

## Lesson 25

So let's quickly review each of the nine events, and ask for each a single question: Why was that event placed where it was on the "Seventy Week" time line shown on the handout?

**Event A:** Event A is the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. Why was it placed at the beginning of the seventy weeks? Because of the word "from" in verse 25. This event is the starting point of the seventy weeks.

**Event B:** Event B is unto the Messiah the Prince. Why was it placed at the end of the first 69 weeks? Because of the word "unto" in verse 25. From Event A unto Event B will be seven weeks and 62 weeks.

**Event C:** Event C is the rebuilt city. Why was it placed at the end of the initial seven weeks? Because of the order in verse 25 - seven weeks and 62 weeks - and because we would expect (and, in fact, in hindsight we now know) the rebuilding to occur after the command to rebuild and before the coming of the Messiah. If Event C did not occur after the initial seven week period, then why else would verse 25 split the 69 weeks into seven weeks and 62 weeks?

**Event D:** Event D is the cessation of the sacrifices. Why was it placed halfway through the final week? Because of the phrase "in the midst of the week" in verse 27.

**Event E:** Event E is the confirmation of the covenant. Why was it placed throughout the final week? Verse 27 tells us - he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week.

**Event F:** Event F is the end and the consummation. Why was it placed at the end of the seventy weeks? Because it is the end and the consummation! Where else would we place "the end"? (And recall that this is the end of Jerusalem; not the end of the world.)

**Event G:** Event G is the cutting off of the Messiah. Why did we place it halfway through the final week? Because (a) we determined that the "he" in verse 27 must be Christ because Christ confirmed the covenant, (b) if the "he" in verse 27 is Christ, then Event D, the cessation of the sacrifices, also refers to the work of Christ, and (c) Christ caused the sacrifices to cease at the cross. Thus, Event D is the cross, and we know from the text that Event D occurs in the midst of that week. Event G is also the cross ("cut off" from Isaiah 53), and thus Event G must also be at the midway point in the final week.

**Event H:** Finally we have Event H, which is the destruction of the city by the prince that shall come, Titus the Roman general. That event must be placed where we placed Event F, "the end."

## Is that view the only possibility?

No. Some argue that the final week begins at the cross, which would then put the destruction of the temple by Titus at the midway point, and the final and complete destruction of the city at the end of the final week.

That is certainly possible, but I don't think it fits as well. Placing the cutting off at the beginning of the final week seems unlikely because of the confirmation that is occurring throughout the entire week. Placing the cutting off at the end of the week wouldn't work at all because that is when Jesus is coming in judgment against those who cut him off.

If for that reason we conclude, as I think we should, that the cutting off occurs midweek, then that confirms we were right when we concluded that the cessation of sacrifices that occurred midweek also refers to the cross.

Either way, the seventy weeks end with the first century destruction of Jerusalem, and we can't give on that point for any number of reasons, not the least of which is that Jesus himself pointed us back to Daniel for the fulfillment of that very event.

## How are symbols used in this prophecy?

There are several important symbols in the prophecy of the seventy weeks (or the seventy sevens) - and, not surprisingly, they all involve the number seven.

First, the "week" itself is symbolic.

Recall that the word translated "week" is the Hebrew word for seven. Seven denotes perfection. That the week is the basis for the entire prophecy lets us know that this prophecy is going to perfectly accomplish whatever it is about (which, as we have seen, is the judgment of Daniel's people and the holy city).

We see this same symbol with the use of seventy weeks, or seventy sevens, which reinforces the perfection of the judgment. The figure of "seventy sevens" is found elsewhere in the Bible.

**Genesis 4:24** - If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech **seventy and sevenfold**.

**Matthew 18:21-22** - Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until **seventy times seven**.

In each case, the "seventy times seven" figure denotes something that is perfect and complete - perfect and complete vengeance and perfect and complete forgiveness.

What was perfect and complete about the decree that Daniel received in Chapter 9? The decree in Daniel 9 was God's final decree with respect to the Jews under the law of Moses. It was the perfect and complete end for the old covenant, which at that point vanished away with finality after waxing old and decaying. (And recall that we know from Hebrews that the old covenant was not in effect after the cross because otherwise Jesus could not be High Priest.)

This decree represented the completion of God's work with regard to the Jews. This decree embodied all of the elements that were needed to completely fulfill all of God's promises to the Jews. As far as God was concerned, this decree was his final word with regard to the Jewish age.

The "seventy by seven" symbol was the perfect symbol to denote this statement of God's completed activity. God is telling Daniel that this is a final decree. One day the Messiah would come, and the city would be destroyed. That all happened in the first century.

Second, we see seven weeks depicting the time in which the temple and the city are rebuilt and restored. Again, God had foretold these events, and God caused them to happen. The restoration was perfectly fulfilled, but that perfection did not prevent the people from once again rebelling and falling away from God.

Third, we have one week at the end of the seventy week period, which includes the time from the coming of the Messiah up until the judgment of Jerusalem in AD 70. The work of the Messiah was perfect. Jesus accomplished all that he came to do. (Premillennialists deny this, but they also fail to comprehend the meaning of these beautiful symbols.)

Fourth, we have a half week, three and a half days, which is a broken seven.

We have seen this symbol before, and we know it denotes something that is temporary. In this case, the key three and half day period is the second half of the week. Why? Because it begins when the Messiah was cut off; that is, it begins at the cross. Was that the end? Was that permanent? Not at all.

Any time we see a broken seven in the Bible, one thing we know for sure is that whatever that broken seven depicts is not the end of the story! It may look like the end, but it is not the end. It may look like a defeat, but it is not a defeat.

As for the cross, Jesus soon came with power and judgment against those who had cut him off. A broken seven is the perfect way to depict Jesus' triumph over death after what to many looked like a defeat at the cross. The cross was not the end of the story! That is why the cross occurs halfway during that final prophetic week leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem.

## Other Views about the Seventy Weeks

How else do some interpret this "seventy weeks" decree? We could spend weeks answering that question, but we won't. Instead, we will look briefly at a few of the more popular interpretations.

Despite some who loudly proclaim that they take every word in the Bible literally, no one does that, and this decree is a good example. Why? Because literally this decree would have to take place in only 70 literal weeks, which is 490 days, and no theory I have seen makes that claim. Instead, all theories start with the proposition that the 70 weeks period refers to a time period longer than 70 weeks.

It is at this point that we get the two main categories of interpretations, which have been called the chronological and non-chronological approaches. And which bucket you land in depends on how you interpret the 70 week symbol (and all agree that it is not a literal 70 weeks).

A chronological approach tries to map the 70 weeks to a specific chronological period, usually by taking each day in the 70 weeks to be a year.

A non-chronological approach views the 70 weeks wholly figuratively, with 70 being a combination of the symbol 7 (perfection) and the symbol 10 (completion), so that 70 weeks (or literally in the Hebrew 70 sevens) simply denotes a perfectly complete period of time determined by God.

How long was that period in actuality? There are several possibilities, but none of them under this view can be derived solely from the 70 week or 490 day period. Instead, we need to look elsewhere in the Bible and in secular history to see when the various events occurred.

The view we just looked at on the handout is a non-chronological view, and the most likely answer to the actual time period of the 70 weeks is shown at the bottom of the handout - 608 years, which is the length of time between the decree of Cyrus in Ezra 1 and the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

How can we get the number 608 from the number 70 or the number 490? You can't, which is why this approach is said to be non-chronological. (I'm not a big fan of those names because our approach certainly places events on a chronological timeline.)

What about the chronological approaches? We will briefly look at the two most popular such views, one of which is likely the most prevalent view in the church today.

Before doing that, it will be helpful to review the history of the exiles' three main returns to Palestine.

## Return Number 1: 539 BC

In 539 BC Cyrus gave a decree that the Jews should return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. (Some historians think the decree was given in 538 BC. We will use the 539 BC date instead.) This decree can be found in Ezra 1 and 2 Chronicles 36.

**Ezra 1:2-4** - Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? 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 the God,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

**2 Chronicles 36:23** - Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up.

The leaders of this return were Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, and Jeshua. After their return, work on the temple was begun, sacrifices were made, and the Feast of the Tabernacles was celebrated.

The Samaritans had prospered during the Jewish deportation, and they were not happy when the exiles returned. Their guerrilla tactics stopped work on the temple for 19 years until 520 BC. The temple was completed in 516 BC. This return is described in the first half of Ezra.

## Return Number 2: 458 BC

Ezra, a descendant of a High Priest killed by Nebuchadnezzar, was concerned about the spiritual condition of the Palestinian Jews. There was great disparity between the rich and the poor. Most of the exiles had been men, so mixed marriages with non-Jews had become very common. Many of the children from these marriages did not even speak Hebrew. The Jewish law had been neglected. Prophets from this period speak of murder, adultery, perjury, and injustice.

Artaxerxes gave Ezra approval to rebuild the city. This decree is found in Ezra 7:12-26.

**Ezra 7:11-13** - Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel. Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace, and at such a time. I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee.

Ezra led 1500 men with their families to Jerusalem. He read the law to the people, who were very moved when they realized how far they had strayed from the law of God. He commanded that the mixed marriages be dissolved, that the non-Jewish wives be sent back to their own lands, and that the walls be rebuilt. (Some have suggested that the commands to send the women out of the city and to rebuild the city walls may not have been unrelated!)

The Samaritans again caused trouble. They reported the "treasonous" rebuilding of the wall to Persia, and they then proceeded to tear down the wall. This return is described in the second half of Ezra.

## Return Number 3: 445 BC

Nehemiah, a cup bearer in the court of Artaxerxes, asked the king to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The king agreed, perhaps because he wanted a fort close to the Egyptian border. This is the decree found in Nehemiah 2.

**Nehemiah 2:2-6** - Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it. And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.

The Samaritans ridiculed their efforts and spread rumors that Nehemiah planned an insurrection and wanted to be king himself. The wall was rebuilt in 52 days. This return is described in the book of Nehemiah.

## The Millennial Chronological Viewpoint

The starting point for this view is the decree given 445 BC by Artaxerxes to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. (That is, the starting point for this view is the third return.)

Verse 25 tells us that, from this point, it will be 69 weeks (7 + 62) until the Messiah comes. Using the so-called "universal prophetic Day equals a Year" principle (more on that later...), they add 69 weeks of years (69×7 or 483 years) to this starting point. Here is where things really get complicated.

If we add 483 years to 445 BC we arrive at the year AD 39, which misses Jesus' ministry and death by a wide margin. (Keep in mind that when you add years to a BC date to obtain an AD date there is no year zero. For example, the year 1 BC + 1 year is the year AD 1.)

The solution? Instead of counting 483 solar years (containing 365 days each), they count ahead 483 *lunar* years (containing 360 days each) to reach the year AD 32, which they claim is the year that Jesus was crucified.

The use of lunar years is called by some "the prophetic mode of reckoning."

Are lunar years used in the Bible? Yes, they are, but typically such years are used in the Bible to figuratively depict only *short* periods of time, usually with a lunar month rather than a lunar year.

All sorts of problems arise when lunar years are used to literally depict *long* periods of time. The only reason the premillennialists use lunar years here is that they miss their target by a mile when they use solar years.

After the 69 weeks (483 lunar years), they tell us that the prophetic clock stopped and has not ticked once in the intervening 2000 years. Instead, they say, we have been living in a prophetic gap period that they call the church age.

The last of Daniel's seventy weeks will occur, they say, when the Rapture begins. The final three and a half years of these seven years will be the Great Tribulation when the Antichrist will reign on earth. Following those seven years, Jesus will return to reign for a thousand years on Earth.

There are enormous problems with this view. We will look in a moment at some of the specific problems of this approach, but I think we can already see some general problems with this approach.

First, it ignores the first century time frame of this prophecy that we got from verse 24.

Second, it ignores the focus of the prophecy on the Jews and Jerusalem that we also got from verse 24.

Third, it ignores the context of the prayer at the beginning of Chapter 9 that caused this prophecy to be personally delivered by an angel to Daniel.

Fourth, it causes the gospel to make a distinction between Jew and Gentile even though Romans 10:12 tells us "there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek."

Fifth, it ignores the repeated warnings in the New Testament that the end will not be preceded by any signs but instead will come as thief in the night.

And there are also big problems when it comes to the specifics of the premillennial approach to Daniel 9. But before we look at those problems, let's pause for a few moments and consider the general premillennial approach to interpreting scripture.



## Problems with Premillennialism

First, does it make any difference what we believe about premillennialism? Is it all just a matter of opinion? Should we make an issue out of it?

Here is how Professor Carroll Osburn of Abilene Christian University answered that question:

There should be room in the Christian fellowship for those who differ on whether more than one cup in communion is acceptable, whether the communion bread is to be pinched or snapped, whether one can eat in the church building, whether funds can be used from the church treasury to support orphan homes; whether the Lord's Supper must be taken every Sunday, or whether instrumental music is used in worship. There should be room in the Christian fellowship for those who believe that Christ is the Son of God, but who differ on ... premillennialism, ... congregational organization, or ... whether baptism is "for" or "because of" the remission of sins.

According to Professor Osburn, premillennialism (and baptism and instrumental music, for that matter) is on par with the raging controversy over whether communion bread should be pinched or snapped. That is, premillennialism, baptism, and instrumental music are just side issues that don't really matter so long as we all just believe that Christ is the Son of God.

Is premillennialism a side issue that doesn't really make that much difference? To answer that question, let's turn to John Walvoord, who was perhaps the leading proponent of premillennialism. Here is what he had to say about its importance:

If premillennialism is only a dispute about what will happen in a future age which is quite removed from present issues, that is one thing. If, however, premillennialism is a system of interpretation which involves the meaning and significance of the entire Bible ... that is something else. ... It is not too much to say that millennialism is a determining factor in Biblical interpretation of comparable importance to the doctrines of verbal inspiration, the deity of Christ, substitutionary atonement, and bodily resurrection.

Thus, according to Walvoord, premillennialism is a "determining factor in Biblical interpretation." And if you read their commentaries, you soon find out that this is no exaggeration. They manage to work those thousand years into practically everything even though the "1000 year" figure they rely on occurs only in Revelation 20.

With all due respect to Professor Osburn (which isn't much), it does make a difference what we believe about premillennialism. It is not a side issue, it is a main issue. Why? Because the premillennialist doctrine has consequences that run counter to the very heart of the gospel.

Premillennialists teach that one day the Levitical priesthood and the sacrificial system will be restored. In this way, they belittle the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice and his eternal priesthood.

They teach that Jesus is not presently ruling over Israel. Thus, they belittle his claim to have all authority in heaven and earth. They belittle his title of King of kings and Lord of lords.

They teach that Jesus' mission on earth was a failure, and that the church (his body) was a result of that failure. Thus, they belittle the plan of God, and they belittle the importance of his church. They teach that our Lord and Savior was a failure who caused God to come up with a Plan B at the last minute.

Can I say that Jesus is the Son of God and yet claim that he was a failure? That his church was a mistake? That he does not have all authority? That his sacrifice was not sufficient? Professor Osburn apparently thinks that I can.

It makes a great deal of difference what we believe about this important issue. It strikes at the very core of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Premillennialism is false, and we must continue to proclaim that.

We owe a great debt to Foy Wallace on this point. In 1933, Foy Wallace (then the editor of the Gospel Advocate) debated Charles Neal (minister of the Main Street Church of Christ in Winchester, Kentucky) about the thousand year reign. Brother Wallace was largely responsible for keeping that false doctrine from infiltrating the church.

Now let's circle back to the millennial view of Daniel 9 and look at a few of the major problems with that view of these verses.

## Reasons Why the Millennial Chronological Viewpoint is Wrong

**Reason #1:** There is no proof that the so-called "Day Equals a Year" principle is in operation here. Although this principle is sometimes claimed to be some sort of "Universal Prophetic Principle," it is in

fact used with certainty only twice in the Bible.

**Numbers 14:34** - After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.

**Ezekiel 4:6** - And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year.

How do we know the principle is in operation in these two passages? Because God tells us explicitly each time. Does that mean God couldn't use it elsewhere without telling us? No, but it does cast doubt on the idea that he would. Why tell us there but not here?

But could it be a universal principle? No. There are many cases where it is clearly not in use. The creation account leaps to mind. Was the creation week a seven year period? I know of no one who believes that it was.

We know with certainty it is not a universal principle - not even in prophecies. Jonah was in the belly of that fish for three days, and we learn in Matthew 12:39-40 that those three days were a prophetic sign of the time between the crucifixion and the resurrection. Did that take three years? It would seem it must have if there is some sort of a universal principle in operation.

There is no universal principle of Biblical interpretation that requires us to view days as years. To take that view here requires an assumption because God does not tell us here (as he does elsewhere) that the principle is in effect.

**Reason #2:** Beginning with the 445 BC decree from Nehemiah is just an assumption, and not a very good one. The prophecy clearly has a starting point, but what is it?

Verse 25 tells us that the starting point was the time when the word went out to restore and build Jerusalem. When was that? If it were not for the efforts to make a chronology fit this prophecy, then there would never have been any question as to the starting point: it is the decree of Cyrus in 539 BC. Let's consider the facts.

God had prophesied that Cyrus would rebuild the city. Some deny that he did, but listen to Isaiah.

**Isaiah 44:28** - That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: **even**

**saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built;** and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.

**Isaiah 45:13** - I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: **he shall build my city**, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the Lord of hosts.

Cyrus gave a decree relating to Jerusalem in 539 BC. Daniel received this vision around 539 BC. Put yourself in Daniel's place. Which decree would you have thought God was speaking about? The only decree you knew about!

The decree that Cyrus had just given must have been the one that God was referring to. And if the starting point was a decree that would not occur until after the days of Esther, then why was Gabriel in such a hurry to deliver this decree to Daniel?

The context virtually demands that we take the starting point of this prophecy to be the decree of Cyrus in 539 BC. And if we take that decree as our starting point, then we will never reach the cross in 69 weeks of years (483 years) - lunar or solar.

**Reason #3:** The use of lunar years to reach their target date is baseless. Going back to the lunar calendar to make the numbers work out is (pardon the pun) lunacy.

No country (ancient or otherwise) has ever used lunar years to count out long periods of time without including some method of intercalation (the insertion of days into the calendar) to reconcile the lunar and solar years.

At the time of Daniel, the Assyrians, Babylonians, Sumerians, Persians, and Egyptians all had methods in place for reconciling lunar and solar calendars. None of those countries would have measured a long period of time with lunar years - and neither did God.

Yes, lunar months (not years) are sometimes used to give us nice round numbers for short prophetic symbols, but they are not used to pinpoint precise events hundreds of years into the future.

**Reason #4:** Even with all of these gymnastics, they still miss the date of the cross - perhaps by as much as several years. This inaccuracy is particularly troubling based upon their own comments regarding the accuracy of what they call the Divine Chronology. Here is what one leading proponent had to say:

And accuracy as absolute as the nature of the case permits is no more than men are here entitled

to demand. There can be no loose reckoning in a Divine chronology; and if God had designed to mark on human calendars the fulfillment of His purposes as foretold in prophecy, the strictest scrutiny shall fail to detect miscalculation or mistake.

I agree that the strictest scrutiny will not detect an error on God's part. However, even a casual scrutiny is enough to detect numerous errors on the premillennialists' part.

#daniel