

The Seventy Sevens of Daniel 9

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1. The Prophecy

One of the most fascinating prophecies in the Old Testament for the chronology of the Bible is that of the “seventy weeks” in Daniel 9:24-27. The [general consensus](#) of interpretation among conservative Christians is that these “weeks” refer to groups of seven years,¹ and **many have seen it as predicting precisely the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, which it indeed does!** If we assume this,² then there is actually only one real possibility for the starting point, as various interpreters have confirmed (e.g. [Reformed](#), [charismatic](#), and [Seventh Day Adventists \[changed link again\]](#))³: the decree of Artaxerxes I of Persia in 458 or 457 B.C., the seventh year of his reign, found in Ezra chapter 7, and this actually fits the facts perfectly! (**Some sources, including F. LaGard Smith, say the decree occurred in 458 B.C., but about as many others say 457 B.C.;** calculating events by kings’ reigns is always a bit **tricky, but this is not a problem.**)⁴

What is amazing about this prophecy is that it cannot be explained away by those who do not believe the Bible is the Word of God. The dates match perfectly, something only God could have orchestrated. He gave the prophecy to Daniel in 542 B.C., some 80 years before the start of the time frame.

2. The Liberal View

Some liberal scholars who deny prophecy claim that the book of Daniel was written much later: [the latest proposed date is 164 B.C.](#) But this fails to explain how the prophecy lines up so perfectly with the life of Jesus, born centuries later. Like many other Old Testament prophecies, like the prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem found in Micah 5:2 and faithfully quoted by the Jewish religious leaders to wicked King Herod in Matthew 2:6, it cannot be explained away, and demonstrates the fidelity of God’s Word, to the praise of his glory.

3. The Details

<p><i>alternate text, in italics, from endnotes)</i></p>	
<p>²⁴ “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 <i>most holy One</i>.”</p>	<p>Seventy ‘sevens’ = 490 years, from 457 B.C. to 34 A.D. (Remember, there is no year 0!) However, as seen below, this period goes a few years past the death and resurrection of Jesus.</p> <p>“to finish transgression, to put an end to sin”: Jesus took care of our sins once and for all on the cross, ending their deadly power over us.</p> <p>“to anoint the most holy”: Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed One, the king!</p>
<p>²⁵ “Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.</p>	<p>“the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem”. In the older NIV this said “from the issuing of the decree to restore”, which is almost certainly the intent. As mentioned above, the decree in Ezra 7:12-26 in 458-457 B.C. fits the time frame perfectly, though it mentions repair of the temple rather than the city. However, this was the beginning of the “Second Return” chronicled here and in the book of Nehemiah, and the result was indeed the restoration and rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. This decree was reinforced and clarified by letters this same King Artaxerxes gave to Nehemiah a few years later in 444 B.C. (Nehemiah 2:7-9), providing him with materials to rebuild the wall and the gate. So it seems clear that this is the decree referred to.</p> <p>“until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes”: $69 \times 7 = 483$ years. Multiple evidences suggest that Jesus’ ministry began in 27 B.C., as shown in my chronology and in <i>The Narrated Bible</i>, and there are exactly 483 years from 457 B.C. to 27 A.D.! (Remember, there is no year 0!)</p> <p>Seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ add up to 69, but what do the first seven sevens refer to? Most interpreters view this as the period required to complete the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, with “streets and a trench” (“trench” here is an uncertain term, and may refer to the wall). Even after the wall was completed in 444 B.C., a great deal of the city would still not have been occupied or properly rebuilt, as suggested in Nehemiah 11:1-2. Thus the city would have been fully rebuilt after seven sevens, or 49 years, in 408 B.C.</p>
<p>²⁶ After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be put to death, but not for himself.</p>	<p>The older NIV had “will be cut off”, but this is clearer, and probably refers to Jesus’ death after his period of ministry. He died for our sins, <i>not for himself!</i></p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>The ruler who will come is clearly still Jesus, as we can see by the first sentence in verse 27, but the rest is not quite as clear. Many have said that this refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (which would still be “after the sixty-two sevens”, though not within the last “seven”). “The people” would be Jesus’ ethnic group, the Jews, who brought about this destruction by rejecting their Messiah. If so, then the description is very apt.</p>
<p>²⁷ 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.</p>	<p>This shows that the last seven-year period, from 27 to 34 A.D., is split in half, and indeed Jesus’ ministry lasted 3½ years. And he did indeed “put an end to sacrifice and offering”, because his sacrifice fulfilled and did away with all need for the Old Testament sacrifices and offerings, all of which had been signs pointing ahead to him.</p> <p>What event formed the end of this period, in 34 A.D.? I believe it was probably the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 6:8-7:60) and the subsequent persecution by Saul and the scattering of the church (Acts 8:1-3). Why were these two events so important that they would constitute the end of the seven years in which the Anointed One would “confirm a covenant”? Because it marked the moment of total rejection of the Messiah by the Jewish leadership, and the first of many martyrdoms that resulted from this. The covenant had been finally rejected, and because of the persecution unleashed under Saul of Tarsus, the gospel began to reach gentiles as well!</p> <p>Many others agree in selecting this event, including this page and this page. This page states that this is the general Reformed position (though the writer is a dispensationalist and holds a different position).</p>
<p>And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.” (NIV)</p> <p>And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.” (ESV)</p>	<p>This last sentence is confusing, as shown by the vastly different translations given by the NIV and the ESV. (The older NIV had an even different translation. See section 6. below.) Most commentators think this again refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and that it refers to “the bringing of ensigns and standards of the pagan Romans in to the Temple” as this site suggests.</p>

4. A Possible Christmas Connection

Dr. Hugh Ross, in his article [The Christmas Star](#), speculates that the wise men who came from the east to see baby Jesus in Matthew 2 might have been wise men from Persia or Babylon who knew about this prophecy of the prophet Daniel because they belonged to the same order of magi (wise men) of which Daniel became the head in Daniel 2:48. Thus they would have known the year in which the Messiah was to be born, and, as Dr. Ross says, “The appearance of an extraordinary stellar event to the watchful magi confirmed that the momentous arrival was at hand. Expecting the leaders of Israel to be equally watchful, they went straight to the capital city to learn the Anointed One’s location...”

Dr. Ross is not the only one who has speculated about this possible connection, and it is a tantalizing possibility, though obviously we cannot be certain about it.

5. The Jewish View

Orthodox Jews also believe in the Messiah (מָשִׁיחַ /mā'šīaḥ/ “anointed (one)”),⁶ but they do not believe that he is Jesus, and believe that he has not yet come. Interestingly, they consider that many of the same passages in the Hebrew Scriptures apply to him as Christians do, including many passages that do not actually use the word מָשִׁיחַ /mā'šīaḥ/ “anointed (one)” (which is what “Messiah” means), as shown by [this page](#) and [this page](#). (The [Ashkenazi](#) pronunciation of מָשִׁיחַ “Messiah” is [mɔ'ʃiaχ], often spelled Moshiach in English, which is why it is spelled like this in these articles. The “ch” in this name is pronounced [χ] like in German, not [tʃ] like in English or Spanish.)

For example, in the second link we see the evidence that the Messiah will be a descendant of David, even though none of the references given uses the term “anointed (one) / Messiah”. This was also well known in Jesus’ day, and turns out to be one of the important evidences that Jesus meets the criteria for the Messiah. And the first link shows that Orthodox Jews also recognize that parts of Daniel 7 and 8 apply to the Messiah, like the “son of man” in Daniel 7:13-14.

However, Orthodox Jews **do not accept Daniel 9:24-27 as referring to the Messiah**, in spite of the fact that the noun מָשִׁיחַ “anointed (one)” (“Messiah”) is used twice in these verses, and a form of the verb מָשַׁח /mā'šāḥ/ “anoint” is used once. Interestingly, they do accept the fact that the term “week” in this passage does indeed refer to a period of seven years, just as Christians do. However, for this very reason they refuse to see this passage as referring to the Messiah, since no matter how you figure it, it would mean that the Messiah has already come, sometime around the time of Jesus!

5.1. A Jewish Rebuttal and some Responses to it

[This article](#)⁷ by Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz lays out a number of arguments from the Jewish perspective as to why this passage could not refer to the Messiah, nor could it refer to Jesus. I will not take the time to refute each of their arguments, which turn out to be invalid, but I will just mention a few.

5.1.1. Traditional Jewish Chronology

The biggest one is simply that the article follows the [traditional Jewish chronology of the world](#), which is simply wrong! As [this article](#) says, this chronology was originally put together by Rabbi Yosi ben Halafta in the 2nd century A.D., and “the estimate of the time...was too short because Rabbi Yosi underestimated the length of the Persian Empire by about 160 years”. Currently the dates of the Persian Empire are well established by modern secular scholarship based on multiple evidences, but the Jewish chronology has never been adjusted accordingly. Thus the arguments in the article mentioned at the start of this paragraph have a 160 year error! A number of the other numbers in the article aren’t accurate either.

5.1.2. The Proper Translation of Verse 25

Another argument made in the article is that the “anointed (one)” in verse 25 must be different from the “anointed (one)” in verse 26. The explanation given in the article is not very clear. The rabbi says:

Actually, according to the Hebrew the 7 and 62 weeks are two separate and distinct periods. One event happens after seven weeks and another event after an additional 62 weeks.

and goes on to say:

The use of the definite article (ה ~ Hey) that means “**the**” in verse 26, “and after **the** 62 weeks shall an anointed one be cut off,” is sometimes deleted in Christian translations, but it’s presence in the Hebrew original clearly indicates that **the 62 weeks is to be treated as separate period of time from the original 7 weeks.** (Emphasis mine)

It is true that the *King James Version* (KJV) leaves out the article, though the NIV and the *English Standard Version* (ESV) do not. But in any case there is no argument with the first quote above, or with the text I have marked in bold in the second quote. Clearly something must have happened at the end of the 7 weeks and before the beginning of the 62, as I discuss in the chart in section 3 above. But none of that proves that the two anointed ones are not the same.

The real issue is the proper translation of that part of verse 25. The rabbi says:

The correct translation should be: “until an anointed prince shall be 7 weeks (49 years),” “then for 62 weeks (434 years) it (Jerusalem) will be built again but in troubled times.” Then after (those) the 62 weeks shall an anointed one will be cut off.”

And the ESV would agree with him (and a few other versions as well):

²⁵ Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. **Then** for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. ²⁶ And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off...

The important break in the text is marked by the yellow highlight. However, the ESV footnote gives an alternative translation, which is also the translation that most English translations follow, like the NIV:

²⁵ Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ **It** will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. ²⁶ After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be put to death...

Here there is no sentence break between the seven sevens and the sixty-two sevens, and this changes the whole understanding of whether there was one Anointed One, or two. Actually the issue seems to be, though rabbi Kravitz does not say so, that in the Masoretic text there is what is called a “major disjunctive accent” between the seven sevens and the sixty-two sevens, as Ellicott points out. This is not an accent mark like in Spanish that shows where stress goes, but is actually a divider in the middle of a verse which often corresponds to the end of a sentence in English. However, these are interpretive marks which were not in the original Hebrew, but were added by the Masoretes. The Hebrew text as such actually reads more simply the second way.

(Oddly enough, the *New International Version* in English and the *Nueva Versión Internacional* in Spanish take opposite positions on this question and on several other translation choices in this passage, even though they are published by the same organization.)

5.1.3. Other Jewish Views

Reform Jews tend not to believe in the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures, and only consider the traditional Jewish chronology to be a quaint tradition like so many others, so for them the whole question is irrelevant. Conservative Jews will fall somewhere in between. So the Orthodox Jewish view is probably the one that counts here. However, if anyone knows of any Jewish arguments that have been made on this question based on an *accurate* dating of the Persian Empire, please let me know!

6. Comparison of 4 English Versions of this Passage, with the Important Differences Marked in Distinctive Colors

All of the endnotes in the texts below are from the published texts themselves.

The differences between the NIV 1993 and the NIV 2011 are underlined. There are only four of these, but some of them are important for the interpretation of the passage.

The various colors of **bold text** correspond across the four columns. These indicate important differences between the versions which affect the interpretation. In many of these cases the other interpretation is given in an endnote, showing that both interpretations are recognized as valid possibilities.

The key differences in punctuation and sentence division between the ESV and the other versions which significantly affect the interpretation are **highlighted**. Again, the ESV offers the other alternative in an endnote.

NIV 1993	NIV 2011	ESV (2001)	KJV (1611)
<p>²⁴“Seventy ‘sevens’⁸ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish⁹ 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.¹⁰</p> <p>²⁵“Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree¹¹ to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One,¹² the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. ²⁶After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing.¹³ 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. ²⁷He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’¹⁴ In the middle of the ‘seven’¹⁵ 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.^{16,17}</p>	<p>²⁴“Seventy ‘sevens’¹⁸ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish¹⁹ 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 Place.²⁰</p> <p>²⁵“Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One,²¹ the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. ²⁶After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing.²² 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. ²⁷He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’²³ In the middle of the ‘seven’²⁴ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple²⁵ he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.^{26,27}</p>	<p>²⁴“Seventy weeks²⁸ are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.²⁹ ²⁵Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again³⁰ with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. ²⁶And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its³¹ end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. ²⁷And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week,³² and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”</p>	<p>²⁴ Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. ²⁵ Know therefore and understand, <i>that</i> from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince <i>shall be</i> seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. ²⁶ And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof <i>shall be</i> with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. ²⁷ And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.</p>

¹ The Hebrew word שבוע /šə'buʿaʿ/ “week” is derived from שבע /šəbaʿ/ “seven”. In an earlier version of this article I had said that it was simply the word for seven, but that was inaccurate, and it is always translated “week” in all Bible versions in all passages except in this passage in a few versions like the NIV, where it is translated as ‘seven’ or ‘sevens’.

² Some have questioned this, e.g. [R. C. Sproul](#), though he finds the possibility intriguing. F. LaGard Smith discusses the issue, and agrees that this is the probable interpretation, but does not feel able to commit himself to the details of the timeframe.

³ And lots of others, including [this page](#) and [several on this page](#).

⁴ The dispensational position is rather different, both as to the starting point of the 70 weeks and to what happens in the final week, as expounded [here](#). I find their arguments complex and involved, and I think the straightforward approach fits the facts quite well.

⁵ Prior to February, 2019, I had used the 1993 text of the NIV in this article instead of the 2011 text. I have now replaced this with this 2011 text. The two texts only vary in four places, and the interpretation I prefer in each case is always given in a footnote if not in the main text, so this is no problem for my arguments. See section **6.** for a comparison of the differences.

⁶ This noun occurs 39 times in the Hebrew Scriptures. However, it is evident that not every occurrence of it refers to the Messiah: some simply refer to a particular king, priest, or prophet who had been duly anointed and installed in office. (It is even occasionally applied to a foreign king who was never anointed, like Cyrus I of Persia in Isaiah 45:1, but who was God's chosen instrument, and so was metaphorically anointed!) However, quite a few of the occurrences do clearly indicate the promised Messiah, and others may or may not refer to him.

⁷ On the website of an organization called "Jews for Judaism", which was set up specifically to combat the efforts of the Jewish Christian organization [Jews for Jesus!](#)

⁸ **Daniel 9:24** Or 'weeks'; also in verses 25 and 26

⁹ **Daniel 9:24** Or **restrain**

¹⁰ **Daniel 9:24** Or **Most Holy Place; or most holy One**

¹¹ **Daniel 9:25** Or **word**

¹² **Daniel 9:25** Or **an anointed one**; also in verse 26

¹³ **Daniel 9:26** Or **off and will have no one**; or **off, but not for himself**

¹⁴ **Daniel 9:27** Or 'week'

¹⁵ **Daniel 9:27** Or 'week'

¹⁶ **Daniel 9:27** Or **it**

¹⁷ **Daniel 9:27** Or **And one who causes desolation will come upon the pinnacle of the abominable *temple*, until the end that is decreed is poured out on the desolated *city***

¹⁸ **Daniel 9:24** Or 'weeks'; also in verses 25 and 26

¹⁹ **Daniel 9:24** Or *restrain*

²⁰ **Daniel 9:24** Or *the most holy One*

²¹ **Daniel 9:25** Or *an anointed one*; also in verse 26

²² **Daniel 9:26** Or *death and will have no one*; or *death, but not for himself*

²³ **Daniel 9:27** Or 'week'

²⁴ **Daniel 9:27** Or 'week'

²⁵ **Daniel 9:27** Septuagint and Theodotion; Hebrew *wing*

²⁶ **Daniel 9:27** Or *it*

²⁷ **Daniel 9:27** Or *And one who causes desolation will come upon the wing of the abominable temple, until the end that is decreed is poured out on the desolated city*

²⁸ **Daniel 9:24** Or *sevens*; also twice in verse 25 and once in verse 26

²⁹ **Daniel 9:24** Or *thing*, or *one*

³⁰ **Daniel 9:25** Or *there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks. It shall be built again*

³¹ **Daniel 9:26** Or *His*

³² **Daniel 9:27** Or *seven*; twice in this verse