic Temple as Ezekiel 43:12.

Old Testament scholars Kevin Zuber, Michael Rydelnik, and Leon Wood summarize the relationship between Daniel 9:24 and Ezekiel 37–48 in the following way:

The sixth objective is "to anoint the most holy place." The "most holy place" refers to the "holy of holies" in the Tabernacle and Temple (cf. Ex 26:33 NASB). **"The phrase 'holy of holies' [...] occurs...thirty-nine times in the Old Testament, always with reference to the Tabernacle or Temple or to the holy artifacts in them."** The idea

of anointing would have been well known from rituals and services of the Tabernacle (Ex 40:9; Lv 8:10). **The single clear implication of this objective is that there will be (as Ezekiel certainly indicates, Ezk 38–40) a temple and a “holy of holies” to anoint—“a yet future literal, millennial temple.”**

THE MESSAGE OF THE SIX PURPOSE STATEMENTS

When we zoom out and look at the six purpose statements in Daniel 9:24, we discover that they represent a concise summary of God’s prophetic plan for Israel and the city of Jerusalem. Moreover, there is a definite element of crescendo in how the six purpose statements begin by discussing Israel’s final period of transgression, sin, and iniquity during the 70 weeks, and then climax with the promise of everlasting righteousness, the sealing of vision and prophet, and the anointing of the Holy Temple after the 70th week. The overall message of the six purpose statements is that after the 70 weeks Israel will finally become a truly righteous nation, with God’s presence dwelling in their midst in the Age of Jubilee.

Many scholars have recognized that the six purpose statements are eschatological. Furthermore, just like the concept of the Messianic Jubilee at the beginning of verse 24, the six purpose statements confirm the Messianic End-Times interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27. Old Testament scholar Thomas Edward McComiskey summarizes this point:

The view set forth here requires that the [infinitive] clauses of 9:24 [i.e. the verbal actions] be determined as eschatological. **That is, these clauses that express the purpose of the 70 weeks must be understood as characterizing the whole span of time [...] to the end of Jerusalem’s desolations, an event that becomes a reality only when Antichrist is destroyed.**¹¹

11 Thomas Edward McComiskey, “The Seventy ‘Weeks’ of Daniel Against the Background of Ancient Near Eastern Literature,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, 47 (1985), 34.

As further noted by Old Testament scholar Joyce Baldwin, the six purpose statements concern events that will lead to “the accomplishment of God’s purposes for all of history.”¹² Or, in the words of Old Testament scholar Stephen Miller, these six statements communicate that the 70 weeks will culminate with the “arrival of the future kingdom of God.”¹³ John Bergsma also adds, the “ensuing restoration in the 491st year (i.e. year of eschatological jubilee) is not described but implied by the hopeful descriptions of the “seventy week” period in v. 24.”¹⁴

Because the Jubilee was associated with the return of the Israelites to their ancestral land in the Torah, it makes perfect sense that this return-to-land aspect of the Jubilee will also be fulfilled with the purpose statements, when the Messiah returns. As many prophecies indicate, the Messiah will return and bring the nation of Israel back to their land, thereby accomplishing the goal of the Jubilee and the Daniel 9:24 purpose statements at the same time (e.g. Deut. 33; Isa. 11; 27).

PRESSING INTO THE PROPHETIC REALITY

At the doctrinal level, Daniel 9:24 is a critical text that can help us properly discern and honor God’s ongoing prophetic purposes for Israel and the city of Jerusalem. At an even more practical level, the six purpose statements also remind us that we should do all that is within our power now to press into Israel’s prophetic destiny, as outlined in Daniel 9.

We can intercede. We can work towards the establishment of righteousness within the Jewish community. We can teach others about God’s plan for Israel and the city of Jerusalem. We can seek the fulfillment of the purpose statements in our own lifetime, even as we recognize that only the Lord Himself will ultimately bring them to pass at the end of this age.

12 Baldwin, *Daniel*, 191

13 Miller, *Daniel*, 259.

14 Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 231.

Like Isaiah we can cry out to God and preach His word until righteousness goes forth from Jerusalem like a blazing torch (Isa. 62:1–2). Like Ezekiel we can fix our hearts on the day when the Messiah will reign from his holy of holies, in the Messianic Temple. And like Daniel we can give ourselves to a life of holiness, consecration, prayer, and fasting, until God's name is vindicated in Israel and among all the nations.

I believe the purpose statements are there to motivate us to live this particular sort of lifestyle. They are there to ignite a fire in the hearts of the Lord's people and to cause us to embrace lives of activism that will eventually lead to their eschatological fulfillment.

Personally, I have begun incorporating the purpose statements of Daniel 9:24 into my prayer life, and using them as a liturgical framework to inform my intercession on behalf of Israel and the nations. Below is a sample prayer that I encourage readers to utilize and modify as they see fit, which I believe brings us into alignment with how the purpose statements are meant to motivate kingdom-minded intercession, just like we see in the life of Daniel.

A DAILY PRAYER BASED ON DANIEL 9:24

Heavenly Father, hear our prayers.

Heavenly Father, we ask you to bring an end to sin in Israel.

Heavenly Father, we ask you to cleanse your people and to purge their iniquity.

We ask you Lord to bring in everlasting righteousness on this earth, to validate the words of your prophets, to overcome unbelief in the world, to reveal yourself to Israel and the nations, and to establish your sanctuary in the midst of Jerusalem, just as you promised to do all of these things in Daniel 9:24.

Send us the promised Messiah Lord, the one who will complete our joy and bring us into the Age of Jubilee.

May your kingdom come, may your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.

8

HOW MANY ANOINTED FIGURES APPEAR IN DANIEL 9:25–26?

AFTER THE BROADER DESCRIPTION of the Messianic Jubilee and God's eschatological purposes for Israel in Daniel 9:24, Gabriel transitions in Daniel 9:25–26 to a more grass-roots discussion of key historical events that will transpire during the 70-weeks period. In the next four chapters we will look at these historical events in more detail, and also discover how they are connected to the ministry of the Messiah.

In Daniel 9:25–26a we read:

25. So you are to know and discern that from the going forth of a word to restore and to build Jerusalem until [the] Anointed Prince (*Mashiach Nagid*) there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks it will be rebuilt again with plaza and moat even in times of distress.
26. Then after the sixty-two weeks [the] Anointed One (*Mashiach*) will be cut off and have nothing [...] (*author's translation*).

Note: For reasons that will become clear in the next section, most of the punctuation in the above English translation has been removed.

THE INTERPRETIVE ISSUES

There are a number of questions that must be answered before we can accurately interpret Daniel 9:25.

First, we need to determine whether Daniel 9:25–26 refers to only one anointed leader or two. In these verses, there is a *Mashiach Nagid* (Anointed Prince) mentioned in verse 25. Then, verse 26 also refers to an Anointed One (*Mashiach*). The question is, are these the same person, or two different people? Is there one anointed leader who appears after the seven weeks (49 years), and then a second anointed leader who is cut off after the sixty-two weeks (434 years)? Or, is there only one anointed leader who appears after the seven weeks and sixty-two weeks are combined into 483 years, who is then cut off sometime after this 483-year period? Furthermore, if we choose the second option (i.e. one anointed leader after 483 years), why are the seven and sixty-two weeks separated? Why wouldn't the prophecy just say, "until the Anointed Prince there will be sixty-nine weeks?"

A second interpretive issue that requires consideration is whether Daniel 9:25–26 is even speaking about the Messiah at all. It is possible these verses could be referring to another important and anointed, albeit non-Messianic, leader, or leaders, primarily because the word *mashiach* had a wide range of applications in the Hebrew Bible, and did not always refer to the Messiah. Thus, we have to ask, what biblical evidence justifies reading these verses in a Messianic way?

Third, we must also determine the starting date (*terminous a quo*) of the 70 weeks. In what year should we begin our countdown and start making our 70-weeks calculation?

One reason we have so many different interpretations of the 70-weeks prophecy today is because Jewish and Christian scholars answer each of these questions in different ways. Since we have already covered most of the common interpretations of this passage in chapters

4–6, we do not need to retrace all of that ground here. So in the next four chapters, we will proceed to answer each of the three questions raised above. We will start in this chapter by looking at the evidence that proves there is only one anointed person in Daniel 9:25–26, not two.

ARE THERE TWO ANOINTED LEADERS OR ONE?

When we analyze the most popular English Bible translations in use today, they reveal a widespread disagreement over the question of how many anointed individuals appear in Daniel 9:25–26. For example, both the highly popular ESV Bible and the JPS (Jewish Publication Society) Bible reflect the view that the anointed individual in verse 25 is not the same anointed individual who is cut off in verse 26:

ESV: “Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, **there shall be seven weeks**. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and have nothing [...].”

JPS: “Know therefore and discern, that from the going forth of the word to restore and to build Jerusalem unto one anointed, a prince, **shall be seven weeks**; and for threescore and two weeks [i.e. 62 weeks], it shall be built again, with broad place and moat, but in troublous times. And after the threescore and two weeks [62 weeks] shall an anointed one be cut off, and be no more [...].”

The ESV and JPS translators placed their concluding punctuation after the seven-week period, which implies that the anointed one of verse 25 would come after only 49 years. These translations also imply that Jerusalem would be built again for sixty-two weeks (434 years), after which point a second anointed one (*mashiach*) would come and be “cut off.” Because of where the punctuation is placed in the ESV and JPS, in this scenario the anointed leader/prince (*Mashiach Nagid*) of verse 25

and the anointed one (*Mashiach*) of verse 26 cannot be the same person.

In contrast to the ESV and JPS, many other English translations present the seven weeks and sixty-two weeks as one unified period of time, and therefore imply that there is only one anointed figure in this verse who comes after 483 years (7 + 62 weeks), who is then cut off in verse 26, after the 483-year period:

NASB: “So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem **until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks**; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.”

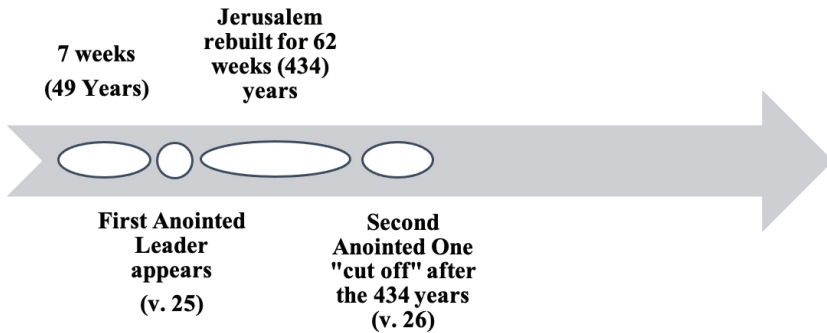
KJV: “Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem **unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks**: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.”

NIV: “Know and understand this: from the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem **until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven sevens and sixty-two sevens**. It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.

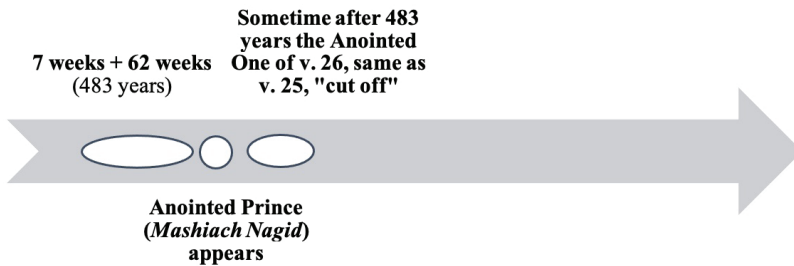
TLV: “So know and understand: From the issuing of the decree to restore and to build Jerusalem **until the time Mashiach the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and 62 weeks**. It will be rebuilt, with plaza and moat, but it will be in times of distress.”

The following timelines illustrate the two possible ways we could divide the timeframe in verses 25–26:

Scenario 1 (ESV & JPS)



Scenario 2 (NASB, NIV, KJV, TLV, HCSB)



THE HEBREW GRAMMAR AND SYNTAX ISSUES

At the outset, it needs to be stated that based strictly on the rules of Hebrew grammar and syntax, both of these scenarios are technically possible. The reason both of these options are technically possible, is because the only word separating the seven weeks from the sixty-two weeks in the original Hebrew is the conjunction “and.” In biblical Hebrew this conjunction can either continue the same sentence, just like in English, or, begin a new sentence altogether (which is less common in English but very common in Hebrew).

Furthermore, unlike English, biblical Hebrew does not use punctuation marks such as periods, commas, semicolons, etc. to divide sentences. Usually this poses no problems. However, in the case of Daniel 9:25–26, this lack of punctuation places a significant interpretive burden on the shoulders of the translator. As the various Bible translations indicate, the translator is forced to decide whether the conjunction “and” between the “seven weeks and sixty-two weeks” is part of the same sentence (NASB, NIV, KJV, etc.), or, the first word in a new sentence (ESV, JPS; note: the ESV translates the conjunction as “Then” instead of “And.”).

Many readers will have noticed that where the punctuation is placed in verses 25–26 is one of the primary driving factors that will determine whether a person believes Daniel 9:25–26 is Messianic or not, which is why this entire issue is so important. It is no coincidence that both the ESV and the JPS present a non-Messianic translation, whereas the NASB, NIV, KJV, and TLV present a Messianic translation of the same verses. By and large, the idea that the seven and sixty-two weeks should be combined into one unit of time is accepted by those who believe Daniel 9:25–26 is Messianic, whereas the idea that the seven and sixty-two weeks should be separated into two sentences is accepted by those who believe Daniel 9:25–26 is non-Messianic, non-eschatological, and related only to past historical events.

Obviously, there is a lot at stake here. How we divide the timeframe in Daniel 9:25–26, and how we understand the identity of the anointed person(s) in these verses, will have a dramatic effect upon how we interpret the rest of the prophecy. In addition, if we get this part of the prophecy wrong, the law of compounding errors will inevitably set in, and we will misinterpret many other aspects of the prophecy as well.

WHY THE COMBINED “SEVEN WEEKS AND SIXTY-TWO WEEKS” IS ACCURATE

It is true that we cannot determine from Hebrew grammar and syntax alone whether we are dealing with one or two anointed figures in Daniel 9:25–26. However, thankfully, there are many other biblical and

historical clues that we can incorporate into our study of this passage to determine whether the Two Anointed-Ones Theory or the Single Anointed-One Theory is correct.

In the rest of this chapter, we will analyze the primary pieces of evidence that prove there is only one anointed individual in Daniel 9:25–26, who was to come after a combined seven and sixty-two weeks (483 years). In the next chapter, we will also cover the evidence that proves this singular anointed individual in verses 25–26 is the Messiah.

THE DATES IN THE TWO ANOINTED-ONES THEORY DO NOT WORK

The first reason we should question the idea that Daniel 9:25 indicates that one anointed figure would come after 49 years, and that a second anointed figure would come after 434 years, is because no one who subscribes to this theory can present a working model of the Daniel-9 timeline that aligns with history. This is an insurmountable problem and a primary signal that the entire theory is built on a false premise.

For example, in chapter 4 we saw that the common Antiochene interpretation of Daniel 9 proposed by many liberal scholars today posits that the 70 weeks began with the destruction of the Temple in 586 BC, with the alleged first anointed figure, Joshua the high priest, appearing 49 years (7 weeks) later, at which point another 62 weeks passed, leading to the next anointed figure, the high priest Onias III, who was murdered in 171 BC.

To briefly review, there are a number of problems with this interpretation.

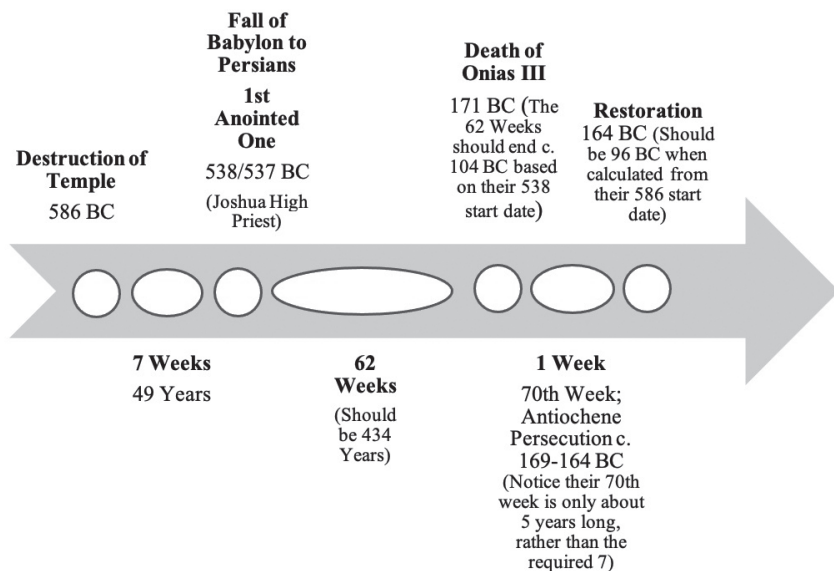
First, it requires that we start the 70-weeks countdown in 586 BC, when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians. 586 BC is one of the worst possible starting dates for the 70 weeks. So even right out of the gate, this Non-Messianic, Antiochene Two Anointed-Ones Theory already has major issues.

Second, and even worse, if we calculate the dates of the first 69 weeks put forth by proponents of this Two Anointed-Ones Theory, they only cover 415 years (from 586 to 171 BC), rather than the required

483 years. As we established in chapter 3, the individual weeks of the 70 weeks are seven-year periods of time, and any interpretation of Daniel 9 that does not accept the biblical definition of the word *shavua* (week) as a period of either seven days or seven years is deeply flawed.

When we start our first seven weeks in 586 BC, they end in 538/537 BC, and then, the next 62 weeks should end in 104/103 BC, 434 years later. These dates imply that even if we were to accept that there is a second anointed figure in Daniel 9:26, he could not arrive on the scene of history and be cut off until after 103 BC, which is nearly seven decades past the death of Onias III in 171 BC. In other words, even if for the sake of argument we did want to hypothetically accept that Daniel 9:26 refers to a second anointed individual, Onias III still died way too early to be the alleged second anointed figure who was cut off according to Daniel 9:26.

Chart of Antiochene, Two-Anointed Ones Theory



With all of the weaknesses of this Two Anointed-Ones Theory in mind, we have to ask the question: if Daniel 9:25–26 does predict two anointed figures who would come at different intervals (one after 7 weeks and one after 62 weeks), then why does one of the most popular forms of this view (the Antiochene view) require so many violations of solid biblical interpretation to work? If we are truly supposed to read Daniel 9:25–26 in the way proponents of the Two Anointed-Ones Theory suggest, then they should at least be able to present a Daniel-9 timeline that works with history, and one that uses a standard seven-year measurement of time for each of the 70 weeks (rather than making some of the weeks a period of seven years, like their first seven weeks, while simultaneously shortening the later weeks on arbitrary grounds).

Of course, again, based on the grammar and syntax of Daniel 9 I can see why many people propose the Two Anointed-Ones Theory as a possibility (ESV & JPS). Theories are fine, but unless they also work out in practice they are useless. When we try to make the Two-Anointed Ones Theory align with real history, real dates, and real people, it doesn't pan out, and for this reason alone we should not be hesitant to disavow its validity.

JEWISH ANTI-MISSIONARY GROUPS AND THE TWO ANOINTED-ONES THEORY

Among the advocates of the Two Anointed-Ones Theory, we also find many Jewish “anti-missionary” groups such as Jews for Judaism, as well as other individual Jewish teachers, rabbis, and authors. One of the reasons this theory is popular within the Jewish community today, is because Daniel 9:24–27 has often been used by Christians and Messianic Jews (sometimes rightly and sometimes wrongly) to try and convince Jewish people that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah.

As a result, the Jewish community has attempted to refute the Messianic interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27 by falling back on various forms of the Two Anointed-Ones Theory. Unlike the Two Anointed-Ones Theory covered in the last section however, which is popular

among liberal Christian scholars, most Jewish anti-missionary models of the Two Anointed-Ones theory suggest that Daniel 9:24–27 was fulfilled in the first century AD, not the 160s BC.

One of the most in-depth explanations of the Two Anointed-Ones Theory from a non-Messianic Jewish point of view can be found in the book, *The 70 Weeks of Daniel (9:24–27)*, written by orthodox Jewish scholar Gerald Sigal. Like supporters of the Antiochene view, Sigal also argues that the 70 weeks started in 586 BC. However, unlike proponents of the Antiochene view, Sigal says King Cyrus of Persia was the first anointed one of Daniel 9:25, who defeated the Babylonians 49 years later, in 538/537 BC. Then, Sigal states that for the next 434 years (62 weeks) Jerusalem was rebuilt, after which point the second anointed one appeared and was “cut off.”

Sigal believes this second anointed figure of verse 26 was the Hasmonean Jewish king and high priest Alexander Yannai (Jannaeus), who held power from 103–76 BC. Notably, Sigal also argues that verses 26–27 were fulfilled in the first century, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. In effect then, Sigal, and many other Jewish commentators, hold to what we might call a Non-Messianic Two-Anointed Ones Theory that is situated within a broader First-Century Fulfillment framework. Below is an overview from Sigal’s book that summarizes his interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27:

Verse 25 delineates the time between the beginning of the Seventy Week period and the appearance of “an anointed one.” Starting with the “going forth of the word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem,” in 586 BC, the first sequence of seven weeks (49 years) culminates with Cyrus, the anointed one (see Isaiah 45:1). [...] Following these 49 years is a period of “troubled times” lasting 62 weeks or 434 years. [...] **According to the text punctuation, the seven weeks and the sixty-two weeks of years are not meant to be added together into one combination of sixty-nine weeks. As a result, we see that there are two different anointed ones spoken of in this passage.** [...] Thus, Christians are mistaken in arguing that only one anointed one is mentioned in the

passage and they are also wrong in giving either anointed one the singular messianic identification as the long-awaited Messiah. [...]

There are a number of indicators pointing to this “anointed one” [i.e. the second one] as being the high priest Alexander Yannai (reign: 103-76 BC) who came to power just at the end of the sixty-two week period in 103 BC. He was the last of the important Hasmonean leaders. There is nothing unusual in referring to a high priest as an anointed one, since he was anointed on assuming that position. Alexander Yannai also held the position of king, a position formalized by anointing. The phrase “after sixty-two weeks” indicates the time frame during which the “anointed one shall be cut off,” that is, suffer *karet*, “excision.” Alexander Yannai is not “cut off” immediately after sixty-two weeks, but through the actions of his reign he was to have this final judgment following his death. [...] The penalty accompanying *karet* is here aptly described as “to have nothing,” or “be no more.” That is, he will have no reward after death.

This punishment is given to Alexander Yannai infamous for his unjust, tyrannical, and bloody rule. He is notorious for his violent animosity directed against the Pharisees and his brazen rejection of the Oral Law. For example, Josephus records that Alexander Yannai fought against the Pharisees for six years, “and...slew no fewer than fifty thousand of them.” **He also “ordered some eight hundred of the Jews to be crucified, and slaughtered their children and wives [...].”** Verse 26 shows when Alexander Yannai, the “anointed one,” would assume power and what kind of punishment would be meted out to him for his transgressions against God in disgracing his priestly and kingly office. Alexander Yannai’s sons continued his unmitigated lust for power and thereby finalized the demise of the Hasmonean dynasty.

The second part of verse 26 is a sweeping historical synopsis of events leading to the destruction of the Second Temple. [...] Verse 27 focuses on what the Romans will do at the end of the Second Temple period. The text presents a broad sweep of the historical

period from the end of Jewish political sovereignty, which is marked by the Roman entrance into the Temple (63 BC) until the Temple destruction in 70 CE. Verse 27 continues the presentation of verse 26. This verse also concerns itself with the last seven years of the Second Temple's existence.¹

Sigal offers the most detailed explanation of Daniel's 70-weeks prophecy that I have been able to find from a modern Jewish commentator. Yet, other Jewish interpretations do exist with minor variations. For example, some Jewish commentators believe Herod Agrippa II, who was king at the time of the Temple's destruction, could have been the second anointed figure in verse 26.²

In any case, by and large, Jewish commentators and rabbis today will generally affirm an interpretation of the 70-weeks prophecy that is characterized by four main features, as we can see in Sigal's summary above. These features include the following ideas:

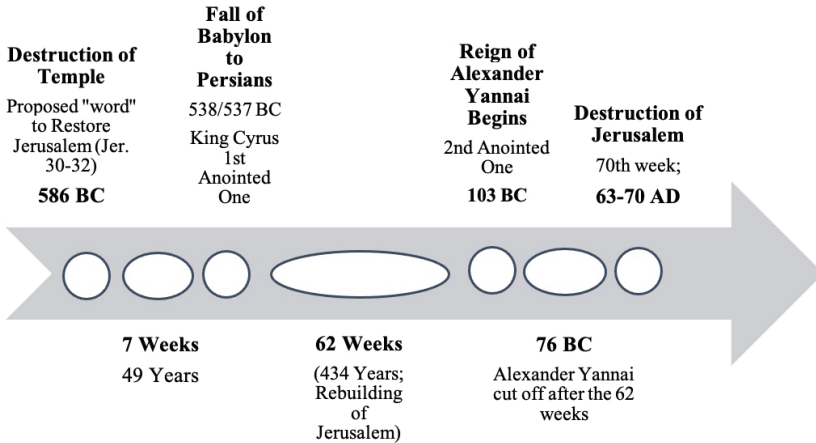
- The 70-weeks prophecy started in 586 BC.
- There are two non-Messianic anointed figures in verses 25–26. The first anointed figure was probably King Cyrus, and the second was probably Alexander Yannai, or another later Jewish leader who lived during the Second Temple Period.
- The Roman emperor Vespasian or his son Titus was the “Prince to Come” mentioned in verse 26.
- The events of verse 27 were completely fulfilled sometime in the first century, most likely when the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD.

1 Gerald Sigal, *The 70 Weeks of Daniel (9:24-27)* (USA: Xlibris, 2013), 107-113.

2 See “The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9,” Aish HaTorah, online. Also, Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz, “Daniel 9 – A True Biblical Interpretation,” *Jews for Judaism*, online.

In chart form, Sigal's view can be laid out as follows:

Orthodox Jewish Outline of Daniel 9:24–27



A CRITIQUE OF THE ORTHODOX JEWISH VIEW

Sigal knows his history, and to his credit, his first two sets of dates, from 586 BC to Cyrus in 538/537 BC, and then from Cyrus in 538/537 BC to Alexander Yannai in 103 BC, do cover a period of 49 + 434 years. 586 BC minus 49 years (the first seven weeks) minus another 434 years (the next 62 weeks) does bring us to the year 103 BC.

With that said, there are still major problems with Sigal's outline of Daniel 9:24–27, and with the orthodox Jewish interpretation of this prophecy in a general sense.

THE STARTING DATE AS 586 BC

Again, we see that every version of the Two-Anointed Ones Theory requires a 586 BC start date. We will not belabor this point here, but it should be reiterated that just because Jeremiah prophesied in 586 BC that Jerusalem would eventually be restored and that the Jews would

come back from exile (Jer. 30:18-22; 31:38-40), these prophecies do not qualify as the “word” of restoration mentioned in Daniel 9:25. The most historically-defensible starting date of the 70 weeks will become clear in chapter 10.

Gabriel was not telling Daniel that the 70 weeks could be calculated retrospectively by looking back to 586 BC. He was telling him that the “word” of restoration was right on the horizon, so that he (Daniel) could watch for it.

A MURDEROUS AND UNGODLY MASHIACH?

Another serious mistake made by Sigal in his interpretation of Daniel 9:24–27, is that he applies the word *mashiach* (v. 26) to Alexander Yannai. In the Bible, the word anointed (*mashiach*) is mostly reserved for men whom the Lord Himself chose to carry out a particular task on His behalf. We will study this word more in the next chapter. But for now, we should recognize that when this word is used as a noun, to denote a title, or even to describe someone’s identity or vocation, it always has a positive connotation in the Bible, never a negative connotation. In essence, *mashiach* is a title of honor.

To argue, as Sigal does, that the *mashiach* in Daniel 9:26 was Alexander Yannai, a corrupt leader who committed mass murder against the Lord’s people, makes no sense. Sigal provides no valid explanation as to why Daniel 9:26 would give so much attention and prominence to Alexander Yannai, nor does he provide any explanation as to how Alexander Yannai functioned as God’s anointed servant, or what he actually did on God’s behalf.

To say that Alexander Yannai was a priest and king in Israel, and was therefore technically anointed, is not enough. If Alexander Yannai was the alleged second *mashiach* of verse 26, then we would have to be able to show why he was deserving of this title of honor, and why he would be mentioned within a Messianic-eschatological Jubilee prophecy in the first place. Once we understand how the word *mashiach* is used throughout the Hebrew Bible, it is not possible to defend the idea that this term would

be applied to a genocidal megalomaniac like Alexander Yannai.

I understand why Sigal suggests that Cyrus was the alleged first anointed one of verse 25. Though I disagree, primarily on the grounds that choosing Cyrus would require a 586 BC start date for the 70 weeks, at least Cyrus is identified in the Bible as an anointed leader (*mashiach*) who would be used as God's chosen instrument (Isa 45:1). Alexander Yannai is never identified in the Bible as a *mashiach*, and his character and actions directly contradicted the character and actions of Cyrus, who actually did do something positive for the Lord.

It is tragic that instead of accepting the Messianic connotations of the word *mashiach* in Daniel 9:25–26, Sigal and other Jewish interpreters have opted to apply the most distinguished title of honor in Judaism to a murderous and wicked tyrant, Alexander Yannai. One might reasonably hope that the Jewish community would do better, and be willing to accept the definition of the word *mashiach* throughout the Hebrew Bible (more on this in the next chapter).

WHAT ABOUT THE COVENANT?

Another serious problem with Sigal's interpretation is that he has no explanation of the seven-year "covenant" mentioned in Daniel 9:27. He says the last seven years in this verse took place between 63–70 AD, because this was when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. To put it bluntly, this is not what the text says.

Verse 27 indicates that there will be a covenant confirmed for one week. Sigal ignores this important detail, and offers no commentary or historical data to support his view that verse 27 could have been fulfilled in the first century, without any type of covenant being made between the Jews and the Romans during this time. Consequently, even though Sigal and other Jewish interpreters do manage to situate one anointed figure (i.e. Cyrus) 7 weeks (49 years) after 586 BC, and then a second anointed figure (Alexander Yannai) after 62 weeks (434 years), this is all pretty much irrelevant, because their timeline depends on too many omissions of historical and biblical data to be reliable.

JERUSALEM WAS NOT REBUILT FOR 434 YEARS

Another piece of evidence that disproves the Two Anointed-Ones Theory (in both its liberal Christian and orthodox Jewish forms), can be seen when we realize that it requires us to accept that Jerusalem was rebuilt for 434 years (62 weeks). From a historical vantage point such an idea is demonstrably false, and I am personally surprised that proponents of the various Two Anointed-Ones theories have not recognized the degree to which their timelines contradict history on this point.

If we look again at the JPS and ESV Bible translations, we can see that if we position the arrival of the first anointed figure after seven weeks, we are also required to accept that the next statement regarding the sixty-two weeks applies exclusively to the rebuilding of Jerusalem during times of distress:

JPS: “Know therefore and discern, that from the going forth of the word to restore and to build Jerusalem unto one anointed, a prince, shall be seven weeks; **and for threescore and two weeks [i.e. 62 weeks], it shall be built again, with broad place and moat, but in troublous times.**”

ESV: “Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. **Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time.**”

Even if we use the 539/538/537 BC start date (i.e. the year of Cyrus’ victory over Babylon) as the beginning point of the 62 weeks, as proponents of the Two Anointed-Ones Theory say we should, by their own logic this would mean Jerusalem would then be rebuilt for 434 years after that point in time, until 103 BC. The obvious problem with this idea is that Jerusalem was not rebuilt during a time of distress from 538 to 103 BC!

In his excellent article, “Is Daniel’s Seventy Weeks Messianic?” Old Testament scholar J. Paul Tanner explains how the Two Anointed-Ones

Theory fails to correlate with the history of Jerusalem's rebuilding during and after the reign of Cyrus. Tanner clarifies:

Besides, it is illogical to separate the sixty-two weeks from the seven weeks and have a separate sentence begin in verse 26, for this implies that the rebuilding efforts took sixty-two weeks of years (i.e. 434 years) [but they did not]. [Some scholars] suggest that "sixty-two weeks" is the time Jerusalem "continues to exist" following the rebuilding [...]. Yet, the text makes no point about Jerusalem's continuation of existence; **only its rebuilding is referred to.**³

I might also add that Jerusalem continued to exist after the 100s BC, so to say that the sixty-two weeks refer only to Jerusalem's existence does not correlate with history either. Others will say the sixty-two weeks relate only to Jerusalem's time of distress. However, Jerusalem experienced distress for many years after 103 BC, so this is an unfounded assertion as well.

There is no getting around the fact that if we want to accept a Two Anointed-Ones Theory, we also have to accept that Jerusalem was rebuilt for 434 years, because that is what the placement of the punctuation in this scenario requires. Yet, we know from history that Jerusalem was not rebuilt for 434 years (from 538-103 BC).

In addition to Tanner, Old Testament scholar Harold Hoehner also recognized that the notion that Jerusalem was rebuilt for 434 years contradicts history. Hoehner wrote:

To place a break between the seven weeks and the sixty-two weeks is foreign to the context and makes no sense. **This means that it took 434 years to build the plaza and moat [and city], which does not fit historically,** nor what was intended by Daniel in the context. In conclusion, then, **the seven weeks and sixty-two weeks need to be considered cumulative or continuous [...].** Thus, it is a total of

3 J. Paul Tanner, "Is Daniel's Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 166 (July-September 2009): 328.

sixty-nine weeks from the going forth of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince⁴

The foundation of the Temple was laid in c. 536/535 BC, and the Temple was completed by c. 515 BC, about 20 years later. After this, the book of Nehemiah reveals that the rebuilding of Jerusalem, including the city walls, lasted into the 400s BC, not the 100s BC. There is no basis to the claim that Jerusalem was rebuilt for sixty-two weeks after the exile, as the Two Anointed-Ones Theory would require.

Advocates of the Two Anointed-Ones Theory, including the translators of the ESV Bible, ignore this gaping hole in their own timeline, but it is the proverbial elephant in the room, the *coup de grace* that definitively undercuts the foundation of their entire argument. The message communicated in Daniel 9:25 is that the Messiah would come after “seven weeks and sixty-two weeks.” At the end of this chapter we will cover why the sixty-nine weeks were broken up in this way.

The following statement in verse 25, “it will be rebuilt again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress,” is a parenthetical addition to the previous main point about the Messiah. When we look at the text, there is no timeframe connected to the rebuilding of the city. The end of verse 25 only tells us the city would be rebuilt during a time of distress.

The phrase “with plaza and moat” or, with the “streets” and “the wall,” is a difficult Hebrew phrase to properly translate. In any case, it is probably a concise way to refer to the complete rebuilding of the city’s infrastructure.

Once we understand from history that Jerusalem was not rebuilt for sixty-two weeks, we have another reason to conclude that the translations of Daniel 9:25 in the NASB, KJV, NIV, HCSB, and TLV, all of which begin a new sentence after the phrase “and sixty-two weeks”, are superior to the translations of this verse in the ESV and JPS Bibles:

4 Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 130-131.

NASB: “So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem **until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks**; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.”

THE TWO ANOINTED-ONES THEORY IS BASED ONLY ON THE MASORETIC TEXT

Besides the way the Two Anointed-Ones Theory contradicts history, including the history of Jerusalem’s rebuilding after the exile, this theory also lacks validity because it is based primarily on one single punctuation marker in the Masoretic Text (c. 500-900 AD). As a matter of fact, it was actually the Masoretic Text that gave rise to this theory in the first place. This is a critical point that is widely overlooked.

To briefly elaborate, the Two Anointed-Ones Theory is not based on the original text of the Hebrew Bible. This theory is rooted in a biased interpretive tradition that crept into both Judaism and Christianity at a much later point in history, well after the first century, when the Masoretic Text was completed.

As mentioned previously, the inspired text of the Hebrew Bible originally had no punctuation and no vowel pointings. This is why we often hear that biblical Hebrew is a “consonantal language” (i.e. it consists only of consonants). Even in modern Hebrew it is still most common to find books, newspapers, etc. written with no vowel pointings (although in contrast to biblical Hebrew, punctuation markers are used in modern Hebrew).

For the most part, vowels and punctuation were implied and understood in biblical Hebrew, so they didn’t need to be overtly written. For example, in contrast to English, where a sentence might be written as: “Tom went to the store”, in biblical Hebrew, the equivalent would look more like: “tm wnt t th str.” This absence of vowels and punctuation might seem weird to us at first, but once a person gains an intuitive understanding of a language, it can work just fine, and in Hebrew, it did, for thousands of years.

After the first century AD however, there was a growing desire within the Jewish community to preserve the exact Hebrew rendering for future generations, and to clarify the meaning of certain passages. This eventually led a group of rabbis known as the Masoretes to begin adding vowel pointings and some punctuation to the original Hebrew text, which we still use today. There were different groups of Masoretes who produced different manuscripts, but most can be dated to sometime between c. 500-900 AD.

Overall, the Masoretic Text is reliable. However, it always needs to be kept in mind that the vowel pointings and punctuation marks in the Masoretic Text are not part of the original text, a point that is especially important to remember when looking at Daniel 9:25.

When the rabbis came to Daniel 9:25, they inserted a punctuation mark known as an *atnah* between the words “seven weeks” and “sixty-two weeks.” An *atnah* looks like a small upward facing carrot punctuation mark, and it was used primarily to separate two clauses (i.e. as a disjunctive/dividing accent). The disjunctive or dividing function of the *atnah* explains why it is portrayed with a semi-colon in the JPS Bible and a period in the ESV, with a new sentence beginning immediately after.

ESV: “Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks [*atnah* is here in MT, which the ESV has represented with a period]. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time.”

Just as importantly, the *atnah* in the Masoretic Text could also be used to add emphasis, to inspire the reader to pause and meditate, or for clarification. In other words, the *atnah* was not always used to separate two clauses, and Old Testament scholar J. Paul Tanner has produced evidence that an *atnah* was sometimes used with large numbers, not to separate the

numbers, but to clarify that all of the numbers should be read together.⁵

Some have suggested the Masoretes inserted the *atnah* in Daniel 9:25 to separate the “seven weeks” and “sixty-two weeks” because they wanted to produce a translation of Daniel 9:25 that was non-Messianic and non-eschatological, primarily as a way of distancing themselves from the “Christian” and/or Jewish-eschatological interpretation of this verse, which they certainly would have been aware of. As I discussed in my first book, *The Passover King*, there were definitely times when the Masoretes changed the original Hebrew text so that it would appear less Messianic and less eschatological. Nevertheless, in the case of Daniel 9:25, it is difficult to be certain that they added the *atnah* because they wanted to intentionally produce a non-Messianic reading. I personally suspect this was the reason the rabbis added the *atnah*, but because an *atnah* could be used for many reasons, we cannot be 100% certain on this point.

Either way, whatever led the Masoretes to insert the *atnah* between the “seven weeks” and the “sixty-two weeks,” it needs to be understood that basing our entire translation and interpretation of this verse on a minor punctuation mark that was not even part of the original Hebrew text is poor methodology. Yet, this is exactly what those who subscribe to the Two Anointed-Ones Theory are doing, including the translators of the JPS and ESV Bibles.

The alleged importance of the *atnah* is also a common talking point among Jewish anti-missionary groups today. Some readers may have noticed earlier that Sigal mentions he does not combine the seven and

5 Tanner, “Is Daniel’s Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 2,” 328. Tanner notes: “In Numbers 1:46, which has the number 603,550, an *atnah* occurs between six hundred and three thousand, and five hundred and fifty, as though to mark thousands from hundreds. There is certainly no full disjuncture in this case; rather the *atnah* aids in clarification.” To be clear, we cannot be certain that the *atnah* in Daniel 9:25 was added only to clarify that the Masoretes wanted us to read the “seven and sixty-two weeks” as one combined number, although this is possible. Tanner’s point is that the idea that the Masoretic *atnah* in Daniel 9:25 must be read as a disjunctive accent is misguided, because the *atnah* could mean many things. Thus, to base the separation of the “seven and sixty-two weeks” in Daniel 9:25 only on the *atnah* in the Masoretic Text, as many Jewish commentators and Bible translators do (ESV & JPS), is a mistake.

sixty-two weeks because of “the text punctuation,” meaning, he bases his 70-weeks timeline primarily on the *atnah* in the Masoretic Text.⁶

In reality, the *atnah* in the Masoretic Text is irrelevant to the proper interpretation of the 70-weeks prophecy. But no doubt, it is one of the primary reasons so many people, Jews and Christians, are confused over the meaning of Daniel 9:24–27.

DANIEL 9 IN THE EARLY MANUSCRIPTS

In contrast to the Masoretic Text, every other early translation of the Hebrew Bible depicts the “seven weeks and sixty-two weeks” as a single unified period of time after which only one anointed figure would appear. There is no early interpretation or translation of Daniel 9:24–27 that posits two anointed figures instead of one in verses 25–26.

Old Testament scholar J. Paul Tanner comments on how the early manuscripts of Daniel 9 disprove the Two Anointed-Ones Theory:

The primary Greek version of Daniel (which was accepted by the early church fathers) was the text of Theodotion. [...] **[This] Greek text reflects no bifurcation of the verse between the two temporal references.** [...] Even Jerome, who knew Hebrew and lived in Palestine in the latter part of the fourth century AD, **where he certainly would have known of the best manuscripts of that day, made no indication in his Latin Vulgate translation of separating the seven and sixty-two weeks.**⁷

Likewise, in his article, “Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah’s Coming in Essene, Hellenistic, Pharisaic, Zealot, and Early Christian

6 Sigal, *Daniel’s 70 Weeks*, 107–113.

7 Tanner, “Is Daniel’s Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 2,” 326. It is also important to note that Theodotion was a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible originally produced by and for the Jewish people precisely because they rejected the Septuagint once it became widely accepted by Christians. Theodotion reflects an early Jewish understanding of Daniel 9, not a Christianized attempt to support a Messianic reading of Daniel 9 for evangelistic reasons.

Computation,” Old Testament scholar Roger T. Beckwith notes that all of the early manuscripts depict only one anointed figure coming after a combined “seven weeks and sixty-two weeks.” Beckwith writes:

As we shall see, the only known non-Messianic interpretation which dates from pre-Christian times has likewise a single anointed one, at the end of the 69 weeks. [...] **In the Septuagint [i.e. Old Greek], in Theodotion, in Symmachus and in the Peshitta the 7 and 62 weeks are treated as a single period, at the end of which the anointed one comes. The same is true even of Aquila’s translation. [...] It was not until the Masoretic punctuation of the Hebrew Text reached its present form (c. 500-900 AD) that a sharp division was made between the 7 and 62 weeks, implying a different (and presumably non-Messianic) anointed one at the end of each.** This reaction against the Messianic interpretation of the prophecy seems not to have occurred until after the Jewish rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus and the disappointment of the other Jewish Messianic hopes of the first and second centuries CE.⁸

These insights from Tanner and Beckwith are extremely helpful. They reveal how all of the earliest manuscripts of Daniel 9, including Greek translations such as the Old Greek Septuagint (c. 100s BC), Aquila (c. 140 AD), and Theodotion (c. 150 AD), as well as the Syriac Peshitta (c. 100s AD) and Latin Vulgate (c. 300s AD), depict only one anointed figure coming after a combined seven and sixty-two weeks. This is an important point, because both the Old Greek and Theodotion were early Greek versions of the Old Testament produced by and for the Jewish community. We also saw in chapter 6 that early Jewish groups such as the Essenes, who utilized the *Testament of Levi* and other apocalyptic works, were only looking for one Messianic deliverer at the end of the 70 weeks.

8 Roger T. Beckwith, “Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah’s Coming in Essene, Hellenistic, Pharisaic, Zealot, and Early Christian Computation,” *Revue de Qumran*, 10 no. 4 (Dec. 1981), 521-522.

RESPONDING TO THE MODERN JEWISH VIEW

Many orthodox Jewish groups today argue that linking the seven and sixty-two weeks into one unified period of time is nothing more than an evangelistic ploy utilized by Christians who are trying to force a Messianic interpretation of Daniel 9 on the Jewish community. The manuscript evidence does not support this claim.

In point of fact, the manuscripts show that it was the early Jewish interpreters who understood first that the seven weeks and sixty-two weeks should be combined into one unified period of time. Later Christians and Messianic Jews did not invent the idea that Daniel 9:25–26 refers to only one anointed figure. They received this view from the early Jewish commentators and early Jewish manuscripts.

If we're being objective, it is not hard to see that the modern-Jewish, non-Messianic interpretation of Daniel 9 is a more recent invention. The Messianic-eschatological interpretation goes much further back into history, and it was also the predominant Jewish view until well after the first-century AD.

As Beckwith notes, it was only much later in history that the non-Messianic interpretation of Daniel 9 became popular among religious Jews. This happened after the Jewish people's hopes of Messianic redemption were mostly crushed in the wake of the Second Jewish Revolt (c. 135 AD), and especially after the Masoretic Text became the most widely used version of the Bible within Judaism (c. 500–900 AD). It was probably also during this time (post-135 AD) that the Two Anointed-Ones Theory was invented, because it offered the Jewish people a way to understand Daniel 9 that did not require them to accept that they had missed their Messiah, the one who came after “seven weeks and sixty-two weeks.”

THE SEPARATION OF WEEKS IS CONNECTED TO THE JUBILEE MOTIF

So why then were the first seven weeks separated from the sixty-two weeks in Daniel 9:25? Put simply, the reason for this separation is

because the first 49 years (seven weeks) represent the first Jubilee cycle out of the ten Jubilee cycles that were initially introduced in verse 24, with the mention of the “70 sevens.”

Just like the 70 sevens (490 years) of Daniel 9:24 symbolically evoke the historical Jubilee, the next number mentioned in the prophecy, namely, the “seven weeks” (49 years) of Daniel 9:25, also evokes the same Jubilee theme from the previous verse. It is not a coincidence that the first two periods of time referenced in Daniel 9:24–25, 490 years and 49 years, are connected to the Jubilee.

The first period of seven weeks is set apart as an independent Jubilee cycle because this highlights the Jubilee symbolism that is integral to the meaning of Daniel 9:24–27.

When the numbers in verses 24 and 25 are read together, the message of these numbers is something along the lines of, “There will be 70 sevens that will lead to the Age of Jubilee. Yet, this period of ten Jubilee cycles (490 years) will begin with the first Jubilee cycle of “seven weeks” (49 years), which will in effect function as the down payment leading to the fulfillment of the other nine Jubilee cycles later.”

Proponents of the Two Anointed-Ones Theory will often say things like, “If there is only one anointed figure in this passage who was supposed to come after 69 weeks, why wouldn’t the text simply say this, instead of dividing up the 69 weeks into a period of 7 and 62?” This is a fair question. But the division itself does not prove there must be two anointed individuals here.

When we understand that Daniel 9:24–27 is a Jubilee prophecy, the separation of the first Jubilee cycle from the other years makes perfect sense. In the Hebrew, this connection and wordplay between the Final Jubilee that will occur after *shavuim shivim* (seventy weeks), and the first Jubilee cycle that occurred after *shavuim shiva* (seven weeks), is easy to see and quite beautiful. This division of the timeframe introduces an element of poetic flair and theological texture that would be lost if Gabriel merely said “sixty-nine weeks.” As a result, we need not take such a strictly utilitarian view here. God was perfectly within His rights to be a little

creative by saying “seven weeks and sixty-two weeks.”

I should also add that some scholars have suggested that the reason the first sixty-nine weeks are broken up into seven and sixty-two, is because the first seven weeks could correspond to the time when Jerusalem was rebuilt in the Persian era. This line of reasoning is unnecessary, because for one, the text never connects the rebuilding of Jerusalem to the seven weeks of verse 25. The rebuilding of the city is mentioned parenthetically after the “seven weeks and sixty-two weeks,” not with the seven weeks. Second, as we have seen, the rebuilding of Jerusalem continued for longer than forty-nine years. Third, and finally, there is a much better explanation of this division when we consider it in light of the Jubilee theme of verse 24.

As Roger T. Beckwith writes:

The remarkable division of the period of 69 weeks into 7 and 62 (verse 25) may [...] be an indication that the 70 weeks (of years) are also 10 Jubilees (of 7 weeks each) [...].⁹

Similarly, prophecy teacher Nelson Walters notes:

By separating out a complete Jubilee cycle (the first seven *shavuim*), God left no doubt that the entire prophecy was about Jubilee cycles—ten of them.¹⁰

MOVING BEYOND THE TWO ANOINTED-ONES THEORY

To summarize the points we have covered in this chapter, we can responsibly conclude that Daniel 9 refers to only one anointed individual who was to come after a combined seven and sixty-two weeks for the following reasons:

9 Beckwith, “Daniel 9 and the Date of the Messiah’s Coming...”, 522.

10 Nelson Walters, *70 Times 7: Daniel’s Mysterious Countdown and the Church’s Heroic Future* (Wilmington: Ready for Jesus Publications, 2018), 89.

1. Proponents of the Two Anointed-Ones Theory are forced to choose 586 BC as the only possible starting date for the 70 weeks, which is arguably the least likely date when the 70-weeks count-down began. In addition, even if this date is accepted for the sake of argument, none of the advocates of the Two Anointed-Ones Theory can reconcile the rest of their timeline with history.
2. The Two Anointed-Ones Theory (liberal Christian Antiochene and orthodox Jewish) does not offer a valid explanation of the “covenant” in Daniel 9:27.
3. The Two Anointed-Ones Theory requires us to say that Jerusalem was rebuilt for exactly 434 years after the Jewish return from exile. This proposition is false and can be easily disproven from history.
4. All of the earliest Jewish manuscripts, translations, and commentaries on Daniel 9 reflect the view that there is only one anointed figure in the 70-weeks prophecy, not two. The idea that there are two anointed figures in Daniel 9:25–26 is based on one minor, disputed, ambiguous, and extrabiblical punctuation mark in the Masoretic Text, which was not completed until the 500s or 600s AD at the earliest, and possibly even later.
5. There is a strategic reason for the division of the 69 weeks into a period of 7 and 62. This division is related to the Jubilee theme of Daniel 9:24–27. It has nothing to do with there being two anointed individuals in the text.

As we conclude this chapter, I want to say that I do understand the importance of considering various points of view, and I will admit that for many months the possibility that there could be two anointed figures in Daniel 9:25–26 was something I seriously considered. As a matter of fact, this possibility was one of the primary reasons why I remained unsure of how Daniel 9:24–27 should be interpreted for so long, even as I was in the process of doing the research for this book.

With that said, I also always operate under the assumption that God's word is there to be understood, especially if we apply ourselves to the work of biblical study and historical analysis with an open mind. Even as I tried to take the Two Anointed-Ones Theory seriously and give its proponents the benefit of the doubt, I also began to realize more and more that this theory is like a small boat with gaping holes taking on water, unable to stay afloat, and unable to bear the weight of serious exegetical and historical scrutiny.

This process led me to the conclusion that there is only one anointed person in the 70-weeks prophecy. In the next chapter, we will see that the Anointed One in Daniel 9:25–26 is in fact *the* Messiah, the heir to the Davidic throne *par excellence*.

9

IS DANIEL 9:25 ABOUT THE MESSIAH?

IN THE LAST CHAPTER, we looked at the evidence that proves there is only one anointed person in Daniel 9:25–26. Verse 25 calls this anointed figure *Mashiach Nagid* (Anointed Leader/Prince), whereas in verse 26 his title is shortened to the more basic rendering *Mashiach* (Anointed One):

25. So you are to know and discern that from the going forth of a word to restore and to build Jerusalem until [the] Anointed Prince (*Mashiach Nagid*) there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be rebuilt again with plaza and moat even in times of distress.
26. Then after the sixty-two weeks [the] Anointed One (*Mashiach*) will be cut off and have nothing [...] (*author's translation*).

Pronunciation note: *Mashiach*: mah-shee-ach; *Nagid*: nah-geed.

There have been many arguments made against the idea that this *Mashiach Nagid* (Anointed Prince) in Daniel 9:25–26 is the Messiah. In this chapter, we will examine the evidence that illustrates why these arguments are misguided. What we will discover is that when we conduct a detailed study of both of these terms in the Hebrew Bible, it becomes even more clear that the title *Mashiach Nagid* has Messianic connotations. It will be proven that *Mashiach Nagid* is a title that refers to the Davidic King *par excellence*, the Messiah himself, the very one who will usher in the Age of Jubilee that was first introduced in Daniel 9:24.

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

As we begin our study of the Anointed Prince (*Mashiach Nagid*) in Daniel 9:25, let us first recall that various interpretations of the identity of this figure have been proposed throughout history. Some of the most popular suggestions have included the Persian king Cyrus, Joshua the high priest, and the Messiah himself.

One of the primary reasons there is disagreement over the identity of this Anointed Prince, is because the two terms used to describe him have a “wide semantic range” in the Hebrew Bible.¹ These are not terms that are used exclusively to refer to the Messiah. As a matter of fact, these titles are used numerous times to refer to other historical figures besides the Messiah. Thus, many interpreters argue that because the terms *mashiach* and *nagid* are used in the Hebrew Bible to refer to non-Messianic leaders, the *Mashiach Nagid* in Daniel 9:25 must be an important person, but not necessarily the Messiah himself.

As we attempt to confirm the identity of the *Mashiach Nagid* in Daniel 9:25, we need to keep in mind that every title that is used to describe the Messiah in the Hebrew Bible was at other times also used to describe other people or objects as well. With this in mind, we can more easily recognize that the argument that the *Mashiach Nagid* in Daniel

1 J. Paul Tanner, “Is Daniel’s Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 2,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 166 (July-September 2009):319-35, 323.

9:25 cannot be the Messiah, only because these titles were sometimes used to refer to other people, is flawed. According to that logic, no verse in the entire Hebrew Bible could be about the Messiah, because the Messiah is always described using words and titles that could also apply to other people or other objects in different contexts.

Therefore, when looking at this issue we need to start with the right questions. Instead of asking, “are these terms ever used to refer to other non-Messianic leaders in Scripture?”, as though the answer to this question proves something, we should be asking, “what connotations do these titles carry, why are they used together in Daniel 9:25, and is there any evidence from the prior usage of these titles in the Hebrew Bible that they could have Messianic significance in Daniel 9:25?”

If we ask the right questions, and study the biblical data from the right vantage point, we will find that the Anointed Prince (*Mashiach Nagid*) in Daniel 9:25 could not be anyone other than the Messiah.

THE TERM *MASHIACH* IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

The term “anointed” (*mashiach*) is used as a noun (and sometimes more in the sense of an adjective) roughly 40 times in the Hebrew Bible. This noun form (*mashiach*) is related to the verbal root *mashach*. *Mashach* means “to anoint,” and it is a verb closely associated with the idea of smearing or anointing someone or something with oil, primarily as a means of setting that person or object apart for service to the Lord.

As noted in the last chapter, when used as a noun, *mashiach* always has a positive connotation in the Hebrew Bible. It was not a general title that could apply to anyone. Rather, it was a title of honor and authority that could only be applied to someone who was uniquely chosen and set apart by God for a special purpose.

Generally, the term *mashiach* was applied to an Israelite priest or king who was consecrated to serve the Lord. The Levitical priests were often described as God’s anointed servants (Lev. 4:3-5, 4:16, 4:22), and both Saul and David are repeatedly referred to as the Lord’s “anointed” in 1 & 2 Samuel, and also in the Psalms (1 Sam 12:3-5; 24:6-10;

26:9-11; 26:16-23; 2 Sam. 1:14-21; 19:21; 22:51; 23:1; Psa. 18:50; 20:6; 89:38-51 cf. 1 Chron. 16:22; 2 Chron. 6:42).

Additionally, *mashiach* could be applied to a corporate entity or group of people. For example, in Psalms 28:8, 84:9, 105:5, Habakkuk 3:13, and Lamentations 4:20, the entire nation of Israel (or “Jacob”) is described as the Lord’s “anointed.”

Besides these applications to the Israelite priests, kings, and people, the Persian king Cyrus is also called God’s anointed (*mashiach*) in Isaiah 45:1.

Below are four examples that summarize how the term *mashiach* is most often used in the Hebrew Bible:

- Levitical Priest: “Then the anointed (*mashiach*) priest is to take some of the blood of the bull and bring it to the tent of meeting [...]” (Leviticus 4:5; note that here *mashiach* is functioning more as an adjective, which was also common).
- King David: The Lord “gives great deliverance to His king, and shows lovingkindness to His anointed (*mashiach*), to David and his descendants/seed (*zera*) forever” (Psalm 18:50).
- King Cyrus: “Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His anointed (*mashiach*), whom I have taken by the right hand to subdue nations before him [...]” (Isaiah 45:1).
- The People of Israel: “You went forth for the salvation of Your people; for the salvation of Your anointed (*mashiach*; i.e. Israel)” (Hab. 3:13).

THE TERM *NAGID* IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

Like the term *mashiach*, the second title in Daniel 9:25, *nagid*, is also used in a variety of ways in the Hebrew Bible. It appears just over 40 times and most often describes a military commander, captain, officer, or prince. In a general sense, the term denotes leadership, usually within the context of military, religious, civil, administrative, or geopolitical affairs.

Saul and David are frequently referred to as the *nagid* of the people of Israel (1 Sam. 9:16; 10:1; 13:14; 25:30; 2 Sam. 5:2; 6:21; 7:8; cf. 1 Chron. 5:2; 11:2; 17:7; 28:4). Besides Saul and David, the later kings of Israel, including Solomon, Jeroboam, Jehu, and Hezekiah, are also described using the term *nagid* (1 Kin. 1:35; 14:7; 16:2; 20:5; 1 Chron. 29:22).

In addition, *nagid* could be applied to someone who ruled over the Tabernacle or Temple (1 Chron. 9:11; 9:20; 2 Chron. 31:12-13; 35:8; Neh. 11:11; Jer. 20:1), or over a particular tribe or branch of the military in Israel (1 Chron. 12:27; 13:1; 27:4; 27:16; 2 Chron. 11:11; 11:22; 19:11; 28:7). In 2 Chronicles 32:31, *nagid* is applied to the military leaders of the Assyrian army, and it also occurs in a number of other contexts where it refers to the princes or leaders of various nations (Job 29:10; 31:37; Psa. 76:12; Prov. 28:16; Ezek. 28:2; Dan. 9:26; 11:22). In one rare case, in Proverbs 8:6, *nagid* is used in a metaphorical sense to describe “noble things” (NASB) or “great things” (KJV).

Unlike the title *mashiach*, *nagid* did not always have a positive connotation (a point that will become even more important in chapter 13, when we look at “the Prince to Come” of verse 26). Compared to *mashiach*, *nagid* is more of a general term, one that was often used to refer to leaders that the Lord Himself had not necessarily chosen to perform a positive service on His behalf.

Below are a handful of examples that summarize how *nagid* is used throughout the Hebrew Bible to depict various positions of leadership:

1. King David: “Now therefore, thus you shall say to My servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler (*nagid*) over My people Israel’” (2 Samuel 7:8).
2. King Hezekiah: “Return and say to Hezekiah the leader (*nagid*) of My people [...]” (2 Kings 20:5).
3. The King of Tyre: “Son of man, say to the leader (*nagid*) or Tyre [...]” (Ezek. 28:2).

4. A Ruler within the Temple: “Shebuel the son of Gershom, the son of Moses, was officer (*nagid*) over the treasures [in the house of God].”

As mentioned earlier, because many commentators only base their interpretation of the title *Mashiach Nagid* in Daniel 9:25 on the way these terms are used in the Hebrew Bible, a large number have concluded this individual in the 70-weeks prophecy is not the Messiah. This of course then raises the question: why shouldn't we follow suit, and translate this title in a non-Messianic way as well? After all, don't we want to be careful not to read overt Messianic significance into this passage, when it could just as easily be referring to another important leader in Israel, but not necessarily to the Messiah himself? Maybe the *Mashiach Nagid* in Daniel 9:25 is another historical figure, and perhaps this title is used here in a way that mirrors its more common usage in the Hebrew Scriptures.

These are all fair questions and ideas to put forward. Also, I will be the first to say I have no interest in trying to force a Messianic interpretation of this title if it is not warranted. I do understand where others are coming from when they choose a non-Messianic interpretation of the title *Mashiach Nagid* in Daniel 9:25.

With that said, it can be proven that the title *Mashiach Nagid* (Anointed Prince) in Daniel 9:25 designates the Messiah, and that those who deny this are ignoring key pieces of biblical data. In the next part of this chapter, we will cover the three pieces of evidence that support the Messianic reading of the title *Mashiach Nagid* in Daniel 9:25.

#1: THE MESSIAH IS CALLED BOTH MASHIACH AND NAGID IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

It is true that both the terms *mashiach* (anointed) and *nagid* (leader/ commander/prince) are used in a variety of ways in the Hebrew Bible. However, it is equally true that both of these titles are also used in other prophecies as proper names for the Messiah himself. Thus, to say that

the *Mashiach Nagid* in Daniel 9:25 is not the Messiah, only because these terms could at times also apply to other people, is a moot point, and one that fails to take into consideration the Messianic significance of these titles in the writings of the other Hebrew prophets.

THE MASHIACH IN PSALM 2

One of the best examples of how the title *Mashiach* could be applied directly to the Messiah can be found in Psalm 2. In this Psalm we are told that the “the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against His Anointed [*mashiach*].” Later in this Psalm, we are told that this Anointed One is God’s “King” who will be “installed” “upon Mount Zion,” and also that this King is God’s “Son.” Thus the famous line, “I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD; ‘He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.’”

It is widely accepted in both Jewish and Christians circles that the *mashiach* in Psalm 2 is the Messiah. Some will still argue that the anointed “Son” in these verses is none other than the historical David, because it is true that in the Ancient Near East kings and leaders were often understood to be the “sons” of their god. However, this does not mean the Anointed Son-King in Psalm 2 is David.

We know it is the Messiah in view here because in this same Psalm the Anointed One is also told by God, “I will surely give the nations as your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, you shall shatter them like earthenware.” David never ruled the ends of the earth, nor did he or any of his sons ever enjoy unrivaled control over all the nations. David endured a constant state of warfare until the end of his life. Given this important detail, it only makes sense to conclude that it is the Messiah himself who is receiving his inheritance from God the Father in these verses, which he will possess when he establishes the Messianic Kingdom in the future.

The description of the Messiah as God’s Anointed (*Mashiach*) in Psalm 2:2 is important, because this is the first place in Scripture where the Messiah is identified specifically as *Mashiach*. It is also

worth noting that in Acts 4:25–26 the Apostles Peter and John applied Psalm 2:2 directly to the Messiah. In addition, the *Babylonian Talmud* (*Sukkah* 52a) proves that the early Jewish rabbis interpreted Psalm 2 as a Messianic prophecy, and also recognized that the *Mashiach* in this passage is the Messiah. We read in the *Talmud*:

The Sages taught: To Messiah ben David, who is destined to be revealed swiftly in our time, the Holy One, Blessed be He, says: Ask of Me anything and I will give you whatever you wish, as it is stated: “I will tell of the decree; the Lord said unto me: You are My son, this day have I begotten you, ask of Me, and I will give the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession” (Psalm 2:7–8).²

This text preserves an ancient Jewish tradition, going back thousands of years, which teaches that the *Mashiach* of Psalm 2 is the Messiah. This is the first hint that the title *Mashiach* in another important eschatological prophecy, Daniel 9:24–27, is Messianic as well.

THE ANOINTED ONE IN THE ISAIAH 61 JUBILEE PROPHECY

Besides the reference to the Messiah in Psalm 2, the Messianic Jubilee prophecy we looked at in chapter 2, which can be found in Isaiah 61, also confirms that the anointed person in Daniel 9 is the Messiah. Isaiah 61:1 says this of the Messiah: “The Spirit of the LORD God is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed (*mashach*) me to bring good news to the afflicted [...]; to proclaim liberty to the captives.”

Here in this Jubilee prophecy, the Messiah is described as God’s Anointed One. Although in this particular verse the verb form *mashach* is used instead of the noun form *mashiach*, the message is still the same. In Isaiah 61, it is God’s Anointed One, the Messiah, who ushers in the Messianic Jubilee. Likewise, in Daniel 9:25–26, it is the same

2 *Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 52a, Sefaria, online.*

Anointed One from Isaiah 61 who is also mentioned in Daniel's Messianic Jubilee prophecy.

Biblical scholar John Bergsma recognizes the connection between Daniel 9 and Isaiah 61, which confirms that it is the same anointed figure who appears in both Jubilee prophecies. Bergsma writes:

Thus, we see the association of messiah and jubilee in Dan 9, just as was seen in the texts of Isaiah [...] Daniel 9, like certain passages of Isaiah (e.g. Isa 61), associates the coming of a messiah with the inauguration of a jubilee for Jerusalem and its people.³

THE MESSIAH AS *NAGID* IN ISAIAH 55

The Messiah is also described as God's *Nagid* in another significant prophecy, which can be found in Isaiah 55:3-5:

Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen that you may live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, according to **the faithful mercies shown to David**. Behold, I have made him a witness to the peoples, **a leader (*nagid*)** and commander for the peoples. Behold, you will call a nation you do not know, and a nation which knows you not will run to you, because of the LORD your God, even the Holy One of Israel; for He has glorified you.

The individual in this passage is God's Messianic Servant, who was described earlier in Isaiah 49:6 as one who will be a "light of the nations," so that God's "salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." Just like in Isaiah 49, here in Isaiah 55 the Servant of the Lord is depicted as one who will not only save Israel, but also as one who will bring salvation to the Gentile nations. Isaiah says the Messiah "will call a nation" that previously did not know God, and "a nation which knows you not will run to you [...]."

3 John Stetze Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 230–231.

Besides the emphasis on the Messiah's expansive mission of salvation, it is important to understand that the covenant God says He will make with the nations through the Messiah in Isaiah 55 is rooted in "the faithful mercies shown to David." Old Testament scholar Walter Kaiser explains, "the content of the [Messianic] covenant centers on what God promised King David in 2 Samuel 7:16: a throne, a dynasty, and a kingdom that would be eternal in its scope and universal in its range."⁴ Similarly, Old Testament scholar Robert Chisholm Jr. writes, we must see that the Messianic "covenant is rooted in and brings to fulfillment the Davidic promises." Through this Messianic covenant, Israel and the nations will become "the beneficiaries of the ideal Davidic king's rule."⁵

With the Davidic covenant mentioned as the background, when God then says the Messiah will be a "witness to the peoples, a leader (*nagid*) and commander of the peoples," He is saying that the Messiah will be the Davidic King *par excellence*. The Messiah will be an even better and greater David. As a result, those who "listen carefully" (49:2) to God's prophetic instruction through Isaiah will be brought into a covenant relationship with the Messiah. In this relationship, the Messiah will become their "witness," who will reveal the truth of God to them, their "leader" or "prince" (*nagid*), who will be better than any other political leader in human history, and their "commander," who will lead them to victory over their enemies.

THE MESSIAH IS MASHIACH NAGID IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

As we can see from studying these Messianic passages (Psalm 2, Isaiah 61, and Isaiah 55), the Messiah is called both *mashiach* and *nagid* in the Hebrew Bible. These are Messianic titles that depict the Messiah as the Greater David (Psalm 2 & Isa. 55), and they are also titles that link

4 Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 182.

5 Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Isaiah 55:3-5: The Fulfillment of the Davidic Promise," in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and Expositions of the Messiah in the Old Testament*, eds. Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), 979.

the Messiah's mission to the Age of Jubilee that was previously spoken of in Isaiah 61.

In light of these other prophecies, it is safe to conclude that when Daniel 9:25 mentions the *Mashiach Nagid* (Anointed Prince) who will appear to usher in the ultimate Jubilee, this is not a title that is meant to be interpreted in a vacuum. We are supposed to gather from this title that the Anointed Prince in Daniel 9:25 is the same *Mashiach* and the same *Nagid* who is also mentioned in the other Messianic passages of the Bible, including Psalm 2, Isaiah 55, and Isaiah 61.

The linking of these different passages through identical Messianic terminology is an example of biblical intertextuality, which was one of the primary ways the prophets developed their theological message. One passage is linked to another, that is then linked to another, and the net result is a fuller picture of who the Messiah would be and what he would do that is much deeper and richer than what we could gather from only one text in isolation.

Psalm 2	Isaiah 55	Isaiah 61	Daniel 9:24-27
God's Anointed King (<i>mashiach</i>) will subdue the entire earth and reign on Mount Zion.	The Messiah will be a leader (<i>nagid</i>) and commander, who will bring the nations into the blessings of the Davidic covenant.	The Messiah will be anointed (<i>mashach</i>) to proclaim liberty to the captives, and to usher in the Age of Jubilee.	God's Anointed Prince (<i>Mashiach Nagid</i>) will appear after a specified period of time, and will usher in the Messianic Jubilee after 70 sevens (490 years).

Of course, the terms *mashiach* and *nagid* do not have to refer to the Messiah every time they are used in the Bible. But again, this is a moot point as far as Daniel 9:25 is concerned, because Daniel 9:24–27 is a Messianic-eschatological prophecy about the future Jubilee. This is precisely why the majority of early Jewish interpretations of Daniel 9 were Messianic.

WHY IS THERE NO DEFINITE ARTICLE IN DANIEL 9:25–26?

As a brief aside, I should mention that some people are against the Messianic reading of Daniel 9:25–26 because the definite article “the” is never used with *Mashiach Nagid* and *Mashiach* in these verses. Technically, it could be argued that Daniel 9:25–26 only refers to *an* Anointed Prince, and *an* Anointed One, not to *the* Anointed One. Due to the missing definite article, some (especially orthodox Jews) will argue that it could not possibly be the Messiah in this passage.

This is another dubious argument. Messianic titles often appear in the Bible with no definite article. There is nowhere in the entire Old Testament where we find the phrase *the Messiah*, but this does not nullify the overwhelming number of Messianic prophecies in Scripture.

A perfect example of how a Messianic title could often appear with no definite article can be found in the previously mentioned Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 55:4. Isaiah doesn’t say here that the Messiah will be *the* leader (*nagid*) of the people. He only says the Messiah will be *a* leader (*nagid*). Yet, the context proves that it is the Messiah who is in view, so the lack of a definite article is essentially irrelevant.

This is also the case in Daniel 9:25–26. The lack of the definite article does not disprove the Messianic reading, because the context of the prophecy, as well as the way in which these Messianic titles are used throughout the Hebrew Bible, confirm the Messianic reading. As a result, the NASB, and other English translations that translate the Messianic titles in a definite sense, as “Messiah *the* Prince,” or the KJV, which translates it as “*the* Messiah, *the* Prince,” are accurate translations.

In some cases, in Hebrew, a definite article can be implied, or, is

technically unnecessary with words that are part of a title, and in a sense, a proper name. Even in modern English orthodox Jews often refer to the Messiah as “Messiah” or “*Mashiach*” with no definite article, but this usage does not negate that they are referring to *the* Messiah in a definite sense. The same is also true in Daniel 9:25–26.

#2: ONLY SAUL AND DAVID WERE CALLED BOTH MASHIACH AND NAGID

Another insightful detail that highlights the Messianic significance of the title *Mashiach Nagid* in Daniel 9:25 can be seen when we understand that Saul and David were the only two people ever called both *mashiach* and *nagid* in the Hebrew Bible. In other words, many different types of people throughout the Hebrew Bible were called either *mashiach* or *nagid*. However, no one besides Saul and David were designated using both of these terms.

For example, as we saw earlier, the Gentile king Cyrus is called God’s *mashiach* (Isa. 45:1), but Cyrus is never called God’s *nagid*. Alternatively, the leader of Tyre is called a *nagid* in Ezekiel 28:1, but he is never called a *mashiach*. In a similar fashion, various priests and leaders were called either *mashiach* or *nagid* in different places in the Old Testament. But there was no priest or leader in Israel besides Saul and David who were described using both of these titles.

Saul was called God’s *mashiach* in numerous places, including 1 Samuel 12:3, 24:6, and 26:16, and Saul was also called God’s *nagid* in 1 Samuel 9:16 and 10:1. David was called God’s *mashiach* in numerous places, including 2 Samuel 19:21, 22:51, and 23:1, and David was also called God’s *nagid* in 2 Samuel 5:2, 6:21, and 7:8 (cf. 1 Chron 11:2; 17:7; 28:4).

This usage confirms that the *Mashiach Nagid* in Daniel 9:25 is the heir to the Davidic throne, which is precisely why the two terms are used together in Daniel 9:25, rather than just one or the other. The title Anointed Prince (*Mashiach Nagid*) intentionally evokes the idea of the Messiah as God’s Greater David, who will reestablish the Davidic monarchy in the Messianic Age.

Below are some examples from the Hebrew Bible that illustrate how the Messiah is often presented as the Greater David; a message that Daniel 9:25 reiterates by referring to him as *Mashiach Nagid* (Anointed Prince):

- **King David:** The Lord “gives great deliverance to His king, and shows lovingkindness **to His anointed (*mashiach*), to David and his seed forever**” (Psalm 18:50).
- **King David:** “Now therefore, thus you shall say to **My servant David**, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, **to be ruler (*nagid*)** over My people Israel’” (2 Samuel 7:8).
- **King Messiah:** “**My Servant David** [i.e. the Messiah] will be King over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them.” (Ezekiel 37:24; notice how the Messiah is called “David”).
- **King Messiah:** “Behold I have made Him a witness to the peoples, **a leader (*nagid*)** and commander for the peoples” (Isa. 55:4).
- **King Messiah:** “The Kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against **His anointed (*mashiach*)**” (Psalm 2:2).

As these examples demonstrate, the Hebrew Bible calls the Messiah by the name “David” (Ezek. 37:24), and, from a historical vantage point, it was understood that since Saul was eventually rejected by the Lord, David was the original *mashiach* and *nagid* (Ps. 18:50; 2 Sam. 7:8) of God’s people, the one whose life and career foreshadowed that of the future Messianic King. By using two important Messianic titles, Daniel 9:25 draws on this Davidic motif and applies these two names, *mashiach* and *nagid*, to the future King of Israel, the one who will lead and shepherd God’s people in the Age of Jubilee.

The extent to which many liberal Christian and orthodox Jewish interpreters of Daniel 9 deny the Messianic significance of the title *Mashiach Nagid* is both scandalous and tragic. There is simply no justifiable reason to downplay the Messianic connotations of these two terms.

#3: THE MESSIANIC READING HARMONIZES WITH THE REST OF DANIEL

Another important point that strengthens the argument that the Anointed Prince in Daniel 9:25 is the Messiah, is related to the broader theological message of the book of Daniel. Many will be aware that Daniel contains many prophecies about the Messiah and the establishment of his kingdom. As a matter of fact, there is not even one prophecy in the entire book of Daniel that is not Messianic or eschatological in some way.

For example, the prophecy in Daniel 2 ends with the Messiah's kingdom destroying the Gentile kingdoms that are hostile to God's people (Dan. 2:44-45). In Daniel 7, we also see the Messianic Son of Man figure who receives His kingdom from "the Ancient of Days" (Dan. 7:9-14). Daniel 8 ends with the final archenemy of Israel (i.e. Antichrist) being "broken without human agency," which implies his supernatural defeat when the Messiah appears (Dan. 8:23-26). Daniel 11-12 contains a large amount of historical information. But even this prophecy ends by looking forward to the resurrection in the days of the Messiah, when the righteous who "sleep in the dust of the ground will awake" (Dan. 12:2).

In light of the Messianic and eschatological nature of Daniel, it is necessary to read and interpret Daniel 9 as part of the larger Messianic-eschatological message developed throughout the entire book. When we do this, it makes the case even stronger that Daniel 9 is also Messianic, and that the Anointed Prince in this passage is the Messiah himself, the same Son of Man figure from Daniel 7:13-14, the same "Prince of princes" from Daniel 8:25, and the same individual who will establish the Messianic Kingdom that is mentioned in Daniel 2 and Daniel 7, which in the very last line of the book, Daniel is told will come "at the end of the age" (Dan. 12:13).

In his excellent article, “Is Daniel’s Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic?” Old Testament scholar J. Paul Tanner explains how the prophecy of the Anointed Prince in Daniel 9 is connected to the prior prophecy in Daniel 7, and also to the Messianic theology of the book of Daniel as a whole. Tanner writes:

This “link, then, serves to support contextually the argument that the [*mashiach*] of 9:25 is the “Son of Man” of 7:13, namely, *the* Messiah.”⁶

Also, in a complementary fashion, Daniel 7 focuses more on the other-worldly attributes of the Messiah, whereas Daniel 9:25–26 focuses more on the Messiah’s identity as a rugged human king who will sit on the throne of David. There are beautiful elements of comparison and contrast between the pictures of the Messiah in Daniel 7 and Daniel 9 that can only be appreciated if we accept the intrinsically Messianic nature of both passages. These prophecies function together to give us a mosaic portrait of the Messiah as both the heavenly Son of Man and the earthly Davidic king.

KINGS & JUSTICE IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

In other Ancient Near Eastern cultures, such as in Mesopotamia for example, Jubilee-type legislation that enacted justice was also common. In his article, “The Credibility of Liberty,” Old Testament scholar Jonathan Kaplan writes, “the Jubilee has many analogous practices in the ancient Near East,” and, “the linguistic [...] connections between the Mesopotamian edicts [and laws] and the Levitical Jubilee and other biblical release passages are clear.”⁷

Notably, these laws were often carried out by the kings and rulers, who were responsible for preserving order within their realm, defending

6 Tanner, “Is Daniel’s Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 2,” 324.

7 Jonathan Kaplan, “The Credibility of Liberty: The Plausibility of the Jubilee Legislation of Leviticus 25 in Ancient Israel and Judah,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 81, 2019, 183-203.

the oppressed, and administrating justice. Thus, viewed from an Ancient Near Eastern cultural perspective, it makes a lot of sense that Daniel 9:25 would introduce the future King of Israel, because it would have been understood that only Israel's King Priest could actualize the Jubilee of Daniel 9:24. Which again, is precisely why Isaiah 61 also speaks of the Anointed One (i.e. King) who will bring God's Jubilee justice into full effect (Isa. 61:1).

MESSIANIC TITLES 101

At the beginning of this chapter, we learned that there is no Messianic title used anywhere in the Bible that could not also be used to refer to another non-Messianic figure or object. For example, the Messiah is called the "seed" (*zera*) of Eve in Genesis 3:15 and Numbers 24:7. Yet, the term *zera* (seed) is also used in many other non-Messianic passages to refer to a person's plural descendants (Gen. 13:16). The Messiah is called the "branch" of the Lord in Isaiah 4:2, Isaiah 11:1, Zechariah 3:8, and Zechariah 6:12. Yet, this term "branch" also has a wide range of applications in the Hebrew Bible, and often refers to a tree branch, a sprout, or the bud of a tree (Isa. 61:11). The Messiah is called God's "Servant" in numerous places, including Isaiah 49:5 and Isaiah 52:13. But Moses is also called God's "servant" in Numbers 12:7, as are many other people in the Bible (Gen. 20:8).

This brief overview of Messianic titles demonstrates that determining whether or not a title is Messianic cannot be based primarily on whether or not the words used in the title could also describe something or someone else, because every single Messianic title incorporates common words that have a wide range of meaning. Context is always king in interpretation, and we must explore the context in which a term occurs to determine whether or not it is Messianic, not simply a term's broader or general definition. This is what allows us to make a decision as to whether a particular title is Messianic or not.

When we follow this methodology with the *Mashiach Nagid* in Daniel 9:25, the weight of evidence verifies that the Anointed Prince

in this verse is in fact the Messiah, the heir to the Davidic throne, the very one who will usher in the Age of Jubilee.

To briefly summarize, here are the three main pieces of evidence covered in this chapter, which prove that the Anointed Prince of Daniel 9:25–26 is the Messiah:

1. The terms *mashiach* and *nagid* are applied to the Messiah in other Messianic prophecies in the Hebrew Bible (Ps. 2:2; Isa. 55:4; 61:1).
2. Only Saul and David are referred to as both *mashiach* and *nagid* in the Hebrew Bible, which confirms that Daniel 9:25–26 is a prophecy about the future King of Israel, the Greater David *par excellence*.
3. In every vision in the book of Daniel, the main protagonist is always the Messiah, and the entire book itself is situated within an eschatological framework. This confirms that the main protagonist in Daniel 9:25–26, the Anointed Prince, is the heavenly Son of Man (Dan. 7:13–14), Israel's royal King, the one who will defeat the kingdoms of evil and establish the Messianic Kingdom (Dan. 2:35).

Accepting the Messianic identity of the Anointed Prince in Daniel 9:25–26 is important, because first, this can help us better understand the royal ministry of the Messiah as God's Greater David and mediator of the Jubilee. And second, because understanding that the Messiah is in view in this passage can also help us appreciate why Daniel 9:25–26 is one of the most potently predictive Messianic prophecies in the entire Bible. As we will see in next chapter, these verses do not only tell us something about the identity and vocation of the Messiah. They also tell us when the Messiah would first appear in Israel.

10

WHEN DID THE MESSIAH HAVE TO APPEAR? (9:25)

IN THE 1100S AD, the Medieval Jewish theologian Maimonides, also known as the Rambam, outlined The Thirteen Articles of Faith that are still adhered to and recited by observant Jews today. The twelfth article of faith states, “I believe with complete faith in the coming of Moshiach (Messiah). And though he may tarry, I shall wait, anticipating his arrival each day.”

At the end of the iconic movie *Fiddler on the Roof*, as the Jewish family of Tevya the dairy farmer is being exiled from their home in Czarist Russia, his son-in-law Motel turns to their local Rabbi and says, “Rabbi, we’ve been waiting for the Messiah our entire lives, wouldn’t now be a good time for him to come?” To this the Rabbi responds, “I guess we’ll have to wait somewhere else.”

These examples illustrate how Jewish people throughout history have eagerly awaited the coming of their Messiah, and longed for the day when he will appear to save them and end their suffering. Without

a doubt, looking forward to the coming of God's Anointed One is a good and righteous thing to do.

But what if there is also more to the story? What if the Bible tells us not only to look forward to the appearance of the Messiah in a general sense, but also reveals exactly when the Messiah would make his first appearance in Israel?

This would be great news, because it would mean that we could be even more confident concerning the identity of the Messiah.

In the last chapter, we discovered that the *Mashiach Nagid* (the Anointed Prince) in Daniel 9:25 is the Messiah himself, the heir to the Davidic throne who will usher in the Messianic Jubilee. In this chapter, we will explore what Daniel 9:25 has to say about the timing of the Messiah's first appearance in Israel.

The main idea we will cover is that Daniel 9:25 teaches that the Messiah had to appear in Israel within a certain window of time, ending around the year 27 AD, well before the destruction of the Second Temple. What this means is that any historical figure who did not appear by 27 AD lacks the biblical qualifications to be the Messiah.

THE "WORD TO RESTORE AND TO BUILD JERUSALEM"

Since we know there is only one anointed person in Daniel 9:25–26, and since we also know *Mashiach Nagid* (Anointed Prince) is a Messianic title that describes the Greater David, we now need to determine the starting point (*terminous a quo*) of the 70 weeks. Daniel 9:25 indicates that the Messiah would appear after a combined period of "seven weeks and sixty-two weeks," or 483 years. Once we understand this, the next question that arises is, after 483 years from what point in time?

As we read in Daniel 9:25:

So you are to know and discern **that from the issuing of a word (*davar*) to restore and to build [*bana*] Jerusalem until the Anointed Prince [or Messiah the Prince] there will be seven weeks and sixty two weeks (*author's translation*).**

Based on this verse, we can conclude that the point in time when a word or decree “to restore and to build Jerusalem” was issued marked the starting point of the 70-weeks countdown. As a result, determining the date of this “word” is the only way to ascertain what the Hebrew Bible teaches about the timing of the Messiah’s first appearance in Israel.

It should be noted at the outset that the word translated “decree” in the NASB and some other English translations is the Hebrew word *davar*, which more commonly means a “word.” Because of this general definition, some have said the “word” (*davar*) to rebuild Jerusalem did not necessarily have to be a formal decree, and this is technically true. Nonetheless, we still need to take seriously that this “word to restore and to build Jerusalem” had to include some type of unique permission or verbal declaration that allowed Jerusalem to be rebuilt and restored.

THE POSSIBILITIES

There are six different events and dates that are often proposed as the starting point of the 70 weeks. These six possible dates for the *terminus a quo* of the 70 weeks are summarized in the chart below:

Starting Point and Date:	Relevant Biblical Texts
605 BC: The date of Jeremiah’s prophecy about the Babylonian exile and restoration.	Jeremiah 25:1–16
586 BC: Jeremiah’s prophecy of restoration & the actual fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians	Jeremiah 30:18–22; 31:38–40
538/537 BC: The decree of Cyrus, which sparked the initial return from exile, and allowed the Jews to rebuild the Temple and the city of Jerusalem.	Ezra 1:1–4; 2 Chronicles 36:23; Isaiah 44:28; 45:1–13

520/519 BC: The decree of Darius, which allowed the Jews to continue rebuilding the Temple.	Ezra 6:1–12
457 BC: The decree of Artaxerxes I to Ezra, which allowed Ezra to return to Jerusalem to establish an independent government in the city.	Ezra 7:11–28
444 BC: The time when Artaxerxes I gave Nehemiah permission to go to Jerusalem, to continue rebuilding the city and its walls.	Nehemiah 2:1–6

NOT 605 OR 586 BC

Neither 605 BC nor 586 BC can be considered the time when a decree or a “word” went forth to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. Jeremiah’s prophecy in 605 did speak of judgment on the Babylonians after 70 years (Jer. 25:12–13), and is therefore definitely related to Daniel’s prayer in Daniel 9. However, this pronouncement said nothing specific about Jerusalem’s restoration.

Proponents of the Two Anointed-Ones Theory (including orthodox Jews and liberal Christians) choose 586 BC as the time when a “word” went forth to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. Jeremiah did predict restoration and rebuilding at this time (Jer. 30:18). But we have already seen this theory is plagued with problems. No one who adheres to this theory can make all of their dates align with history. And, this entire theory is predicated on the false presupposition that Daniel 9:24–27 is not Messianic or eschatological in any way.

Just as bad, implying that Jerusalem’s restoration began (as per Dan. 9:25) on the day when the city was destroyed makes no sense.

In summary, 605 and 586 BC are the two worst options for the starting date of the 70 weeks. Process of elimination then requires us to choose either 538 BC, 520 BC, 457 BC, or 444 BC.

A WINDOW OF TIME

The case I will make in the next part of this chapter centers around the idea that the most logical starting point of the 70 weeks was the time when Cyrus issued a decree to the Jewish exiles in 538 BC. With that said, there is also some important biblical and historical data that indicates that the starting point of this decree could have been a bit more fluid, implying that Israel was supposed to look for the Messiah not on one particular day, or in one particular year, but within a certain window of time. This biblical and historical data related to the window of time within which the Messiah had to appear is hardly ever incorporated into calculations of the 70-weeks timeline. Yet, I believe it is essential to factor into our interpretation.

Let's look now at why Cyrus' decree in 538 BC needs to be integrated into the 70-weeks timeline. After we have done this, in the next chapter, we will also cover the reasons why 444 BC, the date favored by many evangelicals over the last 200 years, could not have been the start date of the 70 weeks.

THE CASE FOR THE DECREE OF CYRUS IN 538 BC

When we analyze the relevant biblical and extrabiblical texts, it becomes difficult to deny that Cyrus' decree in 538 BC was the "word" referred to in Daniel 9:25. This "word" allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their Temple, and the city itself, so it fits perfectly with the description of events in Daniel 9:25.

Many evangelicals have disregarded the decree of Cyrus on the grounds that Cyrus only allowed the Jewish people to rebuild the Temple, and not the actual city of Jerusalem. But this assertion is false and it can be easily disproven.

In both Ezra and Isaiah, as well as in the writings of Josephus, we are told that it was Cyrus who decreed the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Isaiah 44:28 mentions Cyrus by name, and associates him with the rebuilding of both Jerusalem and the Temple:

The Lord says: “It is I who say of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.’ **And he declares of Jerusalem, ‘She will be built [*bana*],’ and of the Temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid.’**”

In a parallel statement in Isaiah 45:13, the Lord also said this of Cyrus, “**He will build [*bana*] my city and will let my exiles go free.**” Then, in Ezra 1:2–4 we are given the actual decree, or at least part of it, that Cyrus issued to the Jews in captivity:

Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, “The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me **to build [*bana*] Him a house in Jerusalem**, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and **rebuild [*bana*] the house of the LORD, the God of Israel**; He is the God who is in Jerusalem. Every survivor, at whatever place he may live, let the men of that place support him with silver and gold, with goods and cattle, together with a freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.”

When read together, Isaiah 44:28, Isaiah 45:13, and Ezra 1:2–4 emphasize that Cyrus was commissioned by God to rebuild both Jerusalem and the Temple. The same word “to build” (*bana*) appears in all of these passages, which is the precise word used in Daniel 9:25 to denote the rebuilding of the city. Also, Isaiah’s prediction that Cyrus would “declare” of Jerusalem, “She will be built,” fits perfectly with the “word” to rebuild Jerusalem that Gabriel said would be issued in Daniel’s lifetime.

CYRUS ACCORDING TO JOSEPHUS

In addition to Isaiah and Ezra, the Jewish historian Josephus also linked Cyrus to the rebuilding of both the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. Here is the additional decree, not found in the Bible, that Cyrus issued to the governors of Syria.

Josephus writes:

Cyrus also sent an epistle to the governors that were in Syria, the contents whereof here follow: “King Cyrus To Sisinnes and Sathrabuzanes Sendeth Greeting. I have given leave to as many of the Jews that dwell in my country as please to return to their own country, **and to rebuild their city, and to build the temple of God at Jerusalem on the same place where it was before.**”¹

Like the biblical data, this quote from Josephus disproves the popular idea that Cyrus’ decree in 538 BC did not allow the Jews to rebuild Jerusalem (i.e. the city itself). It is a historical fact that Cyrus allowed the Jews to rebuild both their Temple and their city.

EVANGELICAL VIEWS ON CYRUS

Unfortunately, over the last 100 years, the idea that Cyrus’ decree is not related to Daniel 9:25 has become part of a firmly entrenched commentary tradition within evangelicalism. For example, John Walvoord wrote that during the reign of Cyrus “there is no mention in the decree of rebuilding the city [...]”² Harold Hoehner, in his famous book, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, also wrote, “Cyrus’ edict refers to the rebuilding of the temple and not to the city.”³ In his commentary on Daniel, Andrew Hill states, “the [decree] of Cyrus refers only to the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple.”⁴ We also find this idea in the recently released *Moody Handbook on Bible Prophecy*. Scholar Kevin Zuber writes:

1 Josephus, *Antiquities*, 11.1.3.

2 John F. Walvoord, *Daniel* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012), 275.

3 Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 122.

4 Andrew E. Hill, “Daniel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Daniel-Malachi*, eds. Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2008), 170.

Some interpreters posit the starting point (*terminus ad quo*) as the decree of Cyrus the Great to rebuild the Temple, given in 538 BC. But the decree Daniel has in mind is a decree to rebuild the city, Jerusalem, not the temple.⁵

Each of these scholars have come to the conclusion that Cyrus only allowed the rebuilding of the Temple and not the city of Jerusalem, because they are reading Ezra 1:2–4 in a vacuum. Instead of this approach, we need to allow the other relevant Scriptures, as well as the relevant extrabiblical and historical data, to inform our understanding of what was included in the edict of Cyrus.

If we follow this methodology, it becomes clear that both the Bible and the writings of Josephus verify that Cyrus decreed the rebuilding of Jerusalem. There is no getting around this basic historical fact or its relationship to Daniel 9:25.

THE TEMPLE AND THE CITY

Just because Ezra 1:2–4 places more of an emphasis on the Temple does not mean Cyrus only allowed the Jews to rebuild the Temple and not the city. In the ancient world, the construction of a Temple was often viewed as one of the most important acts in the founding of a city, and this was especially true as far as the Ancient Israelites were concerned. Thus, it makes perfect sense that Ezra would emphasize the Temple more than the city in Ezra 1:2–4, because Ezra was primarily focused on the reestablishment of Israel's relationship with the Lord after the exile. But this emphasis on the Temple in the book of Ezra in no way implies that the city was not also being rebuilt simultaneously, especially because numerous historical accounts tell us that it was.

Isaiah 44:28 and 45:13 state categorically that Cyrus' command

5 Kevin D. Zuber, "Daniel 9:24-27: When Will Messiah Come?", in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and Expositions of the Messiah in the Old Testament*, eds. Michael Rydelnik & Edwin Blum (Chicago: Moody Publisher, 2019), 1145.

concerning the Temple was part of his broader decree concerning the entire city of Jerusalem. This is why God said that Cyrus would declare of Jerusalem, “she will be built” (*bana*; Isa. 44:28), and also, “he will build [*bana*] my city” (45:13).

It is unfortunate that the large majority of Christians and Jews over the last 200+ years have overlooked the best possible starting date of the 70-weeks prophecy, 538 BC. God told us in plain language that it was Cyrus, the great king of Persia, who got the ball rolling and proclaimed that Jerusalem was to be restored and rebuilt.

Biblical scholar John Bergsma is one of the few who recognizes the connection between Daniel 9:25 and the decree of Cyrus in 538 BC. Bergsma writes:

It seems that the most obvious candidate for “the word to restore and rebuild” is frequently overlooked. This is Cyrus’ edict of [538/]537 B.C.E. authorizing the return of any Judeans who wished to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. From Ezra 1:1–4, 2 Chron 36:22–23, and Isa 44:24–28 it is apparent that it was *this* decree of return that exercised the most influence over Jewish historical memory, and was widely regarded as fulfilling the prophecy of Jeremiah (and Isaiah) concerning the end of the exile. Since Jeremiah’s prophecy was already mentioned in Dan 9:2, and Cyrus’ edict was widely considered the fulfillment of that prophecy, arguably it is Cyrus’ edict that would first come to mind for Daniel’s readers when a “word” to restore and rebuild Jerusalem is mentioned in Dan 9:25.⁶

CYRUS AND THE JUBILEE

Also of note, Bergsma emphasizes how in 2 Chronicles 36:22–23 Cyrus’ decree is “similar to a jubilee proclamation.” 2 Chronicles 36:22 says Cyrus “sent a proclamation” (*avar*) “throughout the kingdom.” This

6 John Stetze Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 223.

is the same verbiage used in Leviticus 25:9 to describe how the Jubilee trumpet sounded (*avar*) “throughout the land.” Bergsma adds:

It makes sense that the Chronicler would think of Cyrus’ edict as a realization of the jubilee. The edict is, like the jubilee, primarily a proclamation authorizing return to ancestral land, connected with the renewal of [sanctuary worship] (which in Leviticus means the purification of the tabernacle on *yom kippur*; in Chronicles, the rebuilding of the temple.⁷

Indeed, there is an important link between the Jubilee and the decree of Cyrus that confirms its relationship to the Jubilee prophecy in Daniel 9:24–27. Cyrus’ decree represented both the starting point and the initial fulfillment of the greater Jubilee anticipated in the 70-weeks prophecy, because it allowed the Jewish exiles to return to their ancestral land, which also allowed them to enter in to a deeper relationship with the Lord at His holy temple in Jerusalem.

In that sense, although Cyrus was not the Anointed Prince spoken of in Daniel 9:25–26, he was a prophetic type of the coming Messiah. What Cyrus did at the beginning of the 70 weeks foreshadowed what the Messiah will do at the end of the 70 weeks. In a way that will parallel what Cyrus initiated in 538 BC, the Messiah will also bring the Jewish people back to their ancestral land, and restore their temple and their holy city at the dawn of the Age to Come.

This connection between the past actions of Cyrus and the future actions of the Messiah explains why Cyrus is called God’s “anointed one” (*mashiach*) in Isaiah 45:1. Both Cyrus and the Messiah were anointed to participate in the realization of the Jubilee outlined in Daniel 9:24–27.

THE DECREE OF CYRUS AND ENCOURAGEMENT FOR DANIEL

The background and context of Daniel 9 also supports the idea that Cyrus’ decree is the decree spoken of in Daniel 9:25. In order to

7 Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 210–211.

understand why this is the case, we first have to recognize that the events recorded in Daniel 9 took place before any decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem was ever issued.

This is why in Daniel 9:2 we read that Daniel was asking the Lord to restore Jerusalem according to His original promise to Jeremiah. Moreover, in Daniel 9:17, Daniel mentions God's "desolate sanctuary" (Jerusalem and the Temple). When Daniel prayed in Daniel 9, Jerusalem was still in a state of desolation.

Once we understand that the events of Daniel 9 happened before any decree was issued, it then becomes easier to comprehend why the decree mentioned in Daniel 9:25 must be the decree issued by Cyrus in 538 BC. Out of all of the decrees that allegedly fulfilled Daniel 9:25, the only one issued during Daniel's lifetime was the decree of Cyrus, which was probably formalized only weeks or months after Daniel received the 70-weeks prophecy from Gabriel (c. 539/538 BC). By this time Daniel was already in his 80's, and he most likely died within ten years after the events of Daniel 9. As a result, Daniel didn't live to see any of the other proposed decrees except the decree of Cyrus.

Some might argue that this does not necessitate that Cyrus' decree must be the one mentioned in Daniel 9:25. But this argument overlooks that Daniel 9:25 was addressed to Daniel personally. It was a promise of future events that he would begin to witness in his own lifetime. This is why Gabriel addressed Daniel in the second person singular in Daniel 9:25, "*So you [singular] are to know and discern [Daniel] that from the issuing of a decree [...]*" (Dan. 9:25).

All of the pronouns and verb forms at the beginning of verse 25 are in the second person singular, which again, implies that Daniel would witness the "issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem." As a matter of fact, this is the only portion of the prophecy addressed to Daniel directly in the second person singular, so he had to be alive during the initial fulfillment period of the 70-weeks prophecy.

Those who dismiss the connection between Daniel 9:25 and the decree of Cyrus are forced to ignore how the entire prophecy of the 70

weeks, though it certainly contains information related to the distant future, was given as a word of comfort and reassurance to Daniel himself. It was God's way of telling Daniel, "Your prayers have been answered. So when you, Daniel, witness the decree, you will know that the restoration of Jerusalem is underway and you can be at peace."

It only makes sense to conclude that when Daniel heard of Cyrus' decree concerning Jerusalem and the Temple, probably within months (or weeks) of his encounter with Gabriel in Daniel 9, he would have understood that this decree represented the fulfillment of Gabriel's word in Daniel 9:25. Are we really to believe that when Cyrus did finally allow Jerusalem to be restored, and Daniel heard about this, he said, "Oh no, that couldn't be the decree Gabriel was speaking about. Gabriel must have been speaking about some other decree that will be issued many decades from now after I'm dead?" I find this argument illogical, as it does not suit the context of Daniel 9.

We should accept the raw biblical and historical data at face value. When we do, it becomes impossible to deny that the "word" mentioned in Daniel 9:25 was the decree of Cyrus, which he issued on behalf of Jerusalem sometime between 538 and 537 BC. This was the first decree that allowed the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem (Isa. 44:28; 45:13; Ezr. 1:2-4; 2 Chron. 36:22-23; *Antiquities* 11.1.3), it was closely linked to the Jubilee, and it was the only such decree Daniel himself would have been alive to witness.

SHOULD WE CALCULATE 483 YEARS FROM 538 BC TO THE MESSIAH?

If we calculate 483 years (seven weeks and sixty-two weeks) forward from 538 BC, we arrive at the year 55 BC. Because of this, we then have to ask, does Daniel 9:25 indicate that the Messiah had to arrive in Israel by 55 BC? After all, Daniel 9:25 states, "So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, until Messiah the Prince, there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks [...]."

Not surprisingly, because most Christians understand that the

person they believe to be the Messiah, namely, Jesus of Nazareth, did not arrive on the scene of history until sometime between 3 BC-1 AD, they naturally reject the decree of Cyrus, on the grounds that choosing this decree would compromise their position that Daniel 9:25 is a predictive prophecy that specifies the timing of the Messiah's first appearance in Israel. Stated another way, if we believe Jesus is the Messiah, and if we believe the decree of Cyrus is the best starting point for the 70 weeks, wouldn't this also imply that this prophecy is wrong by about 50 years at least? Or, perhaps it could even indicate that Jesus isn't the Messiah after all, and that we should be looking for another Messiah who was alive in 55 BC!

These types of issues have led many evangelicals to reject the decree of Cyrus outright, without even taking it seriously. They believe choosing the decree of Cyrus would compromise their broader belief system, so they ignore it.

THE COMPLETION OF CYRUS' DECREE IN 457 BC

The interesting thing about the decree of Cyrus in 538 BC, however, is that the Bible also says Cyrus' decree was not fully completed and fully enacted without prohibition until the reign of Artaxerxes I in 457 BC. This is a critical piece of biblical data, and it needs to be factored into both how we construct the Daniel 9:25 timeline, as well as how we calculate the date of the Messiah's appearance in Israel.

In order to understand how Cyrus' decree was not fully completed and fully enacted until the reign of Artaxerxes I in 457 BC, we need to briefly cover some of Israel's post-exilic history.

Ezra chapters 1–5 tell us that the only thing the Jews were able to accomplish during the reign of Cyrus himself, was some of the initial work necessary to rebuild the Temple (and presumably the city as well). Then, after a short time, the enemies of the Jewish people convinced the Persian leaders Darius and Artaxerxes I to force the Jews to stop rebuilding the city and the Temple.

There are some chronological difficulties in the book of Ezra, but

we don't need to wade too deeply into those waters right now.⁸ All we need to understand now is that at various points in time, Temple rebuilding efforts were thwarted in Israel (Ezra 4:19–22), and subsequent rebuilding efforts commenced later on.

As we read in Ezra 6:1–3:

Then King Darius issued a decree, and search was made in the archives, where the treasures were stored in Babylon. In Ecbatana in the fortress, which is in the province of Media, a scroll was found and there was written in it as follows: “Memorandum—In the first year of King Cyrus, Cyrus the king issued a decree: ‘Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the temple, the place where sacrifices are offered, be rebuilt and let its foundations be retained [...]’”

In this passage we see that Darius (c. 522–486 BC) discovered the earlier decree of Cyrus, and therefore commanded that all efforts to hinder the Jews from rebuilding their Temple and city cease at once. After Darius, Artaxerxes I came to power (464–424 BC), and issued another decree. This one allowed Ezra to return to Jerusalem with a contingent of Jewish exiles, and a nice stash of gold and silver, specifically for the purpose of carrying out the Temple worship and reestablishing a judicial government under the authority of the Torah.

Ezra 7:25 records part of Artaxerxes' decree to Ezra, which was issued in 457 BC:

8 The early kings of the Persian Empire ruled in this order: Cyrus (559–530 BC), Smerdis (522 BC), Cambyses II (530–522 BC), Darius I (522–486 BC), Ahasuerus (Xerxes I) (486–465 BC), and Artaxerxes I (464–424). The book of Ezra mentions Cyrus (1:1–4), Ahasuerus (4:6), Artaxerxes I (4:7–23; 7:1–12), and Darius I (4:4–5,24; 6:1–14). However, certain events during the reigns of Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes are mentioned before events in the reign of Darius (Ez. 4–6), which doesn't seem to make sense on the surface because Darius I reigned *before* Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes I. It is likely that the book of Ezra is organized based on important themes, not strict chronology. Thus, Ahasuerus, Artaxerxes I, and Darius I are mentioned out of order. This view is confirmed by the fact that Ezra 6:14 mentions Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes in correct order. See: Mervin Breneman, *The New American Commentary: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (B&H Publishers, 1993), 98–99.

You Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God which is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges that they may judge all the people who are in the province beyond the River, even all those who know the laws of your God; and you may teach anyone who is ignorant of them. Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon him strictly, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of goods or for imprisonments.

Prior to this decree, we were also told back in Ezra 6:14–15 that the construction of the Temple was completed during the reign of Darius (c. 515 BC):

And they finished building according to the command of the God of Israel and **the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia**. This temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar, it was the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

The important point to note here is that Ezra 6:14–15 mentions only one singular decree, “the decree,” but associates it with three Persian kings: Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes I. Based on this verse in Ezra, a strong case can be made that even though Cyrus was the one who issued the original decree (Dan. 9:25), this decree was somewhat fluid. It covered a broader period of time.

Cyrus reigned from c. 559–530 BC, Darius from c. 522–486 BC, and Artaxerxes I from c. 464–424 BC. Ezra 7 gives the full account of how Artaxerxes I issued his decree to Ezra after the summary account of the Temple’s completion in Ezra 6:14–15. However, it is still most likely that this earlier statement in 6:14–15 refers to the historical decree given by Artaxerxes I to Ezra in 457 BC, which is covered in more detail in chapter 7. In other words, Ezra 6:14–15 makes a blanket statement that includes the decree of Artaxerxes I, even though the circumstances surrounding this decree are not given until the next chapter.

In any case, the main idea that is important to comprehend as far as

the starting date of Daniel's 70 weeks is concerned, is that according to the book of Ezra, "the word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem" covered a span of time, from the day Cyrus first issued the decree in c. 538 BC, to the day it was completed by Artaxerxes I in 457 BC, 81 years later. This is why Ezra 6:1–3 mentions the original decree of Cyrus as the background to the later decrees in 6:6–12 (Darius' decree; c. 520/519 BC) and 7:11–26 (Artaxerxes' decree; c. 457 BC).

Ezra and the Persians understood that the final decree during the reign of Artaxerxes I was organically connected to, and in point of fact an extension of, Cyrus' decree. Therefore, even though Cyrus' decree in 538 BC did represent the technical starting point of the "word to restore and to build Jerusalem," the actual decree, in its totality, was not fully formulated and fully enacted until 81 years later, in 457 BC.

Though I do not agree with his first-century Preterist view of Daniel 9, Old Testament scholar Peter Gentry is the only scholar I have found who understands the relationship between all of the Persian decrees, and how Ezra connects them to the original decree of Cyrus as one single decree. Gentry writes:

Ezra 6:14 speaks of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes as though they issued a single decree. Darius's decree (Ezra 6) was based upon the fact that Cyrus had *already* issued the decree to permit the return and rebuilding of Jerusalem (see Ezra 5:17–6:7). Darius's decree was therefore a renewal (6:6–7) and expansion (6:8–12) of Cyrus's original decree (6:3–5). Ezra 6:14 shows that Artaxerxes's decree to Ezra (in Ezra 7) [457 BC] is also an extension of Cyrus's original decree. **So the decree which Cyrus drafted in 537 [or 538] to restore the temple [and the city] is not completed until 457 B.C. under Artaxerxes,** which is therefore the date of the "word to rebuild Jerusalem" starting with its sanctuary.⁹

9 Peter J. Gentry, "Daniel's Seventy Weeks and the New Exodus," *SBJT*, 14.1 (2010), 35–36.

If the book of Ezra did not demonstrate that the one decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem encompassed a broad period of time during the reigns of multiple Persian kings, I would find it impossible to choose any other date besides 538 BC as the hard starting point of the 70 weeks, which would therefore imply that the Messiah had to appear in Israel by 55 BC. After all, the Bible is clear that Cyrus was the one who issued the initial decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. We also know that Cyrus' decree became the foundation of all future Persian policy towards the Jews.

However, details do matter, and Ezra 6:14 does indicate that Cyrus' decree was not completed until 457 BC. This was the time when the original decree of Cyrus was enacted without interference, and to the fullest extent possible during the reign of Artaxerxes I.

CONSTRUCTING THE 70 WEEKS TIMELINE

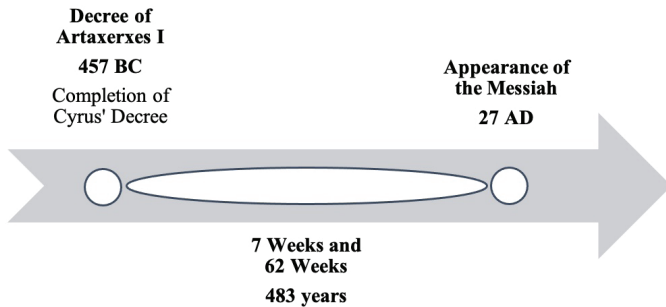
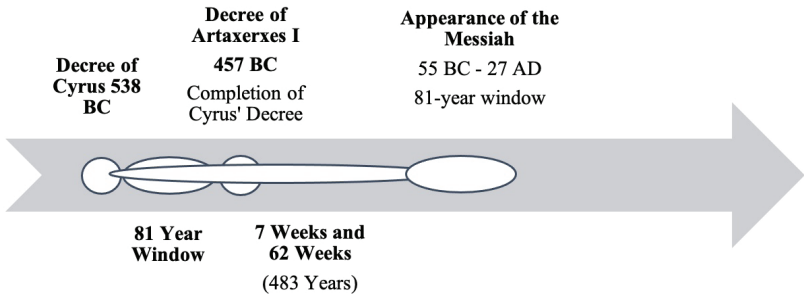
Because we know that Artaxerxes' decree in 457 BC completed Cyrus' decree, there are only two possible ways we can formulate our 70-weeks timeline, and calculate the date of the Messiah's appearance in Israel. As some may have noticed earlier, Old Testament scholar Peter Gentry chooses 457 BC as the true starting date of the 70 weeks, which isn't a terrible option. Based on this starting date, we would then have to conclude that the Messiah had to appear in Israel sometime within the next 483 years (seven plus sixty-two weeks), which brings us to the year 27 AD. (Remember to add a year if subtracting 483 from 457 BC, because there is no year zero).

Another possible way of calculating the starting date of the 70 weeks is to use the window-of-time model I mentioned at the start of this chapter. If we choose the decree of Cyrus as the starting point, but also understand that this decree wasn't completed until 457 BC, this gives us an 81-year window of time. 483 years from the decree of Cyrus brings us to the year 55 BC, whereas 483 years from the decree of Artaxerxes I (when Cyrus' decree was completed) brings us to the year 27 AD. Based on these calculations, Daniel 9:25 could only imply that the Messiah

had to appear in Israel sometime between 55 BC and 27 AD.

Most Christian interpreters of Daniel 9:25 have believed this verse requires us to nail down the date of the Messiah's coming with 100% precision. However, it could be that God deliberately left the starting date of the 70 weeks a little bit vague, so that His people would stay alert, not knowing exactly when the Messiah would come.

Daniel 9:25: Two Possible Timelines Based on Ezra 6:14



CAN WE CHOOSE?

Both of these options bring us pretty close to what Daniel 9:25 reveals about the timing of the Messiah's first appearance in Israel. Both options rightly emphasize the importance of Cyrus' decree. Both options recognize that Cyrus' decree was completed or carried out over a period of 81 years. And most importantly, both options rightfully communicate that the Messiah had to be revealed in Israel by the year 27 AD at the latest, well before the destruction of the Second Temple.

With that said, I will also add that I think the first option that posits a window of time, rather than an exact date of the Messiah's coming, does a better job at incorporating all of the relevant biblical and historical data.

Many Christian leaders have chosen the decree of Artaxerxes I in 457 BC as the starting date of the 70 weeks, and I can understand why. This explanation is simpler, and in many cases, simplicity is a virtue in biblical interpretation.

Nevertheless, for me, choosing 457 BC as the exclusive starting date of the 70 weeks still disconnects the 70-weeks timeline too much from the decree of Cyrus, and from the time when Daniel would have been alive, which is why I believe the window-of-time model is preferable.

In response, I do understand that some people might ask, "but Travis, aren't you making the same error as many of the other models mentioned in previous chapters, which arbitrarily assume that some of the 70 weeks could have been shorter or longer than seven years?" In other words, some might argue that this window-of-time model contradicts what we learned in chapter 3, that each of the 70 weeks have to be periods of seven literal years. If that were true, then Daniel 9:25 would necessitate a definitive start date for the first sixty-nine weeks.

These are fair questions and issues that need to be addressed. In response, I would say we need to keep a few things in mind.

First, I am not saying that some of the 70 weeks were longer or shorter than seven years, as many other interpreters do. I believe the seven weeks and sixty-two weeks of Daniel 9:25 amount to 483 years. However, because of the unique nature of Cyrus' decree, it may not be possible

to determine an exact starting point for our calculation. We can make a strong case for calculating the 483 years from 538 BC (Cyrus' original decree), and we can make a strong case for calculating the 483 years from 457 BC (the completion of Cyrus' decree and the establishment of the formal Israelite government). I could also make a strong case for calculating the 483 years from sometime between these two points, such as the time when Darius issued his extension of Cyrus' decree in 520/519 BC.

The first sixty-nine weeks were definitely 483 years long. But since we can reasonably start calculating these years from at least a few separate points in time, it seems to me that the Bible is pointing us to a general 81-year timeframe during which the Messiah had to appear in Israel, not to a precise date we can circle on the calendar. If we try to force an exact date based on Daniel 9:25, we may be pushing the biblical text beyond the limits of God's intent.

The beauty and truth of Scripture is often lost because interpreters suffocate the text, attempt to drain it of all its mystery, and strain too hard to relieve all of its tension, which it seems to me, was purposefully placed there by God. In the case of Daniel 9:25, God was perfectly capable of causing history to unfold in such a way that there could never have been more than one possible starting date for the 70-weeks decree. But He didn't do this. He intentionally threw us a curve ball and left things vague. So I don't see any reason for taking an extremely narrow approach to the starting date of the decree.

I think the Lord left this portion of the prophecy somewhat open-ended, so that the Jewish people would stay watchful and alert as they waited for their Messiah, rather than being able to put God in a box by knowing the exact date when He had to send the Messiah to redeem them. As we saw in chapter 6, many first-century Jews were looking for the Messiah around the start of the first century, but a lot of them had different expectations regarding exactly when he would come.

Second, the earlier models of the 70-weeks timeline that I criticized, including the Antiochene model, the First-Century Fulfillment model, and the Two Anointed-Ones model, all force the interpreter of

Daniel 9:24–27 to make arbitrary and subjective decisions regarding the timespan of the weeks. The interpreters who defend these models will accept that some of the weeks in Daniel 9 could be longer than seven years and some could be shorter, or that there could be a “probationary period” added to the end of the 70 weeks, so long as their preconceived ideas of what the prophecy means are not violated.

In contrast, there is nothing arbitrary or subjective about the suggestion that Daniel 9:25 could very well, and most likely does, point us to a window of time when the Messiah had to appear, rather than an exact date. This model is not based on subjective notions that we are pulling out of thin air, on our own authority. Quite the opposite, it is the biblical text itself, and in particular the crucial statement in Ezra 6:14, that indicates that the decree of Daniel 9:25 encompassed a fluid period of time, spanning the reigns of at least three Persian kings, beginning with Cyrus in 538 BC, and ending with Artaxerxes I in 457 BC. This was how the decree both comforted Daniel at a personal level, before he died, but also kept things a little bit more open ended.

There is an enormous difference between another interpreter saying, “oh yes, this or that week can be shorter or longer than seven years because it fits my system,” versus the proposal offered in this chapter, which is rooted in the idea that the book of Ezra supports a fluid rather than fixed starting date of the 70 weeks. We must take seriously that the proclamation of Cyrus signified the initial starting point of the decree, and if it weren’t for Ezra 6:14, there wouldn’t be any valid reason for choosing a date other than 538 BC as the *terminous a quo* of the prophecy. Yet, when we “compare Scripture to Scripture,” we are given some other important details that support a more flexible starting date of the 70 weeks between 538–457 BC.

I know this approach will not satisfy everyone. But it is supported by the biblical text. Where are we told that Daniel 9:25 gives us an exact date or year when the Messiah had to appear in Israel? Nowhere. And if God intended that, why did the “word to restore and to build Jerusalem” span 81 years?

Interestingly, Daniel 9:25 doesn't actually say, "from the day or year a decree goes forth..." It simply says, "from the going forth of a word."

Even the language Gabriel used here is somewhat ambiguous in relation to time. So we have to ask, could a word go forth over a period of time longer than one day or one year? Based on Ezra 6:14, I'd say yes.

In any case, we don't want to miss the forest for the trees here, and we shouldn't let the novelty of this window-of-time model distract us from the deeper beauty and prophetic power of Daniel 9:25. This prophecy does reveal, in a general sense, when the Messiah had to appear in Israel, which in and of itself is a miraculous gift of grace from the Lord. One way or another, Daniel 9:25 depicts a Messiah who would appear in Israel no sooner than 55 BC and no later than 27 AD. This was the timeframe during which the legitimate heir to the throne of David had to arrive on the scene of history.

THE MINISTRY OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

We should also note here that according to most scholars, the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth started either in 27 AD with a 30 AD crucifixion or in 30 AD with a 33 AD crucifixion. It is way beyond the scope of this book to assess the pros and cons of each of these dating scenarios. Regardless, and no matter which set of dates is correct, both possibilities harmonize with Daniel 9:25 and thereby validate the Messianic credentials of Jesus.

Daniel 9:25 does not make any prediction about specific events or dates in the life of the Messiah. It only implies that the Messiah would be in Israel (i.e. born and presumably recognized as the Messiah) sometime between 55 BC and 27 AD, and Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled this Messianic qualification.

He was born at the earliest in 4 BC, but possibly a few years later, and began his ministry either at the end of Daniel's window of time in 27 AD, or a few years later, in 30 AD. Even though Jesus didn't begin his ministry until the end of Daniel's window of time, or shortly thereafter, he was already widely recognized as the Messiah by both many

Jews and Gentiles immediately after he was born, squarely within the timeframe Gabriel said the Messiah would appear in Israel (Matt. 2:1-12; Lk. 2:21-38).

These events connected to the life and ministry of Jesus were not a coincidence. God sent us the Messiah right on schedule, just as He promised to do in Daniel 9:25.

In addition, when compared to all other historical figures, it was Jesus of Nazareth who led the largest and most significant Messianic movement during the precise time when Daniel said the Messiah would be on the earth. And not only that, Jesus is also the only Messianic claimant from this period of time who still has followers today, roughly two billion worldwide, who believe he is the Messiah.

As a result, we have to ask the question, if some other person who lived between 55 BC and 27 AD was the Messiah, then why is there no other Messianic figure from this period besides Jesus who has a substantial following today? Apart from Jesus, there aren't any other viable Messianic candidates who lived during this time.

In many ways, Daniel 9:25 proves the Messiahship of Jesus. Those of us who believe in him should recognize the profound degree to which the 70-weeks prophecy both verifies his Messianic credentials, and bears witness to the supernatural foreknowledge, sovereignty, and omniscience of God. Over 500 years before it happened, God told us when the Messiah would come.

We all yearn to know the Messiah and to have our faith in him more deeply rooted in the word of God. Daniel 9:25 was given to us so that we would be able to more easily recognize and accept the most important person who has ever walked this earth: our *Mashiach Nagid*, our Anointed Prince, the heir to the Davidic throne, the one who will soon return to usher in the Age of Jubilee.

In Hebrew, his name is Yeshua.

11

A RESPONSE TO THE PROPHETIC-YEAR THEORY

IN THE LAST CHAPTER, we learned that the decree of King Cyrus in 538 BC, which was fully enacted by Artaxerxes I in 457 BC, signified the starting point of the 70 weeks. Understanding the importance of the decree of Cyrus also enabled us to discern what Daniel 9:25 does and does not tell us about the timing of the Messiah's first appearance in Israel. Daniel 9:25 gives us a window of time within which the Messiah had to appear in Israel, not an exact date.

Over the years, many evangelicals have taken a categorically different approach to the Daniel-9 timeline, and to the date of the Messiah's coming in this verse. They have argued that Daniel 9:25 predicts the exact date of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem in 33 AD. This theory is based on a 444 BC starting date of the first 69 weeks, and it also relies on a 70-weeks calculation that is made using what are often called 360-day "prophetic years."

In the last 150 years, this prophetic-year approach to Daniel 9:25–26

has been immensely popular within Christian circles, and it is still widely accepted by many who adopt a Messianic-eschatological reading of Daniel 9:24–27. Given the popularity of this prophetic-year approach to Daniel 9:24–27, in this chapter, we will cover both what this theory teaches, and its major weaknesses.

THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE PROPHETIC-YEAR THEORY

In the late 1800s, Bible teacher Sir Robert Anderson published his famous book, *The Coming Prince*. In this book, Anderson first articulated what would eventually become the most popular view of the Daniel-9 timeline among evangelicals.

Anderson proposed that the starting date of the 70 weeks was 445 BC, the year Artaxerxes I gave Nehemiah and his companions permission to go to Jerusalem to “rebuild” some of the walls of the city (Neh. 2:1–6). Based on this starting date, if we calculate 7 and 62 weeks (483 years) forward, we end up in the year 39 AD, well beyond the time when Jesus lived and ministered in Israel.

Since Anderson was an evangelical who believed in Jesus, he couldn’t accept that the prophecy overshot the life of Jesus by almost ten years. So Anderson proposed that each of the years in the Daniel-9 timeline are what he called 360-day “prophetic years,” not the normal 365-day years that make up our calendars today.

In effect, because Anderson was convinced of a 445 BC start date for the 70 weeks he had to shorten his timeline to try and make it line up with the life of Jesus. Thus, Anderson calculated that an “era of sixty-nine weeks, or 483 prophetic years reckoned from the 14th March, B.C. 445,” brings us to the year 32 AD, which he called the “Passover of the crucifixion.”¹

In the 1970s, Anderson’s 360-day “prophetic-year” theory was subsequently popularized within evangelical circles by Harold Hoehner, in his bestselling book, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*. Hoehner

1 Sir Robert Anderson, *The Coming Prince* (Lawton: Trumpet Press, 2014), 106–108.

tweaked Anderson's timeline, and started the 70 weeks in 444 BC, rather than 445 BC. He also calculated that the end point of the 69 weeks was March 30, 33 AD, the date he chose as the day of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Hoehner wrote:

Using the 360-day year the calculation would be as follows.

Multiplying the sixty-nine weeks by seven years for each week by 360 gives a total of 173,880 days. The difference between 444 BC and AD 33, then, is 476 solar years. By multiplying 476 by 365.24219879 or by 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, 45,975 seconds, one comes to 173,855.28662404 days or 173,855 days, 6 hours, 52 minutes, 44 seconds. This leaves only 25 days to be accounted for between 444 BC and AD 33. By adding 25 days to March 5 (of 444 BC), one comes to March 30 (of AD 33) which was Nisan 10 in AD 33. This is the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.²

Hoehner also mentions on p. 135 of his book that his entire theory was based on the work of Anderson. He states, the "solution that is the most plausible is the one introduced by Anderson."

Today, one is likely to encounter Anderson and Hoehner's theory, which is based on 360-day prophetic years, in commentaries written by conservative evangelicals. For example, in the recently published commentary, *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy* (2019), Bible scholar Kevin Zuber endorses Hoehner's methodology. Zuber states:

The 69 weeks of years (483 years) if calculated by "biblical/prophetic years of 360 days each," would yield 173,880 days. Starting with the decree of March 5/4, (Nisan 1) 444 BC and calculating the 173,880 days, the 69-week period ends on March 29/30, (Nisan 10), AD 33.

2 Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 138.

This best fits with “the date of Jesus the Messiah’s triumphal entry (Lk 19:28-40).”³

THE WEAKNESSES OF THE PROPHETIC-YEAR THEORY

There are two pieces of biblical evidence that disprove the idea that the 70 weeks of Daniel 9:24–27 are comprised of 360-day prophetic years. In the rest of this chapter, we will look at this evidence, which demonstrates why the Prophetic-Year Theory is flawed.

#1: THE DECREE TO RESTORE JERUSALEM WAS ISSUED BEFORE 444 BC

First, we discovered that the initial decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem was issued by King Cyrus in 538 BC, almost 100 years before Nehemiah traveled to Jerusalem in 444 BC. Scholars who adhere to the Prophetic-Year Theory are often the first ones to mention that Cyrus never allowed the city of Jerusalem to be rebuilt.

As we learned however, this assertion contradicts what we are told by the prophet Isaiah and the Jewish historian Josephus. Because we know the rebuilding of Jerusalem was already well underway before Nehemiah arrived in the city, we cannot consider 444 BC the year when a decree to restore and rebuild the city first “went forth” (Dan. 9:25).

It is true that the restoration of Jerusalem was not yet complete when Nehemiah arrived. This is why Nehemiah 2:17 mentions that the “walls of Jerusalem were broken down and its gates [...] consumed by fire” (cf. Neh. 2:17). However, the fact that the restoration of Jerusalem was not complete by the time of Nehemiah does not negate all of the restoration work that had already begun many decades prior. Israel’s

3 Kevin D. Zuber, “Daniel 9:24-27: When Will Messiah Come?,” in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and Expositions of the Messiah in the Old Testament*, eds. Michael Rydelnik & Edwin Blum (Chicago: Moody Publisher, 2019), 1145. Note: Zuber references the work of Anderson and Hoehner, and quotes directly from Michael Rydelnik to support his view. See, Michael Rydelnik, “Daniel,” in *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 1306.

enemies even stated way back in Ezra 4:12 (i.e. in the 500s BC) that the Jewish people were “rebuilding the rebellious and evil city and [...] finishing the walls and repairing the foundations.”

As a result, the idea that Artaxerxes’ conversation with Nehemiah in 444 BC marked the beginning point of a word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem was issued, which is what Daniel 9:25 is concerned with, is not true. Such a word had already been issued, over 100 years earlier, when Daniel was still alive.

Also, Artaxerxes’ words to Nehemiah are never described as part of an official royal edict or decree. Only the decrees of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, completed by 457 BC, are included in the royal edict mentioned in Ezra 6:14. This is why we should not include 444 BC in our timeline, or when calculating the window of time during which the Messiah had to appear.

In reality, Artaxerxes granted Nehemiah permission to go to Jerusalem after the two men had a personal conversation. There is no indication in the book of Nehemiah that Nehemiah’s trip to Jerusalem required a royal proclamation by the king, because by that point, the decree had already been issued and put into full effect by 457 BC.

The reason Nehemiah needed permission from Artaxerxes to go to Jerusalem was because Nehemiah was Artaxerxes’ cupbearer in the royal court (Neh. 1:11). Basically, Nehemiah needed permission from his boss to get off work!

When we understand that the “word to restore and to build Jerusalem” goes all the way back to 538 BC, the prophetic-year timeline of Daniel 9 falls apart, as it depends on choosing one of the worst possible starting dates for the 70 weeks.

Many evangelicals have chosen 444 BC as the *terminous a quo* of the 70-weeks prophecy, because they believe this date allows them to bring Daniel 9 into alignment with certain key events in the life of Jesus, which they argue took place in 32 or 33 BC (though even these dates for the crucifixion are debatable). Such efforts are not necessary, because there is a much better way of formulating the Daniel-9 timeline that

both preserves its relationship to the original decree of Cyrus, and avoids the complex mathematical maneuvering of the 360-day Prophetic-Year Theory.

Daniel 9:25 only predicts the general timeframe during which the Messiah would first appear in Israel. This verse was never meant to line up exactly with the final week of Jesus' life before his crucifixion.

#2: 360-DAY PROPHETIC YEARS ARE NOT BIBLICAL

In addition to the problems with The Prophetic-Year Theory's start date for the 70 weeks (444 BC), this theory is also unreliable because it is based on 360-day prophetic years that were never used in Ancient Israel. Put simply, 360-day prophetic years are not biblical.

The Israelites used a lunar calendar of twelve 29-30 day months, which totaled 353-355 days in a year. Just as importantly, the Israelites also added an extra month to their calendar every so often in order to make their year correspond to the 365 days of the solar year. There was no such thing as this "prophetic year" in Ancient Israel, and Daniel himself would not have been aware of this time designation.

The reason it was so important for Israel to add extra months to their calendar from time to time, was because their months were linked to the agricultural harvest cycles of the Ancient Near East. This meant that if Israel didn't reconcile their lunar calendar with the solar cycle, over time they would have ended up with their harvest festivals in the middle of winter, which would have been an unacceptable option from both a practical and spiritual standpoint.

Adding the extra month to the lunar calendar was the only way to make sure the agricultural festivals (Passover, Weeks, Tabernacles) would occur at the same time every year, which again, disproves the possibility of a 360-day prophetic year in Ancient Israel.

As noted by Old Testament scholar Robert C. Newman:

First, in order for the prophecy to come out right, Anderson [and others who hold to a 444 BC date for the decree] assume that the Jews used "years" of only 360 days. He seeks justification for this

from Revelation 11:2-3, and he calls such a period a “prophetic year.” However, the Old Testament connects the Passover festival, in the middle of the first month, to the offering of the first-ripe grain (Lev. 23:6-14). **Therefore, the Jewish calendar was locked into the seasons. Both the Talmud and archaeology indicate that this was accomplished by adding an extra lunar month every few years, so that in the long run the average length of the Jewish year matches our solar year of just under 365 ¼ days.** (Also see Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* sections 58-61).⁴

Old Testament scholar Gleason Archer concurs. He writes:

Robert Anderson [...] calculated what he called “prophetic years” as consisting of 360 days each. The 360-day year was known, to be sure, in Egypt, Greece, Assyria, and Babylon, all of which made some use of a system of twelve months having 30 days each. **All of them, however, used some sort of intercalary month in order to make an approximation to the 365 days of the solar year—whether 5 days added after the twelfth month or an additional month every six or seven years. In other words, they all used various devices to mark the phases of the moon (29 ½ days from one new moon to the next) and yet reconcile these twelve lunar units with the solar year of 365 ¼ days.** The Assyrians usually alternated between 29-day months and 30-day months (which therefore totaled 354 days) and the needed 11 extra days were supplied by varying methods, depending on the decision of the local or national priests. The same was true with the Babylonians and Sumerians [...]. As for Egypt, the 365-day year was followed—but without the insertion of an extra day every fourth year (“leap year”) as was later done with the Julian calendar. The unhappy result for the Egyptians was that over

4 Robert C. Newman, “Daniel’s Seventy Weeks and the Old Testament Sabbath-Year Cycle,” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society*, 16 no 4, Fall 1973 p. 229-234, p. 30.

a cycle of 1,460 years, their three seasons would gradually work their way around the calendar, till “winter” [...] would occur during the summer, and so on. But even at that, the Egyptians never used a 360-day year, as Anderson supposed.”⁵

These insights related to the Israelite calendar disprove the Prophetic-Year Theory that is still widely accepted by many evangelicals today. There is no evidence that any Ancient Near Eastern culture used a strictly lunar calendar made up of 360-day years, without some mechanism to reconcile the lunar months with the solar cycle.

DO GENESIS 7 AND REVELATION 12–13 PROVE THE PROPHETIC-YEAR THEORY?

Advocates of the Prophetic-Year Theory will often point to Genesis 7:24 and 8:3, as well as Revelation 12:6–14, to support the idea that our calculation in Daniel 9 should be made using 360-day years. Genesis 7:24 and 8:3 mention that the flood lasted “150 days,” or five months. Revelation 12:6–14 refers to the last half of Daniel’s 70th week, and mentions that the Antichrist will have power for 1,260 days, which is described as “a time, and times, and half a time,” or “42 months” in Revelation 13:5.

From these texts in Genesis and Revelation, the leap is then made by proponents of the Prophetic-Year Theory that if the flood lasted for five 30-day months (150 days), and if Revelation mentions a 42-month period of 1,260 days (i.e. 42 months made up of 30 days each), this must be proof that all of the years in Daniel 9 are made up of 360-day years as well. After all, 360 times 3.5 is 1,260.⁶

When assessing this argument, we should keep in mind that superimposing these verses from Genesis and Revelation onto the entire

5 Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *Daniel in Expositors Bible Commentary: Daniel-Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 115.

6 Hoehner makes this precise argument from Genesis and Revelation in his book. See, Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, 136-137.

timeline in Daniel 9, as though they conclusively prove that every year in the 70 weeks could only last 360 days, rather than the average 365, is bad interpretive methodology.

As we have already established, the Bible does use 29-30 day lunar months. This is not in question, so we should not expect to see anything else in Genesis 7 and 8, or in Revelation. Yet, in no way does this lunar biblical calendar nullify the reality that people in the Ancient Near East also added extra months to their calendar *of years*.

The mention of 30-day months in Genesis is an irrelevant point as far as Daniel 9 is concerned, because the same people in the Ancient Near East who used these months, including Noah and his family, and Daniel, would have also reconciled their annual calendar with the 365-day solar year. We also know that groups such as the Essenes, who were extremely adamant about the proper observance of the biblical festivals, used a calendar of 364 days, not 360 days.

Compared to Genesis 7–8 the text in Revelation 12–13 is a little more interesting. Why does Revelation mention 1,260 days?

365-DAY YEARS IN DANIEL 12

Before answering this question, we first need to recognize that in Daniel 12:11–12, Daniel says the last half of the 70th week will last 1,290 days, and then to a certain extent, even up to 1,335 days. In other words, in Revelation, the last half of the 70th week is 1260 days, but in Daniel 12 it is 1,290–1,335 days.

1,290 days is three-and-a-half 365-day years (plus a couple weeks). This means Daniel 12:11–12 uses regular 365-day years when presenting the 70-weeks timeline, not 360-day prophetic years.

Daniel 12 clarifies that the 1,260 days in Revelation 12 cannot be appealed to in a vacuum to support the Prophetic-Year Theory. If Daniel was calculating based on 360-day prophetic years then we would need some proof of this within the book of Daniel itself, or in the Old Testament, but no such proof exists.

THE FINAL STAGES OF THE 70TH WEEK

When looking at the last half of the 70th week, it is interesting that we are given three different lengths for this period of time in Daniel and Revelation (i.e. 1,290, 1,335, and 1,260 days), which brings us back to the question of why Revelation 12 mentions 1,260 days, rather than 1,290-1,335 like Daniel 12. In a later chapter, we will cover how these distinct numbers probably indicate that the final events of the 70th week will occur over a 75-day period of time.

Daniel and Revelation emphasize different events that will take place towards the end of the 70th week, some after 1,260 days, some after 1,290 days, and some after 1,335 days. But in any case, the 1,260-day time designation in Revelation 12 does not cancel out the clear indication in Daniel 12:11–12 that the 70th week is made up of 365-day solar years.

THE 70 YEARS OF THE EXILE AND THE SABBATH CYCLE

We also know that in Daniel 9, Daniel was already making calculations based on the 70 years of exile foretold in the book of Jeremiah, and there is no evidence that he used 360-day years to make these calculations. Instead, most scholars agree that Daniel used 365-day years, just like the authors of the other historical books of the Bible.

The Sabbath and Jubilee cycles in the Torah were also calculated using adjusted 365-day years, because the Jubilee fell on the Day of Atonement in the fall. Because the 70 weeks are made up of ten Jubilee cycles, or 70 Sabbath cycles of years, this is more internal proof within the book of Daniel that the 70 weeks are comprised of 365-day years.

These were the years Daniel, and everyone else in the ancient world, was already familiar with. They knew a lunar cycle of months had to be reconciled with the seasons by adding extra time to their annual calendar (which we know today is necessary because of the earth's rotation around the sun).

Old Testament scholar Gleason Archer has summarized this point. He writes:

The evidence from the book of Revelation 12 “therefore furnishes very slender support for the supposition that **the Hebrews of the first millennium B.C. [i.e. in the time of Daniel]** differed from all others in the ancient (or modern) world and used 360-day years rather than solar years in reckoning prophetic time. **Certainly in their numerous chronological statements in Kings and Chronicles, the OT authors used nothing but true solar years. This conclusion alone ought to be decisive against Anderson’s theory.**”⁷

MOVING PAST COMMENTARY TRADITION

The Prophetic-Year Theory is a human fabrication, invented by Sir Robert Anderson in the 1800s. This theory has no biblical basis because (1) it requires us to choose 444 BC as the starting date of the Daniel 9:25 decree, which is nearly 100 years too late, and (2) because it requires us to accept a complex Daniel-9 timeline that is based on 360-day prophetic years, which were never used to make time calculations in Ancient Israel.

No doubt Anderson was well-intentioned, and trying to come up with an interpretation of Daniel 9 that he could fit with the life of Jesus. But unfortunately, Anderson went to extremes in his interpretation of the 70-weeks prophecy and introduced an element of confusion that is still with us today.

As a matter of fact, many Jewish scholars have criticized the idea that Daniel 9 is Messianic because they recognize the holes in the popular evangelical interpretation of this prophecy (the Prophetic-Year Theory). Of course, these Jewish scholars are ultimately wrong to propose that Daniel 9 is not a Messianic prophecy. However, ironically enough, they are right about the fact that evangelicals have often tried to force a contrived and inaccurate interpretation of the text based on certain preconceived notions about how Daniel 9 must align with events that took place in the life of Jesus.

7 Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *Daniel*, 115.

If we want to unlock the full power and potential of Daniel 9:24–27 as a predictive prophecy that reveals when the Messiah first appeared in Israel, we need to move beyond the commentary tradition of evangelicism, and offer the Jewish community, and the wider world, a better alternative. The Prophetic-Year Theory does not represent the only way to read Daniel 9:24–27 in a Messianic light. There are other biblically and historically-viable ways to make sense of the 70-weeks prophecy that legitimately prove the Messiah had to appear in Israel by the early part of the first century AD.

12

THE ANOINTED ONE CUT OFF (DANIEL 9:26)

IN HIS GROUNDBREAKING BOOK, *The Jewish Gospels*, orthodox Jewish scholar Daniel Boyarin explains how prominent the idea of a suffering Messiah has been within Judaism for nearly 3,000 years. Boyarin states:

Over and over we find the commonplace [...] statement that what divides Christians and Jews most sharply is the idea that the divine Messiah could suffer and die; indeed, many hold that it was this belief (produced, supposedly after the fact) that was the most tangible marker of an absolute break between Jews and their new rivals, the Christians. [...]

This commonplace view has to be rejected completely. The notion of the humiliated and suffering Messiah was not at all alien within Judaism before Jesus' advent, and it remained current among Jews well into the future following that—indeed, well into the early modern period. The fascinating (and to some, no doubt,

uncomfortable) fact [is that Messianic Jews and Christians] have a very strong textual base for the view that the suffering Messiah is based in deeply rooted Jewish texts early and late.

Jews, it seems, had no difficulty whatever with understanding a Messiah who would vicariously suffer to redeem the world. Once again, what has been allegedly ascribed to Jesus after the fact is, in fact, a piece of entrenched messianic speculation and expectation that was current before Jesus came into the world at all. That the Messiah would suffer and be humiliated was something Jews learned from close reading of the Biblical texts [...]. **The idea of a suffering Messiah is present in ancient, medieval, and early modern Judaism.**¹

What makes Boyarin's comments on the suffering Messiah in early Judaism so remarkable is that he is neither a professing Christian, nor a Messianic Jew. Boyarin does not personally believe Jesus is the Messiah at all. Yet, he is willing to acknowledge that the idea of a suffering Messiah was commonplace in early Judaism, both before and after Jesus lived.

In this chapter, we will explore how Daniel 9:26 fits within the larger framework of biblical and extrabiblical Jewish texts that speak of a suffering Messiah. First, we will cover how Daniel 9:26 reveals a suffering Messiah who would be killed and "cut off" from his people. Then, we will cover how this notion of a suffering Messiah is further expounded upon in both the Bible itself, and within the traditional literature of early Judaism.

DANIEL 9:26

In chapter 10, we discovered that when the beginning of the 70 weeks is calculated in a fluid manner from the starting point of the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes (538-457 BC; cf. Ezra 6:14), Daniel

¹ Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 129-133; 150.

9:25 predicts that the Messiah (*Mashiach Nagid*) would appear in Israel sometime between 55 BC and 27 AD. Because Daniel 9 is a Jubilee prophecy about the coming Messianic Age, we could reasonably expect that the next verse in Daniel 9:26 would be about the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom and the Messiah's great victory over the Gentile nations.

Instead, in an unexpected plot twist, Daniel 9:26 predicts that the Messiah, the same *Mashiach Nagid* associated with the Messianic Jubilee (Isa. 61), would be killed:

Then after the sixty-two weeks **the Anointed One [*Mashiach*] will be cut off and have nothing**, and the city and the sanctuary will be destroyed by the people of the Prince to Come. And his end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined (Dan. 9:26; *author's translation*).

In chapter 8 we looked at the evidence that proves there is only one anointed figure in verses 25–26, who appeared after seven and sixty-two weeks. Because there is only one anointed person in these verses, the only viable interpretation of verse 26 is that it is speaking of the same *Mashiach Nagid* from the previous verse, whose title is shortened here to *Mashiach* (Messiah, or Anointed One).

As we see in verse 26, the Messiah was to be “cut off and have nothing” at some point after the sixty-two weeks which were added to the seven weeks of verse 25. The implication is that the Messiah would be cut off after the combined sixty-nine week period, which ended in 27 AD at the latest.

THE GAP OF TIME AFTER THE 69TH WEEK

We are also told that the cutting of the Messiah would occur “after” the seven and sixty-two weeks. This detail places the cutting off of the Messiah in the gap of time between the 69th and 70th week.

Many interpreters have been opposed to this notion that there is a

gap of time in Daniel 9:26. But as we have already established, a gap or additional period of time is required in every 70-weeks timeline. Moreover, verse 26 says the Messiah would be cut off after the 69th week, but before the 70th week, which is to say, within this gap. The text does not say that the Messiah would be cut off after the sixty-two weeks but also *within* the 70th week, so the gap is certainly there in the text, though admittedly, we are not told how long the gap of time between the 69th and 70th week will last.² The text only states, “And **after** the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing...”

CUT OFF AND HAVE NOTHING

The word used to describe the cutting off of the Messiah in verse 26 is the Hebrew verb *karat*. This verb is used hundreds of times in the Hebrew Bible, where it most often means to kill, to destroy, to perish, to make an end of, or to make or cut a covenant (because making a covenant in the Ancient Near East involved cutting apart various animals; Gen. 9:11; 15:18; 21:27; Ex. 4:25; 31:14; Deut. 12:29; Josh. 7:9; 1 Sam. 5:4; 1 Kgs 5:6; Jer. 9:21; 11:19; Job 14:7; Ps. 37:38).

The phrase “and have nothing” could be translated as “and not to him,” or “and nothing to him.” This statement indicates that the Messiah would be “cut off and have nothing.” He would be killed and no longer have a place in the world.

Understandably, many Christians have also chosen to read deeper theological significance into verse 26, as though it speaks of the Messiah’s vicarious death for others. This interpretation is made on the grounds that “and have nothing” could be translated as “but not for himself,” which is the translation found in the KJV.

2 As noted by Brock David Hollett, some Preterists do place the crucifixion of Jesus after the 69th week, rather than within the 70th week. However, if they do this, they are still forced to place a 40-year gap of time from the crucifixion of Jesus to the destruction of Jerusalem during their 70th week. So either way, they all require some type of gap or additional period of time outside the 70 weeks in their timeline. See, Brock David Hollett, *Debunking Preterism: How Over-Realized Eschatology Misses the “Not Yet” of Bible Prophecy* (United States: Morris Publishing, 2018), 151.

The argument then is that Daniel 9:26 implies that the Messiah would be killed, not for himself, but rather to make atonement for others. Supporters of this reading will often also connect the concept of atonement in verse 26 back to verse 24, which mentions that one of the purposes of the 70 weeks was to “make atonement for/purge iniquity.” In effect, many Christians believe both verse 24 and verse 26 refer to the Messiah’s vicarious death, which accomplished atonement for New Covenant believers.

While it is true that the Messiah’s death made atonement for the sins of others, Daniel 9:26 does not make any direct reference to vicarious atonement. This verse does not explain why the Messiah would die. It only says that he would die.

To understand why we should not read verse 26 as a direct reference to vicarious atonement, we must first grasp that the best possible translation of the phrase *v’ ein lo* is “and will have nothing.” This is a straightforward way to say the Messiah would be killed and have nothing left to his name.

Old Testament scholar Steven Miller explains:

“And will have nothing” (similar NASB, NRSV) is a translation of the Hebrew [*v’ ein lo*], which could be rendered literally “and [but] not to [for] him” (cf. but not for himself,” KJV) or “and [but] nothing to [for] him.” The KJV’s translation would signify that Christ’s death was for others, which is certainly a scriptural truth. **But the phrase [*v’ ein lo*] is in Hebrew an idiom for “not have” (cf. Gen. 11:30; Isa. 27:4).** Therefore, the NIV translation is correct. Thus when [Messiah] died, his earthy ministry seemed to have been in vain. His disciples had deserted him, and from all appearances he had not accomplished what he had set out to do. [He was killed and left with nothing.]³

3 Stephen R. Miller, *The New American Commentary: Daniel*, Vol. 18 (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1994), 267.

In modern Hebrew, the exact phrase used in verse 26 is still used today to say “he doesn’t have,” which again, proves this phrase carries no direct connotation of vicarious atonement here. It is a more basic way to describe the Messiah’s plight.

As Miller mentions, Genesis 11:30 and Isaiah 27:4 use the same phrase from Daniel 9:26 (*v’ein lo*) only to imply that someone didn’t have something. Messianic atonement is not the focus of these other passages, and it is not the focus of Daniel 9:26 either.

Another problem with the idea that Daniel 9:26 hints at substitutionary atonement, is that this is the view often articulated by Christian Preterists who argue that all of the six purpose statements from Daniel 9:24 were fulfilled by Jesus, in the first century. Preterists in the First-Century Fulfillment camp need verse 26 to be about not only the death of the Messiah, but also atonement, because otherwise they would not be able to say the six purpose statements, including, “to make atonement for/purge iniquity,” were fulfilled 2,000 years ago.⁴

As we saw in chapter 7, the six purpose statements in verse 24 are all eschatological and related to the destiny of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. The phrase “make atonement for/purge iniquity” refers to what the Jewish people and Jerusalem will undergo within the 70-weeks period (i.e. refinement, purging, and judgment). This phrase in Daniel 9:24 does not refer to the first-century ministry of the Messiah.

Consequently, it is not a valid argument to say that verse 26 is about Messianic atonement because Daniel 9:24 is about Messianic atonement, because this earlier verse is not about Messianic atonement per se.

Again, to be clear, the lack of sacrificial atonement language in Daniel 9:24–26 does not negate that the Messiah’s death did accomplish atonement for sins. All I am saying here is that this idea is not overtly stated in Daniel 9:26, and we need to be careful not to derive the right

4 This pattern can be seen in the article by Peter J. Gentry, “Daniel’s Seventy Weeks and the New Exodus,” *SBTJ* 14.1 (2010): 26–44. Gentry adopts a first-century preterist view of Daniel 9, and not coincidentally, he also argues that “and have nothing” in v. 26 means “but not for himself,” implying vicarious atonement.

doctrine from the wrong text, especially when the doctrine we are discussing is as important as the doctrine of the atonement.

In a shocking twist of irony, Daniel 9:26 tells us that the *Mashiach Nagid*, the Commander of Israel and the nations, the Anointed One of the Lord, would be killed before ushering in the eschatological Jubilee. Daniel 9:26 represents a key turning point in the 70-weeks prophecy. This verse reveals that even though God's plan of Messianic redemption was still on track, events were not necessarily going to unfold in the way most people were expecting. The Jubilee would be interrupted, and there would be a long interval of time before its complete fulfillment at the end of the age.

The Messiah himself would be killed. He would be forsaken and left with nothing.

In order to understand not only when, but also why the Lord would allow the Messiah to die, we need to look at a handful of other key texts, as well as many Jewish traditions, that shed more light on the death of the Messiah.

THE SUFFERING MESSIAH IN ISAIAH 53 AND ZECHARIAH 12:10

As many Christians and Messianic Jews will be aware, there are numerous texts in the Hebrew Bible that explain why the Messiah had to die. Isaiah 53:1–12 and Zechariah 12:10 are particularly important in this regard. These two texts contain key information about the Messiah's suffering and his identity that is not found in Daniel 9:25–26.

THE SUFFERING SERVANT IN ISAIAH 53

The prophecy of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 is well known to many, and it actually begins in Isaiah 52:13–15. In these verses, Isaiah speaks of how God's Servant would "be high and lifted up and greatly exalted," how the Servant's appearance would be "marred more than any man," and how the Servant would "sprinkle many nations."

These three elements in the prophecy are fascinating, because they reveal three key lessons about the Servant and his life. First, the Servant

would be divine and co-equal with God. Second, the Servant would suffer and die. And third, the Servant would shed his blood for other people. His death would be substitutionary in nature.

The Servant's divine status is indicated by the phrase, he will be "high and lifted up and greatly exalted." This phrase "high and lifted up" is an almost verbatim rendition of an earlier statement in Isaiah 6, which gives the account of Isaiah's vision of the Lord in His heavenly temple, when he saw God Almighty "lofty and exalted." In Isaiah 6:1 Isaiah wrote:

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the LORD sitting on a throne, **lofty and exalted** [*ram v'nisa*], and the train of His robe filling the temple.

In Isaiah 52:13, the same Hebrew words are used to describe the Servant being "high and lifted up" (*ram v'nisa*). This linguistic parallel is not apparent in most English translations. But it is of paramount importance, and not an accident or coincidence.

The exalted status of the Servant is depicted using the precise terminology that was previously used by Isaiah to describe the exalted status of the Lord Himself. This is a definite hint that the Servant would be divine.

Unexpectedly however, in Isaiah 52:14, Isaiah also says this divine Servant would be "marred" and disfigured in form, language that implies intense suffering. Verse 15 then explains the purpose of the suffering. The Servant would suffer as a way to "sprinkle many nations."

This word "sprinkle" is the same word used in Leviticus numerous times to signify purifying the Tabernacle, the priesthood, and other ceremonial objects with blood (Lev. 4:6; 8:20; 16:15, 19;). In the Hebrew Bible this word is used almost exclusively in the context of ceremonial cleansing and atonement.

With this usage in mind, it becomes clear that Isaiah wanted to present the death of the Servant as a purifying ritual, modeled after the sacrifices in the Jewish Temple. No Hebrew speaker reading Isaiah 52–53 would

have missed this sacrificial terminology that sets the actions of the Servant against the backdrop of Israel's rituals of atonement.

In Isaiah 53, the Servant's vicarious suffering comes into even sharper focus. We are told the Servant would be a "man," one "despised and forsaken of men," and "acquainted with grief" (v. 3). We are also told that the Servant would offer himself as a "guilt offering" (v. 10), pour himself out to the point of death (v. 12), and bear "the iniquities" of God's people (v. 11).

For good reason, Isaiah 53 is widely regarded as the most important prophecy in the Hebrew Bible that covers the sacrificial death of the Divine Messiah. This passage complements Daniel 9:26 by telling us not only that the Messiah would die, but even more importantly, that he would die to bring forgiveness, new life, justification, and atonement to Israel (God's "people," v. 8) and the "nations" (52:15).

COULD ISAIAH 53 BE ABOUT CORPORATE ISRAEL?

Many Jewish commentators have rejected the idea that Isaiah 53 is about the suffering Messiah. Today, the most popular interpretation of Isaiah 53 among religious Jews maintains that this prophecy is allegorical and symbolic.

Various rabbis in the 21st century argue that the Servant in Isaiah 53 is corporate Israel, not the individual Messiah, and that this passage speaks of either (A) how Israel's suffering in exile would bring salvation to the Gentile nations, or at the very least (B) how the Gentile nations would believe that Israel was being punished by God on their behalf (i.e. receiving the chastisement that they, the Gentile nations, should have received), even if this was not the real reason for Israel's suffering.

Stated another way, most Jewish commentators in the 21st century believe the Servant in Isaiah 53 is the nation of Israel. However, there has been debate within Judaism for the last 1,000 years over whether the suffering of Israel in Isaiah 53 was in fact vicarious, or whether Isaiah

53 was only written from the perspective of the Gentiles who believed Israel's suffering was vicarious.⁵

THE SHIFT IN THE SERVANT SONGS

Either way, the argument that Isaiah 53 is about corporate Israel and not the Messiah is spurious to say the least. It is true that earlier in the Servant Songs of Isaiah the nation of Israel is called God's "servant" numerous times (Isa. 41–48). However, by the time we get to Isaiah 49, there is a definite shift in focus, which brings one individual person into view.

Old Testament scholar Michael Brown highlights this transition in the Servant Songs, and explains why the Servant from Isaiah 49 onward has to be the Messiah:

On a larger contextual level, it should be noted that the Servant of the LORD is mentioned a total of nineteen times in Isaiah 40–51, sometimes with reference to the nation of Israel as a whole (41:8–9; 42:19[2x]; 43:10; 44:21 [2x]; 45:4; 48:20), and sometimes with reference to a righteous individual within the nation (49:3, 5–7; 50:10). In several verses, it is not clear whether an individual or the nation (or righteous remnant within the nation) is referred to, although a good case can be made for the individual interpretation (see 42:1; 44:1–2). **Significantly, the references to the Servant as a people actually end with 48:20 while the references to the Servant as an individual come into indisputable focus beginning with chapter 49 and continuing through the end of chapter 53.** Thus, by the time we reach Isaiah 52:13, the spotlight is on a person, not a people.⁶

5 For an excellent summary of how Isaiah 53 has been interpreted within Judaism, I recommend the article, "Jewish Interpretations of Isaiah 53" by Michael Brown, which can be found in the book, *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*, eds. Darrell Bock & Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012), 61–83.

6 Brown, "Jewish Interpretations of Isaiah 53," 75–76.

Another key point that is ignored by proponents of the “corporate Israel” interpretation of Isaiah 53, is that this interpretation is based on the unbiblical assumption that Israel was/is a righteous nation whose suffering could bring redemption to the world. The problem with this idea is that throughout the book of Isaiah we are repeatedly told the exact opposite. We are told that Israel was/is a wayward and rebellious nation deserving of God’s severe discipline and judgment. As a matter of fact, in the very first chapter of Isaiah, Isaiah even goes so far as to compare Israel to Sodom and Gomorrah (Isa 1:1–20), and also describes Israel as a “sinful nation” a “people weighed down with iniquity” (v. 4).

In light of how Isaiah consistently emphasizes Israel’s rebellion and need for redemption, it is a contradiction to say that Israel’s suffering could somehow bring salvation to the world. In the book of Isaiah, Israel’s suffering is always a result of their own disobedience. It is never a means of bringing vicarious atonement to the nations. After all, how could the “sinful nation” ever bring redemption and truth to the world in the first place?

THE SERVANT BRINGS ISRAEL BACK TO GOD

Isaiah 49 clarifies that it was precisely because of Israel’s disobedience that the Servant of the Lord had to step in and do for Israel and the nations what they were unable to do for themselves. Because Israel failed in their mission to be God’s light to the nations, the Servant picks up the slack, makes atonement for Israel’s sins, and brings the nation back to the Lord. Thus, we read in Isaiah 49:5:

And now, says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb **to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him.**

In this verse, the individual Servant who comes into focus from Isaiah 49–53 is tasked with bringing Jacob (i.e. the corporate nation of Israel) back to the Lord. This verse proves that the Servant spoken of

from this point forward is the individual Messiah who is distinct from Israel. Otherwise, we would be forced to read this verse as though it says that Israel (the Servant) will bring Israel (Jacob) back to God, which is contradictory and incoherent on many levels. The nation of Israel cannot be both the Servant bringing Israel back to God and the nation that is being brought back to God at the same time. In Isaiah 49:5, the corporate nation of Israel and God's Servant are two separate entities. The Servant is in right relationship with God, whereas Israel is depicted as a sinful nation, one that can only be brought back to God through the actions of the individual Messiah.

After Isaiah 49, Isaiah 52:13–15 and Isaiah 53 then explain that the restoration spoken of in 49:5 would be accomplished through the sufferings and death of the Messiah. This is why Isaiah 53:8 says the Messianic Servant would be “cut off out of the land of the living, **for the transgression of my people**, to whom the stroke was due.” Here, we see that the Servant is cut off because of the transgressions of Israel (God's “people”), and that this was to be the specific means through which the Servant would bring Jacob back to the Lord (49:5).

Although Isaiah 53:8 uses a different word for “cut off” (*gazar*) than Daniel 9:26 (*karat*), these two words are essentially synonymous. They both indicate that the Messiah would be killed. Isaiah 53 fills out the picture from Daniel 9:26 and also reveals that the Messiah would be violently killed in order to bring atonement for sins to Israel and the nations.

ISAIAH 53 IN TRADITIONAL JUDAISM

It cannot be denied that many Jewish commentators have interpreted Isaiah 53 as though it only speaks of the sufferings of corporate Israel. With that said, it is equally true that this corporate Israel view of Isaiah 53 has not been the universal standard among Jewish theologians over the last 2,000 years.

Many Jewish scholars have understood perfectly well that Isaiah 53 is a prophecy about the sufferings of the Messiah. The corporate Israel view did not become popular within Judaism until the Middle Ages, and

even since then, this view has not been the only proposed interpretation of Isaiah 53 among observant Jews.

Below are a handful of examples from Jewish commentators that demonstrate a Messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53:

- *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98b* (c. 500 AD): This portion of the Talmud asks of the Messiah, “What is his name?” A number of responses are given, but the final response says this: “And the Rabbis say: **The Leper of the house of Yehuda HaNasi [Judah the Prophet] is his name, as it is stated: ‘Indeed our illnesses he did bear and our pains he endured; yet we did esteem him injured, stricken by God, and afflicted’ (Isa. 53:4).**”⁷ Notice how the Messiah is likened to a rejected leper; an idea the rabbis developed based on their reading of Isaiah 53. As summarized by orthodox Jewish scholar Daniel Boyarin, “We see here both the vicarious suffering of the Messiah and the use of Isaiah 53 to anchor the idea.”⁸
- *Midrash Kohen* (c. 1000-1500 AD): “Elijah of blessed memory takes hold of his [the Messiah’s] head, places it in his lap and holds it, and says to him: ‘Endure the sufferings and the sentence of your Master who makes you suffer because of the sin of Israel.’ **And thus it is written: He was wounded because of our transgressions, he was crushed because of our iniquities (Isa. 53:5)**—until the time when the end comes.”⁹
- *Zohar, 2:212a*, written by Rabbi Moshe de Leon (c. 1200s AD): “In the hour in which they tell the Messiah about the

7 *The William Davidson Talmud*, Sefaria, online.

8 Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels*, 153.

9 Midrash Kohen, BHM 2:29-30 in, Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts: Jewish Legends of Three Thousand Years* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), 115.

sufferings of Israel in exile, and [about] the sinful among them who seek not knowledge of their Master, the Messiah lifts up his voice and weeps over those sinful among them. **This is what is written: He was wounded because of our transgressions, he was crushed because of our iniquities (Isa. 53:5).** Those souls then return to their places. In the Garden of Eden there is a hall which is called the Hall of the Sons of Illness. **The Messiah enters that hall and summons all the diseases and all the pains and all the sufferings of Israel that they should come upon him, and all of them come upon him.** And would he not thus bring ease to Israel and take their sufferings upon himself, no man could endure the sufferings Israel has to undergo because they neglected the Torah [...]. **As long as Israel dwelt in the Holy Land, the rituals and the sacrifices they performed [in the Temple] removed all those diseases from the world; now the Messiah removes them from the children of the world.**"¹⁰

- **Rabbi Moshe Alshech (1500s AD):** Concerning Isaiah 53, "**Our rabbis with one voice accept and affirm the opinion that the prophet is speaking of the Messiah,** and we shall ourselves also adhere to the same view." Orthodox Jewish scholar Daniel Boyarin has called Rabbi Moshe Alshech "a spotlessly 'orthodox' rabbinic teacher."¹¹
- ***Midrash Assereth Memrot* (1600s AD):** "The Messiah in order to atone for them both [for Adam and David] **will make his soul a trespass offering,** as it is written next to this, in the Parashah [scriptural passage] **Behold my servant** [Isaiah 52:13–53:12]."¹²

10 Zohar 2:212a, in Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts*, 115-116.

11 Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels*, 155.

12 Adolf Neubauer, trans., *The Fifty-Third Chapter of Isaiah According to the Jewish Interpreters* (James Parker & Co.: Oxford & London, 1877), 394.

These examples represent only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to traditional Jewish interpretations of Isaiah 53. We could find dozens, if not hundreds, of other examples from the rabbinic literature that speak of the suffering Messiah, and/or reference Isaiah 53 to support the idea that the Messiah would suffer vicariously to atone for the sins of Israel and to heal the nations.

Daniel Boyarin explains:

I cannot overstate the extent to which the interpretation of this passage has anchored the conventional view of Judaism's relationship to Messianism. It has been generally assumed by modern folks that Jews have always given the passage a metaphorical reading, understanding the suffering servant to refer to the People of Israel, and that it was Christians who changed and distorted its meaning to make it refer to Jesus. **Quite the contrary, we now know that many Jewish authorities, maybe even most, until nearly the modern period have read Isaiah 53 as being about the Messiah; until the last few centuries, the allegorical reading was a minority position.**¹³

Many Jewish rabbis across the span of time understood what an unbiased reading of Isaiah 53 reveals. If any readers of this book happen to be members of the Jewish community who do not believe in the concept of the suffering Messiah, I encourage a fresh look at Isaiah 53. I also encourage consideration of this question: what Jewish Messianic figure who lived in the first century, and died shortly after 27 AD, as Daniel 9:26 requires, could possibly have fulfilled Isaiah 53 through his suffering?

The only real candidate is Yeshua of Nazareth.

ZECHARIAH 12:10

Another insightful text in the Hebrew Bible that speaks of the suffering Messiah can be found in Zechariah 12:10:

13 Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels*, 152.

I will pour out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and supplication, **so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced**; and they **will mourn for Him**, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly **over Him** like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.

This text is important because it highlights the sufferings of the “pierced” Messiah, while at the same time attributing divine status to the Pierced One, as though he is God Himself. In Zechariah 12:10, it is no doubt the God of Israel speaking, as in many other prophecies throughout Scripture. Yet, at the beginning of verse 10, God identifies Himself as the one who was pierced.

Then, in the very next line, the Pierced One is identified using a third person singular pronoun, “him.” God says, they pierced “Me,” but then says they pierced “him” (someone else), and will “weep bitterly over *him*.”

On the surface, this passage may seem contradictory, especially if a person has already made a prior decision that God cannot take on flesh, or that the Messiah would not be divine and co-equal with God, that is to say, the very representation of God Himself in human form. But if we look closely at the text, we can see that it is God Himself who is pierced, though His sufferings are experienced in the real world through the life of an individual human.

Old Testament scholar Michael Brown elaborates:

It is perfectly clear that the “Me” in this verse is the Lord himself [...] suggesting the real possibility that the Hebrew text states that it is the Lord himself who was pierced. Read from a Messianic Jewish viewpoint, this makes perfect sense since [...] the Messiah is the very image of God, representing his fullness in bodily form on the earth. Thus, piercing the Messiah was equivalent to piercing the Lord [...].¹⁴

¹⁴ Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus: Volume Three* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 150.

Brown notes how only the doctrine of the Incarnation can explain this mystery in Zechariah 12:10. God takes on flesh in the person of the Messiah and suffers for the sins of Israel, being pierced and rejected by His own people.

ZECHARIAH 12:10 IN TRADITIONAL JUDAISM

The ancient Jewish literature does not discuss the Messiah's divinity when covering Zechariah 12:10. That said, a Messianic reading of this prophecy can be found in numerous places. For example:

1. *The Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 52a* (c. 500s AD): "Granted, according to the one who said that **the lament is for Messiah ben Yosef who was killed**, this would be the meaning of that which is written in that context, 'And they shall look unto Me because they have thrust him through; and they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for his only son' (Zech. 12:10)."
2. Rashi (1000s AD): "The words, 'The land shall mourn,' are found in the prophecy of Zechariah, and he prophesies of the future, **that they shall mourn on account of Messiah**, the son of Joseph, who shall be slain in the war of Gog and Magog."
3. Ibn Ezra (1100s AD): "All the heathen shall look to me to see what I shall do to those who pierced Messiah, son of Joseph."
4. Rabbi Moshe Alshech (1500s AD): "I will do yet a third thing, and that is, that 'they shall look unto me,' for they shall lift up their eyes unto Me in perfect repentance, **when they see Him whom they pierced, that is, Messiah, the Son of Joseph; for our Rabbis, of blessed memory, have said that He will take upon Himself all the guilt of Israel**, and shall then be slain in the war to make atonement in such manner that it shall be accounted as if Israel had pierced Him, for on account of their sin He has died; and, therefore, **in order that it may be reckoned to them as a perfect atonement, they will repent and**

look to the blessed One, saying that there is none beside Him to forgive those that mourn on account of Him who died for their sin: this is the meaning of “They shall look upon Me.”¹⁵

There are different opinions on Zechariah 12:10 in the Jewish literature, and some modern Jewish translations of the Bible have also tried to cancel out the Messianic implications of this verse.¹⁶ This is to be expected, especially now that most religious leaders within the Jewish community reject the notion of a suffering Messiah.

Regardless, the Messianic reading of Zechariah 12:10 does make sense, and many early rabbis understood this. Zechariah 12:10 fits within the broader framework of other prophecies in the Hebrew Bible that also predict a fully divine Messiah who would suffer and die for the sins of his people.

TWO MESSIAHS OR A RESURRECTION?

As some may have noticed, in the rabbinic literature we find the repeated reference to the “Messiah son of Joseph (or Yosef).” In traditional Judaism, the Messiah son of Joseph was understood to be a second Messiah figure, distinct from the Messiah son of David, who would suffer and die for Israel in a final battle (the battle of Gog of Magog) right before the start of the Messianic Age.

Though many rabbis were right to say that the Messiah would suffer and die, they could not reconcile the passages that speak of a suffering Messiah with the passages that speak of a victorious and conquering Messiah. Consequently, they split the difference and said there would

15 Cited from David Baron, *Zechariah: A Commentary on His Visions and Prophecies* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1918), 442. Admittedly, Baron does not cite any direct reference to Alshech’s writings here. However, because Rabbi Alshech is on record in so many other places as teaching a suffering Messiah “Son of Joseph,” the quote is probably reliable.

16 See, Daniel E. Stuart, “Zechariah 12:10–13:1: The Pierced Messiah,” in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and Expositions of the Messiah in the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Publisher, 2019), 1285.

be two Messiahs, one who would suffer, Messiah son of Joseph, and one who would reign as Israel's king, Messiah son of David.

Prophecy scholar David Baron wrote about how this theory of two Messiahs developed in Judaism:

The doctrine or theory of two Messiahs—a Messiah ben Joseph, who should suffer and die, and the Messiah ben David, who shall reign in power and glory—can be traced back to the third or fourth century AD [200s-300s AD], and very probably originated in the perplexity of the Talmudists at the apparently irreconcilable pictures of a suffering, and yet a glorious Messiah, which they found in the prophecies.¹⁷

After the belief in two Messiahs became firmly established in Judaism by the 300s AD, it continued to appear throughout the rabbinic literature. Personally, I find the rabbinic attempt to reconcile the different Messianic passages of Scripture very interesting. With that said, the rabbinic notion of two Messiahs is still a false theological construct. Furthermore, this notion of two Messiahs has historically stopped the Jewish community from understanding the nature, work, and identity of the one true Messiah.

Scripture teaches there is only one Messiah, and this can be proven by taking another look at Daniel 9:25–26. The ruling and reigning *Mashiach Nagid* (Anointed Prince) of Daniel 9:25, which we saw in chapter 9 is a Davidic title, is the same suffering Messiah who is killed in Daniel 9:26. There is one singular Messianic figure in this passage, though he is described using terminology that is typically associated with two distinct Messiahs in traditional Judaism. In a fascinating way, Daniel 9:25–26 unites the ministries of the Messiah son of Joseph and the Messiah son of David from traditional Judaism, and shows us that the one true Messiah would embody both the humiliation of Joseph, and the royal privileges of David.

The New Testament further reveals that the way the one true

17 Baron, *Zechariah*, 441.

Messiah was able to suffer and die, yet still hold his claim to the throne of David, was through his resurrection. After Jesus was crucified, God raised him from the dead on the third day. He now waits in heaven for the time when he will return to sit on the throne of David, as the *Mashiach Nagid* (the Anointed Prince) of Daniel 9:25, the one who will bring the Jubilee to its eschatological fulfillment.

Traditional Jewish commentators could not reconcile the suffering and reigning Messiah because they did not appreciate the centrality of the resurrection in Messianic theology, nor did they understand that the Messiah would come twice. As we read in Hebrew 9:27–28:

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, **so the Messiah also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.**

ENTERING THE KINGDOM

The message of the prophets is clear. Anyone who looks with eyes of faith to God's Pierced One, His Anointed Servant, and believes that he died to make atonement for our sins, and was then raised from the dead to give us eternal life, will be invited into the kingdom of God to experience the Messianic Jubilee. In a profound way, Daniel 9:26 centers the righteous community's participation in the future Messianic Kingdom around the death of the Anointed Prince. This represents an unexpected twist of irony in the story of how the eschatological Jubilee will come to pass, because it violates our rational expectations, and shows us that the Messiah, the hero of the story, did not lay the foundation for our Jubilee restoration through his military might or human strength. He did so through his suffering and death. With a touch of paradoxical providence, God accomplished our liberation through the Messiah's servitude and humiliation. He sacrificed the freedom and comfort that could have been his, in order to give us a place at his table in the Age of Jubilee.

13

WHO IS THE PRINCE TO COME? (9:26)

AFTER DANIEL 9:26 records that the Messiah would be killed, it then transitions to speak of an evil prince who will be associated with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple:

Then after the sixty-two weeks, Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, **and the people of the Prince to Come will destroy the city and the sanctuary.** And his end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined (*author's translation*).

The purpose of this chapter is to determine the identity of the “Prince to Come” in Daniel 9:26. In the remaining chapters of this book, we will also begin a more detailed study of the end-time events discussed in Daniel 9:26–27.

To briefly review the various positions on the Prince to Come, those in the Antiochene camp believe this is a reference to Antiochus

Epiphanes. Many in the First-Century Fulfillment camp argue the Prince to Come was the Roman emperor Vespasian, or his son Titus, who carried out the siege against Jerusalem in 70 AD. Alternatively, many other Christians who subscribe to a first-century fulfillment of Daniel 9:24–27 believe the Prince to Come is the Messiah, the same *nagid* (prince) mentioned back in verse 25.

A final option, which represents the approach taken by most futurists, is that the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26 is a future end-times enemy of Israel, the man commonly called “the Antichrist.”

As we will see, this final approach, which maintains that the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26 is the Antichrist, is correct.

THE MAIN PROBLEM WITH VESPASIAN AND TITUS

If verse 26 was the last verse in the 70-weeks prophecy, a strong case could be made that the Prince to Come was Vespasian or Titus. At first glance, it seems logical to conclude that Daniel 9:26 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, and a Roman leader (Titus or Vespasian) who either took part in (Titus) or ordered the siege (Vespasian) against the city.

In the next chapter I will discuss why I believe Daniel 9:26 is about the end-times destruction of Jerusalem by the Antichrist, not the historical destruction carried out by the Romans in 70 AD. But before we can get to that point, we need to first note that the main problem with the suggestion that the Prince to Come was either Vespasian or Titus, is that in the subsequent verse, in Daniel 9:27, we are told that the Prince to Come will also “strengthen a covenant with the many for one week.” If we put verses 26 and 27 together we read:

The people of **the Prince to Come** will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And his end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. **And he will strengthen a covenant with the many for one week**, but in the middle of the week **he** will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering [...] (*author’s translation*).

Biblical Hebrew, like English, utilizes what is called “the law of the antecedent,” which means that if a new subject is not introduced in a subsequent verse, the subject from the preceding verse should be understood as the primary subject of that subsequent verse, and thus, as the individual or entity carrying out the described action(s). The law of the antecedent requires that the Prince to Come of verse 26 is the same person who will also confirm the seven-year covenant of verse 27, and put a stop to Temple sacrifices. We can be certain of this because verse 27 does not introduce any new individual who will carry out these actions. Therefore, it can only be the Prince to Come from verse 26 who carries out the actions described in verse 27.

Once we understand the relationship between the Prince in verse 26 and the events outlined in verse 27, it becomes difficult to defend the view that the Prince to Come could have been a Roman emperor (Vespasian) or general (Titus), for the very simple reason that neither Vespasian nor Titus ever made or confirmed a seven-year covenant with the Jewish nation. The First Jewish Revolt only lasted from 66–70 AD, and ended with the destruction of Jerusalem, which was carried out by the Roman army under the command of Titus. There was never any point in time when Rome entered into an overt covenant with the Jews for a period of seven years.

DANIEL 9:27 REQUIRES 3.5 YEARS OF PEACE BEFORE THE DESTRUCTION

Another problem with the view that Vespasian or Titus could have been the Prince to Come, is that Daniel 9:27 requires a 3 ½ year period of peace (based on the covenant), before the subsequent destruction mentioned in this verse. The Prince to Come makes the covenant for seven years, and then, 3 ½ years into the covenant, he shows his true colors, breaks the covenant, puts a stop to Temple sacrifices, and desolates the sanctuary. This is the basic sequence of events in Daniel 9:26–27.

What this sequence of events in Daniel 9:26–27 means, is that even if we did, for the sake of argument, want to hypothetically accept that Vespasian or Titus could have been the Prince to Come who carried

out these events, we would also need to be able to show that the Roman leadership was at peace with the Jewish nation for the 3 ½ years leading up to the destruction in 70 AD.

We know from history that Rome was not at peace with the Jewish nation for the 3 ½ years leading up to the destruction in 70 AD. As a matter of fact, Rome was officially at war with the Jews beginning in 67 AD, about three years before Jerusalem was finally destroyed in 70 AD. This historical reality discredits the notion that Daniel 9:26–27 is exclusively concerned with first-century events.

The Roman general Vespasian began methodically reconquering the land of Israel from the north in 67 AD, murdering and pillaging as he went. In 69 AD Vespasian returned to Rome to claim his place as emperor, at which time his son Titus took over the offensive against Judea and Jerusalem. In his book, *Rome and Jerusalem*, historian Martin Goodman outlines Rome's war against the Jewish nation beginning in 67 AD:

[T]he command of the war in Judea was entrusted instead by the emperor Nero to a reliable if uninspiring soldier, who had made his name in the conquest of Britain more than twenty years earlier. Titus Flavius Vespasianus, the future emperor Vespasian, spent months collecting a large force. His son Titus brought a legion from Alexandria. The complement of three legions and a large body of auxiliary and allied troops, totaling altogether sixty thousand men, was gathered in Ptolemais (modern Akko) on the Mediterranean coast in early spring 67 AD. The next two years were spent cautiously gaining full control of the surrounding countryside—in 67 Galilee, Samaria, and northern Judaea; in 68 the regions to the east and south of Jerusalem, including Idumaea (the region around Hebron) and the environs of the Dead Sea. But from June 68 any further progress was slowed by political uncertainty and ambition. The death that month of Nero threw into doubt Vespasian's formal right to prosecute the campaign [...but] in July [of 69] Vespasian himself was acclaimed by his own

troops [to be emperor], [and the siege of Jerusalem would eventually go forward under Vespasian's son Titus in 70 AD].¹

This history reveals that the Romans had already begun to reconquer Israel with a massive military force in 67 AD, and that both Vespasian and Titus were already at war with the Jews three years before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. As a result, there is no way Vespasian or Titus could be the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26, because the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26 will be in a covenant of peace with the Jews for 3 ½ years before he wages war against Jerusalem.

COULD THE PRINCE TO COME BE JESUS?

In light of some of the grammatical (law of the antecedent) and historical problems with the view that the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26 was Vespasian or Titus, many Christians have adopted the view that the Prince to Come is Jesus. This view is often articulated in the following way:

First, the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26 is called a *nagid* (prince/leader). This is the same word that was used in Daniel 9:25 when the Messiah was called the *Mashiach Nagid* (Anointed Prince). Thus, the *nagid* of verse 26 (the Prince to Come) must be the same Messianic Prince (*nagid*) who appeared earlier in the prophecy, which proves the Prince to Come is the Messiah.

Furthermore, making Jesus the Prince to Come in verse 26 also fits perfectly because the Hebrew law of the antecedent implies that this Prince in verse 26 will make the covenant of verse 27, and put a stop to Temple sacrifices. Since we know Jesus inaugurated the New Covenant with his people, and that his death brought an end to the sacrificial system (at least in some way, eventually...), this is further proof that he is the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26.

1 Martin Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations* (New York: Random House, 2007), 12.

THE JEWS DIDN'T DESTROY THEIR OWN CITY & TEMPLE

There are at least four major problems with the idea that Jesus is the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26. First and foremost, this view requires us to accept that the Jewish people destroyed their own city and sanctuary in 70 AD, which is not the way things went down.

As we read in Daniel 9:26, Gabriel states that “the people (*am*) of the Prince to Come will destroy the city and the sanctuary.” The Hebrew word here for “people (*am*)” often suggests ethnic and/or national identity. Thus, proponents of the idea that the Prince to Come is Jesus argue that Jesus’ people (the Jews), that is to say, his ethnic and national kinsman, destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, which also proves that Jesus is the Prince spoken of at the end of verse 26.

The obvious problem with the idea that the Jewish people destroyed their own city and Temple, is that it never happened. The historical records are clear that Roman troops under the command of Titus systematically besieged, conquered, and burned Jerusalem to the ground. As a matter of fact, the Jews did everything in their power to defend Jerusalem and to stop it from being destroyed, even to the point of suffering massive casualties and horrific starvation within the city after Titus began his siege in the spring of 70 AD.

Given these historical realities, the suggestion that it was the Jews who destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD is categorically false, and no historian would ever take this suggestion seriously, which in turn, proves that the Prince to Come cannot be Jesus.

For example, historian Martin Goodman states that it was the Romans, not the Jews, who obliterated the holy city in 70 AD:

In 70 AD the great city of Jerusalem, one of the most significant and renowned of its day, and, for the Jews, the centre of all their aspirations, both religious and national, **was devastated by Roman forces** after a terrible siege.²

2 Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*, 3.

With this history in mind, we can already begin to see that the entire argument that Jesus is the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26 is built on a false premise, because it requires us to distort the simple historical account of how events unfolded in Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Unfortunately, and even in light of this history, there are still those who make the argument that perhaps the Jews did destroy Jerusalem in 70 AD, at least in some way. It is common to hear proponents of this view say things like, “well, even though the Romans technically destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD, it was the Jewish nation’s rebellion against Rome that *caused* the destruction, so really, we can in fact say that the Jewish people (*am*) were more responsible for the destruction of the city than the Romans, which consequently allows us to preserve the idea that Jesus is the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26.”

No doubt the Jewish people played a significant role in the destruction of Jerusalem through their own willful disobedience and arrogance, towards both God and Rome. Josephus himself, who was well aware of Daniel’s 70-weeks prophecy, even mentions that the Zealots ridiculed the writings of the prophets, and yet in the process eventually caused God’s word to be fulfilled.

Josephus writes:

These men, therefore, trampled upon all the laws of man, and laughed at the laws of God; and for the oracles of the prophets, they ridiculed them as the tricks of jugglers. Yet did these prophets foretell many things concerning the rewards of virtue, and the punishments of vice, which when these zealots violated, **they occasioned the fulfilling of those very prophecies belonging to their own country. For there was a certain ancient oracle of these men, that the city should then be taken and the sanctuary burnt, by right of war,** when a sedition should invade the Jews, and their own hand should pollute the temple of God. **Now, while these zealots did not quite disbelieve these predictions, they made themselves the instruments of their accomplishment.**³

3 Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, Book 4.6.3 in *The Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 682.

This is a fascinating statement by Josephus because it reveals that the Zealots understood the 70-weeks prophecy, but still resisted the Roman army nonetheless. However, that the Jews were “instruments” in the destruction of Jerusalem in no way implies that they destroyed the city themselves. Even Josephus doesn’t say the Jews destroyed the city. He merely states that they played a role in its destruction.

Josephus is noting the irony that the Zealots thought they would be immune to destruction, even though they seemed to believe (perhaps because of Daniel 9:26), that Jerusalem might eventually be destroyed. This irony doesn’t prove that it was the Jews who destroyed their city or wanted it to be destroyed. It only proves that the Zealots were arrogant and reckless.

Also, just because the Jewish Zealots played an instrumental and causal role in the eventual destruction of Jerusalem, this does not indicate that they carried this destruction out themselves. For example, when Israel rebelled against the Lord in times past and the Lord sent the Babylonians to judge the nation and destroy Jerusalem, do we say the Jews destroyed their own city at this time, or that the Babylonians destroyed the city? We say the Babylonians destroyed the city, because this is what happened, and this is what the Bible says happened (Jer. 52:12–16).

No historian or Bible commentator would argue that the Jews destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 BC just because their rebellion played a role in the occurrence of these events. Likewise, no serious historian would entertain a similar argument regarding the events in 70 AD. Just because Jewish rebellion often brought judgment against the nation, the Bible still consistently states that those responsible for conquering and destroying the Jewish nation, at various points in time, were the pagan Gentile nations, including the Assyrians, Babylonians,

Seleucids, and Romans. Daniel 9:26 highlights a similar type of destruction, one that will be effected by an evil Gentile “prince.”⁴

THE COVENANT IS MADE FOR ONE WEEK, NOT IN THE WEEK

Going back to what we covered in chapter 5, another significant weakness with the argument that Jesus is the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26, is that this view requires us to accept that Jesus only made the covenant of verse 27 *in* the 70th week, rather than *for* one week. The grammatical rules of biblical Hebrew disprove this notion. The Prince to Come makes the covenant “for one week,” which rules out that this could be Jesus, because Jesus never made any temporary seven-year covenant with anyone.

Some still try to connect the seven-year covenant to the start of Jesus’ ministry, but this requires a purely subjective interpretation of the Gospels. Surely if Jesus actually did fulfill Daniel 9:27 by making a seven-year covenant at the start of his ministry, we would have been explicitly told about this somewhere in Scripture. And yet, we are not. There is no biblical text, anywhere in the New Testament, that connects the ministry of Jesus to the seven-year covenant of Daniel 9:27.

4 One reasons some say Daniel 9:26 indicates that the Jews (i.e. the people of their v. 26 Prince, Jesus) are in view in this verse, is because the Hebrew verb “destroy” is in a causal form called the Hiphil. This verse could literally be translated, “the people of the prince to come will cause the city and the sanctuary to be destroyed.” This grammatical nuance then leads back to the idea that Jesus’ people, the Jews, only “caused the destruction,” without actually carrying it out, which supposedly bolsters the argument that the Prince to Come is in fact Jesus. This is a weak line of reasoning because there are still too many other historical and biblical problems with this idea that the Prince to Come is Jesus. In other words, we can’t base our entire interpretation on one grammatical data point. We have to look at the weight of evidence. The Hiphil (causative verb form) still makes sense when the Prince to Come is viewed as a Gentile leader, because it will in fact be his people who carry out and cause the destruction. Stated another way, the Hiphil (causative verb form) doesn’t prove anything one way or another about the identity of the Prince to Come, and it should not be appealed to as though it does. This is a peripheral piece of data that should be secondary to other historical and exegetical considerations.

**THE NAGID OF VERSE 26 IS AN EVIL PRINCE,
NOT GOD'S ANOINTED (MASHIACH)**

Third, we know the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26 cannot be the Messiah, because the term *mashiach*, when used as a title and applied to an individual, implies a positive vocational calling that was given to someone who was set apart to do something of benefit for the Lord. *Mashiach* is never used in the Hebrew Bible to refer to someone who is primarily evil, murderous, or tyrannical in their actions.

The *nagid* (Prince) of Daniel 9:26 is involved in the destruction of Jerusalem, a deceptive covenant, and abominable acts of desolation within the Temple (v. 27), so he cannot be the Messiah. He must be an evil leader opposed to the purposes of the Lord, not the same *Mashiach Nagid* from verses 25–26 who will lead the Lord's people into the Age of Jubilee.

It is interesting that the Davidic Messiah of verses 25–26 is called a *nagid*, and that the evil prince of verse 26 (the Prince to Come) is called the same thing. So I do understand why many people conflate these two figures, and believe they are the same person.

A better approach is to accept that this juxtaposition between the Anointed Prince (*Mashiach Nagid*) of verses 25–26, and the Prince (*nagid*) to Come later in verse 26, is meant to function as a stylistic literary device, one that highlights the comparison and contrast between the two individuals. One is a good political leader anointed (*mashach*) by the Lord, whereas the other is an evil political leader who creates destruction in his wake. It's the classic good guy vs. bad guy story. Also, it is very common for the Messiah to be juxtaposed with the Antichrist in the book of Daniel, and Daniel 9:26 follows this same pattern.

That the Messiah and the evil Prince are both described using the same term doesn't mean they must be the same person. Elsewhere in the Bible the Antichrist is consistently referred to as a "king" (*melek*; Dan. 11:36; 11:40), which is the same title given to the Messiah in numerous other places as well (Ps. 2:6). Most people would accept that a generic title such as *melek* (king) could be used to describe both the Messiah and another evil ruler, because this is the pattern we see throughout Scripture.

In the same way, another generic title, such as *nagid* in Daniel 9:25–26, could be used to describe two different people as well, and this is the interpretation that is supported by the entire context of the passage. There is a good Anointed Prince (*Mashiach Nagid*) who is contrasted with an evil Prince (*Nagid*). The Prince to Come will do his best to bring destruction, but the Anointed Prince of the Lord will still reign in the end.

THE MESSIAH IS CUT OFF IN 9:26A

The view that Jesus is the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26b also contradicts the fact that the Messiah is cut off and killed at the beginning of verse 26, before the Prince to Come is ever mentioned.

It doesn't make sense that the cut off Messiah of verse 26 would suddenly reappear and begin carrying out the tasks that are mentioned in the rest of the prophecy (v. 27). There is a simple chronology of events in Daniel 9:24–27 that becomes unnecessarily jumbled and complicated if we misinterpret the identity of the evil Prince.

AN OUTLINE OF 70-WEEK EVENTS

Verse 24 is an overview of God's eschatological program for Israel that will lead to the Messianic Jubilee and the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. Verse 25 covers the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple beginning in the time of Cyrus, and also the appearance of the Messianic Prince in the first century. Verse 26 is the unexpected pivot point that describes the death of the Messiah and the future destruction of Jerusalem by the Antichrist (the Prince to Come). Finally, verse 27 is a more detailed explanation of some of the key actions that will be carried out by the evil Prince in the future, including an attack against Jerusalem and the Temple, which will eventually lead to the end of the 70 weeks and the beginning of the Age of Jubilee.

The idea that Jesus is the Prince to Come muddies the waters and hinders our ability to discern this basic, albeit important, chronology of events in the 70-weeks prophecy. Daniel 9:24–27 exhibits a simple

ABBA structure. Verse 24 is eschatological (A). Verse 25 is historical/messianic (B). Verse 26a is historical/messianic (B). Verse 26b is eschatological (A). Verse 27 is eschatological (A). All of the history in Daniel 9:24–27, outlined in verses 9:25–26b, is bookended on both sides with eschatology (v. 24; 26b–27).

And again, we will explore in the next chapter why the destruction of Jerusalem mentioned in 9:26b should be understood as the end-times destruction of Jerusalem that will be carried out by the Antichrist (Prince to Come) in the future, not the destruction of Jerusalem that was carried out by the Romans in 70 AD.

WHAT MUST ALSO BE TRUE?

Any time I am considering a doctrinal proposition, I often ask myself the following question, “For this proposition to be true, what other unstated propositions or assumptions must also be true?”

The reason it is important to consider this deeper question, rather than simply looking at a doctrinal proposition on the surface, is because most doctrinal propositions are also hitched to a number of other initially invisible assumptions, premises, and presuppositions. In many cases, something which may seem true at first becomes harder and harder to accept the more we also understand the other propositions that must be true in order for the original stated proposition to be true as well.

For example, when we look at the argument that Jesus is the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26, this position does have some merit. It is worth considering Jesus as a possible candidate here, primarily on the grounds that the Prince to Come is depicted as a *nagid*, the very same title that is also applied to the Messiah in Daniel 9:25.

However, when we consider what else must be true for Jesus to be the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26, this interpretation begins to crumble. For Jesus to be the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26 we would also have to accept that (1) the Jews destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD, (2) that Jesus made a seven-year covenant sometime during his ministry, and (3) that Daniel 9:24–27, even though it uses Jubilee

symbolism meant to inspire hope, is not an end-times prophecy at all, but rather, is a prophecy that reached its fulfillment in 70 AD when Jerusalem was destroyed.

Each of these propositions violate everything we know about first-century history, the life and ministry of Jesus, and the eschatological significance of the Jubilee within Second Temple Period Judaism. Whether these propositions are stated, defended, or ignored by those who argue that Jesus is the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26, these propositions are part of their argument, and it is precisely these propositions that both weaken and disprove their argument.

There is no way the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26 could be the Messiah.

THE PRINCE TO COME IS THE LITTLE HORN OF DANIEL 8

If the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26–27 is not Vespasian, Titus, or Jesus, then who could he be? The simple answer is that the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26–27 is the same eschatological enemy of Israel who was first introduced in the two preceding visions, in Daniel 7:8–11 and 8:9–27.

In Daniel 8:9–27, this end-times enemy of the Jewish nation is called the Little Horn (cf. Dan. 7:8–11). Not surprisingly, in this earlier context, the Little Horn does many of the same things the Prince to Come does in Daniel 9.

There are two main blocks of text in Daniel 8 that describe the circumstances of the Little Horn's rise, as well as his exploits and character. These primary texts are summarized and condensed below:

And out of one of them came a rather small horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful Land. It grew up to the host of heaven, and some of the host, that is, some of the stars it threw down to the earth, and it trampled them. It even exalted itself to be equal with the Commander of the army; and **it removed the regular sacrifice from Him, and the place of**

His sanctuary was thrown down. And because of an offense the army will be given to the horn along with the regular sacrifice; and it will hurl truth to the ground and do as it pleases and be successful (Dan. 8:9–12).

And in the latter period of their dominion, when the wrongdoers have run *their course*, **a king will arise, insolent and skilled in intrigue.** And his power will be mighty, but not by his *own* power, and **he will destroy to an extraordinary degree** and be successful and do *as he pleases*; he will destroy mighty men and the holy people. And through his shrewdness he will make deceit a success by his influence; and he will make himself great in his own mind and he will destroy many while *they are* at ease. **He will even oppose the Prince of princes, but he will be broken without human agency** (Dan. 8:23–25).

There are many similarities between the Little Horn in Daniel 8 and the Prince to Come in Daniel 9. These two visions build upon one another, overlap to a certain extent in content, but also each add unique details of their own.

Daniel 8 and Daniel 9 both speak about the Little Horn/Prince to Come ending sacrifices and destroying the Temple. The same Hebrew word for destroy/destruction (*shachat*) is used in both passages (8:24; 9:26). This lends credibility to the idea that the destruction carried out by the Little Horn is the same thing as the destruction carried out by the Prince to Come in the subsequent vision.

However, Daniel 8 gives more details relating to the character and specific actions of the Little Horn, which Daniel 9 mostly leaves out. In Daniel 8:23–25 the Little Horn is described as “insolent and skilled in intrigue,” mighty in power, one who will “destroy to an extraordinary degree,” and one who will “destroy mighty men and the holy people.” In addition, these verses state that the Little Horn will be a deceiver, will “magnify himself in his heart,” “destroy many while they are at ease,” and “even oppose the Prince of princes [the Messiah].”

Similarly, whereas Daniel 9 mentions the seven-year covenant that will be made by the Prince to Come, this detail is left out of Daniel 8. Yet, if we understand that the covenant of Daniel 9:27 will be a deceptive covenant (a point we will cover more in chapter 16), it becomes clear that this covenant in the 70-weeks prophecy is connected to the line in Daniel 8:23–25 that tells us the Antichrist will “make deceit a success by his influence.” In other words, one of the ways the Antichrist will deceive Israel and be successful (the subject of Dan. 8), is through the covenant of Daniel 9:27.

The synergistic interplay between these two visions is a good example of biblical intertextuality, and how Scripture uses progressive revelation to develop theological truth. Old Testament scholar Mark Hassler has recognized the intertextual relationship between Daniel 8 and 9. He explains in more detail why we should accept that the Little Horn in Daniel 8 is the same person as the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:

During the final period of seven, the coming prince emerges onto the scene. The prince represents the same ruler as the little horn of chapter 8, as confirmed by three specific points of correspondence. Namely, this individual lives in the end time (8:17; 9:26–27), he stops sacrifices (8:11–13; 9:27), and he pertains to “the transgression/abomination that desolates” (8:13; 9:27). **The vision of the coming prince develops the vision of the little horn by revealing the start time for the abolition of the sacrifices and the transgression/abomination that desolates.** These atrocities begin “in the middle of the week/period of seven.” [Furthermore...] the eradication of the sacrifices in chapter 8 [explains why this same event] “dominates the remaining visions [in Daniel 9–12].”⁵

5 Mark A. Hassler, “The Identity of the Little Horn in Daniel 8: Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Rome, or the Antichrist?” *MSJ* 27/1 (Spring 2016): 42. Final quoted portion is from: Philip R. Davies, “Eschatology in the Book of Daniel,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 17 (1980): 36.

THE LITERARY CONNECTION BETWEEN DANIEL 7–12

Another clue that establishes the connection between Daniel 8 and 9 can be found in the concluding statements in both Daniel 7 and 8. Both Daniel 7 and 8 end with Daniel expressing his confusion over what he had seen:

At this point the revelation ended. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts were greatly alarming me and my face grew pale, but I kept the matter to myself (Dan. 7:28).

Then I, Daniel, was exhausted and sick for days. Then I got up again and carried on the king's business; but I was astounded at the vision and there was none to explain it (Dan. 8:27).

These statements at the end of Daniel 7 and 8 connect each of the subsequent visions in the rest of the book. They reveal that one of the purposes of each successive vision was to clarify for Daniel (and for us) what he had previously seen.

At the end of Daniel 7, Daniel was confused. So God added more detail in Daniel 8. At the end of Daniel 8, Daniel was still confused. So God added more detail in Daniel 9, and also in Daniel 10–12. This textual relationship between all of the visions in the book of Daniel reinforces the view that the Little Horn and the Prince to Come in Daniel 8–9 are the same person. It also explains why the Prince to Come seemingly appears out of the blue in Daniel 9:26. In reality, he doesn't. He had already been introduced in the two preceding visions.

Those who argue that the Prince to Come was either Vespasian, Titus, or Jesus, are overlooking the fundamental connection between all of the visions in the book of Daniel. The book of Daniel uses intertextuality to explain later prophecies in light of previous ones, and vice versa. The only person connected to the cessation of sacrifices, and the destruction of the city and the sanctuary in Daniel, is the Antichrist (i.e. the Little Horn/Insolent King/Prince to Come).

Biblical scholar John Bergsma summarizes the relationship between these visions:

The angelic message of “seventy weeks (Dan 9:24–27) is obviously related to the other prophetic visions of the book (chs. 2, 7, 8, 10–12). All the visions are concerned with the ushering in of the eschatological kingdom after a long time period. With the exception of ch. 2, they all describe the coming of an oppressive ruler (7:8, 11, 20–22, 24–26; 8:9–12, 23–25; 9:26–27; 10:21–45) just before the arrival of the final kingdom. It is reasonable to assume that these visions overlap in their descriptions of events and are meant to be mutually illuminating. [...]

Chapter 9 is linked with the preceding and succeeding chapters by, among other things, the key word “to understand.” A direct link with ch. 8 can be seen in the way ch. 8 ends (“there was no one who understood”) and ch. 9 begins (“I understood”). Thus, the negative note on which ch. 8 ended is changed to a positive: the seer now has understanding. **The implication is that the revelation which follows will shed light on the vision of ch. 8.** The theme of “understanding” is continued in ch. 10 (vv. 1, 12, 14), thus linking the narrative of ch. 9 to the visions that follow, as well.⁶

It isn't important that the Little Horn and the Prince to Come aren't given the exact same name in both prophecies, because Daniel often described the same person using different terminology. The Messiah is called “one like a son of man” in Daniel 7:13, the Anointed Prince in Daniel 9:25, and the “Prince of princes” in Daniel 8:25. These are all different names for one Messianic figure.

In the same way, the final end-times enemy of Israel is described in various ways in Daniel. In Daniel 7–8 he is called the Little Horn

6 John Stetzer Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 214.

(Dan. 7:8–27; 8:9), and a king (Dan. 8:23; cf. Dan. 11:40 where he is called “the King of the North”), but in Daniel 9:26 he is also called the “Prince to Come.” Because the actions of this individual are the same throughout Daniel, it is reasonable to conclude that the same person is in view in each of these prophecies.

Of course, the Hebrew Bible never calls the Little Horn/Prince to Come by the name “Antichrist.” But this is still an acceptable umbrella term to describe his identity. He is the one who will appear at “the time of the end” (Dan. 8:17; 9:26) to oppose the God of Israel and His people to an unprecedented degree.

COULD THE LITTLE HORN BE ANTIOCHUS EPIPHANES?

There are still many prophecy teachers who reject the idea that the Little Horn figure in Daniel 8 is the end-times Antichrist. It is common to hear the argument that the Little Horn in Daniel 8 (and by extension the Prince to Come in Daniel 9:26) is Antiochus IV Epiphanes, not the Antichrist (cf. Antiochene view).

One of the most significant strikes against the view that the Little Horn is Antiochus, is related to the incongruity between his conquests and those of the Little Horn in Daniel 8. For example, the Little Horn of Daniel 8 is presented as one who expands his empire “toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful Land (i.e. Israel),” so much so that his triumphs are described as “exceedingly great” (Dan. 8:9).

Though Antiochus IV Epiphanes did wage war in Egypt (i.e. in the south), he was eventually humiliated there by the Romans and forced to withdraw, without holding on to any territory in Egypt whatsoever.

Historian Hans Volkmann writes:

In Eleusis, a suburb of Alexandria, the Roman ambassador, Gaius Popillius Laenas, presented Antiochus with the ultimatum that he evacuate Egypt and Cyprus immediately. Antiochus, taken by surprise, asked for time to consider. Popillius, however, drew a circle in the earth around the king with his walking stick and demanded an

unequivocal answer before Antiochus left the circle. Dismayed by this public humiliation, the king quickly agreed to comply. Roman intervention had reestablished the status quo.⁷

This picture of Antiochus' humiliating defeat in Egypt does not harmonize with the picture of the Little Horn's awe-inspiring victories in the "south" (Dan. 8:9).

Antiochus' exploits in the east, though substantial to a degree, were not all that impressive either, especially when compared to what his own father achieved. Antiochus IV's father, Antiochus III the Great, reached all the way to India, whereas Antiochus IV only got as far as Persia before retreating and then dying.

In terms of Antiochus IV's conquests in Israel, he already controlled Israel when he came to power, but he never conquered Israel or expanded his kingdom "toward the Beautiful Land" as Daniel 8:9 says the Little Horn will do. As a matter of fact, Antiochus IV was defeated by the Maccabees and effectively lost control of Israel towards the end of his life (c. 160s-134 BC).⁸

These details related to the military conquests of the Little Horn pose significant challenges for those who contend that this figure could be Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The Little Horn of Daniel 8 is presented as a great and unrivaled conqueror of Israel, the south (North Africa), and the east (Babylon, Persia, and perhaps beyond). By comparison, Antiochus IV, though certainly a malicious enemy of the Jewish nation, was a bit of a light weight.

In his excellent article, "The Identity of the Little Horn in Daniel 8: Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Rome, or the Antichrist?", Old Testament scholar Mark Hassler elaborates on why the military history in Daniel 8 does not fit with the reign of Antiochus IV:

7 Hans Volkmann, "Antiochus IV Epiphanes: Seleucid King," *Brittanica*, online, 25 January 2021.

8 Harry Oates, "The Maccabean Revolt," *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, online, 29 October 2015.

The little horn defeats his enemies in the south, east, and beautiful land (Dan 8:9). To the south Antiochus launched an Egyptian campaign (170–168 BC). Initially he prevailed in Lower Egypt, but he evacuated the country when the Roman forces of Gaius Popillus Laenas thwarted his attack upon Alexandria. **His incomplete triumphs hardly seem “exceedingly great”** (v. 9). Antiochus’ two-year eastern campaign largely succeeded in Armenia, Babylonia, Media, and Persia. But he died during the campaign and retreated shamefully from the botched invasions of Elymais and Persepolis [in Persia]. **His eastern expansion pales in comparison to that of his predecessor, Antiochus III the Great, who reached India (1 Macc. 8:6–8).** The beautiful land of [Israel] already belonged to Antiochus IV when he assumed the throne. Antiochus III had already secured it from the Ptolemies (Josephus Ant. 12.3.3–4). **Antiochus did not conquer the beautiful land; he lost control of it.**⁹

Old Testament scholar William Shea also explains that the military conquests of Antiochus IV Epiphanes do not harmonize with those of the Little Horn in Daniel 8:

Antiochus IV never captured Alexandria, the capital of Egypt, but he enjoyed military successes in Lower Egypt during his campaigns from 169 to 167 BC. However, he had to forsake these briefly held, ill-gotten gains, due to diplomatic pressure from the Romans. Only the first part of his campaign toward the east was successful. He died before he had carried out his plans for that region to consolidate his control over it. Although he bore down harder on the Jews than had his predecessors, he was not the one who brought Judea into the Seleucid Empire, since it was already part of that domain when he came to the throne. The three defeats his forces suffered there shortly

9 Mark A. Hassler, “The Identity of the Little Horn in Daniel 8: Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Rome, or the Antichrist?” *MSJ* 27/1 (Spring 2016): 42. Final quoted portion is from: Philip R. Davies, “Eschatology in the Book of Daniel,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 17 (1980): 36.

before he died signaled developments that ultimately led to Judea's independence. **The net results of what Antiochus accomplished in these three geographical spheres was rather negligible and even negative in some cases. Thus he does not fit very well the specification of this prophecy which states that the little horn was to grow "exceedingly great towards the south, towards the east, and towards the glorious land."**¹⁰

This history speaks for itself. It demonstrates that even though the actions of Antiochus IV Epiphanes certainly foreshadowed those of the Little Horn to some degree, the Little Horn is still a different person, and one who will be far more successful in his conquests, at least for a time, than Antiochus IV ever was. As Daniel 8:17–19 says, the Little Horn is a king who will emerge at "the time of the end," and he is no doubt the same person as the Prince to Come, who is also connected to "the end" of this age in Daniel 9:26.

All the other options regarding the identity of the Prince to Come, including the arguments that he could be Jesus, Vespasian, Titus, or Antiochus IV Epiphanes, fall short in a number of ways. The eschatological context of Daniel 9, as well as the intertextual relationship between Daniel 8 and 9, even to the point that the Little Horn and the Prince to Come carry out the exact same actions in both prophecies, prove that the Prince to Come is the Antichrist.

THE JUBILEE AS THE DAY OF GOD'S VENGEANCE

One final point that is widely overlooked when the identity of the Prince to Come is discussed, is that it makes perfect sense that the Antichrist would appear within an eschatological Jubilee prophecy, because the Jubilee was associated with God's "vengeance" against the powers of evil (Isa. 61:2). It was understood in biblical times that the forces of

10 William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 46.

evil, both human and supernatural, oppress God's people and stop us from experiencing the Jubilee freedom God intends. This is why the Jewish sectarians at Qumran for example, who wrote the *Melchizedek* document, connected the eschatological Jubilee to the defeat of Belial:

The interpretation of it concerns Belial and the spirits of his lot who [turned] away from God's commandments to commit evil. **And Melchizedek [the Jubilee priest] will carry out the vengeance of God's judgments and on that day he will free them from the hand of Belial and from the hand of all the spirits of his lot (*Melchizedek*, 9–10, 12–13).**¹¹

Once we comprehend how the Jubilee inspired hope in the day when God will judge the forces of evil and oppression, we can also more easily understand why the end of the 70-weeks prophecy includes so much information about the Antichrist. The Prince to Come is the one who will oppose God's people in the last days, but ultimately be judged right before the Age of Jubilee begins. The destruction of the Prince to Come (the topic of 9:27b) signals the defeat of evil that is the necessary prerequisite to a new age of Jubilee freedom (the topic of 9:24).

11 Translation by Bergsma, in *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 279–280. Note: Some of the quote above is placed in brackets in Bergsma's translation, because the original manuscript is incomplete. I have removed the brackets to facilitate a better reader experience.

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DOES DANIEL 9:26 TEACH A ROMAN ANTICHRIST?

AMONG FUTURIST COMMENTATORS who accept that the Prince to Come is the Antichrist, there is also a common teaching that Daniel 9:26 reveals the ethnicity of the Antichrist, or his nation of origin. Most who argue that Daniel 9:26 speaks to the ethnicity of the Antichrist believe this verse indicates that the Antichrist will be of Roman descent, or at the very least, that he will come from a revived Roman empire.

The reason many prophecy teachers use Daniel 9:26 to support a Roman Antichrist, is because we read at the end of this verse:

And the **people** of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war, desolations are determined (NASB).

Based on these words, it is often argued that “the people” (*am*) of the Antichrist (the Prince to Come) were the ones who destroyed

Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD. Therefore, because it was the Romans who carried out these actions, this proves the Antichrist will be of Roman origin.

In this chapter we will look at why Daniel 9:26 doesn't prove that the Antichrist will come from the former Roman empire, and why we should not use this passage as a proof-text for the Antichrist's nationality and/or ethnicity. At the end of this chapter, I will also offer some thoughts on what the Bible does reveal about the Antichrist's ethnicity and nation of origin.

THE ROMAN ANTICHRIST THEORY & DANIEL 9:26

The idea that Daniel 9:26 teaches a coming Roman Antichrist from a revived Roman Empire was first articulated by evangelicals in the 1970s. Below are some examples that demonstrate the centrality of Daniel 9:26 in evangelical doctrinal statements regarding the Antichrist's connection to Rome:

- In the 1970 bestseller, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Hal Lindsey popularized the idea that Daniel 9:26 refers to a future Roman Antichrist. Lindsey wrote, "Daniel's prediction also indicates that a prince would rise up from among the people who destroyed the second Temple (who were the Romans in A.D. 70) [...]. **This "prince" [Antichrist] must be from a revived form of the ancient Roman Empire.**"¹ Lindsey's book sold nearly 30 million copies by 1990. It is difficult to overstate the impact his writings have had on evangelical eschatology, including the belief in a future Roman Antichrist.
- Following Hal Lindsey, in the famous *Left Behind* fictional book series, Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins developed their narrative with an Antichrist named Nicolae Carpathia from Romania, who traced his bloodline back to Ancient Rome. No doubt Daniel

1 Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 56.

9:26 was at the heart of this decision to make the Antichrist an ethnic Roman. By 2016 LaHaye and Jenkins had sold nearly 80 million copies of their books, which still influence popular evangelical eschatology today.

- Messianic Jewish scholar Arnold Fruchtenbaum, in his book, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, also popularized a Roman Antichrist based on Daniel 9:26. He wrote: “Verse 26 also states that *the prince that shall come* is of the same nationality as the *people* who will destroy the city and the Sanctuary....history has shown that this was accomplished by the Romans in A.D. 70. **The obvious conclusion, then, is that the Antichrist is a Gentile of Roman origin.**”²
- In a Tweet sent out on January 22, 2018, Israeli prophecy teacher and author Amir Tsarfati wrote: “**Daniel 9:26–27 speaks of the Roman Empire** coming to destroy the temple and Jerusalem after the death of the messiah. **The same empire is to be there for the 70th week - the great tribulations.** [...]”
- In the popular Bible commentary on Daniel, *The New American Commentary*, Old Testament scholar Stephen Miller also affirmed the evangelical consensus of a Roman Antichrist. Miller wrote: “**The ‘people’ who would destroy Jerusalem and the temple were the Romans**, but v. 27 makes clear that this “ruler” will be the future persecutor of Israel during the seventieth seven. [...] If the text is to be taken literally at this point, **this future ruler will come out of the peoples and the nations that made up the ancient Roman Empire. [The book of Daniel confirms] that the Antichrist’s origin will be from the fourth empire, Rome.**”³

2 Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (San Antonio: Ariel Publishers, 2018), 211.

3 Stephen R. Miller, *The New American Commentary: Daniel, Vol. 18* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1994), 268.

As we can see, Daniel 9:26 has been the anchor of the evangelical Roman Antichrist position for many decades, and still is today. The most popular theory among futurist prophecy teachers within many segments of the Body of Messiah, is that Daniel 9:26 requires a revived Roman Empire out of which the Antichrist will emerge.

For years, this theory has fueled speculation about the European Union, as it is supposedly the EU that is paving the way for the Antichrist and the next Roman Empire. The Roman Antichrist Theory based on Daniel 9:26 has also led to the widespread belief among some Protestants that the Roman Catholic Church will be the primary religious institution utilized by the Antichrist and the False Prophet of Revelation 13.

There are nuances of opinion within the Roman Antichrist camp. Some who hold to this view believe the Antichrist will come from the former Roman empire (geographically), whereas others believe the Antichrist will both come from the former Roman empire (geographically) and be an ethnic Roman (in terms of his bloodline). However, in a general sense, most advocates of this view end up in the same place, with a European-centric Antichrist from the heart of the former Roman empire.

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL READING OF DANIEL 9:26B

Though it is widely assumed that the destruction of “the city and the sanctuary” at the end of Daniel 9:26 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, an assumption that has led many to conclude that the “people” who destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD will be the same people from whom the Antichrist will emerge, there is another possibility here that should not be overlooked. It is more likely that Daniel 9:26 doesn’t refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD at all, but instead, refers to the destruction of “the city and the sanctuary” during the reign of the Antichrist (the Prince to Come), which will take place during the 70th week of the end times. If this is the case, and I believe it is, then Daniel 9:26 does not tell us anything about the ethnicity or nationality of the Antichrist one way or the other. It only tells us that the people who will be with the Prince to Come in the future, whoever they may be, will

destroy Jerusalem and the Temple. According to this reading, Daniel 9:26 is nothing more than a general statement about the Antichrist and his armies invading, conquering, and destroying Jerusalem in the future.

As a brief aside, I need to thank Joel Richardson for helping me see that the destruction mentioned in verse 26 is eschatological, not historical. Joel and I corresponded on this point through email back in January 2021, and I would not have come to understand the following points were it not for his invaluable insights.

Given the gravitational power of interpretive traditions, this idea that the end of Daniel 9:26 is entirely eschatological, and not concerned with the events of 70 AD, will not be accepted by most. However, there are a number of clues in the book of Daniel that indicate that this portion of verse 26 is only concerned with the distant future, and that the events of 70 AD are not the topic of discussion.

CAN A PEOPLE BE SEPARATED FROM THEIR LEADER BY 2,000+ YEARS?

The Prince to Come is an end-times figure. He is the Antichrist, the Little Horn from Daniel 7–8. The identity of the Prince to Come should lead us to ask, “why would it make sense to separate ‘the people’ of verse 26 from the actual Prince they will serve by a period of at least 2,000 years?” If the Prince to Come is one who will appear during the 70th week (and he is), then it makes the most sense to conclude that the “people” referenced in Daniel 9:26 will be with him during the 70th week. The idea that the evil Prince will come during the 70th week, but his people came thousands of years before, is incoherent, and lacks a biblical basis. This idea is never stated in the text. It is an assumption that is often read into Scripture, usually by those looking for a proof-text to support the Roman Antichrist Theory.

There are many passages in Scripture that use the word “people” (*am*) to denote a king-subject relationship, or “people” serving under a military commander, such as we see in Daniel 9:26. A good example is Exodus 1:9: Then Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, “said to his people

(*am*), ‘the Israelites have become far too numerous for us.’” Similarly, in Joshua 10:7 we read, “So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people (*am*) of war with him, and all the valiant warriors.”

We would never separate the “people” from their military commander when interpreting these other passages (Josh. 10:7), so we should not separate the people from their Prince in Daniel 9:26. A more natural reading is that the “people of the Prince to Come” are the people who will be under his command when he invades Jerusalem during the end times (a topic we will cover more in chapters 16-17).

If the “people” of the end-times Prince in Daniel 9:26 are meant to be separated from him by thousands of years, then we would need some other piece of evidence from somewhere in Scripture that there is a biblical pattern that allows this to be the case. No such evidence exists. Everywhere a “people” are linked to their leader in Scripture, both entities (i.e. the people and their leader) are contemporaneous. They live at the same time. For this reason, it is logical to conclude that both the people and the Prince in Daniel 9:26 will not appear until the end times. This is just a basic way to say that the Antichrist will lead an army.

DANIEL 9:26 USES END-TIMES LANGUAGE

Second, Daniel 9:26 contains eschatological language. At the end of verse 26 we read, “and *his* end shall come with a flood, *even to the end* there will be war, *desolations* are determined.” This eschatological language highlights that the destruction mentioned in verse 26 is that which will take place during the end times, not that which already took place in 70 AD. The phrase, “even to the end (*gets*)” demonstrates that the end of the age is in view here, as this is a word (end; *gets*) that is used elsewhere in Daniel to refer to the end times (cf. Dan. 8:17–19; 12:4, 9, 13).

Moreover, the word “desolations” (*shamem*) at the end of verse 26 is the same word used in Daniel 9:27, where we are told that the Prince to Come will be one who “makes desolate (*shamem*).” It is not likely that this eschatological language in Daniel 9:26, which mirrors the eschatological language in other portions of Daniel, and in Daniel 9:27,

is a coincidence. This language shows us that Daniel 9:26 is about the end-times destruction of the city and the sanctuary that will be carried out by the Antichrist, which is also mentioned both earlier and later in the book of Daniel.

Also, most English Bibles translate verse 26 as though it says, “and *its* end shall come with a flood,” referring to the city and the sanctuary. This interpretation is technically possible, but not airtight, because in the Hebrew text the Prince to Come is the closest antecedent and could therefore receive the possessive term (its/his).

To briefly elaborate, in the NASB for example, the word order makes it appear as though “the city and the sanctuary” will come to an end with a flood. The NASB states, “the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood.”

The word order in the Hebrew text is as follows: “And the city and the sanctuary will be destroyed [by] a people [of] the Prince to Come, and his end [will come] with a flood...” Notice that in the Hebrew text the Prince to Come is mentioned right before the term “end.” The possessive suffix added on to the word “end” (which can be translated as “its” or “his”) is also third person masculine singular, so it does make sense to conclude that it is being applied to the Prince of verse 26, not to “the city and the sanctuary.” If the “end” were connected to the city and the sanctuary here the possessive suffix would likely be plural, since “the city and the sanctuary” represent two entities, not one.

The point communicated at the end of verse 26 could simply be that during the end times the people under the command of the Prince to Come will destroy Jerusalem and the Temple, and will cause wars and desolations to the end of this age. Yet, even the destroying Prince will meet his end and be destroyed. *His* end will come like a flood, that is to say, suddenly and without mercy.

Either way, whether we apply the possessive term his/its to Jerusalem and the Temple, or to the Prince, this is a peripheral issue in the grand scheme of things. Regardless of where we land on this point, the

eschatological reading of verse 26b has merit. Though to be sure, if Daniel 9:26b does reference the destruction of the Prince himself, this would make the eschatological interpretation even stronger.

In summary, the way in which Daniel 9:26b uses end-times language, and also quite likely refers to the final destruction of the Antichrist, validates the argument that from this point on the entire prophecy is eschatological. The notion that Daniel 9:26b is about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD is an interpretive tradition that became popular only after the events of 70 AD, primarily through the writings of Josephus, other rabbinic commentators, and certain early church fathers. The text itself favors the eschatological reading, not the historical reading.

IT'S THE PROPHECY OF THE 70 WEEKS

Third, reading the end of verse 26 as a reference to end-time, rather than past-historical, events, is preferable because it keeps most of the contents of the prophecy within the 70 weeks. It avoids the awkward insertion of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD into the prophecy, which occurred many decades after the 69th week.

As we discussed in earlier chapters, there is a gap in the 70-weeks prophecy, and the cutting off of the Messiah did technically occur in this gap, “after” the 69th week but before the 70th. However, this is the rare exception in the text, and there is no real reason to place any of the other events of the prophecy outside the 70 weeks, especially because the destruction events of verse 26 directly mirror the destruction events of the 70th week in verse 27. In other words, 9:26b introduces what will take place during the 70th week, during the reign of the Antichrist, and 9:27 picks up the same story and clarifies the details (and the fact that this destruction will occur within the 70th week).

The events of 70 AD were significant in Israel’s history, and certainly foreshadowed what will take place during the reign of the Antichrist. However, just because Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD it does not automatically follow that Daniel 9:26 must be referring to this destruction,

as nearly all Jewish and Christian commentators have assumed. At the end of Daniel 9:26 there is a shift in the text to focus on the end-times Prince to Come. The events referred to from this point on (vv. 26b–27) are eschatological, which makes sense, because Daniel 9:24–27 is a Messianic end-times prophecy. There is nothing in the prophecy that is not in some way connected to the future Jubilee, so even from that vantage point, the historical events of 70 AD don't really fit.

A FUTURIST READING OF DANIEL 9:26B

Understanding that the events mentioned after the cutting off of the Messiah in Daniel 9:26 are eschatological, allows us to more easily appreciate that Daniel 9:26 does not reveal anything about the ethnicity or nationality of the Antichrist. This text doesn't say "the people" who destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD will be the same "people" who will produce the Antichrist. It only makes a general statement about the Antichrist and his armies destroying Jerusalem.

Daniel 9:26 should not be used as a proof-text to support a Roman Antichrist. Nor should this text be used to validate any other theory regarding the Antichrist's ethnicity or nationality. Daniel 9:26 is there to help the Lord's people understand the significant *events* that will take place during the Antichrist's career, particularly in Jerusalem, which are clarified in 9:26b–27.

As sobering as this prophetic reality is, the Antichrist and his people will at some point in the future invade, conquer, and destroy Jerusalem and the Temple. "The people of the Prince to Come will destroy (*shachat*) the city and the sanctuary." The Antichrist "will remove the regular sacrifice from YHWH and the place of His sanctuary will be thrown down" (Dan. 8:11; paraphrase). The Antichrist will "destroy (*shachat*) to an extraordinary degree" (Dan. 8:24).

These intertextual comparisons show that the destruction Daniel 9:26 says will be carried out by the Prince to Come and his people directly parallels the destruction from the previous Antichrist (Little Horn) prophecy in Daniel 8. Notice in particular the repetition of the

Hebrew verb *shachat* (destroy) in both texts. The events leading to this destruction will come into clearer focus in Daniel 9:27.

Below is a chart that summarizes how Daniel 9:26 uses the same eschatological language as Daniel 8 and 9:27, which proves that the destruction “of the city and the sanctuary” in this verse is a future end-time event.

End-Times Language in Daniel	End-Times Language in Daniel 9:26b
The Antichrist will “destroy (<i>shachat</i>) to an extraordinary degree...” (8:24)	“...the people of the Prince to Come will destroy (<i>shachat</i>)...”
“...the vision pertains to the time of the end (<i>qets</i>)” (8:17).	“...even to the end (<i>qets</i>) there will be war...”
The Antichrist is one who “...makes desolate (<i>shamem</i>)...” (9:27)	“...desolations (<i>shamem</i>) are determined...”

THE LINGUISTIC AND HISTORICAL PROBLEMS WITH THE ROMAN ANTICHRIST THEORY

After hearing this argument that the destruction in Daniel 9:26 is eschatological, not historical, some people will remain unconvinced, and will still appeal to Daniel 9:26 to support the Roman Antichrist Theory. They might respond that Daniel 9:26 must refer to the events of 70 AD, and because it was the Roman people who destroyed Jerusalem at this time, this verse does in fact reveal that the Antichrist will be of Roman descent, or at the very least, that he will come from a revived Roman Empire.

Even if we did want to hypothetically accept for the sake of argument that Daniel 9:26b refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, and not the end-times destruction of the city by the Antichrist, there would still be two major problems with the Roman Antichrist position

that would undermine its validity. These two problems are related to the meaning of the Hebrew word “people” (*am*), and the history of how events unfolded in Jerusalem in 70 AD.

THE MEANING OF THE WORD PEOPLE (*AM*)

At the heart of the Roman Antichrist Theory is the presupposition that the word “people” (*am*) in Daniel 9:26 carries a specific ethnic and/or national connotation. Those who accept this theory believe the Antichrist will be of Roman descent, or at the very least, that he will come from the former Roman empire, because they believe “people” (*am*) must connote either bloodline or kingdom, or perhaps even both.

The reason we shouldn’t be so quick to read ethnic and/or national connotations into the word “people” in Daniel 9:26 however, is because in many cases, this word was used in a more general sense in the Hebrew Bible. Just like in English, “people” (*am*) in biblical Hebrew could refer to many different types of people who were inter-related in a number of different ways. This word doesn’t have to refer to a bloodline, kingdom, empire, or nation.

It is true that the word (*am*) is sometimes used as a synonym for words like “nation” (*goy*) or “kingdom” (*mamlakah*) in the Bible. (Gen. 27:29; Deut. 4:27). It is also true that in many other places *am* refers to ethnicity or a person’s descendants, that is to say, to bloodline. This is why the term *am* often shows up with the words “sons” or “tribe” to indicate physical descent (Gen. 49:16; Ex. 12:31; Num. 20:1; 21:6; Deut. 9:2; 29:13; Josh. 17:14).

At the same time, it is equally true that in many other cases “people” (*am*) was used even more generally to refer to any collection of people, including those under the command of a military leader or king (Gen 26:11; Ex 1:9; Josh. 10:7), or those who lived in a land (Gen. 23:7; 2 Chr. 36:1). In these cases, *am* has no national or ethnic connotations whatsoever. It denotes a group of “people,” like we would say today, “those people over there...”

Importantly, in most cases where the term “people” conveys

something technical, such as affiliation with a kingdom, empire, or bloodline, this will be made clear by the context, which is what we should expect, since *am* (people) has so many different meanings. For example, in Exodus 12:31 God calls the Jewish nation his people, “the sons of Israel,” indicating physical descent/ethnicity.

In Daniel 9:26 there are no specific contextual clues indicating that *am* (people) denotes nationality, empire, or ethnicity. Therefore, the argument that *am* must refer to the kingdom, empire, and/or ethnicity of the “people” mentioned in Daniel 9:26b is weak. This is an example of confirmation bias and overinterpretation. People read their preferred definition of *am* (whether nationality, ethnicity, or some combination of both) into the text, as though it indicates the Roman empire, or Roman bloodline, when in reality, “people” (*am*) is used in a more basic sense in Daniel 9:26.

In Daniel 9:26, *am* (people) refers only to the people who will be united under the military banner of the Antichrist. It has no technical meaning here related to the Antichrist’s kingdom, nation, empire, or ethnicity. Only the Antichrist’s future invasion of Jerusalem, which will be carried out by his people, whoever they might be, and wherever they might come from, is in view here.

THE HISTORICAL REALITY IN 70 AD

An additional problem with the Roman Antichrist Theory, is that it is often based on an oversimplified view of first-century history. As the theory usually goes, it was an army full of Roman Italians who destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD, and because these were the “people” out of which the Antichrist will arise, this proves the Antichrist will be a European from the former Roman Empire, with ethnic pedigree going all the way back to Ancient Rome.

In reality, even though it was the Roman Empire that destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD, most of the people in the Roman legions who carried out this destruction were from the Middle East and North Africa. They were not ethnic Romans, Italians, or Europeans.

As a result, if we were going to use Daniel 9:26 as a proof-text for the ethnicity and nationality of the Antichrist, an equally strong case could be made that this verse points us to a Middle Eastern Antichrist, not a Roman or European Antichrist. Though again, I do not believe Daniel 9:26b says one thing or the other about the Antichrist's kingdom, nationality, or ethnicity. All I am saying is that even by their own logic, many people within the Roman Antichrist camp should be more open to a Middle Eastern/North African Antichrist, because it was the "people" from these regions who destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Because most people probably won't accept that the destruction mentioned in Daniel 9:26 is entirely eschatological, and not related to 70 AD, in the next few sections we will take a closer look at the events of 70 AD, and the makeup of the Roman legions that carried out the destruction of Jerusalem at this time. This history will further demonstrate that Daniel 9:26 does not necessarily prove a Roman Antichrist in such a straightforward fashion, as many evangelicals have assumed.

THE ROMAN LEGIONS AND THE EVENTS OF 70 AD

In his book, *Mideast Beast*, Joel Richardson highlights that by 70 AD the Roman military was made up of mostly "provincial" forces from the regions occupied by the empire. The lower number of ethnic Romans/Italians who did remain in the military in the late-first century typically served in Rome itself, or in the elite Praetorian Guard, which was an imperial police force dedicated to protecting the Roman leadership that did not participate directly in Rome's military battles.⁴

From this we can gather that even though the Roman empire did destroy Jerusalem in 70 AD, the majority of the "people" who carried out this destruction were not ethnically Roman or European. They were

4 Historian Lawrence Keppie writes, by 69–70 AD, "only the praetorian and urban cohorts continued to be recruited principally in Italy [...]." "From Hadrian's time onwards [...] Italians were to be found only in the city-based military units, the Praetorian and Urban cohorts," unless there was a unique need. Lawrence Keppie, *Legions and Veterans: Roman Army Papers 1971–2000* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2000), 44 & 60.

provincial soldiers from Turkey, Syria, Arabia, North Africa, and the Balkans (northwest of Turkey). Richardson writes, “the ‘provincialization’ of the army was true for all of the Roman legions of this time period, but it was most clearly and markedly the case for the Eastern legions that were used to attack Jerusalem.”⁵

What this provincialization of the Roman army means, is that even if the destruction mentioned in Daniel 9:26 is not eschatological, an airtight case cannot be made from this one verse that the Antichrist must be an ethnic European or Roman, because ethnic Romans were not the “people” who destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD. Now again, I do believe Daniel 9:26 is eschatological, and therefore, I also believe any argument about the Antichrist’s ethnicity from this verse is moot. However, since not everyone will accept this point, it is important to show that if we do want to hypothetically entertain the idea that Daniel 9:26 gives us the ethnicity or place of origin of the Antichrist, the historical realities would point us more towards a Middle Eastern—not European—Antichrist. Or, at the very least, the historical realities would make the situation very ambiguous, to the point that we wouldn’t want to base our entire doctrine of the Antichrist’s ethnicity/nationality on this one verse.

TACITUS AND TITUS ON THE ROMAN MILITARY

The work of ancient historians confirms that the siege against Jerusalem in 70 AD was carried out by the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa, not ethnic Europeans or Romans. The Roman historian Tacitus writes that Titus carried out the attack with six legions (four full legions and two partial legions), which included the 5th, 10th, and 15th from Judea, the 12th from Syria, some men from the 18th and 3rd from Alexandria, Egypt, as well as with a “strong contingent of Arabs, who

5 Joel Richardson, *Mideast Beast: The Scriptural Case for an Islamic Antichrist* (Washington D.C.: WND Books, 2012), 92.

hated the Jews with the usual hatred of neighbors.”⁶

In *Mideast Beast* Richardson states that only the 5th legion was stationed in Judea, and only the 18th was stationed in Egypt, whereas the 3rd, 10th, 12th and 15th were all stationed in Syria.⁷ It is likely that some of the legions Tacitus said Titus “found” in Judea (10th & 15th) and Egypt (3rd) were of Syrian origin. In any case, there can be no doubt that the legions that conquered Jerusalem in 70 AD were from the Middle East and North Africa, and were made up of people indigenous to these regions.

Josephus confirms the history in Tacitus and notes the involvement of Syrian and Arab troops in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. He writes that Titus “came by the land of Syria, where he gathered together the Roman forces, with a considerable number of auxiliaries from the kings in that neighborhood.”⁸ In another place Josephus adds:

Malchus also, the king of Arabia, sent a thousand horsemen, besides five thousand footmen, the greatest part of which were archers; so that the whole army, including the auxiliaries sent by the kings, as well as horsemen and footmen, when all were united together, amounted to sixty thousand.⁹

A Roman legion in the first century consisted of roughly 5,000 soldiers. Since four full legions, and two partial legions took part in the siege against Jerusalem, we can deduce that approximately 25,000 provincial Roman troops from the Middle East, North Africa, and the Balkans were involved in the destruction of the city in 70 AD. Another

6 Tacitus, *The History*, ed. Moses Hadas, trans. Alfred Church & William Brodribb (New York: Modern Library, 2003), Bk. 5.1.

7 Richardson, *Mideast Beast*, 93.

8 Josephus, *The Complete Works of Josephus, the War of the Jews or the History of the Destruction of Jerusalem*, 3.1.3.

9 Josephus, *The War of the Jews*, 4.2.

35,000 mercenary troops from the surrounding regions and Arabia, which would be the “auxiliaries from the kings in that neighborhood” mentioned by Josephus, also participated in the battle. Rome’s conquering force came in at a staggering 60,000 soldiers.

MODERN HISTORIANS ON THE ROMAN ARMY

In the last 25 years, it has become a point of agreement among historians that the soldiers who served under Rome in the eastern portion of the empire were local Middle Easterners; Turks, Syrians, Arabs, and North Africans. Historian Lawrence Keppie summarizes this consensus in his book, *Legions and Veterans*:

That Italians were increasingly replaced in the legions in this period by provincials is itself no longer a novelty for scholars [...] In the East, that is Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt, it seems clear that local recruitment was under way under Augustus so that by his death [14 AD] only a very small number of legionaries derived from Italy or indeed any of the western provinces.¹⁰

To support this claim, Keppie cites inscriptions and papyrus documents that list Roman soldiers who worked on various projects in the east. In one inscription containing the names of 36 men who helped build military installations in Egypt, Keppie notes, “almost all give origins in Asia Minor [Turkey] or in Egypt itself; out of 36 men, only three are from Italy and the West.” Keppie also references a papyrus document from Egypt with the names of fifteen soldiers, only two of whom were from Italy, while the other thirteen were from North Africa, Syria, and Turkey.¹¹

Scholars still debate the exact proportion of provincial soldiers to

10 Lawrence Keppie, *Legions and Veterans: Roman Army Papers 1971–2000* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 200), 57–58.

11 Keppie, *Legions and Veterans*, 58.

native Roman soldiers in the east. However, there is general agreement that by 70 AD the eastern legions were probably made up of at least 75-90% indigenous provincials, if not more.

In his book, *Soldiers, Cities, and Civilians in Roman Syria*, historian Nigel Pollard even tentatively concludes that recruitment for the eastern legions could have come almost 100% from the eastern provinces by the late-first century.¹² Historian Antonio Santosuosso confirms that most of the Roman soldiers stationed in the east came from Turkey, Syria, the Balkans, and North Africa.

Santosuosso writes:

Initially legionaries of direct Italian origin were common on both frontiers [east and west]. However, unlike the western frontier, which provided few indigenous legionnaires, **the presence of indigenous legionnaires in the east is apparent from the beginning of the Roman Empire. Asia Minor (Turkey) provided most of the recruits on the Euphrates frontier**, as well as troops from Pannonia [the Balkans] to **North Africa and Alexandria [Egypt]**.¹³

Keppie elaborates on how the nuances of Roman military recruitment should influence the way we understand history. He states:

That the legions in the East consisted largely of ‘orientals’ [Middle Easterners], with limited knowledge of Latin (Greek was the universal lingua franca), and presumably none of the Romans’ traditions and culture, needs to be kept in mind when considering historical events of the period.”¹⁴

12 Nigel Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities, and Civilians in Roman Syria* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000), 114–117.

13 Antonio Santosuosso, *Storming the Heavens: Soldiers, Emperors, and Civilians in the Roman Empire* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), 99.

14 Keppie, *Legions and Veterans*, 59.

Indeed, we might be prone to imagine that the army of Rome that destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD was full of purebred Italians. History clarifies that it was largely an army of Middle Easterners and North Africans that destroyed Jerusalem, many of whom would have had no particular linguistic, religious, or cultural loyalty to Rome at all. Based on what we know about Roman recruitment practices, it is likely that at least 45,000-50,000 out of the 60,000 soldiers that took part in the siege in 70 AD, and likely even more, were from Middle Eastern and North African nations surrounding Israel.

THE DESTRUCTION CARRIED OUT

When Titus besieged Jerusalem in 70 AD, his original goal was to starve out the Jews in the city and force their surrender, thereby preserving the city intact. Titus even enlisted Josephus, who by that time was working with the Romans, to negotiate terms of peace with the Jews.¹⁵

When these efforts failed, the Roman forces brought the hammer down and began to systematically invade and conquer the city. However, even though Titus did give the command to conquer the city, it was never his intention to burn the entire city and Temple to the ground, at least not initially. As historian Martin Goodman writes, at the beginning of the invasion:

Titus seems to have hoped that this demonstration of power and purpose would be enough to induce the defenders to surrender. He forbade his troops to kill indiscriminately or to set fire to the houses. The revolutionaries were given an opportunity freely to vacate the city and leave the general populace unharmed—or so, in retrospect, claimed Josephus, who asserts that Titus' paramount object at this stage of the siege was "to preserve the city to himself and the Temple for the city."¹⁶

15 Martin Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 21.

16 Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*, 20.

When this more conciliatory approach failed, Titus did sanction extreme measures. Even then however, he only wanted to set the Temple gates on fire to give his men access to the Jewish insurrectionists inside, as he was still hoping to preserve the Temple as one of the spoils of war.

In the fog of war, things got terribly out of hand. Fire spread to the Temple itself, which prompted Titus to urge his soldiers to quench the flames. His soldiers had other ideas, and by that time they were too inflamed with hatred against the Jews to heed his command. Josephus describes the scene:

And now a certain person came running to Titus, and told him of this fire...whereupon he rose up in great haste, and, as he was, ran to the holy house, in order to have a stop put to the fire; after him followed all his commanders, and after them followed the several legions, in great astonishment. [...] Then did Caesar, both by calling to the soldiers that were fighting, with a loud voice, and by giving a signal to them with his right hand, order them to quench the fire. [...]

Titus supposing what the fact was, that the house itself might yet be saved, he came in haste and endeavored to persuade the soldiers to quench the fire [...] yet were their passions too hard for the regards they had for Caesar [...] And thus was the holy house burnt down, without Caesar's approbation.¹⁷

As the fire in the Temple raged, the Roman soldiers massacred everyone they met in the city. Goodman also writes, in “recompense for the ferocious fighting they had been required to endure, the soldiers were given free rein [from Titus] to loot and kill.” The rest of the city was set on fire, and by mid-August 70 AD Jerusalem was in ruins. The remaining Jewish revolutionaries surrendered, and “Titus ordered the city be razed to the ground.”¹⁸

17 Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 6.4.6–7.

18 Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*, 25.

THE EVENTS OF 70 AD AND THE ROMAN ANTICHRIST THEORY

I believe the word “people” (*am*) in Daniel 9:26b only denotes the future king-subject relationship between the Antichrist and his armies, and that those who read more into this word without a contextual basis are mistaken. However, if we did want to read this verse as though it depicts the events of 70 AD, then “people” could potentially have any number of different connotations, including connotations related not only to nation/empire, but also to ethnicity/tribal affiliation. This creates all sorts of problems for people in the Roman Antichrist camp, who believe Daniel 9:26b is a proof-text that proves their theory. By their own logic, because many who subscribe to the Roman Antichrist Theory believe that “people” in Daniel 9:26 specifies bloodline, they should actually accept a Middle Eastern Antichrist, in large part because it was mostly Middle Easterners who destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD.¹⁹

THE THREE PROBLEMS WITH THE ROMAN ANTICHRIST THEORY

Regardless, it is not my intention to argue that Daniel 9:26 independently proves a Middle Eastern Antichrist. All I am saying is that this verse doesn’t prove a future Roman Antichrist for the following reasons:

1. The destruction mentioned in Daniel 9:26 is related to the 70th week, not the events of 70 AD. This means Daniel 9:26 doesn’t tell us anything about the Antichrist’s future empire and/or ethnicity one way or the other.
2. The Roman Antichrist Theory attributes technical meaning to the word “people” (*am*) in Daniel 9:26, as though it indicates nationality/ethnicity. Neither the context of Daniel 9:26, nor the general definition of “people” (*am*) in the Hebrew Bible, validates that “people” (*am*) must have this technical national/ethnic/tribal meaning in Daniel 9:26.

19 Of course, some in the Roman Antichrist camp will still insist that it doesn’t matter what ethnic peoples made up the Roman legions in 70 AD, because “people” here need only refer to Rome more broadly as a kingdom/empire. But again, this line of argument requires one to simply read their own preferred definition of “people” into Daniel 9:26 (i.e. kingdom instead of ethnicity), even when nothing in the context indicates one meaning over the other.

3. Even if, for the sake of argument, we did want to interpret Daniel 9:26 as though it indicates that the “people” who destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD are the same people from whom the Antichrist will emerge, the fact that it was mostly Middle Easterners and North Africans who destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD creates big problems for those in the Roman Antichrist camp.

Any way we parse Daniel 9:26, no real case can be made from this verse that the Antichrist will be an ethnic Roman, or that he will oversee a revived Roman Empire. Whether someone believes the destruction mentioned in Daniel 9:26 is strictly eschatological (as I do), or whether they believe the destruction is related to the historical events of 70 AD, neither position naturally leads to a future Roman Antichrist.

DANIEL 9:26B AND THE MIDDLE EASTERN ANTICHRIST THEORY

To briefly digress, one other reason I do not deduce a Middle Eastern Antichrist from Daniel 9:26 either, is because even this approach creates problems. As we have already seen, there were actually many different peoples that made up the Roman legions, including Syrians, Turks, Arabs, Egyptians, eastern Europeans, etc. Thus, if we wanted to say that Daniel 9:26 points us to the people (i.e. ethnic group) of the Antichrist, and that these people were present in 70 AD, we would have to ask what exactly this means. Would it mean that the Antichrist will be an ethnic Syrian, or a Turk, or an Egyptian, or perhaps part of some other ethnic group? In other words, if we are going to say this verse reveals the ethnicity of the Antichrist, it would have to designate one particular ethnic people, which isn't even possible, because many ethnic peoples took part in the siege in 70 AD.

This issue demonstrates how attempts to delineate the ethnicity of the Antichrist from Daniel 9:26 create a convoluted mess of problems (whether one takes a Roman or Middle Eastern approach), because this is not the purpose of this text in the first place. Daniel 9:26b is not concerned with 70 AD. It is concerned with the final events that will lead to the Messianic Jubilee.

We should reject the entire premise that was first popularized by Hal Lindsay in the 1970s, which maintains that Daniel 9:26b reveals the ethnicity or kingdom of the Antichrist. There is no textual basis for this premise. It is merely the result of trying to read history back into the biblical text after the fact, when a much more straightforward interpretation has been there all along. The Prince to Come is an end-times figure, so he can't have a "people" under his command until the end times.

MIDDLE EASTERN ANTICHRIST TEXTS

Even though Daniel 9:26 does not speak directly to the nationality or ethnicity of the Antichrist, there are many other texts that do reveal where the Antichrist will come from, and each of these texts also undermine the Roman Antichrist Theory. In every case where the Antichrist is affiliated with a group of people or nations in Scripture, he is always connected to the nations of the Middle East. In the next section, we will briefly skim the surface of four important biblical texts that support a Middle Eastern Antichrist.

NUMBERS 24:7 AND EZEKIEL 38–39

Many people are surprised to learn that the first time the Antichrist is mentioned directly in the Bible is in Numbers 24:7. In this passage, the Antichrist is called "Gog."

Most English Bibles wrongly translate Numbers 24:7 as though it refers to the historical figure "Agag," which is a reading based only on the Masoretic Text. The Masoretic Text is mostly reliable. However, in this case, it was changed by the Masoretic scribes and should not be trusted.²⁰

The majority of other early manuscripts, including the Samaritan Pentateuch, written in proto-Hebrew (c. 100s BC), as well as the Greek

20 John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 220–221. Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 38–39.

Septuagint (c. 200s BC), and some other early Greek and Latin versions (c. 100-200 AD), read “Gog.”

Thankfully, a growing number of scholars now accept that Gog initially appears in Numbers 24:7. In my first book, *The Passover King*, I cover a lot of the research related to Gog in Numbers 24:7. I also explain in chapter 6 of that book why the Gog figure in Numbers 24:7 fits the description of the Antichrist.

To briefly summarize, in Numbers 24:7 Gog is presented as the primary enemy of the returning Messiah (i.e. Israel’s “Seed” and “King”), and as the leader of the nations that will oppose Jesus at the time of his Second Coming. This verse reads:

Water will flow from his [Israel’s] buckets and his seed [Messiah] will be by many waters, and his king [Messiah] will be higher than Gog, and his kingdom shall be exalted (*author’s translation based on LXX and Samaritan Pentateuch*).

This verse indicates that the Messiah will receive his exalted kingdom in the Messianic Age only after he first exalts himself above and defeats someone named Gog. This picture of Gog in Numbers 24:7 harmonizes with the picture of the Antichrist in many other biblical passages.

In Jewish circles, it is widely accepted that Gog is an eschatological figure who will be vanquished by Israel’s Davidic Messiah. Furthermore, in both Numbers 24 and Ezekiel 38 Gog leads a coalition of Middle Eastern and North African nations, which confirms a Middle Eastern, not a Roman, Antichrist.²¹

Though most Christian prophecy teachers believe Gog is someone different than the Antichrist, this interpretation is based on a lack of awareness that Gog first appears in Numbers 24:7 as the enemy of Israel’s warrior Messiah. This confusion over the meaning of Numbers

21 For a deeper study of who Gog is and where he will come from, see chapters 6 & 14–17 in *The Passover King*. These chapters cover the commonly held view that Gog will be a Russian, and also show that Gog is presented in both Numbers 24 and Ezekiel 38–39 as a Middle Eastern Antichrist figure.

24:7 in turn leads to an inaccurate interpretation of Gog's identity in Ezekiel 38–39 as well.

As demonstrated in the following examples, many scholars recognize that Gog is the precursor to the New Testament Antichrist figure, and in Jewish tradition, it has been understood for thousands of years that the Messiah will defeat Gog before he establishes the Messianic Kingdom:

1. Old Testament scholar Michael Heiser: "Gog would have been perceived as either a figure empowered by supernatural evil or an evil quasi-divine figure from the supernatural world bent on the destruction of God's people. **For this reason, Gog is regarded by many biblical scholars as a template for the New Testament antichrist figure.**"²²
2. Historian Bernard McGinn: "Gog [...] appears as the enemy of the chosen people at the end time, and thus the account of **his career and fate could easily be linked to that of Antichrist in Christian tradition.**"²³
3. Old Testament scholar Daniel Block: "Allusions to the Gog oracle appear in Christian apocalyptic tradition, probably as a result of Jewish influence. Most notable is John's portrayal of the eschatological conflict in Rev. 19–20. The scene of the birds gathered for the great supper of God in 19:17–21 is clearly borrowed from Ezekiel's last frame (39:17–20). [...] **Although this passage never mentions Gog by name, the beast [Antichrist...] certainly represents him.**"²⁴

22 Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2015), 365.

23 Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2000), 26.

24 Daniel I. Block, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 25–48* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 490–491.

DANIEL 2

Another key passage that supports a Middle Eastern Antichrist is Daniel 2. In Daniel 2, Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream of an enormous human statue that had a head of gold, a chest and arms of silver, a belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron mixed with clay. Most futurist prophecy teachers have interpreted this statue as though it depicts the Babylonian (gold), Persian (silver), Greek (bronze), and Roman (iron & iron mixed with clay) empires. Since it is generally accepted that the last empire (iron & iron mixed with clay) is the final empire of the Antichrist, this belief has led to the conclusion that the Antichrist will come from a revived Roman empire.

A significant problem with this view of the successive empires in Daniel 2 is that even though the Roman empire did come after the Greek empire chronologically, the Roman empire never controlled the same territory as the previous empires (Babylon, Greece, and Persia). In other words, the Roman empire never fully controlled the geographical heartland of Nebuchadnezzar's empire in Iraq, like the Greeks and Persians did.

The reason this historical detail is important, is because Daniel 2 records a dream that was given to Nebuchadnezzar about the empires that would succeed *him*. Daniel 2 is not about all world empires in a general sense. It is about who would control Nebuchadnezzar's empire after he was gone.

To summarize the research of Joel Richardson, the Romans were a mostly western empire that made some forays into the Middle East (Syria & Israel) and North Africa. But the Romans never penetrated into the heart of the Middle East, Iraq, and Iran, like the Babylonians, Persians, and Greeks did. Rome did briefly control parts of Iraq and Babylon in the year 116. But Rome's control over this area only lasted a few months, because the emperor Trajan suffered a stroke, forcing his army to retreat.²⁵

25 For the best interpretation of Daniel 2, see Joel Richardson, *Mideast Beast: The Scriptural Case for an Islamic Antichrist* (Washington D.C.: WND Books, 2012), 55–78.

The next empire after the Greeks that actually did control Nebuchadnezzar's former domain in Babylon was the Islamic empire, and the successive Islamic caliphates that ruled the Middle East, North Africa, and even parts of Europe from the 600s to the early 1900s AD. During this period the armies of Islam conquered more territory in less time than any empire in history, including the Romans. Based on these historical realities, it is the Middle Eastern Islamic empire that is the best candidate to be the "legs of iron," or, the fourth empire of the Antichrist in Daniel 2.

Unfortunately, our western-centric view of history, combined with our disproportionate emphasis on Rome and Europe, and general ignorance of eastern Islamic history, has caused many of us to overlook that Daniel 2 is about empires that conquered the east, and more specifically, empires that conquered the domain of Nebuchadnezzar, which the Romans never did. Like Numbers 24 and Ezekiel 38–39, the dream of the statue in Daniel 2 confirms a future Middle Eastern Antichrist.

DANIEL 8:9

In the last chapter we saw that in Daniel 8:9, the Antichrist, who is described as the Little Horn in this passage, will grow "**exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful Land.**" Although this text does not tell us as clearly as Ezekiel 38–39 where the Antichrist will come from, it does hint that the Antichrist will oversee a Middle Eastern and North African empire.

From the standpoint of biblical geography, the "south" would include modern North Africa, and possibly some other African nations as well. The "east" would include Iraq, Iran, and possibly parts of Central and East Asia. The "Beautiful Land" is a reference to Israel.

Daniel 8:9 says the Antichrist will conquer lands in these regions, and become "great" in this particular part of the world. This undoubtedly links him primarily to the nations of the Middle East and North Africa, not Europe.

There are many other texts that we would need to look at in order

to present a comprehensive case for a Middle Eastern Antichrist. This survey is not meant to be exhaustive. However, it is meant to demonstrate that when we take a step back and look at many traditional Antichrist texts in a better historical and exegetical light, they do not support an Antichrist from a Revived Roman empire. They support an Antichrist from the Middle East.

This obviously has major implications for the Lord's people today as we await the return of the Messiah. We need to avoid the mistaken over emphasis on the EU and Roman Catholicism, which is so prevalent within many prophecy circles when the identity of the Antichrist is discussed. We also need to gain a more biblical understanding of how the shifting geopolitical faultlines in the Middle Eastern Islamic world will eventually lead to the rise of the Antichrist.

15

THE 70TH WEEK (9:27)

IN CHAPTER 14, we discovered that some of the central events in the Antichrist's career are introduced in Daniel 9:26, which states that he and his people will desolate Jerusalem and a future end-times Temple. We also saw how Daniel 9:26 refers to future wars in Israel that will last "until the end," that is to say, until the Antichrist himself is destroyed suddenly, as if by "a flood."

Although most futurist commentators view Daniel 9:27 as the first portion of Daniel 9:24–27 that speaks of the 70th week, a more likely alternative is that Daniel 9:27 is a continuation of the discussion of 70th week events that began in the previous verse. Daniel 9:27 elaborates on the end-times destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple that was first introduced in Daniel 9:26, and specifies how the 70th week will begin, as well as the actions the Antichrist (Prince to Come) will carry out during this time.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the core events of the 70th

week in more detail. These events will include the confirmation of the “covenant” in Daniel 9:27, the geopolitical developments that have to materialize before the 70th week can begin, the building of a future Temple in Jerusalem, and the abomination of desolation. In the next chapter, we will also look at Jesus’ teaching on the 70th week in the Synoptic Gospels and the book of Revelation.

Daniel 9:27 reads:

And he will strengthen a covenant with the many for one week; but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations the utter desolation will come, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate (*author’s translation*).

THE COVENANT

Because verse 27 does not introduce a new subject, the “he” making the covenant here is the Prince to Come from verse 26. Verse 27 clarifies that the Prince to Come will make, or strengthen, this covenant “with the many for one week.”

The confirmation of the covenant in Daniel 9:27 is an important detail, because it indicates that the 70th week, and the final seven-year countdown to the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom, will begin when this covenant is made. Without a doubt, the Antichrist’s seven-year covenant with Israel is one of the most significant end-time signposts in Scripture which those who live during the last days will be able to easily recognize.

Those who accept that Daniel 9:27 is about a future covenant that will be made between the Antichrist and the Jewish nation typically adopt three main views regarding what type of covenant this will be, and what exactly it will entail.

(1) Some believe the covenant in Daniel 9:27 is a general reference to the Abrahamic Covenant. If this is true, then the confirmation of the covenant could imply that the Antichrist will recognize the Jewish

nation's right to the Promised Land, based on the biblical covenant God made with the Jewish patriarchs.

(2) Others argue the covenant in Daniel 9:27 is the Mosaic covenant. This is the view proposed by Old Testament scholar J. Paul Tanner. Tanner believes the Antichrist will be a Jewish false messiah who deceives Israel into believing he is the Messiah by enforcing the Mosaic law (the covenant spoken of in verse 27). Tanner writes:

In light of the contextual clue about “sacrifice and offering,” the words [strengthen a covenant] are best understood to mean that the antichrist will pose as a false messiah who dupes Israel (at least initially) and causes the Mosaic covenant to *prevail* in the land (i.e., he *enforces* it).¹

(3) Another possibility is that the “covenant” in Daniel 9:27 is some future, but as of yet undefined, geopolitical treaty or covenant agreement that will be made between Israel and the Antichrist for seven years.

Of these three options, this last possibility, that the covenant is a geopolitical agreement of some kind, is the most likely for a number of reasons.

THE COVENANT AS A FUTURE POLITICAL AGREEMENT

First, the covenant (*brit*) in Daniel 9:27 contains no definite article (the). This covenant is called “a covenant,” not “the covenant.” Earlier in Daniel 9:4, when Daniel described the covenant God made with Israel (presumably the Mosaic and/or Abrahamic), he referred to God as one “who keeps *the* covenant.” The NASB and many other modern translations wrongly omit the definite article and translate this phrase as “His covenant.” The KJV however gets it right, and translates this portion of Daniel 9:4 with the definite article, and thus, “keeping *the* covenant.”

Because Daniel 9:4 calls God's covenant with Israel “the covenant,”

1 J. Paul Tanner, *Daniel: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2020), 593.

it is most likely that if Daniel 9:27 were referring to the same covenant we would see the same Hebrew construction, with the definite article. The absence of the definite article in Daniel 9:27 lends support to the idea that neither the Abrahamic, nor the Mosaic, nor any other covenant God made with the Jewish nation, is in view here.

Second, the idea that 9:27 must be a reference to the Mosaic covenant, because the Antichrist will be a Jew who enforces the Mosaic law, lacks a biblical basis. The Antichrist is consistently portrayed as a Gentile nonbeliever from the Middle East and as a blasphemer of the Lord in Scripture, not as a Jewish false messiah who will pretend to be obedient to YHVH. In Daniel 8, we are given this picture of the Antichrist as a usurper of YHVH who will magnify himself above the Lord, similar to the way Antiochus Epiphanes did. We are never told in Scripture that the Antichrist will enforce or favor the Mosaic law writ large. Furthermore, Tanner's argument for a Jewish Antichrist is based on a weak analysis of the Antichrist's religious faith in Daniel 11. (Though fully unpacking the implications of that passage is beyond the scope of this book.)

In response to this notion that Daniel 9:27 is not about the Mosaic covenant, some, including Tanner, argue that because there is a "contextual clue" about "sacrifice and offering" in Daniel 9:27, this proves the covenant is the Mosaic covenant, and that the Antichrist will be a Jew who enforces this preexisting covenant, including animal sacrifices. The problem with this suggestion is that even though the covenant could include a stipulation concerning animal sacrifices, which the Antichrist will eventually put a stop to, this is not proof that the Antichrist will be a Jew who forces the Mosaic covenant on the entire population.

History is full of examples of Gentile leaders, including the Persian king Cyrus, as well as many Greek and Roman leaders after him, who allowed the Jews living under their rule to offer sacrifices according to their law. Daniel 9:27 fits this historical pattern of a Gentile leader allowing the Jews to practice their religion, but then taking this right away at a later time, just like Antiochus and the Romans did. Daniel

9:27 aligns more with the idea that in terms of how he will relate to Israel, the Antichrist will be another fickle Gentile leader, not a Jew.

Third, the temporary nature of the covenant, and how it will be made “for one week,” or, “for seven years,” supports the idea that this is some type of specific geopolitical treaty or agreement, not one of the biblical covenants that already exists. In geopolitics, it is common for treaties and agreements to have “sunset clauses,” or to be contingent on further ratification or approval after a certain date.

For example, the U.S.-Soviet Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, known as START I, was signed on July 31, 1991 and put into force in December of 1994. This treaty was only to be in effect for 15 years. When it expired in 2009 there was an option to continue its terms for another five years, but the U.S. and Russia decided against the extension, preferring to replace START I with a new agreement.²

START I is only one example of the common practice adopted by most countries and/or geopolitical entities when negotiating the terms of a treaty. Treaties and formal political agreements are often enacted for a limited period of time.

Because the “covenant” in Daniel 9:27 is strengthened “for one week,” it is hard to deny that this will be a clearly recognizable contract or treaty agreement that the Antichrist will sign with the nation of Israel. Those who live during the 70th week will be able to identify the seven-year stipulation in the Antichrist’s covenant with Israel as the fulfillment of Daniel 9:27.

Fourth, there are many examples in Scripture of personal and geopolitical covenants made by different people and different nations. Genesis 14:13 mentions the Amorites who were Abraham’s “allies.” The Hebrew text literally says they were in a “covenant” with Abraham. Genesis 21:27 refers to a “covenant” that was made between Abraham and Abimelech, king of Gerar, at Beersheba, which was also made again with Isaac in

2 “Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on Strategic Offensive Reductions (START I),” NTI, online, October 26, 2011.

Genesis 26:28. In Exodus 23:32 and 34:12–15, God warned Israel about making a “covenant” with the surrounding nations or their gods, a condition Israel frequently ignored. And perhaps most notably, Isaiah 28:15 says Israel will make a “covenant with death,” which the Lord says, “will be canceled” (Isa. 28:18). In this context, the “covenant with death” is presumably a geopolitical agreement Israel makes with the Gentile nations (and possibly the same thing as the Dan. 9:27 covenant).

I have sometimes heard people who believe the covenant in Daniel 9:27 must be one of God’s redemptive covenants say things like, “Well, in Scripture there is an overarching theme of God making redemptive covenants with His people, so based on this broad biblical metanarrative, the Daniel 9:27 covenant has to be one of God’s redemptive covenants.”

This position fails to take into account the many different types of covenants in Scripture. God’s covenants with Israel and the nations are a prevalent feature in the biblical narrative. But this does not mean every time we see the word “covenant” it must refer to one of the redemptive covenants.

The way in which the word “covenant” is used in certain contexts justifies an alternate reading in Daniel 9:27. Also, because God Himself is not the one making the covenant in Daniel 9:27, and because there is nothing in this verse that describes this covenant as one of God’s covenants, it makes the most sense to accept that the Daniel 9:27 covenant is a political agreement, similar to those described in Genesis 14:13, Exodus 23:32, Isaiah 28:15–18, etc.

It is also worth mentioning that the language in Daniel 9:27 about “the many” entering into a covenant with the Antichrist, mirrors the language in *1 Maccabees*, which says that “Many of the people, every one who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land” (1 Macc. 1:52; cf. 1 Macc. 1:43). The repetition of the term “many” in both Daniel 9:27 and *1 Maccabees* confirms that the alliance the Jews entered into with Antiochus was viewed as a prefigurement or partial fulfillment of the Daniel 9:27 covenant, which again proves this is a

geopolitical covenant Israel will make with the Gentile powers.³

Israel will enter into this covenant with the Antichrist under the false assumption that it will offer them protection and security. However, just as God promised Israel in Isaiah 28:15–18, and also in Exodus 23:32 and 34:12–15, Israel will not be able to escape the Lord’s judgment through self-initiated covenants with the Gentile powers. This covenant will prove to be like a two-legged stool in Israel’s pursuit of peace.

THE DETAILS OF THE COVENANT

In terms of the specifics of this covenant, Daniel 9:27 does not offer much detail. The text states that the Antichrist will “confirm” (KJV; NIV) the covenant or “make a strong” (ESV) or “firm” (NASB) (*gavar*) covenant “with the many for one week.” The Hebrew verb *gavar* is in a causative form here (*Hiphil*), so it could be translated as “cause to be strong.” In most cases where this word is used the KJV translates it as “prevail” (Gen. 7:18; Ex. 17:11), and sometimes as “strengthen” (Zech. 10:6, 12).

The use of the term *gavar* appears to suggest that this end-times covenant will be viewed as not only highly significant, but also as stable, strong, and reliable. The strengthening of the covenant could imply that most people, once the covenant is made, will rest in its assurances, and assume that it is an excellent agreement that offers peace and stability for everyone involved.

Gavar (cause to be strong) could also indicate that the Antichrist will in some way force this covenant upon Israel, but I personally doubt *gavar* carries this nuance in Daniel 9:27. It seems more likely that Israel will willingly enter into a covenant with the Antichrist, because they will believe this maneuver will finally guarantee them peace (and perhaps uninhibited access to the Temple Mount).

It is also interesting that Daniel 9:27 says this covenant will be

3 For excellent discussion of the parallels between the Antiochus covenant vis-à-vis the Daniel 9:27 covenant, see Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church: A New Understanding of the Rapture, the Tribulation, and the Second Coming* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 199–206.

made “with the many.” The word “many” (*rab*) often signifies greatness, abundance, or an extremely large quantity. So again, the implication here is that the Antichrist’s covenant with Israel will be warmly received and accepted by the masses, and perhaps even by the large majority of the population/government.

As previously noted, given that the next part of verse 27 mentions how the Antichrist will “put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering,” it is possible that this covenant will include terms that allow the Jews to worship freely on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Though admittedly, the specifics of this seven-year covenant are vague, so we should keep an open mind and stay watchful.

THE TEN-NATION CONFEDERACY

Because Daniel 9:27 speaks of a covenant the Antichrist will make with Israel, it is common to hear Christians speculate on whether certain events in the news represent the fulfillment of this prophecy. Every time a significant development unfolds in Israel or the Middle East, there is talk of whether or not it will lead to, or even if it could be, the Daniel 9:27 covenant.

In the wake of President Donald Trump’s Mideast peace initiatives in 2020 for example, known as the Abraham Accords, which established an unprecedented level of economic, diplomatic, and military cooperation between Israel and her Arab neighbors, many Christians began to surmise that these peace talks could lead to the covenant of Daniel 9:27. Ever since Israel became a modern nation in 1948, similar speculation has surrounded every peace negotiation they have had with their Muslim neighbors. Even in 1993 many prophecy teachers were claiming that the Oslo Peace Accord signed by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was the Daniel 9:27 covenant.

I do believe the covenant of Daniel 9:27 will be a formal agreement between Israel and the Antichrist. I also believe that Christians who mock or marginalize this idea are committing the opposite error of Bible prophecy fanaticism, namely, Bible prophecy neglect! So I can

definitely respect the impulse that drives us to stay watchful, to peruse the headlines, and to discern how events on the geopolitical stage could be lining up with biblical prophecy.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that before the Antichrist can appear on the scene, and therefore, before he can make any type of covenant with Israel, there are many other prerequisite geopolitical events that have to happen first.

One of the most significant prerequisite events that has to happen before the strengthening of the Daniel 9:27 covenant, is the formation of the Antichrist's ten-nation coalition. In Revelation 13:1 we read:

The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they will receive authority as kings with the beast [Antichrist] for one hour. These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast.

In Daniel 7:23–27, we are told that the Antichrist will not only be a part of this ten-nation coalition, but also, that he will emerge out of it, and take power over it by subduing three of its kings. In other words, this ten-nation coalition will exist prior to the rise of the Antichrist himself:

The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth which will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it. As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise, and another [Antichrist] will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings (Dan. 7:23–24).

It is likely that this ten-nation confederacy will be made up of many Middle Eastern and North African nations, because the Antichrist is consistently linked to these nations in the Bible (cf. Ezek. 38; Num. 24; Dan. 2; Dan. 8). Currently, no coalition of ten “kings” exists in the Middle East, or anywhere else in the world. Consequently, as much

as we need to stay watchful in the realm of current events, and understand how many geopolitical trends are moving us closer to the rise of the Antichrist, we also need to stay grounded, and avoid the common prophecy sensationalism that rises to the surface every time there are peace talks in the Middle East.

Any and every peace deal in the Middle East does not potentially qualify as the Daniel 9:27 covenant. The covenant of Daniel 9:27 will be strengthened/confirmed by a warrior prince who presides over a ten-kingdom confederacy of nations, one that does not yet exist. If we want to watch for one of the next big events on God's prophetic timeline, we should be watching for the formation of this ten-kingdom alliance, not quite yet the signing of the Daniel 9:27 covenant.⁴

THE MARK OF THE BEAST

The same can also be said for "the Mark of the Beast." Those who speculate on whether or not every new technological development they see on the news could be the Mark of the Beast, such as new microchips, or a new vaccine, show that they do not understand Bible prophecy, and in particular, the 70th week. There cannot be a Mark of the Beast until the midpoint of the 70th week, and before the 70th week can even begin, we must see the ten-nation coalition from which the Antichrist will emerge.

The reality of these prerequisite geopolitical events does not mean we shouldn't be diligent, prayerful, and watchful. It is also doesn't mean we shouldn't recognize how certain geopolitical and technological developments are setting the stage for the events of the 70th week. It is certainly no coincidence that events on the world stage, including the restoration of modern Israel, and recent advances in microchip technology, have set some of the pieces of the 70th week in place.

⁴ It is also likely that before this ten-kingdom alliance can even materialize, there will have to be a series of wars in the Middle East that reshape the geopolitical landscape. I hope to address this topic in future books and teachings as well.

But as I write these words in 2021, we still have quite a bit of time, and this is time we can use wisely for the Lord. The way in which a lot of prophecy teachers today deal with the Daniel 9:27 covenant and the Mark of the Beast, as though it's all about to happen, right now, is unhelpful and distracting.

We are called to watch, but we are also called to be “sober minded.” We're not supposed to get drunk on speculative prophecy sensationalism.

THE NEXT TEMPLE

In the middle of his seven-year covenant with Israel, the Antichrist will apparently do an about face, turn on the Jewish nation, and initiate a time of unsurpassed destruction and idolatry in the Land. The latter half of Daniel 9:27 describes this time in the following way:

But in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations the utter desolation (will come), even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate (*author's translation*).

Since the earliest days of the Church there has been a debate among Christians over whether or not there will be a rebuilt “third Temple” in Jerusalem during the end times. The early Church father Hippolytus for example, though he accepted the eschatological nature of Daniel 9:27, still spiritualized the portion of the text that speaks of the Antichrist putting “a stop to sacrifice and grain offering.” Many modern commentators have also followed this trend. They argue that passages that speak of actions the Antichrist will take in the Temple (Dan. 9:27; 2 Thess. 2:3–4), only concern how the Antichrist will forbid Christian worship and persecute the Messianic community.

This spiritual-allegorical reading of the language in Daniel 9:27 is misguided. The terms used here to describe “sacrifice (*zevach*) and grain offering (*mincha*)” are used hundreds of times in the Hebrew Bible to refer to Temple sacrifices and offerings (Lev. 7:11–21; 6:14–15). These

words have no other meaning, and the only way the Antichrist will be able to “put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering” is if there actually are such offerings being made during the 70th week. Based on Daniel 9:27, there will have to be a third Temple, or at the very least, a sacrificial altar and portable Tabernacle structure, built and overseen by the Jewish religious authorities in Jerusalem in the future.

This impending reality of a third Jewish Temple is becoming more and more likely every day. It is already the ambition of the Temple Institute in Jerusalem to rebuild a third Temple. Furthermore, although Jewish worship is now technically forbidden in the area, in 2019 Israeli Rabbi Eliyahu Weber led a small prayer service on the Temple Mount, and told reporters from the Jerusalem Post, “the ultimate goal is to be able to offer sacrifices in the Temple.”⁵

In light of the prophetic testimony of Scripture, I wouldn’t bet against the rebuilding of another Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. The word of God will not fail on this point.

Daniel 8:11 and 9:27 require the reestablishment of Temple sacrifices in Jerusalem prior to the return of Jesus. We should not allegorize, spiritualize, or historicize these verses in an attempt to nullify this reality, especially because these future Temple sacrifices in Jerusalem will function as one of the clearest end-time signposts for the Lord’s people in the days ahead.

There are some details about this third Temple that Daniel 9:27 does not reveal, such as what it will look like, and whether it will be in operation prior to the rise of the Antichrist, or if perhaps the sacrifices will only commence after his “covenant with the many.” But these issues aside, the prophetic requirement of physical sacrifices being offered in a third Jewish Temple/Tabernacle, which the Antichrist will initially endorse, but then stop halfway through the 70th week, is firmly established in Scripture.

5 Jeremy Sharon, “Jewish prayer has returned to the Temple Mount- Exclusive,” The Jerusalem Post, online, Dec. 12, 2019.

THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

After the Antichrist puts a stop to sacrifices at the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, and sits in God's seat in the Temple (2 Thess. 2:4), he will then destroy the sanctuary (Dan. 8:11; 9:26) and devastate the Land of Israel. The second half of Daniel 9:27 states that during this time, "on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate."

The phrase "on the wing of abominations" in Daniel 9:27 is difficult to interpret. The Hebrew word "wing" (*kanaph*) frequently means the literal wing of a bird or angel in Scripture (Gen. 1:21; Ex. 25:20; Zech. 5:9). *Kanaph* can also have a metaphorical meaning, in which case it implies the edge, border, or corner of something (Num. 15:38; Ezek. 7:2).

Some commentators have concluded that "on the wing of abominations" refers to a physical space in the Temple.⁶ The Old Greek and Theodotion render this phrase literally as "on/in the temple." The NIV translates it as "And at the temple..."

No doubt the Antichrist will defile and destroy the Jewish Temple. However, I am not convinced the "wing of abominations" in Daniel 9:27 relates only to the Temple, primarily because the text does not say "on the wing of the Temple." It says "on the wing of abominations (plural)."

A better reading maintains that the phrase "on the wing" or "at the end/border of abominations" refers either to the abominations that will be committed by the Antichrist himself, or, to the general lawlessness that will prevail in the last days. If this is the case, the phrase would mean that the actions the Antichrist will take in the Temple are meant to be understood as part of a larger matrix of abominable actions that he will carry out against the Lord, and/or, which will be prevalent during the end times.

We are told in many other places that the last days will be characterized by general "lawlessness" (Matt. 24:12) and "apostasy." The Antichrist

6 John E. Walvoord, *Daniel: The John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012), 289.

himself is also called “the man of lawlessness” (2 Thess. 2:3). As a result, there is strong biblical support for the view that the “wing of abominations” describes the moral climate of the world during the 70th week.

The phrase seems to indicate how the Antichrist will ride a wave of rebellion and emerge from within an environment of end-times lawlessness and idolatry that will be widespread prior to, and even at the beginning of, the 70th week. The Antichrist will already be involved in many abominations in his own personal life, and within his own personal religion, before the midpoint of the 70th week. So too will the peoples of the world be involved in similar forms of rebellion.

Yet, “on the wing” or “at the border” of these abominations, and during a time of ultimate rebellion, the Antichrist will go further, add insult to injury, and even desecrate and destroy the Temple itself. The desolation events of the 70th week will not occur in a vacuum. They will come “on the wing” of many other abominable acts that will characterize this time in history.

Old Testament scholar J. Paul Tanner points out that although the NASB translates the Hebrew participle in Daniel 9:27 as “one who makes desolate,” this is only one word in the Hebrew text (*shamem* in a participle form: *meshomem*), which could be translated with an intensive sense as “utter desolation.”⁷ I prefer the translation, “on the wing of abominations (the) utter desolation (will come),” because it follows the Hebrew more strictly, and avoids the implication that “one” distinct from the Prince to Come is introduced in Daniel 9:27.

There is no other person in Daniel 9:27 besides the Antichrist. The flow of the Hebrew is that “he” strengthens the covenant for one week, which starts the 70th week. Then he puts a stop to sacrifices halfway through the 70th week, and during a time of ultimate rebellion, “on the wing of abominations,” commits the “utter desolation.”

7 Tanner, *Daniel*, 595.

THE THREE-AND-A-HALF YEARS CONFIRMED

Regarding the specifics of the desolation referred to in Daniel 9:27, we discussed earlier how the Antichrist making “desolate” (*shamem*) in this verse is linguistically and contextually connected to the prior statement in Daniel 9:26: “desolations (*shamem*) are determined.” Verse 26 however only mentions the general invasion of Jerusalem by the Antichrist and his “people,” who will “destroy the city and the sanctuary.”

Verse 27 adds that this destruction and time of desolation will take place halfway through the 70th week, only after the Antichrist has put a stop to Temple sacrifices (cf. Dan. 8:11). Daniel 12:11–12 further clarifies that from the time the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be three-and-a-half years before the Messianic Kingdom is established:

From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. How blessed is he who keeps waiting and attains to the 1,335 days! (Dan. 12:11–12).

THE FIRST-CENTURY VIEW AND THE 1,290-1,335 DAYS

Those who favor a first-century Messianic fulfillment of Daniel 9:27 argue that the “abomination of desolation” was set up in 70 AD, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and then made pagan sacrifices to their gods on the site of the destroyed Temple. We will look soon at why this series of events in the first century does not match the events described in the various abomination of desolation prophecies, including Daniel 9:27, 12:11–12, and Matthew 24.

For now, I only want to point out that the 70 AD fulfillment view has no valid explanation of the 1,290-1,335 days that follow the abomination of desolation and lead to a time of great blessing. If we wanted to hypothetically place the abomination of desolation in 70 AD, we would also need to be able to show what significant redemptive event took place three-and-a-half years (1,290 days) after the summer of 70 AD, in c. 74 AD, because Gabriel says those who reach this point in time will be “blessed” (Dan. 12:11–12).

It should be obvious that this time of blessing in Daniel 12:12 that is said to follow 1,290-1,335 days after the abomination of desolation didn't take place in the year 74 AD. In 74 AD Israel was still in ruins, and had only just recently experienced the catastrophic events of 70 AD, during which time many Jews were murdered, or at best sent into exile or enslaved by the Romans. Therefore, it doesn't make sense that the abomination of desolation took place in 70 AD, because if we go 1,290-1,335 days forward from that time (to 74 AD), we do not arrive at the time of distinct blessing outlined in Daniel 12:12.

Not surprisingly, proponents of a 70 AD fulfillment of the abomination of desolation cannot point to any significant redemptive event in 74 AD that would qualify as the fulfillment of Daniel 12:11-12. For this reason, they usually ignore or downplay the 1,290-1,335 days in Daniel 12:11-12 that are said follow the abomination, because this timemarker does not fit within their system.

Some proponents of a 70 AD fulfillment of the abomination of desolation have recognized this problem related to the 1,290-1,335 days in Daniel 12. However, instead of accepting that Daniel 12:11-12 dismantles the foundation of their theory, they push the abomination of desolation up to 68 AD, which was the year the Zealots and Idumeans invaded the Temple. Then, in a bizarre manner, they say the timemarker in Daniel 12:11-12 was fulfilled in 70 AD when the Temple was destroyed.

This is a classic example of an interpretive maneuver rooted in bias. As prophecy teacher Brock Hollett clarifies, equating the abomination of desolation with the Zealots' actions in 68 AD is still "much too late to allow for a period of 42 months prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD."⁸ Also, the Zealots did not put a stop to the daily Temple sacrifices in 68 AD, which Daniel 12:11 connects directly to the abomination of desolation, so moving the fulfillment of some of the events of

8 Brock David Hollett, *Debunking Preterism: How Over-Realized Eschatology Misses the "Not Yet" of Bible Prophecy* (Kearney: Morris Publishing, 2018), 130.

Daniel 9:27 up to this earlier time creates more problems than it solves.

The First-Century Fulfillment view, which equates the abomination of desolation with Roman sacrifices in Jerusalem in 70 AD, or the Zealots' actions in 68 AD, also suffers from the weakness of separating this abomination from the midpoint of their 70th week by 38-40 years. Most proponents of the First-Century Messianic view believe the 70th week ended in 34 AD, which places its midpoint on their timeline in 30 AD (see timeline in chapter 5).

According to Daniel 9:27, if the 70th week lasted from 27-34 AD, with a 30 AD midpoint, this would mean not only the cessation of sacrifices, but also the abomination of desolation, needed to happen in 30 AD, because both of these events are linked to the midpoint of the 70th week in Daniel 9:27 and 12:11. Yet, we know from history this is not the way things went down in the first century.

First-Century Fulfillment proponents attempt to get around this inconvenience by saying, "Yes, but Jesus is the prince of Daniel 9:26-27 who confirmed the covenant, and his sacrifice on the cross did effectually bring an end to Temple sacrifices, in the middle of the 70th week (i.e. in 30 AD), even if this didn't happen in real time until 70 AD."

Leaving aside that Jesus does not fit the description of the Prince to Come, even if we did want to hypothetically accept this scenario for the sake of argument, Daniel 9:27 and 12:11 do not leave room for this 40-year separation between the midpoint of the 70th week (allegedly in 30 AD), and the abomination of desolation (allegedly in 68 or 70 AD). Daniel 9:27 says, "halfway through the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations the utter desolation will come." Both the literal cessation of sacrifices and the abomination of desolation happen at the midpoint of the 70th week in the book of Daniel. This is even more clear in Daniel 12:11, which states, "From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up..." The Hebrew construction here clarifies that both of these events in Daniel 12 happen at the same time.

Moreover, if the cessation of sacrifices and the abomination of

desolation were separated by 40 years, then why would we only be given one time designation of 1,290-1,335 days to count forward from the time these two events took place? This would make no sense, because we wouldn't know if we should count the 1,290-1,335 days from 30 AD (the alleged time when sacrifices ended), or 70 AD (the alleged time when the abomination was set up).

The way the First-Century Fulfillment camp separates these two events introduces a level of confusion that renders the 1,290-1,335 days meaningless. On the other hand, the view that the 1,290-1,335 days will cover the last three-and-a-half years of the 70th week, and end when the Messianic Kingdom is established, makes perfect sense.

The abomination of desolation will be set up during the end times, midway through the 70th week, right after “the regular sacrifice is abolished” in Jerusalem (12:11). This will lead to a time of great difficulty and judgment in Israel. However, Daniel still sets these events contextually within a larger message of hope, and even goes so far as to add that 1,290 days after the abomination of desolation Israel's time of Messianic redemption will be well underway, and will reach a culmination point after 1,335 days.

DANIEL 12 AND THE DEFEAT OF THE ANTICHRIST

As stated in chapter 10, the demarcation between 1,260, 1,290, and 1,335 days in Daniel and Revelation, which represent the time the Antichrist will have power over Israel during the last half of the 70th week, most likely signifies that the Antichrist's loss of power and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom will not happen all at once. It is probable that the Antichrist will lose most of his power after 1,260 days due to various divine judgments (Rev. 16), but still not be completely defeated by Jesus until the 1,290 days, at which point Israel will be fully delivered, which will then lead to the complete establishment of the Messianic Kingdom after 1,335 days.

In my book, *The Passover King*, I discuss the sequence of events that will take place when Jesus returns in greater detail. For those interested in

a precise timeline, I also recommend the book *Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord* by Alan Kurschner. Kurschner writes that the Antichrist will lose his authority after 1,260 days, but not be destroyed until the battle of Armageddon thirty days later (Rev. 19:20), which will coincide with the end of the Revelation bowl judgments (Rev. 16). Kurschner writes:

[T]he nature and purpose of the bowl judgments [Rev. 16] will unfold rapidly during the thirty days that follow the seven-year period [the 42 months of Rev. 13:5]. The prophet Daniel provides evidence of an additional thirty-day period following the seven-year period. The abomination of desolation will last thirty additional days after the completion of the Antichrist's authority of 1,260 days. "From the time that the daily sacrifice is removed and the abomination that causes desolation is set in place, there are 1,290 days (an additional thirty days)" (Dan. 12:11). At the completion of this thirty-day period, the end of the desolation will coincide with the destruction of the desolator (the Antichrist) [as we see in Daniel 9:27; cf. Rev. 19:20].⁹

After these bowl judgments that destroy the Antichrist, Kurschner states there will be 45 days (leading up to the 1,335 of Daniel 12:12), during which time the kingdom of God will be instituted by Jesus.¹⁰ Thus, Gabriel rightly said those who live to see the 1,335 days, that is to say, the complete end of the 70th week and the beginning of the Age of Jubilee, will be "blessed."

9 Alan Kurschner, *Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord: What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Return of Christ* (Pompton Lakes: Eschatos Publishing, 2013), 154.

10 Kurschner, *Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord*, 154–165.

THE 70TH WEEK IN THE GOSPELS AND REVELATION

BECAUSE DANIEL 9:27 is one of the most important end-time prophecies in the Bible, it should not surprise us that this passage was also a central feature in the eschatological teaching of Jesus, both in the Gospels, and in the book of Revelation. In this chapter, we will discuss what Jesus had to say about the 70th week, as well as the practical implications of the 70-weeks prophecy for God's people today.

DANIEL 9:27 IN THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus quotes directly from Daniel 9:27 to describe events that will take place in Israel in the last days (Matt. 24:15–22; Mark 13:14–20). After covering the deception, wars, persecution of believers, and lawlessness that will characterize the “end of the age” (Matt. 24:1–14), Jesus transitions into a more detailed discussion of Daniel 9:27 and the last half of the 70th week:

Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things that are in the house. Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short (Matt. 24:15–22).

It is noteworthy that out of all of the passages Jesus could have referenced to signal the starting point of the “great tribulation,” he chose Daniel 9:27. Jesus tells us that the abomination of desolation “standing in the holy place” (a clear reference to the next Jewish Temple) is the primary sign Israel and his disciples should watch for, in order to understand when the midpoint of the 70th week will begin.

There is also a practical reason Jesus emphasized this particular sign (i.e. the abomination of desolation). When the abomination of desolation is seen “standing in the holy place,” many people in Judea and Jerusalem will have time to “flee to the mountains” before the Antichrist unleashes the time of “utter desolation” spoken of in Daniel 9:27. Those who heed the words of Jesus may very well have their lives saved, but only if they accept the gravity of the situation by fleeing at once, without even turning back to grab their coats.

WAS JESUS REFERRING TO 70 AD?

We have already looked at some of the reasons why the abomination of desolation aspects of Daniel 9:27, 11:31, and 12:11 could not have been fulfilled in 70 AD, due primarily to the weaknesses of the First-Century Fulfillment timeline, and the way this view forces us to ignore that the Jubilee is an eschatological motif in Scripture. Now we’ll

compare the events Jesus connects to the abomination of desolation in the Olivet Discourse to the events that took place when Jerusalem was conquered by the Romans in 70 AD. This analysis will further prove that in Matthew 24 Jesus was speaking of end-time events, not the events of 70 AD.

ROMANS ON THE TEMPLE MOUNT

We do know that in 70 AD the Romans besieged Jerusalem, invaded the city, burned the Temple and most of the city to the ground, and then, as the ultimate act of defiance, offered sacrifices to the Roman gods on the Temple Mount. Josephus records the events that took place at this time:

And now the Romans, upon the flight of the seditious into the city, and upon the burning of the holy house itself, and of all the buildings round about it, brought their ensigns into the temple, and set them over against its eastern gate, and there did they offer sacrifices to them, and there did they make Titus emperor, with the greatest acclamations of joy.¹

Christians in the First-Century Fulfillment camp believe the Romans offering sacrifices on the Temple Mount in 70 AD fulfilled the abomination of desolation prophecies in Daniel and the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24; Mk. 13). However, this view is rooted in a shallow understanding of history, which becomes apparent when we take a closer look at the events of 70 AD in light of the textual details in Matthew 24:15.

NO ONE ESCAPED AFTER THE SIEGE IN 70 AD

First, Jesus makes clear in Matthew 24:15–22 that when Daniel 9:27 is fulfilled, the Antichrist will be seen in the Temple, at which point some Jewish people will escape Jerusalem and “flee to the mountains.” The

¹ Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 743; 5.6.316.

abomination of desolation will lead to a time of intense tribulation in Israel. Yet, many who are prepared will get out of the city and survive in the wilderness. Jesus did not teach that all of the inhabitants of Jerusalem will be universally defeated and killed when Daniel 9:27 is fulfilled.

In contrast to this picture in Matthew 24, in 70 AD, after Titus began his siege against Jerusalem, no one escaped. No one was able to “flee to the mountains.” (Note: In the next section we will look at the argument that Jesus’ flee-to-the-mountains prophecy was fulfilled in 70 AD.)

The reason no one escaped at this time, was because the Romans built a completely separate wall around the entire circumference of Jerusalem, five miles long, and presumably at least 10-20 feet high, before their final assault on the city.² The Romans literally turned Jerusalem into an enclosed prison, and hedged in the Jewish rebels on every side. Those still left in the city suffered starvation, disease, and death, even before the Romans’ final conquest. After this wall was built Josephus said, “all hope of escaping was now cut off from the Jews, together with their liberty of going out of their city.”³

Josephus further describes this series of events, noting that after the majority of Jewish people refused to surrender to Titus some of his commanders proposed that they should attack the city with their entire army. Titus considered this, but he was concerned that if the entire Jewish army were to wage a counterattack his forces might not prevail.

Consequently, the Romans decided to barricade the city, so they could first starve and weaken the Jewish rebels before their attack. When this decision was made, Titus realized how hard it would be to stop the rebels from coming in and out of the city through “secret passages,”

2 Between May 10th and June 2nd 70 AD the Romans did carry out some initial offensive maneuvers against Jerusalem before this wall was built. However, once Titus realized how deeply entrenched the Jewish defenders were, he pulled his forces back, built the wall, and subjected those inside Jerusalem to a longer siege/starvation campaign. The final assault against the revolutionaries was carried out in August. Stephen Dando-Collins, *Legions of Rome: The Definitive History of Every Imperial Roman Legion* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2010), 352–354.

3 Josephus, *Wars*, 5.12.3.

so he decided to build the new wall around Jerusalem. The building of this wall in such a short amount of time represented an astonishing accomplishment of ad hoc military engineering and construction. It was a testament to the skill and ingenuity of the Romans, which often gave them an edge in battle.

Josephus describes how the Romans built the wall, and the effect it had on the Jewish population inside Jerusalem:

And therefore, his [Titus'] opinion was, that if they aimed at quickness joined with security, they must build a wall around the whole city; which was he thought, the only way to prevent the Jews from coming out any way, and that then they would either entirely despair of saving the city, and so would surrender it up to him, or be still the more easily conquered when the famine had farther weakened them. [...]

These arguments prevailed with the commanders. So Titus gave orders that the army should be distributed to their several shares of this work. [Josephus also notes how zealous the Roman soldiers were to build this wall.] Titus began the wall from the Camp of the Assyrians, where his camp was pitched, and drew it down to the lower parts of Cenopolis; thence it went along the valley of Cedron to the Mount of Olives; it then bent towards the south, and encompassed the mountain as far as the rock called Peristreon, and that other hill which lies next to it, and is over the valley which reaches to Siloam; whence it bended again to the west, and went down to the valley of the Fountain, beyond which it went up again at the monument of Ananus the high priest, and encompassing that mountain where Pompey had formerly pitched his camp, it returned back to the north side of the city, and was carried on as far as a certain village called "The House of the Erebenthi," after which it encompassed Herod's monument, and there, on the east, was joined to Titus' own camp where it began. **Now the length of this wall was forty furloughs** [about 5 miles], one only abated.

Now at this wall without were erected thirteen places to keep garrisons in, the circumference of which, put together,

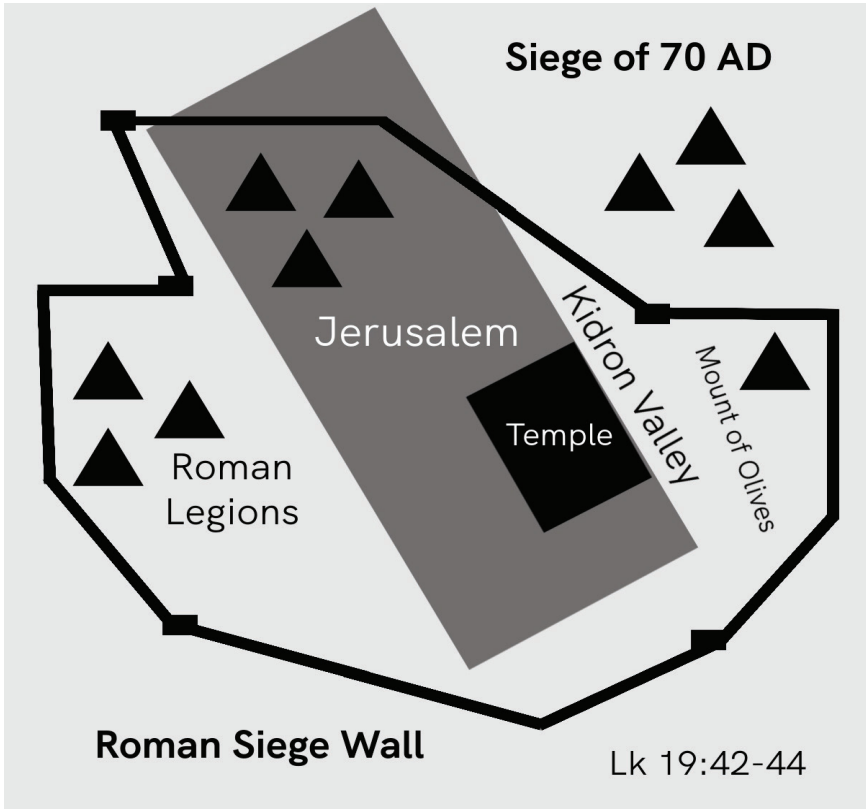
amounted to ten furloughs; the whole was completed in three days: so what would naturally have required some months was done in so short an interval as is incredible. **When Titus had therefore encompassed the city with this wall, and put garrisons into proper places, he went round the wall, at the first watch of the night, and observed how the guard was kept;** [...] They also cast lots among themselves who should be upon the watch in the night-time, and who should go all night long round the spaces that were interposed between the garrisons.

So all hope of escaping was now cut off from the Jews, together with their liberty of going out of their city. Then did the famine widen its progress, and devoured the people by whole houses and families; the upper rooms were full of women and children that were dying by the famine; and the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged; the children also and the young men wandered about the marketplaces like shadows, all swelled with the famine, and fell down dead wheresoever their misery seized them. [...] many died as they were burying others [...] Nor was there any lamentation made under these calamities, nor were heard any mournful complaints; but the famine confounded all natural passions [...] A deep silence also, a kind of deadly night, had seized upon the city.⁴

In the map below, the wall of Titus is depicted with the solid black line around (and through parts of) the city.⁵

4 Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 722–724; 5.12.491–526.

5 Map image from: Siege of Jerusalem (70 AD); *Weapons and Warfare*, online.



After this protracted siege, which lasted around 5 months, the Roman army systematically conquered Jerusalem piece by piece. The Romans did encounter some heavy resistance in the city. However, as Josephus records, after months of suffering the weakened Jewish hold-outs were never going to be any match for the Roman war machine. The Roman army plundered and slaughtered at will, and in the end, Titus was so frustrated with the Jews that he let his troops burn the city to the ground. Notably, the Temple was burned down on Tish B'Av in 70 AD, the same day the first Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. Then, with the ashes of the Temple under their feet, the Romans made sacrifices to their gods on the Temple Mount.

These details concerning the wall Titus built around Jerusalem in

70 AD, as well as the way the conquest unfolded, disprove the idea that Daniel 9:27 and Matthew 24:15–22 could have been fulfilled in 70 AD. The siege wall simply did not allow Jesus' flee-to-the-mountains prophecy to come to pass in the first century. By the time Titus actually did make it up to the holy place (i.e. the Temple), there was essentially no one left in the city who could have fled, and the Temple itself was already on fire and then in ruins! Personally, I am surprised that more people who espouse a first-century fulfillment of these passages overlook these details in Josephus' account, as well as the extent to which the events that took place in 70 AD fail to harmonize with the events Jesus describes in the Olivet Discourse.

WHAT ABOUT THE FLIGHT TO PELLA?

Some proponents of a first-century fulfillment will note that many Christians (mostly Messianic Jews) did escape Jerusalem before Titus' siege, and therefore, this proves Daniel 9:27, and Jesus' words in Matthew 24:15, were fulfilled in 70 AD. The first part of this argument is true, but the second part is false.

The early Church historian Eusebius notes that many Messianic Jews were warned in a prophecy to leave Jerusalem before the war began. Eusebius wrote:

“The people of the Church in Jerusalem were commanded by an oracle given by revelation **before the war** to those in the city who were worthy of it to depart and dwell in one of the cities of Perea which they called Pella. To it those who believed on Christ traveled from Jerusalem, so that [...] holy men had altogether deserted the royal capital of the Jews and the whole land of Judea ...” (*Church History* 3, 5, 3)

The early Church writer Epiphanius also wrote:

For when the city was about to be taken and destroyed by the Romans, **it was revealed in advance to all the disciples by an angel of**

God that they should remove from the city, as it was going to be completely destroyed. They sojourned as emigrants in Pella, the city above mentioned in Transjordan. And this city is said to be of the Decapolis.” (*Epiphanius, On Weights and Measures 15*)

These texts from Eusebius and Epiphanius clarify that the disciples in the first century fled Jerusalem “before the war,” because the coming destruction was “revealed to them in advance,” which contradicts what Jesus said will happen when Daniel 9:27 is fulfilled. Jesus said his disciples will “see” the abomination of desolation, “standing in the holy place,” and then “flee to the mountains.” This is not what happened in 70 AD. None of the disciples of Jesus saw Titus in the Temple, or on the Temple Mount, and then fled. They fled many days before Titus arrived.

The disciples fleeing Jerusalem in 70 AD before the war was an important event, because it shows how God can supernaturally preserve His people in the midst of calamity through divine revelation. But this flight of the disciples to Pella before the war is not what Jesus was referring to in Matthew 24. Either we are forced to say that Jesus got certain portions of his prophecy wrong, and Daniel 9:27 was fulfilled in 70 AD, just not quite in the way he predicted, or, we are left with the reality that Daniel 9:27 and Matthew 24:15 were not fulfilled in the first century.

ABOMINATION IN THE TEMPLE THEN DESTRUCTION

Overall, the chronological sequence of events in 70 AD does not line up with the chronological sequence of events in Matthew 24. As a matter of fact, what happened in 70 AD was the exact opposite of the scenario Jesus lays out in Matthew 24:15. Whereas Matthew 24 places the destruction *after* the abomination of desolation is seen in the holy place, in 70 AD, the destruction took place *before* the Romans ever made it up to the Temple Mount. Jesus speaks of the abomination of desolation in the holy place while Jerusalem is still intact, which will give his people a chance to “flee.” Titus went up to the Temple Mount when

Jerusalem was already in ruins, and after that point, no one escaped the city, because by that time, most of the Jewish rebels were already dead.

Furthermore, Josephus only says the Romans brought their standards to the “eastern gate” on the Temple Mount and offered sacrifices there. He never says anything about the Romans being in “the holy place” or setting up an idol within the Temple.⁶

STANDING IN THE HOLY PLACE

Some Preterists do understand the historical problem with saying that people fled after Titus reached the Temple Mount (because they know this didn’t happen). However, instead of accepting that their view is historically untenable, they redefine what the “holy place” in Matthew 24:15 means. They will say perhaps “standing in the holy place” only refers to Titus being outside Jerusalem, because Jerusalem is the “holy city” and some people did flee while Titus was still on the outskirts of Jerusalem, before he built his wall.

This view is weak because (1) the holy place refers to sacred Temple space, not simply to Jerusalem in a general sense. In agreement with what we see in Matthew 24:15, the Hebrew Bible refers to the inner sanctuary of the Temple as the “holy place” dozens of times (see LXX: Ex. 26:33). Thus, there can be no doubt that first-century Jews would have understood that a reference to the Temple was intended in Matthew 24:15.

Furthermore, in Daniel 12:11–12 the abomination of desolation is connected to the cessation of sacrifices, indicating an action that will be carried out *in the Temple*. In 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4 Paul also refers to the Antichrist being in the Temple, which should be understood as his interpretation of the abomination of desolation prophecies in Daniel 9-12 and Matthew 24.

6 Titus did go into the Temple before it completely burned to the ground. But still, this does not qualify as him “standing in the holy place” and setting up an abomination (which he never did). And again, no one was able to flee the city once Titus made it up to the Temple Mount anyways.

Put simply, when Jesus said “standing in the holy place” he meant standing in the Temple. This linguistic detail alone proves that Matthew 24:15 could not have been fulfilled in 70 AD, because again, no one fled the city after Titus was seen in the Temple.

TITUS DOES NOT MATCH THE DESCRIPTION OF THE PRINCE TO COME

It is also important to recognize that even though Titus was a pagan enemy of Israel, his conduct during the siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD does not match the conduct of the one who will fulfill the abomination of desolation prophecies in Daniel and the Synoptic Gospels. In Daniel 8–12 and Matthew 24, the Prince to Come is presented as a ruthlessly evil, unmerciful, and deceptive leader associated only with lawlessness and destruction. There is never any indication in Scripture that the one who carries out the abomination of desolation will have anything but murderous hatred and spite towards YHWH and the Jews after the midpoint of the 70th week. Quite the opposite, Scripture indicates that whoever does not flee as fast as they can from this person will be killed.

In contrast to this picture of the Prince to Come, Titus repeatedly tried to negotiate with the Jews in 70 AD, so that their lives would be spared, and so that Jerusalem and the Temple would not be destroyed. Before the siege of Jerusalem began, Titus allowed many Jewish defectors to leave the city. He didn’t even imprison them, but let them go wherever they wanted (Josephus, *Wars*, 6.10.420–423). Titus also sent Josephus to plead with the Jews multiple times to surrender. When Titus was drawing near to the Temple, and many Jews were still barricaded inside, he asked the Jews to “change the place whereon you will fight,” so that the Temple would not be defiled (Josephus, *Wars*, 6.2.127–128).

Some might wonder if Titus’ gesture before the siege of Jerusalem, and the fact that some Jews did leave before the siege began, could qualify as the fulfillment of Jesus’ prediction that the Jews would “flee to the mountains” right before the fulfillment of Daniel 9:27. But again, this is not possible, because besides the chronological problems, taking Titus

up on his offer did not qualify as the type of fleeing Jesus had in mind in Matthew 24:15–18. In Matthew 24:15–18, Jesus emphasizes how the Jewish people will have to flee for their lives lest they be massacred by a wicked tyrant. Titus' kind gesture allowing some Jews to leave Jerusalem before the siege in 70 AD hardly implies that he wanted to murder every Jew in his path in the way Jesus outlines in Matthew 24.

No doubt Titus had selfish motives in all of this. He wanted to avoid Roman casualties of war, and he wanted to preserve magnificent Jerusalem as an operational Roman city in the east. But still, Titus was not the evil desolator described in Daniel and the Gospels. Jesus said the one who commits the abomination of desolation will have no mercy whatsoever on the Jewish people, nor will he have any respect for the sanctuary and the city. The Prince to Come who commits the abomination of desolation will verbally blaspheme and taunt YHVH. He will personally put a stop to sacrifices and willfully destroy the sanctuary (Dan. 8:11; 9:26–27). These are things Titus never quite did in the way the prophetic text describes.

THE FIRST-CENTURY FULFILLMENT VIEW

Throughout this book, we have looked at many reasons why Daniel 9:24–27 could not have been fulfilled in the first century. The First-Century Fulfillment position ignores the eschatological significance of the Jubilee, as well as the eschatological nature of the purpose statements in Daniel 9:24, and their connection to God's plan for national Israel. It awkwardly places the abomination of desolation 36 years after the 70th week on its timeline. It turns a prophecy of hope for Jerusalem into a prophecy that culminates with Jerusalem's destruction. It overlooks the intertextual relationship between Daniel 7–8 and Daniel 9, which demonstrates that the Prince to Come is an evil end-times figure (not Jesus or Titus). It has no valid explanation of the 1,290-1,335 days that Daniel 12:11–12 says will bring the last half of the 70th week to an end (and lead to a time of great blessing). It has no valid explanation of the covenant in verse 27 that is made "for one week." And now, we have

also seen that the idea that Daniel 9 was fulfilled in 70 AD is rooted in a very shallow understanding of the historical events that transpired in the first century when Rome conquered Jerusalem.

In order to prove that a prophecy was fulfilled in the past, the interpreter must show that each of the individual elements in the prophecy had a historical fulfillment that harmonizes with the text of Scripture. One or two data points, and/or some general similarities are not enough. It is the details that matter.

History follows cyclical patterns, and to a certain extent, all of history has eschatological characteristics. Therefore, we should not be surprised that earlier historical events often prefigure and mirror future end-time events.

However, just because there may be some congruency between history and eschatology, we must be careful not to fall into the reductionist trap of sacrificing eschatology on the altar of history. As Bible teacher Mike Winger states, historical events and future end-time events “are similar on purpose, but they’re different on purpose as well, because God wants [us] to know that this [i.e. the abomination of desolation] has not yet happened.”

We should not deny the future significance of Daniel 9:27 and Matthew 24:15, because the abomination of desolation was one of the primary end-time signposts Jesus emphasized in his teaching. Whether we live to experience the fulfillment of Matthew 24:15 or not, this prophecy should still be a central part of the Messianic community’s broader teaching on eschatology, especially as we draw closer to the return of Jesus.

WHAT IS THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION?

Scripture is clear that the abomination of desolation relates to some action the Antichrist will take in the Temple, midway through the 70th week. Beyond this general description, we are not given too many other details that explain what exactly the Antichrist will do at this time.

2 Thessalonians 2:4 offers some specific information, when it states

that the Antichrist will “take his seat in the Temple of God, displaying himself as God.” Jesus also mentions that the abomination of desolation will be seen “standing in the holy place.” In a sense, both Jesus and Paul seem to refer to the Antichrist himself as the abomination of desolation.

At the same time, Daniel 12:11 says the abomination of desolation will be “set up.” This language could point to some type of idolatrous image or idol the Antichrist will install in the Temple. Nevertheless, I hasten to add that the word for “set up” (*natan*) in Daniel 12:11 is somewhat ambiguous.

The only time the phrase “the abomination of desolation” is found outside of the Bible is in the book of *1 Maccabees*, which was written shortly after the Antiochene crisis in the 160s BC. *1 Maccabees* 1:54 states that the abomination of desolation was built “upon the altar, and in the cities of Judah on every side.” From the perspective of *1 Maccabees*, the abomination of desolation was a pagan altar on top of the sacrificial bronze altar outside the holy place, which Antiochus used to sacrifice swine and other pagan contraband. In a secondary sense, *1 Maccabees* notes that the abomination of desolation involved smaller pagan altars throughout Judea as well.

In addition to making pagan sacrifices on the Temple Mount, Antiochus also defiled the Jewish Temple by setting up an image of himself next to the Temple altar in Jerusalem.

Many scholars have noted that *1 Maccabees* 1:54 “stands as the earliest interpretation”⁷ of the abomination of desolation in Second Temple Period Judaism, and that many Jewish people at this time would have understood “Daniel’s abomination of desolation with reference to the Antiochene crisis.”⁸ Though some early Jewish interpreters were ultimately wrong to suggest that Daniel 9:27 was fulfilled

7 John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 357.

8 Dean R. Ulrich, “How Early Judaism Read Daniel 9:24–27,” *Old Testament Essays*, Vol. 27 n.3, Pretoria, 2014.

in the 160s BC, when Jesus referred to a still-future abomination of desolation, it is likely that his Jewish audience would have had the abomination during the time of Antiochus in mind. Moreover, the fact that Jesus drew an analogy between the past actions of Antiochus and the future actions of the Antichrist, further proves that the abomination of desolation will involve events that transpire within the Temple's holy place while the Temple is still in tact, a scenario that contrasts what happened in 70 AD.

That said, it is hard to know the extent to which Jesus intended for us to draw a precise analogy between the actions of Antiochus and the future actions of the Antichrist. We can be certain that the Antichrist will desecrate and defile the Temple in some way, like Antiochus did. However, we do not know exactly how the Antichrist will do this. All we know is that the Antichrist will enter the holy place and carry out some type of idolatrous action therein. It is possible that the Antichrist will set up an image of himself somewhere in or around the sanctuary, perhaps something similar to the "image of the beast" (Rev. 13:15). But this is speculative.

Furthermore, when Daniel 8:11 says the Antichrist will cause the sanctuary to be "thrown down," this language indicates that he will not merely defile the Temple, but instead, he will also destroy it, which is something Antiochus never did. Antiochus only plundered and profaned the Temple. It appears the Antichrist will go one step further.

THE TIME OF JACOB'S TROUBLE

We cannot be 100% certain of what exactly the abomination of desolation will entail. But the significance of the Antichrist's actions, and the events they will lead to, are made more clear in Scripture. The abomination of desolation will lead to Israel's final period of purging and discipline before the Messianic Age. According to Daniel, this time will last for three-and-a-half years (1,260-1,290 days; Dan. 12:11).

In chapter 7, we looked at how the third purpose statement in Daniel 9:24 relates to how the nation of Israel will have its iniquity

“purged/atoned for” (*kaphar*) during the 70 weeks. Daniel 9:27 and 12:6–13 pick up on this idea, and more specifically reveal that it will be the Prince to Come, and his evil actions against the Jewish people, that the Lord will use to refine Israel in the last days. Though this is a sobering reality to reckon with, God’s covenant with Israel has always involved discipline, exile, and intense national hardships if the nation does not walk in His ways, and this is a pattern that will be on full display during the last half of the 70th week. As Daniel 12:7 says, Israel will suffer at the hands of the Antichrist “for a time, times, and half a time; and as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people [i.e. Israel], all these events will be completed,” 1,290 days after “the abomination of desolation” is set up (Dan. 12:11–13).

THE TIME OF JACOB’S TROUBLE IN LUKE 21

In Luke 21:20–24, Luke gives another angle on the abomination of desolation prophecy (Matt. 24:15; Mk. 13:14). Notably however, Luke also adds some important details that are left out of Matthew and Mark’s accounts. We read:

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then **recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains**, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; because these are days of vengeance, **so that all things which are written must be fulfilled**. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to this people; **and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled**.

It is true that earlier in Luke 21:5–6, Jesus referred to the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 AD. In these verses Jesus stated, “the

days will come in which there will not be left one stone upon another which will not be torn down.”

This reference to the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD has led many commentators to assume that all of Luke 21 is about the events of 70 AD. As we have already seen however, this position is indefensible, primarily because when Jesus mentions that people will “flee to the mountains” from “the midst of the city,” he presents a scenario that does not match what happened in 70 AD. In 70 AD, the Romans’ siege wall did not allow this flight from “the midst of the city” to take place as described in Luke 21.

Also, Jesus clarifies in Luke 21:22 that the invasion of Jerusalem mentioned here will lead to “all things which are written” being fulfilled. This is a statement that has eschatological connotations, as it implies the fulfillment of Bible prophecy, and the consummation of all things, not merely the events of 70 AD. The events of 70 AD left many prophecies unfulfilled, and the events of 70 AD were not “written” about anywhere else in the Bible, so this could not have been the time Jesus was referring to in Luke 21:20–24.

It is best to interpret Luke 21:5–6 and Luke 21:20–24 as an example of “prophetic telescoping.” Prophetic telescoping refers to how eschatological events of the distant future (vv. 20–24) are often brought closer and discussed in a context in which other events on the nearer horizon are also discussed (vv. 5–6). This is a common occurrence in many prophecies throughout the Bible.

So to be clear, Jesus did predict the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD in Luke 21:5–6, and also in Luke 19:41–44. But this does not mean this was all he predicted in these passages. Luke 21 in particular has eschatological significance as well.

When discussing the events of the 70th week, unlike Matthew and Mark, Luke does not mention “the abomination of desolation” in the holy place. Instead, he mentions that Jerusalem will be “surrounded by armies” and invaded. This invasion will lead to a time of “great distress” and a period of captivity for the Jewish nation. At the midpoint

of the 70th week, right after the Antichrist fulfills the abomination of desolation prophecies of Daniel, his armies will conquer Israel, and the nation will remain under the control of the Antichrist until Jesus returns (Lk. 21:27). “Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”⁹

As a brief side note, notice as well how Luke 21:27 associates the Antichrist and his armies with the Gentile powers. This is more proof that the Antichrist will be a Gentile military leader who will control Jerusalem until Jesus returns (Lk. 21:25–28), not a Jewish “false messiah.”

THE FINAL INVASION OF JERUSALEM IN ZECHARIAH 14

Many commentators have been reluctant to interpret Luke 21:20–24 as though it refers to a still-future period of end-times captivity and exile that the nation of Israel will experience during the 70th week. Be that as it may, this interpretation is sound, especially because it is confirmed by many other Scriptures that also depict the same events.

For example, in Zechariah 14:2–3 we read:

For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished, and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives [...] (cf. Zech. 12:1–5).

Zechariah 14:2–3, like many other prophetic passages, displays a characteristic I call “prophetic compression.” Prophetic compression refers to how a long series of events is often compressed and outlined in

9 It is common to hear that when the Jewish people regained control of Jerusalem in 1967, this represented the end of the “time of the Gentiles.” This position fails to take into account the future invasion of Jerusalem by the Antichrist and his armies. The “times of the Gentiles” will only end after the Second Coming.

only a few short verses. Many people ignore the prevalence of prophetic compression in Scripture, which often leads to misunderstandings about how long it will take for one particular prophecy to be fulfilled.

For example, because Zechariah 14:3 mentions that the Lord will fight for Israel, right after the previous verse mentions that Jerusalem will be invaded, we might be inclined to assume that the invasion of Jerusalem and the Lord's victory will happen more or less simultaneously, or within a very brief period of time.

The principle of prophetic compression can help us understand that there is no required timeframe in the text between the invasion of verse 2 and the Lord's victory in verse 3. These events do not have to happen back-to-back in a hyper-literal way.

Moreover, once we understand how Zechariah 14:2–3 is related to Daniel 9:27 and 12:11–13, as well as Matthew 24:15, Mark 13:14, and Luke 21:20–24, it is easier to see that Zechariah 14:2 covers the same period of destruction that is linked to the midpoint of Daniel's 70th week, not only in Daniel, but also in the Gospels. In other words, when Jesus said in Luke 21:22 that the invasion mentioned in the Olivet Discourse will lead to “all things which are written” being fulfilled, he had passages like Zechariah 14 and Daniel 9–12 on his mind.

The invasion of Luke 21 will fulfill Zechariah 14 and Daniel 9–12. It will mark the final period of God's “wrath” and discipline towards Israel, the allotted time to “finish shattering the power of the holy people” (Dan. 12:7), so that their iniquities can finally be purged/atoned for (Dan. 9:24), through the “spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning” (Isa. 4:4). As God said in Isaiah 27:9, “through this Jacob's iniquity will be purged; and this will be the full price of the pardoning of his sin,” namely, exile in the last days that will lead to repentance from idolatry (Isa. 27:8–9).

Daniel 9:27, 12:11–13, Matthew 24:15, and Mark 13:14 expand on this Time of Jacob's Trouble theme in the Hebrew prophets by revealing that this time will begin at the midpoint of the 70th week, when the Antichrist is seen “standing in the holy place.” Luke 21:20–24 also adds the important detail that not only will people see the Antichrist in the

Jewish sanctuary at this time, but they will also see Jerusalem surrounded by armies. When the Lord's people in Jerusalem witness these events, they should recognize them as a sign of imminent destruction, and as a final opportunity to "flee to the mountains" (Lk. 21:21).

THE TIME OF JACOB'S TROUBLE IN REVELATION 12

As difficult as the Time of Jacob's Trouble will be, Revelation 12:6 and 12:13–16 do also make clear that a Jewish remnant that heeds Jesus' advice to "flee to the mountains" will be protected and preserved in the wilderness during the last half of the 70th week. These prophecies state:

Then the woman [i.e. Israel] fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished **for one thousand, two hundred and sixty days** (Rev. 12:6).

And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, **he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child**. But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, **so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent**. And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth (Rev. 12:13–16).

This prophecy in Revelation 12 symbolically depicts the nation of Israel as "a woman clothed with the sun," with "the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." The sun, moon, and stars evoke Joseph's dream in Genesis 37:1–9, so it is widely accepted that "the sun and moon refer to Joseph's parents, Jacob and Leah, while the stars are his brothers,"¹⁰ who represent "the twelve patriarchs or the

10 Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50: Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco: Word, 1994), 352.

twelve tribes” of Israel.¹¹ In addition to this symbolism, because the woman in Revelation 12 gives birth to the Messiah, this proves that she represents the nation of Israel.

Some scholars, especially those influenced by supersessionism (replacement theology), believe the woman represents not ethnic/national Israel, that is to say, the literal Jewish nation, but instead, the Church, or, “the whole people of God,”¹² whom they call, “the new Israel.” Equating the woman (Israel) in Revelation 12 with the Church is misleading and unnecessary. Both Daniel 7–12 and the Synoptic Gospels state that the Antichrist will persecute the literal nation of Israel and the literal Jewish people during the 70th week. There is no need to read the Church into the woman’s identity here.

The Serpent’s persecution of the woman in Revelation 12 represents the Antichrist’s persecution of Israel during the nation’s final 3 ½ year tribulation (i.e. the Time of Jacob’s Trouble). Revelation 12 describes in symbolic terms what the Hebrew prophets and Jesus described in more concrete historical terms.

Also, the Church did not give birth to the Messiah as Revelation 12:1–5 depicts. It was the physical descendants of Jacob (Israel) who gave birth to the Messiah.

As a result, the woman in Revelation 12 should be viewed as nothing more than a representation of ethnic-national Israel (the Jewish people). It is truly remarkable that even though many Christian scholars have written Israel out of God’s ongoing story of redemption, God places this vision of Israel’s preservation during the 70th week right in the middle of the book of Revelation.

What is striking about Revelation 12 is that it ties Satan’s attempt to destroy the Messiah when he was born (12:4) to his final attempt to destroy the entire nation of Israel during Daniel’s 70th week (12:6, 14).

11 Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 456.

12 Osborne, *Revelation*, 456.

This passage describes Satan's comprehensive strategy to stand against the reign of the Messiah. It reveals that Satan does not only oppose Jesus in an individual sense. Nor does he simply oppose the Church. Instead, Satan also opposes the existence of national Israel in a very real way, because he knows Israel will be at the center of God's kingdom in the Messianic Age.

The link between Revelation 12 and the other 70th week prophecies in Daniel is confirmed when we read that Israel will be protected in "the wilderness" for "1,260 days," which equals the "time, times, and half a time" from Daniel 7:25 (cf. Rev. 12:14), and also comprises most of the 1,290 days mentioned in Daniel 12:11. This is the length of time the Antichrist will persecute Israel, as we read in Daniel 7:25:

He [the Antichrist] will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One [i.e. Israel] [...] **and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.**

When we juxtapose Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 12:14, these texts reveal that even though many Jewish people will "be given into his [the Antichrist's] hand for a time, times, and half a time," there will still be a remnant of Jewish people preserved and protected by God in the wilderness for the same amount of time.

God's preservation of the Jewish remnant during the final half of the 70th week also raises an important practical point for the followers of Jesus today. Many who love and stand with Israel believe talking about the Time of Jacob's Trouble is inappropriate, or too offensive. But this is a truth from God's word that will save Jewish lives in the future. Christians and Messianic Jews who understand Bible prophecy will be in the best position to prepare the Jewish remnant to "flee to the mountains," and "into the wilderness," during the 70th week.

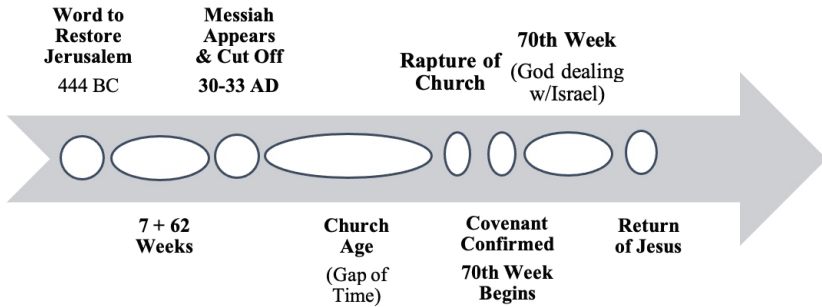
As long as we speak about this topic in the right spirit, and in a way that is biblical, sensitive, and God-honoring, we do not need to ignore or marginalize it in any way. As a matter of fact, we need more pastors,

more ministry leaders, and more scholars who both understand the Time of Jacob's Trouble, and make it a central part of their teaching ministry to the Lord's people. Whether we personally live to see the Time of Jacob's Trouble or not is largely irrelevant. It is still a good idea to sow the seeds of truth today that will one day lead to Israel's preservation during the 70th week.

THE BODY OF MESSIAH AND THE 70TH WEEK

Many Christians and Messianic Jews understand the eschatological significance of Daniel's 70th week, as well as the key prophetic events that will transpire during this seven-year period of time. That said, there is still widespread disagreement within the Messianic community over whether or not the followers of Jesus (i.e. the *ekklesia*) will be on the earth during the 70th week. Because Daniel 9:24 says the 70 weeks were appointed for Daniel's "people and holy city," meaning, the nation of Israel, it is often argued that the Church/Messianic community cannot be around for the 70th week, and must therefore be raptured before it begins.

For over 100 years, Daniel 9:24–27 has been one of the central texts used by advocates of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture to justify their position. Since there is a gap of over 2,000 years within the 70-weeks prophecy (which began after the 7 and 62 weeks of verse 25), proponents of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture have often called this period of time "the Church Age," alleging that it will only end when the Church is raptured before the 70th week, so that God can then carry out His purposes for Israel during the final seven-year period (aka. the Tribulation).

Pre-Tribulation Timeline of Daniel 9:24–27 (not drawn to precise scale)**A RESPONSE TO THE PRE-TRIB TIMELINE**

If we were to base our understanding of the 70th week only on Daniel 9:24–27, then a valid case could be made that God only intends to deal with ethnic-national Israel during this time, not the Body of Messiah. However, when we look at the broader testimony of Scripture, and also utilize solid principles of biblical interpretation, the view that the *ekklesia* (the Church/Body of Messiah) must be raptured before the 70th week begins is problematic for three main reasons.

First, this position is based on an argument from silence. An argument from silence is a logical fallacy that occurs when we draw our conclusions primarily from what is not said, rather than from what is said in a biblical text. Daniel 9:24–27 does not specifically address whether or not the Church will be on the earth during the 70th week, so we cannot reach any firm conclusion one way or another about this issue from this text. Just because this passage highlights how the 70 weeks relate to God’s plan for Israel, it does not automatically follow that the Messianic community couldn’t be around for the 70th week.

Second, there are many passages in the New Testament that do indicate that the Body of Messiah will be on the earth during the 70th week, not raptured before it begins. In 2 Thessalonians 2:1–5, Paul counseled

believers under the assumption that they would see the Antichrist in the Temple before the Rapture. In this passage Paul said, before “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him,” the Antichrist and the apostasy “comes first.” In other words, the 70th week and the Antichrist come “first,” and then later, the Rapture.

Similarly, in Matthew 24:15 Jesus taught that his disciples, members of the Body of Messiah, will “see the abomination of desolation” in the sanctuary in Jerusalem. Jesus also said everything written in the book of Revelation was given as a testimony “for the churches” (Rev. 22:16). This implies that “the churches” to whom the book of Revelation was addressed will experience the tribulation events described therein.

Each of these passages indicate that the Body of Messiah will be on the earth, and have a role to play, during the 70th week.

Third, the Pre-Tribulation view that Daniel 9:24 proves the Church will be gone before the 70th week begins, is rooted in the errors of traditional dispensationalism. Traditional dispensationalism is a theological system built around the idea that there is a complete and total distinction between Israel and the Church. According to dispensational logic, if God is focused on Israel during the 70th week, He cannot be simultaneously focused on the Church.

This line of dispensational reasoning is an example of the logical fallacy known as a “false dichotomy.” Scripture is clear that God works with both Israel and the Church (*ekklesia*) at the same time. In the post-resurrection era, God does not dichotomize history into the time He is working with the Church vs. the time He is working with Israel. He works through both national Israel and the Church (the *ekklesia*) in a complementary and overlapping fashion. God’s purposes for Israel during the 70th week do not nullify His purposes for the New Covenant Body of believers during this time.

THE DEFEAT OF DARKNESS

In spite of the hardships that will be experienced during the 70th week, Daniel 9:24–27 is still a prophecy of hope, and one that pertains to the

promise of the coming Messianic Age. This is why Daniel 9:27 ends by speaking of the destruction of the Antichrist, which will in turn pave the way for the Messianic Jubilee.

In Daniel 9:27b we read:

[...] even until a complete destruction, **one that is decreed**, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.

There is a beautiful reminder of God's providential control of history in this portion of verse 27, seen most clearly when Gabriel mentions that the "complete destruction" of the Antichrist is "one that is decreed" (*charats*). The term "decreed" (*charats*) was previously used in Daniel 9:26, when Gabriel, referring to the end times, said, "desolations are determined" (*charats*).

Unfortunately, most English Bible translations do not translate *charats* (decreed) as the same English word in both verses, which causes readers to miss the strategic repetition here. Desolations are decreed (9:26), but so too, the destruction of the one who will desolate has also been decreed (9:27). Indeed, a "complete destruction" will be poured out on the Antichrist and all the forces of evil.

The message at the end of Daniel 9:27 is that God sovereignly orchestrates and decrees all the affairs of history to serve His own ends. He does decree "desolations," and all of the most difficult times we will ever experience. At the same time, God also decrees the end of these desolations. He promises His people deliverance, and that the powers of darkness, including the Antichrist, will not prevail.

As we look at history, and even our own lives, we see this same pattern. Tyrants appear on the scene for a while, and then wither like the grass and vanish. The wicked prosper for a time, but then they are no more.

At the personal level, various trials and tribulations assault us on a daily basis. Yet, if we endure and trust in the Lord, we often find that our deliverance has been "decreed," and that things do improve. Or,

the Lord takes us home, and we experience the ultimate deliverance into His presence.

During the end times, the success, power, and influence of the Antichrist will be devastating. Powerful nations will fall like dominoes in the wake of his conquests. The media will laud him as the greatest person to ever live. Many will commit apostasy and worship him.

Lest believers find themselves in complete despair, or intoxicated with the spirit of the age, Daniel 9:27 reminds us not to get pulled into this trap of deception. Even in spite of all his successes, the Antichrist's reign of terror will be short lived. God has already planned his destruction long ago. It has been "decreed" (9:27).

The final destruction of the Antichrist spoken of in Daniel 9:27 is one of the major themes of Bible prophecy, because it encourages God's people in every age to keep a proper perspective on the political powers of evil that can at times manifest in such crushing and oppressive ways. Bible prophecy reminds us that Jesus, the King of Kings, will have the last word in the end, because only he is "the ruler of the kings of the earth" (Rev. 1:5).

Below are some examples that demonstrate how the decreed destruction of the Antichrist in Daniel 9:27 is intertextually linked to many other passages that expound on the same theme:

- In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever (Dan. 2:44).
- But the court will sit for judgment, and his [the Antichrist's] dominion will be taken away, annihilated, and destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him (Dan. 7:27).

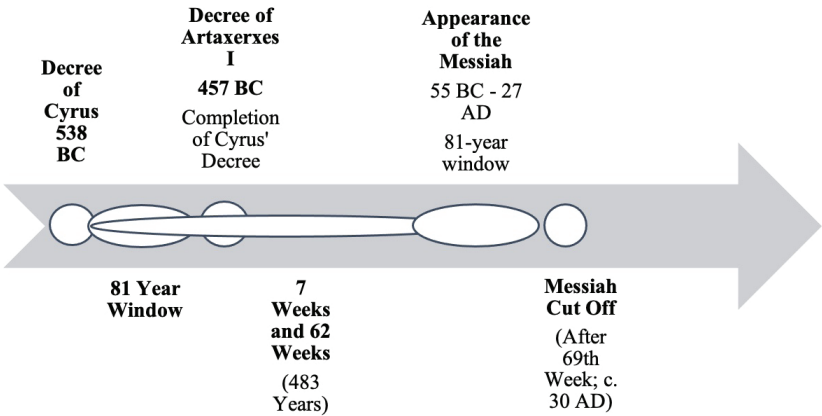
- He [the Antichrist] will even oppose the Prince of princes, but he will be broken without human agency (Dan. 8:25).
- You went forth for the salvation of Your people, for the salvation of your anointed. You struck the head of the house of evil [the Antichrist] to lay him open from thigh to neck. You pierced with his own spears the head of his throngs (Hab. 3:13–14).
- With pestilence and with blood I will enter into judgment with him [Gog = Antichrist]; and I will rain on him and on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, a torrential rain, with hailstones, fire, and brimstone (Ezek. 38:22).
- Then that lawless one [Antichrist] will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming (2 Thess. 2:8).
- And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone (Rev. 19:20).

At the conclusion of his impartation to Daniel, Gabriel centers our hearts on the reality that evil will be defeated, that our Messiah will reign, and that our time of freedom and redemption is not so far away. All the forces of justice and truth, a myriad number of angels, and even the High Court of heaven itself are working now to bring the glorious vision of the 70 weeks to pass, for you, for me, for Israel, and for the nations. If we can look past the veil of darkness that shrouds this world, if we can peer past the fog of the daily headlines, we will see a light dawning on the horizon.

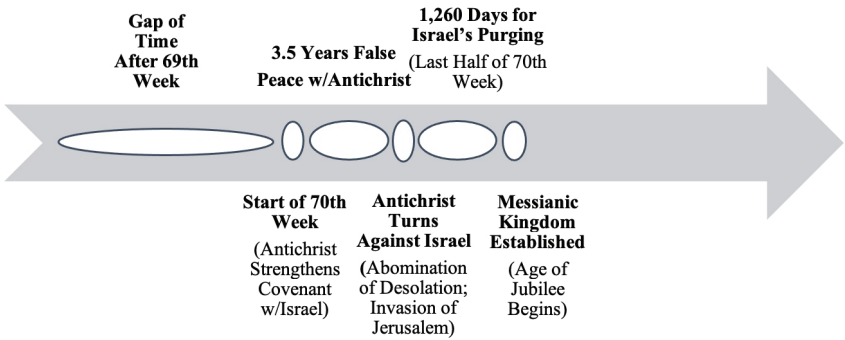
An end to the days of evil has been “decreed.”

“70 weeks have been appointed” and then the Age of Jubilee.

Timeline of first 69 Weeks



Timeline of 70th Week



APPENDIX

“THIS GENERATION” IN THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

IN CHAPTER 17 we looked at how Jesus incorporated Daniel 9 into his teaching on the end times, particularly in the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24; Mk. 13; Lk. 21). Within this same sermon, Jesus also made a statement that has led many commentators to conclude that all of the events described in the Olivet Discourse were fulfilled by 70 AD. Towards the end of his prophecy Jesus said:

Truly I say to you, **this generation** will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Matt. 24:34; cf. Mk. 13:30–31; Lk. 21:32–33).

According to many in the First-Century Fulfillment camp, Jesus said here that his “generation” would not die until all of the events described in the Olivet Discourse (including “the abomination of desolation”) came to pass. A “generation” would typically include people born within

a 15-20 year window of time, so as the argument usually goes, this was Jesus' way of saying his contemporaries would experience the events of the Matthew-24 prophecy in their own lifetime, and then die, towards the end of the first century. According to this line of reasoning, Matthew 24:34 proves a first-century fulfillment of not only the Olivet Discourse prophecy, but also Daniel 9:24-27, because Daniel 9:27 is specifically referenced by Jesus in Matthew 24:15 (cf. Mk. 13:14).

On the surface, this argument that Matthew 24:34 requires a first-century fulfillment of Daniel 9:24-27 sounds pretty straightforward, and it appears to make a lot of sense. But if we dig a little deeper, it is not hard to find its flaws.

THIS GENERATION & THE PASSING AWAY OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

For one, in the very same verse in which Jesus says, "this generation will not pass away," he also says, "**heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.**" The same Greek word sits behind the English phrase "pass away" in both lines of this verse. This parallelism indicates that Jesus' line about "heaven and earth" passing away is a restatement of his previous remarks about "this generation" passing away. The passing away of "this generation" is the same thing as the passing away of "heaven and earth" (as we know them today), which implies that the entire verse is concerned with future end-time events.

Jesus used the phrase "this generation" to describe the entire current (evil) age of history, which will continue to exist prior to the renewing of the heavens and the earth; an event that will only take place at the time of his second coming. When Jesus said, "this generation will not pass away until all these things take place," this was his way of saying that the broader epoch of history we are now living in will continue more or less as it is until all the prophecies in the Bible are fulfilled. Then, in the next line, like any good preacher knows how to do, he restates his point, and says, "heaven and earth will pass away." In other words, there will be a time when things will change, and when the cosmos will be truly renewed. But this cannot happen until all Bible prophecies are

fulfilled first, because “my words will not pass away.” Only at the end of the age will “this generation” (i.e. this epoch of history) pass away, along with the heavens and the earth in their current form.

In 2 Peter 3:10 Peter also linked the passing away of the heavens and the earth to “the day of the Lord,” which is further proof that Jesus’ statement in Matthew 24:34 needs to be understood within an eschatological Day of the Lord framework. Like 2 Peter 3:10, *1 Enoch* 91.15–17 links the passing away of “the first heaven,” and the appearance of “a new heaven,” to the fully inaugurated kingdom of God as well. In Matthew 24:34, Jesus was drawing on this popular Jewish tradition about the passing away of heaven and earth, which again proves the eschatological nature of his “this generation” statement in the same verse.¹

This eschatological reading is more apparent when we recognize that Jesus’ statement in Matthew 24:34 exhibits a simple ABAB structure:

The (A) portion refers to how:

- This Evil Age Will One Day End:

The (B) portion clarifies:

- But Not Until God’s Word is Fulfilled First
 1. This generation will not pass away (A)
 2. Until all these things take place. (B)

1 Note: There is debate among Premillennial scholars over the question of when the New Heavens and New Earth referred to Revelation 21 will appear. Some believe the New Heavens and New Earth will appear after the Millennium, whereas others believe it will appear at the start of the Millennium. Either way, I do not believe Jesus is making a specific comment pertinent to this debate in Matthew 24:34. Instead, it seems most likely that Jesus is making a more general statement about the passing away of this current evil age (“this generation”), which will then lead to a period of transition during which life as we know it, and even the physical world as we know it, will be transformed. The precise timing of Kingdom events, and when exactly we will witness the full inauguration of a newly created cosmos (as outlined in Rev. 21), is a more specific question that I do not believe can be addressed from general statements such as Matthew 24:34 and 2 Peter 3:10, especially because longer sequences of events are often compressed into short eschatological prophecies (“prophetic compression”).

1. Heaven and earth will pass away (A)
2. But my words will not pass away. (B)

THE WORD "GENERATION" (*GENEA*)

One of the reasons the phrase "this generation" in Matthew 24:34 creates so much confusion, is because (1) people are in too big of a hurry to prove that the Olivet Discourse was fulfilled in the first century, and (2) because they are not taking the time to study how, in contrast to English, the word "generation" (*genea*) in the Bible, in both Hebrew and in Greek, often has a broader definition.

In English, we almost exclusively use the word "generation" to describe people who are interrelated through the time of their birth (Millennials, Baby Boomers, etc.), or, people who are biologically a part of the same family tree, such as three "generations" of women in the same family (grandma, mom, and daughter). Because of the way we use the word "generation" in English, when many English speakers read Matthew 24:34 they think the word "generation" must have very specific time-of-birth connotations, an assumption that, if true, would require a 70 AD fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse.

What is being missed when this assumption is read into Matthew 24:34 however, is that even though the word "generation" in Hebrew and Greek can have narrow time-of-birth connotations (just like in English), and even though this way of using the word was very common in the ancient world, the word "generation" in Hebrew and Greek often has a different meaning.

In addition to denoting time of birth, "generation" in Hebrew and Greek can also refer more generally to "common characteristics,"² or, we might say, it can have more of a *qualitative* meaning that allows it to

2 *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Third Edition (BDAG), ed., Frederick William Danker, based on Walter Bauer's (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 191.

be applied in a “transhistorical” way to a group of people living across thousands of years. “Generation” in Greek does not have to describe a very small subset of people who were interrelated biologically, or who were born within a very small window of time.

The common misinterpretation of the term “generation” in Matthew 24:34 is a classic example of how English speakers often read their own English definition of a word into the Bible, without recognizing that even though there is a lot of overlap between modern English meaning vis-à-vis Hebrew and Greek meanings, there are also areas where this oversimplified approach can get us into trouble. Only the context of an individual passage can help us determine the meaning of the word “generation” in any particular case in the Bible.

As previously stated, the contextual connection between “this generation” and the passing away of “heaven and earth” in Matthew 24:34 already proves that “generation” is being used in a broader, more transhistorical way, in this verse, to refer to the entire age of world history since creation. There are also other places in Scripture where “generation” is used in a similar qualitative-transhistorical way, and these examples can help shed more light on Matthew 24:34.

THE QUALITATIVE USE OF “GENERATION”

A good example of how “generation” in Greek could refer to a group of people who lived across a longer period of time (the transhistorical aspect), yet had common characteristics (the qualitative aspect), can be seen in Deuteronomy 31–32. Deuteronomy 31–32 is one of the first texts in Scripture that speaks of the Time of Jacob’s Trouble, which makes it relevant as a background text to the Olivet Discourse.

In Deuteronomy 31:29, Moses speaks of the evil that will befall Israel in the “latter days” because of their corruption and rebellion against the Lord. Then, in Deuteronomy 32:5, Moses says:

They [Israel] have acted corruptly toward Him, they are not His children, because of their defect, but they are **a perverse and crooked generation.**

The Hebrew term for "generation" here is *dor*, which the Greek Septuagint (LXX) translates as *genea*, the same word we also see in Matthew 24:34. Later in the same prophecy, Moses again calls Israel a "perverse generation, sons in whom is no faithfulness" (Deut. 32:20). Not surprisingly, the Greek Septuagint (LXX) uses the word *genea* again here, just like Matthew 24:34.

We know that in Deuteronomy 31–32 Moses was not only describing the literal generation of Israelites who lived during his lifetime, because he starts this prophecy in Deuteronomy 31:29 by confirming that it is eschatological, and concerned with "the latter days." Furthermore, in Deuteronomy 32:39–43 Moses describes the eschatological deliverance of Israel by YHVH, which in his lifetime hadn't happened yet.

The way Moses uses the term "generation" (Heb: *dor*; Greek: *genea*) in Deuteronomy 32 is important, because it shows us that he used "generation" to describe disobedient Israel as a collective group of people who will exist throughout the course of history, until God deals with them "in the latter days" (Deut. 31:29). In other words, Moses used *genea* to refer to his ancestral people as a whole, and their rebellious characteristics/qualities across time.

For Moses, "the perverse generation" was all Israelites, those alive during the exodus and time of wilderness wandering, but also those who would live later, all the way through to the end times (Deut. 32:39–43). Moses used the word "generation" as a blanket term for the Jewish nation, and more specifically, he used this word in a qualitative sense to describe Israel as a rebellious people, not to describe people who were born within a 15-20 year window of time.

Prophecy teacher Brock Hollett summarizes this point:

The idea is that the nation of Israel is a corporate offspring of "blemished" children who perpetually engage in idolatry and rejection of the Lord. **The generation in question [in Deuteronomy] does not refer to a specific time period but to a trans-historical phenomenon of a type of people.** It does not refer [only] to the ethnicity of

the Israelites but to **the nation's spiritual condition, its degenerate disposition towards iniquity.**³

Many New Testament scholars accept that Jesus' statement in Matthew 24:34 about "this generation" is to some extent based on the earlier statements about "trans-historical" disobedient Israel in Deuteronomy 32. Though I do not believe Jesus was only referring to ethnic-national Israel in Matthew 24:34, it is still helpful to understand that the term "generation" (*genea*) could be used more broadly in the Bible, which is exactly what we see in the Olivet Discourse.

THE QUALITATIVE USE OF GENERATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

There are also examples in the New Testament that illustrate how "generation" could depict this current evil age, or, the larger group of faithless people who have lived throughout world history.

Jesus spoke of the "unbelieving generation" (Mk. 9:19), the "unbelieving and perverse generation" (Matt 17:17), and the "evil and adulterous generation" (Matt. 12:39). In Acts 2:40, Peter admonished his countrymen, "Be saved from this perverse generation." In Philippians 2:15, Paul said to be "blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (*genea*)."

In each of these cases, Jesus, Peter, and Paul do not use "generation" in a limited way only to describe people who were born at a particular time. They use "generation" in a qualitative sense to describe anyone, no matter their age, whose life is characterized by evil, and in that sense, they use "generation" to describe patterns of behavior that characterize this current phase of history. As we are all aware, the "perverse generation" of Jesus, Peter, and Paul still exists to this day, and it will

3 Brock David Hollett, *Debunking Preterism: How Over-Realized Eschatology Misses the "Not Yet" of Bible Prophecy* (Kearney: Morris Publishing, 2018), 91.

continue to exist until Jesus returns. This is the exact point Jesus makes in Matthew 24:34.⁴

Proponents of a first-century fulfillment of Daniel 9 and the Olivet Discourse are often quick to conclude that since Jesus used the word "generation" to refer to his historical contemporaries, this must mean *genea* in Matthew 24:34 refers only to people born in the first century. This argument ignores (1) that *genea* has many different definitions in the Bible, and (2) that *genea* frequently describes types of people who lived during longer periods of history, not people who were born around the same time.

The First-Century Fulfillment interpretation of *genea* in Matthew 24:34 also misses how this usage in the New Testament parallels what we find in early prophecies from the Hebrew Bible, such as Deuteronomy 32. In Deuteronomy 32, the evil generation is national Israel across the ages. But by the time of the New Testament, the concept of the evil generation was broadened to encompass the entire population of world history, which will only "pass away" when "heaven and earth" pass away, after all the words of the prophets are fulfilled (Matt. 24:34; Acts 2:40; Phil. 2:15; 2 Pet. 3:10).

THE PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS'S WORDS

Properly interpreting the word *genea* (generation) in Matthew 24:34 is important if we want to understand the eschatological significance of the Olivet Discourse. But it is also important because it allows us to better understand the practical lesson Jesus communicates to his disciples in this verse.

When Jesus said, "this generation will not pass away until all these things are accomplished. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my

4 Another good example of the transhistorical-qualitative use of "generation" can be seen in Psalm 24:6: "This is the generation of them that seek after Him, even Jacob, *selah*." In this verse, the "Jacob generation" refers to people who are God seekers. The "generation" here describes a type of person and their spiritual attributes, not the time when they were born. Anyone, no matter when they were born, can be a part of this "generation" (Heb. *dor*; Grk: *genea*).

words will not pass away,” he didn’t intend for his words to become the subject of academic discussions and debates on eschatology. He meant for them to provide pastoral guidance to his disciples, including those of us who live today.

So what was the message Jesus was getting at here? What pastoral issue was he speaking into and addressing?

First and foremost, Jesus was encouraging his disciples to stay watchful. If there are things that have to come to pass, and prophetic words that have to be fulfilled before this evil age comes to an end, then it stands to reason that watchfulness is the order of the day, a point that Jesus also makes in the verses just before Matthew 24:34 (see Matthew 24:32–33). Lest we adopt the smug position that “eschatology is a waste of time,” Jesus presupposes that his people who live prior to his second coming will be engaged and alert with regard to impending prophetic realities.

Second, I also believe Jesus was addressing the two extremes of apocalyptic sensationalism, and apocalyptic utopianism in Matthew 24:34, particularly as a way to balance the call to watchfulness with a call to biblical sobriety.

On the one hand, there will always be those people who say, “The world is about to end. It’s all about to happen. The sky is falling. The Rapture is right around the corner. The Battle of Armageddon is imminent! Etc.” To this Jesus says, “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” In other words, there is still a lot that has to happen before we can claim “it’s the end of the end!” Don’t fall into the apocalyptic-prophetic sensationalism. Focus on how to live properly. Focus on the word of God. Avoid the misguided wishful thinking and/or the reactionary fearmongering that leads many to believe that the world could somehow end before all the words of the prophets are fulfilled. Stay watchful, but stay grounded in reality.

On the other hand, there will also always be those people who say, “We can usher in utopia. We can create a new age of justice, harmony, and peace (through whatever political movement happens to be in vogue at the time.” To this Jesus says, not so fast. Though it is perfectly ok

and necessary to work towards positive change in society and government, recognize that "this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."

This "generation," this current iteration and state of history, in which wars, famines, sin, disappointment, economic problems, persecution, etc., characterize our existence, will continue until Jesus returns. Don't fall victim to the over-hyped utopian propaganda, or be disillusioned when "this generation" does the evil it has always done. We will never fundamentally redeem and restore the fallen world. That is something only Jesus will be able to do when he returns, so his point is, have realistic expectations.

By referring to the continuation of "this generation," this evil epoch of history, until all things are fulfilled, Jesus was grounding his disciples in the hope of the future Age to Come, "when heaven and earth" as we know them will "pass away." At the same time, he was also calling us to stay sober-minded in the face of sensational, militant, and/or utopian religious and political movements, all of which were just as prevalent in the first century as they are today. In light of Jesus' prior teaching in Matthew 24, he was also quite likely reiterating to his disciples that they will have to accept the reality of persecution in the midst of "this generation," prior to the establishment of the kingdom of God.

One of the core problems with the First-Century Fulfillment interpretation of Matthew 24:34, is that it causes people to miss the profound pastoral wisdom Jesus demonstrates in this verse. Even as Jesus emphasized apocalyptic eschatology in the Olivet Discourse, he also gave us a major clue as to how we can stay hopeful, grounded, and stable, with realistic expectations, as we await the Age to Come. Namely, through avoiding both extreme sensationalism, and extreme forms of utopian wishful thinking.

COMMON APPROACHES TO "THIS GENERATION"

In summary, many different interpretations of the phrase "this generation" in the Olivet Discourse have been proposed throughout history.

Some have argued “this generation” refers only to Jesus’ contemporaries in the first century. Others have argued “this generation” refers only to ethnic-national Israel, or, perhaps to the final generation that will be alive right before the second coming.

Each of these interpretations misses the mark, and causes the interpreter to overlook both the meaning and practical significance of Matthew 24:34. “This generation” in this context is shorthand for, “the world in its current form,” and it probably also has qualitative connotations related to the evil and perversity that characterize this current phase of history. Matthew 24:34 uses “generation” in a transhistorical-qualitative sense, which was common in the Hebrew Bible and other New Testament writings as well.

As New Testament scholar Neil Nelson explains, “this generation” in the Olivet Discourse:

Refers to that type of consummately evil and unbelieving people who deceive and persecute the disciples of Christ until the time of the *parousia*, when the true followers of Jesus are vindicated and “this generation” passes away in judgment.⁵

Our fallen world will continue in its current state for just a little while longer. Yet, we can have great hope that God is sovereignly orchestrating all things to lead to our ultimate victory in the end. He has everything under control, and the closer we get to the return of Jesus, the more the fulfillment of His prophetic word will prove this to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear:

Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away **until all these things take place**. Heaven and earth will pass away, **but my words will not pass away**” (Matt. 24:34; cf. Mk. 13:30–31; Lk. 21:32–33).

5 Neil D. Nelson, Jr., “This Generation in Matt. 24:34: A Literary-Critical Perspective,” *JETS*, 38/3 (September:1996), 369–385.

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Many blessings to you friend. I look forward to meeting you in the Age of Jubilee.

—TRAVIS SNOW

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