

## Daniel's 70 Weeks

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Your understanding of Scripture will greatly affect how you read and interpret the book of Daniel, especially Daniel 9:24-27. For years dispensationalists have insisted that Daniel 9:24-27 is speaking about a future time when the anti-christ will come and make an alliance with national Israel. This time is commonly known as the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel, or the time of Jacob's trouble. The dispensational position concludes that Jesus fulfills the first part of the prophecy (Dan 9:26); but, because of Israel's rejection of their king (cf., Matt 12:22-32; 27:25), the final week is postponed until the final seven years of human history. This is known as the great tribulation in which Israel will be purified and made ready to accept her Messiah (Zech 12:10). In the meantime, God is dealing with the church, but will once again deal with Israel after he has raptured the church out of the world. After the tribulation the 70<sup>th</sup> week (literally seven years) will be completed and all the promises in Daniel 9:24 will be completed.

There are several questions that have to be answered about the dispensational position.

- 1.) Does the NT make clear reference to a future for ethnic Israel apart from the church?
- 2.) Does the dispensational position allow Jesus and the Apostles to interpret Daniel 9:24-27, or are they forcing a meaning on the text that is incorrect in light of the Cross?
- 3.) Is a literal hermeneutic the way to approach Daniel 9:24-27, as the dispensationalist contends?
- 4.) Is this passage really about Israel and the anti-christ?

The dispensational position is flawed for many reasons, which are outlined below.

- 1.) Jesus is the true Israelite (Matt 2:15; Gal 3:16). Israel's history and worship finds its meaning and end in Jesus. The future for ethnic Israel is bound to the church. In other words, the salvation of Jews is accomplished in the same manner and method that every other person is saved—through faith in Jesus. Thus, every person who believes in Jesus is not only part of the church, but also Abraham's offspring (Rom 2:28-29; 11:25-27; Eph 2:12ff).
- 2.) The word of Jesus accomplishes the promises given in Daniel 9:24. In light of the Christ event, the promises are given in principle, but the full consummation of these things will come at the end of this present age. At that time, God will redeem his church and the 70 weeks of Daniel will be complete.
- 3.) The problem with the dispensational understanding of a "literal" hermeneutic is that it does not take into account that reading a passage literally means reading it according to its genre. The genre of Daniel is apocalyptic, meaning it contains symbols and types. Precise time calculations and one-for-one correspondence is not the aim of this passage.

Apocalyptic time measurements and language conveys a theological point rather than a “literal” point. Therefore, to read the passage literally is to read it apocalyptically, which provides theological insight, rather than “literal” insight. Apocalyptic time measurements simply provide a framework for important truths for Daniel and his readers.

4.) In light of the NT Daniel 9:24-27 is not speaking about Israel in the future, nor is it describing the anti-christ, but it is describing the person and work of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

How do we arrive at such a conclusion? The following section will present Daniel 9:24-27 as fulfilled and continuing to be fulfilled during the church age.

In Jeremiah 29:10 the nation of Israel is told they will be in captivity by the Babylonians for 70 years (cf., Jer 25:11-12). Daniel is aware of this prophecy and understands the time of the conclusion of captivity is near (Dan 9:2). God gives Daniel insight and shows him a vision of the completion of all things and the restoration of God’s people. The time upon which this prophecy begins is with the return of the people to the land, which is under Cyrus the king (2 Chro 36:20-23; Isa 44:28; 45:1; cf., Ezra 1:1-4).

The time frame God gives for the completion of all things and the restoration of his people is 70 weeks. Israel was originally sent into exile for 70 years (each year represented a failure to give the land rest for 490 years). Israel missed 70 sabbatical years of giving the land rest and they missed 10 Jubilee years (cf., Lev 24:8; 25:1-4; 26:14, 34-35, 40-43). The 70 years of exile and the rest for the land is now complete (2 Chro 36:21). Now God is saying that 70 weeks have again been determined for the restoration of his people. Each day in a week is representative of one year; thus, 490 years (cf., Num 14:34; Ezek 4:4-6). Therefore, judgment fell upon Israel for 70 years to bring about the perfection or completion of their disobedience. Now, the perfection or completion of their salvation will come about after 70 weeks or 490 years. Although Israel returned to the land, they still remained very much in exile. Even though they “dwelt” in the land, they did not own it, but continued to be under foreign leaders (Persians, Greeks, and Romans). Israel missed the point of the Sabbath and the Jubilee years and even remained in exile after they returned to the land; therefore, God will bring the final Sabbath and final Jubilee at the end of the 70 weeks and at that time Israel will no longer be exiled, but free.

So how do we understand Daniel 9:24-27 in light of Jesus rather than in light of national Israel or the anti-christ? Daniel 9:24-27 is structured in the following way.

- 1.) Daniel 9:24 covers the entire period between verses 25-27 (70 weeks).
- 2.) Daniel 9:25 divides the sixty-nine weeks or sevens.
- 3.) Daniel 9:26 describes the final week or seven in indefinite terms.
- 4.) Daniel 9:27 describes the final week or seven in definite terms.

Since God has given them seventy years of exile for the 490 years of neglect, God will not bring to completion certain things for his people before the end of the 490 years. Several things will take place at the end of the seventy weeks (Dan 9:24).

- 1.) Finish transgression.
- 2.) Make an end to sin.
- 3.) Make atonement for iniquity.
- 4.) Bring in everlasting righteousness.
- 5.) Seal up the vision and prophecy.
- 6.) Anoint the most holy.

Furthermore, before the end of the 69<sup>th</sup> week the decree will go out to rebuild Jerusalem, the plaza, and the moat even in times of distress before the coming of Messiah (Dan 9:25). The city, plaza, and moat were rebuilt with the return of Ezra and Nehemiah. We know that Messiah will come after the 69<sup>th</sup> week, because seven plus sixty-two is sixty-nine.

After the 69<sup>th</sup> week (or seven and then sixty-two weeks, there is no need to mention the first seven, since it was broken down in Daniel 9:25) Messiah will be cut off and have nothing. For Messiah to be cut off after 69 weeks does not necessitate that it be during the 69 weeks or even immediately after (such as the beginning of the 70<sup>th</sup> week), but only that it was after. There is only one week in which he could be cut off—the 70<sup>th</sup> week. Jesus was cut off after three and a half years of ministry, the equivalent of half of one week (seven years). How do we know Jesus' ministry was three and a half years? The book of John reveals that Jesus participated in four Passovers (John 2:13; 5:1; 6:4; 13:1; cf., Luke 3:23), which would mean approximately three and a half years (Passover took place in the spring). How do we know that Jesus is cut off during the 70<sup>th</sup> week, for Daniel 9:26 only says after the 62<sup>nd</sup> (or 69<sup>th</sup>) week? Daniel 9:26 describes the final week or seven in indefinite terms, Daniel 9:27 describes the final seven in definite terms. Daniel 9:27 speaks about Jesus as making a firm covenant with many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to the sacrifice and grain offering.

The following comparison can be made to help better understand the relationship between Daniel 9:26 and 27.

	Daniel 9:26 (indefinite)	Daniel 9:27 (definite)
Messiah	Messiah cut off	Makes firm covenant, etc.
The people and the one	Destroy city, sanctuary, etc.	Makes desolate / complete destruction

Jesus is the one who makes a firm covenant with many in the middle of the 70<sup>th</sup> week, not the anti-christ. How did Jesus fulfill what is spoken of in Daniel 9:24-27?

1.) He finished the transgression (Dan 9:24; Isa 53:5). As Jesus died he cried out, it is finished (John 19:30). He finished or atoned for sin at the cross. No future sacrifice is needed since he put away transgression at the cross (Rom 6:1-2, 14; Heb 9:15).

2.) He made an end to sin (Dan 9:24). Jesus came into the world to save sinners (Matt 1:21; John 1:29; Rom 5:12-19; 6:23; 1 Cor 15:3; Heb 9:26; 1 Pet 2:24; 3:18; 1 John 3:5). Jesus by his work at the cross took away the power of sin (Heb 10:4-11). This does not mean that sin does not exist, but that sin has been dealt with at the cross and that the eternal sacrifice has been made that takes away sin. The only enemy left for believers is death itself, but at Christ's second coming he will do away with death as well (1 Cor 15:55-56).

3.) He made atonement for iniquity (Dan 9:24; Isa 53:6). Jesus made atonement for sin at the cross. In other words, he satisfied God's wrath and made reconciliation between God and man (Rom 3:21-26; 5:19; 2 Cor 5:19; Eph 2:16; Col 1:20-22; Titus 2:14; Heb 2:17).

4.) He brought in everlasting righteousness (Dan 9:24; Isa 53:11). In other words, he has made all those who trust in him righteous before God (Matt 3:15; Rom 3:21-26; 5:17-21; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 9:12; 1 John 2:29).

5.) He sealed up the vision and prophecy (Dan 9:24; Deut 18:15-16). In the OT "to seal" a document meant to attach a seal to it to show it was authentic or genuine (1 Kings 21:8; Jer 32:10-11). Jesus "sealed" up this vision and completed or authenticated prophecy by fulfilling what was written of him and by being the final prophet of God (Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39; Acts 3:18; cf., Matt 11:13; Acts 3:22; 7:37). Throughout the NT we see the formula, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet(s)," which testifies that Jesus has brought to conclusion or sealed up the vision and prophecy.

6.) He was anointed as the most holy (Dan 9:24). The word *place* is added in the text, which assumes a future temple. However, the most holy is Christ. He is called the holy one of God (Mark 1:24; Luke 1:35; John 17:19; Acts 2:27; 3:14; 10:38; 1 John 2:20; cf., Isa 61:1; Matt 3:16-17; Luke 4:18-22; Acts 4:27). Jesus is the true temple, so in one sense it is a place, but really a person that is anointed the most holy (John 2:21).

7.) He was cut off (Dan 9:26). The idea of cut off is that he did not die a natural death, but died by force. In other words, he was murdered. Isaiah foretold of this day when Jesus would be "cut off" from the land of the living (Isa 53:8; cf., Acts 2:23; 3:15; 5:30).

8.) He confirmed a covenant with many for one week (Dan 9:27). Jesus instituted a new covenant at his death. He confirmed or made firm a covenant by his death. Jesus called

this covenant the new covenant, for it replaced the old (Matt 26:28; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; Heb 8:6ff; 9:14-15; 12:24; cf., Isa 42:6; 49:8; 55:3; Jer 31:31).

9.) He put a stop to the sacrifice and the grain offering in the middle of the final week (Dan 9:27). Jesus put an end to all the sacrifices of the OT. He completely fulfilled and satisfied the requirements of the OT sacrificial system (Heb 7:11; 9:26; 10:8-9, 18-26). The evidence of the end of all sacrifices was the institution of a new covenant (Heb 8:6ff) and the tearing of the temple veil (Matt 27:51). Even though the Jews continued to offer sacrifices for many years after Jesus' death; his work at the cross marked the end of the old covenant and all it entailed, which brings us to the "people of the prince" found in Daniel 9:26-27.

The final fate of Judaism came when the people of the prince and the one who makes desolate destroyed the city and temple (Dan 9:26-27). The people of the prince (Jesus) are not those who are with Jesus, his church, but they are the people who he sends to judge Israel because of their sin (Matt 24:1-2, 15-22; Luke 19:41-44; 21:20-24; cf., Matt 27:25). The people will come and destroy the city and the sanctuary and its end will come with a flood, even to the end. More specifically, one will come who will bring desolation and complete destruction. This prophecy about a people and an individual who came and destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the temple was Titus and the Roman army in 70 AD. With the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem in 70 AD, God was delivering the final blow to Judaism, namely judgment on them for rejecting Jesus and the end to the old covenant. In other words, Judaism and all its laws were ended, because Christ has fulfilled it all.

How does the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple fit within a three and a half year period if these events take place during the later half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week? The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple took place almost forty years after the life of Christ. The answer is found in the already-not-yet dynamic we find in Scripture. Jesus' ministry was three and a half years and with another three and a half years would come the end of the age. However, with the coming of Jesus we are introduced to the last days, which entails all sorts of promises (e.g., new covenant, Spirit, sonship, etc.). This final ushering in of the kingdom has been postponed for over two-thousand years. In other words, the kingdom has come in principle, but not in full reality. Therefore, instead of another three and a half years and then the end of the age, the apostles understand that the last days have dawned, but that the promises of the kingdom are here in principle, but not full reality (Acts 2:17; 1 Cor 10:11; 2 Tim 3:1; Heb 1:2; 2 Pet 3:3). Therefore, as the extension of Christ's body, the church is in the last half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week, which would also make the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple fit within the last half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week. In other words, the last half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week is from the time of Christ's death and resurrection to the end of the age, which is also called the last days by the apostles. The idea of the church age as three and a half years is further supported by John's description of the church's work as "forty-two months, one thousand two hundred and sixty days, a time, times, and half of time" (Rev 11:2; 12:6, 14; 13:5). If the blessings of the end of the age have come during this time, but the day of the Lord has been postponed until Jesus comes again, then it should be no surprise to see the second half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week re-interpreted to be a long period of time, rather than a "literal" three and a half years.

Jesus, at his coming, not only introduced the ultimate Sabbath, which we see fully consummated at the end of the age (Heb 3:1-4:11), but he also ushered in the favorable year of the Lord, the Jubilee year, which began at his first coming and will be complete at his second coming (Luke 4:18; cf., Isa 61:1-2). Jesus also brought an end to the exile of the people of God. Even though Israel returned to the land after 70 years in captivity, the people never truly possessed the land because they continued to live in exile by virtue of foreign rule. However, with the coming of Jesus the exile has ended, for it was a type of the spiritual exile his people experienced that only he could end through a greater exodus (Luke 9:31; cf., Heb 3:1ff). In Matthew 2:17-18 the weeping of Rachel for her children is fulfilled at the slaughtering of the Bethlehem children. This passage is quoted from Jeremiah 31:15 prior to the exile of Israel and the promise of restoration (Jer 31:31-34). The Davidic line was dethroned at the captivity and never restored since that time. However, the tears that began in Jeremiah's day have climaxed and come to an end with the tears of the mothers at Bethlehem. The heir of David's throne has come, the exile is truly over, and God's faithful son brings the promise of the new covenant (Matt 2:15; 26:28; Luke 3:23ff; 22:20; cf., Exo 4:22-23; Hos 11:1). Although the exile has ended, the saints find themselves in a wilderness experience and, in that sense, still in exile awaiting the final consummation of their exodus and entry into the promised land, which has been guaranteed by the work of Jesus at the cross (Rev 12:6, 14; cf., Exo 19:4; Isa 40:31; 1 Pet 1:1; 2:11; 5:13).

Jesus knew perfectly when we would die and it was according to the prophecy of Daniel (Matt 26:18, 45; John 2:4; 7:6, 30; 17:1; cf., Mark 1:15; Luke 3:15, 21-22; John 1:29-31; Gal 4:1-7). In Daniel 9:24-27 we do not find a picture of the anti-christ, but of Jesus himself. We find a beautiful portrayal of what Jesus did at the cross and the exact description of his ministry and redemption. Although we have received these things in principle, we eagerly wait the full consummation of these realities at his second coming.