Ortho-conservative Exegesis of Daniel’s 70 Weeks

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Introduction

Bible scholars have debated the meaning of Daniel 9:24-27 for millennia. When considering the precise application to history that this prophecy has had, and possibly will have, there are many various and complicated factors to consider. The purpose of this paper is not to fairly weigh an assortment proposed views; rather it will expose and defend, through a systematic approach, a modified version of what many consider to be a conservative interpretation of these verses. There are, however, some matters on which most scholars agree. Therefore, in the discussion that will follow, plenary verbal inspiration of scripture as well as other similar concepts will be assumed and not argued for. This paper will give an apology of the 360-day year theory, and thus, having been established, will support the claim that the first seven weeks began in 446 B.C., that Christ’s passion occurred immediately following the second sixty-two weeks, and that the final week remains to be fulfilled.

Daniel indicates that, before Gabriel gave him the information contained in verses 24-27, he had come to understand that the 70 years written of by the prophet Jeremiah (25:11,12) would soon be complete. Daniel had undoubtedly also read in that prophecy, that God will not only punish Israel, but every nation on earth. After considering that God had mandated 70 years in captivity for Israel, and that there was also much of the prophecy that had yet to be fulfilled, Daniel turned to God and prayed for understanding.

Purpose of the Weeks

Both Miller,[[1]](#footnote-1) and Jones,[[2]](#footnote-2) have done excellent work in showcasing the various opinions on the purpose of the 70 weeks. In our opinion, the reasons stated by Gabriel in verse 24 indicate by their very wording, that they refer to the final purpose of the weeks, and cannot, therefore be understood to mean anything which has occurred in the past, including things such as, “the conclusion of the specific sin of Israel’s rebellion that led to exile,”[[3]](#footnote-3) or, “The ‘sealing up’ of the specific sin of Israel’s rebellion,”[[4]](#footnote-4) etc.

Timeline of Weeks

There is not a great deal of disagreement among scholars about the unit comprising the weeks. Many agree that each week consists of seven years. Some have attempted to support the argument that the sevens are symbolic, but, as Miller points out, this argument does not provide a plausible model for the entire 70 weeks.[[5]](#footnote-5) Regarding the length of the years, however, there is no shortage of speculation.

Miller provides an argument designed to refute the theory that a prophetic year is 360 days, vice 365. He claims that it is unlikely because, if, by Anderson’s calculations, the first week began in 444 B.C., it would put the crucifixion of Christ, which Anderson would consider to be the culmination of the 69th week, too far in the future.[[6]](#footnote-6) Miller defends his position by appealing to, “most,” who, he continues, “consider that Christ was not crucified in A.D. 32, but in A.D. 30.” Miller additionally claims that a 360-day year is highly unlikely because the Jews almost certainly followed a 365-day calendar.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Miller’s arguments should be considered weak at best. In showing that the Jews followed a 365-day calendar, Miller did nothing to show what calendar God might use. Indeed, God cannot lie, and He is unchanging.[[8]](#footnote-8) God has also explicitly declared that the earth will wax old, as doth a garment.[[9]](#footnote-9) One would be remiss if they did not consider the possibility that God, in fact, originally created the solar system such that a year was 360 days, and now he continues to count years in this matter.

Genesis contains strong evidence supporting this proposition. It is a matter of arithmetic to determine that Noah, who used a calendar devised before the global deluge, spent five months totaling 150 days inside the ark. If each of these months consisted of 30 days, this implies that, before the global catastrophe, there were 360 days in a year. The accounts known as Joshua’s long day,[[10]](#footnote-10) and Hezekiah’s sundial,[[11]](#footnote-11) provide ample evidence supporting the notion that God is able and willing to adjust cosmic activities as He sees fit.

With regard to Daniel’s specific prophecy, however, there remains evidence stronger still. There are many parallels between the description of the final week of Daniel, and a description of events found in Revelation 11:2-3. Not only the length of time, but also the events which occur at the exact midpoint of that time. If indeed these two prophecies describe the same event, the possible extrapolation of the description of time in Revelation, as it applies to the message from Gabriel to Daniel, must be investigated. Revelation describes three and a half years totaling 1260 days. If the date of 446.5 B.C. (as suggested by H. Morris[[12]](#footnote-12)) proposed as the beginning of the seventy weeks is accepted, and the years of the prophecy are counted to consist of 360 days each, at the end of 69 sets of seven years, the date would be found to be 31.38 A.D. If Jesus were born in 3.5 B.C., He would have to have been crucified at the age of 33.88 in order for his crucifixion and the end of the 69 weeks to occur on the same day. Though this evidence is circumstantial, the disagreement of current scholars as to the specific date described in Nehemiah 2:1 provides ample scope for these events to have transpired exactly as described. This also provides a solution that matches far better with the term, “cut off,” than the solution proposed by Hoehner in response to the weaknesses of Anderson’s view.[[13]](#footnote-13)

There is, however, another more deeply rooted controversy within the discussion pertaining to the dates of the individual weeks. The translators of the ESV Bible chose to utilize the Masoretic texts as a precursor to their publication rather than the received text chosen by translators such as Tyndale. These scrolls contain an abundance of punctuation originally added in an attempt to mimic the technique that proved useful in the preservation of meaning in similar Greek language texts.[[14]](#footnote-14) This tradition is said to have begun in the 5th century A.D. The function of the punctuation differed slightly from the Greek, however, as the Greek punctuation distinguished words, and the Hebrew, sentences.[[15]](#footnote-15) Thus, the difficulty arose when modern Hebrew translators came across the words, “seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks.” (v.25b) They had difficulty translating this passage because of a mark known as the athnac, which is located in the text where we have placed the comma. Because this specific mark is generally used as a colon, some translators felt that it should divide the sentence.[[16]](#footnote-16) The new sentence would then read, “from the going out of the word to restore and build 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.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

The oldest complete Hebrew manuscript of Daniel is the Leningrad Codex. This manuscript was completed in 1008 A.D. and was copied from a corrected codex prepared by Rabbi Aron ben Moses ben Asher before A.D. 1000. This codex exemplifies the punctuation style adopted by the Masoretic School in the middle of the first millennium A.D.[[18]](#footnote-18)

One would be inclined to suggest that these faithful Jews only sought to preserve the meaning of the text, and therefore, the athnac should be accepted and understood to indicate what it might appear to suggest, a break in the sentence. Though the Codex Leningradensis contains the oldest complete copy of Daniel in the Hebrew language, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls not only resulted in verification of the authenticity of Masoretic texts, but also provided a glimpse into the textual meaning before the Jewish scribes standardized the Hebrew text with the addition of vowels and punctuation in fifth and sixth centuries A.D.[[19]](#footnote-19) The result is that evidence supporting the claim that this athnac should change the meaning of the text is not very strong; in fact, the KJV, NKJV and NIV Bibles all prefer the rendering where the two sentences are connected.[[20]](#footnote-20)

When deciphering verse 25 and 26a of chapter 9, it is also prudent to take into account the structure of Gabriel’s message. Upon close inspection, Gabriel’s message is not strictly in chronological order, but rather, is structured in a slightly more complex manner. There is an important reason for this structure: the effective promulgation of the position of events with regard to each timeframe described. Gabriel uses a structure of A, B, A, B, to communicate the message; A referring to the first 7 weeks and B referring to the 62. The fundamental difference between A and B, however, is that the events relating to A occur *during* the timeframe, while events related to B occur *after* the time frame. Gabriel begins with what might be described as a headline or introduction. “From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks (this has described part A), and threescore and two weeks: (this has described part B)” He then proceeds chronologically, beginning with the start of the first 7 weeks: part A. Because these events during the first 7 weeks are so closely tied to the signal which marks the beginning of the weeks, they need no further introduction, “the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.”[[21]](#footnote-21) It is clear that Nehemiah 2:4-8 provides an account of a commandment which meets the criteria exactly. However, it may be considered stronger evidence still that this was indeed the beginning of the weeks if one were to consider the remainder of Nehemiah’s writings. Immediately following the account of Artaxerxes’ decree to rebuild Jerusalem, Nehemiah records the difficulties involved with rebuilding the city, specifically the wall.[[22]](#footnote-22) Gabriel then continues and begins with the information, “And after threescore and two weeks…(part B)” Before he had said this, he had been speaking chronologically, but with this statement he makes the distinction that, unlike the previous period of 7 weeks, the event related to this period of time will not occur during, but *after* the period of time. He then explains exactly what event will take place after the culmination of this time period, “…shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself.” Following this statement Gabriel no longer needs to make any chronological distinctions because his description will now continue once again in a linear fashion.

End Times

The year 70 A.D. marked the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. Verse 26 of chapter 9 speaks of the prince that shall come. It is not this prince, however, that will destroy the city, according to verse 26, but his people. When questioned regarding the signs of the last days by His disciples, Jesus alluded to the mid-point of the final week prophesied by Daniel. Jesus clearly states that no man knows the day or the hour that will mark the end of the world.[[23]](#footnote-23) Accordingly, the “futurist,” perspective identified by Randall Price and Thomas Ice in the Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy is likely the correct analysis.[[24]](#footnote-24) The flood is said by Gabriel to mark the end of this destruction, and this is no more clearly understood than by the enforced dispersion of the Jews in A.D. 135. Strong defines the word used for flood as describing an overflowing; this would fit well with the events previously mentioned.

Gabriel concludes what is known as the 26th verse with a statement about war and desolations. Morris interestingly notes that this statement could be better translated as, “and unto the end wars and desolations are determined.”[[25]](#footnote-25) It is widely agreed that there has been no 7 year covenant which has satisfied the requirements mentioned in either Daniel 9:27 or Revelation 11:2-3, which leaves history in a sort of in-between time that, according to some, such as Morris, is categorized by wars and desolations.

The war spoken of by Gabriel, however, may not be referring to wars in general, as Morris suggests. The Hebrew word *milchamah[[26]](#footnote-26)* used in Daniel 9:26 to describe the war only occurs this one time in all of Daniel, (319 in the entire Old Testament) and unequivocally refers to violent battle. If one is to consider that this war spoken of describes the period from 70 A.D. through the end of the 70th week, they must ask whether the wars being waged on earth at this point in history are somehow different than the wars waged before the time of Daniel. Some may argue that this 2000-year period is indeed the period of war, but war in a spiritual sense. This too is probably misguided. The Greek equivalent of the word Gabriel uses, which is *polemo[[27]](#footnote-27)*, also exclusively describes physical battle. The difference between this and spiritual battle is seen clearly in James 4:1, where the first use of the word, “war,” is the Greek word *polemeo,*[[28]](#footnote-28) which means to be physically engaged in violent battle, whereas the second is the Greek word *strateuomail,*[[29]](#footnote-29) which describes an ongoing military campaign and usually does so metaphorically. Nevertheless, 8 out of the 10 times the word *polemo* is used in the New Testament, it is being used to describe the events foretold in Revelation, and then only in chapters 11-19.

When the 70th week described by Gabriel arrives, the prophecy is clear, the prince described in the previous verse (and likely in 8:24-25) will begin the 7 years by confirming a covenant with many. It is important to note that the word *midst* in the KJV Bible literally means mid point, rather than an ambiguous point somewhere between the beginning and end.[[30]](#footnote-30) The final piece of the prophecy concerns the events that will take place during the mid point of the last week and continue until the end of the 7 years. The determination of desolations will have been continuing all this time, that is, until the end of the war, and by the mid point of the final week, an additional desolation will occur. This event was referred to by Jesus as, “the abomination of desolation.”[[31]](#footnote-31) The “prince that shall come,” will do this in order to overspread abominations. This will continue until the consummation of the treaty. At this point, Gabriel states, “and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.” These events are described in great detail in chapter 11 of Revelation. Verses 2 and 3 describe the time period during which the to witnesses will testify, which, as previously mentioned, is the primary reason these two sections can be compared with confidence.

Conclusion

Untangling these four verses of Daniel is no small task. This paper has attempted to make a convincing argument in support of a theory that many have denied is plausible. We have shown that, by embracing the likely possibility that each year contained within the weeks of Daniel, is to be calculated as exactly 360 days, the stage is set for a logical and contradiction-free exegesis of the 70th week. Additionally, one of the main hindrances to the understanding of the division of past events in the first two sections of weeks, namely the function of the athnac as a mechanism of separation in verse 25, has been systematically rejected. These evidences, along with the others presented, have given strong support to the claim that the first 7 weeks began in 446.5 B.C., the next 62 weeks began in 398.17, and these concluded with the sacrifice of the Messiah on Calvary in 31.38 A.D. Finally, the notion has been suggested and supported that, the last week prophesied by Daniel has not yet arrived, but will begin when the prince described in verse 26 makes a covenant with many people for seven years. The mid point of this last week will be marked by an abomination committed by this prince in the temple, and the seven years will conclude with what has been determined shall be poured out upon the desolate.

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4. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
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6. Miller, 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
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