

Interpreting Daniel's Seventy Weeks: Dismal Swamp or Blessed Hope?

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For over two millennia Bible interpreters have debated the meaning of the prophecy of Daniel's "seventy weeks." Montgomery's oft-quoted judgment is: "The history of the exegesis of the 70 Weeks is the Dismal Swamp of O.T. criticism."¹ In this article, the author will survey the most common interpretations of the passage, both ancient and modern, discuss the key issues in the debate, and then present a case for a literal futurist interpretation. Readers may then decide for themselves if this prophecy is really a dismal swamp or a blessed hope.

Interpretive Options

Interpretations of the seventy weeks prophecy generally fall into one of the four basic categories below. Scholars who take the critical approach to the book's authorship and date hold the first view. They believe the book of Daniel was composed by an anonymous Jew (Daniel is a pseudonym) to encourage the nation during persecution by the Greek tyrant Antiochus IV (175-163 BC). For them, the accounts of chapters 1-6 are not historical but "court tales," and Daniel's predictions are prophecies written after-the-fact (*vaticinia ex eventu*) that must end in the second century BC, the time of the author.

According to the traditional interpretation, Daniel wrote the book in the sixth century BC, the accounts are historically accurate, and the predictions are genuine prophecies of the future.² Scholars who accept the traditional view of the book follow interpretive options 2-4. Space precludes a full discussion here, but the author will briefly summarize and critique each view from a literal futurist perspective.³

1. Critical View

According to most critical scholars, a "seven" or "week" represents seven literal years. Seventy of these seven-year weeks total 490 years. Hebrew *davar* (v. 25) does not denote a decree of a king but the prophetic word to Jeremiah about the Babylonian exile (Jer. 25:1, 11). To make their chronological scheme work, however, critical scholars often inconsistently claim the seven weeks (49 years) begin with Jerusalem's fall in 586 BC, rather than Jeremiah's prophecy given in 605 BC.

The "anointed one" of verse 25 arrives on the scene at the end of this first seven weeks (cf. NRSV, ESV), not at the end of sixty-nine (seven plus sixty-two) weeks as is traditionally understood (cf. KJV, NKJV, NIV, HCSB, NASB). He is usually identified as the high priest Joshua (most common view), Zerubbabel, or Cyrus.

The next group of sixty-two weeks extends from the first anointed one until a second anointed one is "cut off" (v. 26), normally interpreted as the assassination of the high priest Onias III (170 BC). During the final week (seven years), the Jewish people suffer (including the

prohibition of sacrifice) at the hands of the Greek tyrant Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-163 BC). At the end of Antiochus's persecution, the promises of the prophecy would be fulfilled.⁴

Major problems with this interpretation include the following: (1) If the *terminus a quo* (point of origin) is 605 or 586 BC, the total number of years (490) in the seventy weeks is about fifty or sixty years beyond the *terminus ad quem* (end point) of 163 BC. Montgomery shrugs off the discrepancy as “a chronological miscalculation on the part of the writer.”⁵ (2) Positing two “anointed ones”—a first anointed one after seven weeks (9:25) and a second appearing sixty-two weeks later who is then “cut off” (9:26)—is very problematic. Montgomery insists that the Masoretic accent mark, *athnach* (between the Hebrew for “seven weeks” and “sixty-two weeks”), supports this interpretation.⁶ However, the accentuation was not in the original text. According to Ernst Würthwein, the pointing was probably not added until sometime between AD 650 and 750, over a thousand years after Daniel lived.⁷

The *athnach* has a variety of usages, and in this instance it serves to show that the sixty-nine weeks [at the end of which the Anointed One comes] consists of two distinct parts—“seven weeks” [rebuilding completed under Ezra and Nehemiah] followed by “sixty and two weeks.”⁸ Peter Gentry rightly points out, “Problems of interpretation arising from following the accents in the Masoretic Text are insurmountable.”⁹

(3) Critical scholars are locked into a fulfillment of the seventy weeks in the second century BC (the time they believe the author lived) because they hold the *a priori* assumption that supernatural prediction is impossible¹⁰ or not claimed by the Old Testament writers.¹¹ Regarding predictive prophecy, Lucas asks, “Would God do it?” and “Did God do it?”¹² He concludes the answer to both questions is no. Yet, the writer of the book specifically claims that God could, and in fact did, predict the distant future.

Such denials are contrary to Old Testament and New Testament claims, including the clear teaching of Jesus Himself, that God revealed the future to the inspired authors of the Bible (e.g., Luke 24:25-27, 44). By necessity the critical view is non-messianic since the author was unable to predict Christ's first or second advents. Young rightly concludes, “This non-Messianic interpretation is utterly inadequate.”¹³

2. Traditional Messianic View

Young and Steinmann both claim to hold the traditional view.¹⁴ They are correct that most of the early church fathers and reformers interpreted the passage messianically and believed the seventy weeks were fulfilled sometime in the first century AD or soon thereafter. Yet, the views of Young and Steinmann differ markedly from the positions of the early church fathers and the reformers in one key respect. Both scholars hold a symbolic view of the weeks, whereas Tanner points out, “All the early church fathers, along with Jewish scholars, interpreted each ‘week’ as a period of seven years and applied this quite literally.”¹⁵

The reformers also held to weeks of years (total 490 years) that culminated in the first century. According to Luther, this position was the established view of his day.¹⁶ J. B. Payne, Kenneth Gentry, and Peter Gentry have ably defended the literal year version of this view.¹⁷ Payne called his position the “generally traditional interpretation.” If agreement with the church fathers and reformers is the meaning of traditional, the literal version deserves the title.

Young and most scholars who hold to symbolic weeks begin the period with Cyrus's decree in 538 BC and associate the end of the weeks with the destruction of Jerusalem. Payne

and others who accept literal weeks of years usually begin with Artaxerxes I's decree to Ezra in 458 BC and identify the end of the period as the martyrdom of Stephen and/or Paul's conversion.

This view is much more satisfying than the critical approach, and the messianic emphasis is refreshing. Still, it is beset with problems. (1) The weeks are units of seven years, not indefinite periods of time, as those who hold the symbolic version contend (see later discussion of the term "week"). (2) Placing the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans or other events in verses 26 and 27 after the seventy weeks (a common feature of this view) is not justified by the text. Gabriel's words seem clearly to indicate that verses 24-27 encompass all events of the seventy weeks. (3) The complete fulfillment of the blessings of verse 24 is only possible when Christ returns. (4) Proponents of this view argue that Christ put an end to sacrifice and offering by His death in the middle of the seventieth week. Yet, sacrifice did not cease with Christ's death but continued for another forty years until the destruction of the temple by the Romans in AD 70. Furthermore, the text does not say the subject ("he") of verse 27 will make sacrifices unnecessary; it says this individual will "end" them.

3. Eschatological Terminus with Symbolic Weeks

Other scholars agree with Young and Steinmann that the weeks are symbolic, but argue that they end with Christ's return. There are a number of versions of this view. Keil and Leupold believe the seventy weeks are a prophecy of church history from Daniel's time until the consummation. The first seven weeks begin with Cyrus's decree in 538 BC and end with Christ's first coming. The next sixty-two weeks extend from Christ's first advent to Antichrist's persecution of the church in the end times. Christ will build His church (spiritual Jerusalem) during this period. Verses 26 and 27 describe events of the final week.

The cutting off of the Anointed One (v. 26) does not speak of Christ's crucifixion (as the majority of evangelicals believe) but the loss of Christ's prominence in the world and the suppression of the church in the last days. Antichrist is the ruler in both verses 26 and 27. Destruction of the city and sanctuary means that Antichrist will persecute the church (God's spiritual temple) and stop worship until Christ returns and delivers His people.¹⁸

Baldwin's interpretation is similar to that of Keil and Leupold, but differs at several key points. She believes Christ's first advent is after sixty-nine weeks rather than seven and that the cutting off of the Anointed One (v. 26) refers to Christ's death. The seventieth week stretches from the first century until Christ's return, almost 2,000 years.¹⁹ Baldwin's view is preferable to that of Keil and Leupold since the text clearly indicates Christ's first coming is after sixty-nine weeks, not seven weeks. Other scholars agree that the seventy weeks include both Christ's first and second advents but offer interpretations that differ from those of Keil, Leupold, and Baldwin in a broad range of details.²⁰

Interpreting the weeks as symbolic periods rather than literal weeks of years is a serious problem associated with all forms of this view. Difficulties specific to the version of Keil and Leupold include the following: (1) Christ's first coming is after sixty-nine weeks, not after seven. (See discussion under the critical view.) (2) Steinmann points out: "Throughout Daniel, 'Jerusalem' refers to the physical city... The typological interpretation [his label for Keil and Leupold's view] requires that 'Jerusalem' in 9:25 and the reference to 'the city' in 9:26 all of a sudden become references to the church without any contextual clues to this change."²¹ "With streets and a trench" renders such an interpretation completely untenable. (3) Interpreting the cutting off of the Messiah (v. 26), not of Christ's death on the cross, but of His losing influence

in the world is exegetically unsatisfactory. A prediction of Christ's crucifixion is appropriate here for it explains how the promise of atonement for sin in verse 24 will be accomplished. "Cut off" seems clearly to reflect Isaiah 53:8 where similar language occurs describing Christ's death. Further, the notion that Christ and his church will be defeated is foreign to Scripture and would be particularly out of place in the book of Daniel with its strong emphasis on the sovereignty of God.

4. Literal Futurist View

Premillennial scholars generally prefer a literal futurist position.²² Adherents hold that the seventy weeks are literal weeks of years totaling 490 years. The first seven weeks (forty-nine years) extend from a decree to rebuild Jerusalem (usually Artaxerxes's decree to Ezra in 458 BC or Nehemiah in 445 BC) until the work's completion in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. The sixty-two weeks (434 years) end at some point during Christ's first advent. After the sixty-nine (seven and sixty-two) weeks, the Messiah is crucified ("cut off"), and the Romans destroy Jerusalem and the temple (9:26).

In the description of the final week, Daniel presents another account (cf. 7:25-27; 11:36-45-12:2) of the persecution of the saints by the Antichrist and his judgment at Christ's return—the *terminus ad quem* of the seventy weeks. During the tribulation of this seventieth week, the reestablished nation of Israel will repent of its unbelief and recognize Jesus as the Messiah (cf. Rom. 11:25–29; Zech. 12:10–13:1).

Views 2-3 have much to commend them. They are messianic and ably defended. For a number of reasons, however, the literal futurist approach seems to be the most exegetically viable interpretation. Typical objections to this view are as follows: rejection of the literal year interpretation by those who hold to symbolic weeks, the claim that no version of the literal weeks of years interpretation can be made to conform to historical fact,²³ and denial that a gap is possible between the weeks, especially between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks.

The author will now present a case for the literal futurist position. Criticisms mentioned above and others will be addressed in the following examination of the evidence.²⁴

The Most Ancient Christian View

Literal futurism is the most ancient Christian position. According to Tanner, "The earliest clear Christian reference to Daniel 9:24-27 is by Irenaeus in his *Against Heresies* (ca. A.D. 180)... In 5.25.4 Irenaeus has an extended discussion about the Antichrist, which culminates in his linking this with Daniel 9:27."²⁵ Irenaeus's student, Hippolytus, presented the first detailed futuristic study of the seventieth week in his commentary on Daniel—called the earliest known commentary on Scripture (ca. AD 202).

These church fathers understood the weeks to be literal weeks of years and connected the end of the sixty-nine with Christ's first coming. Therefore, they understood an interval of time between the sixty-ninth and the eschatological seventieth week. Both believed that the prohibition of sacrifice in the middle of the seventieth week is the result of Antichrist's persecution. Louis Knowles writes: "In the works of these fathers [Irenaeus and Hippolytus], we can find most of the basic concepts of the modern futuristic view of the seventieth week of Daniel ix."²⁶

Literal Weeks of Years

In Daniel 9:24, Gabriel specified the time period for the fulfillment of the prophecy as “seventy weeks” or more literally “seventy sevens” (*šābu ‘îm šib ‘îm*). According to Young, “Most expositors find here a week of 7 years duration, a total of 490 years.”²⁷ Support for weeks of literal years includes the following. (1) Daniel’s Jewish audience was acquainted with both weeks of days and years. The latter concluded with the sabbatical year that allowed the land to rest (cf. Lev. 25:1–7).²⁸ Of the two, only weeks of years is a valid option in this context.²⁹ (2) The use of definite numbers and the division of the seventy weeks into three groups (seven, sixty-two, and one) argue against symbolic numbers. (3) Other passages in Daniel and the book of Revelation support weeks of years in chapter 9. According to verse 27, a desolator will persecute believers in the last half of the seventieth week. This persecution is stated elsewhere by Daniel to last three and one-half years (Dan. 7:25 “for a time, times and half a time”; 12:11 “1,290 days” [3 ½ years + 30 days]; 12:12 “1,335 days” [3 ½ years + 45 days]).³⁰ The Apostle John also reveals that believers will be persecuted for three and one-half years (Rev. 11:2 “42 months”; 11:3 “1,260 days”; 12:6 “1,260 days”; 12:14 “for a time, times and half a time”; 13:5 “forty-two months” [compare 13:7]). If the final half of the seventieth week is three and one-half years, the total of the week is seven years, and the other sixty-nine weeks should also be seven years each. (4) Weeks of years is the most ancient interpretation. All the early Jewish interpreters (Hellenistic, Essenes, Pharasaic),³¹ early church fathers,³² and the reformers held this view.

The People of the Seventy Weeks

Gabriel informed Daniel, “Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city” (9:24b).³³ Daniel was a Jew from Jerusalem. Thus, applying the people and city to the “church” or “spiritual Jerusalem”³⁴ is not justified in this context. The first of J. I. Packer’s four principles of evangelical hermeneutics reads, “Biblical passages must be taken to mean *what their human writers were consciously expressing* [italics Packer’s].”³⁵ There can be no doubt that Daniel believed the prophecy concerned literal Jews (Israel, Jerusalem, and the Jewish temple).

The Terminus ad Quem of the Seventy Weeks

The *terminus ad quem* of the weeks is stated before their *terminus a quo*. With the conclusion of the seventy weeks, the following six great blessings will be fulfilled: “to finish transgression,³⁶ to put an end to sin,³⁷ to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness,³⁸ to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy” (Dan. 9:24).³⁹

In spite of Young’s case for fulfillment of these goals at Christ’s first coming and a first century AD *terminus ad quem*,⁴⁰ the majority of scholars recognize their complete fulfillment is eschatological. Collins calls these six blessings “an eschatological ideal.”⁴¹ Christ’s atonement made the blessings of verse 24 possible, but sin will only come to an end and “everlasting righteousness” reign on earth when Jesus returns. Keil concludes: “From the contents of these six statements it thus appears that the termination of the seventy weeks coincides with the end of the present course of the world.”⁴²

The Terminus a Quo of the Seventy Weeks

The *terminus a quo* for the seventy weeks is a decree (Hebrew *davar*) “to restore and

rebuild Jerusalem.” Bible interpreters usually understand this to be one of three royal decrees: Cyrus (538 BC), Artaxerxes I (458 BC), or Artaxerxes I (445 BC).⁴³

The view favored here is the second option—Artaxerxes's decree to Ezra in 458 BC. First, permission to return to the land implied permission to build (cf. Isaiah 44:28; 45:13), so any of the three decrees would permit building. Second, Cyrus's decree of 538 BC is not an option if the seventy weeks are literal years. Third, the writings of Ezra and Nehemiah make clear that the city was still in ruins in their day, almost one hundred years after Cyrus's decree (Neh. 1:3; 2:17; Ezra 4:7-23). The population was so sparse in Nehemiah's time that "the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten to live in Jerusalem" (Neh. 11:1).⁴⁴ Fourth, "in times of trouble" points to the troubled period of rebuilding in the fifth century BC under Ezra and Nehemiah.⁴⁵ Fifth, though the decree to Nehemiah in 445 BC specifically mentions rebuilding, work was going on earlier in Artaxerxes's reign (cf. Ezra 4:12, 21).

Payne proposes, "This original attempt must have occurred under Ezra (458 B.C.), whose decree from Artaxerxes granted him just such extended powers (7:18, 25; 9:9)."⁴⁶ Persia stopped the work because of the slanderous accusations of the foreign leaders; the king's reply did not indicate that rebuilding itself was forbidden (Ezra 4:13-16).⁴⁷

Sixth, the 445/4 BC decree specifically mentions rebuilding but faces two major hurdles: the dependence on prophetic years (360 day years) rather than normal solar years and chronological difficulties in the life of Christ. No doubt, in some prophetic texts a year was rounded to 360 days (e.g., Dan. 12:11-12; Rev. 11:3; 12:6), but the normal Jewish year approximated 365 days.⁴⁸ Neither does the 445/4 BC date fit well into the chronology of Christ's life.

Hoehner calculates that Christ began His ministry in AD 29 and died in AD 33.⁴⁹ Luke reports that Christ was about 30 years old when He began His ministry (Luke 3:23). According to Hoehner's chronology, if Christ was born in 5/4 BC, He would have begun His ministry when He was over 33 years of age and died at 36. If Jesus was born earlier, the age difficulty is compounded.⁵⁰ On the other hand, if the weeks are normal years, sixty-nine weeks after 458 BC was AD 26, the year of Christ's baptism. If Christ was born 5/4 BC, He was about thirty years of age. He died three and one-half years later in AD 30. This fits the most reasonable chronology of Christ's life.⁵¹

Finally, the 458 BC date seems confirmed by the fulfillment of the prophecy. Christ did in fact come 483 years (sixty-nine weeks) after the decree of Artaxerxes I given in 458 BC.⁵² As in the case of other prophecies, the time and other details are clarified by their fulfillment.

Identity of the Anointed One

Evangelical scholars overwhelmingly agree that the "Anointed One" of Daniel 9:25 and/or 26 is Jesus the Messiah.⁵³ Reasons for the messianic view include: (1) The titles "Anointed One" (Hebrew="Messiah"; Greek="Christ") and "ruler" (or "Prince") aptly describe Christ. In the Old Testament two classes of persons were anointed, kings and priests. Both offices are attributed to Christ in the New Testament. (2) Only Jesus Christ could procure the promised blessings of Daniel 9:24. (3) Christ made atonement for sin (9:24) by His death on the cross ("be cut off"; 9:26). "Cut off" seems to be a clear reflection of Isaiah 53:8, "He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken."

The New Testament identifies the Servant of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 as Jesus Christ (e.g., Acts 8:32-35). (4) In Matthew 26:64 (cf. Matt. 24:30) Jesus specifically identified Himself as the

"Son of Man" coming with clouds described in Daniel 7:13-14.⁵⁴ This kingly figure in Daniel 7 who delivers His persecuted people from an evil tyrant and brings in the messianic kingdom parallels the description of the Anointed One's person and work in Daniel 9:24-27.⁵⁵

The Seventieth Week

The seventieth week is the climax of the prophecy: "He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing *of the temple* he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him" (Dan. 9:27). Critical scholars relate this verse, as they do the rest of Daniel, to the Greek tyrant, Antiochus IV, and his atrocities against the Jewish people. Evangelical scholars generally interpret the text in two ways: as past events related to Christ's first coming (view 2) or as eschatological events related to Christ's second advent (views 3 and 4).⁵⁶

Virtually all evangelicals agree that verse 26 predicts the crucifixion of Christ ("be cut off") and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans. For those who believe that the seventy weeks conclude with Christ's first coming or its aftermath (e.g., destruction of Jerusalem), verse 27 is a parallel (not consecutive) description that merely expands on the events of verse 26.⁵⁷ The seventieth week signifies that Christ's death would bring an end to the Old Testament sacrificial system, confirm the New Covenant,⁵⁸ and conclude either with the destruction of Jerusalem (Young, Steinmann) or with some event shortly after Christ's death such as the stoning of Stephen and/or Paul's conversion (Payne, K. Gentry).

There are a number of problems with this interpretation. First, Gabriel's words indicate that all events described in verses 24-27 occur within the seventy weeks. Adherents to this position (e.g., Young, Gentry, and Payne) place the destruction of Jerusalem outside of the seventy weeks. Second, Daniel 9:24-27 is straightforward prose. Synonymous parallelism is a common feature of Hebrew poetry, but not prose.⁵⁹ Third, the pronoun "he" in verse 27 agrees with the nearest antecedent, "the ruler who will come" (the Roman prince) of verse 26b, not the Anointed One of verse 26a.⁶⁰ Fourth, in the context of the book of Daniel, stopping sacrifice (whether by Antiochus IV or the Antichrist) is always associated with the persecution of the saints (Dan. 7:25; 8:11-14, 24-25; 11:31; 12:1-2, 7, 11-12). Christ's death did indeed make the Old Testament sacrificial system null and void, but the Romans actually brought it to an end. Therefore, Christ's first coming and atoning sacrifice are referenced in verses 24, 25, and 26, but not in verse 27.⁶¹

According to the earliest recorded comments by the church fathers, the majority of critical scholars, many amillennialists, and almost all premillennialists, the final week is eschatological. As previously established, the fulfillment of all the promised blessings in Daniel 9:24 can only be accomplished by Christ's second advent. Interpreted in the light of the context of the book of Daniel and passages elsewhere in Scripture, verse 27 is not a retelling of events at Christ's first coming (v. 26) but a description of events associated with His second advent. The last half of the final week corresponds to the period of the persecution of the saints described elsewhere in the book (Dan. 7:25; 12:1, 5-12).

Other texts indicate that the abominations of Daniel 9:27 (which include the abomination of desolation) are eschatological and perpetrated by Antichrist (Dan. 12:11; Matt. 24:15). The description of the person in Daniel 9:27 parallels that of the evil ruler who persecutes the saints in the book of Daniel and elsewhere in Scripture (cf. Dan. 7:25; 11:36-12:1; 2 Thess. 2:1-12;

Rev. 13:1-10).⁶² This ruler is yet to come for he will be judged at Christ's return (cf. Dan. 7:11, 26; 11:45; 2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 19:20). "The end that is decreed is poured out on him" is specifically described in Daniel 7:11, 26; and 11:45-12:1. Accordingly, the person who makes the covenant and persecutes the saints is the eschatological Antichrist. He will continue his tyranny until Christ returns and judges him.

As previously shown, the weeks of the passage are weeks of years. This idea means an unknown interval of time took place between Christ's first coming at the conclusion of the first sixty-nine weeks (483 years) and the eschatological seventieth week (the final seven years). Steinmann calls such a gap "unwarranted" and without "textual support."⁶³ To the contrary, evidence for this interval is textual, logical, and clear.

First, a gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks is demanded by the text. If the weeks are weeks of years (as the majority of scholars hold), the sixty-nine weeks (483 years) conclude with Christ's first coming (as the majority of evangelicals agree), and the final week (seven years) culminates with His return (as Dan. 9:24 requires),⁶⁴ a space of time must exist between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks. Second, gaps of time occur between events elsewhere in Daniel, in chapter 7 and particularly chapter 11.⁶⁵

Third, contrary to Steinmann,⁶⁶ a time interval is an ancient view. Some of the earliest church fathers (e.g., Irenaeus and Hippolytus) held that the sixty-nine weeks concluded with Christ's first coming and the seventieth week is the time of the eschatological Antichrist and Christ's return. Since these fathers held to literal weeks of years, a gap between Christ's first and second comings is understood.⁶⁷ According to Knowles, "It is plain that Hippolytus posits a period of time between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks....The debt which the modern 'parenthesis' view owes to this construction is obvious."⁶⁸

Fourth, as R. Gundry points out: "The possibility of a gap between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks is established by the well-accepted OT phenomenon of prophetic perspective, in which gaps such as that between the first and second advents were not perceived."⁶⁹ Fifth, an interval may be explained by the nature of the prophecy. This was God's answer to Daniel's prayer about the future of his nation, thus the present church age was omitted. The seventieth week will begin with Antichrist's covenant with Israel when the focus again shifts to the Jewish nation.⁷⁰

Finally, the New Testament itself supports a gap in time between God's past and future focus on Israel. For example, in Romans 9-11 the Apostle Paul addressed the problem of Israel's unbelief and concluded: "I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.'" (Rom. 11:25-27). In context, "all Israel" refers to the nation. Thus, the pattern laid out by Paul in this plain text is exactly that of Daniel 9:24-27—focus on Israel until its rejection of Christ (sixty-nine weeks), focus on the Gentiles (interval), and focus on Israel in the last days (seventieth week—deliverance and salvation).

Conclusion

Evidence above indicates that the seventy weeks are weeks of years. This 490 year period includes both Christ's first advent after sixty-nine weeks to make atonement for sin (vv. 24-26) and His glorious return at the conclusion of the seventieth week (v. 27). At that time, Christ will

deliver His people, punish evil, and completely fulfill all the promised blessings of verse 24 during the messianic age. Interpreted in this manner, Daniel's prophecy is a message of spiritual salvation for the present and the promise of a wonderful world to come. In conclusion, the literal futurist interpretation of the seventy weeks prophecy is no "dismal swamp," but a blessed hope.

¹ James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 400.

² For a discussion of the book's authorship and date from an evangelical perspective, see Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, New American Commentary, vol. 18 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 22-43, and Andrew E. Steinmann, *Daniel*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2008), 1-19; For a standard critical approach, see John J. Collins, *Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 1-2, 12-61, and Montgomery, 1-2, 57-78, 88-104.

³ For a further discussion of these views, see Miller, 252-73, and the works cited for each position in the following overview.

⁴ This summary follows Montgomery's classic presentation (372-94). Other scholars who adopt this basic approach include Collins, 352-58; LeAnn Snow Flesher, "Daniel 9:24-27 and the Tribulation," *Review and Expositor*, 109 (Fall 2012): 583-91; Sharon Pace, *Daniel*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2008), 298-99; Paul M. Lederach, *Daniel*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1994), 213-219; 295-97. Critical scholars often hold the prophet predicted the messianic age would arrive at the end of Antiochus's rule. For example, Lacocque says, "Daniel announces the coming of the ultimate Jubilee, the Eschaton" (A. Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1979], 178). According to Porteous the climax of the seventieth week "did not prove to be the eschatological event the writer hoped for" (Norman W. Porteous, *Daniel*, Old Testament Library [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965], 141).

⁵ Montgomery, *Daniel*, 393; cf. Porteous, 141; William B. Nelson, *Daniel*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 240; Lacocque proposes a concurrent method of calculation to solve the problem, but the seventy weeks run consecutively, not concurrently (178, 195). Lucas seems to represent a growing trend among critical scholars to alleviate the chronological problems by interpreting the numbers in a non-literal fashion (Ernest Lucas, *Daniel*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary, vol. 20 [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002], 247; also P. L. Redditt, *Daniel*, New Century Bible Commentary [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999], 159; John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 30 [Dallas: Word, 1989], 257). Seow appears to take a mixed view—the 70 weeks as 490 years with the usual divisions (49, 434, 7 years), but elsewhere says the 434 years "are probably not literal and precise years" (C. L. Seow, *Daniel*, Westminster Bible Companion [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003], 137, 149).

⁶ Montgomery, *Daniel*, 379-80.

⁷ Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 21.

⁸ Cf. Steinmann, 472.

⁹ Peter J. Gentry, "Daniel's Seventy Weeks and the New Exodus," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14.1 (2010): 30. Also, the early Greek versions (Septuagint, Theodotion, Symmachus, Aquila) and the Peshitta represent the seven and sixty-two weeks as a unit with the anointed one coming at its conclusion (Roger T. Beckwith, "Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah's Coming in Essene, Hellenistic, Pharisaic, Zealot and Early Christian Computation," *Revue de Qumran* 40 [December 1981]: 522). For a further discussion of the *athnach* in Dan. 9:25, see J. Paul Tanner, "Is Daniel's Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166 (July-September 2009): 325-28; W. H. Shea argues the poetic structure of Dan 9:24–26a supports the "Anointed One" of v. 25 coming after a total of sixty-nine weeks ("Poetic Relations of the Time Periods in Dan 9:25," *AUSS* 18 [1980]: 59–63).

¹⁰ W. Sibley Towner, *Daniel*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox, 1984), 4, 115.

¹¹ Goldingay, 218, 237-38; See Tanner's response to Goldingay, "Is Daniel's Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 2," 320. For an attempt at a mediating position, see Jim Edlin, *Daniel: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2009), 23, 27.

¹² Lucas, 308-9.

¹³ E. J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 193. Beckwith points out that the Essenes (who lived at the time critical scholars believe the book of Daniel was produced) did not identify the murdered anointed one as Onias III in the past, but to the future Davidic Messiah (542).

¹⁴ Young, 192-221; Steinmann, 451-76.

¹⁵ J. Paul Tanner, "Is Daniel's Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166 (April-June 2009): 198; For excellent studies of the church fathers' views on the seventy weeks, see Tanner's full article, 181-

200, esp. 198-200; and Louis E. Knowles, "The Interpretation of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel in the Early Fathers," *Westminster Theological Journal* 7 (May 1945): 136-60.

¹⁶ Carl L. Beckwith, ed., *Ezekiel, Daniel*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture, eds. Timothy George and Scott M. Manetsch, vol. 12 (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 368; also see 367-77.

¹⁷ J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 276-78, 520-22, and "The Goal of Daniel's Seventy Weeks," *JETS* 21/2 (June, 1978): 97-115; Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 3rd ed. (Draper, VA: ApologeticsGroup Media, 2009), 309-22; P. Gentry, 26-44.

¹⁸ C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (n.d.; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 336-402; H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Daniel* (1949; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), 403-40.

¹⁹ J. G. Baldwin, *Daniel*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1978), 168-78; esp. 170-71, 176-77.

²⁰ Richard S. Hess, "The Seventy Sevens of Daniel 9: A Timetable for the Future?" *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 21.3 (2011): 330; Iain M. Duguid's analysis is similar to Baldwin's but differs in a significant point. Like Young, he thinks the subject of Daniel 9:27 is Jesus Christ who confirms the new covenant by His death bringing an end to the Old Testament sacrificial system. But like Baldwin and contrary to Young, Duguid believes that the end of the seventieth week is the "final consummation," Christ's second coming (Iain M. Duguid, *Daniel*. Reformed Expository Commentary [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008], 171-72, 174); Meredith Kline associates the weeks with symbolic sabbatical years reflecting the Old Testament feasts of Jubilee. He believes the total period of the seventy weeks of Daniel 9 represent ten jubilee eras at the end of which will be the ultimate jubilee at Christ's return (Meredith Kline, "The Covenant of the Seventieth Week," in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies Prepared in Honor of Oswald Thompson Allis*, ed. John H. Skilton [Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974], 452-69; Probably, most scholars accept some connection of the seventy weeks to the Year of Jubilee, but Goldingay and Steinmann deny such a relationship (Goldingay, 232; Steinmann, 459); For an evangelical non-messianic (neither "anointed one" is Jesus) eschatological view employing symbolic periods, see Thomas Edward McComiskey, "The Seventy 'Weeks' of Daniel against the Background of Ancient Near Eastern Literature," *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985): 18-45. The weeks begin shortly after Jeremiah's prophecy of the seventy-year captivity (Jer. 29:10; ca. 598 BC), about 594 BC, and end with Antichrist's doom. For a recent commentary that supports McComiskey's view, see Allan M. Harman, *A Study Commentary on Daniel* (Faverdale North, Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2007), 229, 231-32.

²¹ Steinmann, 456.

²² E.g., Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *Daniel*, in vol. 7 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 112-21; John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 216-37; Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 115-39; Miller, 257-73; Thomas A. Howe, *Daniel in the Preterists' Den: A Critical Look at Preterist Interpretations of Daniel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 317-441.

²³ Tremper Longman, III, *Daniel*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 229.

²⁴ The four basic approaches presented above are the most common, but certainly others have been proposed. Leslie McFall presents an extremely complicated (and unconvincing) case for Nehemiah as the messiah of Daniel 9:25-26 (Leslie McFall, "Do the Sixty-Nine Weeks of Daniel Date the Messianic Mission of Nehemiah or Jesus?" *JETS* 52/4 (December 2009): 673-718; For Seventh-day Adventist interpretations, see William H. Shea, *Daniel: A Reader's Guide* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005), 222; Jacques B. Doukhan, *Daniel: The Vision of the End*, rev. ed.

(Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1989), 33-36, 39-44. A novel (but unconvincing) approach is that of D. H. Lurie who takes the weeks to be varying multiples of seven years. ("A New Interpretation of Daniel's 'Sevens' and the Chronology of the Seventy 'Sevens,'" *JETS* 33 [1990]: 303-9). Longman dismisses as futile all attempts to correlate seventy weeks of 490 years with historical events such as Antiochus's persecution or Christ's first or second comings. Rather, the passage points "to God's determined timing of the end of sin and suffering without revealing the exact timing" (Longman, 229); For early Jewish and rabbinic interpretations, see Beckwith, 529-42; and Hersh Goldwurm, *Daniel: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources*, 2nd ed. (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah, 1998), 259-67.

²⁵ Tanner, "Is Daniel's Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 1," 185.

²⁶ Louis E. Knowles, "The Interpretation of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel in the Early Fathers," *Westminster Theological Journal* 7 (May 1945): 138, also 139-42; Tanner, "Is Daniel's Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 1," 185-6; 188-89; See also Jerome's summary of Hippolytus's view (G. L. Archer, Jr., trans., *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958], 103-104).

²⁷ Young, 196; also Pace, 298.

²⁸ The criticism (e.g., Steinmann, 459-60; Leupold, 406) that this seven-year period is not called a "week" (*shavua*) is not valid. That the seven year period concluded with a sabbath year of rest clearly indicates it was considered a unit, a "seven" of years.

²⁹ Seven weeks of years (49 years) define the period between Years of Jubilee in Leviticus 25:8. In the Year of Jubilee, all slaves were freed, land was returned to its original owner, and the land was not sowed or reaped (a sabbath year rest) (Lev. 25:9-13). Seventy weeks would be ten jubilees. Perhaps, God divided the time in this manner to indicate complete freedom, rest, and a permanent return to the land at the end of the weeks. This does not mean that the weeks must begin with a sabbatical cycle (so P. Gentry, 36).

³⁰ For a discussion of these texts, see Miller, 214-15, 325-26.

³¹ Cf. Beckwith, 521-42; Tanner, "Is Daniel's Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 2," 332; Hoehner adds that weeks of years is also found in the Mishnah, *Baba Metzia* ix. 10 (119).

³² Tanner, "Is Daniel's Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 1," 198.

³³ Scripture citations are from the New International Version of the Bible (1984).

³⁴ Leupold, 424, 428; cf. Young, 197.

³⁵ James I. Packer, *Honouring the Written Word of God: The Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer Volume 3* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster, 1999), 153.

³⁶ The result is the same whether, the *qere*, "to finish [*kālā*] transgression" or the *kethiv* reading, "to restrain completely [*kālā*'] the transgression" [or "rebellion"] is followed.

³⁷ Either the *qere* (*tāmam*), "be complete, come to an end, finish," or the *kethiv* (*hātam*), "to seal, affix a seal, or seal up" would have the same result. Sin would end.

³⁸ Of "everlasting righteousness," Slotki says that "commentators [i.e., Jewish] interpret this as an allusion to the Messianic era" (Judah J. Slotki, *Daniel-Ezra-Nehemiah* [London: Soncino, 1978], 77).

³⁹ For a discussion of the translation and meaning of the text relating to the these six blessings, see Miller, 259-62.

⁴⁰ Young, 201; Payne, "The Goal of Daniel's Seventy Weeks," 99, 114; cf. Steinmann, 465-68.

⁴¹ Collins, 353.

⁴² Keil, 349.

⁴³ The view that the "word" is Jeremiah's prophecy of the seventy-year captivity (25:11-12; 29:10) was noted earlier in this article and judged not to be a valid option. Steinmann believes the date is 538 BC, but the "word" could either be Gabriel's message to Daniel or the decree of Cyrus (470). Both events took place in 538 BC. Nelson proposes that the word is not a decree but a word from heaven (236).

⁴⁴ For a further discussion, see Hoehner, 122-24.

⁴⁵ Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), 251.

⁴⁶ Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, 277.

⁴⁷ P. Gentry thinks that Artaxerxes's decree to Ezra was an extension of Cyrus's original 538 BC decree (35).

⁴⁸ Cf. Archer, *Daniel*, 115.

⁴⁹ Hoehner, 27, 44, 114.

⁵⁰ Cf. Steinmann, 461-62.

⁵¹ Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, eds., "The Day and Year of Christ's Crucifixion," "Chronology of the Life of Christ," in *The NIV Harmony of the Gospels with Explanations and Essays* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 311-19.

⁵² This would be the response to Steinmann who asked if earlier decrees permitted building, why the decree of 458? (462, n. 54)

⁵³ Goldingay's objections to the Messianic interpretation result from his faulty *a priori* assumption that God does not provide detailed information about the future (Goldingay, 218). See the previous discussion of this issue.

⁵⁴ Nelson states: "The NT writers clearly understood Jesus to be the fulfillment of the vision in Daniel 7:13" (45).

⁵⁵ For critical interpretations of the anointed one and details of evangelical views, see the section, "Interpretive Options"; Miller, 264; Tanner, "Is Daniel's Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 1," 181-200, and "Is Daniel's Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 2," 319-35; For an unusual view from a critical perspective, see Tim Meadowcroft, "Exploring the Dismal Swamp: The Identity of the Anointed One in Daniel 9:24-27," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120/3 (201): 429-49.

⁵⁶ For a detailed discussion of Daniel 9:27, see Miller, 269-73.

⁵⁷ E.g., Young, 206, 215, 220; Steinmann, 473-74; K. Gentry, 318-19; Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, 278; P. Gentry, 36.

⁵⁸ According to Duguid: "Amillennial and postmillennial Christians believe that the covenant mentioned here is God's new covenant with his people, inaugurated by the Messiah, Jesus, and that the desolation and destruction of the temple took place in the first century A.D." (171); also P. Gentry, 38-39.

⁵⁹ Contra P. Gentry, 36.

⁶⁰ Longman, 228.

⁶¹ Mauro argues "that the modern interpretation which takes Christ and the Cross out of the last verse of the prophecy, where it reaches its climax, and puts antichrist and his imaginary doings into it, does violence to the Scripture and serious wrong to the people of God" (Philip Mauro, *The Seventy Weeks and the Great Tribulation*, rev. ed. [Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, 1944], 89). Christ's coming and death on the cross for our sins are clearly taught in the passage: vv. 24, 25, 26. It is not necessary to see Christ's first coming in every verse of Scripture. Furthermore, the eschatological view does not take Christ out of v. 27. He comes to deliver His people and judge the one who desolates. Actually, futurists present a more complete portrait of Christ in Daniel 9:24-27. Christ's first coming is referenced in vv. 24, 25, and 26, and His second coming in judgment in vv. 24 and 27.

⁶² P. Gentry attempts to circumvent the parallel text argument (40). He contends that the "ruler" of v. 26 is not an evil ruler but Christ as in v. 25. As the nearest antecedent, this ruler (Christ) must be the subject of v. 27, not the evil ruler described elsewhere in the book. Few scholars would agree that the rulers of vv. 25 and 26 are the same individual. Regardless of their interpretation of v. 27, evangelicals usually interpret these rulers to be Christ (v. 25) and a Roman ruler (v. 26). Gentry further claims that there are no direct connections in the seventy weeks vision to Daniel's other visions. But the majority of scholars recognize the striking parallels between chapter 9 and these other Danielic texts. He also incorrectly interprets relevant texts. For example, the fulfillment of Daniel 12:11 is eschatological, not second century (by Antiochus) as Gentry argues. His literary arguments against connections in this passage to texts elsewhere in Daniel are convincing only to those who agree with his literary analysis of the text and general approach to Hebrew prose literature.

⁶³ E.g., Steinmann, 458-59.

⁶⁴ Hoehner believes the promises of v. 24 have eschatological significance for Israel: "To view the six things in Daniel 9:24—to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place—as having been fulfilled in Christ's death at His first advent is impossible" (131).

⁶⁵ Mauro gives examples of numbers in the Old Testament (e.g., 430 years of Israel's sojourn in Egypt) that speak of a measure of time in which an event is to occur and argues that in all cases the time is consecutive and no gaps exist (96). He calls this "an absolute rule, admitting of no exceptions" (97). However, Mauro's analogy does not hold. Daniel does not merely speak of a time period of seventy weeks. If he had left it at that, it would be much more difficult to argue for a gap. But he specifically breaks the seventy weeks into three groups (seven, sixty-two, and one), opening up the possibility of a space of time between them.

⁶⁶ Steinmann, 458, n. 35.

⁶⁷ Tanner, "Is Daniel's Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 1," 200; Tanner adds: "For Clement, the hiatus was in A.D. 70 when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed" (200). In his commentary on Daniel, Jerome surveyed the views of Africanus, Eusebius, Hippolytus, and other church fathers (95-108).

⁶⁸ Knowles, 141; For a further discussion see, Knowles, 138-42, and Tanner, "Is Daniel's Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 1," 185-86, 188-89.

⁶⁹ Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 190; cf. Baldwin, 177.

⁷⁰ According to Duguid, "As soon as Jesus died on the cross, the Jerusalem temple was functionally obsolete. That is why when Jesus breathed his last breath, the curtain in the temple was torn in two, symbolizing the final departure of the Lord from his former abode, never to return. Jesus himself declared the temple and the city of Jerusalem doomed by their refusal to come to him and submit to his rule (see Matt. 23:37-24:2), a sentence that was carried out in A.D. 70" (172). However, Gabriel's message is not a prophecy of doom for Israel but a prophecy of hope—deliverance from sin and the Antichrist (9:24, 27; cf. Dan. 7:25-27; 12:1). Even in the passage to which Duguid refers, God reveals that Israel's present state of unbelief is not permanent. There is a future hope for the nation: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'" (Matt. 23:37-39).