

Introduction

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. And after sixty-two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. (Dan. 9:25–26)

The interpretation of Dan. 9:25–26 has challenged biblical scholars for centuries. Because of this prophecy’s significance for identifying “Messiah Prince” (*mashiach nagid*, v. 25), it continues to be a source of debate between Christians and Jews. [1, 2]† In addition, Jews often disagree with their fellow Jews, and Christians with their fellow Christians, about the best way to interpret these passages. Within Christendom itself, most contemporary commentators have followed either Sir Robert

† Bracketed numerals are reference notes, corresponding to the References section at the end of the text. Unbracketed, superscripted numbers refer to End Notes, which begin on p. 45.

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Anderson [3] or Dr. Harold W. Hoehner [4] in asserting that the *terminus a quo*, or “beginning point,” of the 70 “weeks” (literally *shavuim*, “sevens”) occurred in either 445 BC [3, 5–10] or 444 BC [4, 11–14], respectively. A few of today’s popular Christian authors are especially exuberant about one or the other of these favored points of view. For example, Tim LaHaye states: “Sir Robert Anderson’s masterful book, *The Coming Prince*, shows that Christ coming into Jerusalem the Sunday before his crucifixion occurred in exactly the right year. To my knowledge, his book has never been refuted.” [6] In another essay, LaHaye’s co-writer, Thomas Ice, states even more exuberantly: “Hoehner has put together an airtight case for his understanding of the beginning and ending of the first 69 weeks of Daniel’s prophecy.... To date, no one has been able to challenge the work done by Hoehner. It is fully supportive of the literal interpretation of Daniel’s prophecy and is the only approach that has been demonstrated, thus far, to make the numbers work out.” [12]

The purpose of this work, *Know Therefore and Understand*, is twofold. First, key scriptures will be discussed that call into question a 444 or 445 BC (or 458 or 457 BC) date for the *terminus a quo* of Daniel’s 70 *shavuim*. Second, an alternative solution for the fulfillment of Dan. 9:25–26 will be put forward as biblically more defensible. The 19th century Christian theologian Dr. Nathaniel West may have been the first to formulate this alternative solution, at least in raw form. [15] This work therefore owes a great debt to Dr. West’s original scholarship and insight.

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THE CONTEXT OF DANIEL 9

The events of Daniel 9 take place in the first year of Darius the Mede, most likely 539/8 BC. [16] The man Daniel is reflecting on the prophet Jeremiah's earlier prediction that 70 years would pass until there would be an end to the desolations of Jerusalem (Jer. 25:11; Dan. 9:1–2). The 70 years of Jewish captivity in Babylon were a divine punishment on the Jews for having violated 70 sabbatical years during roughly 800 years of occupation in the Promised Land (i.e., in violation of Lev. 25:2–6 and 26:34–35; see also Ex. 23:10–11; Jer. 25:11, 29:10; 2 Chron. 36:20–21; and Dan. 9:10–14). Whether the violations that Daniel was acknowledging in Chapter 9 occurred sequentially over a 490-year period, or whether they were separated by gaps within the roughly 800-year period, is a subject of debate [12], although it is not unreasonable to assume that some gaps did occur.

While Daniel is praying that the desolations of Jerusalem would end soon—counting from the first desolation (and Daniel's own exile) approximately 70 years earlier—the angel Gabriel

appears and further develops the 70-year theme, giving the prophetic outline in Dan. 9:24–27. In Daniel 9, Gabriel implies that “Jeremiah’s 70 years” may indeed be concluding, but that “Daniel’s 70 sevens” are just beginning. The end point of “Jeremiah’s 70” became the springboard for “Daniel’s 70,” and both are dealt with in Daniel 9 near the beginning of the reign of Cyrus. Gabriel’s issuance of the 70-sevens prophecy to Daniel and Cyrus’ issuance of his decree to the Jews may well have been simultaneous events, occurring in the same year [17] or even on the same day (Dan. 9:23).

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE *TERMINUS A QUO* OF DANIEL’S 70 SEVENS

The first and most conspicuous of the royal decrees allowing the exiled Jews to return westward to Jerusalem from Babylon was the one given by Cyrus, the king of Persia, in 538/537 BC. [18] This decree was acted upon by Sheshbazzar, and later, Zerubbabel, who began to reconstruct the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1–6). A minority of Christian scholars, including Young, Leupold, Keil, Klieforth, Mauro, Calvin [19, 20], and, most importantly, West [15], have backed the decree of Cyrus as the *terminus a quo* for Daniel’s 70 sevens, as have many Jewish interpreters [2, 21] and at least one Messianic Jewish interpreter. [17] Nonetheless, with the exception of West [15], none of these scholars has provided a satisfactorily