

# Daniel's 70 Weeks

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For most of my Christian life, I have accepted the unanimous chorus of conservative Christian chronologists, including Ussher, that the 70 weeks of Daniel 9 total 490 years, and that the first 69 weeks span the time from Artaxerxes' command to Nehemiah until the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. I also held Sir Robert Anderson's theory of "prophetic years" consisting of 360 days each, because it seemed to fit the time frame so precisely. However, my detailed study of chronology over the last year has forced me to abandon these as completely untenable. This article is a retraction of my former position, and explanation of why I have changed my opinion. My conclusions are as follows:

- The 70 weeks of years are regular solar years (lunar years corrected to the solar)
- The period covered by 70 weeks is not 490 years, but 500 years
- The beginning of the 70 weeks is not the decree of Artaxerxes, but of Cyrus.

## **The 70 Weeks are Sabbatical Cycles**

Christian interpreters have long held that the "sevens" (weeks) are periods of 7 years. Yet, they give no explanation as to why years would be given in groups of 7 as opposed to individual years. But, since this prophecy was given to Daniel, a Jew, we must interpret it as a Jew would understand it.

In Leviticus 25, God instructed Israel to keep a Sabbatical year calendar. They were to farm their land for 6 years and allow the land to rest the 7<sup>th</sup> year with neither planting nor harvesting. The agricultural cycle is based on the four seasons. Each of the 7 years within the Sabbatical "week" was a complete cycle of seasons (fall, winter, spring, & summer). It is therefore impossible to separate these years from the solar calendar which is synchronized to the seasons. If a Jew actually tried to use Anderson's 360 day calendar to countdown the weeks of years until Messiah, the planting and harvesting seasons would quickly get out of sync with the tracking of years. Within 30 years, the seasons would be completely reversed, making it impossible to continue using such a calendar to track planting and harvesting. The Sabbatical week (6+1 years) must be synchronized with the seasons (solar year). Anderson's 360 day imaginary year is simply impossible in the real world. The proper calendar is the civil calendar the Jews have used since ancient times, and continue to use today – a lunar calendar corrected to the seasons.

### **The 70 Weeks Must Include Intercalated Jubilee Years**

Chronologists and commentators have also been unable to adequately explain why the countdown to Messiah is not given as merely "69 weeks," but is instead given as 7 weeks plus 62 weeks. Why divide the period of 69 weeks without any explanation? Once again, the problem is the failure to consider the Sabbatical year agricultural calendar.

Leviticus 25 goes on to prescribe a long cycle of 7 of these Sabbatical weeks plus one year – the Jubilee Year. That is, at the end of 7 of these 7 year periods (49 years), there is added an extra year. Just like the 7<sup>th</sup> year is in addition to the 6 regular agricultural years, so also the Jubilee year is in addition to the 7 weeks of years, being the 50<sup>th</sup> year. The Jubilee year is not the first year of the next Sabbatical cycle, nor is it the last Sabbatical year. Scripture states plainly that the Jubilee is the 50<sup>th</sup> year. Consequently, the Jubilee year rounds out the 49 years (7 weeks) to an even 50 years. In other words, there is one year intercalated after every 49 years. Therefore, only 7 of these Sabbatical cycles occur continuously. The cycle is interrupted for the Jubilee year, and then it begins again after the Jubilee year. Consequently, "7 weeks" on such a calendar is not 49 years, but 50 years – a complete Jubilee cycle. The 69 weeks of years which precede Christ's crucifixion in Daniel's prophecy must include the extra Jubilee years, one year added after each 7 weeks of years (49 years).

The reason the prophecy is given in "weeks" is to inform us that it is using the Sabbatical Week calendar. The reason the 69 week period is divided into 7 weeks plus 62 weeks is to mark off the first Jubilee cycle, so that we know the prophecy is being given on the Sabbatical – Jubilee calendar, reminding us to include the intercalated Jubilee years, one for every 7 weeks.

Since the total prophecy of 70 weeks consists of 10 of these Jubilee cycles of 50 years, the total for the entire period is 500 years. All other chronologists have interpreted the 70 weeks as spanning 490 years because they have failed to account for the 10 intercalated Jubilee years.

Since the 70 weeks prophecy is given on the Sabbatical – Jubilee calendar, the starting point must be a Jubilee year. And, the whole prophecy must be synchronized with the Jubilee calendar already in use by the Jews after receiving the land inheritance under Joshua. Therefore, any chronology that does not place the start of the 70 weeks on a Jubilee year, counting from when the Jews first began to observe the Sabbatical – Jubilee calendar for farming, cannot be correct.

### **The Decree of Cyrus is the Starting Point**

All modern Bible chronologists have fallen into the trap of relying partially on secular historical data. The Bible gives us intricate chronological data for all the periods of time from creation until the crucifixion of Christ. But, if we link the start of the 70 weeks to any command except the first one given by Cyrus, we have a huge hole in the data. Even chronologists who claim to base their work on Biblical data alone fill in the supposed missing Biblical data using secular data. For example, Dr. Floyd Nolan Jones' recent work, *'The Chronology of the Old Testament,'* claims to be in what he calls the "Biblicist" school, which he described as follows: *"The goal of the members of this school is to construct a standard chronology of the Bible from the chronological data embedded within the Hebrew Masoretic Text of the Old Testament, independent of any outside sources. In the past, James Ussher has been its leading proponent."* Both Ussher and Jones have failed to achieve this stated goal. Both of them used Biblical data alone to date from Creation to the Babylonian captivity. And they used biblical data (the 69 "weeks" of Daniel 9) to calculate from Artaxerxes' decree to Nehemiah until Christ's crucifixion. However, both Ussher and Jones used secular data to fill in the gap between the end of the Babylonian captivity and the 20<sup>th</sup> year of Artaxerxes, the year they assume Daniel's 69 weeks began, based on Nehemiah 2. The Bible simply does not give us the chronological data from Cyrus' decree ending the Babylonian captivity until Artaxerxes. So, these chronologists rely on secular dates for the succession and reigns of the Persian kings. Yet, the reliability of the secular data, particularly the dates and list of Persian kings in Ptolemy's Canon, (the primary source for the Persian period), are highly suspect.

I am convinced that since God took the trouble to record and preserve in His Word complete chronologies from creation until the end of the Babylonian captivity, and He provided a precise prophetic chronology of "weeks" of years (for the intertestamental period) until the cutting off of the Messiah, He did not fail to provide absolutely everything we need for a complete biblical chronology, without the need to supplement the data with secular sources which are unreliable.

The problem of missing data from Cyrus to Artaxerxes, which has plagued virtually all previous attempts to arrive at a purely biblical chronology, is the result of linking the start of Daniel's weeks to the wrong decree of the wrong Persian king. The problem of missing data only exists if we attach the start of Daniel's weeks to any decree recorded in Ezra – Nehemiah apart from the very first one, that of Cyrus the Great. If we use this decree, there is no missing data to fill, because Scripture states plainly that Cyrus' decree occurred at the end of the 70 years captivity, as recorded by Jeremiah! If our underlying assumption that God gave us all the data we need to construct a complete chronology is correct, then this decree of Cyrus must be the start of the 70 weeks of

Daniel, because it is the only decree that fits the criteria and can be absolutely dated from the Biblical data.

Of course, using the decree of Cyrus as the trigger for the 70 weeks prophecy is immediately rejected by most conservative Christians on three counts:

First, it flows counter to the secular historical dates that are considered to be well established (that the fall of Jerusalem was in 586/587 BC).

Second, many claim that the command that triggers the 70 weeks prophecy must concern the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem, which Cyrus' decree does not mention.

Third, many claim that the commencement criteria in Daniel 9:25, *"from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem,"* must specifically authorize the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. The claim is made that Cyrus only ordered the rebuilding of the Temple, not the city. Since specific mention is made of the reconstruction of Jerusalem in Daniel's prophecy, modern chronologists look to Artaxerxes' command to Nehemiah as the only one which qualifies.

The first objection, that such a chronology would disagree with well-established historical dates, is of course irrelevant for those of us who have a high view of Scripture and a much lower view of man's capacity to discover truth without God's guidance. For those willing to allow scholarly research to correct the Bible, this study will be seen as foolish. My response is simply this: *"The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."* The secular dates are simply wrong. This has been shown before regarding the dating of the Pharaohs. And Ptolemy's king's list has also been shown to be largely guesswork. Many secular chronologies do not take into account the possibilities of overlapping reigns, or periods when there was no king. Secular dates in the BC range are very much suspect.

The second objection, that the decree of Cyrus does not mention the rebuilding of the wall, presupposes something that is not in the text of Daniel. The "wall" statement in Daniel's prophecy has nothing to do with the command itself, but only indicates that the wall would be constructed at some point *"in troublesome times."* Note carefully the wording of Daniel's prophecy. *"Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times."* The command itself does not mention the wall. The comments about the wall's

construction are editorial, describing what will ultimately follow the command. The only criterion is that the command must include the rebuilding of Jerusalem. If the wall's construction must be specified in the decree, so also must the last clause, *"even in troublesome times."* No one would suggest that the Persian king decreed "troublesome times" for his construction project! Therefore, the "wall" comment is only an editorial description of what would occur afterwards, and not part of the decree itself. Regardless of which decree we choose, the latter statement about the wall's construction in troublesome times would still be true.

The third objection, that the command of Cyrus was limited to rebuilding the Temple, and did not include the city of Jerusalem, is simply false. While it is true that the wording of the decree as given in the last chapter of 2 Chronicles and the first chapter of Ezra only mentions the rebuilding of the Temple, these quotations from Cyrus' decree are clearly selective. They are not exhaustive treatments of the entire decree.

*2 Chron 36:23*

*23 Thus says Cyrus king of Persia:*

*"All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!"*

That this is not the entire decree is plain, because Ezra gives a longer version of it.

*Ezra 1:2-4*

*2 Thus says Cyrus king of Persia:*

*"All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. 3 Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. 4 And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem."*

That even Ezra's version is only an excerpt, not the entire decree given by Cyrus, is proven by Isaiah's prophecy about Cyrus some 200 years earlier.

*Isaiah 44:24-28*

*24 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, And He who formed you from the womb:*

*"I am the LORD, who makes all things, Who stretches out the heavens all alone, Who spreads abroad the earth by Myself; 25 Who frustrates the signs of the babblers, And drives diviners mad; Who turns wise men backward, And makes their knowledge foolishness; 26 Who confirms the word of His servant, And performs the counsel of His messengers; Who says to Jerusalem, 'You shall be inhabited,' To the cities of Judah, 'You shall be built,' And I will raise up her waste places; 27 Who says to the deep, 'Be dry! And I will dry up your rivers; 28 Who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, And he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," And to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid".'"*

If Cyrus did not decree both the rebuilding of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem, then Isaiah's prophecy was in error. Clearly, Isaiah was not mistaken, and the decree of Cyrus included the rebuilding of Jerusalem, whether or not this was included in Ezra excerpted quotation.

Furthermore, Josephus wrote that Cyrus' decree was in response to his reading Isaiah's prophecy. He was greatly impressed with this God who called him by name before he was even born. Cyrus immediately decreed both the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple, based on Isaiah's prophecy which included both.

*"Accordingly, when Cyrus read this, and admired the Divine power, an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him to fulfill what was so written; so he called for the most eminent Jews that were in Babylon, and said to them that he gave them leave to go back to their own country, and to rebuild their city Jerusalem, and the temple of God, for that he would be their assistant, and that he would write to the rulers and governors that were in the neighborhood of their country of Judea, that they should contribute to them gold and silver for the building of the temple, and besides that, beasts for their sacrifices."<sup>1</sup>*

Josephus then quotes from Cyrus' decree as follows:

*"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. ..."<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Josephus, Antiquities, Book XI, ch i

<sup>2</sup> Josephus, Antiquities, Book XI, ch. i

Shortly after Cyrus' death, the construction of Jerusalem was opposed by the people of the surrounding area. Ezra wrote about the first letter of opposition sent to Ahasuerus (Cambyses, Cyrus' son), but does not give the content.<sup>3</sup> However, Josephus provides the text of this letter. It is clear from the letter that the Jews were not only rebuilding the Temple, but also the city of Jerusalem and its walls in response to Cyrus' decree.

*"To our Lord Cambyses. We thy servants, Rathumus the historiographer, and Semellius the scribe, and the rest that are thy judges in Syria and Phoenicia, send greeting. It is fit, O king, that thou shouldst know that those Jews which were carried to Babylon are come into our country, and **are building that rebellious and wicked city, and its market-places, and setting up its walls**, and raising up the temple; know therefore, that when these things are finished, they will not be willing to pay tribute, nor will they submit to thy commands, but will resist kings, and will choose rather to rule over others than be ruled over themselves."*<sup>4</sup>

Cambyses replied with the following letter according to Josephus:

*"Cambyses the king, to Rathumus the historiographer, to Beeltethmus, to Semellius the scribe, and the rest that are in commission, and dwelling in Samaria and Phoenicia, after this manner: I have read the epistle that was sent from you; and I gave order that the books of my forefathers should be searched into, and it is there found that **this city** hath always been an enemy to kings, and its inhabitants have raised seditions and wars. We also are sensible that their kings have been powerful and tyrannical, and have exacted tribute of Celesyria and Phoenicia. **Wherefore I gave order, that the Jews shall not be permitted to build that city**, lest such mischief as they used to bring upon kings be greatly augmented."<sup>5</sup>*

Ezra recorded another similar disruption of the building of Jerusalem in the early years of Artaxerxes, prior to his decree to Nehemiah, once again caused by a similar letter sent to the Persian king.

*Ezra 4:11-22*

*11 To King Artaxerxes from your servants, the men of the region beyond the River, and so forth:*

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<sup>3</sup> Ezra 4:6

<sup>4</sup> Josephus, Antiquities, Book XI, ch. i

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

12 Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem, **and are building the rebellious and evil city, and are finishing its walls and repairing the foundations.** 13 Let it now be known to the king that, **if this city is built and the walls completed,** they will not pay tax, tribute, or custom, and the king's treasury will be diminished. 14 Now because we receive support from the palace, it was not proper for us to see the king's dishonor; therefore we have sent and informed the king, 15 that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers. And you will find in the book of the records and know that this city is a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces, and that they have incited sedition within the city in former times, for which cause this city was destroyed. 16 We inform the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the result will be that you will have no dominion beyond the River.

17 The king sent an answer: To Rehum the commander, to Shimshai the scribe, to the rest of their companions who dwell in Samaria, and to the remainder beyond the River: Peace, and so forth.

18 The letter which you sent to us has been clearly read before me. 19 And I gave the command, and a search has been made, and it was found that this city in former times has revolted against kings, and rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it. 20 There have also been mighty kings over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all the region beyond the River; and tax, tribute, and custom were paid to them. 21 **Now give the command to make these men cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me.**

22 Take heed now that you do not fail to do this. Why should damage increase to the hurt of the kings?

It is quite clear that Artaxerxes decree in his twentieth year giving leave to Nehemiah was the resumption of what had been stalled by the opposition of Israel's enemies. It was not the initial decree to rebuild Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. Consequently, the decree of Cyrus in his first year is the only possible start for the 70 weeks prophecy. It is the only decree for which we have a definite date in Scripture, and it is the first decree to meet the criteria in Daniel's prophecy.

Also, keep in mind that Daniel lived until at least the third year of Cyrus,<sup>6</sup> three years beyond Cyrus' decree. Therefore, Daniel lived to see the beginning of his 70 weeks prophecy, the countdown to the coming of the Messiah. This is to be expected, since the prophecy was given in response to Daniel's own request for knowledge. The other

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel 10:1

proposed starting points for the 70 week prophecy would place them outside of Daniel's lifetime.

Dating the 70 weeks prophecy from the decree of Cyrus frees us entirely from reliance on non-biblical sources in establishing our chronology. Christians should have learned by now that all sciences are fluid, and are open to a variety of interpretations depending on the presuppositions of the interpreters. Modern scholarship, even Christian scholarship, falls into the same trap as evolutionists who claim that the earth is millions of years old. They are willing to allow secular historians to correct the Bible. New archeological discoveries frequently overturn long established historical "facts." But the Word of God remains unchanged. It is "sufficient" so that the man of God may be "thoroughly equipped."<sup>7</sup> And that equipment includes the chronological timeline of God's dealings with mankind.

Using this new understanding of the 70 weeks, the crucifixion of Jesus after the end of the 69<sup>th</sup> week must be dated to 493 years after the command given by Cyrus, one week short of the 70 weeks which totals 500 years. Cyrus' decree must be on a Jubilee year, that is, his decree is to be synchronized with the already existing Jubilee calendar.

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Tim. 3:16-17