

# The Seventy Weeks Of Daniel 9:2027

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I suspect that we have all been confronted with this end times scenario:

This diagram comes from a book by Tim LaHaye. This teaching is often found in evangelical books and often heard on Christian TV broadcasts. It can be called *dispensational* (it breaks up God's program with people of different ages into distinctly different dispensations) *premillennialism* (it has a millennium and Jesus is coming at the beginning of the millennium) with a *pretribulation rapture* (it has a rapture at the beginning of the 7year tribulation).

As we see this timeline, I suspect we all know where the notion of a millennium comes from. Revelation 20 speaks of the 1000 years, and millennialists interpret the number literally. I suspect we all know where the notion of a rapture comes from (1 Th 4:1617).

It may not be so clear among us where the notion of a 7year tribulation comes from, and why this tribulation is broken into two segments of 3 ½ years.

The truth is that these notions come from the prophecy of the "seventy weeks" in Daniel 9:2027. The prophecies of Daniel in general, and especially Daniel 9:2027, are very important to dispensationalists. In introducing his comments on the seventy sevens, John Walvoord writes, "The prophecies of Daniel are the key to understanding the major prophecies of Scripture in both the Old and the New Testaments."

The purpose of this paper will be to look at the prophecy of the seventy weeks in Daniel 9:2027. In a special way we will consider the use of this passage by dispensationalists so that we will be prepared to respond to people who come to us with notions of a 7year tribulation.

Without a doubt it is fitting to ask the Lord's guidance and blessing, as we recognize the difficulty of this passage. Leupold has commented about this passage: "If there ever was an exegetical crux, this is it." Montgomery says: "The history of the exegesis of the 70 Weeks is the Dismal Swamp of O. T. criticism." May God guide us in this study!

## I. An Exegetical Study of Daniel 9:2027

### A. The setting

Daniel 9 takes place in the year that Babylon fell to the Medes and the Persians (probably 538 BC). The prophet Daniel, who was in his eighties at least by this time, recalled the prophecy of Jeremiah that "the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years" (Da 9:2). He assumed that the time was near for restoration.

In verses 419 we have the prayer which Daniel offered to the Lord on this occasion. Daniel sincerely confessed the sins of the people. He called upon the Lord to act in keeping with his promise.

In verses 2027 we have the answer of the Lord to the prayer of Daniel. The Lord sent Gabriel with a prophecy concerning Jerusalem and her future. Here are verses 2023 in the NIV:

<sup>20</sup>While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the LORD my God for his holy hill—<sup>21</sup>while I

was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. <sup>22</sup>He instructed me and said to me, “Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. <sup>23</sup>As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision:

*B. Wordforword translation of Daniel 9:2427*

שְׁבַעִים שְׁבַעִים נְחָתָדָּ עַל־עַמְּךָ | וְעַל־עִיר קְדֹשֶׁךָ<sup>24</sup>

“Sevens” (the common word for “week”) seventy it has been determined (Niphal perf, 3ms, hapax) for your people and for the city of your holiness

הַפֶּשַׁע וְלַחֲתָם חֲטָאוֹת וְלִכְפֹּר עוֹן

to finish (Qere = כלה) (Kethibv = כלא “to restrain”) the transgression, and to put an end to (Qere = וְלַחֲתָם = Hiphil infinitive) (Kethibv = וְלַחֲתָם = “to seal up”) sin, and to atone for iniquity

וְלַהֲבִיא צֶדֶק עֲלֵמִים וְלַחֲתָם חֲזוֹן וְנָבִיא וְלַמְשִׁיחַ קְדֹשִׁים:

and to bring in righteousness of eternity, and to seal up vision and prophet, and to anoint the holy of holies

וְתִדְעַ וְתִשְׁלַל מִן־מִצְרָא דְבָר לְהָשִׁיב וְלִבְנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם עַד־מְשִׁיחַ נְגִיד שְׁבַעִים שְׁבַעֵה<sup>25</sup>

and you will know and you will understand: from the going forth of a word to restore and to build Jerusalem until messiah (“an anointed one”) a prince sevens seven

וְשְׁבַעִים שְׁשִׁים וְשָׁנִים תָּשׁוּב וְנִבְנְתָה רְחוֹב וְחָרוֹץ וּבְצֹק הָעֵתִים:

and sevens sixty and two she will return and she will be built (= she will be built again) plaza and \_\_\_\_\_? (moat, trench, wall, within fixed limits) and in the distress of the times

וְאַחֲרַי הַשְּׁבַעִים שְׁשִׁים וְשָׁנִים יִכָּרֵת מְשִׁיחַ וְאֵין לוֹ<sup>26</sup>

and after the sevens sixty and two he will be cut off messiah and there is nothing for him

וְהָעִיר וְהַקְּדֹשׁ יִשְׁחִית עִם נְגִיד הַבָּא

and the city and the sanctuary he will destroy the people of the prince who is coming

וְקִצּוֹ בְשֵׁטֶף וְעַד קֵץ מִלְחָמָה נַחֲרָצַת שִׁמְמוֹת:

and his (or its) end (is) in the flood and until end (there is) war decreed (niphil part, fs) desolations

וְהַגְבִּיר בְּרִית לְרַבִּים שְׁבוּעַ אֶחָד: <sup>27</sup>

and he will make strong a covenant for many seven one

וְחִצֵּי הַשְּׁבוּעַ יִשְׁבִּית | זֶבַח וּמִנְחָה

and the half (middle of) of the seven he will cause to cease sacrifice and offering

וְעַל כַּנְף שְׁקוּצִים מְשֻׁמִּים וְעַד-כְּלָה וְנַחֲרָצָה תִתְּדַ עַל-שָׁמַם:

and on a wing of abominations one who causes desolation (Poel part), and until a complete destruction and decreed (niphil part) she will pour forth (Qal impf, 3fs, נִתְּדַ) upon one causing desolation (Poel part) (or Qal part = “one desolated”).

### C. Translation according to the NIV

<sup>24</sup>“Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.”

<sup>25</sup>“Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixtytwo ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. <sup>26</sup>After the sixtytwo ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. <sup>27</sup>He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven,’ but in the middle of that ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And one who causes desolation will place abominations on a wing of the temple until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.”

### D. A summary of the messages in this prophecy

1. A definite period of time is determined for the future of Jerusalem. As there were 70 years of captivity promised by Jeremiah, so there will be 70 “sevens” in the future. This period of time is broken down into three smaller groupings: 7 “sevens” followed by 62 “sevens” followed by 1 “seven.”

2. The Messianic blessings which focus on the removal of sin will be brought in by the end of the 70 “sevens.”
3. This period of 70 “sevens” begins with the issuing of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem.
4. The Messiah will come after 7 “sevens” or after 69 “sevens” (depending upon how you divide v. 25).
5. Jerusalem will be rebuilt.
6. The Messiah will be “cut off” after 69 “sevens.”
7. Jerusalem will be destroyed by people led by another “leader” to come after 69 “sevens.”
8. A “covenant” will be made by someone (Messiah? antichrist?) with many people for the final “seven.”
9. The person (Messiah, antichrist) who makes this covenant will stop sacrifice and offering in the middle of the last “seven.”
10. Jerusalem will be polluted and the one who caused pollution will come to an end.

## **II. Some Personal Conclusions on Some Interpretive Issues**

It is honest to say that there are a host of interpretive issues in these four verses. There has never been any degree of unity in the church on this passage. Already when Jerome (+ 420) wrote his commentary on Daniel, he listed nine different interpretations and left it to the reader to pick which he preferred.

A few conclusions have jelled for me, however. You may not agree with them all. Not all conservative Lutherans do. Let me share, however, four conclusions which make sense to me.

### *A. The Messiah in the passage is Jesus.*

On this point I don't expect controversy. The only people who do not see Jesus here are the higher critics and the Jews.

The passage clearly speaks of the Messianic blessings brought by Christ. Much could be said about each of the six phrases in verse 24. Suffice it to say that Jesus without doubt is the one who has “atoned for wickedness” and who “brings in everlasting righteousness.”

### *B. The 70 “weeks” do not refer to 490 literal years.*

Here is where the controversy begins!

Many people take it for granted that the “weeks” in this passage refer to “weeks of years.” They also insist that the years must be literal years. That means the passage speaks of a period of 490 years broken into segments of 49 years (first 7 weeks), 434 years (62 weeks), and 7 years (1 week).

The Hebrew word is שָׁבוּעַ. It occurs 20 times in the Old Testament. It is the normal OT word for a week of days, and in all other OT occurrences it refers to a normal week of days. There is no other use parallel to the Daniel use in the Old Testament. In the Hebrew of the intertestamental period (cf. the Book of Jubilees) and in the Mishnah, the word does take on the meaning “weekofyears.”

It would seem to me that the notion of a week of years might be in place with the Daniel passage. In several other apocalyptic passages of the Bible the period when the antichrist will flourish is given as roughly 31 years. These passages may well parallel the last half of the last seven in Daniel 9.

Here are the passages:

Daniel 7:25—He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for *a time, times, and half a time*.

Daniel 12:11—From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be *1290 days*.

Revelation 11:23—They [the Gentiles] will trample on the holy city for *42 months*. And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for *1,260 days*, clothed in sackcloth.

Revelation 12:6—The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for *1,260 days*.

Revelation 12:14—The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for *a time, times and half a time*.

Revelation 13:5—The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for *fortytwo months*.

Still, even if the notion of “weeks of years” may be in the picture in Daniel 9, that does not mean they are literal years. Two good reasons can be given why the 70 weeks should not be taken as 490 literal years.

First, in apocalyptic literature we are led not to take the numbers literally. For example, in Revelation we are led not to take the 42 months as literal months. Dr. Becker interprets the 42 months as the entire NT era when the church is persecuted by the devil and his helpers. Similarly we understand the 1000 years of Revelation to be a symbolic number for the complete period of the NT era. On Daniel 9 Judisch says, “These heptads and all the other numerical and chronological data in this passage are used symbolically. For such is the common usage of numbers in the apocalyptic genre of literature.”

Secondly, no matter what anyone says, taking the numbers literally does not fit naturally with the historical course of events. One must resort to some sort of juggling or rearranging to make the 490 years fit. We will speak more of this later.

I would agree with Keil on this point. He says the 70 weeks is “an intentionally indefinite designation of a period of time measured by the number seven, whose chronological duration must be determined on other grounds.” If “7” is the number of divine work and “10” is the number of completeness, then “490” (7x7x10) may well refer to the period in which the divine work of greatest importance is brought to perfection.

Of course the number 70 in this context is also reflecting the Jeremiah prophecy about a 70 year captivity and the prayer of Daniel. Daniel prayed: “Is the 70 years about up?” God answered, “I’ve got a new period of 70 marked out for Jerusalem during which I will bring to a completion the blessings of the Messiah.”

C. The “issuing of the decree” refers to the decree of Cyrus in 538 BC.

What is the decree (דְּבַר) which begins the 70 weeks?

This is a much debated point, and at least six different suggestions can be found:

- 1) God’s decision and word in heaven that these events would happen
- 2) Jeremiah’s prophecy that Jerusalem would be rebuilt
- 3) Edict of Cyrus in 538 BC (Ezr 1; 2 Ch 36)
- 4) Darius I reaffirming the edict of Cyrus in 517 BC (Ezr 6:112)
- 5) Artaxerxes I to Ezra in 458 BC (Ezr 7:1126)
- 6) Artaxerxes I to Nehemiah in 445 BC (Ne 2).

It seems to me that the natural choice is the edict of Cyrus in 538 BC. This the chief decree, of such importance that it is quoted twice in the Old Testament. Picking this decree means that the new period of 70 would neatly follow the end of Jeremiah’s period of 70. Also, Cyrus was predicted in Isaiah to be the one who would bring about the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem (44:28; 45:13). Certainly after the decree of Cyrus there were houses and people living in a rebuilt Jerusalem (Hag 1:4).

I’m convinced that the only reason why some people suggest a decree other than the decree of Cyrus is because they insist upon 490 literal years and they have to look for something to fit. The decree of Cyrus in 538 BC, of course, is too early if you are looking for 483 literal years (69 weeks) from the issuing of the decree to the crucifixion of Christ.

D. The one who confirms the covenant in v. 27 is Christ, not the antichrist.

Verse 27 says: “He will confirm a covenant with many for one “seven.” It is much debated who the subject is. Does Christ confirm this covenant? Does the antichrist?

The context has two possible antecedents for the pronoun. It could be the “Anointed one” of v. 26a (Jesus). It could be the “ruler who will come” in v. 26b. The “ruler who will come” is the closest possible antecedent. Yet this ruler is in a secondary position in its sentence. The Anointed One is the chief figure in the previous two verses and he serves as the subject of the first verb in v. 26. On the basis of syntax, people have argued both sides.

Three reasons lead me to conclude that it is Christ who confirms this covenant and not the antichrist.

First, the passage says that someone will confirm a covenant with many *for one week*. Consistently, as we have seen, the Bible in other places speaks of the time of the antichrist as 31 years or 42 months or 1260 days. One half of seven seems to be the period of the antichrist in apocalyptic language, and not a full seven.

Secondly, the ruler who will come to destroy Jerusalem in v. 26 is naturally taken to be the Roman general Titus who led the Roman armies in 70 AD. One has to make some sort of jump or adjustment if, this leader is going to make a covenant for one week. Does one jump from

Titus to the antichrist? Does one say that it is not Titus in v. 26? There is a problem either way.

Thirdly, in Biblical language we are very comfortable with the concept of Christ “confirming a covenant.” We think of the new covenant, the Last Supper, and so forth. Elsewhere in Biblical language we never hear of the antichrist making a “covenant” with people.

### III. What Do Dispensationalists Do with This Passage?

#### A. *Literal years*

Dispensationalists take it for granted that the 70 weeks are 490 literal years. They, of course, pride themselves on their “literal” reading of prophecy.

In order to make the 69 weeks (483 years) fit from the issuing of the decree to the cutting off of Christ, they look for a decree other than the decree of Cyrus.

Some dispensationalists lean on the calculations made by Robert Anderson in his book, *The Coming Prince*. He pins things done to the very day. He says the decree was issued by Artaxerxes on March 14, 445 BC. If you figure by prophetic years of 360 days, then there would be 173,880 days until the cutting off of Christ. This number is reached perfectly, he says, on April 6, 32 AD which was Palm Sunday. Here is his arithmetic:

476 years of 365 days (445-32) =	173, 740
Leap years	116
March 14-April 6	24
<hr/>	
483 prophetic years =	173, 880

Some dispensationalists look to the decree of Artaxerxes I in 458 BC (or 457 BC) as the *terminus a quo*. Then the 69 weeks (483 years) end with the baptism of Jesus in 26 AD (or 27 AD).

#### B. *Gap theory*

After the 69<sup>th</sup> week came to an end, dispensationalists say the prophetic clock stopped. This is because the Jews rejected God’s plan for them by crucifying Jesus. Now we are in the “mystery parenthesis” of the church age which was not predicted in OT prophecy.

The last week or seven years, therefore, is left unfulfilled. It is held in abeyance. There is a chronological gap between the 69<sup>th</sup> week and the 70<sup>th</sup> week. The 70<sup>th</sup> week is yet to come. It will come when the church age comes to an end and God goes back to working out his program with the Jews. This last week, therefore, will begin when the Christians will be raptured off the earth.

This seven year period is equated with the “tribulation” period in Revelation. Most dispensationalists read the book of Revelation chronologically. They say that chapters 13 deal with the church. The rapture is hinted at in Rev. 4:1. Chapters 6-19 deal with the seven year tribulation. Chapter 20 deals with the millennium. Chapters 21-22 deal with eternity in heaven.

So the seven years prior to the millennium are derived in this way. The length of the period comes from Daniel 9. It is the one week that is left for the Jews. The events of the seven year tribulation chiefly come from Rev. 6-19.

Here is how the schemes look:

### *C. The Antichrist*

There is one key feature of the seven years, however, that also comes from Daniel 9. That is the role of the antichrist.

When v. 27 says, “he will make a covenant with them many for one week,” dispensationalists think of the antichrist making a covenant with the Jews during the seven year tribulation. Actually they say this is what begins the tribulation (along with the rapture).

Isn't Titus the antecedent of “he” however? Dispensationalists say that v. 26 is referring to the army of Titus destroying Jerusalem in 70 AD, but not Titus. The “ruler who will come” is the future antichrist who will be of the same people (Romans) as the people who destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD. This is one reason (along with Dan. 7) that dispensationalists say that the antichrist must be a “Roman.” They paraphrase in this way: “Jerusalem will be destroyed by Romans. The future ruler (antichrist) will be of the same people. This antichrist will make a covenant for seven years with the Jews when the tribulation begins.”

They also see the antichrist in the second phrase of v. 27: “In the middle of that ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering.” They say that the antichrist who made a favorable covenant with the Jews at the beginning of the seven year tribulation will turn against the Jews at the halfway point. Obviously the temple in Jerusalem must have been reconstructed at some point. After 3 ½ years the antichrist will shut down the sacrifices at the temple. This is when things really get bad (the “great tribulation”).

So from Daniel 9 dispensationalists draw these features of their end times scenario: the tribulation will be seven years long, the antichrist will be a Roman, the antichrist will make a covenant with Jews at the beginning of the seven years, the antichrist will shut down the temple worship after 3 ½ years.

### *D. Importance of Daniel 9 in their thinking*

It is remarkable how this scheme (which seems so far fetched) is so consistently held by so many people who are writing books and preaching on TV. Here is a list of some authors who hold to this position: John Walvoord, Gleason Archer, Jack Van Impe, Leon Wood, Arno Gaebelein, Dave Hunt, and the Scofield Reference Bible. Church historians say that this “gap theory” in Daniel 9 was first popularized by John Nelson Darby (1800-1882).

It is remarkable how certain these men are that their interpretation of this difficult passage is correct. LaHaye confidently asserts almost as if it were so obvious that it could be taken for granted, “Daniel was specific in 9:27 that the Tribulation would be seven years long.”

It is also remarkable how this difficult prophecy is set up as of vital importance to their



system. Gaebelein wrote: “The prophetic message Gabriel brought from the throne of God to Daniel is perhaps the most important not only in the Book of Daniel, but in the whole Bible. The clear understanding of it is indispensable to every reader of God’s Word, who wants to know God’s purposes concerning the future.” Ironside wrote about the prophecy of the seventy weeks: “We have here the backbone of the entire prophetic system of the Bible.”

#### **IV. Problems with the Dispensational Interpretation**

##### *A. Standard dispensational weaknesses*

Behind this interpretation we can see a number of the standard dispensational weaknesses. There is the insistence that prophecy be interpreted literally. There is the insistence that the OT does not prophesy the church. There is the insistence that God has separate programs for the Jews (Israel) and the church.

In addition, there are a number of specific problems with their handling of this passage.

##### *B. The “gap” is nowhere indicated.*

The seventy weeks are set up in such a way that one would expect them to be consecutive. There is nothing in the text to indicate that there would be a long gap intervening between the 69<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> weeks.

##### *C. The interpretation strings together a number of suppositions.*

Included in the dispensationalist interpretation are a large number of suppositions, each of which can be and has been challenged. The more suppositions that are linked together, the more difficult it is to accept the whole interpretation as absolutely true. It’s like building a house of cards. One may set up a fairly stable first floor. But when you add additional “floors” up to ten levels, the whole thing gets shakier and shakier.

Here is a partial listing of the suppositions which are needed to support the theory:

1. The 70 weeks refers to 490 literal years
2. The decree in v. 25 was not the edict of Cyrus in 538 BC
3. The “ruler who will come” in v. 26 is not Titus, but the future antichrist
4. V. 27 is talking about the antichrist and not Christ
5. There is a long gap between the 69<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> weeks

##### *D. It establishes doctrine on the basis of a difficult, unclear passage.*

I’m sure all of us sense this weakness. Already at the time of Jerome there were nine different interpretations of this passage. There has never been uniformity in the church on its interpretation.

The dispensationalists have taken a difficult, unclear passage and made it the basis for doctrine which is nowhere else presented in Scripture. This goes contrary to proper

hermeneutics. We say that each doctrine must have a clear *sedes*. Difficult passages must be interpreted in harmony with clear passages.

Not only has a 10-story house of cards been built up, but the dispensationalists have chosen to stand with their full weight on this structure and have made it the foundation of their system.

## V. Other Problematic Interpretations

While we are considering the passage, let's look at some other ways in which the passage has been interpreted.

### A. Higher criticism

Liberal scholars say that this portion of Daniel was written during the period of the Maccabees. It presents history and not prophecy.

Commonly it is understood that the last week was the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes from 171-164 BC. The cutting off of the anointed one was the assassination of the High Priest Onias III in 171. The middle of the week when sacrifice and offering ceased was the desolation of the temple carried out by Antiochus in 167. The writer (writing between 167 and 164) looked forward to the restoration of the true worship which was accomplished by Judas Maccabeus in 164.

What is the starting point? Obviously 538 BC to 171 BC is less than the required 483 years for the first 69 weeks. Perhaps an earlier date should be picked for the decree. Or the author made a mistake in his calculations.

Here is the scheme:

Needless to say, this interpretation does not satisfy us. It fails to see Christ. It differs on the date and authorship of the book of Daniel.

### B. Literal 490 years ending in about 33 AD

Many good conservative exegetes follow this interpretation. They take the 70 weeks to refer to 490 literal years. The coming of the Messiah at the end of the 69<sup>th</sup> week, then, is Christ's baptism (in about 26 AD). The crucifixion of Christ is taken as the moment when the sacrifices were made to cease. Therefore the crucifixion is in the middle of the last week and is 3 ½ years after the baptism (about 30 AD).

What is the end of the 70 weeks? According to this view, there is nothing monumental to end the 70 weeks. Perhaps in 33 AD one could take the stoning of Stephen as the end.

This view must adopt a decree other than the edict of Cyrus in 538 as the starting of the 70 weeks. Commonly these interpreters look to the decree of Artaxerxes to Ezra in 458 BC.

Here is the scheme:

Certainly we feel in harmony with the Christ-centered nature of this interpretation. I struggle, however, with the insistence on literal years. I struggle with moving the decree away from the decree of Cyrus in 538. I sense that the destruction of Jerusalem was meant to be included in the 70 weeks as God looked ahead to what would happen to Jerusalem in the future.

### *C. Seven weeks from Cyrus to Christ; 63 weeks from Christ to Judgment Day*

I will say from the start that this view is held by such respectable interpreters as Keil, Leupold, and Kretzmann.

This interpretation rests on a different sentence division in v. 25. It follows the Massoretic *athnach* in the word for “seven” שִׁבְעָה. It understands v. 25 to say that the Messiah will come after seven weeks. The rebuilding of Jerusalem will take place in the following 62 weeks. Here is Leupold’s translation: “Unto an Anointed One, a Prince, there will be seven heptads. And for sixty-two heptads she shall again be built ...”

The seventy weeks, then, is broken up in this way: seven weeks from Cyrus to the first coming, 62 weeks in the NT era when the church is built up, and one final week at the end of time when the antichrist arises to persecute the church in a powerful way. According to this interpretation the “cutting off” of the Messiah is not his crucifixion. It refers to the damage done to the church at the end of time. The one who makes the covenant with many is the antichrist. He will shut down Christian worship during the last, gruesome week.

This interpretation takes the six statements in v. 24 (“to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness,” etc.) to refer to the perfect consummation of the Messiah’s work on Judgment Day and not to his first coming.

Here is the scheme:

I suppose one could say that there is nothing in this interpretation which is contrary to Christian doctrine. Yet I do not find it to be the best explanation of this passage.

To my mind it gives a forced explanation of the phrase, “the Anointed One will be cut off.” It seems to take away the notion of imminency for believers of our day. (Public Christian worship has to end before Judgment Day can come?) The notion that the church will be built up for 62 weeks and then the antichrist will arise for the final week does not seem to be in keeping with the actual events as they have occurred in history. Also, at least some of the six phrases in v. 24 naturally lead us to think of the cross more than the Second Coming (e.g. “to atone for wickedness”).

## **VI. What Is Left for Possible Interpretations?**

### *A. 69 Weeks from Cyrus to Christ, 1 week from Christ to Judgment Day*

In dealing with a passage for which there have been countless interpretations, it hardly seems right to come up with something new. Yet I was surprised in the reading that I did that I did not find the following interpretation. I will offer it as a trial balloon.

Perhaps one could take the 70 weeks as symbolic. The cutting off of the Messiah after 69 weeks could refer to his crucifixion. By his crucifixion the Messiah confirmed the new covenant of grace which will be in effect for many throughout the NT era (the last 1 week). In the midst of the last week of human history, the temple sacrifices were ended as the temple was destroyed in 70 AD. From 70 AD until Judgment Day we are in the last “31 years” when the antichrist will be active persecuting the church.

Here is the scheme:

The one thing this interpretation has going for it is that it tries to integrate the 70 weeks with the other prophecies in Daniel and Revelation which speak of the 42 months/3 years/1260 days. We understand the 42 months to refer to the NT era when the church is persecuted by the devil and the antichrist. Why not take the last half of Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week in the same way?

Please tell me what fails in this interpretation!

#### *B. Cyrus to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD*

This is the interpretation which is presented in Prof. Jeske’s volume of *The People’s Bible*. It is also found in the *Concordia SelfStudy Commentary*, the *Concordia SelfStudy Bible*, and *Judisch*. I don’t know of a better interpretation.

This interpretation does not insist upon 490 literal years. It sees the 69 weeks as the time from the edict of Cyrus in 538 to the coming of the Messiah. The cutting off of the Messiah refers to his crucifixion. His crucifixion did away with the OT sacrificial system, so we can conclude that his crucifixion came at the midpoint of the last week.

The *terminus ad quem* of the 70 weeks is the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. This fits well with the context of the prophecy. Daniel was wondering about the city of Jerusalem. The angel Gabriel laid out the future of the city. It would be rebuilt, the Messiah would come and bring the blessings of forgiveness, and then the city would be destroyed.

Here is the scheme:

## **VII. Concluding Comments**

### *A. Focus on the Gospel blessings, not the chronology!*

It is regrettable with this remarkable prophecy that it is studied so much with a view to chronology. So much of the discussion of this passage has to do with laying out the right timeline. People seem to be preoccupied with the arithmetic, not the gospel comfort.

Before we leave it today, we do well to take note of its splendid message of God's grace in Christ, found especially in the six phrases of v. 24. Through the Messiah' work we have the full saving blessings of God!

The Messiah has put an end to sin (Qere) or sealed up sin (Kethibh). Either way this is a comforting thought.

The Messiah has atoned for wickedness. The standard word for atone has the picture of covering over. Our sins are covered!

The Messiah has brought in everlasting righteousness. We think of the imputed righteousness of Christ. This is a righteousness which is perfect for all eternity.

The Messiah has sealed up vision and prophecy. At the very least this means that Christ has fulfilled the OT messianic prophecies. Judisch understands further that visions and prophecies (and other charismatic gifts) are no longer needed since the 70 weeks have come to an end.

The Messiah has anointed the most holy place. Some commentators suspect that this refers to the anointing of the church on Pentecost with the Holy Spirit. Perhaps it refers to the heavenly tabernacle which Christ has entered and opened for us. Either again, it is a comforting message.

Without a doubt this prophecy was intended to be a joyful message for Daniel. Sure the rebuilt Jerusalem would be destroyed again. But it would not happen until the messianic blessings had been fully brought. There would be the anointing of a new most holy place. As Daniel was wondering about the future of Jerusalem, he was given good things to look forward to! The mercies of God would come in full measure through the Messiah in the coming 70 weeks.

We too should see the consoling import of this prophecy. A gospel sermon could be preached on it. Focus on the gospel blessings!

When one sees how the passage is sometimes used strictly for purposes of chronology, one is reminded of the dictum of Luther. He once said that the devil is trying to mislead theologians by two ways: 1) by work righteousness and 2) by inducing them to leave the essentials to discuss less important things in religion.

*B. Remember this as one of two passages in the OT which speak of the coming Savior as the "Messiah!"*

This thought follows naturally after the previous. With this passage, we should not forget that it is one of only two passages in the OT which speak of the coming Savior as the "Anointed One" or "Messiah." Psalm 2:2, of course, is the other.

We commonly put the word "Messiah" into the mouths of OT people as the word which they used to refer to the coming Savior. Yet this term is used very rarely in the Old Testament. It is properly said, "The extensive use of the term Messiah (Christ) as a title of the great Son of David is primarily a NT phenomena."

Daniel 9, however, offers us a passage where this treasured word is used twice. It is the "Messiah" who would come after 69 weeks. It is the "Messiah" who would be cut off for our salvation. As there were anointed prophets, priests, and kings in OT times, so there would be one

great “Anointed one” who would come to fulfill these offices completely and perfectly!

Wouldn't it be nice if Daniel 9:24-27 were remembered for this special fact as much as for the seventy weeks? Wouldn't it be nice if this passage were known as “The Prophecy of the Coming of the Messiah” rather than “The Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks”?

## Endnotes

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